This thesis sketches my foray into an inquiry with youth; an inquiry which aimed to inquire into beliefs about “knowledge” while simultaneously inquiring into how I enacted knowledge in my research practices. Inquiry into beliefs about knowledge – what knowledge means, where knowledge comes from, who knows (and who doesn’t) – was undertaken to gain insight into how knowledge is known and the effects of conceptions of knowledge on daily living. Beginning with the assumption that beliefs about abstract concepts, such as knowledge, tend to be held implicitly and therefore elude critique and revision, I created an experimental inquiry process to explore the possibility of surfacing beliefs about knowledge with youth through the use of interactive activities. The interactive activities were designed to reduce the abstraction of “knowledge” and facilitate thinking about knowledge as situated concretely in day-to-day life. Feminist pragmatism supported the impetus for the inquiry and the interactive imperative for the inquiry explorations, and also informed the interpretation of texts generated in the inquiry.

Through bringing together the voices of youth with the voices of other thinking friends, the relevance and significance of youth’s insights into how knowledge is known is made apparent, and is also foregrounded in proposed considerations for teaching-learning encounters. The inquiry also served to transform how I think about and respond to the enduring challenges associated with the knowledge work of my research practice.
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my son, Riley Shannon Nicholson, who has inspired me from the day he was born to embrace wonder, exercise creativity, revel in uncertainty, and love the flux of the world.

He is my window
Into a world
Where every thing can be any thing
No thing is simply what it is,
And every thing is like something else.

Although I failed to acquire the type of practical skills he hoped I would obtain in the carpentry program he wanted me to take in lieu of a doctoral degree, I hope that over the ensuing years I have helped to foster his appreciation for the practicality of thinking about conceptions of knowledge.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the family members to whom I said a final ‘goodbye’ in the years it took to finish this work.

Karyn Elizabeth Shannon (née Nichols) (1952-2007)

Carmen Marie Shannon-Lane (1965-2008)

Margaret Elizabeth Emily LaPlante (née Block) (1914-2008)

John Haines Nicholson (1914-2008)
This dissertation re-presents an inquiry into how youth experience “knowledge” in their lives. The inquiry with youth was facilitated by the use of several interactive games designed to provoke thinking about knowledge in a way that reduced the abstraction of the construct of knowledge. The interactive games (also referred to as “provocative inquiry activities”) provoked discussion about knowledge situated within the various contexts of the youth’s lives: relationships with peers, parents, and teachers, in and away from school. The provocative inquiry activities surfaced youth’s perspectives about their parents’ beliefs about knowledge, the ways in which knowledge is enacted in schools, and knowledge within peer relationships. The inquiry activities posed questions about who “knows” (and who doesn’t), what is taken to be knowledge in different contexts, and what youth think and feel about the ways in which they and others enact knowledge in their lives.

Through inquiring into knowledge with youth, I aimed to propose some recommendations, grounded in the lived experience of youth, for opening possibilities for knowing within educative spaces, particularly schools. As a long-time researcher with

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1 I include quotation marks around the word “knowledge” to indicate that I hold knowledge to be a construct that does not have a singular and static meaning. I am not engaging in the traditional philosophical endeavour of striving to determine valid and invalid assertions about the world. I am interested in exploring conceptions of knowledge within the context of lives. For simplicity I will not continue to use quotations marks around “knowledge” throughout this dissertation, however, I will continue to inquire in this dissertation into the meanings and consequences of conceptions of “knowledge.”

2 Youth in this project, refers to young people aged 14 to 18 years of age because that is the age range of young people who participated in this project. I acknowledge that the term “youth” extends to young people both younger than 14 and older than 18 years of age.
many questions about my own practice, the inquiry served also to focus my attention in new ways upon how I enact knowledge in my research practice.

The Impetus for the Inquiry

The impetus for this inquiry grew out of my experiences with tensions in my research practice and feeling profoundly unsettled in a doctoral course on theorizing knowledge. Theorizing knowledge in this course provoked inquiry into beliefs about what knowledge means, where knowledge comes from, and how beliefs about knowledge become accepted within cultures and passed between generations. Theorizing knowledge also involved exploring the ways in which some ways of knowing – in this course, particular attention was paid to Indigenous ways of knowing – become eclipsed in dominant cultures (i.e., Eurowestern) which uphold their beliefs about knowledge as representative of the “real” definition of knowledge.

In the years preceding my entry into a doctoral program I had been troubled by a few persistent questions about my research practice. I was particularly troubled by frequently feeling that I was making claims in my publications that did not sufficiently acknowledge the doubts I had about the knowledge produced in my research. While engaged in data analysis in past projects I was aware that I frequently paid little attention to the inconsistencies and contradictions I noticed in the data. By focusing my attention on developing themes that reflected the salient things which participants said, I tended to leave out the ways in which some things participants said did not fit with other things.

3 Prior to beginning my doctoral program, I had worked as a contract researcher for eight years. Most of my research was qualitative and followed phenomenological and ethnographic inquiry traditions. The research involved a variety of projects focusing on promoting child and youth well-being. In this dissertation I will describe how interacting with questions about knowledge in this inquiry prompted me to question how I thought about research and re-vision my research practices.
they said. However, I was aware that my analyses adhered to approved methodological procedures intended to provide confidence in the knowledge claims I was making and thus, lived with the tension of knowing that no one would likely question what it was that I was leaving out of my interpretations. I struggled to acknowledge that there was much I could not know about the complexities of the people and processes which I was researching, but felt that I did not have a way to express my confusions and doubts in my writing. I wanted to find a way in my future research to work with these tensions rather than acting as though they didn’t exist.

A particularly pivotal moment occurred part way into the “Theorizing Knowing” course when I read an article that brought me to tears. Below is the passage from Marker’s (2003) article that depicts how the interests of researchers can limit their ability to appreciate particular ways of knowing and kinds of knowledge. In the passage, Marker (2003) recounts a story told to him by an archeology student:

[The archeology student] was working with a team that was consulting with Tlingit elders about the location of an ancient village site in Alaska, and as they sat in the town’s school gymnasium, the directors of the project were growing impatient with the lack of progress. They showed the elders maps, descriptions of artifacts, and analyses of the geology, but the old people were silent. Frustrated, the anthropologists took a break to decide on another strategy to extract the information they needed for their research. This student had lived with one of the traditional Native families and had worked hard over the summer cooking for a fishing boat. She was well liked by the local people and, in this context, on the morning while the crew drank coffee and tried to strategize their communication styles, an old man silently took her hand and pulled her outside. “Follow me,” he said. “Are we going far?” she asked. The old man simply said, “you are asking questions about that village, you must follow me.” They walked over ridges and grassy bluffs, through a thick forest and down to a glacier carved coastline. They walked all day and into the twilight summer night. She was exhausted when they finally stopped and he showed her an enormous rockslide

4 The “Theorizing Knowing” course was intended to provide participants with a solid foundation in the important role that our understanding of knowledge, in theory and practice, plays in our lives as researchers, scholars, learners, and human beings.
that rolled out into a remote bay. “Here,” he said, “many years ago a terrible earthquake pushed this mountain down on top of the village. Many families died in the terror of this rockslide which has covered the place. If you are very still, you can feel spirits and the sadness here.” She wept uncontrollably and when she regained composure, the elder said, “you feel it now, don’t you? The questions you were asking at the gym in town don’t belong there. The questions you were asking belong here. Now you understand.” (Marker, 2003, p.371)

After I stopped crying, I asked myself: What have I done with my feelings in my past research? What is it I have taken to be knowledge? What ways of knowing have I permitted to inform, and what ways of knowing have I excluded from informing my research practices and knowledge claims? What might I do differently?

In conjunction with contemplating my past and future interactions with knowledge in research, I was also wondering about what had provoked my tears. I was not crying only because I recognized a disjuncture between the sources of knowing acknowledged in the archeology student’s experience in Alaska and the knowledge enacted in my research practice. I was crying too because of the realization that I was in my early 40s and was just becoming acquainted with some of my own beliefs. I was, for the first time in my life, recognizing that some of the assumptions I had unknowingly taken up from my culture were not representative of what I believed from having lived in the world. My tears were laden with grief and relief. I was grieving the loss of attachment to some of the beliefs of my culture at the same time as I felt relief for having some understanding of the many instances in my life when I had felt the need to be silent about my beliefs because I doubted their acceptability. For example, I believed that knowledge can reside in places. I believed that some knowing defies language. I believed that emotion and spirit have roles in knowing. These were not sources of knowledge that had been affirmed in my education and so I had not been permitted them
to inform my knowledge work (research). And I wondered, where might I be today, and how I might be doing research if these awarenesses had been prompted in my youth?

And, hence, an inquiry with youth began to take shape in my imagination. Several questions began to form in my thoughts: To what extent do youth today – three decades after my early educative experiences – reflect Eurowestern knowledge as “real” knowledge? Might youth already have awarenesses about Eurowestern dominant conceptions of knowledge being only one way, among many, of thinking about knowledge? Might having been born into and raised in a postmodern world mean that the hold of dominant conceptions of knowledge has been loosened for youth? How do youth experience knowledge enactments in school? Do youth sense a dissonance between how knowledge is enacted in schools and their experience of living in the world?

I began to envision a twinned inquiry: an inquiry that explored how knowledge was experienced by youth while at the same time I would inquire into how I was enacting knowledge throughout the research process. While the experiences of youth would feature centrally in the research and evoke some considerations for knowledge interactions in schools, I was equally interested in how the inquiry into knowledge with youth might help me gain insight into some of the tensions in my knowledge/research

5 Following Thayer-Bacon (2003a) I employ the term Eurowestern rather than Western (Boler, 1999) in order to acknowledge that the history of thinking traditions derived from European traditions while refraining from encompassing the peoples in the Western hemisphere whose cultures and traditions predate European influence. Others refer to dominant conceptions of knowledge as Eurocentric thinking (c.f., Gergen & Gergen, 2003) and others posit it as “the legacy of Enlightenment thinking” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 629). All refer to traditions which took hold in North America in the 20th Century and reflect systems of thought that privilege reason and rationality and sustain oppression (Minnich, 2005).

6 By postmodern I mean a world which has troubled the confidence in Western conceptual systems and see the uprising of marginalized voices alongside the rise in communication technologies to fuel a sense of the limits of patriarchy and rationality (Lather, 1991; Whitmer, 1997). Following Thayer-Bacon (2003a) I appreciate the efforts of postmodern philosophers who accept that the world is shifting, unstable, without a fixed centre; who disrupt whatever strives to still the world. However, like Minnich (2005), I do not align with those who want to wipe out categories in the name of essentialism; I find value in working with the particulars of experience and do so here by focusing attention on the experiences of youth.
practice. Marker (2003) reminds me that research is improved by analyses that attend to history, hegemony, and self. Learning, Boler (1999) tells me, rests on a willingness to feel unsettled and uncertain. Hence, as a starting point and following the advice of Boler (1999) and Marker (2003), I committed to attending to, rather than glossing over, my feelings of discomfort, doubt and uncertainty as they arose throughout the research process.

Key Theoretical Influences

Feminist pragmatist thinking has supported the rationale for this inquiry and also informed how I paid attention in this inquiry. While some theorists’ work made “guest” appearances in contributing to particular aspects of my thinking, the work of Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich and Barbara Thayer-Bacon featured prominently in my thinking throughout all processes of envisioning, conducting, analyzing, and re-presenting this inquiry. I will discuss how their work has informed my thinking over the years in the chapters that follow this introduction, but introduce some of their contributions here in order to set the scene for what follows.

Feminist Pragmatism

Feminist pragmatism acknowledges that we live in a gendered world and stresses that issues of power should be incorporated into analyses. Minnich (2005) exposes the

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7 In this introduction I focus primarily on how feminist pragmatism informed how I would engage the inquiry with youth. In Chapter 2: Cycles of Interpretation, I will discuss how feminist pragmatism informed what I looked for in interaction with the texts generated in inquiry.

8 I will introduce the contributions of these theorists (e.g., William James, John D. Caputo, Patti Lather and Megan Boler) as I turn to their work to help me with my thinking in the chapters that follow.

9 For the purpose of this project, I am drawing on and providing an overview of feminist pragmatism as represented by Thayer-Bacon and Minnich and using that as the analytic frame. While criticisms of these positions are ever-present, as is true for all other positionings, this frame constitutes the position taken in this dissertation and will be justified throughout the work.
logic of dominance that supports sexist attitudes and shows it to be the same kind of thinking that sustains adultist perspectives which deny the validity of the knowledge of children and youth.

Minnich (2005) sketches the ways in which Eurowestern beliefs about knowledge both inform and deform thinking. In particular, she focuses on “conceptual errors” that uphold exclusions and proposes that the root conceptual error that upholds systems of domination is the division of people into kinds. Conceptual errors arise from premising what constitutes valid knowledge upon the experience of particular people – the defining and select few (i.e., white, privileged, heterosexual males) who were held up as representative of all humankind – such that the knowledge derived from the experiences of others (i.e., women and non-white males) is deemed as invalid rather than merely different (Minnich, 2005). Generalizing from the select few to what is held to be true for all made possible the creation of supposedly impartial categories premised upon partial realities. Supposedly impartial categories tend to be used to distinguish what is inferior from that which is taken to be the ideal, rather than to discern mere difference. The problem with conceptual errors is that they close possibilities for thinking when they are reproduced in established systems; in other words, “they do not open us up to realities – they resist realities” (Minnich, 2005, p.31, emphasis in original).

Minnich’s (2005) contemplation of the exclusions that arise from conceptual errors prompted me to think also of the ways in which the knowledge of children and youth tend to be judged as inferior. The present inquiry with youth stands among other inquiries that take seriously the knowledge of children and youth by evoking their experiences in research spaces. Thus, youth voices are highlighted in the present
exploration into knowledge. Inviting and taking seriously youth’s experiences with knowledge, goes beyond moving their voices from a private to a public space because children and youth have not really had voices even in supposedly private spaces. Historically, researchers have thought for children and youth, and their purposes for inquiring into children and youth’s experiences has usually been in the service of thinking about what’s best for them. In the present inquiry, I wanted to think with youth.

We can, according to Minnich (2005), work to undo conceptual errors by reawakening our capacity to think critically about the conventions, concepts and theories that pre-shape realities for us. Flowing from this, it behooves us, I think, to spend less time telling children and youth what to think, and practicing with them, the art of thinking together.

It is in this spirit that I engaged the inquiry with youth; mindful that youth and I are knowers of the knowledge that we will be inquiring into and that while errors will inevitably permeate the ways that we think, we have the ability to disrupt settled beliefs that limit possibilities for knowing. By coming together to acknowledge that the maps we use to understand knowledge have been socially constructed and yet policed as though they were ‘real’ (Thayer-Bacon, 2003b), we can see also the potential that exists for our participation in re-visioning the boundaries in the maps, to open possibilities for knowing. As Minnich (2005) reminds us, even though partial knowledge has long been

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10 I consider the distinction between public and private space to be problematic because “public” influences (i.e., social and cultural) are with us always even in supposedly private domains (e.g., home).
11 Although I state that I am not concerned with proposing what’s best for youth, I must acknowledge that by stating a desire to open realities, I am in fact complicit in doing research that suggests what is better for youth (i.e., multiple realities rather than singular reality).
taken to be the very standard of impartiality and hence, created a system that was closed to correction, there have always been voices questioning the system. Through this inquiry, I add youth’s voices to those others that have and will continue to question knowledge.

Focusing on youth’s experience with knowledge is supported by feminist pragmatism as pragmatism starts with experience (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). Feminist pragmatism attends to the role that language plays in what we know but also reminds us to be attentive to that which cannot be discursively had. How one conceives of experience’s contribution to knowledge depends upon whether one employs a binary or a unifying logic. Thayer-Bacon (2003a) states that “in a binary logic, experience is forced to be either absolute or relativistic, either universal or particular,” while experience at the hands of a unifying logic becomes an unanalyzable totality (p.423). Feminist pragmatists enact a qualified relativism which includes accepting that the knower cannot be separated from the known: “knowers are socially embodied and embedded inquirers who are limited in their knowing by their environment, which includes their experiences with the world around them and with each other, and their human capacities” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a, pp.99-100). In these regards, feminist pragmatism reminds me that what the youth express in inquiry is situated in the complexities of their lives in a way that I will not be able to tease apart. Feminist pragmatism also invites me to be creative in my research approach, to include images and feelings in the inquiry space, to accept that some of what is known by youth will defy my attempts to know it, and to never stop questioning what I purport to know.
Feminist pragmatism emphasizes that the point of thinking with youth is not to attempt to know their perspectives correctly and finally (Minnich, 2005). Reality, or truth, does not comprise the focus of pragmatist thinking; rather, the pragmatist is primarily concerned with what concrete difference in actual life an idea’s being true will make (Thayer-Bacon, 2002). Feminist pragmatists emphasize the role of social negotiation in establishing the criteria for use in settling doubts, acknowledging that while our conclusions may be satisfactory, satisfaction needs be thought of as tentative and temporary and therefore needs to be subject to continual inquiry and critique (Thayer-Bacon, 2002). In other words, there is no final endpoint that is closer to truth or reality, and hence, inquiry never really ends. From this, I accept that what I re-present as youth experience with knowledge is fully situated in the context within which the youth voices exist; a context which is incredibly complex and beyond clearly specifying in all its particulars. Nevertheless, an inquiry into knowledge with youth is valuable because it involves a belief-surfacing process which is a necessary starting point for social negotiation of what conceptions of knowledge should be accepted for now and what conceptions of knowledge should be let go.

Qualified relativism again reminds me that including others’ perspectives in our inquiring process – especially those who seem different – “offers us the means for adjusting for our own limitations, correcting our standards and improving the warrants for our assertions, and recognizing the role of power and privilege in epistemological theories” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003b, p. 418). By coming together with others to think about what we hold as knowledge, we can lessen the hold that our beliefs have on us (Minnich, 2005). By bringing youth together to inquire into their experiences with knowledge and
by sharing that inquiry with them, both youth and myself as researcher have participated in a social process that creates openings for revisioning knowledge.

**Naming the Inquiry Approach**

The work of Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich and Barbara Thayer-Bacon include important concepts which have helped me to find a new name for representing my relationship with the youth in inquiry, name the approach I took to conducting the inquiry, and enact a respectful orientation to engaging critique in the inquiry.

Minnich’s (2003, 2005) notion of *thinking friends* provided a new way for me to think about the youth who participated in the inquiry; a way that felt qualitatively different than considering them as informants or participants. Thinking friends are people with whom we have thinking conversations through oral exchange or engagement with their written words (Minnich, 2005). Thinking friends help us build conceptual bridges. Through open processes of active engagement in thinking with youth, and with youth in mind, the work re-presented in this dissertation reflects both a desire and an effort to overcome dominant traditions (Minnich, 2003). Seeing the youth in the inquiry as thinking friends also reflects my view of the inquiry as an event in which we practiced thinking together.

Minnich’s descriptions of her own work (2003, 2004, 2005) as *philosophical fieldwork* resembled how I thought of the inquiry I was engaging with youth and provided a name for what I was doing. Philosophical fieldwork involves philosophizing in the field and philosophizing, according to Minnich (2005) is thinking “stung awake” by encounters in which certainties appear untroubled by questions about meaning. The interests of philosophizing focus on what theories and systems take for granted, what they
create, and make possible and impossible (Minnich, 2005). Philosophizing finds allies in many places and does not rely upon the use of any one technical language.

Philosophical fieldwork involves thinking with others in face-to-face encounters and reflecting in solitude with them in mind. The term reflects the thinking that I did with youth during our interactions and with them in mind as I contemplated what surfaced in inquiry alongside the thoughts of formal theorists. Minnich’s (2005) sense of philosophizing also gave me a way of surfacing my doubts, confusions and uncertainties in the interests of gaining insight into that which I have learned to take for granted. Philosophical fieldwork is an approach to research that is concerned with thinking about and through meaning systems and questioning how meaning systems can inform and deform our relationships (Minnich, 2005).

Philosophical fieldwork acknowledges that both formalized research methods and informal interactions contribute in important ways to research. Formalized methods can serve to protect against my imposing what I think I know upon that which I seek to understand. However, as Minnich (2005) stresses, the informal arts of being together also serve an important function: they protect us against trained ways of thinking and acting which force what we are trying to understand into frames of meaning such that the unruly uniqueness of what we are trying to understand cannot be revealed. Oft-times in the inquiry space with youth, I chose to resist grasping for theories to make sense of what I heard youth say, and instead enjoyed the energy and laughter which flourished in their interactions. I knew that there would be time enough to focus on theories when listening to the audio-tapes of our interactions and reading the transcripts of the tapes. Other times I would turn to theories to pose questions to the youth when we sat to debrief the inquiry
activities. I was often challenged, however, to find the language in which I could translate ideas from theories in a way that connected to the discussion among the youth\textsuperscript{12}. 

One particularly important concept – *caring reasoning* – from Barbara Thayer-Bacon’s work guided my approach to engaging critique in the inquiry with youth. Thayer-Bacon (2003a) describes caring reasoning as what we use to recognize and select what to attend to in encounters with others when our primary interest involves understanding an other. The concept of caring reasoning highlights that care has an important role in reasoning. The act of attending in order to gain understanding of an other is an act of care. Caring reasoning states that “we must try to suspend our own doubts long enough to make sure we have heard fairly the other’s voice” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a, p.126).

Caring reasoning is particularly important in an inquiry in which one aims to critique beliefs and practices because it posits a particular orientation to the timing of critique in inquiry. Caring reasoning demands that the researcher pay careful attention to generously attempting to believe what others say *before* moving to critique (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). By attending first to believing an other, one is afforded an opportunity to gain better perspective of one’s own situation, thus enlarging one’s view by placing one’s own situation within a wider context. Such insights into one’s own contextuality should precede the process of critique because they make comparison from a relational perspective possible.

I entered the inquiry with youth being mindful that this approach to critique would be especially important in an inquiry with youth because I wanted the youth to feel

\textsuperscript{12} I will talk more about this in Chapter 2: Cycles of Interpretation.
free to surface their beliefs and assumptions without feeling judged by myself – the only adult present in the inquiry. I was sensitive to the likelihood that the youth had, at some point in their lives, felt the power adults have to impose their own knowledge as superior to that of youth. As Minnich (2005) stresses, the appropriate object of critique should not be individuals; rather, critique should aim to disrupt closed, rationalizing systems that resist realities and turn knowledge to the purpose of dominance. The notion of caring reasoning reminded me to interact with youth in a way that they could not construe as being intent upon highlighting errors in thinking as residing within them as individuals. I did not want the inquiry interactions with youth to stifle their willingness to speak freely. I also wanted the inquiry to afford the youth an opportunity to experience the social construction of knowledge in the inquiry. I hoped they might come to appreciate that we all share responsibility for what we know and in doing so, come eventually to a place where they would have confidence to plunge into critique. Thus, the concept of caring reasoning influenced the extent to which I probed for more information in my conversations with youth. And while some readers might see this inquiry as not having focused sufficiently upon critiquing knowledge, the inquiry did serve a valuable purpose by drawing youth into discussion. Like Socratic dialogue which appears to never get anywhere, the conversations provoked by the inquiry activities had the effect of stimulating questioning, dissolving certainties, and awakening curiosity about knowledge (Minnich, 2005).

13 I will say more about questioning and critique in the inquiry interactions in Chapter 1 when I discuss research relationships.
14 Youth’s comments about what they got out of participating in the inquiry attest to these effects (see Chapter Eight).
The Meaning of Knowledge: A First Reading

Before commencing the inquiry I felt compelled to define for myself what it was that I took “knowledge” and “knowing” to mean\(^\text{15}\). I thought I should also articulate where I thought knowledge comes from and have some sense of why I thought it was important to inquire into conceptions\(^\text{16}\) of knowledge. I thought I should articulate my own position on these questions before commencing the inquiry since I was planning to ask youth these same questions.

Knowledge, for me, represented culturally-based ideas (Garoian, 1999) “legitimated within sub-communities of people who share specialized languages and logics” (Minnich, 2003, p.21). The term knowledge represents both an active process (Fels, 1998) \textit{and} a phenomenon (the phenomenon of knowing) (Davis, Sumara, and Kieren, 1996).

Following Thayer-Bacon (2003) I saw knowledge as arising out of a human need to connect and re-connect. Our being in the world, I believed, is not separate from the world (Hoy, 1993), and being in the world invokes making meaning. I took meaning to be not some private, internal mental state but rather the way in which something can become intelligible \textit{as} something in a web of relations to other things (Hoy, 1993, p.183). Thus, I believed that the personal participation of the knower cannot be separated from what is known; knowledge is always personal.

\(^{15}\) I include my initial thoughts about knowledge and knowing here so that readers might trace the movement between the conceptions I held at the commencement of the inquiry and the ways in which my conceptions of knowledge were unsettled and transformed through the process of being in inquiry.

\(^{16}\) More recently I have taken up the question of the similarities and differences between a conception, an idea, and a belief. I use “conception” to refer to a thought that includes assumptions (thoughts we are not necessarily aware of having) \textit{and} beliefs (what we hold to be true and for which a degree of comprehension is implied). An idea is an act of awareness that can include a belief, an opinion, or a supposition. I believe that our assumptions are often invisible to us and yet, along with our beliefs (of which we have some awareness) influence our actions. (Informing sources: Angeles, 1981; Blaauw & Pritchard, 2005)
If someone were to ask me to define my epistemology, I would describe it as attuned with the relational epistemology articulated by Thayer-Bacon (2003), which positions the knowing self as always in relation to others and the world (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). We are dependent and independent and interdependent; our relations are always ecological. A relational self evolves within a constantly changing world and therefore knowing is always in flux.

While my thinking about knowing reflects constructivist sensibilities, I do not align myself with individualist constructivist perspectives of knowledge. I appreciate that complex, beyond-the-self influences bear upon the knowledge construction activities of individuals and groups. While Polanyi (Greene, 1969) argues that language represents a subject’s taking up of a position in the world of his meanings, Palmer (1969) qualifies such a notion by stating that a subject understands through the shared world of understanding but does not create the shared understanding and language; s/he only participates in them.

While I brought some of my own ideas about knowledge and knowing into the inquiry space with me, I expected the inquiry to influence my conceptions about knowledge. And participating in the inquiry did, indeed, provoke questioning of my conceptions of knowledge and reshape my thinking about my knowledge practices in research.

Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Explored in the Inquiry

An inquiry into conceptions of knowledge which aims to surface and loosen the holds of dominant beliefs must begin by articulating what it is that I include in dominant beliefs about knowledge. There are, of course, many possible ways to focus attention on
dominant beliefs about knowledge, and various aspects of Eurowestern knowledge upon which I could focus attention. I have had to choose only some.

In this introduction I touch briefly on the particular conceptions of knowledge that I intended to explore in inquiry with youth. As the inquiry progressed, however, I was prompted by what the youth voiced in inquiry to grapple with issues pertaining to conceptions of knowledge that I had not conceived of prior to commencing the inquiry interactions with youth. I will unfold the play of ideas about knowledge in the chapters that follow this introduction\(^\text{17}\). In proposing some features of dominant Eurowestern conceptions of knowledge I do not mean to imply that all Eurowesterners uphold these conceptions, nor that they are not contested. I mean to suggest that these features of dominant conceptions of knowledge tend to be prevalent in much of our thinking. I list them in general terms although they have been highlighted in different ways by many theorists including Minnich (2005), Thayer-Bacon (2003, 2008), and various Indigenous scholars (c.f., Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Dei, 2000; Marker, 2003; Smith, 1999).

a) When speaking about truth or reality, a *separating logic* (either/or) is preferred over a unifying logic (both/and).

b) Knowledge is assumed to be *objective* and derived from *rational* thought. That which is derived from personal (i.e., subjective) experience is considered to be something other than knowledge.

\(^{17}\) I have been challenged to re-present in this dissertation the meandering path which this inquiry led me down. In the interest of not confusing readers and maintaining a focus on what youth shared in the inquiry, I have omitted recounting some aspects of the mess that arose in the process of doing this research. I acknowledge here that the journey of conducting this inquiry was far less coherent than this re-presentation suggests.
c) Since knowledge is derived from rational thought, it does not include emotions nor spiritual nor embodied knowledge.

d) Since knowledge is objective, experiences specific to gender, race, class, and age are considered outside or irrelevant to the domain of knowledge.

e) Hierarchies of knowledge and knowers are created and upheld in order to posit what is superior and inferior rather than distinguishing between what is merely different. Hierarchies of knowledge extend to include the purposes for which knowledge is created: knowledge for practical application is considered lesser knowledge than knowledge for intellectual purposes.

f) The aim of knowledge is to predict and control the world (others and the environment).

Summary Statement: Research Focus

Through conducting provocative inquiry activities with youth which engaged thinking about knowledge from a variety of conceptual angles, I aimed to stimulate discussion that would provoke questioning conceptions of knowledge. In re-presenting the inquiry I aim to highlight the ways in which youth think about knowledge, posit the historical traditions of thinking about knowledge that are reflected in what they say about knowledge, and gain insight into how youth feel about their experiences with knowledge. No single activity alone was expected to get at all the questions I had about knowledge, but together, combined with individual interviews and e-communication with the youth I expected to be able to propose:

- The meanings youth hold for knowledge and the meanings which youth believe adults in their lives hold for knowledge.
Youth’s perspectives about the sources and purposes of knowledge.

The different ways that knowledge is enacted in different contexts (school-based, familial, and peer interactions) in youth’s lives.

Some dominant Eurowestern beliefs about knowledge that youth uphold and resist as revealed in the issues and concerns which arise for youth with respect to how others position knowledge and knowing.

Some recommendations for facilitating inquiry into conceptions of knowledge, and being sensitive to how knowledge is embodied in school classrooms.

For the purpose of improving my research practice, I aimed to:

Practice attending to rather than glossing over feelings of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty that arise in the research process in order to preserve rather than diminish the problem of knowing within knowledge work.

The Flow of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters presented in three parts. Part I contains two additional chapters following this first introductory chapter to describe how the inquiry was conducted and the interpretive processes through which I made sense of what surfaced in the inquiry. Chapter Two focuses on providing a sense of the research process and the relationships between the researcher and the youth who participated in the inquiry. In Chapter Two: “Research Relationships and Encounters,” I describe the process of creating the inquiry with youth; I introduce the theories which supported the use of interactive activities for inquiry purposes, the process of securing youth participants for the inquiry, and offer some brief descriptions of the ten youth who
became my thinking friends. I then contemplate the issue of knowing the youth and describe some of the theories that guided my facilitation of the inquiry. Chapter Two also includes a brief description of the provocative inquiry activities used in the inquiry, the order in which they were conducted, and includes a brief statement about the intended purpose for each inquiry activity, and the other means by which data was solicited in the inquiry (e.g., two brief individual interviews with each youth, small group discussions and electronic communication).  

In Chapter Three: “Cycles of Interpretation,” I illustrate the theories and processes that were engaged to make meaning in and through the inquiry. I review the interpretive theories that influenced how I conducted and made sense of the inquiry, paying particular attention to radical hermeneutics, pragmatism and feminist pragmatism. I explore and take a position on the meanings of the terms, research, inquiry and methodology and propose how I will enact these terms in the research. I then turn to describe the role of “thinking friends” (Minnich, 2005) in philosophical fieldwork (the approach to research I use to name this inquiry). Following this, I attempt to illustrate, using examples, how I interacted with the data in the inquiry. I describe how I worked with feelings of familiarity, surprise, doubt and confusion during analyses to become aware of my habits of attention during interpretation and posit how in the present inquiry I strove to overcome my past impulse to engage in bracketing my beliefs and values and instead attend to them as much as possible throughout interpretation. I

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18 I have also included an appendix which contains a full description of each of the Provocative Inquiry Activities used in the research. Alongside the activity descriptions in Appendix A, I have inserted comments about which activities the youth enjoyed the most and my thoughts on how well each activity stimulated inquiry.

19 The ways in which I interacted with the data generated in the inquiry are also part of Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

20 “Habits of attention” refers to habitual tendencies to notice and not notice certain things.
describe the process of selecting the four touchstone questions posed by youth which provide an entry point for the explorations in the middle chapters. To foreshadow how I intend to work with troubling my past research practices in the present inquiry, I introduce three crises in qualitative research (e.g., representation, legitimation, praxis) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003)\textsuperscript{21}. In this chapter I describe how the process of engaging in the inquiry quickly began to shape how I was conceiving of the inquiry. In particular, my sense of being able to articulate what youth thought about knowledge was troubled and provoked further inquiry into what the inquiry was about and how it might be re-presented.

Part II of the dissertation contains four chapters that focus on illustrating the play of ideas around knowledge between youth, myself, and other thinking friends (theorists). Each of the four chapters in this section of the dissertation is titled with a touchstone question posed by a youth thinking friend. Each title question represents a touchstone around which I both explore what happened in the inquiry and bring in theorists as additional thinking friends to help extend the inquiry into knowledge. In these four middle chapters, attention is drawn to how the questions and issues raised by youth provoked inquiry into how I enacted knowledge in my past research practice. Through the use of a series of text boxes inset into each chapter, I theorize what dominant conceptions of knowledge appear to be upheld and resisted by the youth in the inquiry, and by myself in my past (and present) research practices.

\textsuperscript{21} I chose to focus my research contemplations around challenges/issues that cross qualitative research traditions because I do not consider my past research practice to align with any singular approach to research. For example, even though my past research was described as phenomenological, I did not align with a particular branch of phenomenology, and even though I employed some analysis techniques from ethnographic research, I did not purport to be doing ethnographic research. In focusing attention on negotiating crises that cross traditions, I attempt to illustrate that the challenges of most qualitative research are caught up in the question of how we know what we think we know.
Chapter Four: “Is there a certain test to take or thing to say or believe before I’m a knowledgeable person?” launches an exploration of school-based “tests” for knowledge, including teacher stereotypes of students which imply knowledge-ability as being dependent upon performance in school. Chapter Four begins exploring the notions of self as autonomous rational being, objective knowledge and valid knowers, truth as residing in stories, and separating (either/or) logic. These explorations turn back on the youth’s proposition that experience is important in constructing knowledge.

The touchstone question for Chapter Five, “Do our values and experiences affect how we see, judge, or imagine things?” commences an exploration of youth’s definitions of knowledge and knowing alongside their perceptions of how adults in their lives position these terms. Within the exploration, the questions and issues youth raise relate to rationalism and the creation of hierarchies of knowledge. The explorations provoke me, the researcher, to contemplate my impulse to take the stance of theoretical observer in my past research. Together with the youth, we explore and resist the notion that knowledge is tidy and clearly expressable. Chapter Five also branches from the touchstone question to contemplate whether opinions constitute knowledge and how opinions are formed and judged. Traditional concerns with absolutism and relativism are explored and an alternative (qualified relativism) (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a) is proposed. Finally, the challenge of negotiating perspectives is considered in light of adultist perspectives which inhibit young people’s participation in co-constructing knowledge.

Chapter Six: “Can anyone know anything if they don’t know themselves?” focuses on exploring the possibility of knowing oneself and knowing others. Chapter Six also explores the possibility that self knowledge makes possible knowledge beyond oneself.
In this chapter the traditions that posit the self as knowable are contemplated for their effects on compulsions to articulate a known self. Along with the idea of a knowable self, the exploration branches to consider how theories are used to support the possibility of self knowledge. The contemplation of knowing self and other compelled me, the researcher to consider how I have engaged with the idea of transparency in my past (and present) research practices. The notion of a relational self is explored before turning to the ways in which dominant conceptions of knowledge have distanced self from other and hence supported the practice of othering (e.g., racism, sexism, anthropocentrism, and adultism). Chapter Six ends on a hopeful note about the transition from the use of nouns (things) to verbs (processes) in thinking about the world.

Chapter Seven: “Do you have to know for sure and have reliable sources to back up your actions?” introduces the tradition of thinking that knowledge is higher than practical action and briefly contemplates the possibility of provoking change through research. The primary concern voiced by youth – knowledge that helps one determine how to act – launches an exploration of knowledge for action. The problem of conceiving of the individual as an autonomous being surfaces again in the exploration and bridges to contemplation of the possibility of becoming aware of beliefs which are embodied in action. From this point, the idea of knowledge as action is explored and includes contemplation of how I have enacted interpretation in my past (and present) research. The youth’s concern with determining how to negotiate multiple and contradictory perspectives regarding the issue of global warming launches an exploration of how to act in the face of uncertain knowledge. Caputo’s (2000) invitation to put an end to ethics is inserted alongside contemplation of how codes of ethics are used in
professional practice and contemplation of offering guidance to youth when one accepts that the particulars of situations in which one must act cannot be known in advance.

Part III of this dissertation contains two chapters which focus on extending the inquiry to teaching-learning encounters. Chapter Eight: “To Set in Motion Lessons from the Inquiry” extends learning from the inquiry to teaching-learning interactions in teacher education programs and teaching in high schools. Chapter Eight reflects on youth’s descriptions of the effects of how knowledge tends to be enacted in schools in order to propose recommendations for creating a conceptual climate for inquiry into how knowledge is known/experienced in classrooms. Chapter Eight focuses on considering how dominant conceptions of knowledge are embodied in teaching-learning encounters. While the youth in this inquiry described how they experience conceptions of knowledge in schools, this chapter posits also that dominant conceptions of knowledge affect teachers in teaching-learning encounters in ways that are similar to how they affect students. The recommendations in Chapter Eight include suggestions for teacher education which focus primarily on encouraging student teachers’ early exploration of conceptions of knowledge, and attending to how adolescent development is positioned in teacher education programs. Recommendations for facilitating inquiry into conceptions of knowledge with students in high-school classrooms are also included in this chapter.

In Chapter Nine: “Looking Back, Gazing Forward” I revisit the intended purpose of the inquiry and reflect upon some of the challenges associated with conducting the inquiry. I also describe what I learned about my research from engaging this inquiry. My learning from the inquiry revolves around an increased awareness of how conceptions of knowledge have been and continue to be implicated in my research
practice. Alongside positing having gained some insights into my research practice, I acknowledge that the struggles which have been part of my past research practice are not capable of being resolved, but that an increased awareness of their origins and the ability to name them will help me to live with them in my future practice. Chapter Nine also looks forward by expressing my hopes for continuing the inquiry in the future.

Notes on Language Use

Throughout this dissertation I frequently use the term “we.” I recognize that the use of “we” is considered problematic because it suggests that I am attempting to speak for others. I have decided to retain the use of “we” in order to signify my desire to stand with particular social groups: women, parents, scholars, adults, pedagogues, and anyone working to surface and trouble their formative assumptions. Despite suggesting that I wish to stand with particular groups, I recognize that every social group which I consider myself a member includes more diversity than I can know or speak about. Recognizing such diversity led me to wonder if the only way in which I could appropriately speak would be to employ the first person “I.” However, the sole use of “I” presents other problems for me since I believe that even when I appear to be speaking for myself there are also others I am also speaking of and through. This belief reflects Caputo’s (1997) contention that our memories are ancient; those who have gone before us are also always with us. And so, following Caputo (1997) I intend my use of “we” to be unsure and highly qualified, a “we” that recognizes that I cannot say “we” and wonders whether the “we” I use even exists.

Another alternative would be to avoid using both problematic terms. This alternative – to speak in a way that avoids using we, or us (or me, or I) – seems
inadequate too and for reasons that trouble me greatly. I worry that avoiding the use of “we” and “I” would end up distancing me from others. Writing in such a way approximates too closely for me the once-required use of the third-person voice in academia; the disembodied “objective” observer, the separate self, who speaks from a place of detachment. Given that I see myself as a social being always in relation, I could not justify language use that positions me as separate from others. Similarly, I think the consistent use of “one” is equally unacceptable because it tends to reinforce the idea that a person is an autonomous individual; a positioning which is at odds with my relational orientation to being. On occasion, I use “one” in order to invite comments about its effects in practice.

Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich (2005) chooses, as I do, to use the term “we” despite its challenges. She asserts that there is no simple way to resolve the conceptual and political tensions involved in the use of “we,” nor should we desire to resolve them. “We” can be employed to speak with one another while recognizing that despite all our differences, “we are all natal and mortal, relational, communicating beings who live, love, work, and have our being on this earth,” and just because we hold particular views and have had particular experiences, it does not mean that we are those views (Minnich, 2005, p.xii).

I wish my writing to be received as reflecting an effort to create shareable ground. I ask of readers that you do not infer by my use of “we” that I am assuming sharable ground. Rather, my use of “we” is a way of showing that I stand beside you in sharing responsibility for much of what we struggle with, alongside the many things which we can and should celebrate, including our ability to think and question together. By
shareable ground, I suggest that which we *might* share; a ground upon which those who consider themselves either insiders or outsiders (or both) are invited to tread. I have attempted to specify throughout this dissertation who I mean to include in my use of “we.” There are times when I mean to align myself with other women, parents, educators, and researchers. I have probably neglected to be specific in more than one instance and apologize to readers who find my use of “we” too ambiguous or wholly unacceptable.
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS AND ENCOUNTERS

I spent several months pondering how to engage an inquiry into conceptions of knowledge with youth. I also spent months working towards finding youth to volunteer to participate in the inquiry. In this chapter I describe the inquiry process I created and introduce the youth who volunteered to participate in the inquiry – the youth who became important “thinking friends.”

Creating a Process for Inquiry with Youth

When I was envisioning a way to conduct an inquiry into knowledge I doubted that it would be possible to inquire into conceptions of knowledge via individual interviews with youth. I thought that surfacing implicitly held beliefs and provoking thinking about knowledge might be better facilitated through group interaction. I thought that the energy and varied perspectives of several youth together would contribute to a dynamic thinking space that would exceed what I could hope to evoke in one-on-one encounters with youth. For a while I considered the possibility of conducting focus groups. However, I worried that conventions around speaking in groups and turn-taking might stifle that dynamic flow that can fuel exploration. Further, I wanted to get beyond the question and answer format typical of my past research and find a way to engage more creatively; to inquire in a space that was more exploratory, more open to surfacing possibilities and that also made connections between the relatively abstract concept of knowledge and its existence in the day-to-day lives of youth. I wanted to develop activities around which youth could interact with one another in a way that would facilitate their thinking about conceptions of knowledge.
In my doctoral program of studies I took a course in Performative Inquiry with Lynn Fels (1998, 2002) and was introduced there to Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (2002) and Charles Garoian’s Performance Art Pedagogy (1999). My experience in the course prompted me to pursue another source (Rohd, 1998) that significantly informed the development of the activities I employed in the inquiry. From the literature on performance-based inquiry, I saw many possibilities for engendering inquiry into knowledge.

The literature on performative inquiry reveals the potential power of group interactions for inquiry and provided me with some ideas about how to attend to what would happen within the group activities. Performative inquiry invites participants to imagine worlds (Fels & McGivern, 2002). By asking youth to inquire into an abstract concept such as knowledge and to connect it to their daily lives, I would be asking them to engage in imaginative worlds through the acts of re-membering, creatively calling forth what happened before and creatively imagining its meanings. Further, performative inquiry made me hopeful that the inquiry interactions would arouse within the youth “a questioning and level of engagement that continue the conversation after the activity has concluded” (Fels, 2002).

Fels’ (1998) notion of the “stop” as a moment of risk and opportunity invited me as inquiry facilitator to pay attention to moments during interaction in which attention

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22 The performative, as used by Fels, is not synonymous with performativity as used by Judith Butler, although their uses are not wholly unrelated. Performative inquiry “is a research vehicle that acknowledges performance in action and interaction as a place of learning and exploration. Its tools of inquiry, for researcher and participants, are their bodies, imaginations, experiences (shared and individual), feelings, memories, biases, fears, judgments, and prejudices, hopes, and desires – simply, being, becoming” (Fels, 1998, p.29, emphasis in original). Butler’s work deals with identity from a poststructuralist perspective, representing performativity as the performance of subjectivity through words and actions which are performed as a consequence of word use (c.f., Butler, 1995).
becomes slowed and focused. The stop calls into presence the taken for granted, that which our attention tends to skip over\textsuperscript{23}.

The literature on performance art pedagogy used language that reflected my epistemological orientation. Inquiry, seen as cultural work in performance pedagogy, accepts that knowledge “can never be understood merely in terms of either the actions of the subject or the qualities of the object because it emerges in the mutually specifying dynamics of their activities and reactions” (Garoian, 1999, p.166). From performance pedagogy, knowledge is viewed as an elusive construct. A performance art pedagogy affirmed the value of inviting youth into an inquiry space to participate in making and transforming meanings about knowledge.

Boal (2002), like Polanyi, asserts that beliefs tend to be invisible because we acquire and use them in an implicit way (Greene, 1969). Thus, we must first work deliberately to know a thought, a conceptualization, a social image, before we can change it. This reaffirmed my suspicions about the need to be creative in how I might provoke youth’s beliefs about knowledge. Interactive activity can set in motion a process of exploration which stimulates creativity and transforms people’s images from selves as observers (Boal’s “spectators”) into selves capable of action (Boal’s “spect-actors”). Thus, through interactive inquiry I hoped that the youth and I might make what is implicit more explicit; getting to know the beliefs about knowledge that are implicitly held. As

\textsuperscript{23} The notion of the stop was also an important trigger for attending to moments in the inquiry which I needed to attend to in my analyses; moments in which I experienced surprise, confusion, doubt, or familiarity. I made notes about these moments in the inquiry interactions in a field diary and also continued to attend to similar feelings in interaction with the texts produced in the inquiry. I will say more about this in Chapter 2: Cycles of Interpretation.
Minnich (2005) and Thayer-Bacon (2003) acknowledge, it is challenging to become aware of our formative assumptions, but until we do, we cannot begin to critique them.

Rohd (1998) extended Boal’s work with adults to engage theatre for dialogic purposes with youth. Rohd’s work attests to the potential power of creating an interactive space for inquiry with youth. Rohd (1998) asserts that humans have an intrinsic need for dialogue and, like Thayer-Bacon (2003), he argues that we become who we are through dialogue. He posits that theatre lives in us and around us every moment of our lives when we play, laugh, tell stories, and share silences together. Interactive dialogue becomes a medium for exploration that not only surfaces ideas but also opens participants to their power to act for change: “The act of expression is an act of connection – through it we become positive, active participants in our lives and in our communities” (Rohd, 1998, p.xix).

Given that the literature above includes as central in its discourse the term “performance,” I feel compelled to note that the youth in this inquiry did not really engage in “performance” as some might understand performance to mean. For example, the inquiry activities I created did not ask them to take on imagined roles as one would do in a role drama. Rather, the activities invited them to express their own perspectives and propose what they held to be the opinions of others with respect to conceptions of knowledge. The activities were intended to provoke thinking and conversation to facilitate exploration, and in this sense, invoked the imaginative processes that some would align with performance.

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24 Role drama involves the taking on of roles to explore a particular situation and/or issue within an imaginary world (Fels, 2002).
I developed several inquiry activities\textsuperscript{25} by adapting activities located in several other sources, and creating a few original activities. It was not difficult to alter activities from sources which focused on exploring constructs like race or power to focus instead on exploring knowledge. I adapted one activity from Boal (2002): “The Great Game of Power.” I adapted one activity from Rohd’s (1998) Theatre for Community-Building and Dialogue: “Beliefs Exploration.” I adapted one activity from Garoian (1999): “Paper Cut-Outs,” and one activity from Luce-Kapler, Sumara, and Davis (2002): “Exquisite Corpse.” I also adapted one activity from an article by Pitt and Britzman (2003): “Feeling Knowledge.”

Additionally, I created four original activities. On one occasion in my past I participated in an activity about sharing appreciation with others and used my memory of that activity to create the “Sharing Wisdom” activity. Boal’s (2002) emphasis on the power of images to evoke feelings that “short-circuit the brain, the ‘cops in the head’ placed there by society or personal experience” (2002, p.xxiii) prompted me to create the activity I called “Exploring Knowing Images.” I created the “Tree of Knowledge” activity as a means to probe some ideas that the youth raised in one of the interactive inquiry sessions. Finally, I created the “Graffiti-ing” activity as a means to re-present for youth some of the things they had said in the inquiry that caught my attention and for them to have an opportunity to question and extend what they, and the other youth, had said.

From reading the literature on performative inquiry, performance art pedagogy, and other theatre-based interactions I learned about the importance of commencing group

\textsuperscript{25} A detailed description of all the inquiry activities employed in the large group sessions and the foci of the small group sessions can be found in Appendix A of this report.
interactions with warm-up activities. The warm-up activities I selected for use in the inquiry (Boal, 2002; Rohd, 1998) were intended to help the youth get to know something about one another. The warm-up activities were also aimed at helping the youth become comfortable engaging with one another in structured activities before moving on to activities that would deepen the inquiry by inserting ambiguity and posing challenges.

Finally, the literature also indicated that every interactive activity should be followed by a debriefing session in order to invite the collective sharing of the experience of exploration. During debriefings with the youth I asked general questions like, “What was it like to do that activity?” “What happened?” “What ideas about knowledge showed up?” “What did you learn about yourself?” “What did you learn about others?” “What were you thinking as you responded?” I also asked some questions specific to each individual inquiry activity.26

Table 1 provides a brief description of the intent of each of the provocative inquiry activities. I chose to use a variety of activities in order to offer the youth numerous and various provocations to help them think about how they experience knowledge in their lives.

26 The questions used to facilitate the debriefing discussions that followed each activity are noted near the bottom of each activity description in Appendix A.
Table 1. Summary of Provocative Inquiry Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Name</th>
<th>Intended Purpose/Opportunity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper Cut-Outs</strong></td>
<td>Focus on student-teacher relationships; how do youth’s perspectives about teacher stereotypes of students reflect or diverge from their sense of themselves as learners; what ideas about knowledge are evident in the perspectives revealed in the stereotypes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exquisite Corpse</strong></td>
<td>An anonymous exploration of what knowledge means, where knowledge comes from, kinds of knowledge, what’s important about knowledge, and how adults in youth’s lives tend to position knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs Exploration</strong></td>
<td>An introductory activity to help youth feel comfortable expressing their perspectives on questions related to knowledge. e.g., do they ‘agree,’ ‘disagree,’ or are they ‘unsure’ about statements such as: “Reading is the best way to become knowledgeable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investigating Knowing Images</strong></td>
<td>Is it possible to see knowledge at play in interactions among other people? When youth look at an image of people together in different situations/contexts, what assumptions do they have about how knowledge is being positioned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Great Game of Power</strong></td>
<td>Do youth see objects in the world as infused with symbols of power and/or knowledge? How do they explain how some symbols are valued or validated over others? What relationships do they suggest exist between symbols of knowledge and: a) people as knowers; and b) the purposes of knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharing Wisdom</strong></td>
<td>Who knows (and who doesn’t)? Does age play a role in youth’s experiences with what is considered valid knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feeling Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>How do youth experience the relationship between knowledge and emotions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tree of Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Build on previous inquiry responses to explore the relationship between culture and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graffiti-ing</strong></td>
<td>Extend previous inquiry responses by posing a question alongside a quote from each youth. Youth cycle through quotes/questions and emergent collection of feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recruiting Youth Inquirers**

I pursued a variety of avenues to recruit potential youth participants for the inquiry. First, I created an information poster which included the URL for a website I developed to provide information about my research. In January 2007 I contacted the youth program coordinator at four recreation centres in the study area (a mid-sized city in Western Canada) to ask if I might put up a poster in their facility. I received permission to do so from all four youth coordinators. Additionally, the youth coordinator at one recreation centre invited me to give a recruiting presentation to her youth leadership group.

In February and early March of 2007, I contacted several high schools. First I contacted principals at two high schools with whom I had an established relationship. I asked their permission to put up a poster in their school hallways. One of the principals invited me to make a brief presentation at an assembly, which I did the following week. The principal at the other school invited me to speak to the career counselors at her school and I arranged to meet with them later that same week. I was invited by leadership counselors in two schools to give a presentation to their youth leadership groups. I put up a poster in a fifth school but did not receive an invitation to speak with anyone in that school.

In addition to the recreation centres and schools, I also contacted the local Boys and Girls Club, and phoned the contact person for youth advisory councils attached to several service organizations in my city. I delivered a poster to the local Boys and Girls Club and contacted the leader of a local youth advisory council and was invited to speak to the youth advisory council at one of their regular meetings. Finally, I asked several
parents I knew to spread the word about my research, and posted the project website link along with an invitation for volunteers on two local websites: a parenting magazine blog area for parents of teens, and a youth interest site.

My goal was to bring together a group of approximately 10 to 12 youth from various backgrounds for the purpose of engaging in inquiry together. Eight females and two males came forward to volunteer to participate in the inquiry. Two youth responded to a presentation I made at their school assembly, three youth responded to the presentation I made to their youth leadership group, two youth responded to information I had shared with their parents, two youth came via referrals from a friend who had decided to join the inquiry project, and one youth contacted me via the info I had posted on the youth interest website.

When each youth initially contacted me to express an interest in participating in the research, I asked to arrange a time to meet with them to introduce myself and answer any questions they might have. This first meeting with each youth was intended to establish a sense of rapport between me and the youth before we convened as a large group. During the initial meeting I also asked the youth a few questions such as, “What made you interested in participating in this research?” and “What do you need to feel comfortable in a group setting?” I also asked each youth about their availability for group inquiry sessions. When it became apparent that all the youth were willing and available to meet over spring break (March 19-23, 2007), I arranged a space for us to meet and made sure that each youth had a way of getting to and from the meeting location (a meeting room in a local public library) each day.
Table 2 summarizes the age and gender composition of the group of youth who participated in the inquiry. Following the table is a series of brief vignettes about the youth that describe their ethnic background and reveals some of their likes and dislikes.

**Table 2. Youth Participants by Age and Sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following youth vignettes were developed during a warm-up activity intended to help the youth get to know something about one another. In the activity the youth were asked to “interview” another person in the group. Each youth was provided a card listing the things they needed to find out about the other person. After everyone was finished “interviewing” they each took turns introducing the person they had just interviewed to the group. The names of the youth that are used throughout this paper are pseudonyms that were chosen by the youth.

*Payton* is a 14 year-old female. She was born in Victoria, B.C. of Scottish/English/Métis/Welsh ancestry and has one older sibling. Her favourite food is celery. Payton is not crazy about the clump of food that gets stuck in the sink drain after doing the dishes. In school, she likes English and does horseback riding and musical

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27 At our first group meeting the youth noted the gender disparity in the group. One of the female participants declared that if I, the researcher, had been a male, she probably would not have participated. That lead me to wonder if I had been a male if perhaps more male youth would have volunteered to be part of the inquiry project.
theatre after school. She would love to go on a Hero Holiday\textsuperscript{28}. She can often be heard saying “Ya, like.”

\textit{Jericha-Fay} is a 14 year-old female. She was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba of Polish/Swedish/Finnish/Irish ancestry and has one younger sibling. She loves Thai food and is not crazy about people not putting their own dirty dishes in the dishwasher. In school, she likes English. After school she likes to hang out with friends, write, play field hockey, play piano and sing. She would love to go to Venice. She can often be heard saying “I’m tired.”

\textit{Frankie} is a 14 year-old female. Frankie was born in Victoria, B.C. of Scottish/Algerian ancestry and has two younger siblings. Her favourite food is couscous. She is not crazy about the sound of nails scratching on woven plastic binders. In school, she likes English and after school she plays soccer. She would love to go to China. She can often be heard saying “Yah.”

\textit{Pandora} is a 15 year-old female. She was born in Victoria, B.C. of Italian ancestry and has one older sibling. She loves sushi and is not crazy about people who talk too loud. In school, she likes English, Math, and P.E. She plays tennis and does karate after school. She would love to go to Italy. She can often be heard saying “I don’t know.”

\textit{Ruby} is a 17 year-old female. She was born in Vancouver, B.C. of Chinese ancestry and has no siblings. Ruby’s favourite food is sushi. She is not crazy about not getting things done. In school, she likes Chemistry and P.E. and after school she likes to

\textsuperscript{28} Hero Holiday is an organization that provides opportunities for high school students to participate in humanitarian relief projects by bringing practical assistance to those living in extreme poverty (see: http://heroholiday.absolute.org).
hang around with friends, watch TV and shop. She would love to go to Australia. She can often be heard saying “Cool!”

_Romeo_ is a 17 year-old female. She was born in Victoria, B.C. of Chinese ancestry and has two younger siblings. She loves Italian and Japanese food and is not crazy about insects. In school, she likes Art and Biology and she takes singing lessons after school. She would love to go to Africa. She can often be heard saying “ Seriously” and “Ugh, so annoying.”

_Pippen_ is a 17 year-old female. She was born in Victoria, B.C. of British ancestry and has one older sibling. Pippen’s favourite food is mashed potatoes. She is not crazy about adults who don’t understand information technology. In school she likes Photography, and Marketing and Entrepreneurship. After school she likes to sleep/relax and read. She would love to go to Mexico. She can often be heard saying “That’s a dirty lie.”

_Vladimir_ is a 17 year-old male. He was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick of Chinese ancestry and has one older sibling. Vladimir loves salmon. He is not crazy about unbalanced things. In school he likes Math and Physics and after school he swims. He would love to go to Russia. He can often be heard saying “El oh el [LOL], not.”

_Julio_ is a 17 year-old male. He was born in Offenburg, Germany of Iranian ancestry and has two older siblings. Julio’s favourite food is rice. He is not crazy about people who judge things without experiencing them. In school, he likes English and Literature. After school he participates in leadership, music, theatre, and environmental stuff. He would love to go to Iran. He can often be heard saying “Dude.”
Paige is an 18 year-old female. She was born in Abbotsford, B.C. of British ancestry and has one older sibling. She loves chicken cordon bleu and banana peppers. Paige is not crazy about the sound of people biting their fork when they are eating. Her favourite school subjects are English and Dance. After school she likes to play guitar, dance, listen to music, and hang out with friends. She would love to go to Edinburgh, Scotland. She can often be heard saying “Hilarious,” and “Awesome.”

Several of the youth enjoyed extant relationships before joining the inquiry group. Pippen, Paige, and Julio are friends; they are in Grade 12 in the same school where Ruby is in Grade 11, and Frankie, Payton and Jericha-Fay (who are also friends) are in Grade 9. Julio encouraged Paige to join the inquiry project after having met with me for the initial interview, and Paige encouraged Pippen to join the group part-way through our first week of activities. Pippen joined the group after the first week of activities and participated in only an initial interview and one group session.

Ruby and Romeo were acquainted through Mandarin and summer school classes they had both attended in the past. They were surprised to run into one another again in the inquiry group. Pandora was not familiar with anyone in the group before joining the group. She attends Grade 10 in a school which none of the other group members attend. Vladimir is a grade 12 student in the same school where Romeo attends Grade 11, but they had not met one another prior to joining the group.

Knowing the Youth?

Having shared something here about the youth inquirers, I feel compelled to acknowledge that I am not able to say much at all about their socio-cultural situatedness and its influences on what surfaced in the inquiry. I cannot profess to “know” the youth
who participated in the inquiry, although I do know each of them in a partial way. The question of our ability to know ourselves and others is a question which is central to interpretation and the desire to achieve transparency in research\(^{29}\).

The challenge of knowing\(^{30}\) what is known prompts me to always question the proposition of individual knowing and accept that a knower \textit{cannot} be held solely responsible for what s/he constructs. I prefer to respond to questions about how well I got to “know” the youth inquirers by saying that I “appreciated” them. By “appreciate” I mean that I esteemed their existence, was sensitive to their needs within the inquiry space, and deliberately endeavoured to be attentive and responsive to our interactions in that space.

\begin{center}
Facilitating the Inquiry
\end{center}

My past research experience with youth, including youth who were in secure custody, has shown me that young people are keen to talk when they sense that an adult has a genuine interest in what they have to say. Rohd (1998) affirms my past experience conducting research with youth (Artz, Nicholson, Halsall & Larke, 2003; Nicholson, 2006; Nicholson & Artz, 2007; Nicholson, Artz, Halsall & Larke, 2004) in his assertion that “young people respond to honesty, caring, and to someone as interested in listening as in talking” (p.127).

My past experiences with youth have shaped my present sensibility about how I wished to facilitate the inquiry interactions and how I wish to re-present our inquiry into knowledge. My values include a desire to involve youth more fully and take more

\(^{29}\) I will take up the issue of knowing self and other and the possibility of achieving transparency in research in Chapter Six of this paper.

\(^{30}\) I will return to the question of interpretation in Chapter Three where I discuss the analysis process.
seriously the particular insights that arise from their situatedness; insights into the world that can inform – and even transform\textsuperscript{31} – how adults view the world. In communicating my values and aims, I have paid careful attention to the language I use and through my work, strive to resist adultist beliefs about youth knowledge being inferior.

Thus, my use of the term “youth” rather than “adolescent” is deliberate. In popular usage, youth refers to “a young person” whereas “adolescent” is commonly used to refer to a person who has not yet achieved adulthood (Webster’s Dictionary). I posit that the meaning of “adolescent” does a disservice to youth by positioning youth as something other than the dominant and desired state of being (i.e., adult). The term “adolescent” is reflective of an age-specific prejudice: adultism\textsuperscript{32}. Adultism, like “ageism” that applies largely to the prejudice against the elderly, reflects the ways in which the age of the physical body is used to define, control, and order the actions of the social body such that time becomes the means by which we attempt to regulate what some people can and cannot do, and can and cannot be (Valentine, Skelton & Chambers, 1998). While “youth” cannot be separated from the influences of gender, class and context (Caputo, 1995), the phenomenon of being marginalized simply because of being young applies to people \textit{across} diverse backgrounds (Bell, 1995). Adultist attitudes are used to justify the exclusion of youth in serious matters.

Other obstacles that limit youth’s participation in serious conversations include conceiving of youth as a “subculture” of the dominant society (i.e., the adult world)

\textsuperscript{31} My belief in the potential of transformation which might arise from taking youth’s voices more seriously is derived from my sense of the transformations that have been possible throughout history when the voices of other marginalized groups have first been taken seriously (e.g., women, racial minorities).
\textsuperscript{32} Adultism refers to bias against young people based on the assumption that adults are superior to children and youth (Tate & Copas, 2003).
(Tittley, 1999), and viewing the period of youth as having value only for its relation to emerging adulthood (Caputo, 1995; Krueger, 2006; Wulff, 1995). Positioning youth as a subculture produces specific codes of behaviour for youth and does not treat seriously the influencing functions that society has on youth and that youth have on society. Positioning the adult world as the mainstream culture and youth in opposition is now considered inappropriate given the world in which we live. Tittley (1999) argues that “we live in a world of coincident communities, a great swamp of possibilities. There is no main stream. There are many streams. …Subcultures can no longer be seen to be ‘pushing off’ against the rest of culture” (p.4).

Adults who devalue the period of youth tend not to see this phase of life as productive and important in its own right. Instead, these adults focus their interactions with youth on propelling youth towards desired outcomes in adulthood (Krueger, 2006). Contrary to this perspective which positions youth as incomplete adults, I join other youth advocates in viewing youth as capable agents within the particular situations and surroundings of their lives. I deem it important to include youth in research in ways that position them as persons who negotiate, manage, and contribute to producing culture rather than being seen merely as the passive recipients or products of culture.

In addition to my personal values about youth, I responded to institutional requirements for ethical research by going beyond the ethical requirements of university protocols for research,33 to also recognize that special personal and moral relationships arise out of coming together for the purpose of research (Marshall & Shepard, 2006).

33 I used a process consenting approach in the inquiry. Youth and their parents were asked to sign their consent to participation at the beginning of the project and then youth were asked again for their verbal consent each time we met throughout the duration of the inquiry.
Thus I maintained an orientation of response-ability and care for the youth over a time period that extended beyond our research interactions and included, on occasion, responding with care to personal concerns and problems that youth shared with me.

As outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, the purposes of the inquiry included providing youth with an experience with questioning beliefs about knowledge; an experience which I believed would benefit them. Minnich (2003) stresses that in addition to facilitating the development of well-reasoned and informed opinions, it is also important for individuals to develop opinions about knowledge. Moreover, I expected that this research would demonstrate youth’s capacity for engaging in serious discussion about topics like knowledge and thereby highlight for other researchers, youth practitioners, teachers, and parents, the value of including youth in serious conversations.

Additionally, I believe that by encouraging youth to question taken-for-granted beliefs about knowledge – if such questioning went beyond, of course, the restricted example which this inquiry represents – society may benefit because youth will be better able to participate in socializing future generations in new ways of thinking (Rorty, 1999).

As I mentioned earlier, the concept of caring reasoning (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) was central to how I facilitated the inquiry. Caring reasoning states that “we must try to suspend our own doubts long enough to make sure we have heard fairly the other’s voice” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p.126). “Caring reasoning dissolves the subject-object split
by demanding careful attention focused on generously attempting to believe an other” before moving to critique\(^{34}\) (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 211).

By being mindful of the goals for dialogue in the inquiry and the role that caring reasoning plays within ethical research relationships, I paid attention to how I was listening to youth in inquiry and made a concerted effort to convey that I believed, rather than doubted, what they were saying. Throughout the inquiry activities my goal was to facilitate open exploration and to avoid suggesting to the youth that they should take up my beliefs about knowledge. I offered examples and questions from my own experience alongside those shared by the youth. I attempted to listen without judgment to what was shared in the group. It was important to me that the inquiry constituted an opening. I wanted the youth’s participation in the inquiry to be a place in which they began to think about conceptions of knowledge and felt safe (i.e., they would not be ostracized, ignored, or denigrated for offering different points of view) to surface typically taken-for-granted beliefs before anyone would critique what they were saying.

In addition to being concerned with enacting caring relationships with the youth, I believed that genuine dialogue in the inquiry space required that the youth practiced caring for one another. The warm-up activities that preceded each day’s provocative inquiry activities were one way in which I helped the youth get to know one another. I believe that knowing something about others helps us to be more caring in our interactions. I began facilitating caring for one another when the youth arrived for the first day of the large group sessions. When the first youth arrived, I wrote out a name tag

\(^{34}\) Of course, participating in the inquiry was in itself an engagement with critique because participating in the act of questioning beliefs is a form of critique. When I refer to the application of caring reasoning in the context of this inquiry, it is specific to not critiquing what the youth were surfacing in inquiry.
for the youth and then handed her the name cards and pens to write a name tag for the next youth to arrive, and also asked that she ask the next youth to write a name tag for the third youth. The youth quickly took over and as each new person arrived, they were welcomed by a peer asking their name and preparing a name tag for them.

Another way that care within the inquiry space was facilitated was by devoting time during the first large group session for the group to create guidelines for their participation in the inquiry. The youth were not very vocal during this activity and I ended up having to propose suggestions and invite their responses. It may have been that they were either inexperienced at participating in developing interaction guidelines or that they were still unsure about speaking up in the group. The group guidelines that we ended up were these:

“Our Group…

…Listens to one another

…Doesn’t judge others

…Includes small group sharing

…Discusses everything

…Thinks outside ourselves

…Acknowledges feelings that arise but gives space (doesn’t try to solve)

…Accepts that there are no ‘right’ answers in this space

…Welcomes doubt and uncertainty.”

Another way in which I attempted to create a safe space which was conducive to exploring ideas was via sharing my doubts and confusions with the youth during conversations. I explicitly acknowledged the value of their questions (e.g., “That’s a
really important issue,” “Yeah, that’s amazing to think about,” “That’s a good question,” “That’s interesting,” “There’s an interesting thought,” “It’s not an easy thing to talk about, is it?”). I communicated to youth that when I posed questions for which I did not have an answer, my purpose in posing those questions was for us to think together about difficult questions. I voiced aloud the limitations of my own attention and interpretations by stating that my ideas reflected only one possible meaning among many possible meanings (e.g., “What stands out for me is not necessarily what’s there, right? Like there’s so much more there than what’s going to capture my attention.”).

The version of thinking that I attempted to communicate in inquiry with the youth differs from inductive and deductive logic by focusing on exploration and suggestion. The thinking I aimed to model was non-coercive and was not intent on proving anything or arriving anywhere; it was not aimed at persuading or refuting. It was the kind of thinking with others that Minnich (2003) describes as open-minded, reflective, questioning, listening, “making sensitive distinctions that hold differences in play rather than dividing in order to exclude” (Minnich, 2003).

Another way in which I demonstrated respect for the youth was by offering a small honorarium to acknowledge the value of their time and contribution to the project. I felt strongly at the outset of the project, that youth, like adults, deserve to be compensated for their time and energy. Each youth received a small honorarium for each individual interview and each group session they attended. Youth were also compensated for the time it took to participate in e-communications via two lottery-style draws.
It was important to me that the youth in my research did not have the “hit and run” experience described by Marshall and Shepard (2006, p.150)\textsuperscript{35}. I checked in with the youth frequently between inquiry sessions and a few times after the inquiry sessions concluded. I communicated my appreciation of the youth by showing interest in them beyond what they could offer my dissertation research. I wanted to preserve a connection with the youth over time since I was uncertain about how quickly I would be able to prepare some preliminary “findings” to share with them and a few of the youth expressed early on their interest in learning how I made sense of what we did together.

From June 2007, when I conducted the final interviews, through December 2008 I made contact with the youth three or four times each via email. In the last group inquiry session I gave each youth a personalized thank-you card in which I had written one of their quotes from the inquiry along with a quote from a famous person. I joined two of the youth for tea in July 2007 at their invitation. In September 2007 I sent an email to those youth who were continuing high school to acknowledge the start of another school year and expressed my hope that they would have an enjoyable and successful year. For the four youth that had graduated from high school, I sent my best wishes in their new pursuits. In the emails I also said that I might want to reconvene the group again in the future to share a summary of my dissertation\textsuperscript{36}. I continued to respond to communication from two youth into the Spring of 2008.

\textsuperscript{35} The hit-and-run experience refers to researchers who use their skills to obtain meaningful and intimate data and then leave soon afterwards, showing little concern for the impact of the research process on the participants.

\textsuperscript{36} In May 2008 I sent an email to the group asking if anyone would like to meet to hear a summary of the dissertation. Three of the youth were available and willing to meet, two youth responded that they were living out of town, and I did not hear back from the other 5 youth. I wrote back suggesting that I would send an e-copy of a complete draft of the dissertation to each youth and they could contact me if they wanted to talk about it.
I include these details of what I consider to be the enactment of care and response-ability in research with youth in order to provide some particulars that may help other researchers to envision the creation of research relationships in their own work. I do not consider my sustained relationship with some of the youth to be a breach of the ethical guidelines for conducting research. I believe that when adults establish relationships with young people through any means, they should remain supportive and interested in the lives of those young people until their support and interest is no longer of importance to the youth. When youth contacted me to share things that were going on in their lives or ask for support, I responded as an adult who genuinely cares about encouraging and supporting young people\textsuperscript{37}. However, in listening to their concerns, I refrained from telling them what to do, and conveyed, instead, an interest in soliciting from them the meanings they were making of their own experiences and helped them to negotiate potential responses.

Inquiry Interactions

As I mentioned earlier, I began by conducting individual interviews with each youth before commencing the large group inquiry sessions. We then met as a large group for four days (2 hours each day including a food/beverage/socializing break) over Spring Break in 2007 to engage in the provocative inquiry activities\textsuperscript{38}. After Spring Break, I conducted three small group inquiry sessions, one additional large group inquiry session, 

\textsuperscript{37} If some of the youth desired a relationship with me that lasted even to this point in time today, I would not have considered it inappropriate to respond willingly, although I recognize the difficulty (i.e., time and energy) that I would have encountered should \textit{all} the youth have wanted to sustain a relationship with me.  

\textsuperscript{38} I did not record the initial introductory individual interviews. I began recording the inquiry interactions when we first met as a large group. I transcribed all the audio tapes from each interaction and they became the texts with which I interacted in the months that followed the face-to-face encounters.
and engaged in e-communication with individual youth. The project concluded with a closing interview with each youth. A graphic representation of the components of interaction in the inquiry is provided in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Inquiry Interactions**

![Flowchart showing inquiry interactions from March 2007 to June 2007.]

**March 2007**
- Introductory Individual Interviews

**Large Group Inquiry Sessions**
- Paper-Cut-Outs, Exquisite Corpse, Beliefs Exploration, Investigating Knowing Images, Great Game of Power, Sharing Wisdom, Feeling Knowledge, Graffiti-ing

**Small Group Inquiry Sessions**
- Pizza Meeting, Tea for Three, Donuts for Four (Tree of Knowledge)

**Ongoing e-communication**

**June 2007**
- Closing Individual Interviews
Small Group Inquiry Sessions

I arranged three small group discussions following the spring break inquiry sessions. The first group discussion occurred on April 11. Six of the youth met with me over pizza in a local restaurant. Four of the ten youth were unable to attend the meeting. In this meeting I used an example about knowledge that was shared in one of the inquiry activities to create a reading/responding activity (see “Tree of Knowledge” in Appendix A) and invited the youth to discuss it.

The second small group discussion was arranged with two of the quieter group members who knew each other. I realized through their initial interviews and in e-communications that these two youth had a lot to say but spoke less frequently than others in the large group sessions. My meeting with them over tea on April 26 (see “Tea for 3” discussion in Appendix A) gave me an opportunity to explore further some of the things they had shared in the large group sessions and with me via e-communications.

The third small group discussion (see “Donuts for 4” discussion in Appendix A) was held on May 3rd with three of the four youth who had been unable to attend the April 11th meeting over pizza. In that discussion I took the opportunity to probe some of the responses the three youth shared in the large group sessions and also invited them to do the reading/responding activity (i.e., “Tree of Knowledge”) that the others did when we met over pizza.

E-communication

To extend the inquiry to contemplate how conceptions of knowledge showed up within their present daily lives, I invited the youth to converse with me one-on-one outside of the large group. Given youth’s common participation in making use of
electronic social networks (Boyd, 2006), I invited youth to share with me after each inquiry session via e-mail or MSN (instant messaging) any examples of conceptions of knowledge that showed up in their day-to-day lives. As I mentioned before, in order to provide an incentive for youth to take the time to think about and communicate their observations to me I offered to enter their name in a lottery-style draw to win $20. Their name was entered in the draw once for each communication they shared. I made the same offer with youth for the period between the April 11th meeting and the last large group session on May 18th. Table 3 shows the number of e-communications shared with me by individual youth between March 24 and May 18.

**Table 3. E-communication with Youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of E-communications Sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandora</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jericha-Fay</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vladimir</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankie</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payton</td>
<td>0&lt;sup&gt;39&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>39</sup> Payton was grounded from using the internet at home throughout the inquiry. I invited her to phone me but she did not phone. Communicating by phone was not a form of communication used by any of the youth in the inquiry. A couple of youth made an initial phone call to arrange the first interview but after that, all communication occurred via email or MSN.
Closing Interviews

I invited each youth to do a final closing interview in June 2007. Some of the youth (Payton, Jericha-Fay, and Paige) were challenged to arrange a time to meet with me and opted instead to submit their closing comments via email. I was able to conduct closing interviews with four youth (Ruby, Romeo, Vladimir, and Julio) but was not able to arrange final interviews with Pandora, Frankie and Pippen.

In the final interviews I asked youth to comment upon what it was like to be part of the project and what they thought about the inquiry activities. I asked them to talk about what stood out for them in terms of learning from the experience, and what about our inquiry was similar and different to what they do in school. I also invited them to suggest why they think it might be important to question conceptions of knowledge, and the extent to which they think their participation in the project is likely to have lasting effects on them. Finally, I asked them to state what they thought was weird about the project or what didn’t work for them so that if I was to conduct the inquiry with another group, I could be mindful of beneficial ways in which I might revise the inquiry.
CHAPTER THREE: CYCLES OF INTERPRETATION

In this chapter I review the interpretive theories that I drew upon to help make sense of the texts generated in the inquiry. Cycles of interpretation will also be represented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six as I engage with the questions about knowledge raised by the youth in the inquiry and contemplate their questions in light of my research practices. In the chapters that follow this one, I will articulate what I used to believe and enact in my practice alongside the emerging sensibilities that have been nurtured through this inquiry; sensibilities that have informed interpretation in this inquiry and will influence my future research practices.

Interpretive Theories

Hermeneutics acknowledges that there is no absolute certainty, no permanent, fixed system of knowledge that can be constructed, that knowledge is what we think is true in the moment until something else happens to change our minds. John Caputo’s radical hermeneutics (1987, 1997, 2000, 2005) has influenced strongly my sensibility regarding analysis/interpretation. William James’ (1913) pragmatism and Barbara Thayer-Bacon’s feminist pragmatism have also informed my beliefs about knowledge in a significant way, as has the thinking of Elizabeth Minnich. I refer to their work here in order to describe how their thoughts have guided my interpretive activities, including my emerging sense of what the inquiry was about.

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40 Radical hermeneutics distinguishes itself from traditional hermeneutics which aims to decode the meaning of a text and to reveal an author’s intention (Caputo, 1987).  
41 Barbara Thayer-Bacon’s (2003) feminist pragmatism extends James’ earlier ideas. I include her among those whose work has strongly influenced my own.  
42 I refer to some key premises within the work of the authors I cite, however, my references do not reflect a commensurate representation of their work.
Radical Hermeneutics

The aspects of Caputo’s thinking that have contributed the most to my own sensibility about analysis/interpretation are his invitation to remain faithful to the difficulty of life and his proposal of the impossibility of certain knowledge. Caputo (2005) describes the aporia as being in a situation where you feel like you can’t move but you get to work anyway. With the merely possible, Caputo (2005) contends, you can grab a method and go to work and feel full of confidence. With the impossible, he argues, you’re really going somewhere because you can’t move but you move anyway.

John Caputo has been influenced strongly by the work of Jacques Derrida. He expresses great appreciation for how deconstruction has transformed hermeneutics through its suspicion of any attempt to still the movement of the flux of the world. As a researcher, Caputo’s words invite me to embrace the difficulty I experience each time I engage in the process of interpreting “data.” I continually ask myself what can I possibly know and what might I do in order to move towards that which I do not yet know? What Caputo contends is that the difficulty of life should prompt us to be willing to disturb what gives us comfort: finding answers, creating resolutions, and securing decidability. Rather than pursuing what consoles me, Caputo encourages me to ask questions ceaselessly, to be willing to acknowledge that I can never rest from thinking.

The difficulty of life requires that we cope with the flux, with “the shifting and elusive circumstances and the impossibility of knowing ourselves and others” (Caputo, 1987, p.293). The difficulty invites us to dance our way into the play of living in the world. The steps of the dance cannot be laid out for us in advance; in fact, because questioning never ceases, the dance of interpretation becomes a praxis rather than a
position. This is what Caputo (1987) refers to as anti-method; inquiry that is not
comforted by a theoretical outlook that allows one to settle into a standpoint nor to be
able to pronounce on *The* meaning of things. Caputo speaks of this in terms of finding a
way while realizing that there is no Way.

And yet while Caputo invites us to dance into the flux, he also emphasizes that
restoring the difficulty of life is not intended to make life impossible. Rather, having
faith in difficulty means to have faith in the flux and to enjoy the play. We can inquire
and move without the reassurances provided by relying on the constraints of methods,
authority, institutional structures, creeds, criteria and rules. Radical hermeneutics
attempts to describe things as they are (i.e., always in flux); to acknowledge that we have
all along been in perpetual motion although we have wanted to describe our thinking as
though it has not been part of our condition to remain always on the way.

Radical hermeneutics is not about overcoming all tradition. It acknowledges that
tradition cannot be overcome; tradition is always with us (Caputo, 1997). Caputo
acknowledges that decisions are “worked out through ongoing debate in which the forces
of rhetoric clash and settle into consensus” but he acknowledges that all decisions are
contingent – they reflect “the most appealing insights available, the most persuasive
arguments, sometimes by those who have experience and sometimes by those who have
new ideas, sometimes well, and sometimes disastrously. That is always how it has been”

Radical hermeneutics compels us to “sharpen our senses about the contingency of
our schemes …[because] none of us occupies a privileged place of insight, none of us has
access to a god (or a goddess) who passes on to us any hermeneutic secrets” (Caputo,
1987, p.258). Our constructions are deeply contingent upon historical, social, and linguistic beliefs and practices. Deconstruction admits that it does not know—“it affirms the irreducible alterity (i.e., otherness\(^{43}\)) of the world we are trying to construe” (Caputo, 1997, p.52). The decidability with which we have grown comfortable has only given us the illusion that we act knowingly.

Radical hermeneutics is suspicious of anyone who wants to give us foundations for certainty and acknowledges that even the best ideas have a tendency to resist alteration and to become repressive (i.e., normalizing and therefore vulnerable to subversion), thus inviting us always to continue questioning, to think without cessation. Questioning, according to Caputo is thought’s movement. Questions have a certain kind of kinesis; a kinesis that resembles the difficulty of life. Rather than seeing today’s world as one in which there are no ground rules (as some would accuse anyone with deconstructionist leanings), Caputo is optimistic about the postmodern world for in it he sees the promise of a “postparadigmatic diaspora” in which a lack of postmetaphysical foundations (i.e., the foundations that posit stability, certainty, fixed viewpoints) “generates a new morality of civility and fair play” (Caputo, 1987, p.262).

**Pragmatism**

One of the key notions from pragmatism that continues to inform my thinking is James’ (1913) definition of common sense: “truths grown petrified by antiquity” (James, 1913, p.65). It is his acknowledgement of the value of disrupting that which has become statuesque, that which has hardened and cannot be moved, that influences my interpretative activity.

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\(^{43}\) I will unfold my contemplation of otherness later in this chapter and in Chapter Six.
William James (1913) argued that knowledge is created through the process of novelty intruding upon what is familiar. He was convinced, however, that we tend to accept very little novelty, preferring to graft new ideas onto old beliefs with a minimal amount of disturbance. Something significant always has to happen to compel us to alter old beliefs. New ideas stretch old truths just enough to admit to the existence of some novelty, some apparent contradiction, some fact that is incompatible with an existing opinion, or some desire which an existing opinion cannot satisfy.

James refers to men’s temperament as that which encompasses all which has become familiar to him; his representation of the universe, his perspective. He asserts that in philosophy however, men expend a good deal of effort denying temperament, willing instead to only give impersonal reasons for their conclusions. James confesses that by acknowledging the role of temperament he is speaking out of turn, exposing what most in his field dismiss as irrelevant and unworthy of consideration. He points to the disruption as something of value however because it opens the way for men to recognize that there is an insincerity in discussions that deny that temperament plays a role in what gets thought. James contends that most men,

are a mixture of opposite ingredients, each one present very moderately. We hardly know our preferences in abstract matters; some of us are easily talked out of them, and end by following the fashion or taking up the beliefs of the most impressive philosopher in our neighborhood. (James, 1913, p.8)

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44 James uses only the masculine pronoun in his writing, as was common in his time. I reiterate the same language here in order to give the reader a sense of the way in which James typically wrote. His thinking in 1913 did not include consideration of women. Although James was concerned with the fact that reality tended to be construed as what those best qualified to have experience said it was, he appeared to be not well aware of the fact that he participated in great exclusions, especially those stemming from sexism. That, for me, is a limitation of his pragmatism which Thayer-Bacon’s feminist pragmatism addresses well.
James continues that labels such as rationalist and empiricist, and intellectualism and sensationalism have been used to make contrasting viewpoints appear to be simpler than the men whom purportedly uphold the views implied by the terms. I sense in James’ words an early concern for the complex and impossible task of positing situatedness with clarity.

James (1913) contends that the experience of not knowing is something that we thrill to. He suggests that we all possess a curious fascination with hearing things talked about and in not understanding what we hear, we experience a “problematic thrill” that derives from our experiencing “the presence of vastness” (p.5). James argues that rationalists aim to provide a refined object for contemplation while “the bewilderments, surprises, cruelties, and wildness of this colossal universe” can hardly be encapsulated in something refined (p.22). Rationalism makes systems and systems must be closed for the absolute ground of things. For the rationalist, the universe is a perfection eternally complete that is amenable to discovery and explanation. James argues that “it is only the smallest part of his experiences’ flux that anyone actually does straighten out by applying to it conceptual instruments” (James, 1913, p.179). Here I take James to be reflecting a hermeneutic sensibility regarding what can be known.

James stated that his pragmatism was intended to be a method that could settle metaphysical disputes by tracing each notion to its respective practical consequences. James asserts that by turning towards concreteness, adequacy, facts, and action, we can act against the pretense of finality in truth. James’ description of the world coincides with the language used by Caputo in describing the flux, the indeterminacy of
interpretation however, his words seem to reflect a desire to explain the concrete universe, which is a pursuit that I doubt Caputo would consider worthwhile.

I believe that Caputo would perhaps be willing to participate in acts of describing the concrete world but he would argue that we will never arrive at knowing it, and that we must be willing to be forever en route. Further, the notion that practical consequences determine what is best for us to believe presents another set of challenges. When James states that “if no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternative means practically the same thing” he leans upon an either/or logic, a separating way of thinking that assumes that we are capable of imagining alternatives and of discerning the practical consequences associated with alternatives. What deconstruction helps us to do is to move towards a way of thinking that is unifying, a both/and logic that helps us to keep moving because it recognizes that we are always limited by our thinking.

Caputo writes that deconstruction is affirmative in that it starts something new. Deconstruction is not simply positive and conservative; it does not merely reproduce. It strives to reach beyond the limits of dominant reproductive readings which create distilled effects (Caputo, 1997). Deconstruction allows the tension that accompanies being interested in canonical works while also being open to new works because deconstruction is always open to different interpretations of concepts (Caputo, 1997). Deconstruction also interrogates what gets positioned in opposition. Deconstruction arises out of the responsibility “to ask any question, to think any thought, to wonder aloud about any improbability, to impugn the veracity of the most venerable verities” (Caputo, 1997, p.51). Caputo focuses on never resting from thinking in order to preserve
the difficulty of life. Caputo asks us to look to the limits of our thinking and to see the limits everywhere.

While James turns to the study of particulars to help explain the concreteness of the universe and provide a bridge between science and religion, Caputo appears to link science and theology in his own way by infusing notions of faith and love within his hermeneutics. James describes pragmatism as focusing away from “first things” such as principles, categories, and supposed necessities and towards “last things” such as fruits, consequences, and facts derived from experience (James, 1913, p.55). And ideas, according to James, are parts of our experience. James’ reference to faith is infused with ideas about the Absolute as he contends that faith is something that is always dogmatically affirmed. Faith, for Caputo, is an optimism in the benefits to be derived from delighting in the flux of the universe and allowing its play.

While James acknowledges that beliefs in the Absolute grant us moral holidays, Caputo, in a similar vein, suggests that holding a deity as the ultimate wise one allows us to rest from thinking. Both Caputo and James use the term “play” in their thinking. James’ use of play seems to support his pragmatic pluralism, which he says has had no need of dogmatic, rigoristic temper: “Provided you grant some separation among things, some tremor of independence, some free play of parts on one another, some real novelty or chance, however minute, she is amply satisfied and will allow you any amount, however great, of real union” (James, 1913, p.161).

Finally, I see in both James’ pragmatism and Caputo’s hermeneutics an acknowledgment of the role that people play in constructing knowledge. James states that the truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea.
It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is the process of verifying itself “both directly and indirectly (p.206). …Its validity is the process of its valid-ation” (p.201). This sounds much like Caputo’s assertion that the powers that be are really the powers that have become (Caputo, 1997). Thus “truth” for both James and Caputo involves the problem of which realities are given credence.

**Feminist Pragmatism**

My initial perusal of James’ work was largely prompted by my attraction to the work of two American feminist pragmatist philosophers – Barbara Thayer-Bacon and Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich – whose feminist pragmatist philosophies, introduced earlier, have had a strong influence on how I enacted interpretation in this inquiry.

Barbara Thayer-Bacon’s work (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2006) supported me in my desire to inquire into epistemology without taking up the concerns of traditional philosophy (i.e., determining standards and criteria for warranting arguments, and determining truths from falsities). She posits a relational epistemology located within the context of the world rather than an epistemology removed from our ordinary, everyday lives. Since I wanted to inquire into conceptions of knowledge, where these conceptions show up in youth’s lives, and their effects, it was encouraging to connect with the work of a feminist philosopher which supported the relevance of my intended inquiry.

A unique aspect of Thayer-Bacon’s (2003a, 2006) work is her inclusion of children as respected knowers. Because I take seriously the importance of others to our understandings of how we are in the world, it is important to me that thinkers take into consideration their interactions with many diverse peoples. Rarely do I come across philosophers who converse with and include children in their thinking. I believe that by
excluding children as knowers, their philosophy of interpretation is lacking in the same way that philosophy was lacking before women (and non-white men) were deemed to be human beings. Through exclusion, their brand of philosophy is infused with what Minnich (2005) describes as faulty generalizations which deform thinking.

Through Thayer-Bacon’s (2000, 2003a & b) and Minnich’s (2005) highly readable texts, I was introduced to a description of some of the historically situated ideas about knowledge which I have inherited. Their words helped me to voice some of the reasons why I have felt at odds with the way in which dominant discourses position knowledge. For example, considering children and youth and women to be inferior knowers is a dominant and enduring belief that compelled me in many contexts (e.g., as a student in classrooms, as a woman at a dinner party where the interests and voices of men dominate the conversation) to resist sharing my ideas with others. Their resistance to positing knowledge as that which is derived only from rational thought has affirmed for me the value of bringing emotional and spiritual knowing into my work.

The work of Minnich and Thayer-Bacon has kindled my appreciation for the potential of philosophy to inform how we are in the world. For most of my life I have thought of philosophy as the discipline which produced the hyper-judge, the judge of judges, the ones who could be the absolute source of all legitimation (Caputo, 1997, p.66)\textsuperscript{45}. I was not interested in being part of a discipline that positions only a select few

\textsuperscript{45} It is no wonder that some fear that philosophy is dying (Caputo, 1997). The Canadian Philosophy of Education Society recently sent an appeal out to its members requesting suggestions for how to reinvigorate the role of philosophy within education. I believe via that some valuable suggestions exist already with respect to teaching philosophy as the right of everyone to have a say on the things we love (c.f., Caputo, 1987, 1997; Minnich, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). By calling forth the relevance of philosophy to our daily living, by reducing its abstraction and situating it within our day-to-day lives – as I have aimed to do in my inquiry with youth – we can nurture interest in philosophy for its promise of informing how we live in the world.
(i.e., those with formal training in the interests and practices of Philosophy) to have legitimate knowledge. I did not realize that some of the challenges and hopes that characterize and arise out of my experience of living in the world were shared by philosophers.

Thayer-Bacon (2003a) describes how logical reasoning within Enlightenment philosophy was posited as the only source of knowledge and that individuals by themselves were considered capable of discovering truth. The traditions which have shaped dominant discourse – what counts as knowledge – have excluded relations between people and the knowledge derived from the heart, intuition and imagination. Enlightenment philosophy suggested that dependence was something to be overcome by individuals. Thayer-Bacon’s (2003a) relational epistemology expounds on our relationality, stressing that we are relational beings and therefore exist as dependent upon, independent of, and interdependent with others.

Minnich (2005) highlights that those individuals who were capable of discovering truth were only a select few (i.e., privileged white heterosexual men). From the experiences of those select few individuals, generalizations were made that were held to be true for all human beings. These faulty generalizations were then used to distinguish between kinds of people, creating a hierarchy from which one could base conclusions about what constituted superior and inferior knowledge.

Both Thayer-Bacon and Minnich align with traditional pragmatists in positing that the central problems of philosophy are false dichotomies: mind/body, reason/will, intellect/emotion, self/other, public/private. They also seek to lower the level of abstraction of philosophical theory by highlighting that theory is always connected to
experience and a theorist’s connection to their larger society. Thayer-Bacon (2003a) asserts that the results of inquiry are the measure of a theory because we cannot find answers to our doubts within our own individual consciousness, nor can we ignore the relatedness of our ideas to other ideas. Minnich (2005) echoes this assertion when she stresses that we never think alone.

Thayer-Bacon (2003a) addresses the problem of positioning relativism and absolutism as a dichotomy. She argues that the distinction between absolutism and relativism rests on separating the knower from the known. Her relational epistemology embraces a qualified relativism. She argues that the opposite of subjective is not objective, but repetitive. She states that pragmatism does not represent a view from everywhere but rather opens up the possibility of a view from somewhere.

Thayer-Bacon writes clearly about fallibilism (the impossibility of certain knowledge) and pluralism (the existence of more than one truth); two important concepts for thinking about knowledge. She argues that even philosophers who wish to shake the ideas inherited from Enlightenment philosophy have trouble letting go of frameworks for incorrigibility and certainty.

She describes how Aristotle’s correspondence theory was the precursor to the scientific method and how the pragmatist Peirce, who influenced William James, followed Aristotle while also asserting that we will not know truth until the end of time. Thayer-Bacon follows James and Dewey in contending that embracing the fallibility of knowledge and a pluralistic universe mean that we must learn to live with warranted assertions. Even though our procedures for positing warranted assertions are error-prone,
they are amenable to self-correction via inquiry with others, and practicing being self-critical.

Thayer-Bacon employs feminist and postmodernist theories to address the issues of power and the limits of culture and language and thus, extends the thinking of early pragmatists. She contends that we can learn to question the context of our history but that we can never escape it wholly in order to gain an outsider’s perspective; we can only get partial glimpses. Her feminist pragmatism acknowledges the importance of attending to what is different, recognizing what gets left out, and respecting that which is queer. She accepts the indeterminacy of experience and the need to be attentive and receptive towards that which cannot be discursively had. She works to disrupt fixed constructs because of the tendency for a concept to lead to a method which becomes a habit, and then a tyranny.

Thayer-Bacon (2003) exemplifies generous readings of others’ work. With thoughtful attention, she describes their valuable contributions before moving to extend their work through respectful critique. I need to witness generous reading by others in order to risk welcoming their influence; their mindful inclusion of others in their thinking bolsters my confidence in the ideas they espouse. I need to see that they have worked to see in others that which they did not know; that they have not assumed too readily to know another through their own horizon. The caring reasoning which she enacts in her writing is akin to the infinite task of reading which Caputo (1987) describes as involving both love and respect for others’ work, searching for heterogeneity in the work with each new reading. The notion of searching for heterogeneity with each new reading embodies relational thinking; thinking which nurtures connections and extensions.
Both Caputo and Thayer-Bacon reflect an openness to other, to the unknown, to the impossibility of getting things straight or right, and a personal humility that I need to see in an other in order to allow myself to be vulnerable to their persuasion. I am generally suspicious of people who suffer no self-doubt. Such people are for me, like the Enlightenment philosophers Caputo charges with having access to The Secret; they imply that they know what cannot be known by ordinary people. Unwavering confidence, I believe, inhibits imagining possibilities.

And Minnich’s (2005) words frequently cohere with ideas expressed in Caputo’s work. She speaks about horizons which elude us even as they call us; knowing and accepting that we will not ever settle meaning once and for all. Like Minnich, Caputo (2000) evokes the power of questioning; of working towards shifting horizons for intelligibility rather than working to fill them in.

Along with James, these thinking friends remind me to attend to my temperament, my propensity to allow minimal novelty to disrupt my knowing, and the need to allow for the play of the universe in my interpretive acts. It is my sincere wish that readers will be able to see in the chapters that follow, an enactment of remaining faithful to the difficulty of life.

Contemplating Terms and Practices: Research, Inquiry, and Methodology

By contemplating meanings of the terms ‘research’ and ‘inquiry’ I engage in an interpretive exercise that informs how I make sense of the present inquiry. Contemplating terms is one way in which I strove to increase my awareness of beliefs that supported by prior research practices and articulate an emerging sensibility toward my research practice in the present and future. Representing my exploration of terms
reflects an attempt to trace the movement of my research sensibilities which was initiated by engagement in the inquiry.

Research and Inquiry

My understanding of research when I commenced this inquiry was largely shaped by my earlier graduate education which reflected a social science research tradition. I do not profess here to address the many and varied ways in which research is conducted under the auspices of social science; rather, I touch upon my experience here and come to know it better as I engage in the inquiry.\footnote{In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will describe how my understandings of my prior research practice improved in this inquiry by situating readings of Caputo, Minnich and Thayer-Bacon within the particulars of my research practice as I engage with the texts generated in the inquiry.}

My education in social science research taught me that through application of methods deemed appropriate for pursuing particular research questions, I could get at the truth. Truth from this perspective was accessible; it could be discovered if one went about pursuing it in the right way. My first foray into research involved conducting a descriptive study into primary school teachers’ use of observation for assessment purposes (Nicholson & Anderson, 1993). In that study I interviewed twenty-one primary teachers and employed ethnographic data analysis techniques to interpret what the teachers said in their interviews (c.f., Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Throughout the study I did not doubt that the processes by which I was endeavouring to understand assessment of learning would lead me to the truth about how observation is used for assessment purposes. I especially did not question the ability of the teachers whom I interviewed to be able to speak the truth about their knowledge and enactment of observation.
From that first experience doing research I then was hired to work on a variety of research projects over a period of eleven years. After several years of doing research, some questions began to emerge for me. In addition to the question of how to include my doubts and confusions in my analysis and writing, another enduring question involved wondering how researchers can generate more than what is not already known. I struggled to appreciate why my research seemed to produce only minor variations beyond what already existed in the knowledge base. I thought that by beginning always with what is known in order to determine gaps in “the knowledge base” coupled with disciplinary prescriptions about what questions are relevant to a disciplinary field resulted in “new” questions resembling old questions. I wondered what possibilities might exist by entering an inquiry with little knowledge of what constituted current “knowledge” in the field. I wondered what would happen if a researcher commenced an inquiry with a level of naïveté that would create openings for what is not yet known.

More recently I began to question the limits that discipline-prescribed methods place on the questions that a researcher might ask. It seemed to me that often the answers that my research produced were generally already suspected (c.f., Palmer, 1969). And it did not fulfill me to spend my work life confirming what was already known. But in encountering Hoy (1993) who said that new knowledge necessarily arises out of a context of intelligibility and James (1913) who asserted that facts arrive to us already “cooked” by our temperament, I wondered if anything other than what was already known was possible. Specifically, what could an inquiry with youth into conceptions of knowledge tell us that we don’t already know?
Reading Caputo (1987, 1997) offered me a way to engage in an alternate reading of my research practice. It helped me to explore tensions and accept dead-ends by acknowledging that the pursuit of finite knowledge was an impossibility and that the difficulties of transparency, contradiction, and uncertainty were not to be overcome by pursuing a better method or paradigm. Rather, they are to be accepted as the difficulty of life, the difficulty of knowing. It invited me to practice research and acknowledge the existence of problems of transparency, contradiction and uncertainty without asking me to make unified and final claims about what can be known. As I engaged the inquiry into conceptions of knowledge, I began to suspect that my existing research sensibilities would not be conducive to exploring conceptions of knowledge.

Radical hermeneutics (Caputo, 1987) helped me to see that my research practice could involve opening to the incoming, to possibilities within the impossibility of knowledge. It asks, however, for a new language, other ways of re-presenting what is expressed about research endeavours. Learning new language and practicing other ways of expression are ever-present challenges for me. The hermeneutic task requires a willingness to risk everything in dialogue with a text (Palmer, 1969); a task which I take to involve risking one’s known self, one’s cherished assumptions and beliefs. Hermeneutics acknowledges that understanding is always changing because the world, our situations and our interpretations are always changing (Hoy, 1993).

A re-reading of my language so far makes me sensitive to the possibility that some readers may suspect that I align with humanistic hermeneutics. I confess to being attuned to some of what those who follow in Gadamer’s footsteps believe. For example, I concur that the world cannot be understood without reference to being in the world (i.e.,
the way of life that is understanding) and that this process of coming to know is never-ending. I appreciate that Gamader’s recognition of understanding as situated in linguistically mediated, historical culture was a precursor to the pursuits of many feminists over the past several decades. I also value greatly his contention that an investigation into the ontological conditions of life ought to influence the way in which life is led (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). And although his description of understanding as the fusion of horizons makes sense to me, I feel more strongly that the breaching of horizons that Caputo (1997) invites is what we need to embrace if we are to welcome what is yet to come, that which always escapes us and prevents unity from closing in upon itself.

Disciplinary foci are akin to what Caputo (2000) refers to as predelineated horizontal schemes. It seemed to me that my past research worked more to fill in the existing horizon by building up the known body of information. What I desired, I began to see through reading Caputo, was to work at the limits of disciplinary boundaries. I began to wonder if putting all my energy into crafting superior questions would help me move closer to that which I did not already know.

Caputo describes Gadamer’s work as striving to help us get beyond the Enlightenment illusion of unprejudiced knowing, but concludes that Gadamer’s hermeneutics reflects “the philosophy of eternal truth pushed to its historical limits” which amounts to a “plurality of expressions of the same truth” (1987, p.111). How could I hope to do more than that myself? Caputo explains that the deep unity of interpretation is always safe in Gadamer’s hands because he never seriously puts in question the truth of the tradition established by metaphysics. How was I, I worried, to
resist the urge to synthesis? Caputo refers to Gadamer’s hermeneutics as “another metaphysics that aims to give us comfort in the face of the flux” (p.112). Is it possible to do empirical work that respects the flux, or is it only possible to speak of these things in discourse? I will return to this question in my concluding statements at the end of this dissertation.

I revel in Caputo’s philosophy of movement and becoming and was mindful of his words throughout my participation in this inquiry. Through engaging into an inquiry into conceptions of knowledge, I experienced a shift from conceiving of truth as something to be discovered through the application of methods deemed appropriate by a discipline to an appreciation for the ongoing task of interpretation that is central to all inquiries. This new appreciation demands of me, as a researcher, the willingness to find possibilities within the impossibility of certain knowledge. It prompts me toward a humble and tentative scholarship and demands my commitment to wonder ceaselessly. It invites me to embrace the discomfort within my research practice rather than seeking ways to make discomfort disappear. The realizations resonated with my past dilemmas around how to sustain confusion and doubt during data analyses and re-presentation. Thus, I was mindful to retain discomfort as a productive energy throughout this inquiry.

Methodology

The term method is derived from the Greek met(a)hodas meaning a pursuit derived from a journey (Minnich, 2005). The term methodology refers to the study of methods – the principles and procedures – employed in an organized discipline or used in organizing the discipline (Angeles, 1981). Because methods are typically derived within and used for the purposes of discipline-centered practices, the prescribed use of a single
methodology limits inquiry by establishing boundaries and using exclusive language that preclude some particular orientations to seeing (Pryse, 2000). Through this inquiry I gained an increased appreciation for the conceptual confines that limit all disciplines and theories. I began to accept that I will always encounter challenges when I attempt to use theories as interpretive guides.

In my inquiry, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I blended inquiry procedures informed by performative inquiry, performative pedagogy, and theatre for dialogue with a feminist pragmatism orientation towards knowledge and a hermeneutic sensibility toward the impossibility of certain knowledge. Working at the nexus of various theories (c.f., de Finney, 2007), suggested a way of being in research which I felt had integrity with my epistemological and ontological orientation: a way of being that reflects my desire to employ a methodology that can be worn like a skin – something that is a part of me and with me always – rather than a piece of clothing that I can put on and take off at will (Brown, in Caputo, 2005).

This way of conceiving of “method” is similar to what Minnich (2005) describes as acting responsibly and with freedom. To act responsibly and with freedom is to state what we choose to know and how we will act in light of it. By enacting a blended methodology (i.e., theoretical/conceptual research in interaction with others) that accepts the limits of knowledge and opens to the flux of the world, I have attempted to reflect in my research my beliefs about what can be known.
In an attempt to overcome the research training from my earlier years\(^{47}\), I committed in this inquiry to taking seriously contradictions, confusions, and doubt. I have, as Law (2003) argues for, tried to embrace non-coherence and mess in this research. Reality, according to Law is “multiple, slippery and fuzzy” (2003, p.9) and researchers should not feel compelled to apologize for being unable or unwilling to make things tidy.

I decided to continue to use the term research to reflect the larger project. Research encompasses people and actions. I will also continue to use the term inquiry to reflect the purpose of the encounter and the process of engaging with thinking friends. Inquiry, as I use it, is akin to anti-method but holds “method” to be what is derived from the inquiry journey, rather than a series of steps laid down in advance to pre-specify a path for thinking and action.

The Role of Thinking Friends in Philosophical Fieldwork

I introduced this inquiry as philosophical fieldwork and noted earlier that I considered the youth who participated in inquiry to be my thinking friends. These ways of thinking about the inquiry and its participants were not established in my mind before commencing the inquiry. Rather, they emerged through the process of being engaged in the inquiry. Through the process of engaging in the inquiry into conceptions of knowledge and confronting the question of whether or not “research” and “inquiry” are synonymous terms, I began to think of my research as philosophical fieldwork (Minnich, 2005).

\(^{47}\) Again, I remind the reader that I will describe aspects of my training in research in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven as I turn to feelings of doubt, confusion, surprise, and familiarity in encounters with the texts generated in the inquiry (i.e., conversations with youth and other thinking friends) to further the inquiry.
Philosophical fieldwork involves thinking that does not hold to a single logic; it is about “listening and hearing, looking and seeing, taking in and trying to comprehend without rushing to interpret, to translate into familiar terms, to explain” (Minnich, 2005, p.4). This definition was similar to Caputo’s (1997) definition of what it means to “do philosophy,” which is to “worry over presuppositions,” (p.66).

The notion of worrying about presuppositions compelled me to question the way in which I was positioning the youth in the inquiry. It became apparent to me within our first couple of days together that what the youth were sharing in inquiry was prompting my own extended inquiry into conceptions of knowledge. I began to see that the transactional relationship within our inquiry space made it seem inappropriate to consider the youth inquirers “research participants.” They seemed to me more like thinking friends.

Thinking friends are people with whom we have thinking conversations through oral exchange or engagement with their written words (Minnich, 2005). Philosophical fieldwork acknowledges that we need to turn to others to help us think. Sometimes conversations occur in face-to-face interaction with thinking friends and sometimes they are carried in our own heads (Minnich, 2003, 2005). Thus, in this inquiry, I had both face-to-face encounters with youth thinking friends and also kept them in mind when I engaged in conceptual encounters with other (formal theorists) thinking friends. Thinking friends help us build conceptual bridges. The youth in this inquiry contributed through their questions especially, to the conceptual bridges which I was able to build.

48 My understanding of the issue of how to position the youth in inquiry transformed as I grappled, in particular, with the question of a knowable self which surfaced while contemplating Julio’s question which provides the touchstone for Chapter Six. In Chapter Six I will elaborate on how my positioning of the youth shifted from that of “participants” (with researcher as theoretical observer) to that of “thinking friends.”
Enacting Interpretation

I engaged in interpretive activities in every moment of being in the inquiry process. I continue to do so as I re-present the inquiry here. I focused a good deal of attention on reading and re-reading the texts generated in the inquiry. With every reading and re-reading I noticed things I did not notice before, and new questions arose alongside awareness of possible meanings I had not thought about before.

While facilitating the inquiry and during analyses, I engaged in reflection and reflexivity. Reflection and reflexivity exist on a continuum (Finlay, 2002). Reflection tends to involve looking inward with a focus on ‘thinking about’ something after an encounter with it. Reflection distances oneself from what it is that one is thinking about. Reflexivity involves a more immediate, continuing, dynamic, self-awareness that occurs in the midst of the situation and focuses “outward into the realm of interaction, discourse, and shared meanings” (Finlay, 2002, p.534).

A postmodern perspective of reflexivity critiques the presupposition of the intentionality of consciousness which assumes that what needs to be known can be known (Lather, 2001). The researcher can not play the master interpreter and should accept that misrepresentation is part of telling stories, including our own. Radical hermeneutics reminds us that inquiry alone might not be sufficient to open to possibilities; rather inquiry must be sustained to invite enduring self-critique (Caputo, 1997). Rather than seeing reflexivity as a means to arrive at clarity that can be shared with others, reflexivity might better be thought of as a means by which we strive to avoid making the other a part of oneself (Lather, 2001).
In this inquiry, reflexive thinking permeated my encounters with the youth during inquiry activities. I worked to be ever-mindful of how I was in the inquiry space: thinking quietly before speaking aloud the potential questions I might pose to probe their responses and the potential effects of various questions; thinking about what might happen to the energy of their conversation during an inquiry activity if I were to insert myself into the discussion; being careful to moderate my language use so that it did not depart too much from the language youth were using to articulate their thoughts about knowledge; and making choices about activities to extend or suspend depending upon the inquiry momentum which an activity was engendering among the youth.

My reflections away from face-to-face encounters took the form of extended contemplations about what the youth said in the inquiry. These reflective periods were a phase of data analysis in which I also turned to theorist thinking friends to think further about the questions that were surfacing for me in response to what I was reading in the transcripts of the inquiry discussions. I prefer to use the term contemplation over the term reflection because contemplation better suggests, I believe, related thinking – thinking that includes the presence of many, rather than thinking turned inward (which, to me, risks suggesting that one thinks alone). The term reflection suggests too readily the image of a mirror that tells one what exists. Contemplate refers to gazing upon with an intended purpose and for me that purpose was to think with others; more openly wondering about what might exist rather than looking to see what does exist with respect to knowing knowledge.
Encountering Data: Enacting Theory

The hermeneutic circle holds that the meaning of a text comes to be only in reading. There is a philosophic shift of attention from the epistemological model of perception to the hermeneutic model of reading because objects of interest do not have meanings that are prior to and independent of their interpretive uses (Hoy, 1993). This reminded me that my assumptions and beliefs are ever-present as I engaged in interpretation; that what exists in texts is not there for me to perceive, but that I bring what I re-present into being. And Caputo (1997) was also always in the foreground of my thoughts, reminding me too that that which I re-present here, in this moment, will be different than what I would re-present after another reading because it is not possible to have a stable position with respect to a text (Caputo, 1997). As Caputo (2005) would say, there are no such things as uninterpreted facts; interpretation goes all the way down.

Texts generated in the inquiry included transcripts of the inquiry activities and debriefing discussions, artifacts generated in writing activities, e-communications with youth, and my journal notes. Texts read also included the work of theorist thinking friends. During analyses of the texts generated in the inquiry, I noted through journaling what appeared familiar, what surprised me, what prompted doubt and what confused me about what I read. In this way I worked to track my assumptions and values with respect to what was surfaced in the inquiry. This form of attentiveness was a departure from the way in which I attended during analysis in my past research.

In my past research, informed by the coursework in my earlier graduate

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49 I kept a journal at hand throughout the many months engaged in reading and re-reading the texts. In the journals (which totaled over 140 pages of notes) I recorded my thoughts and questions, alongside the felt experience of being in the research.
education, I practiced *bracketing*\(^{50}\) my beliefs as though my beliefs were something that I could free myself from at will. In this inquiry I practiced *attending to my beliefs*\(^{51}\). I accepted that my beliefs were embedded within and could not be removed from the interpretive process but that I would have to work to become aware of what my beliefs were. I accepted that in addition to not being able to free myself of my beliefs, neither could I readily articulate my beliefs. I would have to turn to the emotions I was experiencing during interaction with the data to gain insight into what my beliefs were. Attending to my beliefs however, was not in the service of arriving at a more accurate depiction of truth, but aimed instead to help me become more mindful of how I engaged in interpretation and how I might avoid making the youth a part of me\(^{52}\) (Lather, 1993, 2001).

By noting when I experienced familiarity, surprise, doubt and confusion as I interacted with the texts, I practiced becoming aware of my habits of attention and inattention during the interpretive process. When I noticed something in a text that seemed familiar I took that to signal agreement with my existing beliefs – what I expected. When I noticed something that surprised me I took that to signal the unexpected, something unfamiliar but to which I was sufficiently open to notice. When I noticed feeling doubtful about something in a text, I took that to signal a counter to my

\(^{50}\) Bracketing refers to suspending one’s beliefs in order to better access the essential structures of the phenomenon which one is attempting to understand.

\(^{51}\) My process was similar to Peshkin’s (2000) metanarrative reflections in which he uses “problematics” to show “what underlies the researcher’s process of interpretation, with its numerous occasions for interpolating and extrapolating, judgment-making and assuming, doubting and affirming” (p.5).

\(^{52}\) If I assumed inherent meanings in what the youth said in inquiry, it would be tantamount to pretending that the meanings I inferred were not my own; that I believed truth lay in what the youth – as subjects capable of speaking their truths clearly – and that I could play the master interpreter by discovering and reporting what exists and thereby denied the oft-contradictory and partial nature (i.e., situated and incapable of representing the whole of experience) of voices (Lather, 1991).
beliefs. When I noticed feeling confused, I took that to signal a moratorium – a situation in which I could not readily determine my belief or disbelief; there was not sufficient familiarity for which to make a judgment. There were times when reading prompted feelings of both doubt and surprise or familiarity and some degree of confusion.

What follows below are a few examples from my journal notes that demonstrate the interpretive process in which I turned to my emotions to gain insight into my how my beliefs were informing the interpretations I made of what youth said. And yet, all the while I ask myself whether my efforts to gain insight into my beliefs put me back into the centre or create ways of knowing that take me beyond myself53 (Lather, 1992). As I work to disrupt positioning others as knowable objects which I confess to doing in my past research, do I simultaneously suggest that I might find a way to know myself?54 Despite these questions, I forge ahead, accepting that I cannot escape myself.

Exemplifying Interpretation

**Text:** “I feel a kind of power in knowing that not everything can be completely understood.” – Frankie

**Reaction/Signal:** Surprise/the unexpected.

**Response/Interpretative Action:**

1st reading: I am delighted to hear her speak about the inability to know everything. I did not expect the youth to talk in terms of the impossibility of knowledge. I thought that the

53 As I present some examples of my interpretive processes, I still wonder whether my efforts serve to support my interpretation, or help bring interpretation to life by inviting the reader into the analysis in order to demystify and open to critique the ways in which the text which re-presents the inquiry with youth has been structured?

54 I will return to contemplate the issue of knowing self and other in Chapter Six.
ways in which schools focus on subject knowledge as decided would compel youth to talk about knowledge in terms of arriving at “right” answers.

2nd reading: I notice that Frankie was referring to not being able to find words to express her emotions. I recall Boler’s (1997, 1999) suggestion that emotions are often considered to exceed language or rationality and so are assigned to the unconscious. The relationship between emotions and conceptions of knowledge needs to be part of my inquiry.

3rd reading: Frankie is very articulate. It is tempting to use her quotes because they sound so good. But how did what she say connect with some of the other things that concerned youth about conceptions of knowledge?

4th reading: What is the “power” that Frankie refers to? Is it a sense of freedom from decidability? Is it to do with the power of emotions?

* * *

Text: The youth made no connections between the diaper, cane, and suspenders (in the “Great Game of Power” activity) – they did not think in terms of age-related symbols of knowledge. (Field Note: March 22/07)

Reaction/Signal: Surprise/the unexpected

Response/Interpretive Action:

1st reading: I realize the potential for objects to have varied symbolism. I wonder if perhaps the issue of adultism is not as salient an issue for youth as it is for me. However,

55 In each of these examples, I engaged four readings but of course, fewer or many more readings are possible. I happened to cycle through the transcript data and my inquiry notes four times. With additional readings, potentially new ways of thinking about what was said would have been possible.
the youth did talk a lot about adultist perspectives towards the knowledge of younger people. Maybe it is that the symbols youth chose for the objects reflected the objects’ utility for acquiring knowledge: the cane, suspenders and diaper symbolized means to acquire knowledge. There are so many ways to think about knowledge.

2nd reading: There are other instances in the inquiry when youth made reference to developmental aspects of knowledge. Ruby especially spoke in these terms. Ruby really loves science. Do I make reference to her interest in science as likely involved in acceptance of the ages/stages that developmental theories reflect?

3rd reading: I wonder what would have happened if I did not first ask the youth to arrange the objects in a hierarchy of power before asking them to then switch to a hierarchy of knowledge. Why did I use the power hierarchy in the first place? Was it only because that is the way Boal had focused the activity? Or did I hope to explore relationships between power and knowledge? I asked the youth that question after the two hierarchies had been created (e.g., what had changed?). However, they didn’t have much to say about it.

4th reading: In the final interviews, this was one of the activities that the youth told me they enjoyed the most. This was definitely the most interactive of the activities. I think they also liked using tangible things on which to focus their discussion.

* * *
Text: “I don’t think they care what they know because they’re carefree and all that so it
doesn’t matter what they know.” - Vladimir

Reaction/Signal: Doubt/disbelief and confusion

Response/Interpretive Action:

1st reading: Vladimir’s comment was in response to the question of whether ‘knowledge’
was present in a photo of a group of youth dancing. What does he mean? Is he
suggesting that knowledge only exists when people are working hard? Is he reflecting a
conception of knowledge that assumes that knowledge derives only from rational
thought?

2nd reading: I was surprised that no one in the group saw this example of youth dancing
as reflecting body knowledge. Even the two girls in the group who I know were dancers
didn’t say anything about what you need to know to be able to dance well. When I asked
them that question pointedly, they spoke about bodies in relation to one another on the
floor and hard work but not of bodily knowledge. Is this an example of dominant
discourses of knowledge; dismissing what we know through our bodies because it is not
really knowledge? The old mind/body split?

3rd reading: This example makes me think about the challenge of facilitating participation
in the group discussions. Before I could ask Vladimir to say more the conversation
quickly skips over his statement. It is much harder to facilitate the participation of 10
youth than I expected. I am always wondering if I have adequately made possible
opportunities for each person to speak. I feel it is my responsibility as facilitator and yet
also recognize that some of the quieter members of the group might feel uncomfortable if
I make a point too often or too assertively of including their voice. Do I go back to
Vladimir to ask for clarification? If I did, would it be to confirm his conception of knowledge? Why would I want to know? Would I then use his conception to propose similarities and differences among the youth? I don’t think that that is what this inquiry is about.

4<sup>th</sup> reading: Reflecting on wanting clarification of what youth intended to mean provokes another impossibility for me. If I were to ask them to clarify their meanings, am I not also suggesting to them that they should be able to be clear? Do I even think that is possible?

* * *

**Text:** “The more you know the more interesting life will be.” – Pandora

**Reaction/Signal:** Familiarity/Belief and Doubt/Disbelief

**Response/Interpretive Action:**

1<sup>st</sup> reading: I want to agree with Pandora. Knowing about our world does make life interesting. But some people would argue that more knowledge leads to greater challenges, especially because the pursuit of knowledge often creates an awareness of how little one actually knows. But having certain knowledge can also help determine appropriate action (e.g., understanding alcohol addiction helps you respond to the alcoholic). But what about the “interesting” bit that Pandora mentions? What interests us? Does being interested refer to being attentive? And what tends to capture our attention? Novelty perhaps? I believe that we are addicted to novelty. But if having knowledge means you know what’s what in the world, wouldn’t that decrease your chances to seeing novelty? I am reminded of standing atop a local mountain with friends
and seeing the amazing bird that I had seen many times alone – a small bird that flies straight up in the air for about 50 feet and then plummets down like a bullet to the level of the tree tops. I could watch it all day. When I point it out to my friends, they quickly identify the bird and then turn to walk away. It was as though knowing the bird (and perhaps being able to explain the behaviour) dissolved wonder and amazement.

2nd reading: This example also makes me think about knowledge as quantifiable. The youth took issue with the statement “Adults know more than kids.” They really focused on the knowledge of kids as being different – not more or less – than knowledge of adults. They recognized that contexts influence what people, both young and old, know.

3rd reading: Reflecting on “more” knowledge makes me think about how knowledge tends to be positioned in schools: subject content that is presented in a transmission fashion so that students come to see knowledge as commensurate with information rather than something generated via thinking. How did we come to see knowledge as something that can be quantified? How did we come to see knowledge as a thing rather than a process?

4th reading: Thayer-Bacon (2003a) describes traditional Epistemology as being concerned with measuring, quantifying, and shaping the world to meet our needs and desires. I wonder about the historical shift from God as all knowing to individual man as capable of discovering truth through exercising rational thought. I wonder when philosophy became caught up with science. Thayer-Bacon notes that Dewey was enamoured with the scientific method. I get so frustrated with people who want to quantify all experience. It seems to leave out so much.

* * *
In the early stages of analyses, I had a waking dream\(^{56}\). I wrote it in my journal. At the time I was not sure what it meant. It seems to reflect my struggle with the seeming impossibility of interpretation in the research. In this waking dream I am walking in the forest and sense that I am approaching a pool of water. As I get close to the pool I try to identify it.

* A waking dream...

I sense the presence of a pool of water. I can smell the moisture in the air and beyond where I stand, shards of reflected light sparkle between the branches of the trees, signalling a glimmering surface in the near distance. When I arrive at the pool I see that it is deep and varied in colour. A multitude of plants grow along its shore. I listen carefully, with all of my being. In the depths of this pool are ideas about what it means to know and where knowledge comes from.

As the wind blows, the water ripples and I see upon its crests questions about “knowledge” and “knowing.” The knowing of some people that never flows out into the centre of the pool clusters at the murky edges. A bird cries out a reminder that human knowing is only one form of knowing.

As I stand there looking and listening, the pool begins to grow. Before long I can no longer see its edges. A voice inside me whispers that this is a very important pool, a pool worth getting to know; but knowledge of the pool can only be had by immersing oneself in its depths. I am not ready to dive in and yet I feel compelled to explore it.

I stand at the edge of the pool, looking out at the body of water before me. What mysteries are hidden in its depths? How would it feel to be engulfed in its body? Looking out, I wonder what it would be like to swim in it.

Looking in, I realize that I am already wet.

I don’t know how it happened; I cannot explain the composition of the moisture that covers me and I can’t say from where it came. I reach for a towel to dry myself off, but I realize that I cannot. The water droplets on my skin cannot be made to go away.

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\(^{56}\) I refer to this as a “waking dream” because it was not a dream that I had while sleeping; it occurred between sleep and wakefulness early one morning. It was more like a moving, mental picture; an act of imagination that I experience frequently (e.g., when first awakening or while hiking in the forest) when I am not dealing with myriad distractions.
Along with my surprise at being wet without having jumped in the pool, I realize that it is my wetness that I believe I need to be able to articulate if I am to meet my goal of improving my research practice. My wetness reflects my situatedness. And yet today, many months after having this waking dream, I have come to accept that I cannot fully and completely articulate how I am situated in the world; I cannot be transparent to myself.

Caputo (2000) suggests that I have not failed in my attempt to dry myself, to come clean. We are all, he contends, “up to our ears in historical, political, social, religious, sexual, and who knows what other sorts of structures and networks, saturated by them, radically saturated, which is of course, another way of saying that we are all wet and not too sure that we know what is what” (Caputo, 2000, p.12).

Shortly after the first waking dream, I had another. This dream began as a luxurious float on a warm body of water.

Another waking dream...

After a day of splashing, I imagine myself floating in the warm, still water of the pool. I am weightless and reveling in the liquid hug that buoys me. A voice (my advisor?) calls out to me, “You can’t stay there.”

I am jolted out of my reverie and call back, “What do you mean?” The voice replies, “You must swim in the whole pool. Go towards the edges.”

I look around me with confusion. “But I can’t see the edges; they’re beyond my vision,” I say. The voice pleads with me to trust: “It does not matter if you can see them, just keep swimming and attend to what you encounter on the journey. You will know when it’s time to stop swimming when that moment arrives.”

I begin to move.
This time the dream reflected my sense that I could not just rest with the impossibility of interpretation, I had to find a way to move. Embracing the impossibility of knowledge did not mean that I could give up; that I could float endlessly among what cannot be known. Rather, the impossibility demanded that I keep moving.

My journal notes also reveal the shifting sensibilities I experienced while in inquiry. I share a few of them here.

April 7, 2007: In attempting analyses in a hermeneutic sensibility I am not relying on the “methods” I am using to uncover knowledge. Instead I am immersing myself in a relational dynamic that involves continual interpretation, questioning, wondering, extending, positing/suggesting, and again in a never ending cycle. What I can do is describe the journey through the cycles. Is that enough? I have to catch myself from the propensity to rely upon “what” the youth have said as the “truth” and also from taking my interpretation of what they say and holding it against what I know or what the literature says or philosophers say and putting that forth as the “truth.” But I am having trouble describing this sense of what I am attempting to do – I don’t know where I am going. I seem only able to note the tendencies that I am trying to resist.

April 14, 2007: It has been three days since I met with the group over pizza. I find it hard to write right away – I feel almost overwhelmed with the volume of the exchange and the pace, and feel at a loss of what to say and what to make of what was shared. I spent my time the past two days transcribing the tape from our discussion and making a few notes of thoughts and “stops.” Again, I found myself laughing as I transcribed the tape; how the conversation went from galaxies, the universe, Pluto losing its “planet” status, to Sailor Moon. There was alot of laughter. I am glad that our gatherings include some levity. I am reminded too that not everything the youth say should be taken seriously – sometimes an idea gets shared in the group and it gets picked up on and extended because it has an element of fun to it. I suspect if someone else were to do a textual analysis, or maybe even a phenomenological analysis of the transcripts without having been there during the discussion, they would draw conclusions about what things mean to the youth that would be inappropriate/untrue/skewed...words removed from context and the emotion connected to their use.

April 27, 2007: As I transcribed another tape yesterday I realized that I sometimes hear things in the tape that I didn’t hear at the time they were spoken. It’s partly the process of typing out the words that sometimes makes me hear differently. Again I am reminded about the tangled web that is looking for meaning in language.
May 1, 2007 (am): In a film I watched recently – Hank Williams, First Nation – I remember enjoying the silences between the characters. Often when you’d expect someone to say something in the film, there would be silence and yet the characters in the scene seemed to be relating to one another still. …I think I like that not just because so often I have a lot going on inside me and don’t want/enjoy the “noise” of speech, but because I so often feel that speech falls short of real communication. We are so reliant on speech that I think we have forgotten much about how we can also commune without it.

If hermeneutics requires that we become aware of our own preconceptions in order to see how they contribute to our understanding of a text, how do we get to awareness? Perhaps this is where meditation comes in – it helps us become aware.

…This reminds me of feeling in my interactions, especially with academics, of not being afforded a space to be heard. Their vast “knowledge” quickly interprets and places me “somewhere” from where our interactions then ensue. I follow along, propelled by a force beyond my reach, like being at the end farthest from the fulcrum in a game of “crack the whip.” …My interactions with academics reveals to me how frequently we are prone to taking up the last idea that excited us and testing it in a conversation with others, applying it to situations/data for which we are in the process of understanding/making meaning. Sometimes, when I witness that behaviour in others I have felt annoyed, thinking to myself, “It’s only that thing which you liked last week that is now given valence over other possible interpretations.” But today I see it as inevitable – how could it be otherwise? We draw upon our social world to make meaning. In our interactions with others we experiment with ideas, testing, trying, observing, extending. But what about those other possibilities? Krishnamurti (1969) refers to knowledge as “filling oneself up with the past” - “being taught what to look at, not how to look” (p.25).

May 1, 2007 (pm): Today I am more aware of how what we notice speaks to the interpretive act already under way. Do we not interpret during every waking moment? …I am coming to see research more as a conversation. An inquiry that cannot help but be as much about the researcher and the interpretive process of doing research as it is about what is considered the “data.”

Am I meditating enough? Is its purpose to get away from interpretation or is the aim of meditation for me in this moment to experience the data in a new way; to move beyond what might immediately attract my attention? …Today I am going to read once through everything in the “data” files but I am going to resist taking out my coloured highlighters and marking the documents with my thoughts. I am going to resist highlighting what catches my attention. After reading I am going to put on some quiet music and sit with the data. What will come of the “passive” analysis? Do I then take what “surfaces” as being that which comes to mind after/through the meditation? That is, that which I have trouble resisting? Or is it possible that inquiry cannot be about not knowing? Maybe I’ll revisit Packer (Meditative Inquiry) before reading the data, and Krishnamurti (Freedom from the Known). Why? So I can “properly” orient
myself to meditation? Or so I can avoid meditating and keep thinking? It is so comfortable and familiar for me to read, to absorb other people’s thoughts.

August 16, 2007: As I re-read the document of how my beliefs, values, etc. showed up in the interaction with youth, I see that many are relatively newly formed; informed by what I have learned in my doctoral program. Every time I try to separate something in analysis – e.g., distinguishing my beliefs about knowledge from how I revealed myself as an inquirer, and distinguishing what happened in the inquiry from what youth said – the process shows me how inseparable these things are.

December 11, 2007: It’s so interesting that an inquiry into “ideas about ‘knowledge’” brought me eventually to the impossibility of knowledge. Was it the impossibility that was behind the tension that provided the motivation for the inquiry, or was it the inquiry that surfaced the impossibility?

December 20, 2007: How does one tell a story of a journey without telling it chronologically?

Through this re-reading of my journal notes I find myself wondering whether the process of interpretation itself resembles what it means to know; the partial, temporal, transitory, continually moving thing (if it is a thing) that is knowledge? It seems to me that in some ways I am coming to know anew the question I posed to youth; that is, What is knowledge? Knowledge as enacted in my past research practices, and perhaps here too, is the phenomenon of knowing temporarily arrested. And I suspect that the difference between what I have done in the past and what I strive to do now is to emphasize the temporal nature of the arrest; to write my doubts about arriving at knowledge; to show that knowledge is always en route.

Surfacing Touchstone Questions

Through reading and re-reading the texts generated in the inquiry and being mindful of how I engaged in interpretation, as informed especially by feminist pragmatism (Minnich, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2003a) and radical hermeneutics (Caputo,
1987, 2000, 2005), four questions posed by youth became touchstones for exploring conceptions of knowledge. I began to think about the touchstone questions as entry points that could be used to explore issues pertaining to knowing knowledge. The four touchstone questions were also connected to many of the issues which the youth raised about knowledge in the inquiry.

While reading and re-reading the texts generated in the inquiry, I noticed myself returning often to the questions which youth posed in inquiry. Their questions compelled me to think not only about the perspectives the youth espoused about knowledge, but also about what it was they wanted to know about knowledge. Hence their knowing of knowledge was reflected also in what they wondered or did not know. Since my own sensibility about conceptions of knowledge was shifting while being in the inquiry, I found my attention being attracted to that which perhaps was also shifting for them. As the youth spoke what they believed they were simultaneously connecting with their own doubts as confusions; much like I was doing in relation to questioning how I was enacting research within the inquiry into knowledge.

I began to look for relationships between the myriad questions and concerns voiced by youth regarding conceptions of knowledge. I created conceptual-maps to depict graphically some relations between the questions posed in inquiry and issues raised by “theorist” thinking friends. The issues concerning knowledge seemed to cluster around opinions, experience, knowers, and where knowledge is located. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of the interrelations among the youth’s questions and issues regarding conceptions of knowledge.
Four questions posed by youth (bolded in Figure 2) seemed to be related to many other questions which youth raised in the inquiry. These four questions became “touchstones” for exploring conceptions of knowledge. Minnich (2005) has referred to touchstones as that which helps us find important knowledge where we might not have looked before. These four questions comprise the headings for the contemplations which I unfold in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven of this paper. While there were a number of other possible touchstone questions, these four questions were chosen because they reflected a large part of the engagement with youth and they were questions which endured in my thinking and provoked further inquiry.

The Shifting Landscape of the Inquiry

As previously mentioned, my original plan for the research shifted through the process of engaging in the inquiry. Rather than striving to answer from the perspectives of youth the questions related to what knowledge means, where knowledge comes from and how knowledge works, etc., I began to conceive of the inquiry as being about a conversation in which thinking together created a space for each of the youth and myself to continue to contemplate emergent knowings within the impossibility of certain knowledge.

With respect to the contributions of youth to the conversation, I attended to the language youth used to speak about knowledge, and considered potential relationships between their language and popular metaphors used to think about knowledge. I also attended to youth’s descriptions of how adults in their lives position knowledge and youth’s perspectives about adults’ conceptions of knowledge to propose aspects of
dominant conceptions of knowledge which youth accept and resist. All of these aspects of the youth contributions to knowing knowledge are woven into the chapters that follow.

Figure 2. Surfacing Touchstones and Interrelated Questions that Arose in the Inquiry and Guided Further Exploration
For my part, given the twinned character of this inquiry, the critique of my past research practices took the shape of articulating how my sensibilities were shifting with respect to the three crises within qualitative traditions outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2003). These three crises are the crisis of representation, the crisis of legitimation, and the crisis of praxis. Thinking in relation to these crises provided me with some particulars upon which to think about the issues concerning knowledge raised by youth in tandem with concerns about how I embody knowledge in my research practice. In brief form, the crisis of representation posits that proposing a direct link between experience and a text is problematic. The crisis of legitimation asks when different traditions employ different criteria for evaluating research, how can qualitative studies be evaluated? The crisis of praxis troubles the possibility that change in the world is possible when society itself is thought of as only and always a text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

I had not, in my prior research practice, articulated how I took up and addressed these crises in my work. Through the process of engaging in this inquiry with youth, I thought through and about how I was embodying knowledge in the present inquiry, and thus, was prompted to situate my practice in relation to the crises. I will, in the chapters that follow, describe how contemplation of my practice in relation to the crises was prompted by the exploration of each touchstone question posed by a youth. Because knowledge was the focus of the inquiry and what is taken to be knowledge is at the root of interpretation, I will continue to sketch the interpretive process as I come up against knowledge issues in conversation with my thinking friends in the chapters which follow.
PART II: ILLUSTRATING THE PLAY OF IDEAS

CHAPTER FOUR: “IS THERE A CERTAIN TEST TO TAKE OR THING TO SAY OR BELIEVE BEFORE I’M A ‘KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON’?”

– Payton, female, age 14

Payton invites us to contemplate what it means to be “knowledgeable.” And by suggesting that she is not yet knowledgeable, Payton also invites us to contemplate why young people are not typically seen as being knowledgeable. Her touchstone question is related to a few other questions related to knowledge; namely, how is knowledge tested, and how is being knowledgeable related to what one says or espouses to believe?

Throughout youth’s discussions in this inquiry, it is possible to see traces of dominant conceptions of knowledge. On occasion some youth appeal to knowledge that is derived from rational effort/reason and uphold the individual as an autonomous rational agent. The youth both questioned and struggled to resist dominant conceptions of knowledge. They questioned the ways in which privileged discourses were used to sustain dominant conceptions of knowledge in schools; especially how teachers premise knowing students upon assumptions they hold and that those assumptions are used to distinguish between “good” and “bad” students – a distinction that was viewed as being synonymous with being deemed as knowledgeable or un-knowledgeable. As I share some excerpts from their discussions in this chapter, I will show how they took up and challenged dominant conceptions of knowledge.

As I listened to the youth discuss the problem of testing knowledge, I was provoked to question how I have also upheld and resisted dominant conceptions of
knowledge in my research practice, especially the authority afforded researchers and the criteria used to posit authority within particular disciplines (these relate to the crisis of legitimation in research). Encountering the challenges of re-presenting what youth said also made me contemplate the crisis of representation in research. After exploring the issues raised by the youth, I move to contemplate how the issues they raised pertain to my research practice and strive to articulate how the process of being in inquiry with youth prompted me to consider what I used to believe and enact, and how movement through inquiry has helped me to articulate a new sense of myself as a knowledge practitioner/researcher.

Youth Perspectives on Conceptions of Knowledge Enacted in School

When one thinks of testing knowledge, thoughts of classroom testing come quickly to mind. How is it that the knowledge of youth is tested in school settings? The notion that a test can be used to determine whether a student has taken up the required knowledge is enacted in classrooms daily. However, the youth in this inquiry questioned both the conflation of learning with knowledge and the sources upon which teachers rely to determine whether a student has become knowledgeable.

Teachers’ Assessment of Students’ “Knowledgeability”

Several youth engaged in a passionate critique of teachers’ tendency to position students’ knowledge as that which is learned in school. They expressed feeling frustrated that teachers tend to consider “good” students as knowledgeable and students who struggle to perform well in school as not knowledgeable. Along with the “what” of learning, the youth also questioned teachers’ requirements for learning to be demonstrated in a certain way.
Frankie: Teachers …see it like just anyone with good grades is a good student and they don’t look at the kids who like may not be the best students but are really eager to learn.

Jericha-Fay: Grades aren’t really based on what you’re learning but on if you’re getting assignments in on time so it’s not really based on how keen you are to learn or how much you want to put into it, it’s more are you doing the assignments right, the way I want you to do them.

Frankie questions the conflation of performance with effort while Jericha-Fay stresses that performance of “learning” is a lot about doing what the teacher wants you to do when he or she wants you to do it.

Julio added that his P.E. teachers were aware of his interest in theatre and choir and his lack of interest in sports. He also felt that his P.E. teachers “hated” the students in the Challenge program (an enriched program in the school district). Julio’s comments indicate his view that teachers are also prone to holding as knowledge that which is defined as desirable within their subject area specialties.

Payton picks up on Julio’s point about teachers defining knowledge within disciplinary boundaries and adds her frustration that teachers tend to privilege only some ways of expressing knowledge.

Payton: The kids who are failing in Challenge are considered a lot smarter than kids who are getting straight A’s who aren’t in Challenge. …I think it’s ridiculous. … A lot of classes seem to think that smart refers to mathematics, social studies, but for me smart refers to artistic abilities which I excel in. I wish they would vary their idea of smart.

Minnich (2005) confirms that being “knowledgeable” in school is typically equated with a student’s ability to take up what has been deemed as important to know within designated subject areas.
The youth continued to talk at length about how the Challenge program makes unfair distinctions between the knowledge abilities of students. Frankie agreed with Payton that teachers distinguished between students in the Challenge Program and students in the regular program. Jericha-Fay stated that Challenge students are expected to be more respectful than other students, they get privileges not afforded other students (e.g., their own dances, more field trips, and better text books). The distinction however, did not sit well with Frankie or Payton:

Frankie: I think I benefit from that but I don’t think it’s right either because …I don’t think it’s fair to the other students. …It doesn’t mean that people who aren’t in Challenge don’t want to learn and that they don’t want to work hard either.

Again, Frankie returns to stress the difference between student performance – that which is held to be knowledge – and student interest or engagement in learning. She questions whether students who perform better are actually learning more or are more knowledgeable than students who are not seen as the best performers.

Julio, who used to be in the Challenge program and then decided to return to the regular program, reflected on some of the differences he observed between classes in each program. He sympathized with teachers and their task of ensuring student learning:

I can kinda see it because I was in Challenge last semester and I dropped it, and like the difference between teachers, I think they’re people too and they have feelings just as much as we do but we don’t see it and they’re probably pressured hard. Challenge teachers don’t have to worry about that as much because they have students who wanna work, they will be on top of things whereas regular teachers are more stressed out because they have a lot of stuff to get through, they have a lot of students who don’t come to class, they interrupt, they don’t pay attention, they don’t hand anything in, so it’s like they’re not trying as hard but they may be trying harder.
Later in the conversation however, Julio recalled a particular instance of discrimination which confirmed his belief in the teachers’ differential treatment of students based upon whether teachers view them as “good” or “bad” students:

In my English class, what I noticed, there’s 5 or 6 of us who have dropped out of Challenge and gone into the regular and we’re favoured a lot more. Like I handed in an assignment a week and a half late and she [teacher] was okay with that but another student who like didn’t do any work tried to hand something in late and she said, ‘No it’s a deadline.’

The categorization of students into “kinds” (i.e., “good” or “bad” students), is premised upon assumptions about ideals (Minnich, 2005); in this case, what an ideal student should be like. All other students are judged in contradistinction from that ideal. One of the inquiry activities served to get close to some potential assumptions that make it possible for teachers to distinguish between knowledgeable and not knowledgeable students.

In the “Paper Cut-Outs” activity, the youth listed their perceptions of teacher-held stereotypes of students. Without prompting, the lists they created contained both stereotypes of individual students along with some generalizations they believe teachers hold about youth in general. Table 4 shows the list of teacher-held stereotypes of students generated by the youth. While most of the stereotypes youth perceived their teachers to hold were negative\(^57\), a few stereotypes were among those which could be considered positive (noted at the bottom of the list).

\(^{57}\) It intrigued me that the youth positioned teachers’ stereotypes of students in predominantly negative terms. I recall, however, that at one point in the inquiry, Julio acknowledged that the term “ stereotype” typically indicates a negative and biased way of viewing a group of people. It is possible that if I had framed the activity in terms of using words to describe how teachers see students, that the youth might have included different descriptors.
Table 4. Youth Perspectives of Teacher-held Stereotypes of Students and Youth in General

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-held Stereotypes of Students Generated by the Youth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Too talkative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Immature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Unorganized</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dumb</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Insecure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Slacker</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Druggy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know-it-all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hate school/ uninterested in school, curriculum and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unmotivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disrespectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t like hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Short attention span</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Steal and are troublemakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Too self-absorbed to think about important issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t know what is good and bad for their health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are all rowdy and reckless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If skip class, must be going to get high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Get everything given to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socialize too much; are just in school to be with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are all the same; no uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hard worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are having the time of their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gifted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Genius</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Julio emphasized that even terms that could be construed as only positive can have negative effects for students.

Julio: Like “genius” maybe from a teacher’s perspective is positive and from the person’s perspective it’s positive but everyone else like around him they go like, ‘Oh yeah, there goes the genius’ and it’s got negative connotations.
The list contains several assumptions embedded in what teachers and youth believe need to happen for students to learn. Specifically, teachers’ stereotypes suggest that a problem exists among youth in general; a problem that involves a lack of motivation and interest in learning. They suggest that students cannot learn if they are too loud or talk too much because learning cannot happen when students socialize too much. The message is that youth need to pay attention to what the teacher wants them to know and not be distracted by their desire to converse with others. The implicit assumption is that learning is not a social event. The various stereotypes make it possible to blame a students’ failure on lack of effort alone.

The ways in which the youth suggest that teachers cast students reflect some assumptions and attitudes from the second half of the 20th Century when it was generally accepted that some students just didn’t have what it takes to learn and they should be taught different things (Deschenes, Cuban and Tyack, 2001). The language of science was used to provide a supposedly objective rationale for discriminating between students. The labels which the youth believe teachers apply to them in the name of knowing them as knowledge-able, still place the blame for poor performance on the student or his/her family rather than considering how the school and the school system could be changed to fit the needs of students.

**Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices:**

**The Individual as Autonomous Rational Being**

When teachers (and educational systems) perpetuate the idea that students who fail are at fault for their own failure, they uphold the notion of self as an autonomous individual who is capable of accessing Truth through reason. The notion of liberal democracy is founded upon the belief that autonomous rational beings can achieve success if they are protected from the interference of governments (Thayer-Bacon, 2008). A belief in self as autonomous rational agent
would posit that everyone is capable of succeeding if they want to succeed. Rational autonomy is concerned little with the structures that make the success of some more likely while inhibiting the success of others.

The self as autonomous rational being who can author their own success is premised upon individualism – the idea that individuals develop atomistically on their own, without the help of others (Thayer-Bacon, 2008). The popular belief in the “self-made man” is consistent with self as autonomous rational agent. Within this way of thinking, it is easy to forget that we all make our start in the world as relational beings – in relationship with the people and environments into which we were born (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). When we turn to our experiences as children and youth we are more likely to recognize our relationality, but Western culture which values independence pushes the young among us to move away from relational existence. In fact, independence (financial, emotional, and professional) provides the markers by which we tend to gauge adult success.

I have often had the experience, in the present inquiry and past research with youth, of witnessing their surprise when I acknowledge explicitly what I have learned from them. It is apparent to me that it is a rare experience for them to experience the power they have to contribute to the co-construction of knowledge.

While the Enlightenment was beneficial in serving to free people from the limits of religion that inhibited thinking, the appeal to reason that suffused that era has had a lasting legacy. As Minnich (2005) declares, it continues to deform our thinking. And while we are capable of thinking about ourselves, we are not capable of arriving at knowing ourselves (or others) once and for all.

Thayer-Bacon (2003, 2008) has developed a relational theory of knowledge which is premised upon the belief that “we are always in-relation-with-others. We become individuals out of our social settings and we continually affect the social settings we live in; it is a give-and-take that works both ways. We never choose freely, autonomously, without the influence of others. The myth of autonomy is a dangerous and deceptive myth that is a holdover from the classical liberal assumption of individualism. We are always influenced by the cultural and natural contexts of our lives, so deeply that it is even difficult for us to become conscious of these influences without the help of others not like us” (Thayer-Bacon, 2008, p.19).

I wonder what might happen if we were to commit to explicitly acknowledging the many times and ways in which we influence one another’s thinking. Would we start to feel less alone in our responsibility for what we know and don’t know?
In the activity debriefing the youth stated that teachers assume that if students are foreign – (i.e., don’t speak English well) – they are stupid. They also noted that teachers tend to assume that if a student acts disrespectfully towards a teacher, s/he must not care about other people or events in the world. Teachers don’t seem to acknowledge that youth can be very concerned about others and events in the world but their disrespect directed toward a teacher might be personal.

**Cycling Around:** Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and by the Researcher:

“Authorized” Knowers, “Valid” Knowledge

The assumptions that children and youth are not capable of forming opinions about the world make it possible for teachers (and other adults) to frame problematic behaviours (such as disrespecting teachers) as having no valid grounding in the way things really are. For example, in schools, students’ knowledge – their assertions about what they know – has no standing as legitimate knowledge because children and youth are not authorized knowers (Minnich, 2005). Even when youth come together to affirm one another’s knowledge, it does not gain status because its validation has occurred only among other non-authorized people. This issue, which positions adults as the only valid knowers is at the root of adultism.

The question of who is deemed a valid knower prompts me to think about the privilege that has been accorded to me as researcher: one who is authorized to say what constitutes knowledge. The issue of the authority of knowledge has been referred to as the crisis of legitimation in research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The crisis of legitimation in research takes as problematic the question of how research is to be evaluated. Since a text is no longer considered to represent experience accurately, fully, and completely, the question of what constitutes valid knowledge remains always on the move (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). The notion of reliability (i.e., the ability of another researcher to re-produce the same “findings” if they used the same approach with the same informants) seems to have been dissolved in evaluations of qualitative research today. That is probably because it is too caught-up in notions about objectivity and denial of the temporal and partial quality of knowledge. The notion of validity maintains a presence in the discourse on qualitative research.

I reflect back on the ways in which I have arrived at “valid” knowledge claims I made in my past research. As I think about the means by which I have attempted to generate “legitimate” knowledge, I recognize my reliance upon methods. By naming, even often in only a paragraph in a journal article, my alignment with
accepted methodologies such as phenomenology, I offered would-be judges a way to evaluate my knowledge claims. By offering, often in only a paragraph or two, some awareness of weaknesses associated with the research, I was considered to have adequately met some standard for critical self-reflection. Probably the strongest contribution to my research being deemed “valid” was derived from having conducted the research in collaboration with tenured faculty – truly authorized knowers.

Today, through this inquiry with youth, I am more aware of the ways in which “validity” has been and is being transformed within qualitative research discourse. Lather’s (1992, 1993) work, in particular, has shaped my thinking. Patti Lather contends that validity is a limit question in research, a question which “repeatedly resurfaces, one that can neither be avoided or resolved” (1993, p.674). I have come to accept that the crisis of legitimation (the process of determining what counts as “valid” knowledge in research) is intimately caught-up in the crisis of representation (the problem of re-presenting experience) in research. The problem of valid knowledge reflects the fact that stories shared in research reflect constructed rather than “found” worlds as social science would have us believe (Lather, 1993). What I used to believe that research methods promised me in my past research was the means by which I would discover knowledge. By posing the right questions to the right people and listening carefully, I would be able to find the truth within their statements; truth that needed to be conveyed to unknowing others in order to persuade them to change the way they thought and behaved. This practice of producing knowledge felt relatively straightforward until I started to notice that I was feeling uncomfortable about leaving out what didn’t fit in the stories in which I assumed truth resided. I began to recognize my complicity in constructing supposed “truth.”

Through inquiring into knowledge with youth, I have had an opportunity to learn about the problems of knowledge encountered by youth and have been provoked by their problems to contemplate further my own complicity. In the process I have become more attuned to the inseparability of what can be known from issues of expressing knowledge; that as a researcher I cannot avoid being involved in the politics of knowing and being known (Lather, 1992). In my present and future research, I work to share more of my practices, to hold my knowledge claims more loosely, ever-ready to have them disputed and revisioned via interaction with others. Actually, my research work now is less about making knowledge claims that suggests my work as finished or having authority; I want to find a way to research that involves me in always being in the position of beginning again. And I wonder, given the politics of knowing, how well do research funders receive research that makes tentative and loose “claims” – that avoids providing “over-simple answers to intractable questions” (Lather, 1993, p. 674) – which hold authority always in the process of becoming?

As readers strain to evaluate the “validity” of the knowledge re-presented in this dissertation, I wonder to what criteria from among the varied interpretive
community which have shaped my thinking will they turn for guidance? Will they look to feminist pragmatism to see whether I have adequately re-presented the processes of thinking instead of focusing on the products of thinking? Will they look to see how well I have enacted the epistemology espoused by feminist pragmatism? Might they view the focus on youth’s experiences with knowledge as reflecting a phenomenological pursuit and hence work to ascertain whether I adequately re-presented youth’s experiences with knowledge? Will this work be judged according to postmodern standards for inquiry and given the vast array of ways in which postmodernism has been and continues to be defined, upon whose definitions will they turn? I have been influenced by Caputo’s (1987, 2000, 2005) thinking especially around the notions of living with the difficulty of life (uncertainty) and resisting compulsions to still the flux in order to open to that which is not yet known. Caputo (2005) has helped me to become more comfortable with difficulty, to see apparent impossibilities as productive spaces which invite living within them without striving for resolution. Like Lather (1993), Caputo affirms that the problem of validity cannot be resolved. But since the problem of validity cannot be avoided either, might this re-presentation be evaluated according to how well it demonstrates an ability to move within the impossibility of certain knowledge?

The assumption that youth, in general, are “having the time of their lives” signals the belief that youth don’t realize how easy they have it and should be more appreciative of this time in their lives, or it can suggest the belief that youth are enjoying themselves too much; they don’t realize that they should be more serious about the tasks at hand which will secure their future.

**Teachers’ Knowledge of Students**

Included in their paper cut-outs, and discussed in a debriefing session, were a number of assumptions which the youth stated teachers rely upon to gain knowledge of their students. The youth noted that in addition to judging students based on their course marks, teachers judge students based on assumptions they make about the meanings of students’ appearance, the music they listen to, their clothing style, their extra-curricular activities, their group of friends, their family background, their actions, their past, where
they live, and their parents’ occupations. Youth who dress in alternative styles (e.g., punk, rebel, jock, emo, gangster) are generally cast by teachers as “different” and “stupid,” and are often also assumed to be drug-users. Again, these aspects of a students’ life were used to determine whether a student fit into the category of “good” or “bad” student.

Paige recounted her own experience with being discriminated against by teachers when she dressed alternatively. Julio, who was a good friend of Paige’s, affirmed her belief:

Paige: I dressed weird and listened to weird music and stuff … they [teachers] just assumed that I was dumb.

Julio: When people who dress more alternatively, or you know, more punkish, what I’ve noticed is that teachers always say, ‘Oh you’re failing everything’ and ‘You’re unmotivated, you’re a slacker, you do drugs, you’re only here because you have to be here.’ But they don’t give them [students who dress differently] a chance to prove themselves.

When I asked the youth whether they would change how they dressed in order to avoid being cast as dumb by teachers, they generally agreed that they would not change how they dressed. I did observe however, that when we met as a group, none of the youth dressed in a way that I would consider shocking. Paige mentioned that she used to dress weird and that she no longer dresses that way. Did the prejudice she met at school in the past have something to do with how she dresses now? What do I do with what they told me?

Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by the Researcher: “Finding” the “Truth” in Stories

The problem of assuming that research can represent the truth within others’ stories evokes the crisis of representation in research. It assumes that the truth
exists to be found. It posits truth as static and accessible rather than socially constructed or co-constructed. If I accept that I cannot speak authentically of the experience of the youth, how can my research sufficiently include them? (Here I contemplate the issue of the autonomous rational individual from the perspective of research which hopefully complements my contemplation from the perspective of feminist pragmatist philosophy earlier.\textsuperscript{58})

Lincoln and Denzin (2003) suggest that I can work within this tension by including the youth in the research process. But what, I wonder, should “inclusion” look like? This inquiry was not action research, which I take as involving many people in all phases of the research, especially beginning with determining the impetus for and the focus of the research. I am aware that much of what is called “action research” actually fails to involve others in the process of defining and determining how to conduct the research. I am also aware that in my own prior research, when participants have been invited to participate in the analysis of transcripts, rarely do participants accept the opportunity to do so. More often than not, participants want the researcher to do the interpretation work. And by virtue of the professional expectations of researchers, the responsibility to prepare re-presentations tends to fall upon their shoulders.

This is consistent with what happened in this inquiry. The youth reported enjoying being part of the inquiry sessions and talking with one another about issues related to knowing knowledge. They did not however, find it easy to make themselves available to participate in data analysis, even though I did extend the invitation to a couple of youth who expressed an interest early on in the inquiry. And even then, given what I am learning about the myth of self knowledge through engaging this inquiry, do I assume that the youth would be able to better interpret their own stories or those of their peers? Or is the question really not about privileging a standpoint but in acknowledging that additional and especially different perspectives are always valuable to help us see beyond our horizons to that which we do not yet know. To move away from seeing truth as always present and its discovery as being possible by applying methods deemed appropriate for getting at truth, and move towards seeing truth as co-constructed in our social interactions. Feminists suggest that it is possible to reach conclusions, as long as one presents them as temporary and tentative and having been derived through a process of social negotiation (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

In my past research I struggled with my role of speaking meaning for research participants. That is, I felt uncomfortable stating their truths for them; I wanted to find a way to be certain that what I shared in my research writing was what they meant. So my first discomfort was with my ability to speak others’ truths; what I had not yet appreciated was their inability to speak their own truths. Gergen and

\textsuperscript{58} I will return to the crisis of representation as I interact with the youth’s contemplations about the relations between experience and knowledge in Chapter Five. I will also return to the issue with a focus on knowing self and other in Chapter Six.
Gergen (2003) remind me that considering what youth say in this inquiry as though the youth’s descriptions are transparent reflections of their experience and knowledge catches me enacting modernist assumptions – assumptions about the epistemic agency of the individual.

My research now, hopefully, reflects my acceptance of all knowledge as being inevitably partial. My worries about the impossibility of speaking at all within research subside when I read that descriptions and explanations are acceptable as long as I do not suggest that what the youth in this inquiry said is representative of all youth and I show that my re-presentation expresses the multiplicity of the youth; that I allow them to exist in these pages in their full complexity, including their contradictions (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). However, now I am aware that wanting this doesn’t necessarily help me to enact it. What would the full complexity of youth in their multiplicity look like on paper?

Frankie and Paige had differing experiences with being judged as capable or incapable by teachers based upon what the teachers knew about their parents.

Frankie: My science teacher found out that my dad was like an engineer and like a professor at UVic and I was talking to him about it and I kind of felt like after she found that out she suddenly expected more from me, that I was going to be really good at science right away or that I was going to be really into it or something.

Paige: When an adult asks me what my parents do it’s like, my mom’s a bartender and my dad, like he doesn’t have a job, and as soon as I tell people that, it’s like ‘Well, you’re going nowhere.’

In these narratives students report being judged by teachers for their apparent willingness and inherited ability to take up the commitment to “knowledge” as defined by the school system and how their appearances and family backgrounds are assumed to attest to willingness and ability. That there are only two potential categories that matter – “good” or “bad” – reflects the either/or logic of dominant conceptions of knowledge.

**Cycling Around:** Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and by the Researcher: The Use of Separating Logic

If teachers think about students in terms of either “good” or “bad” categories they an enacting either/or logic. Either/or logic is a separating logic (Thayer-Bacon,
It is a dualistic way of thinking that posits that some things cannot exist together. An either/or logic employed alongside beliefs in individualism always pits us against one another because freedom for the individual implies that we are always in competition with others who might infringe upon our freedom. In schools, students compete to be the best students. Grading systems that state that only a certain percentage of students can be awarded excellent marks uphold the belief that there must always be a certain number of individuals who are less capable of knowledge.

Minnich (2005) posits that either/or thinking supports an overall logic of dominance that serves to support the dominance of some people over others. The logic of dominance has coercive qualities. The stratification system employed by teachers to ascertain “good” from “bad” students and the definitions that back them up are prescriptively present in modes of reasoning. Even though the knowledge teachers use to categorize students is partial, their espoused knowledge is taken to be the very standard of impartiality by many within the system. The capacities and functions and knowledge of students needs to be cast as lesser in order to justify control over students. Students are coerced into complying with the definitions in order to avoid being judged inferior. Most students will strive to suppress, to hide any thoughts or behaviours aligned with inferiority. When they enact resistance they are not likely to be heard by authorized knowers.

Teachers do not remain unscathed by a logic of dominance – the same logic that supports sexism, classism, ableism, and racism. When teachers enact adultist perspectives, they must remember always to display their own self-mastery to avoid slipping into that which they align with “student-ness.” They have to be sure that others, and not they, fulfill the functions defined as inferior (Minnich, 2005). If we refrain from establishing moral superiority to justify the subordination of some people, all we have established is that some differences exist. So it is not that we need to resist difference, only that we should avoid positioning difference on a hierarchy which deems some people as superior (in the case of this inquiry, adults) and others as inferior (in this case of this inquiry, youth).

In my past research I have struggled to resist either/or logic, especially in judging some forms of research as being superior to rather than different than other forms of inquiry. Just as teachers might get caught up in trying to determine “good” and “bad” students, researchers also get caught up in positing what constitutes “good” and “bad” research.

It is possible to resist the limits of either/or logic by turning to a connecting logic, a both/and logic. Thayer-Bacon’s (2003) relational theory of knowledge employs both/and logic through language that reveals how things overlap, associate, integrate, refer, compare connect, relate to each other and how, in that relating, things affect and change each other. In education and in research, the connecting
logic of both/and makes it possible to enjoy the benefits of multiple ways of knowing and being without having to absorb their deficits. However, we need to remember that practices that “tolerate” difference rather than engaging with it, are likely to “leave us living uneasily next door to each other but not in genuine communication” (Minnich, 2005, p.261).

This contemplation of “good” and “bad” students and the use of separating logic reminds me of my attempts to determine whether my research was “good” or “bad.” In recent years I have realized that my struggles to “overcome” feelings of confusion and doubt in research reflected my desire to remove uncertainty. My attempts to decide between “good” or “bad” also reflected my use of separating (either/or) logic. It seemed to me that the academics who were accorded the most status were the ones who secured the most research funding and few of them seemed to suffer little doubt about their endeavours. What, I wondered, would I need to do to become that “good” researcher? I sought methods of inquiry and re-presentation that would bolster my confidence; that would rid me of uncertainty with respect to the knowledge claims I made.

Reframing Student as Learner: Resisting Teachers’ Knowledge Practices

After listing their beliefs about teacher-held stereotypes of students on their first paper cut-outs, the youth were asked on separate paper cut-out figures to list descriptors for how they saw themselves and their friends as learners. In the youth’s lists there are descriptors that reflect a strong sense of their ability and willingness to engage in the process in learning; a sense that was denied by the stereotypical descriptors youth believe teachers hold for them. Table 5 contains the youth’s descriptions of learners which reflect how they see themselves and their friends.

Like the teacher-held stereotypes which contained contrary instances of a few potentially positive descriptors, youth included among their largely positive descriptors of themselves and their friends, a few potentially negative descriptors (at the bottom of
Table 5. Youth Perceptions of Themselves and Their Friends as Learners

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptors of Self and Friends as Learners Generated by the Youth</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Know that understanding is key to having learnt something; tests alone don’t show understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Asks questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Someone who looks for new information</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is open to new ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Willing to give time up for learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Smart</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Creative</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Accept that things don’t always go as planned</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Uncertain but optimistic about the future</td>
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<td>• Thoughtful</td>
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<td>• Hardworking</td>
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<td>• Don’t give up</td>
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<td>• Intelligent</td>
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<td>• Motivated</td>
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<td>• Determined</td>
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<td>• Willing to listen</td>
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<td>• Respect what’s out there</td>
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<td>• Have a cheerful, open, attitude</td>
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<td>• Explore, take risks</td>
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<td>• Have confidence</td>
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<td>• Believe own values</td>
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<td>• Take responsibility</td>
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<td>• Accept own flaws</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Always look ahead</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Set goals and dreams</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Take criticism from elders</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Not necessarily smart but wants to learn and makes an effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Keen</td>
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<td>• Thinking ahead</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sometimes withdrawn; like to learn alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Likes to read</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Disorganized</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Uncertain</td>
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<td>• Discouraged</td>
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the list). They suggest that organization skills are important to learning. Feelings of uncertainty and discouragement, however, speak also to how they experience learning in
school. Like teachers, however, youth generally positioned their own and their friends’ success within the process of learning as an individual, rather than a social or systemic, matter.

However, during the debriefing discussion after the two lists were created, the youth engaged in conversation about some systemic issues related to student learning. I reflected on the fact that the majority of the youth in the inquiry described themselves as successful students (e.g., were or had been in the Challenge program) but took issue with structures that disadvantaged others rather than themselves. I also noted that most of the conversation about inequities in schools during the debriefing of the “Paper Cut-outs” activity, was generated by the four students in a public high school. The two youth who attended an independent school did not engage in the discussion about inequities. It could be that they do not experience inequities in their school to the same extent that the public school students did, and it is also possible that they had thoughts about these issues but did not share them. Again, I find myself troubling notions of re-presentation and feeling troubled by the challenges associated with re-presenting the inquiry.

The teacher-held stereotypes of students that the youth proposed are generally more negative than the ways in which youth see themselves and their friends as learners. The youth’s comments about stereotypes and inequitable treatment of students affirm their awareness that the names teachers use to label students contain both explanations for poor performance and prescriptions for remediation. Teacher-held stereotypes combined with the other examples of teachers’ enacted conceptions of knowledge reflect beliefs that an individual’s lack of knowledge results from having either inferior
intellectual capacity (i.e., a genetic disposition), or having applied insufficient effort (i.e.,
guilty of apathy or inappropriately prioritizing how one spends one’s time).

Interestingly, “disorganized” was the only descriptor that appeared on both the list of teacher-held stereotypes of students and the list of how youth saw themselves and their friends as learners. This suggests that this might be one aspect of learning or knowledge that youth agree with teachers about: that organizational skills are important to learning and becoming knowledgeable, at least within the way becoming knowledgeable is positioned in schools. The youth’s descriptions of themselves and their friends as learners attested to their positive view of knowledge-ability to an extent which cannot be gleaned from the teacher-held stereotypes. The youth revealed knowledge of aspects of participating in knowledge that they suggest is not acknowledged by their teachers, namely listening, asking questions, wanting to learn from others, being willing to explore and take risks, and being interested in learning.

Despite the strength with which youth asserted their opinions about teacher-held stereotypes, Pippen, in an interview away from the group, read the list of stereotypes and cautioned against ready interpretation of the list. She said that while students might think that teachers hold particular stereotypes of students, it could be that students are just stereotyping teachers’ stereotypes of students. And as Julio reminded us earlier, teachers’ differential treatment of students may be tangled up with their desire to see students succeed in school.

Pippen and Julio indicate that the ways in which performance in schools is framed reflects not only the attitudes of teachers but also the climate of the institutions in which
they teach and the ease by which we base what we think we know of others upon our assumptions.

That there do not exist many ways of being a student denies plurality of being. Minnich (2005) asserts that fear of judgment by teachers reflects students’ awareness that judgment tends to result in marking people as inferior rather than merely different. However, it is also possible that the either/or logic is associated more with youth perspectives about teacher conceptions and practices – it is possible that teachers practice a pluralist acceptance of difference between students but youth do not somehow pick up on teachers’ enactment of complexity in school settings. This begs the question though, what would it take to make plurality and complexity explicit so that they are part of students’ lived experiences in schools?

In all of this, we are reminded that adults are typically accorded the power to determine, to judge whether youth are knowledgeable or not. Youth rarely are given the power to make assertions about their knowledge in their own lives, especially in the context of school.

The youth want to be known by teachers for more than their ability to perform well according to school-based criteria for attainment of knowledge in subject areas. In other inquiry activities, the youth highlighted the role that experience plays in how they think about knowledge (see Chapter Five). In many ways their contemplation of experience indicates their efforts to resist dominant discourses of knowledge as positioned in schools. In particular, they raised the importance of what they know from being in the world and questioned adults’ positioning of experience which suggests experience can be quantified.
Responding to Payton’s Question

I return now to Payton’s query that provided the title for this chapter and wonder how I might respond to her question about what she needs to do to be seen as a “knowledgeable person?” When I initially thought about engaging in an inquiry with youth around conceptions of knowledge I thought that the youth’s discourse would reflect postmodern ideas about our grasp of reality being partial, incomplete and fragmentary. Their discourse did reflect humility, tolerance and an interest in dialogue with others in how they positioned sources of knowledge. However, what really settles in my bones is the way their discourse about school positions knowledge and youth’s resistance to conflating knowledge with school performance and adults’ suggestions that young people are unknowledgeable. In crafting a response to Payton’s query I am mindful of what I want for her, so my desires are very much in play; my ideas about what constitutes a good life are imbued in my response. My response would be something like this59:

Payton, you are already a knowledgeable person. Your question about tests, beliefs and the use of language in relation to knowledge shows that you already have an appreciation for how all those things might be entangled in how we think about knowledge. It is the acts of thinking and questioning that create potentiality for knowledge – the ability for knowledge – being knowledge-able. You are a thinker and questioner, and more than your thoughts and questions. The tasks of thinking and questioning are about more than acquiring knowledge; they are about involvement in the world and becoming aware of your own thinking. Continue to participate in negotiating with others what counts as knowledge and to value your unique and important contribution to the process of creating knowledge.

59 I write a personal response to Payton (and to each of the youth whose touchstone question provides an entry point to contemplate issues in each of the middle chapters) because the contemplations in this chapter have largely been with her question in mind; and through her question, I value Payton. The contemplations in this chapter also extend to the thoughts of theorist thinking friends and my own research practices. I respond to Payton in a personal, abbreviated response in order to not forget my response-ability to the youth in this inquiry. If I should meet one of them on the street, I would like to be able to say something in response to their question without asking them to read great lengths of text.
To also acknowledge my own difficulty with being “knowledgeable” and communicate my desire to promote “knowledge” as a process in which we participate while accepting that we are always on the way, I would share with her these words of John Steinbeck:

> It would be pleasant to be able to say of my travels with Charley, “I went out to find the truth about my country and I found it.” And then it would be such a simple matter to set down my findings and lean back comfortably with a fine sense of having discovered truths and taught them to my readers. I wish it were that easy. But what I carried in my head and deeper in my perceptions was a barrel of worms. (Steinbeck, 1962, p.207)
CHAPTER FIVE: “DO OUR VALUES AND EXPERIENCE AFFECT HOW WE SEE, JUDGE, OR IMAGINE THINGS?”

– Romeo, female, age 17

Romeo’s question introduces into the inquiry the notion of knowledge being situated within cultural values and lived experiences. When experience is brought into the realm of thinking about what constitutes knowledge, the notion of knowledge becomes more complex, less easily defined because now the particulars of people’s experience can enter into the discourse about knowledge.

The youth in the inquiry discussed how adults in their lives positioned knowledge and through a variety of inquiry activities were provoked to contemplate the roles of experience and values in what is taken to be knowledge. They also moved to contemplate whether opinions constitute knowledge and struggled with the question of how to judge opinions.

Resisting Adults’ Conceptions of Knowledge

In the “Exquisite Corpse” activity the youth were asked to write their perceptions of how adults in their world position knowledge. Then they were asked to write what knowledge means to them. In response to the prompt *the adults in my life tend to talk about knowledge as though* …youth said:

…you cannot question their validity and you need to have knowledge.

…it is an item to be obtained.

…it is a privilege to have knowledge, always take the opportunity to gain more knowledge.

…it is the key for a successful life.
…they have experienced it to know what “knowledge” truly is.

…it comes from a textbook.

…it only comes from the things taught at school.

Their perspectives of how adults position knowledge implies that knowledge is validated by objectivity and that which is taught in school, and its purpose is to help people succeed\textsuperscript{60}. The youth noted that adults position knowledge as something which adults have and know the meaning of. Youth, on the other hand, need to gain knowledge. For the youth, schools tend to position knowledge within the boundaries of subject matter and thus perpetuate the idea that knowledge is attainable rather than always in the process of being created. In asserting that knowledge is a privilege, they suggest that many people do not have access to knowledge so youth should appreciate what knowledge is offered them.

\textbf{Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices:}

\textbf{Knowledge as a Thing}

The idea of knowledge being a thing is related to dominant conceptions of knowledge, particularly the belief in knowledge as being whole or impartial. Dominant conceptions of legitimated knowledge position knowledge as not partial; rather, knowledge represents the truth, the view that a person deemed capable of reason should be able to get to if they go about it in the right way and the truth at which one arrives will be the same for each and every one (Minnich, 2005).

When knowledge is viewed as a thing, it supports ideas about the possibility of gaining knowledge through simple means of transmission. The transmission

\textsuperscript{60} We never took up the question of what “success” means. It would have helped us explore definitions of knowledge by inquiring into whether there is one or multiple definitions of success and the relationships between different definitions of success and knowledge. From there we could have explored for which kinds of success knowledge in schools is supposed to prepare young people.
model has permeated thinking about education for most of the 20th Century. The knowledge that students need to acquire in school is that which corresponds directly with the way things really are. This assumes that there is one true and real way of knowing the world. What is neglected is that who defines the “whole” is a decision, a choice about whose perspective is taken to be the whole, the true, the real thing.

Ideas about the existence of real truth also support particular research practices – ideas that I have upheld in my past research when I have endeavoured to discover the truth that exists within a problem and worried that the contradictions I notice in data mean I need to work harder to get at the truth. From this perspective, working harder meant trying to come up with other ways of helping participants speak their truths more clearly. Again, the crisis of representation in research is relevant here. The belief that a real truth exists coincides with the belief that people have the capacity, as autonomous rational agents, to access and speak that truth.

In addition to asking youth to posit how adults in their lives position knowledge, I also asked them to state what knowledge means to them. The youth responded to the prompt

*the word knowledge makes me think of…* with the following sentence completions:

…gears in the brain

…intelligence in a subject area

…wisdom

…enlightenment

…trees

…disagreement

…facts, people, and society

…the power to know and act

…understanding how to live.”
The “gears in the brain” response suggests that knowledge resides in the mind and the working brain is what produces knowledge. The response that states that knowledge makes him/her think about intelligence in a subject area suggests that the way knowledge is positioned in schools provides a definition that is pervasive. Other responses (e.g., wisdom, enlightenment, trees, disagreement) suggest that the idea of knowledge is less accessible, and can be associated with more elusive constructs, realms beyond the human, and is also not settled. That knowledge is associated with facts, people, and society, the power to know and act, and understanding how to live suggests knowledge is about living in the world, is enacted, and includes relations between people.

Is knowledge different from wisdom and enlightenment? How are trees located within conceptions of knowledge? These proposals suggest a departure from dominant conceptions of knowledge which I explored further with the youth. Over tea with Ruby and Romeo I took the opportunity to inquire into their use of the terms wisdom and enlightenment.

Ruby: Wisdom, it’s like being dull and then when someone presses your finger, you shine like bright up like crystal. [laughs] It’s like you know something and ‘ding,’ everything brightens up.

Diana: And ‘enlightenment’?

Ruby: Hmmm.

Romeo: The light bulb.

Ruby: [laughs] Yeah. There’s kind of religion to this too. Enlightenment, knowledge, some inner soul. It’s kind of hard to explain.

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61 Intelligence has long been held to represent one’s naturalized capacity for rationality and schools seen as the places in which young people learn to become more rational (Minnich, 2005).
62 I developed the “Tree of Knowledge” activity to explore relations between trees and knowledge with the youth.
Diana: So it’s a knowledge that’s connected to the soul too?

Ruby: Yeah. And knowledge of society.

Romeo: I think it sort of brings you to life when you know a lot and people look up to you and you have this glowing confidence.

Diana: Where do you come across words like that? Do you find it in your everyday conversations? I must admit that I don’t hear them that often but I think they’re really special words.

Ruby: I hear them in quotes.

Diana: Yeah, you like quotes, don’t you? You sent me a few.

Ruby: Like quotes can mean so much, like a few sentences can explain a lot!

Romeo: It just sums everything up.

I read in Ruby and Romeo’s descriptions of wisdom and enlightenment two possibilities; one of viewing wisdom as a deeper form of knowledge that includes spiritual knowledge; and the other, enlightenment as that which explains everything. The achievement of wisdom or enlightenment might be synonymous with achieving absolute and universal knowledge; knowledge that sums up the world. But then again, it might not: the wise person, as Socrates demonstrated, can be the person who realizes best that he or she does not know (per Minnich, 2005).

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**Cycling Around:** Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices: Rationalism and Hierarchies of Knowledge

By including “disagreement” and “knowledge associated with people and society” in what knowledge means, it is possible (and impossible) for me to say that some of the youth are resisting dominant conceptions of knowledge which privilege reason as the source of knowledge. And certainly “trees” is not included in dominant conceptions of knowledge which have long positioned nature in opposition to man (the source of reason) (Minnich, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).
Dominant conceptions of knowledge posit that reason is the means by which man\textsuperscript{63} has access to knowledge. Privileging reason as the source of knowledge is known as rationalism. Rationalism represents the notion that through the use of highly abstract rules and methods for reasoning, one will arrive at properly drawn conclusions; conclusions which are not tainted by one’s location in the world. From a rationalist perspective it is the particular location of a subjective being that is considered problematic, for that location involves particular experiences, bias, emotion and cultural assumptions that are seen to interfere with impartial, or objective knowledge (Minnich, 2005). Rationalism denies that there are many modes of thought and expression and this denial has been used to make many people feel inadequate or inept when their ways of thinking are not recognized and validated.

Rationalism has been used to position disciplines within a hierarchy that indicates which disciplines are closer to achieving real truth. There are even distinctions made within disciplines. Among Philosophy, for example, the disciplines of Metaphysics and Epistemology are accorded higher status because they deal with greater abstractions than those branches of Philosophy which deal with the issues related to daily living (e.g., Ethics). Educational philosophy, which deals with practice, and is therefore grounded in the particulars of experience, has the lowest status (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

Reflecting on my past research practice I confess to being complicit in enacting rationalism to a certain extent even though my inquiries were grounded in the particulars of people’s lived experience. When I think back to how I would describe the data analysis process in my writing, I would cite established procedures to confirm that I had adequately applied reason (abstract principles) to arrive at the truths I claimed. Now I wonder how reason and thinking are similar and different. I am more apt to describe my analysis processes as thinking processes but realize that someone charged with determining the validity of my work would want to know what steps I go through in the process. There are many things I do that are not that different than what would be described as “constant comparison” in ethnographic research. I have struggled to describe my analysis process as involving deductive or inductive reasoning. How can one determine where one starts? Minnich (2005) reminds me that the dominance of the deductive model propels me, as researcher, to rely upon standardized measures, rules, and principles to think.

\textsuperscript{63} Of course “man” did not always include all humans; it was meant to represent a select and privileged few, upon whose experiences in the world what was good and true for all humans was erroneously generalized (Minnich, 2005).
In other conversations, the youth headed down the slippery slope of going beyond rationalism (the pursuit of absolute knowledge) to include experience in knowledge. The role of experience in knowledge featured prominently in the “Exquisite Corpse” activity when the youth were asked to respond to the prompt, *when I think about what it means to know something* … They said:

…I feel as if I had a sense of accomplishment and that no one else know [sic] as I do.

…I believe that to ‘know’ something is to understand it and have experienced it ourselves.

…to know something is to have experienced something and to take the experience with you.

…treasure it. Only share it to my loved ones. Also to understand and look at it in a diverse concept.

…I ‘understand’ something.

…I think about the people who think getting an A+ means knowing something, as opposed to me who believes knowing anything means observing and learning from surroundings, mistakes, and experiences.

…I think about the things I have been taught and things I’ve learnt for myself.

In their comments above, the youth emphasized again that knowledge is a thing, that knowing is about understanding, and that experience is individually-had. Even when knowing is viewed with an open mind (in terms of “looking at it in a diverse concept”) knowing is also positioned as something personal and intimate. In positioning knowing as arising from “surroundings, mistakes, and experiences” in contrast to performance in school, an implication is made that even though knowing is individual, it arises from being embedded in the world. The youth’s comments here show an emphasis on personal
knowledge reflected in language that differs somewhat from what they said about knowledge in schools in Chapter Four.

To further explore the way in which knowledge is enacted in schools, I included the topic of reading for knowledge in the “Beliefs Exploration” activity. The youth were asked to declare whether they agreed, disagreed or were unsure about the statement “Reading is the best way to become knowledgeable.”

Ruby: I don’t think it’s the best way because I think experience is the best way. For example, like cooking, right? Is it better to learn it from a cookbook or actually experience cooking?

Vladimir: I think that even things like math, it’s still better to experience a concept like how does Pythagorus work here, rather than just a-squared plus b-squared plus c-squared.

Jericha-Fay: Some people are really good at reading, some people don’t know how to read or are dyslexic. Some people are better at art, some people are better at figuring it out themselves …like we live in a world where we’re not all the same so we all learn differently and we all obtain knowledge differently.

Romeo: You have to incorporate all sorts of things to learn to understand, like we all use different tools.

Julio: You can only know what you experience yourself. Someone can tell you what something feels like or what something looks like but you can never be confident about it until you figure it out yourself.

Experience featured strongly here and was positioned in opposition to reading. It is possible to view what the youth said as suggestive of the idea that reading does not qualify as experience. The youth affirm the hold that individualism has on their thinking – knowledge derives from experience which is individually had. They also distinguish between thinking experience (e.g., reading) and doing experience (e.g., cooking or other activity in the world) and it is the doing experience that they suggest helps them create understanding.
What the youth said prompts me to reflect upon how I have distinguished between thinking and doing in my interaction with participants in my past research. Has it been in a way that enacts the co-construction of knowledge or in a way that holds the individual as the source of knowledge? Schwandt’s (2003) notion of the theoretical observer resonates for me. I see myself in his descriptions, especially with respect to having distanced myself from the object of the research. When I researched aggressive behaviour, I did not include in my analyses, the conditions under which I would aggress against others. Instead, I turned to theory to make meaning of what participants told me. This, according to Schwandt (2003), is typical within phenomenological and ethnographic research that is not informed by critical or radical theories. Even when I attempted to empathize and sympathize with participants’ situations, it was largely a methodological move intended to facilitate access to participants’ ways of making meaning. Thus, I remained a “marginal native” who did not relinquish an analytical distance from those who participated in the research (Schwandt, 1996, p.63).

While Schwandt’s descriptions speak to me of myself, I wonder, what would the absence of analytical distance look like? Is it helpful to bracket what one knows from theory in order to engage with participants more openly? If one manages to bring little theory into researcher-participant interactions, does one risk potentially deepening the inquiry because they have little upon which to draw to pose questions?

Is there a way to think without theories? Does thinking not always involve comparison with existing ideas; served up in, as James (1917) states, the “sauce” in which we are cooked?

Or perhaps it is more about finding a way to bring thoughts and emotions into the research space; a way to loosen the power that theoretical knowledge has to shape where an inquiry goes? I recall the times in my past research when I resisted tears while interviewing a youth in jail who spoke about the abuse he endured at the hands of his parents or a young woman who spoke about life with a pimp as though these experiences were shared by everyone. To this day I wonder if not crying was the right thing to do.

Every time I attempt to critique that which I have done in practice I worry that I am still trying to overcome the tensions which permeate knowledge work (per Lather, 1992). Will speaking my awarenesses help me find a way to live within that which cannot be resolved?
If I successfully represent how research changes me – the researcher – have I managed to avoid making the youth a part of me (Lather, 1992) or have I merely managed to make the research about me?

What is “Experience?”

The youth seem to position experience as something which happens to them in the world outside of school. They also suggest that experience is perhaps something more active than interacting with words on paper. And yet, experience seems also an elusive concept.

I took up the question of what “experience” means again over donuts at Tim Horton’s with Payton, Jericha-Fay, and Frankie. I asked: “In the writing exercise about knowledge and knowing, we talked a bit about knowledge from textbooks versus knowledge from experience64. What do you think happens when we read something? Is it a different kind of experience than what we generally consider to be experience?”

Payton: I don’t understand the question.

Diana: That’s okay. It’s probably a bad question.

Frankie: Is this a textbook or just a book?

Diana: Well, the example they used was a textbook so I guess we’ll use that.

Payton: I think it could be like an experience, I guess. I mean it’s like there’s something happening to you.

Jericha-Fay: I guess when you’re reading about an experience that somebody else has had and having an experience yourself are two different things. I think reading about it, it would be really intriguing because you would see it from the author’s point of view, I guess, but it’s not the same as doing it yourself and how you would actually feel about it.

64 In an earlier activity debriefing, Jericha-Fay had stated that some people learn from reading and that some people learn from doing things. I took the opportunity in our small group meeting to explore the apparent opposition of reading and experience with these thinking friends.
Diana: So if you think about doing something yourself, what do you picture happening that doesn’t happen when you read?

Jericha-Fay: I don’t really understand.

Diana: Well, I guess it depends on what we’re trying to learn about; one of the examples that came up in the activities was cooking. You can read a recipe and you could, kind of in your head, picture how to cook something, but how is that different than actually cooking? What changes?

Jericha-Fay: I see. Well, I guess picturing it in your head, it’s kind of like when you have a daydream or something like that, everything kind of goes the way you want it to, it’s kind of perfect. When you picture yourself making something, you wouldn’t picture yourself running out of flour or spilling stuff on the floor; you would picture yourself doing everything perfectly. So I guess it’s not very realistic.

Diana: So it’s kind of messier when you do it, not so neat and tidy?

[group nods and says ‘Yeah.’]

The term experience was given considerable attention by William James (1909/1977, 1913). James (1909/1977) refers to the continuity of experience as involving a “pulse of inner life” that contains at once the past, the future and some awareness of our own bodies, the bodies of others, our environment and our thoughts (p.129). He asserts that all units of experience overlap; any separation is an intellectualist fiction derived from using the abstraction of time to separate the “continuous sheet of experience” (p.130). James (1909/1977) believes that the notion of experience exceeds conceptualization and verbalization and that acts of talking about experience sustain the fiction of separation.

Again, I wonder why is reading not an experience for some of the youth? There has long been a dualism supported in education between classroom learning and experiential learning. This dualism probably supports youth believing that experience
only happens outside of schools. How might we, I wonder, make classroom learning about experience too? Given what I have heard the youth say so far, it seems that inviting their away-from-school experiences into their classrooms holds promise for disrupting the dualism between school-based and not-school-based knowledge.

And yet I also suspect that youth are resisting practices in classrooms that position the experience of others in textbooks as the knowledge that needs to be acquired. Youth seem to want to participate in negotiating what counts as knowledge. In suggesting that experience is messier than reading, Jericha-Fay acknowledges that writing, especially in its propensity for linear re-presentation, tidies up that which tends to be messy in the world.

During the “Feeling Knowledge” activity debriefing, Jericha-Fay noted how difficult it was to put emotions into words. She recounted experiencing frustration when she was unable to explain to friends what was bothering her. In the same conversation, Frankie pointed out that in addition to feeling frustrated about the challenge of putting feelings into words, she also experienced a sense of power when she felt at a loss for words:

Frankie: There are some days when I feel really sad or upset but when people ask me why, I can’t quite explain it to them. Sometimes I categorize my feelings: sad, happy, bitter. But the more I think it about, the more feelings I have that I can’t describe in words. It’s like no words have been invented for that specific feeling, and I feel lost, like it is beyond my knowledge. At the same time I feel a kind of power in knowing that not everything can be completely understood.

Frankie’s comment prompted Paige to inquire whether only youth experienced frustration at being unable to put thoughts into words.

Paige: Well, I wonder if your example just applies to teenagers because I know when you’re growing up, because I know when I was 15, grade 10 was like the
weirdest year. And I’d always be like that. People would be like, ‘How are you feeling?’ and I’d feel happy and sad at the same time and I actually didn’t know how I felt. But I wonder if that applies to adults too or if it’s just teenagers?

When I realized that everyone around the table was looking at me, waiting for a response, I responded thusly:

Diana: That’s a good question. I think it probably does apply to adults too but I think maybe we’ve grown accustomed to feeling like we need to respond; we need to get rid of the complexity and so we just give others what they want and they’ll go away. We find something to say. I think another thing too is how much you believe that things can exist together. Like do you believe you can feel angry and happy at the same time?

Paige: Yeah.

Diana: And if you believe that, then you can be okay with that. But if you’ve been taught that ‘No, you can’t have both of them,’ it has to be one or the other, you’ll feel frustrated and compelled to decide between them.

The youth suggest that knowledge from reading tends to represent knowledge as something that is tidy and clear; a representation that is less likely in living in the world. Through the discussion about expressing emotions, the youth also point to the challenges of putting experience into language.

### Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices:

**Knowledge is Tidy and Clear**

The dominant conception of absolute knowledge which is free from traces of uncertainty makes us more likely to accept that which is tidy and that which coheres in a cogent argument to be more representative of knowledge than an experience presented in all its messiness. Indeed, speeches and writing that present a good argument, that establish an impregnable position are thought to reflect that which is true (Minnich, 2005). What we tend to not realize is that the ability to present a strong, indisputable argument depends less upon truth than upon one’s skills at argumentation.

Just as the youth struggle with knowledge in its messiness and the challenge of being asked to put all experience into discursive form, I too struggle with the
same issues in my research practice. In particular, the challenge of representing non-linear experience in linear, written form frustrates me to no end. I have dabbled in poetic representations in order to attempt to “overcome” this challenge. I have also considered (and purchased but not used) complex software that would permit non-linear written representation. Over time, I decided that I did not possess the skills, nor the time to become skilled to employ either means of “creative” representation. And I worry that in attempting to weave thinking throughout my re-presentation I succeed in confusing the reader. I want to offer a coherent argument with clear starting and end points but the task defies me.

This challenge occupied my thoughts little in my past research. While I struggled with the issue of re-presenting the words of participants as “truth” when I was aware of contradictions and my own confusion during analyses, I did not consider the form by which I represented truth to be problematic. In fact, I did not know that other re-presentational forms existed and were gaining popularity in academic circles. It is only recently that I have become aware of arts-based inquiry and representation (c.f., a/r/tography; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). But I am not an artist; I don’t have these means of representation in my repertoire.

Lather (1993) reminds me that it is not about finding more or better words (although I believe that those of us who do have the most words and put them together in better ways are accorded higher status). She argues that the notion that the spoken word represents that “we know what we mean, mean what we say, and say what we mean, and know what we have said” is problematic (p. 199).

Paige gave voice to this issue when she said “I have it in my head, but it doesn’t come out right.” From where I stand now I would say “I don’t even have it.”

Caputo (1997) describes experience as traveling, or going through. Caputo’s contention that knowledge is inseparable from the flow of the world informs how I think about experience. I do not think of experience as separate from thinking. Thinking is experience. As Payton acknowledged, we can call an experience whatever involves something happening to us. Being and thinking are experience because living is experience. We are never the same from moment to moment; we are always in experience. It’s what Caputo refers to as being involved in the world. I wonder, can we ever be uninvolved?
Experience came up again in the “Beliefs Exploration” activity when I asked the youth to take a stand on the statement “Adults know more than kids do.” They said:

Julio: I think adults may have experienced more but I don’t think they necessarily know more … because society has changed a lot.

Jericha-Fay: I think that adults do know more than kids in their experiences.

Pandora: Well, some do know more but it’s not true of all of them.

Julio: It also depends. Like for me, my parents grew up and were ready to live their lives in the Middle East and I’m living my life in Canada so I have experiences that they never dealt with and they have no idea what I’m talking about or no idea of how to help me.

Jericha-Fay: I think it all depends on the situation in general. Sometimes like some adults were raised differently than kids and they had different rules. Like maybe an adult was raised by people who were like racist or something but then there was a kid who wasn’t raised to be racist and the kid honestly knows more than the parent. Or sometimes depending on where an adult is from or where they got their education and they don’t know more.

Romeo: Like my parents didn’t grow up in North America so there’s a whole lot of different things that they’ve experienced that I haven’t.

Vladimir: Where did they grow up?

Romeo: Hong Kong, China.

Jericha-Fay: There’s some things in society that change and some things that don’t so it’s kind of like things that don’t I guess parents would probably know more about because they’ve been here for longer, but society is always changing in some aspects so if you’re a kid and you’re being brought up in a time period where it’s happening you do know more than an adult would, so it just depends.

The youth struggled with the popular notion that knowledge from experience is something that accumulates with age over time. They stated that young people know differently because of their experience in the world and that having different knowledge is just as important as having lots of experience.
On this occasion, the youth began by acknowledging that experience tends to accumulate over time but that more experience is not equivalent to more knowledge. Although Jericha-Fay originally took issue with that proposition, Pandora and Julio’s qualifying statements seemed to influence Jericha-Fay’s thinking. She inserts the idea that knowledge from experience can be related to knowing better how to live with one another than knowing more and eventually highlights the temporal nature of knowledge in her last statement.

However, despite affirming the possibility for experience to support their own valid knowledge in relation to adults, later in the “Sharing Wisdom” activity the youth highlighted again their marginal status as knowers. When asked to write a piece of wisdom for someone older than them, the youth seemed puzzled.

Romeo: It was easier to think of a piece of wisdom to share with a younger person because you could draw from your own experience and use what you had learned from your own mistakes. …And you feel like a younger person would listen to you more.

Julio: We don’t have any status or position yet because we’re teenagers. So no matter what we say – in some situations, it will be just like, ‘Oh, they’re just teenagers, they don’t know what they’re saying’.

Minnich (2005) explains the propensity to devalue the knowledge of young people. She asserts that the Western tradition of associating thinking with the mind and the mind with reason, coupled with the belief that thinking resided only in masculine minds, created and sustained the belief that only some people were capable of serious thinking while non-white men, women and children were considered incapable of serious thinking and knowledge (Minnich, 2005).
Knowledge from Experience: Opinions

The youth have introduced the role of experience in knowledge creation. They struggle to resist school-centered definitions of knowledge as objective and hence valid, and insert into knowledge the importance of their own experiences in the world. While they vacillate between seeing experience as individually and socially-had, they begin to speak about knowledge in terms of opinions. By inserting experience into knowledge, the role of differing experiences evokes consideration of how to sort through a multiplicity of experiences and make judgments about knowledge derived from experience.

The question of speaking what one knows was extended by the youth to the issue of judging opinions in the “Beliefs Exploration” activity when I asked youth to consider and respond to the statement, “If you choose your words carefully, you will never be misunderstood.” Their disagreement with the statement was unanimous. The reasons they gave for not supporting the statement included:

Romeo: Everyone interprets things differently …so there’s never really just one standard.

Julio: You might be understood orally, they understand what words you are saying but they probably won’t understand your opinion. Like some people have been brought up with some things their whole lives and no matter what you say or do you can’t make them understand where you’re coming from.

Jericha-Fay: It isn’t really a matter of how you use your words or how you change them around, sometimes they won’t ever agree with what you’re saying because the world doesn’t like all agree on one thing.

Romeo opens up the question of difference and Julio responds by acknowledging that knowledge is caught up in cultural beliefs. Like others, Julio suggests that meaning is related to conceptual systems and values defined within cultures (Delpit, 1995; Lakoff &
Johnson, 2003). Jericha-Fay’s extension implies that knowledge is dependent upon people coming to an agreement; an issue that will be taken up below in discussing how to judge opinions.

The youth’s suggestion that knowledge depends on cultural context and therefore needs to include diverse perspectives echoes James’ (1909/1977) pluralist ontology. A pluralist ontology posits the world as many rather than as one and so opens to the variation of experience and partial, situated, fragmented knowing.

Things are ‘with’ one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything. The word ‘and’ trails along after every sentence. Something always escapes. …However much may be collected, however much may report itself as present at any effective centre of consciousness or action, something else is self-governed and absent and unreduced to unity. …Monism insists that …everything is present to everything else in one vast instantaneous co-implicated completeness65. …All things interpenetrate and telescope together in the great total conflux. …For monism …everything drags the whole universe along with itself and drops nothing.” (James, 1909/1977, p.145-146)

James acknowledges that our language informs how we see the world. He states that words are useful to us “as we plunge into the stream of experience” but he also recognizes that words cut off certain possibilities as they set up others: “you cannot look on any word to close your quest. Each word must be set at work within the stream of your experience to bring out its practical cash-value” (p. 53). Words summarize things to look

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65 When I contemplate monistic and absolutist beliefs I sense a paradox. I would expect an ontology that pursues unity to be interested in both/and logic but in fact, monism sets up the either/or distinctions in order to pursue unity. If one believes in a predetermined eternal order, then one’s efforts focus upon determining and asserting that order. In order to support a unified whole, one is compelled to consistently distinguish between this and that. The paradox continues where pluralism embraces a both/and logic; a logic that allows particularity and contradiction. But both/and can be construed by some as another form in pursuit of bringing everything together. The propensity for mistaking a both/and logic with a monist ontology prompts me to want to use an either/and logic; what is can be either this or that, and it can also be neither or both.
for; they are definite instruments abstracted from reality and they are real abstractions. They are “past experience funded” (James, 1913, p.265).

One re-reading of the combined transcripts from the inquiry focused upon language use and showed that youth used the term “opinions” in their discourse more often than they used the terms “ideas” or “conceptions” or “theories.” In their discourse about experience and opinions the youth indicated that opinions reflect knowledge from experience in the world. Their discourse positioned opinions as personal; something that each person develops for himself or herself. I asked the youth to share their thoughts on how opinions get formed.

Payton: Everyone has an opinion of their own and you should always have your own opinion, not somebody else’s.

In thinking that opinions are formed in individual minds alone, it makes it impossible to see or name the influences that shape opinions, and thus it is tempting to believe that external influences do not bear upon beliefs-made-public (i.e., opinions). The notion of opinions taking seed within a self that is separate from all others in the world is a notion reflected frequently in the youth’s discourse. It seems that in resisting the school-based focus on others’ experiences, the youth turn instead to their own experiences as though their opinions arise from their experience in the world as autonomous beings. Like experience which tends to be individually-had, according to the youth – knowledge from experience is deemed to be individually-developed.

Payton’s assertion of needing to form her own opinion, recalls Julio’s statement earlier about experience: that one must always make meaning of experience for him or herself in order to say they know something. In other words, experience requires a kind
of going through. Other times, however, the youth reflected a sense that social
encounters influence their “individual” opinions.

Julio: I think opinions are formed from the people who have influenced us when
we were younger. Parents, culture, surroundings: how we are raised can determine
what we are going to think of around us. Personal experiences: We aren’t going to
get any kind of opinion on something unless we experience it.

Ruby: Opinions are formed through influences of peer pressure, media,
environment of surroundings and family members. My opinions come from the
influences of my daily life.

Jericha-Fay: I think personal opinions are formed (and this is going to sound
ironic) from listening to what other people say, and adapting your opinion to the
new knowledge you have just learned. You could be strongly against something,
but someone could voice how they were for it, and they could make a strong point
that could change your opinion.

Romeo: We all have different backgrounds and experience, thus making our
views and the way we see things in different ways. Our opinions can change
through the course of time and the skills we gain. I think every day our experience
influences our opinion, it constantly changes as we grow.

There appear to be contradictions among the youth’s discourse on whether experience
and opinions are individually had or socially constructed. It’s very likely that the youth
feel a confusion similar to that which I (and others) have endured regarding judging
knowledge. What we can say is caught up in what we can know and what we can know
is caught up in beliefs about what can exist. The long-debated notions of objective versus
subjective knowledge enter the mix here.

Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and
Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices:

Forced Choice: Absolutism or Relativism

Thayer-Bacon (2003a & b) argues that either/or logic, the binary logic that
separates prompts us to believe that we only have two choices when it comes to
judging knowledge: absolutism or relativism. Absolutism is also referred to as
the “view from nowhere” – the view of the world (of knowledge) that is closest to god’s view. Absolutism assumes that the world is knowable and that through the application of reason, we can come to know the world as it truly is; a truth that is universal for all beings. As mentioned before, absolutism assumes an objective stance, unsullied by the particulars of individual experience.

Relativism is a term used to represent subjective beliefs and from a perspective employing binary logic, if knowledge is not absolute it can only be relative – that is, applicable for an individual. Hence, the term relativism is also used to denote the “view from everywhere” – suggesting that myriad individual view points exist in isolation and can never get close to truth.

From this perspective – one employing binary logic – youth in schools are prompted to position that which is knowledge as that which has been universally agreed upon as constituting what is real. The value of individual perspectives are considered to be beliefs rather than knowledge and hence not appropriate to include in education.

This perspective – the forced choice between absolutism and relativism – has bearings upon research practices too. Although in my past research I have been concerned little with positing the generalizability of my research findings (striving towards universal truth) and have instead been quite comfortable with positioning the findings as specific to a particular context, I have also at times encountered the scorn which those who strive for universal knowledge level at my research practices. I remember submitting an article for review after completing my first research project on how multidisciplinary healthcare practice served families and being shocked and confused by the feedback of one reviewer. The research involved interviewing healthcare providers from three settings who engaged with practitioners from other disciplines to provide services to children and their families. The parents of the children in each setting were also interviewed. The feedback from the article reviewer included, questioning the validity of the research because it lacked a control group.

Although I have been comfortable asserting that my research findings are specific to particular contexts, I have not, until recently, really grappled with the issue of how my situated interpretations impinge upon my research representations. I am complicit in alluding to having upheld the goal of objectivity by concerning myself only with supporting what my participants said via established theories (knowledge closer to the universal, the absolute).

Thayer-Bacon (2003a) argues that the debate between absolutism and relativism is predicated upon a separating logic which always pits one thing against another to assure
their mutual exclusivity. And Thayer-Bacon (2003a), employing her relational epistemology offers an alternative to the either/or thinking that considers absolutism and relativism as the only available positions on judging knowledge. She affirms that as individuals, we exist in relation to others on both an intimate and a generalized level. Each of us is embodied and embedded within a larger social context. Others enlarge our view and inhibit our view; others socially validate us at the same time as they threaten to socially determine us; we exist as dependent, independent and interdependent beings (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

**Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices:**

**Alternative Grounds for Judging Knowledge: Qualified Relativism**

Qualified relativism (Thayer-Bacon, 2000, 2003a & b) offers an alternative to the thinking that is possible within a binary, either/or logic. Qualified relativism asserts that it is possible to have “a view from somewhere” and that our goal for knowing need not focus upon achieving absolute knowledge. Qualified relativism asserts that “knowers are socially embedded and embodied inquirers who are limited in their knowing by their environment, which includes their experiences with the world around them and each other, and their human capacities (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a, p.101). From a qualified relativist perspective, the world is not knowable with certainty; rather, the world is open and unfinished and knowledge depends upon us coming together to include others’ perspectives in our inquiring process, for it is through inquiring with others, especially those who are different from us, that we can learn about and adjust our limitations, revise our standards for judging and better recognize the roles that power and privilege play in what we take to be knowledge (Thayer-Bacon, 2003b).

Qualified relativism offers us another way of thinking about judging knowledge; a way that connects rather than separates the knower from the known without sliding into vulgar relativism (i.e., the view from everywhere).

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66 James’ pluralist ontology lays the path for Thayer-Bacon’s qualified relativism although Thayer-Bacon states that James’ emphasis on the individual rather than the relational provoked accusations that his ontology promoted vulgar relativism (i.e., the idea that anything goes).
“Testing” Knowledge from Experience: Judging Opinions

Part way through the inquiry I invited youth to practice negotiating opinions by creating an activity that highlighted two divergent opinions on a topic. The example illustrated that cultural beliefs are involved in what we take to be knowledge (see the “Tree of Knowledge” activity). In the example provided, cultural beliefs made it possible for two people to have very different and opposing views on spiritual knowledge as depicted in Disney’s popular children’s movie “Pocahontas.” In the activity, the youth were asked to read statements on tree-shaped paper cut-outs. The pink trees reflected one perspective on Disney’s Pocahontas movie, and the green trees reflected another, opposing perspective. The pink trees contained a variety of statements from a website which reflected a Christian fundamentalist view and posited that the movie taught children very harmful beliefs. The green trees contained a variety of statements from a website of an Indigenous educator who referenced the movie as an example of knowledge residing in the spirit world that is connected to nature. In the discussion that ensued, the youth struggled to judge the opposing perspectives.

Julio: I’d like to say this one (pink) is wrong but I don’t think I can.

Paige: You can’t just read these and be like, ‘This one is totally right’ and ‘This one is totally wrong’ because some people probably believe like the negative one, or the one that seems negative.

…

Julio: It’s kind of like people think Harry Potter is bad for kids because then kids will think that they can be wizards.

67 In “Pocahontas” the young maiden frequently turned to her spirit guide “Grandmother Willow” for advice. Her grandmother’s spirit existed in the form of a large willow tree.
68 The discussions frequently shot off on tangents about graduation and friends at school. I have used “…” to link statements that returned to the thread about judging opinions.
Paige: Well, it depends because some people love Harry Potter and other people don’t; like my grandmother who passed away, but she was extremely religious and … she didn’t even like any of her grandchildren watching it because it was witchcraft and all this stuff and she thought it was really bad, even though it was not real.

…

Romeo: I think we’re in a society where a lot of people are different and I think we have to like accept other people’s views and not be so like closed with your own mind.

Julio: And also nowadays there’s so much different that we don’t know what is…

Pippen: …not different any more.

Julio and Paige begin by highlighting that it is very challenging to judge what is right and wrong in light of acceptance of differences. As Julio introduces another popular movie, “Harry Potter” Paige is reminded of her grandmother’s dislike of the movie because it too can give children harmful ideas. Paige introduces the issue of what is “real” and suggests that ideas can have real effects in the world even though they are premised upon things that do not really exist (e.g., magic). Then Romeo introduces the notion of plurality and Julio and Pippen extend plurality to the challenge of knowing anything other than difference in today’s world.

I conducted the “Tree of Knowledge” activity separately with the three youth who were unable to meet when the activity was conducted the first time. These youth, too, were challenged by the demand for judgment of opinions that the activity provoked.

Payton: It says that ‘The idea that every person can have a spirit guide for making life’s decisions is demon possession.’ Does that sound like it’s bad that you can have a spirit to guide you?

Diana: Yeah. From that perspective.
Frankie: It just kind of sounds more like how paganism was seen back a long time ago because they couldn’t understand it. It’s just so different maybe than whoever was writing about this like from their culture and their beliefs that they just couldn’t accept it.

Jericha-Fay: It doesn’t really sound very constructive. It’s like it wasn’t really researched, I guess, and really understood what it [“Pocahontas”] really talked about. Because it’s a Disney movie but there’s lots of things in there that are life lessons, I guess.

Frankie: It’s more just attacking. What website was this?

Diana: Yeah, that’s interesting too. They’re just two random websites that came up when I Googled “tree of knowledge;” you know, anybody can post anything they want on the web. But for the first two that I looked at, they showed such radically different views. We did this at the meeting when we got together for pizza and the question was kind of to highlight how different beliefs and maybe culture can shape how we see things. I think one is a really radical fundamental Christian perspective – the one that [says] ‘Parents seems oblivious to the attack on home and the reach of unclean ideas on the minds and devotion of children.’ And the other one was a First Nations educator.

Frankie: What’s kind of funny to me sometimes is like how the Christian Fundamentalists can be like, the fact that they would let themselves be guided by a spirit and in a way sometimes if you look at it, God is sort of like their own kind of spirit to them. And the reason they don’t see that is because it’s a more general, their religion is more communal, it’s a community thing. So they all come together and these things are already written in the bible and here [green trees] it’s more like the same spirit but the person is interpreting it for themselves, it’s like a singular belief and this [pink trees] is a general belief that’s shared by a lot of people.

Jericha-Fay: It just seems like almost – I don’t mean to be stereotypical to the Christian religion – sorry if I offend anybody – but it seems like when something remotely spiritual or remotely conflicts for their own religion, it seems like somebody always has to lash out and say ‘Oh that’s wrong, this is right.’ I respect people’s religions and I’m like open to everything and it just doesn’t make sense to me how they have to be so against it. Why can’t they just be open to things like that? We don’t have to believe the same thing but do they have to put it down so dramatically like that? Nobody is forcing them to believe in that kind of stuff. I mean, like not everybody who is Christian is like that, I’m just saying in general.

Payton: No, any religion is sort of like that sometimes. Like if it’s not your religion, it’s bad. And not everyone but some people in a religion.
In the discussion with these three youth, Frankie posits that beliefs change over time and across cultures. Jericha-Fay appeals to reason by suggesting that if the person with the radical view against “Pocahontas” had done sufficient research, they would have been rid of their negative perspective on the movie. She suggests that with enough information, people should develop balanced perspectives; perspectives less likely to reflect extreme views.

While Jericha-Fay elicited the notion of evidence into her contemplation of how to judge perspectives, Frankie countered by considering the power of shared beliefs to make perspectives “true.” Jericha-Fay appears to indicate that it is possible for an individual to align him/herself with a group that professes to have a unified perspective, while still holding beliefs contrary to those of the group. She contends, and Payton adds her agreement that it is up to the individual to maintain a moderate view in order to permit everyone the freedom to hold opinions. It is as though people with “extreme” views are impinging upon the freedom that others have to think. Thus, the way we talk about knowledge influences the perceived space we have to negotiate knowledge.

Minnich (2005) invites us to think carefully about how we tend to conceive of and use the term “judgement.” She contends that judgment is a mystified concept. Judgment refers to bringing “something in all of its particularity before a set of laws, principles or standards in such a way that both the particularity of that which is to be judged and the generality of the principle, law, or standard is honored” (Minnich, 2005, p.174). Judgment, as a mystified concept, functions to lock in old forms of thoughts that

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69 Mystified concepts are opaque concepts that inform and deform thinking because they are simultaneously confusing and efficacious. Their opacity keeps us from seeing clearly how the concept reflects and serves powerful systemic interests (Minnich, 2005).
uphold old hierarchies and errors in a dominant culture while also appearing neutral and above argument. Laws, like principles, do not and cannot contain within themselves sufficient specificity to enable direct consideration of all possible particular and real situations, persons, and acts. Judgment therefore, cannot be not the result of straightforward deductive reasoning, and it is not the result of knowledge (Minnich, 2005). Judgment requires our mental and emotional engagement; it resembles thinking more than knowing. However, moving from conceptual laws, principles, and rules to judging involves a problem. Minnich (2005) states it thus:

The ability to move from the conceptual to the physically apparent, to connect the established with the innovative, to see in an individual case what is general and how the general illuminates the individual case is required of good judges of any sort, from those in law courts, village squares, or kitchens, to teachers assessing individual students’ progress. However, the dominance of the deductive model (and the appeal of its greater certainty, which lessens responsibility) tends to push away from focusing on the individual toward focusing on standardized measures, rules, principles. …However much we recognize that no certainty is available to judges, however much we value compassion as a judicial virtue, there is always pressure on the courts to reduce judicial latitude. …If we are to honor excellence and not merely exclusivity, and if we are to learn to make sensitive, appropriate judgments and not merely apply pre-existing rules, we cannot remain within closed circles. Judgments and the way we make them need to be reflexively considered within a context of commitment to respectful openness and caring. (pp. 175-178)

I suspect that some educators would be frustrated by the youth’s apparent inability or unwillingness to engage in judging the contradictory opinions in the “Tree of Knowledge” activity. Ruitenberg (2007) is one educator who has expressed her frustration with students who cannot see the difference between opinions and mere preferences. In her treatment of what is lacking in her students, Ruitenberg implies that educators, before her, have failed the students by not asserting the existence of standard for judgment:
The justifiable fear of moral absolutism leads some educators to fear even such minimal standards as moral humility and respect for (which is not the same as agreement with) the judgments of others. Such standards, however, are necessary if we wish to prevent our students from falling into the solipsistic traps of subjective relativism (Ruitenberg, 2007, p.57).

Minnich (2005) argues that we need not fear being unable to make epistemological or moral claims on the assent of others. While she does not like the term “relativism” because its connotations in use implies that we are not relational beings, she agrees with Ruitenberg (2007) that retreats into “relativism” in which students are perceived to be unwilling or unable to recognize or engage with difference, point to fears about moral absolutism. She explains, however, that we have not learned to engage with serious differences because dominant traditions have taught us that the important values we hold must be absolutely right or absolutely wrong. Instead, we (students, all of us) tend to get stuck in accepting plural absolutes. And, as educators, we need to accept responsibility for how little we practice thinking together with students (Minnich, 2003).

Throughout the inquiry, the youth indicated their comfort with plural absolutes by suggesting that there is nothing that can be done with multiple perspectives; that one has to allow everyone to have their own opinion. It would seem that they too, along with Ruitenberg’s (2007) students do not know how to engage with pluralism.

However, by asserting that we as educators or philosophers have the answers suggests that we know the invariable plurality that we will encounter with others and thereby are capable of facilitating negotiation. I still wonder how to do this. In proposing that educators who went before us failed our students, do we risk placing ourselves in line with the authoritarian elite? Do we again risk alienating our students from participating in the difficulty of knowing? Caputo (1987) states that when debate is
conceived in advance to be possible only among those who conform to the ruling paradigm; only the opinions of those people we are prepared to respect in advance are allowed to enter into debate. From my perspective, if we expect students to come to us already able to manage the challenges of plurality, we might inadvertently inhibit participation in inquiring into perspectives. I believe that what our students need is first to experience themselves as valid knowers in classrooms. It is important, at the same time, to make explicit the process of first contributing and valuing perspectives for the purpose of eventually practicing negotiation in light of a set of standards. From there, we can begin the work of negotiating perspectives. The experience of first being validated is especially important in light of youth’s fears about being judged as not knowledgeable which tend to inhibit their participation in question-posing and conversation.

Judgment can be developed but not taught, demonstrated by not proved (Minnich, 2005). Judgment is not the result of straightforward deductive reasoning – if it was, we would need no judges. Judgment cannot be written down as so many laws ready for application. Judgment involves a kind of mental and emotional engagement that is more “like thinking than knowing, more like taste than deductive reasoning” (Minnich, 2005, p. 175).

Judging requires the ability to move from the conceptual to the physically apparent, to connect the established with the innovative, to see in an individual case what is general and how the general illuminates the individual case. However, the dominance of the deductive model (and the appeal of its greater certainty which lessens responsibility) tends to push us away from focusing on the individual toward focusing on standardized measures, rules, principles. In education, those practices translate into treating students as though they were mass-produced goods that should be as identical as possible.
In order to revisit youth’s early expressions in the inquiry about being judged as not knowledgable, I focused on one re-reading of the combined inquiry transcripts on the language youth used to talk about judging knowledge. Their discourse was infused with absolutes and labels: “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong,” “incapable,” “smart,” “intelligent,” “bright,” “disrespectful,” “stupid,” “dumb,” “brilliant,” “passive,” “brave,” “unusual,” “different,” “negative,” “educated,” “foreign,” and “alternative.” I also looked for terms that reflected the consequences of being judged as knowing (or not knowing): “revealing,” “acceptance,” “self-doubt,” “punish,” “prejudice,” “feelings,” “lost,” “confused,” “nervous,” “gain/lose,” “competition,” “mistaken,” “frustrated,” “helpless,” “popularity,” “ignore,” “look down on,” “effort,” “pretend,” “pressure,” “afraid,” “assume,” “agree,” “offend,” “conflict,” “awkward,” “objection,” “compare,” “true,” “sure,” and “shy.” And when the youth spoke about how it feels when you know something, they used words such as “enlightened,” “safe,” “relaxed,” “feel good,” “participate,” “comfortable,” “contribute,” “confident,” “secure,” “accepted,” “understood,” “share,” and “learn.”

This re-reading confirms that youth experience knowledge as involving risk. And risk, for youth, extends beyond risking being judged negatively by teachers to include fearing negative judgment by peers. Pippen stated that it is very important among her peers to not be perceived as knowing too much. She said that offering your opinion is likely to be interpreted as asserting that you see yourself as better than others. Living knowledge for youth, it seems, is a precarious balancing act. Negative judgment by peers tends to be associated with knowing one’s place; with not asserting that one knows more
than others. In this way, youth seem to police their peers’ knowledge behaviour by ensuring that youth do not overstep their assumed rightful place; a place that is perhaps aligned more closely with the way in which authorized knowers (i.e., adults) position youth – not capable of “real” knowledge.

I took up the topic of risking knowing in front of peers over tea with Ruby and Romeo. I asked them whether they felt free to pose questions in class at school. Both Ruby and Romeo stated that it’s easier to wait until you have time alone with the teacher to ask your questions. They feared that their question-posing would result in them being judged as not knowing by their peers.

Ruby: If I ask [questions], what will other people think? Will they think that I don’t know anything?

Diana: How do we learn to fear not knowing? What typically happens to a person who doesn’t know something?

Ruby: We ignore them.

Romeo: We look down on them.

Diana: Why do we do that?

Romeo: When you know something you just feel like you expect someone else to know, kinda. Like when you know something, you think it’s simple and you understand it but if they don’t understand, it’s really difficult.

Ruby: They don’t ask questions because they want to pretend that they know. It’s so they’ll feel more confident.

Romeo: There’s just lots of judging going on in the classroom.

Considering knowledge (like experience) to be something that is easily quantified (knowing too little or too much) contradicts what the youth suggested earlier about knowing differently. Their struggles to live with knowledge reflect the complexity of
thinking about and enacting knowledge in day-to-day life. As I contemplate the challenges faced by youth, events from my past are called to the foreground of my thinking.

I remember the experience of living by a dictum that interferes with one’s ability to participate in negotiating knowledge. Words from my childhood echo in my head:

*It is better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.*

Minnich (2005) indicates that fear of being judged negatively for not knowing is justified because ideas about one’s knowledge have long been used to uphold hierarchies:

That many of us fear to be judged even more than we fear judging in a world run by ‘masters’ is perfectly sensible: we fear being mis-taken, being marked as inferior rather than simply different, and we understand that someone is trying to control us by submitting us to such (faulty, but very powerful) judgments. (p.176)

I recall one of my first classroom experiences with fear surrounding questioning:

*I am drawing pictures in my third-grade class in West Vancouver. I did not like the first picture I drew, so I managed to get my hands on another piece of paper and began to draw a second picture. The teacher found my crumpled paper and smoothed it, took it to the front of the class and asked, “Whose picture is this?” To this day I do not know why she asked the question. Perhaps we were only allowed one piece of paper. I was not quick to admit to being the artist of the discarded picture. When no one confessed, the teacher became visibly agitated and continued to demand to know who had drawn the picture. She moved around the classroom confronting each of us with a determined, inquiring stare. I did not want everyone to know that I had drawn the picture. I thought perhaps the teacher would understand. I suggested aloud, “Maybe they don’t want to say because it’s not very good.” My suggestion to the teacher had an unintended effect; she chastised me for being insulting: “That’s a terrible thing to say! Now you’ve hurt someone’s feelings.” I remember being upset that the teacher thought I had insulted somebody. I expected that she would have seen my response as an answer to her question. I wonder, what is the relationship between questions and answers? Are either ever really what they seem?*
Reframing classrooms to value questions as much as, if not more than answers is one way of inviting youth to practice judging knowledge. Questioning, according to Caputo (1987), is thought’s movement; questions have a certain kind of kinesis. When we embrace undecidability we keep questions in question. Caputo asserts that we must learn to love undecidable complicity and confusion. His assertions leave me to wonder anew, “How are we to do that when our questioning tends to be taken as invalid or problematic by others?” I also wonder, “Why is it a comfort to be able to decide?” Is it so that we can feel confident that our actions will be regarded favorably by others; so that we can act with the illusion of acting knowingly and reduce the likelihood of receiving negative judgment from others? Are dampening questions and decidability in the service of avoiding risk? Questioning, according to Minnich (2005) threatens those that view certainty as a good and without which we would be thrust into chaos of mind, morals, and society.

Minnich (2003) reminds us that in order to learn how to judge appropriately we need lots of practice. We also need to have opportunities in which we can share our experiences and beliefs without fear of ridicule. The youth in this inquiry suggest that because knowledge is positioned in schools as objective and valid there is little room for them to practice judging opinions about subject matter. The contemplation herein of the legacy of dominant conceptions of knowledge invites educators (and parents, and others who work with children and youth) to invite the experiences and opinions of youth into discussion and to provide opportunities for them to practice knowing without fear of being judged as knowing too little or too much; to see that knowledge is socially constructed and requires their active participation in order to bring the experiences of
children and youth to bear upon that which has for so long been considered beyond their knowing.

According to feminist pragmatism\(^{70}\), knowledge is situated as always in the process of re-construction within democratic communities always-in-the-making (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). Feminist pragmatism supports radical hermeneutics in asserting that no one of us occupies a privileged place of insight, none of us has access to interpretive secrets and we need to own up to that “embarrassment” so that we are always induced to proceed with caution and humility rather than forging ahead with unwavering certainty (Caputo, 1987, p.258).

Thus, I respond to the tone I read in Ruitenberg’s (2007) expressed frustration with her students (and the educators who went before her) by thinking about what we, as educators might do differently. Ruitenberg acknowledges that her classroom fulfills a transition space for young people to go from the specificities of intimate relations to the public world in which encounters with opinions require judgment. However, she does not appear to make explicit for her students what it is that the private/public dualism has prevented: namely, that young people have been excluded from practicing engaging with plurality precisely because they have not been considered capable knowers and judges. Making explicit for young people the traditions which tend to confuse our thinking relieves them of feelings of inadequacy for being unfamiliar with how to engage with

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\(^{70}\) A common criticism aimed at pragmatism – that pragmatists are willing to say that anything can be acceptable for the time being – is rendered null by feminist pragmatism (c.f., Thayer-Bacon, 2000, 2003, 2006; Minnich, 2005) which acknowledges the limits of patriarchy and rationality and in emphasizing the temporal and partial nature of knowledge, insists that inquiry never ceases. Such a recognition holds that authorities are suspect, and their survival will not outlast their utility because their utility is always being assessed in public debate. Following Caputo (2000), I contend that it is not really about whatever we choose today as being acceptable for now, but that we must not allow to suffice for today that which sufficed yesterday because it was regarded as yesterday’s truth; we must never rest from the responsibility of thinking.
 plurality. Given that another of our thinking errors involves thinking of individuals as self-directing, self-determining, self-made, we do little to ameliorate the anxieties that accompany thinking-tasks in classrooms; contexts in which the unspoken message of personal (rather than cultural/societal\textsuperscript{71}) failure is communicated to students for not being able to do what is required of them.

Fear of judgment for being seen as lacking knowledge may be supported by the combined effect of metonymic concepts and our common metaphors for knowledge. I suspect that two systematic metonymic concepts\textsuperscript{72} we use – that of substituting parts for the whole and substituting the producer for the product (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) – combine with our predominant metaphors for knowledge to support a conceptual error that characterizes our thinking about knowledge; namely, \textit{I am what I know}. The belief that “I am what I know” substitutes the producer for the product. Thus, we are seen as being that which we know.

The belief “I am what I know” seems to be reflected in the fear of judgment which underpins feelings of risk associated with knowledge, because someone suggesting that I do not know is taken to be the equivalent of their suggesting that I do not exist. When ideas are positioned as entities that can be accumulated and translated into a commodity with exchange value (i.e., the producer becomes the product), certain kinds of knowledge become equated with their exchange value. Some kinds of knowledge are deemed to have little exchange value (e.g., knowledge of and from emotions, knowing associated with the body, and children’s (and senior’s) knowledge). Educators (and

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\textsuperscript{71} Thayer-Bacon (2003) reminds us that we do not author our own experience; we are not free to create identities under the conditions of our own choosing.

\textsuperscript{72} Metonymy refers to the process by which we use one entity to refer to another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).
parents, and others who work with children and youth (and themselves) that we are all much more than what we know; we cannot be reduced to our thoughts and ideas. We also need to remind our children and youth that much of what we know through living in the world cannot be discursively had. Practicing thinking together and negotiating knowledge is not about ascertaining who is right and who is wrong; it should not be premised upon the dominant either/or logic, but work instead to help us think better by highlighting what is relational in our experience. And highlighting what is relational requires that everyone participate in voicing experiences and their contributions to perspectives. We need the knowledge and experiences of children and youth to improve our thinking.

Following Minnich (2005) I propose practicing judgment with students in a way that acknowledges that none of us are authors; the ideas we share are communal, partial, and temporary. Judgment is possible when we turn to one another in order to become aware of our formative assumptions; a practice that enlarges our thinking (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). Responsibility for what we know and how we think rests not with us as individuals, but with all of us together, including those who have gone before us.

Responding to Romeo’s Question

I return now to Romeo’s query about whether values and experience affect what we see judge or imagine. I am mindful that Romeo has had some cross-cultural experiences having parents who were born in Hong Kong. I suspect that Romeo has a sense of how cultural values and different experiences affect how people see the world and what they turn to in order to judge opinions. My response to her speaks my desire for her to acknowledge these awarenesses from her own experience:
Romeo, you brought into our discussions a level of appreciation for difference that helped us all to think better together. By asking questions about whether values and experience influence how we see and how we judge things, you reminded us to turn to experience, especially what is different, to enlarge our views. You reminded us that there is no One way to see and judge and so we must try to surface the particulars of our experience in the company of others in order to judge as best we can.

I would leave Romeo with this quote from Lisa Delpit which, I believe, epitomizes the substance of her question:

We do not see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs.

(Delpit, 1995, p.46)
I want to agree with what Julio implies; that one must first know oneself in order to know more. I think that by knowing our own thoughts we have more hope of changing how we think and therefore opening to what we don’t yet know. We must have an encounter with ourselves in order to think, to participate in knowledge creation. However, I wonder, what does an encounter with oneself imply? Can we know who we are? What can we know about ourselves?

The youth in this inquiry explored the possibility of knowing oneself. They also explored the possibility of knowing others. And they articulated some of their own experiences with and questioned practices known as “othering” (i.e., positioning other as inferior to oneself by virtue of assumed difference). As we contemplated the issues of knowing oneself and knowing beyond oneself, traces of the legacy of dominant conceptions of knowledge arose and were taken up and resisted. The question of a knowable self has important implications for research, and so again I will reflect upon my research practices as I encounter the questions and issues raised by youth.

The Possibility of Knowing Oneself

I begin with an email I received from Vladimir. In his email he expresses his frustration that his supervisor asked him to present a more calm, relaxed presence in the tea room where he worked.

Vladimir: When my supervisor was demonstrating how to serve people, she showed some things that made me feel awkward. But that was part of “selling”
the service. For example, my fast-paced personality means that I talk fast and I walk fast. I was told that since the tea room encouraged a laid-back atmosphere, I had to talk to customers slowly, and walk at a leisurely pace in the room. …The goal was to present a face of relaxed-pace, even when I personally am rarely as “relaxed” as in an English tea room. So to the guests, am I part of the quaint atmosphere of calm and laid-backness, or am I myself?

Vladimir questions whether being asked to behave in ways that feel awkward to him are synonymous with asking him to be other than who he really is. In doing so, he defines himself according to what feels familiar and comfortable. This suggestion makes me wonder whether being “true to oneself” prevents us from taking risks; from willingly entering spaces in which we feel uncomfortable and uncertain.

Vladimir also raises the issue of personality, which makes me wonder how the notion of personality helps us to know ourselves. The concept of personality derives from the field of psychology and assumes that a person possesses a set of traits, motives, and basic conflicts that persist over time and across situations, and that all behaviour is an expression of the traits and motives that underlie personality (Bower & Hildgard, 1981). Vladimir suggests that he has a fast-paced personality. Is he speaking about knowing who he is or knowing what he does? He admits that he walks fast and talks fast and rarely feels as relaxed as he believes people tend to be in English tea rooms. But what does this tell me about who Vladimir is?

Contemplating the possibility of knowing oneself turns easily to knowing what, for the whats of knowing seem more easily accessed than the who. Vladimir illustrates what I believe is a common tendency: that in trying to posit who we or other persons are, we turn to language that we assume speaks of personality; describing a person as introverted, extroverted, outgoing, shy, talkative, gregarious, Type A, calm, warm, etc.
The descriptors available within the proposition of “personality” lead us to believe in the existence of an essential self. The concept of “who” is more slippery; we attempt to wrest the elusive “who” from that which (what) we can name and hold still.

Contemplating a sense of “being true to oneself” and knowing oneself via “personality” leads me to Caputo’s return to the pre-Cartesian use of per-sona (1987). Caputo invokes the pre-Cartesian per-sona, per-sonare to explicate the opening through which the flux resonates. Per-sona used to refer to a sounding through, a resonating that did not name a seat of self-identity but rather picked up “the interplay between mask and voice, face and speech, look and language” (Caputo, 1987, p.290). Common usage of the word persona today tends to refer to what a person gives off rather than a sounding through. We tend to speak of someone’s “persona” as that which we receive or perceive when we encounter an other. The idea of a “persona” being what a person “gives off,” as they enter a room for example, privileges the view of the perceiver in determining other. Thus, the concept of persona today perpetuates a distinction between self and other and the possibility of knowing another through oneself.

The idea that one possesses aspects of self (i.e., traits) that are stable across contexts and over time is consistent with the idea that identity (singular) is achieved once and for all. It does not leave room for a partial, fragmented sense of self or the possibility of multiple selves. Arendt (1971), following Heidegger, asserts that plurality of self/ves arise(s) when a person relates to her/himself: “articulating this being-conscious-of-myself, I am inevitably two-in-one” (p.442, emphasis in original).
Not long after encountering Arendt’s articulation of the notion two-in-one, I came across a passage in a novel ("Love Medicine," Erdrich, 1984) I was reading that seemed to describe the experience of self as non-singular:

In school, they called him Howard. It happened like this: The first grade teacher had said to his mother, “Your boy is very bright Mrs. Kashpaw. Did you teach him how to read?”
“‘I don’t know how he learned it,’ his mother had said. ‘Unless from that TV program.’”
King Junior watched everything, but Sesame Street was what taught him. He read the backs of cereal boxes, labels on cans, the titles in her love magazines. He was ahead of the other children in kindergarten, and so they put him in the first grade. “King Howard Kashpaw, Junior,” said his new teacher. “Which of those names would you like to be called?”
He had never thought about it.
“Howard” he was surprised to hear himself answer. It was that simple. After that he was Howard at school.

They were cutting out red paper hearts one afternoon. Hearts to tack up on the bulletin boards. The teacher had a black Magic Marker. One by one the children went up to his desk and used the Magic Marker to write their names in the center of their hearts. The sharp-smelling ink soaked into the paper. PERMANENT, it said on the marker’s label. “That means forever,” said the teacher when Howard asked. “It won’t erase.”
“Good,” said Howard.
He sat down and watched the teacher tape his heart on the wall. The wall was green. Placed against the wall, oddly, the heart seemed to pulse. In and out. He stared at the heart with his name firmly inside of it, and suddenly something moved inside of him. He felt a jolt of strangeness. For a moment he was heavy, full of meaning. Howard was sitting there. Howard was both familiar and different. Howard was living in this body like a house. Howard Kashpaw.

(pp. 238-239, emphases in original).

Howard, in first grade, has an experience of sensing his own plurality. And I wonder, how is it that we have come to see ourselves as singular rather than plural beings?

Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices: The Imperative of Knowing Oneself

Dominant conceptions of knowledge which uphold self as an autonomous rational being insist that one should be able to posit a stable identity, “to take oneself up as
a knowable, recognizable identity, who ‘speaks for themselves’,” rests upon the assumption one is in control of the process of self construction (Davies, 1992, p.56). We see that the drive to know oneself absolutely derives from the same tradition that suggests the world is knowable in an absolute sense and the self is an autonomous rational being who is capable of knowing the world absolutely.

Thayer-Bacon (2003) contends that the tradition of empiricism has prompted us to believe that we have to choose between isolation and loss of self. From the dominant conception of self as an autonomous entity, we fear that by positing relationality we will lose our control over ourselves. We fear that if we open ourselves too much to others that we become vulnerable to manipulation and domination.

Boler (1999) agrees that fear of losing self is premised upon having learned to separate ourselves from others. When we encounter what is different or what demands change in how we see ourselves, we experience fear because our notion of identity is caught up in a static sense of a bounded self.

The idea of a unitary self is also appealing because it is easier to manage conceptually than the notion of multiple selves. Just as we are prone to desiring the comfort and certainty that accompanies absolute knowledge of the universe, we crave absolute knowledge of ourselves. Absolutism dissolves complexity and increases our chances of arriving at certainty and feeling comfort.

Opening to plural selves and others hinges upon attuning to the particular rather that coveting universals for decidability. However, attuning to the particular, being open to what is unique, provokes uncertainty. It is important that we come to appreciate that uncertainty is productive rather than leaving us with nothing. As Minnich (2005) reminds us “The opposite of uncertainty is not knowledge but dogma and pedantry” (p.176).

Minnich (2005) contends that we cannot know ourselves as objects because such knowledge contradicts the fact that we are subjects of our own knowledge. The challenge, according to Minnich (2005) of knowing oneself lies in the issue that in knowing ourselves, we change the knower and the known. What we know when we purport to know ourselves is at best, what has been, not what is at the moment or what is always coming to be (Minnich, 2005, p.198). Thus, Minnich highlights the temporal and dynamic notion of a self always in the process of becoming.
The youth contemplated the problem of knowing oneself in the “Graffiti-ing” activity.

Frankie: Sometimes we have day-to-day personalities. We could look back on ourselves a year ago and think, “Oh, she did that because she was thinking this”… but in present day lives, sometimes we don’t understand or know ourselves because we are in a current state of evolution.

Julio: You can’t know yourself in 5 minutes. Maybe that’s why we live for so long. To truly get to know oneself.

Jericha-Fay: In the process of growing, people come to know themselves better. But if someone has to grow up in a day, they miss out on knowing how they would feel about specific things.

Ruby: For a person to know themselves it is all about time. Growing is a developmental stage in our lives that we come to know ourselves. (emphasis in original)

Frankie, Julio and Jericha-Fay seem to indicate that knowing oneself is a gradual process; they do however, also suggest that it is possible to arrive at knowing oneself although it may take an entire lifetime to do so. It is possible to read Ruby as suggesting that adolescence is a period in which youth get to know themselves; that particular stages of life are meant to serve the purpose of defining who one is.

Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices: Turning to Theories for Objective Knowledge of Oneself

Alongside a compulsion to know oneself as an autonomous unitary being, the legacy of dominant conceptions of knowledge also suggest that development of self is purely an individual phenomenon.

Just as one might turn to theories of personality to try to achieve knowledge of oneself, turning to identity development theories is another common way of striving toward self-knowledge. While theories are not at fault, for theories are useful and important contributors to our thinking, what we need to be mindful of, is how we are engaging with and using theories. Theories which purport to have
proven how individuals develop are incredibly seductive. From them we can gain assurance that we know ourselves and others. Many age and stage theories of identity and development invite us to believe that the development of self can be understood via “objective” descriptions. While the theorists themselves may have posited their theories with the hope that they would be seen as tentative guides for further exploration, our quest for certainty has us often turning to theories to identify and explain ourselves and others, rather than provoking continued inquiry.

As Ruby prompts us to consider when a person does the work of knowing oneself, Payton speaks of the process, the how of knowing oneself:

In response to the question of coming to know oneself, Payton suggested that there are practices a person can engage in to try to get to know oneself:

Spending time alone and sorting out your emotions – deciding how some things make you feel, or your reactions to them, is a good way to get acquainted with yourself and know who you really are.

Payton’s recognition of attending to emotions as a means to gain insights into oneself is similar to Thayer-Bacon’s (2003a) assertion that we need to have outer dialogue with others and inner dialogue with ourselves in order to gain insights into our contextuality. Inner dialogue, facilitated by practices such as meditation, pays attention to one’s thoughts and thereby helps foster awareness of habits of thought. Paying attention to inner dialogue helps us become aware of the concepts that we rely upon, the ways of thinking that shape our view.

Meditative inquiry73 (Packer, 2002) is a practice for increasing awareness of one’s habits of thoughts. Packer (2002) invites us to question thoroughly our thoughts of

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73 Meditative inquiry derives from Zen Buddhism. While some people might argue that meditation from this tradition aims to overcome the world or achieve a monist understanding, I assert that the practice of mindfulness, of increasing awareness of ones habitual reactions is a practice that can be used for myriad purposes.
self and other: “Me is really no-thing other than thought, memory and sensations that happen to have tremendous electrochemical power within this bodymind, giving it the false impression of existing as a separate entity among other separate entities” (Packer, 2002, p.100). Just as Thayer-Bacon (2003a) reminds us that our sense of being separate from others is an illusion, Packer invites us to ask whether there is such,

… an entity as me or I? Or is it just like the weather – an ongoing, ever changing stream of ideas, images, memories, projections, likes and dislikes, creation and destruction, that thought keeps calling I, me, Toni, and thereby solidifying what is evanescent? …Most human beings take it for granted that I am me, and that me is this body, this mind, this knowledge and sense of myself that feels so obviously distinct and separate from other people and from the nature around us. …All of us talk I-and-you talk. …How are we to come upon the truth if separateness is taken so much for granted, feels so commonsense? (Packer, 2002, pp.43-44)

Just as we think we are the owners of our traits, our personalities, our bodies, our knowledge, and our opinions, we identify others by the characteristics and abilities that we perceive to be theirs (Packer, 2002). With the energy of questioning, Packer (2002) asserts, we can become aware of our habitual reactions that prevent us from having little awareness of the actual moment-to-moment happenings between us. A quiet mind, free from habitual reactions, can engage in wondering without knowing and so can live for a moment without seeking a description, an explanation, or a comment. With self in abeyance, the walls that separate and divide us are dissolved.

Now just as Payton prompts me to pursue ways of increasing my awareness, Packer suggests that I might practice ways of placing myself in abeyance. I wonder whether the practice of losing oneself stands in contradiction to the practice of attending to one’s habits of thought. As I contemplate this I return to the problem of knowing oneself as a researcher.
The idea of placing self in abeyance resembles the bracketing of beliefs that I enacted in my past research practice. In this present inquiry I have been working to insert myself into the research more fully. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) posit that we are likely to believe that knowing oneself is easier than knowing others because we have direct access to our own feelings and ideas. I made a commitment in this inquiry to pay attention to feelings of confusion, doubt, surprise and familiarity in order to show how I was complicit in the interpretations I offered. I thought that if I could make my interpretations more transparent74 to myself I would also be able to overcome some of my own biases and thus, improve the quality of my research. The question of quality is related to questions of validity and hence the crisis of legitimation in research.

Fine (1994) urges me to “come clean about the contradictory stances, politics, perspectives and histories we import to our work” (p.148). I ask myself whether I have managed to articulate my partialities and pluralities. Have I managed to avoid freezing identities? Is it possible to “succeed” at such a task? Is “coming clean” not also an attempt at clarity, at putting things right? I worry the problem of knowing myself and all the while suspect that others have ready access to the me that I cannot know.

I began the process of attempting to situate myself by trying to tease out the influences that shaped the ideas and values that I held. My first effort involved referencing my beliefs in relation to those articulated by scholars to whose work I felt attuned. In other words, I turned to their words to speak myself. However, my perplexity increased as I began to realize that situating myself asked more of me than aligning myself with theories. I needed also to try to describe how my experiences in the world have contributed to the beliefs that I hold. Could I say what attracted me to certain theories and not others? It felt a nigh impossible task to articulate my life experiences and their influences on my beliefs. I wondered, how far back into my history should I dig? How might I determine which particular experiences have been most influential? What could I even remember?

A recent encounter highlighted the impossibility of knowing myself. John Caputo (2005) told an audience at the University of Victoria that there is a lot of American pragmatism in our bones. Pragmatism is not a theory that was named

74 Transparency is intended to reduce ambiguity with respect to understanding the purpose of the research, how the research was designed, and how inferences and theory development played out in the research. Transparency is desired because it is thought to make it possible to judge research quality (Dale, 2006; Demerath, 2006).
in my undergraduate or earlier graduate coursework and yet having recently read James, Minnich, and Thayer-Bacon, I felt an affinity for the pragmatic perspective. But I did not know why it appealed to me. How did American pragmatism find a way into my bones without me realizing it?

My experience in this inquiry has made me doubt that I can know my beliefs completely, and I am not even sure they are my own. My prior belief in the possibility of achieving transparency suggests that an ideal interpretation is possible if a reader has sufficient knowledge of my interpretive processes. As I reflect on my desire to achieve transparency of myself within my research I notice that I am caught up once again in the pursuit of absolute knowledge. By suggesting that if I were able to clearly describe how I mediate truth, readers would have access to Truth reflects my desire for objective knowledge. Butler (2006) asserts that I cannot be transparent to myself; that one’s life cannot follow a narrative form. I wonder if there is any way out of this problem of knowing self.

Reading Caputo (1987, 2000) suggests to me that my inability to clearly articulate my situatedness is part of my situatedness, and that despite my urge for synthesis, part of my condition is not knowing.

Minnich (2005) reminds me that conceptual errors will always reside in my thinking. Thayer-Bacon (2003a) reminds me that although I cannot overcome my situatedness, I can gain insight and improve my thinking by turning to others. I am beginning to appreciate that I can not clearly describe my interpretive processes but I can suggest them; what I represent of myself and youth in this inquiry will be contingent and partial, the meanings I suggest will be adequate rather than ideal. And while I might be unable to articulate my situatedness, I contend that there is value in the attempt. The value does not accrue from the possibility of arriving at a clear and complete articulation, but of spending time living with the difficulty.

Caputo (1987) emphasizes that self knowledge is not possible, that we do not know who we are.

The self is precisely not that which always abides in itself, self-identically present to itself but that which breaks under the strain, gives way to the pull of the flux, which is constantly being divested of its illusions, tormented by the unconscious, constantly being tricked by its history and its language …the self is anything but what it pretends to be. (p.289)
The Possibility of Knowing Other

If it is not possible to know oneself, what are the chances that we can know an other (i.e., other knowledge and other people)? Can we really see other people for who they are? James (1913) reminds me that when we meet like-minded people we are more likely to consider it a coincidence than we are to recognize that what we see is our own attunement to that which we already know. From that I suspect that the “who” we think we see in others is not really them at all. But what might “really them” mean anyway except to signify the possibility of complete and total knowledge?

Pandora shared an experience which reflected on knowing other. Her example is situated within the context of doubles-tennis and pays special attention to our propensity to not only assume we know others, but to make those assumptions quickly:

Pandora: When we were just warming up …my doubles partner came up to me and told me that when the ball is hit to me I should hit it back to the girl in the red sweater because she wasn’t as good as her partner. I just thought, “How do you know that?” We’d seen her hit the ball a few times, and already my partner seemed to think she somehow knew the girl’s strength. …I mean, people can really surprise you. For all we know, that girl could have been an amazing player who was just holding back at the beginning. …My point is you just can’t know someone or something by the first impression given. Knowledge isn’t a ten-second thing.

Pandora acknowledges the assumptions that we operate with in the name of “knowing” others. In other inquiry conversations the youth suggested that although they could know themselves, it was more likely that another person, rather than self, could be known in multiple ways.

In the Graffiti-ing” activity, the youth had these things to say in response to my question, “What does it take to really know someone?”
Jericha-Fay: People can know each other in different ways. A father knows his
daughter in a completely different way than her best friend.

Frankie: Maybe people’s knowledge of others varies per person. A mother may
think she knows her daughter better than anyone else, but is her perception similar
in any way to that of her daughter’s best friend? Both these people think they
know the daughter best, but they are seeing two different people.

Ruby: Most of the time things have a one sided opinion. We know one
perspective but not always the other (e.g., newspaper articles or even celebrities,
or perhaps even ourselves).

In this exchange, Jericha-Fay leaves open the possibility for knowing people differently
and while Frankie seems to concur, she adds that people can actually be different people
to others. Ruby seems to create an opening for getting to know oneself through access to
the varied perspectives of others. Ruby introduces the idea that notions about knowing
others are derived from the stories told by the media and ourselves.

Davies (1992) adds that “stories are the means by which events are interpreted,
made tellable, or even livable. All stories are understood as fictions, such fictions
providing the substance of lived reality” (p.57). And Caputo (1997) asserts that we live
in a time when the responsibility to the other is paramount over the rights of the self; we
are called to put heteronomy before autonomy.

Frankie has an encounter with a story in print that seemed to disrupt her
sensibility with respect to assuming to know other, especially marginalized other. After
reading a newspaper article on homeless people Frankie sent me an email to share her
thoughts on how popular perspectives influence how we see others and how they can stop
us from asking questions about who people are:

Our knowledge of things or people around us is largely based on outer
appearance. We see people on the streets, and perceive them as lazy without even
knowing them, or what they have been through. … We can be so unfair to people
different from us sometimes. We identify strength in those who have completed their education, who have started a family or a successful career because that is common knowledge. What we don’t bother to see is the strength in those who have fought a much harder battle, simply because our eyes are telling us that these people are worthless.

Frankie points out that our cultural values about hard work and definitions of “success” blind us to knowing strength in multiple ways. Frankie shows that we see others with our beliefs and in doing so, limit who others can be.

Frankie’s email made me think of a song that has brought tears to my eyes on many occasions. Our cultural values are embedded in the language we use to make distinctions between people. Language provides us with concepts and categories which we apply to other people to give us the illusion of “knowing” others. The words tell us what “is” in a categorical way as though who people are can be contained within categorical names. The rapper Everlast sings about this.

“What It’s Like75”

I’ve seen a rich man beg,  
I’ve seen a good man sin,  
I’ve seen a tough man cry.  
I’ve seen a loser win,  
and a sad man grin,  
I heard an honest man lie.  
I’ve seen the good side of bad,  
and the down side of up,  
and everything between.

…to know what it is  
usually depends on where you start.

75 From “Whitey Ford Sings the Blues” (Tommy Boy Records, 1998).
The title of Everlast’s song suggests that what can be known are possibilities; what people are like rather than who people really are. He reminds us that dualisms create divisions that deny the multiplicity of selves and the possibilities for seeing ourselves in others while also seeing others in ourselves. In disrupting the divisive tendencies within language Everlast invites us to resist, like Pandora did in her tennis example, turning quickly to assumptions in the name of asserting knowledge of others.

Language fails us in knowing who we are because we, like other persons, are places in the flux; other persons are a mystery; we should respect and revere others for the mystery that they are (Caputo, 1987). To enact respect and reverence means that we let be.

Buber suggests that it is easier for us to make others into objects than it is to turn ourselves into objects. And perhaps as we are likely to go about our lives with little consciousness of our own plurality, we also fix others as that which we see. Buber (1937) attests to our tendency to treat others as Its, as objects we contemplate or use, as things of interest or useful to us. Buber posits that the realm of human being does not consist merely in feeling something, perceiving something, imagining something or wanting something. These realms are the realm of It. Beyond the realm of It is the realm of You. The realm of You does not have something for an object, for wherever there is something there is also another something – it always borders on others. Where You is said, however, there is no something because You has no borders. Buber (1937) states that presence of a You is born of association; I-You cannot be accomplished without me or without you. I require a You to become. Buber’s “You” that is born of association signifies a relational self, a self always in relation to relational others.
The Relational Self: Being Always in the Process of Becoming

Thayer-Bacon (2003a) reminds us that if we assume ourselves to be antecedent to the social process, we end up with solipsism76. She urges us to remember that all our first experiences occur within a context. Our Eurowestern tradition has left us with little appreciation of our interdependence by positing self as overly differentiated and unitary (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

Others agree that self is relational, that self refers to multiple subjectivities rather than a unitary individual, or essential self (c.f., Minnich, 2005; Riley-Taylor, 2002). A person is not a consistently identical subject, but is responsive to and acts upon the multiple contexts which make up his or her life and develops ideas about self and other through relations; in other words, we bring one another into being (Bateson, 1994).

Reflecting on our inescapable propensity to make others a part of oneself, we might ask whether our knowing aim is about achieving synthesis through fusing horizons (achieving understanding) or whether we are willing to risk having our horizons breached – that is, to live with the difficulty of life (Caputo, 2000). Caputo (2000) argues that we should not respond to that which is troubling with efforts to work harder to find meaning, to reconcile differences in order to arrive at unity; rather, we should allow that which is indigestible to affect a disturbance in our horizons. In order to risk the approach of the other, we must be willing to put our meanings, institutions, beliefs and practices at risk.

There are a variety of traditions in the world that do support the idea of a social self. Thayer-Bacon’s (2003a) relational epistemology posits that human relatedness is central to subjectivity. The self is always a social self; we begin our life in intimate

76 Solipsism is the belief that no reality exists outside what one alone perceives.
relation with an other and it is through social relationships that we develop a sense of our
own unique self – a self that is simultaneously embodied, gendered, social and unique.
The notion of self as a separate entity is only an illusion – self signifies a relation. The
quality of the social relationship affects the ideas being constructed, especially in light of
the inclusivity of the social milieu and the extent to which ideas have the opportunity to
be freely expressed. As we invite our own continual becoming we must create a space to
permit the continual becoming of the other. Thayer-Bacon (2003) states that because we
cannot assume to know the other as concrete, existing separately from our own
perspective; we must listen to the other’s self-definition and acknowledge its partiality at
the same time – openness needs be ever-present.

Thayer-Bacon (2003a) posits caring reasoning as an orientation toward other. It
is an orientation that strongly influenced how I interacted with youth in inquiry. Thayer-
Bacon’s (2003a) notion of caring reasoning resonates with Caputo’s (1997) appeal for us
to have faith. Caring reasoning insists upon generous listening with the intent to believe
an other before moving to critique. Faith is the opening of the address to the other that
asks the other to believe me. Just as there is no self outside the social self, there can be
“no society without faith, without trust in the other” (Caputo, 1997, p.23). Caring
reasoning and faith must be part of our encounters with others which amounts to allowing
oneself to come under the spell of others, allowing others to influence us.

The notion of a social self always in process of becoming has important
implications for teacher education and teacher-student interactions. By positing that self
represents a social relation, teachers can begin to see their work as identity work
(Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). The identity work of teachers involves opening spaces for
youth to explore multiple identities and helping to diminish the perceived need to foreclose on singular identities. Teaching as identity work resists the dualism of self and other by insisting that teachers acknowledge that they, too, are always in the process of becoming – affirming that the identity work in which youth engage is a process that is not finished by adulthood. Identity, the development of self, is a process which we continually co-construct with others in the various contexts of our lives. Practicing teaching as identity work also helps educators negotiate the legacy of dominant ways of thinking that support othering (i.e., exclusions premised upon race, class, gender, and other social constructions) (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006).

Somewhat paradoxically, accepting that it is possible to know oneself with certainty leads not to acceptance of others but is more likely to lead to distinguishing others from oneself. If we accept the possibility of absolute knowledge of oneself, along with that belief we expect absolute knowledge of other is possible. Since we cannot obtain absolute knowledge of others, we slip into relying upon the concepts and categories that lead us to believe we “know” the other. Thus, a belief in absolute knowledge of oneself facilitates the distancing of self from other. When we ‘other’ people – that is, make them our own; define them according to that which we think we know – we deny their existence and in doing so, rob them of their human dignity (Arendt, 1971). And engaging in “othering” also requires that we deny that we are engaging in exclusion (Law, 2003).

Exploring Othering

When youth proposed stereotypes by which teachers “know” students, included in the statements youth shared was that some teachers assume a student is dumb if he or she
does not speak English well. On another occasion, Romeo sent me an email wondering about the connection between her English skills and the likelihood that others would quickly judge her as unknowing:

Romeo: What if you know lots of things but if you don't present it in a way that other people can benefit does that mean you are just dumb or stupid?

In another conversation, Vladimir recounted an experience he had with his mother; an experience which he believes was provoked by racist sentiments:

Vladimir: In today’s society we like to say we don’t have prejudice against whatever race or whatever but I think in reality we still do. When I was in London for example, I was like on the train with my mom and then I was sitting there and this woman came up to us and said, ‘Hey, this boy doesn’t have a ticket’ or something. And then my mom just jumped down her and said, ‘Well, you know what, what does it have to do with you?’ and ‘We do have a ticket and you can’t bug us.’ And then I think we got into some pretty nasty argument about none of your business and so forth and it went on and on so eventually that woman just backed off but at the same time we kind of realized that racism in modern society exists even if we don’t want to think of it.

These examples from Romeo and Vladimir (who both have Chinese parents), remind us that often difference is used to position and interact with others as though they are inferior. Distinctions predicated on departure from the ideal which was defined according to the experiences of the privileged few support multiple harms; a few of which the youth touched upon in the inquiry (e.g., racism, sexism, anthropocentrism, and adultism).

Minnich (2005) explains that our propensity to engage in othering is supported by a primary conceptual error at the heart of our thinking tradition – that of defining the norm or ideal human in reference to an exclusive few (i.e., White, European, heterosexual men). The norm is considered both positive and neutral (i.e., premised upon objective
and infallible judgment). The few have come to represent the inclusive kind of human such that some socially selected distinctions have been turned into divisions; distinctions which are assumed to be facts of nature. The error of dividing people into kinds keep us from thinking clearly within and about ideals and practices. Thus, our conceptual system – our dominant way of making meaning – is premised upon the error of faulty generalization. Any deviation from the ideal, the norm is devalued not for being merely different but because difference is judged as inferior. Faulty generalizations reduce individuals belonging to the non-ideal group to no more than examples of their “kind” and its supposed traits (Minnich, 2005).

Racism

The problem of othering was apparent in Julio’s recollection of his family’s experience watching the movie “300.” Frankie, whose family also has non-European roots, empathized with Julio.

Julio: The movie “300” – me and my family can’t watch it …They completely filmed it to make the Persian Empire look terrible. …We had to walk out. And then I was talking to one of my friends about it and he was like, ‘Why are you angry? You’re Iranian.’ I was like ‘Iranians are Persians.’ …And then my other friend was like, ‘Ah don’t make this all about yourself, don’t get all personal. We don’t get upset about Braveheart.’ I thought that was interesting because there are a lot of those war movies out there but none of them are specifically against one side, it’s just their vision of the war. But now there are more movies about Middle Eastern countries and they’re directly targeted against the Middle Eastern countries to make them look bad. That made me angry what my friend said because they don’t really understand what it’s like to watch one of those and have a lot of people look at you that kind of way.

Frankie: I’m half Algerian. …And it’s like different for like ‘Braveheart’ or something because they’re not portraying them in a bad way and it’s not something that people are having an issue with right now. …So many people are already getting like persecuted just because they look like someone who may be from the Middle East. And people are like, ‘Oh, are you a terrorist or something?’ Like even my dad gets that in airports just because sometimes he looks Middle Eastern. And like it’s not fair to be suddenly making a movie and to be making
them look bad because you want to take the other side because then it just like builds on people’s views even if it’s like completely untrue.

Julio and Frankie assert together that the media is frequently involved in promoting beliefs that sustain the practices of othering. In their examples, the media is suggested to fuel people’s fears about unknown others who might be dangerous. Fear of the unknown other is related to the desire for absolute knowledge; the desire for certainty that provides comfort, a holiday from fear.

Along with fear of others exists the belief that some people have the inherent right to control other people. This belief reflects the logic of dominance. A logic of dominance derives from the few that defined themselves in contradistinction from, and superior to others. A logic of dominance needs to define the knowledges, capacities and functions of ‘others’ as inferior and in need of control in order to back up the superiority of the few, including prescriptions for reasoning that reflects their preferred models (Minnich, 2005). The dominance-preserving system sustains the separation and exclusion of some ‘kinds’ of people. The dominator paradigm that represents Western culture sees the individual as the significant foundation for self-esteem, competence as necessary for winning, dominance as the source of power, and affluence as the highest virtue (Eisler, 1987). In contrast, a partnership paradigm holds belonging as the significant foundation for self-esteem, mastery to be the means towards competence, independence as the source of power (everyone has the capacity for independence), and generosity as the measure of virtue. Whitmer (1997) describes this dominance arising from fear of control by others as a very pervasive mythos which sustains violence77 in

77 The term violence includes both physical and social violence (exclusionary beliefs and practices).
Western societies. She proposes that in the place of the violence mythos, which positions violence as inevitable, that we embrace a mythos of interdependence; a mythos that upholds an interdependent description of human community premised upon the integration of respect, trust, and responsibility.

**Sexism**

The problem of othering by sex/gender prescriptions was noted in the discussion which followed the “Paper Cut-Outs” activity, when the youth noted the skewed gender composition of our inquiry group (only two out of ten participants were male). Paige exclaimed,

> I probably wouldn’t have volunteered if it [the researcher] was a man. Like I would think if I were to like write something on these [cut-outs] and there’d be a man reading it, I would think that he would be like judging me; I wouldn’t want to share anything.

Paige voices her concern with being othered by males; those who have long been held to be more capable of reason and objective knowledge. In our shared situation as females, Paige assumes a degree of safety from negative judgment. Implicit in her expression, is the assumption that whatever she might say could be judged as inferior.

I took the opportunity to raise the issue of sexism with Jericha-Fay, Frankie and Payton in a small group meeting (“Donuts for Four”). The conversation quickly turned to experiences with sexism in school:

Payton: In P.E. sometimes the boys are given less time to do a run. We have 35 minutes. The guys have to do it in 30 minutes. Girls are given more time because girls are “less athletic” and guys are stronger. Which, in proven fact, I think there are tests done that guys generally are stronger, but I think that’s a stereotype that girls wouldn’t be as fast.

Frankie: I think maybe it is kind of true. Like we don’t want to believe it. Like if you look at the Times-Colonist run [10 km], the fastest woman there overall was
23rd I think in the whole race and the rest were all men. And so maybe they are more physically fit in terms of running ability. But it’s kind of still sexist because they still assume that you’re not going to be as fast so you’re the one who should be getting more time to do that. Because I know that I have come faster in the run than some boys before but they automatically assume that you’re going to be slower.

Here Payton and Frankie resist thinking that everyone in a group differentiated by sex can or should possess the same abilities and trouble thinking that does not allow for within group differences.

Jericha-Fay then shares some examples from her interactions with a peer and a teacher in Woodworking class.

Jericha-Fay: I was talking with G, a guy in my woodworking class, and he was talking with his other friend about when they went to the gym and their teacher was checking the maximum weight on the leg press and he was like, ‘Oh it’s only 220 [lbs], this must be a girls’ gym.’ It was an all-guys class, so I guess he felt okay saying that but it’s unbelievable that some teachers are stereotyping like that. I feel like my woodworking teacher is almost easier on girls, like my friend missed a joint, so it stuck out on her table. The teacher was totally okay with that and he helped her fix it and then when he was with G [male friend] he gave him a hard time about messing his up. Like haven’t we gotten over that yet? Like it’s the 21st Century!

There are a couple of possible messages in the teachers’ behaviours in Jericha-Fay’s example. First there is the coerced alignment with dominant masculinity enacted by the P.E. teacher. By inviting the boys to laugh about females’ weakness together, they assert their own physical superiority. In the case of the Woodworking teacher, the implicit message communicated by the teacher is that girls should not be expected to do as well as boys in Woodworking. Along with this assumption is the possibility that it does not matter what girls do. It is also possible to read into this example the possibility that the teacher assumes that it is okay to be more strict with boys than with girls.
Listening to Jericha-Fay provokes passionate anger for Frankie, who moves beyond commenting on treating boys and girls differently to question practices that limit what boys and girls can be.

Frankie: But then the teacher is just going to make the boys think the same way as what he just said. And that’s what makes me angry! Like, they think, ‘Oh, we’re only going to offend girls’ but maybe it’s also making the guys think a certain way or feel like they have certain expectations to act like men and then it just sets the whole thing off again. Or like when they’re saying ‘You have to run in a faster time than girls’ – what about guys who aren’t as fast as the girls? Then they’re feeling like they have pressure to be the stronger ones and then when they get older they’re just going to pass that on and it’s going to keep the stereotypes up.

In the same conversation, Frankie, Jericha-Fay, and Payton debated whether sexism has decreased in the past few decades.

Jericha-Fay: I think it’s a lot better than it used to be, the sexist roles that men and women take on, but I think it’s still kind of there. I guess it will always be there.

Payton: But a lot of guys think if you stand up for a woman, if you say like, “Oh, that’s not true, girls are just as good as guys,” they call you a feminist. And I think, like, personally, that’s not an insult. They call someone a lesbian or a feminist just because they’re sticking up for girls?

Jericha-Fay: Like if you stand up for guys and act like a chauvinist, does that mean you’re gay?

Frankie: Has sexism really gone away? Sometimes people are like, “Oh no, that doesn’t happen anymore,” but I think it does happen, it’s just more subtle. ...Maybe people don’t persecute us so much for standing up for ourselves, but we still have to stand up for ourselves more than men do.

Jericha-Fay reflects a popular belief: that sexism has decreased and that a certain amount of sexism is inevitable – a belief which is supported by the error of classifying humans by kinds (Minnich, 2005). Payton argues that sexism is tinged with the imperative of compulsory heterosexuality; if one supports women too much they disrupt the “natural”
sexual order. Frankie asserts that the fact that women still have to defend their desires and interests means that equality has not been achieved.

The exclusions surfaced by the youth focus on othering differences that are not mere differences but posit inferiority – one way of being is held up as the ideal and all other ways of being are judged based upon their divergence from the ideal. They note that the way we think and speak about difference have real effects. For Paige, it is expressed in reluctance to share her thoughts with men. Frankie believes that the communication of gender “norms” serves to not only denigrate those persons held up to be inferior but also conveys the message to those persons considered superior to avoid the behaviours and characteristics that resemble the inferior group. Together they resist beliefs and practices that limit the expression of full humanity based upon restricted definitions of what being male and female means.

**Anthropocentrism**

Similar to the ways in which the possibility of knowing self distances us from knowing other, the possibility of knowing self and other contributes to an ability to distance oneself from nature. The logic of dominance mentioned earlier has been used to explain and justify the subordination of nature to human beings (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). Dominant conceptions of knowledge which sustain the dualism of self-other sustain also the dualism of man-nature. Feminists argue that the dominant Eurowestern philosophical tradition identifies man with the human and the realm of the mental which are held to be superior, while woman is identified with the inferior realms of nature and the physical (Minnich, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).
Thayer-Bacon (2003a) links the separation of man from nature and the mental from the physical back to Plato’s ontological categories of the forms in which the soul was seen as immortal and immaterial and the body mortal and material. The soul was considered to be everlasting and was capable of knowing the Truth while our bodies were seen as the temporary matter of nature. The body was seen as distracting and deceiving us from true knowing. Hence, the mind was separated from the body just as man was separated from the nature.

Nature has also been othered by being thought of as that which we are not. Our thinking along these lines of separation has been supported by setting man and nature in a dichotomous relation. Fine (1994) describes delusions of separation in terms of man as home; that which we assume to know. We work away from man as home to split apart all that is seen to be outside man; all that resides in the world outside the home is the unknown which we expel.

In the “Great Game of Power” activity the youth surfaced the notion that nature “is just there.” Nature, they suggested, is not related to knowledge or power. In the “Graffiti-ing” activity I reminded the youth of what they said earlier and asked them, “Can knowledge come from nature or is knowledge always about nature?” They responded with:

Frankie: Nature’s knowledge lies within itself and comes naturally, while as people, we tend to take much of it [knowledge] from others.

Payton: Knowledge can come from nature – a small seed is planted, and struggles to grow. But it tries and tries and eventually it blossoms. From this flower you have learned to never give up. Similar life lessons can be found all over in nature.

Jericha-Fay: People tend to overlook nature as a source of knowledge, but nature has so much knowledge in itself. It’s been around for longer than anyone or anything.
Ruby: Knowledge came from the very beginning and at the beginning there was nothing but nature.

Julio: You think you own whatever land you land on.

In this exchange, the youth reflect a separation of humans from nature. Frankie posits that nature has its own knowledge and humans have their own. Payton reflects the belief that humans can learn from nature but humans and nature are distinct. Jericha-Fay and Ruby suggest that nature is the origin of our environment and that perhaps we need to value the knowledge within nature more than we tend to do. Julio’s comment indicates some appreciation for the anthropocentric and dominator orientations to knowledge—humans have long competed with one another for the right to have dominance over lands and to exploit those lands (and the people within them) for their own purposes.

Even though dualisms and hierarchies need not lead to domination over others, they have historically worked this way (Minnich, 2005). In dualistic thinking, the emphasis is on difference at the expense of relations, of connections. Thayer-Bacon (2003a) asserts that differences can help us to gain perspective into our own views. She urges us, in our efforts to re-conceive and re-vision our world, to eliminate the logic of domination so that difference can be used to stimulate growth and emphasize connections rather than breed domination.

**Adultism**

One exclusion that I am particularly concerned about is that of what adultism does to how we interact with younger people. Although I touched upon the issue of adultism in Chapter Four, I return to it again in order to highlight its inclusion among various othering beliefs and practices.
Julio brought to the inquiry an example of being oppressed and humiliated by an adult’s authority. His example is from an out-of-school context – riding the bus:

Julio: I went on the bus, it was almost the middle of the second week of school and I had an A-block spare so I didn’t need to go to school until 10, so I’d take the bus at like 9:30 and we didn’t have our Go cards yet so I had my last year’s Go card, so I go on and I have my iPod on and it’s loud so I can’t hear what he’s saying to me, and put in $1.25 and he yells at me: he’s like, ‘It’s $2.00!’ ‘No, I’m 16.’ ‘No you’re not, it’s $2.00!’ So I showed him my Go card from last year, he’s like, ‘I need a date of birth, that’s not good enough.’ I’m like, ‘But it says [school], last year, Grade 11.’ And he’s like, ‘No.’ So then I showed him my student agenda, my History 12 textbook, my English Literature 12 textbook, he’s like, ‘That’s not enough, I need more.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, what do you want me to give you? My passport?’ ‘Anything with a date of birth.’ ‘Well, I don’t have a driver’s license. Okay I’ll give you 75 cents.’ He’s like, ‘No, get off my bus!’ He’s sort of like swearing at me. So I’m like okay, okay, and I get off. So we wrote a letter and we went into BC Transit and the guy thought that I was angry because I wanted my money back, not that I was insulted and verbally abused in front of a bus load of people, including my friends.

Adultism excludes children and youth as knowers because its standards for judging thinking and knowledge have been premised upon contexts and discourses in which children and youth have never been included as full and valid participants. The knowledge of children and youth has not been considered legitimate – they have been conferred with no authority as knowers; their assertions carry no weight. Their ways of thinking have garnered interest only to serve the purpose of highlighting how their thought differs from adult thought so as to nurture its development toward the ideal.

I was stunned to notice that both Rorty (1999) and James (1913) employ analogies in their writing that liken children to dogs. In seeing children as similar to dogs – non-speaking creatures – they deny the need to contemplate how the knowledge of children – particular human beings situated in the world – has value. To take seriously the ways in which children think and know their worlds – and by taking seriously I mean
to allow children’s thoughts and perspectives the power to influence oneself – has long been neglected to the point of being simply unworthy of scholarly consideration (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

The youth in inquiry expressed awareness that the knowledge of “proper” knowers (Minnich, 2005) – those people validated by the socio-cultural context – is supported by authoritative positioning.

Frankie: Well, like the seniority in the unions and stuff. Like there are a lot of problems with that when you try and complain about something going on with like a teacher, a bus driver, and how you go to the people who are supposed to help you if you’ve got a problem and they’re just like, ‘No, he’s got seniority’ or like, ‘He hasn’t done anything wrong’ and it’s only because they’re in the union.

Julio: It’s probably hard for all of us because we don’t have any status or position yet because we’re teenagers. So no matter what we say – in some situations, it will be just like, ‘Oh, they’re just teenagers, they don’t know what they’re saying.’

While Frankie notes that authority can come with the position one holds in a paid-occupation, Julio notes that authority never seems to be accorded young people.

My efforts to highlight youth’s voices in these contemplations of knowledge is a response to Minnich’s (2005) question: If knowledge belongs to humankind, what are we taking as knowledge when so many people have been excluded from participating in creating knowledge? Systematic practices of exclusion mean that in order to really include others in creating knowledge, we have to go beyond the dominant traditional contexts and roles in which “knowledge” is held to be created.

Minnich and Thayer-Bacon invite us to include the knowledge of children and youth in co-creation processes. While there have been numerous appeals of late to encourage youth to participate in civic matters, I still wonder how much they have been
asked to participate in determining what is taken as knowledge in schools. The youth in this inquiry suggest they haven’t. We need to think carefully about the ways in which our schools have been designed to reflect our constructions of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. For within those explorations resides opportunity for critique and revision to overcome how adultism pervades students’ experiences in schools.

The world has changed since I was a little girl. When I was little, we did not speak in terms of gender. People had a sex and it was male or female. Today in research discourse I notice that we have moved from speaking about “gender” to “genderings,” from “race” to speaking about “racializing,” and from “subjects” to “subjectivities.” The moves represent a shift in thinking about “what” we see in people to “how” our seeing is constructed and how we construct others. Our thinking and relating is now represented as an active process. We no longer see race or gender as something that is inherent in a person but as a social construct that we apply to people and which has shifting meaning and varying consequences across contexts. These realizations have been important in my research practice, especially with respect to moving from expecting sex differences in findings as though they were inevitabilities derived from biology toward an appreciation of the social construction of gender. My analyses now include, when appropriate, how social processes impinge upon performances in a way that positing sex differences or gender differences can serve to uphold differences that are not real, to reinforce ideas about gender by suggesting gender as something real.

Social constructions are problematized in a lot of academic work these days, but conversations about the enactment of racism, sexism, adultism, etc. can be challenging in many face-to-face encounters. One often encounters, as I have among my student teachers, pleas for us to be able to simply treat everyone the same. The experience of exclusion does not seem to exist as a reality for many people who are from the dominant culture. They believe that racism and sexism are things of the past. The answer, they suggest, is to simply find a way to get along by respecting one another’s differences. It is hard to help them understand that respect cannot be had by pretending that difference does not exist.

Minnich (2005) confronts the notion of equality and its longstanding equation with sameness. Although our laws uphold the equality of all citizens, we have
tended to interpret that to signify that all people are the same. She contends that striving for equal rights of all peoples “does not ask us to disregard all distinctions – quite the contrary. To establish equality, and to protect it, we need to ascertain very carefully which distinctions must be recognized in order to be neutralized; which can be ruled entirely out of order; which may need to be privileged (if only temporarily) to allow all to start on an even footing. …Equal rights is an enormously complex and changing goal; we simply frustrate and mislead ourselves when we assume that it has to do with absolute sameness, with blindness to all distinctions” (Minnich, 2005, p.180). In other words, we cannot hope to revision our world by adding equalized others onto established systems. From this I am reminded that the question of knowledge is really a question of how we are in relation with others and our world.

Despite Julio’s experiences with being othered, he expresses hope that the young generation today will create a less exclusive world through their openness and willingness to learn about other peoples:

I see a cycle going on like where when all the older people are gone and the younger people are growing up they’re already being taught to be more accepting. …Like thirteen year-olds are very like [gestures to imply openness]. I think as they grow up there will be even more alternative people like them, like not so conservative, more open to learning.

I read Julio’s statement as suggesting that the imperative to “be true to oneself” (per Vladimir) might be loosening its hold; that the next generation(s) will feel less need to uphold an inviolable position to defend who they are. The imperative to be “true to oneself” suggests that self can and should be transparent to oneself and that once you reach a point in your life in which your beliefs have been decided, thereafter one’s energies should go towards conserving that which is known; defending, supporting, upholding one’s position – a position which interferes with opening to the other.
Responding to Julio’s Question

In thinking about whether “anyone can know anything if they don’t know themselves” the inquiry with youth explored problems associated with believing that we can know self and other. Julio’s question also provoked an exploration into the ways in which youth experience and resist practices of othering. While we cannot become objects to ourselves, there are practices we can turn to in order to become more aware of our habits of thinking, including the habits that sustain harms to others. Practicing inner dialogue for mindfulness and engaging with others in conversation can help us to open to self and other; to sidestep proclivities for certain knowing and embrace instead an ongoing invitation to become (plural) while allowing others to be.

Again, my response to the youth includes an articulation of desire. What I might say to Julio would be something like this.

Through your conversation with others in the inquiry, I hope that you noticed how in inquiry you were standing inside a particular social process that contributed, like the other contexts in your life, to how you come to know yourself and others. I heard you speak many times about your personal experiences with being othered and your sensitivity to the ways in which we tend to judge others according only to our own limited perspectives. The ways in which others have othered you are not only a reflection of their not knowing themselves, but also of their not knowing how their thinking has been constructed by history and culture. While we cannot ever hope to know ourselves and others completely and with certainty, we can work to undo some of the harms associated with the traditions of our thinking. Keep noticing and questioning and fighting against exclusions.

And I would offer Julio these words from Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich:

We are unique, related subjects whose freedom is conditioned (not determined) by worlds not of our making but in our care, open to the effect of our actions. (Minnich, 2005, p.273)
CHAPTER SEVEN: “DO YOU HAVE TO KNOW FOR SURE AND HAVE RELIABLE SOURCES TO BACK UP YOUR ACTIONS?”

– Jericha-Fay, female, age 14

The touchstone question Jericha-Fay offers leads to contemplation of the relation between knowledge and action, specifically knowledge for action. Jericha-Fay’s question raises the issue of whether one must “know for sure” in order to act. In wondering if one must have “reliable sources” before one can act, she suggests that knowing for sure involves turning to authoritative knowledge.

As I weave together related questions that arose from the inquiry into the contemplation of this chapter’s touchstone question, I will show that knowledge is also spoken in terms of being action, and derived from action. Although each issue will be dealt with separately, it is important to acknowledge here that knowledge for, as, and from action are inextricably related.

The Eurowestern tradition of knowledge holds knowledge to be purer than action; knowledge is about higher things than the practical. Caputo (2005) offers an example from his experience as a philosopher which illustrates the tradition of separating knowledge from action.

During a public forum at the University of Victoria in 2005, Caputo exclaimed that he was amazed to hear the ways in which people were taking his ideas and applying them in practice. Nurses especially were weaving his ideas into nursing education practice. He announced that Kierkkegard liked to confound Hegel by

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78 A transactional relation exists between knowledge and action such that the demands of situations mean that action doesn’t always cohere with accepted truths. Positing the existence of a transactional relation is not the same as positing mutual causality or reciprocity (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a, 2008). A transactional relation posits the co-existence of knowledge and action as mutually dependent and interdependent; knowledge and action are partial and do not exist apart from one another. The relation between knowledge and action cannot be distinguished.
asking how to “apply” his philosophy; it never occurred to Hegel that anyone would apply it. Caputo then likened his own experience to Hegel’s; it had never occurred to him that people would use his ideas in so many different ways. With what sounded like pleasure tinged with surprise, he added that “no other philosophers have ‘examples’.”

However much our traditions suggest that knowledge should be about higher things than the practical, we cannot deny that what we need to understand is related to what we need to do, just as what we need to do is related to what we need to know (Minnich, 2005).

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**Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted in the Researcher’s Research Practices: The Crisis of Praxis in Research**

The tradition of thinking which posits knowledge to be purer than action pertains to the crisis of praxis within research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe the crisis of praxis as the question, If society is only and always a text, is it even possible to effect change in the world? This leads me to contemplate my orientation to effecting change in my past and present research practices.

In my past research I believed that change was possible through highlighting for unknowing others what they needed to know in order to revise their thinking. Thus, I saw change as engendered through reason. My research culminated in coherent arguments that appealed to people’s rationality – by inserting what they had previously not known into their thinking, change would happen. I held the assumption that thinking differently would provoke acting differently and that information was all that people needed to think differently.

Throughout the present inquiry I have felt attuned to the impossibility of certain knowledge and believe in the possibility of change without appealing to the urge for metaphysics, for synthesis (Caputo, 2000). Minnich has reminded me that thinking includes questioning, which is thought’s movement. Thayer-Bacon stresses that change is possible if we focus more on the processes of thinking than on its products. Together, they suggest that since we always live with partial knowledge, change asks us to resist filling in horizons with information gleaned from the established boundaries of traditions and instead focus our attention on working at the edge of the boundaries. This is akin to Megan Boler’s (1999) appeal to be willing to live at the edge of our skins.

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79 Following Thayer-Bacon (2002), I position thinking as a form of human activity which cannot be separated from other forms of human activity, including forms of activity which shape how humans think.
I believe that I have come to think differently through participating in this inquiry; through connecting with the difficulty of knowledge and especially becoming more aware of how my thoughts are not mine alone; they are shaped within historical traditions in addition to being shaped by my experiences in the world. How is this similar and different to my earlier beliefs that with information, one will think differently and act differently?

Have I done research differently this time? In the present research I have attempted to retain some mess in my research this time by including the doubts and uncertainties that the inquiry provoked for me rather than offering it as a tidy synthesis. Perhaps others will perceive it as a synthesis. The form of this representation is limited not only by my ability to think about knowledge but also by the skills I have to re-present the inquiry. I also recognize that the fact that this is packaged as a dissertation means that I cannot escape having it received by some others as an authoritative text.

Additionally, I wonder this: When Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that society is only a text, are they diminishing the particulars within contexts that provide grounds for action? Does the crisis of praxis perhaps reflect concerns about relativism which plague so many? Does the crisis of praxis reveal mourning for authority?

As I voice my wonderings and pose questions which I cannot answer I worry that revealing my uncertainty will be judged unacceptable. Should I have answers to all my questions? Similar to my youth thinking friends who worry that others will think they know nothing if they voice their questions in classrooms, I worry that my questions might nudge my contribution to knowledge into a pile of papers deemed “insignificant.”

Knowledge for Action

In the inquiry, Romeo struggled with the knowledge-action relationship when she encountered the behaviour of another that she thought was not aligned with what he knew. The example Romeo shared involved a store owner who did not comply with an inspector’s demand that he remove faulty merchandise from his store.

Romeo: I am sort of confused with the whole situation. The store owner argued that he should not have to follow the recommendation because the fault caught by the inspector was not his doing [the supplier provided him with poor merchandise] and to correct the fault would require financial burden on his part.
In a way I wonder if he [the business owner] knows the knowledge of the laws, that he must always obey the laws that are set. At the same time it sounds like there was a huge gap in the communication process, both sides had misunderstood each other.

Romeo raises issues about following individual rights, rules, communication, and interpersonal understanding to explain why the store owner’s behaviour did not reflect what she assumed he should know. In the example she offers we also see that determining who should take action involves judgment – in this case, who is deemed responsible for the faulty merchandise. I think that we often suspect that when people behave in ways that we would not expect, given what we assume they know, we think they have either misunderstood the situation in which action was required, or there was a miscommunication between the person requesting action and the person being asked to act. Often though, and Romeo hints at this, choices for action hinge on anticipated personal gains or losses.

Frankie references the issue of environmental sustainability to posit that action hinges on having information that permits understanding of the consequences of one’s actions.

Frankie: Knowing the importance of recycling could be different from understanding the importance of recycling. For example, you could know that it is very beneficial to the environment to recycle, but not take any steps to understand why. Sometimes to really know something we have to question it with our own beliefs. From there we can take action.

In Frankie’s example, a person may not act in an environmentally responsible way because he or she does not understand why it is important. Frankie suggests that the right information about the benefits of recycling might help someone change his or her
behaviour and start recycling. Decisions for action involve both how (i.e., what they are taking into account in their thinking) and why behavioural choices are made. Frankie posits that a person needs to make a conscious connection between his or her action and its consequences. Awareness of the consequences, which she calls “benefits,” is what drives action. She also appeals to reason – “understanding” why something is important should be enough to prompt action. By including beliefs in the same statement though – “to really understand something, we must question it with our own beliefs” – Frankie indicates that it’s not likely to be enough for someone to just tell you that recycling is important; the sense of importance has to be integrated into one’s belief system.

In response to Frankie’s assertion, Julio followed with a strong exclamation: “If something isn’t important enough to do, you DON’T know it.” In Julio’s emphatic statement is an affirmation of Frankie’s allusion to beliefs and how values – that which ones holds to be important – drive knowledge/action.

Payton offered another example of the problem of acting in light of what one knows:

Payton: I think you can know something but not practice it. …You can know abusing is wrong but still abuse. But one has to wonder if it is really knowledge if you don’t practice it.

Payton joins Frankie and Julio to connect knowledge and the practical in a way that resists that knowledge can be above day-to-day life. Like pragmatists, who assert that knowledge cannot be for the sake of knowledge alone, knowledge always has purpose for living in the world.

I recognize in Frankie’s proposition the assumption I have held in the past about how knowledge generated by my research will effect change.
Thus, Payton and Julio question whether knowledge can be considered to be that which a person espouses to know without demonstrating it in action. They suggest that action is driven by moral imperatives; decisions between right and wrong. Ricks and Griffin (1995) assert that even when a person knows the right thing to do, s/he may choose not to do it because her/his beliefs and values about herself/himself and others get in the way. In Romeo’s example, the store owner likely had beliefs about the right of the inspector to impose financial hardship on him and held as more important his own financial well-being than complying with the inspector’s demands. The store owner’s choice of action probably also took into account his beliefs and values regarding the likely effects that his noncompliance would have on his customers. In Payton’s example, the knowledge of abuse being wrong should be enough to deter a person from abusive behaviour.

Another example about the transactional relation between knowledge and action was offered by Ruby. Her example is situated within the context of learning to play the piano.

A lot of piano practice is going forward. My piano teacher is like, ‘How about you try going backwards.’ And then like when I played the song backwards it seemed to connect more and when I play it forward again, it makes more sense. You just try to reverse it …Like it came out easily. …You have to think more and because you think more it kind of opens lots of things when you play it forward again. – Ruby

Ruby turns attention to our propensity to think of knowledge and action in linear relational terms; knowledge derives from action and action derives from knowledge. Linear thinking posits cause and effect, directionality (forward/backward) and start/end points. Ruby highlights the transactional relation of knowledge/action; both only exist together.
Ruby, like the other youth, suggests that it is the individual who acts, and like the others she also acknowledges that action by the individual is always embedded in social relations. For Julio and Frankie and Payton, knowledge/action is for social well-being. For Ruby, knowledge/action is socially facilitated in the teacher-student relationship.


Minnich’s effort at transforming knowledge is an example (among many feminist examples) at invigorating the knowledge-action relation. Knowing is social and intimately related to acting. Thayer-Bacon (2003a) has stressed that knowledge exists within personal, social, ecological, wholistic, and scientific relations. Her relational “(e)pistemology” draws attention to relational forms of knowing to counter the individual descriptions that have dominated Eurowestern theories of knowledge. So just as our knowing is embedded within relations, so too is our acting for knowledge/action exist in a transactional relationship.

Minnich (2005) argues that the reason we tend to think of the individual as acting in isolation from others is because knowledge has been both misconstrued and mystified; it has been derived from partial, faulty abstractions which have not helped us to deal with particulars or develop egalitarian connectedness. Our knowledge system supports the idea that individuals are autonomous rational beings.

Just as the errors in our thinking through faulty knowledge systems make it possible to position others as inferior and in need of control, it also permits us to think that we have a right to decide upon our actions as though they are in the service of only ourselves.

The notion of individual freedom to choose that which one will allow to influence one’s behaviour is supported by rationalism and universalism. Thayer-Bacon (2008) argues that a pluralistic, relational democracy would acknowledge the ways in which the voices of people from the dominant culture with fluency in the dominant language were those who were heard at meetings in which ideas about freedom and democracy were debated. Dominant culture has ways of homogenizing and silencing diverse opinions and perspectives. Notions of

81 Thayer-Bacon (2003) uses this styling when she references the word “epistemology” in order to signal that she is using the term in a non-transcendent way; a way not removed from the context of ordinary, everyday experiences. Her styling also reflects her attempts to reconstruct the meaning of the term.
freedom and democracy should not tolerate the existence of a highly unequal social order; freedom and democracy need be committed to shared authority.

Minnich reminds us that “it does not take monsters to perpetuate monstrous acts; it takes ordinary people living with skewed systems without asking questions” (Minnich, 2005, p.137).

**Knowing the Consequences of Beliefs: Reducing Separation and Distancing**

Following Frankie’s suggestion that we need to “understand” the consequences of action, it seems that we need to consider whether, and how to get close to consequences. Pragmatism asserts that to assess the practical efficacy of an idea, we must be able to look to the results of the idea in its enactment. In other words, we determine truths by trying out ideas in the world and determining their worth by looking at how ideas work. Feminist pragmatism insists on careful attention to how ideas create and sustain harms to some people while serving to privilege others.

If beliefs and values are embedded within the transactional relationship between knowledge and action and we cannot know ourselves transparently (as was posited in Chapter Six), how is it that we might facilitate shared authority and democratic action? Boler (1999) suggests that dominant conceptions of knowledge which have us believe we are separate from others (including nature), make it possible for us to assume the comfortable position as spectators.

Spectating allows a person to inhabit a position of distance and separation in situations with others; to remain in the ‘anonymous’ spectating crowd. Spectating makes possible the abdication of personal responsibility for the ways we treat one another. Witnessing, on the other hand, is relational and honours the complex relations of the personal, cultural, historical and material conditions of lives. Witnessing is a collective
action; through witnessing we learn to see differently, but witnessing requires a willingness to live with fear that accompanies exposing one’s cherished beliefs to critique.

In learning to see through collective witnessing, Boler (1999) contends that one is challenged to disrupt the oversimplifications of popular history; to recognize how truths have been constructed in relation to particular silences. To act as though our thoughts of unknown others are of personal importance, regardless of whether we may be seen as trespassing (i.e., resisting the urge to be silent) against what many consider to be acceptable (read: separate) social interaction. Boler (1999) reminds us that looking to how ideas work in the world is not about ideas born in individual minds as though minds come into and thrive in the world in isolation. She returns us to the proposition that we never think alone (Minnich, 2005).

I remember/I am complicit…

A joke was circulating after the space shuttle “Columbia” exploded. I heard it when I was with a group of people at a social gathering. The joke was told by a man. It went like this: “Do you know the last transmission received from the shuttle before it crashed? (pause)… Let’s let a woman drive.”

I did not laugh. It sickened me to think that these incredible talented and educated female astronauts were being reduced to a stereotype. Implicit in the joke was also the message that having females on board the shuttle was a likely explanation for the failure of the mission. Although I did not laugh, I also did not speak up.

Later I heard via a friend that some of the men who were present at the social gathering and overheard the joke noticed that I didn’t laugh and were telling others that they thought I was uptight and had no sense of humour.

What silenced me? I suspect I am guilty of what Vladimir asserted in a discussion of knowledge and power:
Vladimir: People tend to cower in the face of authority, even when they know what’s right.

To share my disgust at the joke would require me to be courageous. Refusing to pretend to find humour in the joke was perceived as out-of-order. However, by not speaking up, I missed an opportunity to express another way of thinking, or being in relation to others. I am reminded of a quotation from my childhood; a quote which I perhaps don’t enact as often as I might:

*Because the message will never be received does not mean it is not worth the sending.* (David Stacton, 1958, in “Segaki”)

Spectating and witnessing are different actions. They reflect how we are (or choose to be) in relation to others. How we are (or choose to be) in relation to others is part of most everything we do in our day-to-day lives. For example, imagine yourself in the following situation:

You are walking down the street with a friend and you come across a youth whose head is half shaved; the other half aglow with purple hair.

Your friend bursts into laughter.

You ask why he laughed and he replies, “Because that girl looks ridiculous.”

You notice you are feeling uncomfortable with the situation and want to know more: “But what struck you as funny? The contrast in the image or merely being surprised by what you saw?”

Your friend responds: “It’s bizarre that someone would do that. It’s got to make you wonder why.”

You sense an unfair judgment; a judgment predicated on appearance alone, upon obvious unknowing and so persist, “Why would you feel compelled to judge that youth?”

Your friend asserts, in a louder, defensive voice, “I wasn’t judging them. I was just laughing. Lighten up.”
But there is something in the exchange that unsettles you; something that tells you that judgment was present despite your friend’s contention otherwise. You sense that this minor example is caught up in the same kind of thinking that distances us from others in ways that sustain major harms but you know that to continue questioning your friend would fracture your relationship. Although you wonder why it is considered particularly poor form in social exchange to question another person too vigourously, you choose to do what you have been taught is polite and refrain from further inquiry. You are left asking yourself, why do we tend to feel uncomfortable questioning ourselves or having others question us? Do we feel we at risk of losing ourselves? Is questioning what one does to be relegated to the private sphere, like emotions, politics and religion?

Boler (1999) has proposed a pedagogy of discomfort that asks us to embrace discomfort, to resist falling into the safety and security of spectating for it serves to distance us from others and thus prevents us from gaining insights into the effects of our beliefs – which are not ours alone – in the world.

Krishnamurti (1969) agrees that in order to “see,” emotional content must be present. He contends that we do not act contrary to our conditioning because we don’t notice that there is no emotional content in our knowledge.

Only when there is an emotional content do you become vital. If you see the danger of your conditioning merely as an intellectual concept, you will never do anything about it. In seeing danger as a mere idea there is conflict between the idea and action and that conflict takes away your energy. It is only when you see the conditioning and the danger of it immediately, as you would see a precipice, that you act. So seeing is acting. (Krishnamurti, 1969, p. 28)

Megan Boler (1999) asserts that dominant conceptions of knowledge have permitted us to avoid naming the affective dimensions of our conceptual disturbances. She states that we

82 The example could be seen as minor because the youth did not hear the laughter or comments made about her. However, the judgment has farther-reaching implications. The unexamined assumptions would likely influence how he interacts with youth in face-to-face encounters, and his interest in support programs for youth. However, it is also possible that his retorts do not represent his beliefs. He might have felt compelled to come up with a reason for laughing and chose a reason that he suspected would be supported by others. He might have been enacting dominant masculinity which would make him feel that replying with “I don’t know” was not an option.
desperately need to develop language of the affective to be able to consider how boredom, confusion, excitement, and fear shape our attention and thinking. I believe, following Boler (1999) that not knowing what to do with the emotions that novelty introduces is implicated in our resistance to the unfamiliar and inaction. She states that our frameworks for thinking “reflect emotional investments that by and large remain unexamined during our lifetimes, because they have been insidiously woven into the everyday fabric of common sense” (Boler, 1999, p.181).

When I think about the emotions that can arise when one is confronted with having to give up her/his views in order to bring into consideration new ideas, the lack of social acceptance for making emotions explicit means that all the feelings associated with knowledge remain invisible to us. By keeping emotions from being visible we effectively deny their existence. Thus, we continue to have little awareness of how we feel about conceptions of knowledge and how the process of creating knowledge makes us feel. And when conceptions of knowledge have effects on our lives, we are not able to say how or why because we have become either immune to the emotional sensations that arise when conceptions of knowledge prompt us to feel shame or delight, or if we are aware of those emotional sensations, are likely to be unable or unwilling to share them with others. Emotions inform how we know knowledge, including our ability to see the consequences of ideas in action.

This contemplation of knowledge for action provokes us to turn to one another and attend to the emotional to resist the distancing and separation from other that

83 James (1913) states that in philosophy “common sense” refers to “a man’s use of certain intellectual forms or categories of thought” (p.171). He adds that most people never suspect common sense of not being absolutely true.
dominant conceptions of knowledge sustain in the knowledge/action transactional relation.

Knowledge as Action

James (1913) attests to the difficulty of disrupting systems of thought. He points out that we have a propensity to ignore or abuse others who bear witness to phenomena that are so novel “as to make for a serious rearrangement of our preconception” (p.61). James acknowledges that “our knowledge grows in spots” and that we let the “spots spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can” (pp. 167-168). James notes that discomfort tends to shut down new knowledge. Emotions that tell us our beliefs are being threatened are likely to provoke action that turns away the other, turns against that which we do not already know. Feminists have added to James’ thinking that what turns us away is not only protection of ourselves, as though we were isolated individuals, but also one’s standing within established social hierarchies which support dominant conceptions of knowledge.

Hence, an important form of action is conceptual movement. Minnich’s (2005) examples of harms perpetuated by faulty knowledge\(^\text{84}\) illustrate that we embody what and who we consider to be real, valuable, and of significance: women are missing from curriculum texts, we teach history by focusing on wars rather than peace, and while we acknowledge different cultural perspectives we do not include them in public discourse.

\(^\text{84}\) For Minnich (2005) faulty knowledge is knowledge based upon faulty generalizations, mystified concepts and circular reasoning.
Ruby acknowledged her awareness of the possibility of being mislead by faulty knowledge:

Ruby: The things that we can see can lead to assumptions that are not always accurate. Knowledge can sometimes fool us. … Sometimes what we know is not always right and that can screw up what we do.

Indeed! If we see ourselves and others as autonomous entities, what we believe and think is seen to have no bearing upon the thoughts and beliefs of others. Being asked to question our beliefs is seen as inappropriate, an infringement upon personal freedom.

Minnich (2005) stresses that the traditions that “inform and deform” (p. 50) our thinking and actions have perpetuated sexist, racist, and other exclusionary practices which have been hard to undo. In one example of perpetuating sexism, she refers to the exclusive use of the ‘he’ pronoun in speech and writing.

The ‘simple’ matter of pronouns can reveal millennia of persistent errors, and there is no shortcut to fixing all they have skewed. Every time we stumble over a pronoun, we stumble over the root problem, the creation of ‘kinds’ of humans such that only some were allowed full participation in all the systems so long premised on their dominant centrality. … We cannot, by fiat from the present, ignore the old hierarchical exclusions or transmute them into inclusiveness simply by making it evident that we see them as such. (Minnich, 2005, p.263)

Minnich suggests that mere acknowledgment of our formative assumptions is not enough to undo their work in the world. However, she asserts that recurrently thinking about the multiplicity of our being and knowing helps us to unfreeze concepts and dissolve the ideologies they anchor so that we can make choices and take responsibility for how we are with one another in this world. To think about what we hold as knowledge, knowledge that supports what we consider to be approved practices, lessens the hold that our beliefs have on us (Minnich, 2005).
The quest for absolute knowledge, the acceptance that certain knowledge is possible compels us to think that we do not need to act until we know for sure. And yet acting under conditions of tyranny is easier than acting in the face of uncertainty. No other human capacity is as vulnerable as thinking. Tyranny tells us precisely what to do; it invites us to take a rest from thinking (Minnich, 2005).

**Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted in the Researcher’s Research Practices: Revisiting Interpretive Acts**

Minnich (2005) states that “there is nothing merely academic in how we think and what we know. We are creatures and creators of meaning” (p.1). If knowledge is about meaning and meaning is about interpretation, I am led to contemplate how I have created meaning in my past research. What have I done to interpret texts? Have I managed to get “close” to the consequences of my beliefs in order to see how they act? As I create this text box I am aware that the contemplations here repeatedly return to issues related to dominant conceptions of knowledge already explored in earlier chapters: issues of individual autonomy, rationality, separating, distancing, achieving synthesis, and the possibility of absolute/universal knowledge.

In my past research I think my interpretive acts in encounters with data tended to focus more on identifying what participants said in order to make associations with what other participants and theories said. I did this by identifying the meaning (naming themes) within what was said by participants and comparing and contrasting those with themes in other sources. As I mentioned before, by striving to bracket my beliefs and values during research, I did not have to include in the interpretation process questions about how my habits of attention were influencing what I saw and what I made absent. By ignoring what did not fit or was contradictory, I perpetuated a silence about what might be true; a voice that speaks that which is not yet known, that which appears unintelligible because it speaks a truth that I do not recognize. Schwandt’s (2003) theoretical observer is akin to Boler’s spectator – I confess to having embodied both.

In this inquiry I desire to embody the witness by working to insert my beliefs and values in my interpretations. I strive to be the researcher who is willing to be unsettled, to live with the discomfort of placing my beliefs in front of others for scrutiny and critique. However, as I make this confession I notice that I wish not to endure too much discomfort. While I might be willing to live with it, I don’t pretend to like it. Having others confirm that discomfort is a productive space helps me walk towards it, knowing all the while that even though I feel uncomfortable, I can not know whether I am really acting differently.
The problem with relying upon rules for behaviour, codes of ethics, standards for practice, or popular wisdom about the right thing to do in different situations, is that the infinite possibilities presented in situations preclude the production of a finite, definitive grounds upon which one can determine how to act. The problem of acting is compounded by the fact that we cannot be transparent to ourselves. Self-reflection in isolation “runs the risk of reducing historical complexities to an overly tidy package that ignores our mutual responsibility for one another” and is likely to result in little change or any good for self or others; it is more likely to lead to solipsism or mere confession (Boler, 1999, p.177). Thus, we must turn to one another, especially those who are different than us to become aware of our formative assumptions and improve the warrants for our assertions (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

The Problem of Acting in the Face of Uncertainty

The propensity to desire certain knowledge/absolute knowledge in order to act has permitted us to justify harms done to others because of their supposed “natural” inferiority. As we open to plurality and not knowing self and others, we are asked to live with uncertainty. In the face of uncertainty, how do we determine how to act?

Ruby and Romeo suggested that many people turn to religion to relieve themselves of the difficulty of acting without knowing.

Ruby: People need something to believe in. Like, for example, I was watching the news and there was this thing about people losing weight and they have this religion that they believe in, like they believe in God and they only eat when they’re hungry; religion ties the connection with losing weight. And it actually works, and like people in America, they’re really obese and they have a lot of people with this problem and they use this method of religion and losing weight and it actually works and there’s books written about it. …I think they just need something to believe in.
Romeo: They need that guidance to motivate themselves – to have something to look forward to. I think that’s what most, like Christianity or like Islam, they all have that goal kind of thing, so that’s what brings them forward.

Diana: And from a spiritual perspective, who can know things? [pause] Like would it be whoever knows the Bible of the Koran the best? Would they be the knowers?

Romeo: Well, I think people definitely refer to the Bible as the central key to, like all the answers are in there kind of thing, but I don’t know who is the person who knows everything.

According to Caputo (1987), Romeo’s inability to know who the person is who knows everything should come as no surprise. It is not as easy today to figure out who the wise people are. It was much easier when a single paradigm ruled.

In ancient Greece, for example, the wise ones were called the phronimos. The phronimos conveyed phronesis – practical knowledge, knowledge for doing. Caputo (1987) refers to practical knowledge – phronesis – as a fundamentally conservative notion because it can function only within an established paradigm.

It knows how to keep something alive, to renew it in changing circumstances but always within the compass of an established order. …Phronesis cannot function if there is conflict about who the prudent man [the phronimos in a given culture] is. (p.217)

This is where the concept of metaphronesis becomes helpful. Metaphronesis is the kind of phronesis you need to have beyond phronesis that tells you what to do if you don’t know who the wise people (the phronimos) are. This is the real challenge of today; because our traditional exemplars have come into question, what we really need is insight. Insight points to what is needed to cope with the puzzles that confound us; puzzles which arise from living in the flux of the world (Caputo, 1987).
This takes us back to the contention that we must turn to one another in our relatedness to think (Minnich, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). We cannot rely on our perspectives alone or we slip into solipsism and risk becoming the phronimos to oneself and only oneself. We cannot avoid the need to think because every situation demands something new of us, but we need others, especially others who are different, to help us think more comprehensively. We need also to be willing to permit the other to breach the horizon of our thinking (Caputo, 2000).

The problem of negotiating competing paradigms was highlighted when the youth in the inquiry raised the problem of determining how to act in the face of contradictory perspectives on the issue of global warming.

Frankie: Jericha-Fay’s Woodworking teacher doesn’t believe in global warming and what Al Gore said and stuff. And I saw the movie “An Inconvenient Truth” and I like really believe it and so we’re both like pretty opposed about it but I guess neither one of us is wrong, it’s just like what we heard and like how we thought of it. It’s just weird, like it’s the same idea and two people can take it in completely different directions from their experiences and things. …I never really know what’s right anymore. …I can’t figure it out for myself because it requires all these studies and all this scientific knowledge; so how am I supposed to establish my own views about global warming and things like that?

Frankie voices a dilemma about how to decide between conflicting perspectives. She indicates that a person’s experiences in the world influence their perspective. She also suggests that she feels responsible for crafting an opinion to represent her “own view” and wants to align with “what’s right.” Thus, taking a position on the issue of global warming becomes an ethical dilemma; a question that seeks right action.

Jericha-Fay echoes Frankie’s struggle:

Jericha-Fay: I’m very confused about the message of global warming. It’s obvious to me that climate change is happening, but both sources [Woodworking teacher and Al Gore] seem to know what they’re talking about. It’s confusing to have to
believe one or the other. But on the whole, why should it matter if global warming is happening or not? Shouldn’t we be doing things to preserve our planet anyway? Or do you have to know for sure and have reliable sources to back up your actions? …It’s kind of hard to believe people when you know that everybody has an agenda. Everybody has some reason to do what they’re doing.

Frankie and Jericha-Fay struggle with judging perspectives; with knowing who or what to believe. Jericha-Fay indicates that she feels the urge to decide how to act without certain knowledge but also appreciates that she cannot possibly know and that she must act anyway. She indicates that she believes there are things she can do that are good for the planet and do not require that she take a position on global warming in order to act.

Global warming is a good example of a singularity. Jericha-Fay’s query regarding whether we need to know with certainty before we can act on issues such as global warming – issues for which the long-term consequences of our actions cannot be known in the present – evokes the problem of acting without certain knowledge. She also notes at the end of her statement, by positing that people’s “agendas” influence the positions they defend, that values – beliefs about what is important – play a big role in people’s thinking. The way in which she speaks of agendas suggests that she is suspicious that often people take positions on issues in pursuit of individual gain. This brings us back to Romeo’s query about the store owner’s action and Frankie’s assertion that action is connected to benefits. The question then turns to for whom is knowledge/action for?

Thayer-Bacon (2003) reminds us that the historical separation in Euro-western philosophy, science, and religion that places nature in the ‘other’ category in contrast and

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85 Singularity refers to the wholly other, that which is more than merely new; that which we cannot yet know (Caputo, 2000).
opposition to humans makes possible the exploitation of the environment for man’s purposes.

**Cycling Around: Exploring Dominant Conceptions of Knowledge Upheld and Resisted by Youth and in the Researcher’s Research Practices: The End of Ethics**

Caputo invites a way of thinking about the knowledge/action transactional relation that resists the compulsion for certain knowing in dominant conceptions of knowledge. He encourages us to join him in declaring an end to ethics. But his “end” does not mean a leveling of laws or a calling off of ethics, but of loosening them up, of recognizing the difficulty of making ethical decisions. The end of ethics is affirmative of something yet to come, that which we cannot foresee and orients towards justice as that which is always to come. Caputo (2000) contends, ends where singularity – the wholly other; that which is more than merely new begins.

In the merely new there is nothing really or radically new going on, but only some sort of new example or new instance of a form that is already familiar and in place (Caputo, 2000, pp.175).

Caputo (2000) remarks that it is precisely the singularity of the other – that which is yet to come – which characterizes the ethical situation. In a postmodern world, defined by plurality, the general schemata are in doubt. Thus, things are not as simple as they were when Aristotle composed his ethics. “Aristotle thought the main problem facing ethical judgment lay in the movement from the general schema to the concrete situation, but he did not think there was a crisis in the schemata” (Caputo, 2000, p.182). The singular is idiosyncratic and so resists the resources we have to grasp things, to know them, to master them. When we are faced with a singular situation, we do not have it, but rather it has us. We still need concepts to help us think, but preferably concepts that point to their own inadequacy, concepts that acknowledge that what we attempt to signify always exceeds our grasp (Caputo, 2000).

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86 Caputo (2000) takes issue with pragmatist perspectives that contend that justice is something which we can generally understand; the ideal which results from the end of inquiry that will suffice as an imperfect approximation. He argues that such thinking breeds a complacent state of mind and delusions of having achieved success. I would argue that a feminist pragmatist perspective (e.g., Thayer-Bacon, 2000, 2003a & b, 2006) disrupts the notion of having arrived at an ideal and keeps in motion the need to continually inquire.

87 Caputo’s (1987, 2000) use of ‘other’ is not meant to infer contrast and opposition and distinctions which make possible ‘othering’ (as contemplated in Chapter Six). Rather, ‘other’ for Caputo refers to that which is unthinkable, that which is yet to come.

88 Aristotle’s “schemata” refers to the beliefs and practices we have grown up with (Caputo, 2000) and so are akin to the formative assumptions that I refer to throughout this dissertation.
Artistotle used phronesis to explicate how movement to the concrete particulars of a situation results in an improvement; one would only have to turn to the wise ones (phronimos) to determine how to act in the shifting sands of reality. In our present world, however, where there is “widespread and radical disagreement about the schemata, … the problem the singularity of judgment poses is not a matter of moving from the universal to the particular but of assessing radically singular situations where the general schemata are in doubt” (Caputo, 2000, 182). We need to find a way to move in the world when we don’t know who to turn to. This calls for us to be more radically oriented towards the demands of the singular situation and its surprises.

Rules, codes of conduct, guidelines for practice, or one’s parent demanding that you “do it because I told you to,” can serve to define our sense of duty to self and other. But duties cannot help us grasp singularity because singularity is always beyond our grasp, and reliance on duty inhibits the best which we have to offer one another (Caputo, 2000). Singularity, the wholly other, requires us to turn to the other – that which we do not yet know; that which is outside the horizon of foreseeability. Codes of ethics created for professionals suggests that professionals should be able to and can determine in advance of situations how to enact their professional duties. However, the singularity of the situation – each situation we encounter requires that we be open to that which we do not yet know89 – demands that we approach ethical rules as provisional and in need of continual critique and re-visioning.

The question of guidelines for professionals compels me to return to contemplate how to offer guidance to the youth who are concerned about right action. Jericha-Fay’s

89 Caputo (2005) contends that by embracing uncertainty it is not that we are left inarticulate. There are things we can know, things we can say. We can describe the situation that does not yield to rules and state reasons we have for what we say while acknowledging always that what we say is provisional and tentative.
Woodworking teacher informed her and his other students that in order to live with uncertainty, youth need to become critical thinkers.

Jericha-Fay: Like, after my Woodworking teacher talked about it [his denial of global warming] for an hour he said, “I’m not saying this to scare you or to sway your opinion a whole lot; I am saying this to make sure that you all grow up to be critical thinkers, that you analyze everything and that you question everything.” …I guess it’s just good to be a critical thinker.

The notion of critical thinking has proliferated education in the past several years. One should ask though, what purposes do critical thinking, as typically defined and promoted, serve? Does critical thinking merely promote skepticism in which we feel justified to argue against everything posited by another, or does critical thinking help us negotiate perspectives?

Thayer-Bacon (2000) has explored the way in which critical thinking has been positioned and enacted in education. Her feminist redescription of critical thinking takes exception with critical thinking’s reliance on reason as the only tool we use to think. In positing an alternative – constructive thinking – Thayer-Bacon (2000) invokes the inclusion of intuition, imagination and emotions as tools also crucial to thinking.

“All inquiry begins with emotion and imagination;” it is emotion and imagination that motivate and inspire us to achieve beauty, goodness, and truths (Thayer-Bacon, 2000, p.154).

Critical thinkers, from the dominant definition of critical thinking90, are people who employ reason and logic to become good problem solvers. The Eurowestern tradition of viewing reason as the most objective tool for thinking goes back to ancient Greece and is

90 Critical thinking gained momentum in the early 1960s when Robert Ennis attempted to define aspects and dimensions of critical thinking (Thayer-Bacon, 2000, p.1). At that time, America was very much concerned about the threat of communism and the need to protect democracy and critical thinking was viewed as a tool to help protect Americans from indoctrination that would interfere with their definitions of truth and justice.
rooted in the assumption that knowers can be separated from the known; objective
knowledge is unbiased by experiences.

Thayer-Bacon (2000) argues that critical thinking’s reliance on reason as the only
tool for constructing knowledge and its separation of the knower from the known has
meant that vital tools that help us think have been ignored or diminished; tools such as
imagination, intuition, and emotion. She posits that thinking is socially constructed and
that knowledge is simultaneously both personal and public. By insisting that the knower
cannot be separated from the known, Thayer-Bacon (2000) acknowledges that “the ideas
we have do not come out of a vacuum; they come from our experiences and transactions
with others” (p. 7). People’s experiences cannot be separated from their ideas.

Aligned with the tradition of considering knowledge to be “purer” than action (per
Minnich, 2005), access to truth via reliance on reason alone turns attention to disciplines
(practices of thinking) that are furthest removed from direct experience: those of
mathematics and Philosophy.

The critical thinker has been most closely associated with the image of Rodin’s
Thinker, a “solitary, able-bodied, healthy (therefore not poor), solitary male who is using
his mind to logically reason through his problem to find the Truth” (Thayer-Bacon, 2000,
p.144). In proposing a quilting bee as an alternate metaphor to that of Rodin’s Thinker,
Thayer-Bacon (2000) describes in analogic form, “tools” in addition to reason (i.e.,
intuition, imagination and emotion) which are used to think constructively.

Intuition is used to pull ideas together in the same way that needles and thread
connect material. “Intuition helps us move through our thoughts and feelings and make
sense of our experiences” to understand how ideas relate to one another (Thayer-Bacon,
Thus, intuition takes what has been measured, ordered and held in place and helps us begin the work of shaping.

Imagination is a tool that provides the variety of sources for ideas and thoughts. Variety points to the patterns and designs of thoughts. Imagination invites us to get involved with thinking with others for the potential sources for our thoughts are almost limitless and through varied sources we develop greater insight; but we must be receptive and attempt to appreciate other patterns through exercising care.

Emotions are also crucial to thinking. Emotions are ever-present and are what stir us to have doubts and concerns, thus providing the colours and textures of ideas. Through imbuing ideas with vibrancy and energy, emotions stir us and move us to act; they provide the felt need to think. Emotions remind us that the body is not separate from the mind and so our bodies are involved in creating knowledge just as we embody our knowledge as we interact with the world, which includes others.

Reason provides us with rulers, scissors, and straight pins. Reason helps us straighten and order material (ideas) and hold the pieces of material together until they can be sewn together. We need reason to help us decide which of our ideas to leave in and which to remove. The pins hold our ideas into place so that we can occasionally step back and look at our thinking from a distance. Reason is what we use to critique our ideas once we have pulled them together. Reason also helps us to fit our ideas together in a coherent fashion. We need intuition, imagination, emotions and reason to think constructively.

There are, of course, many other ways of thinking about and talking about the relations between knowledge and action. I have chosen to focus attention on a few
theorists whose work, I believe, has informed new ways of thinking about and enacting possibilities in education. I turn my attention to that contemplation in the next chapter.

Responding to Jericha-Fay’s Question

There is so much to think about in contemplating the transactional relation of knowledge and action. My response to Jericha-Fay’s question about the need to know for sure and have reliable sources to back up one’s actions would be something like this:

Your question prompted action for me by setting in motion a contemplation of the web of relations between thinking, knowing, and acting reflected in your question. Through thinking about knowledge as being simultaneously for, as, and from action, I have come to see that we are always in action. Thinking is a form of action. Questioning is also an act; it is thought’s movement. And while we might think we need to turn to authority, to absolute knowledge in order to act, we can appropriately include our perspectives in determining action when we turn to others to inquire into, critique and negotiate what it is we take to be knowledge. As you already acknowledged, we do not have to wait for certain knowledge, for evidence of benefits in order to act. Turn to your emotions, intuition, imagination in your encounters with others and incorporate those tools along with your use of reason to make choices about how to act.

I am grateful to you for your willingness to take up the difficult problem of how to respond to the singularity of global warming. My son will be living with you in the world beyond my tenure here. I believe that by continuing to ask questions like the ones you posed in our inquiry together you will find ways to act despite the impossibility of knowing in the present, and your actions will influence the future.

I would leave her with these words of another thinking friend:

In the realm of thinking, as in that of action, nothing is ever finally settled. Whenever thinking seems to reach a conclusion, to lead into knowledge, another thought, another question, another feeling, another voice emerges. There is always another way to turn an idea, another perspective on a phenomenon, a different conceptual approach to explore, a fresh and startlingly suggestive example to be taken into account. …To some, the open-endedness of thinking and the dissolving effects of critique seem to make action more difficult. …[Remember that every conversation] is a new beginning and, indeed, an enactment, a practice of the ends we seek.

Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich (2005, pp.273-276)
PART III: EXTENDING THE INQUIRY

CHAPTER EIGHT: TO SET IN MOTION LESSONS FROM THE INQUIRY

Reflecting back on the purposes stated for this research, the explorations in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven illustrated some of the ways in which the youth in this inquiry experience conceptions of knowledge in their lives and how they take up and resist some dominant conceptions of knowledge. Another purpose for this inquiry was to gain insights into my own research practice through the process of engaging the inquiry with youth. In addition to the text boxes woven throughout Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, I will reflect upon lessons learned with respect to my research in Chapter Nine.

The third objective I had for this inquiry was for it to generate some recommendations for facilitating inquiry into conceptions of knowledge in schools. The recommendations I offer in this chapter extend the explorations in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven with respect to how unexamined assumptions about knowledge may be embodied in schools by teachers and students. Since teaching and learning encounters are largely about how people come to know things and how they interact with one another around knowledge, in this chapter I will also connect the explorations from this inquiry to teaching-learning encounters.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to respond succinctly and meaningfully to the teaching and learning dynamic, which featured in much of what the youth discussed in the inquiry. The recommendations I propose are supported once again by the work of Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich and Barbara Thayer-Bacon – the two feminist pragmatist philosophers whose work has both supported my desire to bring this inquiry to life, and informed how I made sense of the inquiry. Alongside what they say about living with
uncertainty and negotiating plurality, I add the voice of Deborah Britzman who has written extensively about teaching and teacher education.

The considerations I posit are grounded in the assumption that education is knowledge work and although conceptions of knowledge are reflected in our education\textsuperscript{91} discourse, we tend to talk \textit{around} them rather than \textit{about} them in teaching-learning encounters\textsuperscript{92}. We are particularly unlikely to talk explicitly about conceptions of knowledge in interaction with high school students in classrooms\textsuperscript{93}. It is important that in addition to working \textit{with} knowledge, that educators nurture the development of opinions \textit{about} knowledge (Minnich, 2005).

In developing opinions about knowledge, teachers and students can explore how knowledge is shaped by historical and cultural influences and how many, if not all, of our formative assumptions about knowledge tend to be held implicitly and therefore resist critique. Teaching and teacher education have a history of being caught up in defending against uncertainty (Britzman, 2007). Uncertainty, however, holds much promise; it is a productive space in which to linger. Because uncertainty “is the necessary result of openness to what is unique, individual, particular, new” (Minnich, 2005, p.176)

\textsuperscript{91} Although I recognize that education takes place in many settings besides schools, I use the term education here to refer to formal education contexts: K-12 schools and post-secondary institutions.

\textsuperscript{92} By suggesting that the problem of knowledge is not taken up by educators, I do not mean to assert that individual teachers are responsible for what does and does not happen in institutions of education. I recognize that no one operates in isolation of the influences of systems and social processes which limit their ability to think and act. I hope that in my recommendations some teachers will read affirmation of their current practices and others will accept the invitation to take up the problem of knowledge, or take it up differently, for themselves, \textit{and} for and with their students.

\textsuperscript{93} I realize that some high schools offer courses in philosophy (or IB Theory of Knowledge) but argue that many students graduate from high school without ever confronting questions about what knowledge means, where knowledge comes from, and who knows; questions which are intimately related to how we live in the world.
uncertainty should be thought of as our human condition (Britzman, 2007). Minnich (2005) asserts that education should aim to remove too-empowering certainties.

Since my propositions about the implications of this inquiry and the considerations for education which I derive from it are grounded in my assumptions about the purposes of education, I turn now to express what it is that I take to be the purposes of education.

The Purposes of Education

The purposes of education are expressed in varied and multiple ways. My expression of the purpose for education is grounded in the assumption that how we think about knowledge affects most everything we do in educational interactions.

Stated succinctly, I propose that the purpose of education is this: Education should help us learn how to live with the difficulty of life; to act without requiring certainty in the face of flux and plurality. From this perspective, living with uncertainty becomes a virtue that can be fostered through formal education: the engendering of open and enlarged minds that are responsive to what is unique, unfamiliar, particular, and singular.\(^94\)

While Britzman (2007) asserts that frustration is an inevitable result of feeling uncertain, I would argue that feelings of frustration in the face of uncertainty are learned and derive from dominant conceptions of knowledge which prompt us to protect against being revealed as unknowing. We are frustrated by our inability to achieve that which is

\(^{94}\) The singular refers to that which is not yet known.
supposed to be achievable – certain knowledge\textsuperscript{95}. Just as we have learned to feel frustrated in the face of uncertainty, we can unlearn that response.

Britzman (2007) poses the question of what choosing uncertainty would look like in teacher education and teaching. Teachers learn very early that professional guidelines for practice cannot come close to resembling the complexity of classroom life. They know that the material covered in textbooks is not sufficient to convey to students how to live in the world. Teacher education has a role to play in assisting teachers to describe and respond to the complexity and uncertainty that imbues teaching practice; to find ways that resist fixing teachers and their practices.

Thayer-Bacon (2003) asserts that school tends to focus on the desired results, rather than the processes by which we think, make meaning, and construct knowledge with others. The youth in this inquiry suggested that their school experiences tend to teach mainly the ends of thinking. When knowledge in schools is positioned as the ends of knowledge (i.e., subject content as knowledge) rather than the process of how knowledge becomes, the implicit message to students is that once they have taken up what is considered to be knowledge in a subject area, they can rest from thinking. Such an orientation to knowledge negates that the difficulty of life demands ongoing participation in keeping questions astir.

This inquiry highlights some of the implications associated with not fostering the ability to live with the difficulty of life and how this can be revisioned in teaching-learning encounters.

\textsuperscript{95} Remember that an orientation to uncertainty, to the fallibility of knowledge does not imply that a person can withdraw from participating in negotiating knowledge that comes to be; rather, it demands participation because it is only through coming together with others that we can live with the difficulty of life.
Implications for Teaching-Learning Encounters

Britzman (2007) states that teaching needs to be reconsidered in light of the fact that it takes place in schools which tend to reflect 19th Century thinking in their encounters with 21st Century children. Britzman’s (2007) assertion returns us to my initial curiosity regarding knowledge: namely, might youth today adhere less to dominant conceptions of knowledge than previous generations because they have been born into a postmodern world; a world of plurality, mistrust in grand narratives, and a plethora of information conveyed amidst rapid change in what is considered knowledge? The youth in this inquiry suggested that dominant conceptions of knowledge do influence their interactions with teachers, peers, and knowledge in schools, but they also resist dominant conceptions of knowledge more than I have done myself until recently and more than I suspect many previous generations have done. However, the issues of autonomy, rationality, and absolute authority are still in play in the ways youth experience knowledge in the world.

If we learn through embeddedness in our social and cultural milieu the lessons of dominant conceptions of knowledge – that we should be able to know ourselves and others transparently, that we can and should be able to develop opinions as though they are ours alone, that objective knowledge is possible and derived solely from the application of reason, that only some people are capable of rationality and deemed knowers (sufficiently of age and “natural” intelligence), then we most likely will embody those beliefs in teaching-learning interactions.

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96 In referring to 21st Century students I imply my belief that young people today live in a postmodern world; a world of plurality, mistrust in grand narratives, and a plethora of information conveyed amidst rapid change in what is considered knowledge.
This exploration of how these assumptions shape teaching-learning interactions is organized in three interrelated parts: first, I will posit how dominant conceptions of knowledge influence how teachers and students come to know one another in teaching-learning interactions; second, I will suggest how dominant conceptions of knowledge shape how teachers and students interact around knowledge work; and third, I will propose how together these impede pursuit of the purpose of education: namely, how teachers and students learn together how to live with uncertainty and practice negotiating plurality. In each of these turns, I will invoke the lessons learned and articulated through my engagement with youth (represented in the preceding four chapters).

**Coming to Know One Another in Teaching-Learning Encounters**

The primary dominant conception of knowledge that shapes how teachers and students come to know one another in teaching-learning encounters involves the assumption that one should be able to know oneself and others transparently. A belief in the possibility of absolute knowledge supports the notion that one should be transparent to oneself; that it is possible to achieve certain knowledge of oneself and therefore, also certain knowledge of others. When one feels uncertain about who oneself is, feelings of uncertainty are more likely to provoke retreat from engagement rather than participation in inquiry. When one feels uncertain about who an other is, feelings of uncertainty are more likely to provoke turning to stereotypes, external appearances, or making assumptions based on language used by an other, than to being open to other.

Alternately, when the teaching-learning relationship is infused with conceptions of self that hold self and other to always be in a state of becoming, a different orientation toward self and other is engendered; an orientation that lives with uncertainty. If
teaching-learning encounters reflect acceptance that we never arrive at certain knowing of self or other, that persons are always in the process of becoming in relations with different people across the contexts in which they live their lives, then teachers and students are invited to engage together in the process of *coming to know*.

When beliefs about self and other as knowable entities are enacted in teaching-learning encounters, it becomes easy to pay little attention to the process of coming to know one another. When teachers assume to know their students they may neglect the important act of reflecting back students’ realities, something that is necessary for students to feel like teachers are responding to their needs (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006).

There were several occasions during the inquiry with youth when the youth exclaimed, “Teachers need to hear this!” Most often, their exclamations were in relation to feeling like teachers did not seem interested in getting to know their students beyond what was demanded of school/classroom definitions of the learning task. Julio, a Grade 12 student, was particularly vocal about his disappointment:

> It just really bothered me the entire year that teachers didn’t want to get to know their students; they just kind of wanted to do their job. And I think part of their job should be getting to know their students. …The counselors were really good …but I think teachers should, even more so, because we see a lot more of them.

> I’m the only one [who will be] paying for my own post-secondary education, I have to work. …It was frustrating that they didn’t understand – I wasn’t asking for less work, I wasn’t asking for extensions, I just wanted them to understand like this is what I’m going through right now; will you cut me some slack or just tell me how you can help me, just give me extra attention.

> I thought teachers were supposed to help us get further in life. …Life is far more important than a letter grade.

In addition to how assumptions about knowledge shape how teachers are in teaching-learning encounters, the assumptions they hold about youth also influence their
interactions with students. Assumptions which flow from dominant conceptions of knowledge are perpetuated in some (not all) adolescent development courses. It is important to look at how adolescent development is positioned in teacher education programs because it influences how graduates will enact the teacher role in relation to students.

Youth development courses which position identity as work undertaken only during youth makes it difficult for teachers to find an entry point for developing relationships with students; others with whom they share existence as relational beings. Teachers are then constrained in their ability to think in terms of themselves as becoming in relation to their students and colleagues, just as students are becoming in their relations with teachers and peers in schools.

Further, theories of development often contain traces of adultism which suggest, somewhat paradoxically, that the healthy development of youth depends upon adult assistance (i.e., left to their own devices, children and youth will not develop optimally) while also suggesting that youth are autonomous beings who need to strive for independence (a prominent signifier of achieving adulthood in Eurowestern society). Thus, youth are simultaneously and paradoxically positioned as incapable of looking after their own development and yet also expected to be in charge of their own development. One of the ways that this can be enacted in teaching-learning encounters is that teachers may come to see their role as that of ensuring that youth make the right choices. This may compel teachers to determine in advance what the “right choices” are and preclude inquiry with youth into the complexities of their lives and the myriad choices that might be appropriate in particular situations.
Another way in which dominant conceptions of knowledge tend to be embodied in some development theories is positioning identity as singular and stable. The implicit message is that youth should be able to articulate who they are and the ability to assert knowledge of self is taken to indicate that one has arrived at an achieved identity. Such depictions of identity neglect the relationality of being; the fact that we are always in the process of becoming in interactions with different people across the various contexts in which we live our lives.

Many development textbooks will also suggest that the type of identity one should achieve is dictated by one’s culture and that cultural values are beyond questioning. So, for example, when individualism is noted as a value within North American culture, it is not accompanied by critique of the problems that individualist perspectives pose for living with one another. I propose that identity is better thought of as a construct that helps us think about being in a way that should help us also to resist fixing ourselves and others.

The assumptions underlying dominant conceptions of knowledge interfere with teachers becoming allies for youth in their development process. Positioning teaching as identity work asks teachers to take on the role of development allies who negotiate meaning with youth through shared authority and shared responsibility (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006).

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97 It is beyond the scope of this discussion to include a thorough analysis of textbooks used in youth development courses. They are certain to be varied and include psychological, cultural, and postmodern approaches to development. What I hope that this discussion will accomplish, in conjunction with the preceding chapters, is to invite teacher educators to look at the ways in which the texts in their programs take up or trouble dominant conceptions of knowledge.
Interacting Around Knowledge Work in Teaching-Learning Encounters

Three related assumptions underpin much of what happens in teaching-learning encounters with respect to interacting around knowledge work. These three assumptions were illustrated in the inquiry and are: the knower can be separated from the known; reason is the means by which knowledge is produced; and knowledge should feel certain. These assumptions are grounded in an individualist perspective which posits that the individual is an autonomous, rational being; one who exists separate from others and is capable of knowledge through the application of reason.

Dominant conceptions of knowledge posit that absolute knowledge is possible; it is objective knowledge derived through the application of reason which helps one to feel certain. Absolute, objective knowledge denies the importance of particular experience because experience cannot be objective. The privileging of reason as the tool by which knowledge is obtained denies the existence and credibility of other tools for creating knowledge, such as intuition, emotions and imagination (and whatever knowing derives from the use of these tools). Privileging reason also supports the privileging of “intelligence” in teaching-learning encounters which includes paying considerable attention to discerning who has sufficient intelligence (i.e., the innate ability to employ reason) and who has not. Absolute, objective knowledge derived through reason should enable one to feel certain about what one knows.

Both the denial of the role of experience in knowledge and the lack of variety of tools purported to generate knowledge play out in teaching-learning encounters in particular ways. First, knowledge is positioned as subject content; subject matter is considered sufficiently objective to be passed on to those who need knowledge. Subject
matter as knowledge positions knowledge as a thing rather than a process. When knowledge is positioned as subject content, there is little room for teachers and students to bring into teaching-learning encounters their experiences in the world. When knowledge is positioned as a thing, it is easy to fall into seeing teaching-learning encounters as involving the transmission of knowledge from teacher (deemed a sufficiently valid knower to enact the role of transmitter) to student (the invalid knower who is in need of knowledge). Privileging reason as the means to arrive at knowledge prompts teachers and students to get caught up in hiding whatever might suggest they are lacking in intelligence and/or the means to counter one’s lack of intelligence: hard work. Finally, since one should feel certain about what one knows, feelings of uncertainty must derive from one’s own incapacities (either lack of intelligence or insufficient effort) rather than complexity and flux. I will consider each of these propositions in turn.

Knowledge as Subject Content

Subject knowledge reflects only some of what we need to live in the world. Minnich (2005) asserts that curriculum needs to move away from supporting circular definitions of fields of study98 to include open, critical investigations of fields. This inquiry indicated that students would like teachers to invite them to define and pursue their own questions, locate the sources and kinds of information that provokes thinking creatively; that resists locking in definitions and opens instead to the complexity of evolving questions about what subject matter could be about.

98 Minnich (2005) uses the term circular definitions to depict how most fields define their content: it is what teachers in that field teach. The problem with circular definitions of fields is that by reiterating the definitions, the field does not merely justify itself, it also invokes the definition’s authority to prohibit questions. Thus what we expect within a subject field continues to make irrelevant or obscure, all that we are not expecting to see there.
The youth in this inquiry indicated that they want more than subject knowledge from their time spent in school. They stated that knowledge is positioned in schools as that which is contained in textbooks and curricula. The youth noted that what contributes most to the opinions they develop are their experiences in the world. They recognize that what is offered in schools does not invite contemplation of their multiple and varied experiences in the world. They want to engage with the big questions about truth and meaning; they want school to be about how to live in the world.

When knowledge is taken to be a thing, the employment of a transmission model of knowledge in schools makes sense. A transmission model of knowledge conceives knowledge to be entities which can be imparted to students via a competent, knowledgeable source (i.e., the teacher). A transmission model of knowledge positions knowledge as something that can be reduced to its parts and then built up in a sequential fashion. A transmission model also perpetuates the separation of the knower from the known and denies that knowledge is generated in relations within particular contexts (Eisner, 2002).

While no one would likely deny that many examples of resistance to this model are enacted in classrooms today, the youth in this inquiry suggested that knowledge is still experienced by students this way in schools. The problem with treating knowledge as a thing is that it turns knowledge into an object rather than a process. Objectifying knowledge keeps us at a safe distance from the flux of the world (Caputo, 1987) and thus confounds us when it comes to the need to negotiate plurality.
Embodying “Intelligence” or “Merit”

Teachers and students can get caught up in defending themselves, struggling to determine what degree of risk to take in exposing what they do or do not know. They feel the need to defend themselves against being judged as lacking or falling short of expectations; to prevent the unveiling of oneself as incapable of absolute knowledge.

If teachers learn that their role is to be the “expert” knower in classrooms, then it is little wonder that they might feel compelled to always demonstrate self-control, have mastery over the objects of knowledge, and capably exert control over others. The notion of “expert” knower has been referred to as a myth by Minnich (2005) and Thayer-Bacon (2008). Supposed “experts” possess the desired characteristic of strength and are always capable of action because they have anticipated the situation in advance and predetermined an appropriate choice of action. Non-experts are viewed as vulnerable to the unexpected and unsure about how to act. Being seen as a non-expert is an undesirable position for teachers (and other professionals). The myth of the expert, by asserting the self-directedness of the individual, supports a definition of professional liberty as freedom from the interference of others. The myth of the expert compels us to strive to be seen as independent and not in need of others’ help, to refrain from asking too many or “stupid” questions, to respond to others’ questions with definitive answers, to enter discussions intent upon asserting what we know, to pursue supervisory roles in order to exert power over others, to defend the definitions of the subject fields in which we want to be seen as an expert, and to refrain from sharing ideas with others for fear that they might take credit for one’s “own” ideas.
When the myth of the expert is enacted in classrooms, students can feel unsafe to engage in questioning – and without questioning, which is thought’s movement, authentic engagement is inhibited. Teachers worry that revealing their own questions and uncertainties will diminish their authority in the classroom (Thayer-Bacon, 2008). Avoiding questions in teaching-learning interactions supports beliefs in the existence of absolute knowledge/authoritative knowledge/universal knoweldge\(^9^9\) because without questions, we are led to believe that the “real” answers are either already in front of us, or that they exist but our own inadequacies prevent us from seeing them.

Thayer-Bacon (2008) highlights the difficult positioning teachers endure in schools. She contends that teachers are expected to be The Authority in their classrooms, while recognizing simultaneously that their authority is always second to that of their administrators, legislators, and parents. This situation makes it very difficult for North American teachers to be able to share authority with students. Teachers are expected to manage the behaviour of students and ensure the safety of all but they find it difficult to integrate means for students to assume responsibility for their own behaviour because the system in which they practice advises them that above all, they must not lose control.

The notion of intelligence is used to explain why so many people (teachers and students) are unable to become experts; an explanation that places blame solely on the individual. Minnich (2005) reminds us that intelligence is a mystified concept\(^1^0^0\) which derives from and is supported by circular reasoning (i.e., intelligence is what intelligence tests test). Because education reflects the dominant definition (albeit mystified and

\(^9^9\) Whenever we attempt to sift out what makes unity of understanding difficult, we can be said to be striving for absolute or authoritative (inarguable) or universal (Truth) knowledge (Caputo, 1987)

\(^1^0^0\) Intelligence is conflated with the naturalized capacity for rationality, which is itself a concept with many meanings, none of which are agreed upon by everyone (Minnich, 2005).
narrowly defined) of intelligence, teachers and students in teaching-learning interactions will often end up feeling inadequate and inept when their particular ways of making sense are neither acknowledged nor extended in educative encounters. The notion of intelligence as an innate trait that represents capacity to reason gets played out in education encounters through considerable attention aimed at determining who “possesses” intelligence and who does not. People with less intelligence are viewed as lacking the prerequisites needed to become experts.

When we enact assumptions about intelligence in teaching-learning interactions we might do things such as taking great precautions to avoid making mistakes and hiding from others any mistakes that we do make. We are also likely to view discussions as win/lose situations and hold as more intelligent, those people who “win” the most arguments, who are best able to establish an impregnable position. In order to disrupt dominant conceptions, teachers and students can engage together in questioning why a university professor is considered to be more intelligent than, say, a plumber, child care worker, hair stylist, teacher, secretary, garbage collector, or store clerk. The types of occupations held up as representing “success” are also infused with ideas about who is more and less intelligent.

As mentioned earlier, effort tends to be positioned as an antidote to supposed lack of intelligence. If one is not “naturally” able to succeed through the gift of intelligence, success will be possible if one just works hard enough. It is not an uncommon experience for post-secondary instructors to have students demand A’s because the

101 Caputo (1997) reminds us that the logic of the argument (logocentrism) ends up brushing aside whatever seems irrelevant to the argument. Thinking that uses the argument to structure and confirm knowledge, inhibits, neutralizes, and stills the play of possibilities.
students feel they have put in sufficient effort to warrant a high grade. Alternately, students who accept that academic abilities are innate might give up when they first feel challenged by trying to understand a concept or when they receive a low assessment of their learning. Merit is another myth that gets enacted in teaching-learning encounters (Thayer-Bacon, 2008). Like intelligence, the myth of merit is premised upon individualism. The notion of merit denies that systems opportune different people in different ways. It is very difficult to revise structures that make success for some more likely than for others when school success is predicated upon the myth of merit. Proposals to change structures may be vetoed because they are viewed as supporting people who are assumed to be unwilling to work hard (e.g., providing opportunities for students to do make-up exams; providing after-school tutoring for students, encouraging students’ cooperative work). Again, we see how easily success can be positioned as a personal responsibility when the autonomous individual is expected to take charge of his or her own life in order to reap benefits. The individual (student and teacher) is held as solely responsible for his or her own success or failure.

Competitive structures are often employed in schools to encourage students (and teachers) to assert their intelligence and to work hard. Along with the innateness of “intelligence,” competition is also largely unquestioned in North American culture because the urge to compete is seen as an innate drive. However, competition has a way of provoking students (and teachers) to view their peers as potential obstacles to their own success. Their attention then focuses on avoiding failure within the established
“reward” boundaries, and collaborative efforts are judged according to the likelihood that cooperation will help one compete (Magnuson, 1999).102

Educators should be mindful of how they might inadvertently enact the myths of intelligence and merit in their teaching-learning encounters. Attention should also be paid to the structures within teaching-learning encounters that make competition appear to students to be the only way to succeed. To provide opportunities for students to experience how knowledge is co-constructed with others, individualism must be diminished and shared responsibility for success foregrounded in interactions.

**Practicing Negotiating Plurality in Teaching-Learning Encounters**

Dominant conceptions of knowledge can lead students and teachers to believe that they must choose between absolute knowledge (i.e., through reason we can discover Truth/objective knowledge), and naïve relativism (i.e., espouse the view that every perspective/opinion is equally good). Both orientations preclude the need to negotiate perspectives with others to arrive at better judgment. I argue, however, that we tend to not see social negotiation of plurality as an option because few of us ever got to experience in school how pluralism can be negotiated.

In their comments about participating in the inquiry, the youth indicate that they do not have opportunities in school to explore what knowledge means, where knowledge comes from, and who knows. I contend that such opportunities are necessary stepping-stones to practicing negotiating plurality.

Ruby (Grade 11): I’ll always think about it. It’s about thinking and every day we think. I never really thought about knowledge; it was just knowledge. It was a

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102 Some “cooperative” goal structures in schools actually turn opportunities for experiencing interdependence into opportunities for success at competition. Such goal structures promote “toxic” interdependence (Magnuson, 1999).
different way of looking at it. Like thinking just that it was more out there every
day and not in a box. I really liked the group discussions. It was a chance to talk.
I’m not really much of a talker, but I like to listen. …People tell their stories and I
like storytelling. I like listening to stories and it gives you something to think
about.

Romeo (Grade 11): I learned a lot of different perspectives in how teens and
young people can contribute so much to the world. …It just gives you a new
perspective of learning but learning in a way that’s really useful. … I’ve learned
way more from that than from like school in general. …Here you can talk about
your own experiences and we just all gather and it’s just like an enriched
conversation. Teachers have to follow a certain curriculum or cover certain topics
so it still limits kind of some sort of knowledge. And once it’s like systematic
then creativity doesn’t really come in. I know like for me, when I’m at school,
some of my creative side kind of just shuts down, just cause I’m there and it’s just
so structured, everything is in order, I just get tired.

Payton (Grade 9): I really thought about knowledge and knowing, which I haven’t
considered before. …One of the things that really stood out for me was how
everyone can think their own opinion but once somebody else voices their opinion
yours can change. …Probably it will be the most helpful when it comes to my
emotions and keeping an open mind.

Jericha-Fay (Grade 9): You see it [knowledge] everywhere all of the sudden.
…Kind of like in biology when you study the digestive system and then you eat
something and you think about that and it feels weird and you get all like twitchy
and stuff. …And you see it differently – like learning how to do something in
woodwork, it was like “Yeah, I’m learning this” and you don’t really think about
you’re gaining knowledge. All the sudden everything is in kind of a different
perspective. … I think it is very important to explore ideas about knowledge and
knowing because it is an everyday aspect in everyone’s lives, and you just don’t
notice it until you begin to explore it. It's like when you learn a new word;
suddenly it is everywhere.

Paige (Grade 12): I’ve thought about things now that would have never entered
my mind before the project. I actually put my mind to work to think. I'll always
be questioning ideas about knowledge and knowing.

Frankie (Grade 9): It’s like once you start thinking about it [knowledge], it’s like
everywhere and you think so much more about it that it’s kind of a different
process, the whole thing. Like if someone was teaching me a language and I was
trying to think about how I was learning that language, in a way it might make it
easier, but it also might make it more complicated to assess the way I’m taking in
these thoughts and stuff.
Julio (Grade 12): It [the inquiry] was really cool because it’s not what I do every day and in theatre and in class I don’t usually get to speak up and say like in-depth for minutes at a time, “This is what I think, this is what I think, this is what I think.” …But not my thoughts on theatre, not my thoughts on this literature, but my thoughts on life.\(^{103}\)

Vladimir (Grade 11): I don’t think that it did that much, opened my eyes to new concepts because I took the “Theory of Knowledge” course. And I think in that course it was basically divide knowledge into different components of knowledge and ways of knowing and kind of like different components of that, so it wasn’t that hard to understand all this, what we did over spring break. But I think what is pretty interesting is the part where, I think the first day, in which we basically listed what other people think of what adults think of us and what we think of what adults think of us and then I think cause over there – it looked like we all had kind of negative connotations but I don’t, rarely actually express it, it gets kind of passively accepted as is. …It just gives me an insight into what other people see that we think that they don’t express on a day-to-day basis.\(^{104}\)

Additional Considerations for Teaching-Learning Encounters

When we look at the ways in which dominant conceptions of knowledge can be embodied in teaching-learning encounters we can see that how we are with one another is inextricably related to how we interact around the idea of knowledge.

An appropriate starting point that helps disrupt dominant conceptions of knowledge would involve re-titling teacher education courses with “Youth” Development rather than “Adolescent” Development.\(^{105}\) The terms adolescent and adolescence frame the high school years as a period in life of which the primary purpose is in moving

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\(^{103}\) Minnich (2005) states that opportunities that permit one to bring their personal experiences into spaces where knowledge is negotiated with others serves to free us. She contends that “There is something very powerful in the direct, nontheoretical turn to speaking oneself with others who really listen” (2005, p.254).

\(^{104}\) Vladimir’s comments depart somewhat from the other youth. He has taken an International Baccalaureate course which he describes as explaining the “components of knowledge” which, to him, provided him with knowledge about knowledge so that the inquiry didn’t open his “eyes to new concepts.” At the same time, however, he notes that he was provoked to think anew about some aspects of knowledge.

\(^{105}\) In my writing here I switch to employ my preferred terminology (“Youth”) although I recognize that many teacher education courses on development still use the term “Adolescent.”
towards adulthood and in doing so, deny the important and valuable stage of life that youth are in.

It is important to look carefully at the conceptions of knowledge that are reflected in course texts used in youth development courses and think about how they position the teaching-learning relationship. Do they suggest that developmental theories can be used by teachers to “identify” and “explain” the youth they will encounter in their classrooms? Do they position teachers in the role of setting the “right” example, of telling youth what constitutes “right” and “wrong” and in doing so, neglect to acknowledge the difficulty of living in a world characterized by flux?

Fortunately, some helpful examples already exist for how to teach youth development without reifying dominant conceptions of knowledge (c.f., Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). These authors posit developmental theories as entry points for inquiring into and negotiating understandings with youth. To disrupt the hold of dominant conceptions of knowledge, educators can engage collaborative inquiry with their students to gain insight into how youth make meaning of what happens in their lives. After youth perspectives have been generously heard, educators can propose alternative meanings without taking the position of the Authority, the one who knows.

We can begin to loosen the hold of the myth of the expert within teacher education programs by refraining to include the term “expert” in our discourse and to reposition the question of being knowledgeable as that of engaging the process of coming to know with others. We can assert as unnecessary the idea that knowledge serves desire for power over objects and others by turning to examples from our history and other
traditions in which knowledge is supported by renunciation, gentleness and acceptance rather than mastery (Minnich, 2005; Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

We can commit to surfacing and questioning beliefs about knowledge. To set the tone for relationality, shared responsibility, and collective inquiry it is helpful to emphasize early and frequently in interactions with students that the knowledge created in the collective space is a shared responsibility and depends upon the willingness of each and every person to participate in surfacing and questioning beliefs. In my teaching practice I begin each class by writing this phrase on the board:

\textit{We see and hear with our beliefs, and we never think alone}.\(^{106}\)

Emphasizing a commitment to shared responsibility helps many students to feel less vulnerable in exposing their beliefs. Educators may feel uncertain about facilitating inquiry into conceptions of knowledge. They must begin by letting go of the notion that one must be an expert on knowledge before one can begin to facilitate discussion about it.

The facilitation of inquiry into knowledge with youth in classrooms should be guided by the application of \textit{caring reasoning} – a commitment to listening generously with the intent to believe one another (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a). It is important that the inquiry not get caught up in positing right and wrong perspectives about knowledge, and instead create an open space for exploring unexamined beliefs and aspects of shared historical traditions that have shaped beliefs. In order to reduce the likelihood that an inquirer will feel compelled to take a defensive stance – a stance supported by the belief that an autonomous self \textit{should} be able to apply reason to arrive at absolute knowledge –

\(^{106}\) This phrase is a combination of quotes from Delpit (1995) and Minnich (2005).
a sense of shared responsibility needs to be engendered in the inquiry space. In other words, the facilitator needs to stress continually that “personal” beliefs are not individual “possessions” – they are historically and culturally situated, but through surfaced beliefs together and questioning beliefs we can begin the work of negotiating what we wish to re-vision.

The importance of a low-risk space for inquiry was affirmed by these comments from the youth post-inquiry:

Paige (Grade 12): I knew I wouldn’t be judged. … When you asked a question, you would listen and we knew you were listening and you wouldn’t try to shove your ideas or opinions onto what we were saying, you accepted it. … When I’m at school and I give input to a subject it almost feels like my peers and/or teachers try to force me to abandon my ideas and just believe what they believe in.

Jericha-Fay (Grade 9): I think this experience was different in a way that people were not perturbed by your opinions, where at school people are more inclined to object to your opinion.

Payton (Grade 9): You’re not worried anyone is going to judge you. Even if it’s not really personal, it’s still important. … It was very different [than school] because there were fewer people and everyone could have a lot more focus put on them individually. In class, sometimes my opinions can be ignored or overlooked because there are so many people who want to voice theirs.

Vladimir (Grade 11): There was only about 10 of us so it was kind of more personal and everyone gets to discuss it more but not that different than what I had in school.

Julio: Youth tend to speak up when they know someone believes in them.

In their comments the youth highlight the importance of opportunities to engage with others in small groups free from fear of judgment. As trust builds in a group, facilitators can insert opportunities to deepen inquiry through challenging some of the ideas raised earlier by participants. It is a good idea to advise participants in advance that the level of
risk might feel higher and also remind them that the ideas that are being challenged are not their own creations; they are not solely responsible for what they believe.

Rather than conveying to students that the task at hand is to understand knowledge, teachers should stress that insight into implicitly held assumptions will be gradual and the value of the inquiry lies within engaging the exploration. Increasing opportunities in classrooms for students to disrupt the notion of certain knowledge about the world and the possibility of arriving once-and-for-all and completely as a knowledgeable person shifts the purpose of engagement in classroom activities from taking up what is “right” to pursuing conceptual movement.

In collaborative inquiry with students teachers can initiate opportunities for practicing negotiating what it is that is taken to be knowledge. Negotiating knowledge can be likened to the process of debate, but in dialogic form without an emphasis on winning through polished argument. The provocative inquiry activities in Appendix A can be used to surface beliefs and facilitate discussion. The practice of negotiation can be nurtured by inviting students to employ varied sets of standards to judge the worth of different opinions about knowledge. Teachers can invite students to join them in paying attention to what gets included and what gets left out when employing different sets of standards. When emphasis is shifted away from arriving at what is right and what is wrong, students’ participation becomes focused on movement of thought.

Teachers can facilitate discussion about knowledge by introducing the ways in which dominant conceptions of knowledge make us believe we have to choose between

\[107\] There are others who we can turn to for more ideas on how to do this; I am able to only offer a few suggestions from my limited experience. Those others likely exist in every context and we should turn to them because we think best when we turn to those around us to think together.
absolutism (objective Truth) and relativism (subjective perspectives) and then introduce the alternative derived from connecting logic: qualified relativism (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

The following sample of questions can be used as entry points to begin moving from thinking about knowledge as something that is, to knowledge as something that becomes and, hence, demands participation:

Where do opinions come from?

If we accept that other people influence the opinions we have, why is it so hard to let go of our opinions when we encounter information or perspectives that put our opinions on shaky ground?

What does it take to change an opinion?

What within the opinions we are contemplating today, do we really believe? What are we less sure about?

Why might statistics be considered “evidence” and our day-to-day experiences count less in making judgments about situations?

If we believed there was no right answer, no universal rule to represent the situation we are discussing, how do you think we might go about talking about this? What might change?

I do not intend to imply that the conversations with students provoked by these kinds of questions will be easy, nor that students will necessarily participate with enthusiasm. As a result of this inquiry I do believe, however, that the challenge of facilitating these types of conversations is largely a consequence of our tendency to not have conversations about knowledge. I argue that we need to commence conversing about knowledge in classrooms in order to create opportunities to practice negotiating knowledge with one another. It is through conversations and inquiry that teachers and students in teaching-learning encounters can come to know knowledge.
Exploring conceptions of knowledge will likely provoke feelings of uncertainty as teachers and students let go of implicitly held assumptions. However, along with uncertainty arises the capacity for increased engagement in learning. Caputo (2000) contends that restoring the difficulty of life will restore love of learning because love of learning involves being impassioned by the passion of non-knowing. Here, in Caputo’s words we can see both-and (connecting) logic at work: we can love knowledge through non-knowing.

Emerging from this study are the following questions which teachers, parents, or pedagogues of any stripe who are interested in sustaining love of learning, may find useful to ask themselves. Questions like the following can help teachers be mindful of how they embody living with uncertainty in teaching-learning encounters. Attending to how they enact restoring the difficulty of life will also support teachers in their facilitation of inquiry in their classrooms.

Do I nurture others’ continuing wonder and awe about the world and love of learning through how I am in the world? Or do I reflect through how I am in the world, that the world is knowable and that certain knowledge is attainable and desireable?

How well do I model a willingness to experience novelty in what seems mundane?

Do I stall the flow of thinking by striving to relate what others say to what is already familiar, or do I open to possibilities within each encounter with others by listening attentively and generously?

Do I actively keep questions astir rather than offering my quick and ready answers?

Do I foster the trust of young people by representing the world and how I live in it in a way that is faithful to the difficulty of life? And do I show that it is possible to love that difficulty?
Through inquiry that respects and values young people’s interest in exploring what it means to live in, and care for the world, and to question the meanings of knowledge of the world and their place in it, opportunities can be created for teachers and students to learn how conceptual habits (dominant conceptions of knowledge) limit how people think and act in the world. Surfacing and questioning conceptual habits should be a primary goal of formal education. As Elizabeth Minnich (2000) affirms:

> It is only through becoming critical of the conventions, concepts and theories that shape our sense of what is ‘real’ that we can come to live under new realities. (p.20)

To restore the difficulty of life requires that we accept that it is possible to live with uncertainty and keep thought moving.
CHAPTER NINE: LOOKING BACK, GAZING FORWARD

My reflections on this inquiry brings me to a place where I want to express what was possible in the inquiry and what was not, alongside what I learned and what I still struggle with. As I think about organizing my thoughts, I realize that I cannot distinguish clearly between what was possible/not possible and what I learned/struggle with. Alongside each aspect of the inquiry that seemed to have worked well exist also my doubts about what I did and how I have re-presented it/posited knowledge about it. Similarly, when I reflect on what felt challenging in the inquiry, I realize that within each challenge I learned something, but there also remains much that cannot be resolved. I will try to create some semblance of flow here by returning to my original intentions for the inquiry and beginning there.

Looking Back on the Initial Hopes for the Inquiry

At the commencement of this inquiry, it was my hope that I would be able to describe some ways in which youth take up and resist dominant conceptions of knowledge (Chapters Four to Seven). I also hoped to propose some recommendations for teaching and teacher education through what youth said about their experiences with knowledge in school (per Chapter Eight). Finally, I hoped that I would gain insights into my research practice through the process of participating in this inquiry.

Insights into Research Practice

One of my objectives, in this inquiry, was to practice inserting my feelings of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty into the research process. What I learned was that the practice of living with doubt, confusion and uncertainty has not made me feel more comfortable about my research practice than I did when I realized that I was leaving these
things out of my interpretative process. I have already shared some of the insights into the challenges of doing research in the text boxes within Chapters Three to Seven. Here I will reflect back on what stands out for me rather than reiterating what I have already written.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this inquiry that changed how I think about my research practice is the fact that the inquiry was about conceptions of knowledge and hence, provoked me to think about conceptions of knowledge that I was embodying in my research practices. If I had set the same goal of gaining insight during the process of conducting research during an inquiry focused on another topic, I doubt I would have learned as much about my practice. My learning, however, involved more of an increased awareness of the challenges associated with research (knowledge work) than it provided a means for overcoming what seemed lacking in my past practice. In other words, while I was able to speak about what perplexed me before, I was not attuned\textsuperscript{108} to the ways in which unexamined conceptions of knowledge were implicated in my struggles. I could not speak to it beyond noting that my analysis left out instances of contradiction and my re-presentations omitted tensions.

I have struggled with the issues of certain knowledge and how language challenges what it is I think I know. In my past research I have taken the language used by participants to reflect inherent meanings. Now, I feel much less certain about language and the meanings I infer from what others (and I) say. I am mindful of the notion that written texts are points of intersection between subjectivities; in the case of

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{108} Some might say that I was blind to the paradigms that informed my work. I have trouble with the notion of blindness because it suggests a dichotomy – a person is with or without sight. I prefer instead to think of qualities, or nuanced sightedness. I will always be in the process of seeing.
\end{footnote}
this inquiry, the text includes multiple subjectivities, and I realize that what I re-presented here could easily have produced a different story with different emphases given different conditions and different participants (including myself). That does not mean, however, that this particular case is without value. I assert that despite its particularity (and perhaps because of it), it represents a journey into thinking with others that I hope is faithful to the difficulty of life; the challenge of living with uncertainty, that may help others to think differently about their own challenges with doing research.

I have come to question the certainty with which I used to believe in a knowable self. I think I was always less certain about the know-ability of others because, especially, my experience as a parent has taught me that one cannot know fully and completely and once-and-for-all even those with whom we have the most intimate relationships. However, what I appreciated less was that I could not know myself, particularly the ways in which my thinking has been/is embedded within historical and cultural traditions, including the thinking tradition of believing that certain self-knowledge should be a goal.

Hence, the awarenesses provoked by the doctoral course (Theorizing Knowing) were complemented by new awarenesses provoked by this inquiry. I feel confident that awarenesses of my own situatedness will continue to grow as I continue to interact with others, especially those who are different from me (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a).

I have experienced a profound appreciation for my youth thinking friends and my theorist thinking friends in this process. They have helped me to not only gain insights but to think better by practicing thinking in their company. As Lincoln and Denzin (2003) remind me,
Bridges to the self seem to be as many as bridges to our respondents, each of them eliciting new glimpses, new images of what our own possibilities might be, of how we might become, of how and in what ways we might come to know. (p.632).

My thinking friends (Minnich, 2005) have fulfilled the promise of thinking friends – they have helped me to construct numerous and valuable conceptual bridges. They have helped me contemplate how to negotiate constructing subjectivity in research, the possibilities for and challenges associated with inquiring into how we know what we know, the ways I take up and resist dominant conceptions of knowledge in my research practices, and offered me the opportunity to practice surfacing assumptions with others and move toward negotiating meanings together.

Thayer-Bacon (2003a) has invited me all along to turn to others. I am glad that I received her invitation. For,

Pluralistically including others’ perspectives in our inquiring process offers us the means for adjusting for our own limitations, correcting our standards and improving the warrants for our assertions, and recognizing the role of power and privilege in epistemological theories. …Inclusion of pluralistic voices becomes a criterion for judging what we count as “knowledge” and “knowledge” becomes a process for knowing that is continually in need of re/adjustment, correction, and re/construction. (Thayer-Bacon, 2003a, pp. 418-419).

**Insights into Facilitating Inquiry**

In addition to gaining insights into my research practice, through the process of engaging this inquiry I also learned about the challenges of facilitating inquiry in a group. I came face-to-face with issues of disrupting flow, facilitating extended conversation, and fostering equal participation.

The use of provocative inquiry activities created a dynamic interaction among the youth but also generated conversation that was, at times, difficult to follow. The youth
tended to speak quickly in short phrases and frequently interrupted one another. It was challenging to know when and how to insert myself without interrupting the flow of their exchanges. Hence, the re-presentation of what youth said in the inquiry interactions often appears clipped and sometimes seems to lack depth. Even when I took instances from the group discussions to a meeting with an individual youth, it proved challenging to explore their ideas more deeply. I felt as though I needed more diverse ways of approaching the topic of knowledge in discussion with youth.

This inquiry constitutes a first attempt and represents work that I would like to continue. I think that finding ways to inquire more deeply into knowledge with youth requires extended practice. However, I also believe that the questions that the inquiry activities provoked set in motion for most of the youth an interest in questioning how they themselves and others in their world know knowledge.

In facilitating the inquiry I also gained a new appreciation for the challenge of nurturing the equal participation of youth. I wanted each of the youth to have an equal opportunity to voice their perspectives, however, some youth seemed more comfortable with voicing their perspectives and were quick to jump in to fill quiet spaces in conversations, while other youth were more quiet and rarely inserted themselves into conversations. This troubled me throughout the inquiry; I frequently wondered about how I might encourage the participation of the quieter youth without making them feel awkward and less interested in continuing to be part of the inquiry. As mentioned earlier, I took the opportunity to meet over tea with a couple of the quieter youth, but there were still a couple of youth who did not accept my invitation to meet away from the large group. Towards the end of the time in which I interacted with the youth, I wrote this
poem which reflects my uncertainty about whether I should be doing more to invite all
the voices into the discussions or permit the differences in participation.

The Lifeguard

I am the lifeguard.
I sit at the end of the pool
Watching the handstands and ball toss.
I imagine no danger in the play.

But someone is sinking.
What are they doing?
Why don’t they stand up?
The water is shallow.

I want to shout as I run towards the sinking form.
“Stand up,
    Don’t disappear.”
There should not be loss
In the play.

There are many players in the pool,
Why must one fall away?

And I worry,
    Did I trip them
        While revering in the play?

May 3, 2007

I highlight the challenge of facilitating the inquiry with youth because I want to
acknowledge the challenges that classroom teachers experience every day in their
commitment to student engagement and participation in learning activities. The
challenge of facilitating student participation in large classrooms in high-schools is not a
challenge I know well. I realize that there are various pedagogical strategies (e.g., small
group discussions, group projects) that teachers can employ to facilitate student
participation, but suspect that with the influx of new students every term, the challenge of facilitating participation is never resolved once-and-for-all. I voice my appreciation of their challenges here because I believe that the tensions in classroom life are poorly understood by the general public and I want to take this opportunity to convey my empathy for teachers’ work and acknowledge whenever I can, the complexity of teaching-learning encounters.

Hopes for the Future: Gazing Forward

I hope to continue to facilitate inquiries into conceptions of knowledge in my teaching in teacher education programs and youth development courses. I would like, in the future, to conduct an inquiry with practicing teachers similar to the one re-presented here. I think engaging a similar inquiry with practicing teachers would help surface what questions about knowledge are most perplexing for teachers and also provide an opportunity for teachers to gain insights into how implicitly held conceptions of knowledge are played out in their practice.

Another vision I have for future research is to engage an inquiry into conceptions of knowledge with a group of youth in a school classroom over an extended period of time such as an entire term or semester. I would like to see what possibilities for deepening the inquiry exist given more time together with youth. Ideally, in such a situation I would like to find a way to turn the facilitation of the inquiry over to youth part-way into the term/semester at which time a group of teachers would join the student-facilitated inquiry.

I look forward to continuing to think about conceptions of knowledge and their effects upon my practices, upon how I am in the world in relation to others. I welcome
the feelings of impossibility, paralysis and uncertainty that new inquiries will bring. I have learned from living with uncertainty in this inquiry that it is possible to move within what feels like an impossibility. Caputo has continued to remind me to ask myself whether discomfort prompts me to stop moving, to attempt to still the flux of the world by leaving out that which makes synthesis difficult, or whether discomfort prompts me to move. There have been many times in this inquiry when I felt paralyzed by the uncertainty I felt, and his words have helped me tremendously. An echo alongside stillness – “turn to the questions” – provided the energy for movement.

I don’t doubt that the inquiry represented in this paper will continue to be part of my new inquiries because I accept that,

Whenever thinking seems to reach a conclusion, to lead into knowledge, another thought, another question, another feeling, another voice emerges to call us back into thinking. (Minnich, 2005, p. 273)

And on, and on it goes.

Minnich’s words remind me of Pandora’s response when asked what she wondered most about knowledge. She said succinctly, “Does it ever end?”
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: WARM-UP ACTIVITIES, PROVOCATIVE INQUIRY ACTIVITY SESSIONS, AND SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

Warm-up Activity: The Clapping Series (from Boal, 2002)

Sitting on the floor in a large circle, initiate a clapping rhythm using hands on legs. Ask everyone to join in and listen to the rhythm that develops – it should eventually turn into a single, simple rhythm. Then stop clapping and announce a change – a pass it along rhythm – “pass the clap.” Turn towards the person on your right and do a simple clapping sequence. The person on your right repeats it as they turn to the person on their right to pass it along. When it comes back to you, change the clapping sequence and continue to add more variation with each consecutive round the clap makes around the circle. Increase the clapping speed. Yell out “change directions” part way around the circle. Yell out “keep it going” then insert a new clapping sequence that travels in the opposite direction so that everyone is receiving claps from their left and their right.

Warm-Up Activity: Defender (from Rohd, 1998, p.17)

Everyone starts walking around the space without talking and with no physical contact. After a few minutes ask that each person silently pick an individual in the room whom they will consider to be their own personal defender. Tell them to keep moving while the making the choice. Then, ask that each person to silently choose one person to be their enemy. As they continue to walk around they need to keep their defender between themselves and their enemy at all times. The game is played entirely in silence. After a few minutes, increase the level of importance:

... your enemy is trying to steal all your money.
... your enemy is running towards you and you have to run away.
... your enemy is your ex-girlfriend/boyfriend that you miss a lot and although you don’t want them coming close to you, you would like a chance to smile at them – try to catch their attention and smile at them.

Debriefing questions:
What was it like to play this game?
Could you tell who had chosen you as a defender? ...As an enemy?
Did it ever get really exciting? ... Confusing?
What does this game tell us about perception and action?
**Warm-up Activity: Blind Handshakes** (from Rohd, 1998, pp.18-19)

Ask everyone to find a partner and some space in the room. Ask that people choose someone they don’t know well yet. They should make sure there is room enough in front and behind them so that they can move without bumping into things.

Ask that each pair face each other and shake hands and freeze. They stand frozen looking at each other. Then ask them to close their eyes. Remind them that as will all eyes-closed games, no one will mess with them; they will be told the rules and they will maintain control of their participation at all times.

Then ask that they let go of their partner’s hand and begin to walk slowly backward, away from their partner. If you bump into something and have to adjust your line of walking, try to remember your twists and turns. Call out “freeze” after a minute or so. Then tell them that keeping their eyes closed they need to try to return to their original position and relocate their partner. When everyone has gotten somewhere tell them to reopen their eyes, check their results and switch partners and try it again. Do this a few times. Remember that this is a silent game and works well if people resist peeking.

*Debriefing questions:*
What was it like to play this game?
What did you like most about it? …And like the least?
What did you rely upon to try to relocate your partner?
Did your strategy(ies) change with each new playing of the game?

**Warm-up Activity: Zip Zap Zop** (Rohd, 1998, pp.22-23)

Get everyone to form a big circle.

Have the entire group repeat the words “zip zap zop” several times together.

Demonstrate the game by starting it.

To start, you throw a pretend ball of energy out of your hands with a strong forward motion aiming straight at someone in the circle, securing their eye contact, and using your hands, body and voice, say “Zip”.

They receive the pretend ball and get ready to pass it on. They will need to say “Zap” on their pass. The third person to exchange the ball calls out “Zop” and the sequence continues this way.

Watch for a couple of exchanges and, if necessary, remind people to secure eye contact before passing the ball.

Tell people that the ball of energy should never hit the ground. If the ball gets dropped, pick it up and keep playing – don’t worry about mistakes and don’t give up.

*Debriefing questions:*
What was it like to play this game?
What helps to sustain your concentration and participation?
What role do the words play in a game like this?
**Warm-up Activity:** Cover the Space (Rohd, 1998, p.12)
Allow 10-15 minutes, set up a big rectangle in the room using chairs or trash cans as corner markers. Ask everyone to start walking around in the designated space. The rules are no talking, no contact and keep moving.

After a little while tell everyone to be aware of their own body, the bodies around them, and the space on the floor. Then ask them to begin to make certain the floor space is well-covered. They need to keep moving at all times and get into the corners and sidelines to cover all the space without banging into each other.

When you shout “freeze!” the bodies should be evenly distributed around the space, filling it. Point out how the group is doing and let them try a few more times.

New variations are introduced on subsequent “freezes”. For example: on the 3rd freeze, ask everyone to quickly create three triangles using all their bodies but without talking. Another variation would be to freeze and then quickly put themselves into groups based on what they’re wearing on the top half of their body without talking about it.

After the groups are formed, go around and ask each person to say out loud what their group is called (e.g., “red tops,” or “necklaces”). If the group is new to each other, have them quickly learn each other’s names in their group. This is a game of freezing, getting new instructions and finding rhythm again.

*Debriefing questions:*
What was it like to work with a group to fill a space without talking and directing one another?
What was it like to fit yourself into a group?
What ways do “groupings” show up in your lives?

**Warm-up Activity:** Fainting (from Boal, 2002)

Give each person in the room a number on a piece of paper. Ask that each person repeat their number silently to themselves and commit their number to memory.

Then ask that everyone begins milling around the room but staying relatively close together rather than spread out.

When a number is called the person to whom the number belongs must fall to the floor as if in a faint. It is up to all the others to catch the person before s/he falls.

If people are good at catching the fainter, try saying two numbers at once.

*Debriefing question:*
What was this like for you?
Inquiry Activity #1: Paper Cut-outs (adapted from Garoian, 1999, p.155)

Cut out paper figures in advance. Produce enough to distribute 3-4 to each group participant. Distribute half the paper figures to the group. Ask them to inscribe stereotypes that teachers hold about “students” on the cut-outs. After all the cut-outs are used or ideas are exhausted, collect the cut-outs and keep them in a pile. Distribute the second half of the paper figures to the group. Now ask them to inscribe how they see themselves and their peers as “learners.” After all the cut-outs are used or ideas are exhausted, collect the cut-outs. Solicit participants’ help to arrange the two piles in two lines on the floor above one another.

Debriefing questions:
What do you see?
How do stereotypes get formed? How do they get sustained?
What ideas about knowledge show up in the stereotypes?
What ideas about knowledge show up in how you see yourselves?

Researcher Reflection: (approximate time spent doing this activity: 1 hour)

The youth seemed to really enjoy this activity. It was a good activity to do early in the inquiry because youth were able to work independently in writing before sharing their perspectives with the larger group. Being able to write their perspectives reduced the likelihood of feeling intimidated and the fact that the paper cut-outs were all gathered together before being displayed meant that the perspectives of individuals could not be readily identified by the others in the group. Laying out all cut-outs containing the “teachers’ stereotypes” below the string of cut-outs containing the youth’s perspectives of themselves as learners gave the group a concrete visual image of language use to contrast in discussion and a significant discussion ensued.
Inquiry Activity #2: Beliefs Exploration (from Rohd, 1998, p.54)
Everyone sits in one part of the room facing the largest open space. Explain the game and the rules: signs appear in three corners of the room that say, “agree,” “disagree,” and “unsure.” After reading a statement, each person decides how they feel and moves the appropriate sign in the room. Each person in each group then gets a chance to say why they made their choice. Ask the smallest group to discuss their choice first so that they will feel less at odds than if they were asked to follow a large group. People are free to move to another choice while people are giving their opinions if they change their mind. No one has to speak if they don’t want to. No one can respond to another person’s opinion. Read aloud statements related to the topic of interest and ask people to be prepared to make their choice and move:
“Kids know more than adults.”
“A good parent lets their kid decide what’s best for him/herself.”
“If you choose your words carefully when you speak, you will never be misunderstood.”
“Reading is the best way to become knowledgeable.”
“I would rather live in a world without art than a world without math.”
“You can only know what people tell you.”
“It can feel scary to say what you know.”
Do not advance to the next statement until everyone who wanted a chance to speak has done so.

Debriefing questions:
What was it like to play this game? What did you learn?

Researcher Reflection: (approximate time spent doing this activity: 30 minutes)
The youth seemed to really enjoy this activity. This activity was done early on in the inquiry. While each youth demonstrated their beliefs by moving about the room, they were free to do so without having to explain themselves so there was a certain degree of safety in being able to volunteer to reveal their perspective. Some of the statements generated more discussion than others: e.g., the statements about parents’ and adults’ knowledge. While there was some discussion during the activity, the debriefing opportunity generated very little additional discussion. This activity could be returned to at the end of an extended inquiry period with a group though to see if responses and reasons for choices change over time with further inquiry into knowledge.
Inquiry Activity #3: Exquisite Corpse (adapted from Luce-Kapler, Sumara & Davis, 2002).

In this writing activity, each person begins with a sheet of paper that has several prompts written out with blank space following for writing. The prompts are:

- The word “knowledge” makes me think of…
- When I think about what it means to “know” something, I…
- The area I know most about is…
- Most of my knowing comes from…
- The adults in my life tend to talk about “knowledge” as though…
- The thing I wonder about most when I think about knowledge and knowing is…
- I think it’s important to think about what it means to “know” something because…

Each person begins by writing a response to the first prompt. Next, they fold the paper over so that the next person cannot read what they wrote and they pass the paper to their right. Watch carefully to see that each person has finished writing before announcing a pass. Remind people to fold over what was written by the people prior to them before passing the paper.

After the papers have been passed as many times as they are people in the group, ask everyone to open the paper they have and make sure it contains their first statement at the top of the page (if not, pass again until everyone ends up with the paper they began with).

Then invite everyone to take a few minutes and silently read the paper they had begun.

Debriefing questions.

- Are there responses written there that are similar and dissimilar to what you wrote yourself?
- What was it like to do the activity? What were you thinking about as you were trying to respond to the prompts?

Researcher Reflection: (approximate time spent doing this activity: 1 hour)

The youth seemed to enjoy this activity. It was another good activity to do early in the inquiry because the youth were able to work independently in writing before sharing their perspectives with the larger group and because each person’s response to a particular prompt ended up on a sheet of paper containing responses from several people it was again difficult for the youth to identify individual perspectives. The debriefing began with one youth suggesting that the responses to all the prompts were likely to be very similar except with respect to the prompt about the thing they know most about. The assumption offered a good entry point to discuss the similarities and differences between perspectives.
Inquiry Activity #4: Investigating Knowing Images

Create a slide show of images that represent people in interaction in different settings. Show each image once in quick succession and then repeat the slideshow allowing a little more time for each image. Ask the participants to think about what might be going on in each image or what the image represents for them.

Present each of the images one at a time on the screen and ask:
- What do you think is happening here? What does this image represent for you?
- Who are these people? What’s going on for them? What do you imagine them being like?
- In what ways might knowledge be present in the image?
- Who “knows” in the image? Who “doesn’t know?” How can you tell?

Sample of “Knowing” Images Used

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Researcher Reflection: (approximate time spent doing this activity: 45 mintues)

This activity was not particularly effective in stimulating questions or discussions. The youth generally agreed that it was strange to think you could “see” conceptions of knowledge at work in pictures. Interestingly, even though 2 of the youth participants present the day of this activity were dancers, the image of the youth group dancing did not prompt thoughts about bodily knowledge.
**Inquiry Activity #5: The Great Game of Power** (adapted from Boal, 2002)

Set up a table in the room with some articles and some images that represent different age groups and items that are likely to be perceived ambiguously (e.g., iPod, diaper, novel, textbook, magazine, feather, pinecone, suspenders, walking cane, credit card, ad for designer sunglasses, passport, peace symbol necklace, set of keys).

a) Ask people to come up one at a time and arrange the objects and images in a *hierarchy of power* beginning with the least powerful object or image at the left of the table and the most powerful object or image at the right end of the table. The arrangement will likely change as each person takes a turn.

Those in the group not actively arranging at any given time should stand close enough to watch but remain silent when someone else is doing the arranging. Ask people to think about the choices they are making and be ready to talk about what went into their decision-making.

After everyone has had a turn individually, ask the group to arrange the table together by consensus.

b) Ask the group together to now arrange the objects and images in a *hierarchy of knowledge* beginning with the most knowledge-laden object or image and ending with the least knowledge-laden object or image.

**Debriefing questions:**

What objects and images represented the highest power? …the lowest power? The most knowledge? …the least knowledge? Why did you make the choices you did?

Is there a relationship between objects and images and knowledge?

If so, what do those relationships look like?

What things go along with knowledge or lack of knowledge that we accord objects and images?

What if we arranged the objects and images according to “status” – would anything change?

**Researcher Reflection:** (approximate time spent doing this activity: 1 ½ hours)

This activity was one of the youth’s favourites. The youth enjoyed having concrete objects from their world to move around and the discussion that ensued during the consensual arrangement of the hierarchy was rich. I think we could have easily spent half a day on this activity. After spending 1 ½ hours doing this activity it was time to wrap-up for the day. The youth expressed shock at how quickly the time had gone.
Inquiry Activity #6: Sharing Wisdom

Part A:
Ask the participants to think about a piece of advice they would give to a younger person: “What would you tell them?”
Write out your note of wisdom on a piece of paper.
Then fold the notes and place them in a bowl. Pass the bowl around the group and ask people to pull out a note and read it aloud.

Debriefing questions:
Was it hard to choose one piece of advice? Were you overflowing with wisdom?
What things influenced your decision about the piece of advice you would share?

Part B:
We’re going to do the same activity again but this time I would like you to write out one piece of advice for an older person, fold it up and put it in the bowl.
Select and read the notes as done in Part A.

Debriefing questions:
Was it hard to choose one piece of advice? Were you overflowing with wisdom?
What things influenced your decision about the piece of advice you would share?
What was different, if anything, about writing out advice this time around?
What does this activity tell us about knowledge?

Researcher Reflection: (approximate time spent doing this activity: 45 minutes)
The youth seemed to enjoy this activity. The activity prompted some of the youth to share relatively cliché bits of wisdom or quotes they were familiar. However, several youth avoided using clichés and the discussion that ensued was good. The youth seemed to be surprised by the fact that some of the wisdom they shared with younger people applied well to older people and vice-versa. The youth also exclaimed that it seemed odd to consider having wisdom to share with an older person. What helped them do the activity though was when they thought about what something they thought their parents or teachers did not appreciate.
Inquiry Activity #7: Feeling knowledge  (adapted from Pitt and Britzman, 2003)

Ask the group to think about and describe a time when… (pose the items below)
Ask them to think about what was going on in each situation.

1. you encountered an idea that bothered you
2. you felt misunderstood
3. you misunderstood someone else
4. you wanted to explain something but you could not find the right words
5. you felt overpowered by others’ knowledge
6. you realized you were mistaken but could not turn back
7. you used knowledge to shock others
8. knowledge made you feel fearful
9. you fell in love with an idea
10. you used knowledge to help others
11. knowledge made you feel powerful

Debriefing questions:
Who is willing to share aloud what they wrote?
What was this like for you?
What did you learn about yourself and others?
What emotions do you think describe your relationship with knowledge?

Researcher Reflection: (approximate time spent doing this activity: 1 hour)

I was pleasantly surprised by the youth’s interest in this activity. I almost didn’t use it because I worried that it might generate little discussion similar to the “Knowing Images” activity. Having the ability to choose among the “situations” enabled the youth to choose something that they felt comfortable with. Some of the youth shared quite personal stories and it felt that at the point in the inquiry that we did the activity an appropriate level of trust had developed that allowed the youth to get personal. Some youth chose not to share their responses openly with the group but because the responses had been written I was able to collect all the responses to include in my analysis. The discussion also revealed that the youth were surprised by realizing the many ways in which emotion and knowledge are related.
Group Pizza Meeting – Tree of Knowledge Discussion

Introduction: When we did the Exquisite Corpse writing activity, someone in the group shared that when they hear the word “knowledge” it makes them think of trees, like in Pocahontas.” Recently, another person in the group told me that that entry in the list I posted on the project website was interesting and that it made her think of the symbol of the tree used by the Knowledge Network. I have also had a couple other people in the group raise the question of how “knowledge” and “knowing” are related to cultural and religious values. So, last week I Googled “tree of knowledge Pocahontas” and the first 2 links I visited brought these issues to the forefront. I wanted to share some excerpts from these 2 websites with you to see what you have to say about how cultural and religious beliefs influence “knowledge.”

Distribute the Pink Tree cut-outs and ask each person to read what is on their tree. Next, distribute the Green Tree cut-outs and ask each person to read what is on their tree.

Questions: What do you think of these examples? How would you reconcile such different perspectives? Do you have examples from your own life that you struggle to reconcile?

Green Tree entries

We are approaching our spring journey, the time for birthing new life within the sacred trees throughout the world.

The principles of trees will inspire you to love and respect nature, and teach you receptivity, nurturing and gentleness - we need both powers to walk in balance.

As a people, we should honor the knowledge of all trees as they share their powers with us, by taking the carbon dioxide and turning it into oxygen.

Evergreens provide us with food, shelter and medicines. By following their example, humans could learn to stand strong in who they are and beautiful at all times.

Grandmother Willow in Disney’s Pocahontas proves to be a very wise and beautiful spirit, just waiting for someone to listen to her soothing messages and receive some exciting revelations about the many aspects of the Sacred.

When the wind blows through their flexible branches, Willows reminds me to bow my head in thanks to our sacred Mother Earth for supporting all life.

Pink Tree entries

Children are born with no guilt or sense of unhappiness but there is a bent in their character that causes them to be independent and if left unredeemed, it will lead them deep into an evil lifestyle.

Satan is after a child’s mind because every idea that separates us from God begins in the mind.

Pochontas is a perfect example of the New Age free spirit who is united by strange powers to the earth, nature and animals.

Pochontas” receives her directions for life – not from her father – but from a tree spirit.

The tree spirit told Pocohantas to “let the spirits of the earth guide you.” The idea that every person can have a spirit guide for making life’s decisions is demon possession.

The story of Pocohantas is a demonic lie. Parents seem oblivious to the attack on home and the reach of unclean ideas for the mind and devotion of children.
Researcher Reflection: ("Tree of Knowledge" discussion)
(approximate time spent doing this activity: 30 minutes)

This activity generated a rich discussion. In the context of having the discussion over pizza however, the discussion spun off into all sorts of realms – which were also very interesting – including consideration of infinity, Pluto losing its status as a planet, intelligent life in the universe, the popular children’s TV series “Sailor Moon,” the movie “Finian’s Rainbow,” upcoming elections for class valedictorian, the contributions of past school council presidents, and peers’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction with grades on exams. I did little to mediate the conversation as I intended the pizza meeting to be an opportunity for the group to stay connected, socialize and have some fun together, while also spending a little time thinking about the potential relationships between knowledge and nature.
Small Group Meeting: “Tea for Three” with Ruby (questions 1-5) and Romeo (questions 6-10)

1. Your quote: “You can know something by what you feel.” Can you say more about the relationship between knowing and feeling?
2. “Kids know different stuff than adults.” Like what?
3. You said that fear of being seen as “not knowing” is normal. But how do we learn to fear not knowing? What typically happens to a person who doesn’t know something?
4. You expressed an interest in science. Where, within a scientific perspective does knowledge come from? Who can “know” in science?
5. Use of “wisdom” and “enlightenment” – what do those terms mean to you?
6. You said people tend to play it safe” with sharing what they know …when and where do you feel most free to share your opinions and when/where might you hold back and why?
7. If books are just one tool to access knowledge, what do you think about the extent to which schools rely on book learning?
8. “Beliefs” and “knowing” – do these refer to and mean the same thing?
9. You saw the “spiritual” in Julio’s description of Persian New Year …from a spiritual perspective, where does knowledge come from and who can know?
10. How do you think people learn to be flexible in how they see things? What inhibits flexibility?

Small group meeting: “Donuts for Four” with Payton, Jericha-Fay, and Frankie

1. In the paper cut-outs someone highlighted the difference between learning alone and learning with others. In your experience, what differences are there? Do you have a preference for one over the other?
2. In the writing exercise about knowledge and knowing, we talked a bit about knowledge from textbooks versus knowledge from experience. What do you think happens when we read something? Is it a different kind of experience than what we generally consider to be “experience?”
3. I frequently hear young people talk about liking things that are “random.” What does “random” mean? What are some examples of something “random?” Why is it appealing?
4. You did an amazing job performing in the musical “How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying.” (written in 1961). What did you think of the story? What did you think of the roles of the males and females in the story? What influence, if any, do you think prescribed gender roles play on what is defined as “knowledge” and who “knows” and who doesn’t “know?”
Graffiti-ing Inquiry Activity (approx. 45 min.)

Eighteen 8 ½ x 11 1/2” sheets of paper were laid out in circular fashion around the edges of a large table. Three sheets of paper outlined the motivation for the inquiry, the researcher’s positioning, and the value of the inquiry. On each of ten sheets, I had written a quote from a youth followed by something their quote made me wonder about. There were also 2 sheets of paper with feedback about inquiry themes. In the middle of the table were two blank pieces of paper. Each cell in the table below represents one of the sheets of paper that contained text.

The youth were then given the following instructions:

- Take some time to read what is on the papers.
- Then when you’re ready, choose a coloured pen and write directly on the papers what you think about what is written there.
- On the blank pages write any questions that come to mind, your ideas about what might be missing or what doesn’t seem to fit, or any thoughts you might have.
- After you’ve finished reading and writing we’ll have a discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation for the Inquiry:</th>
<th>Researcher’s Position:</th>
<th>The Value of Inquiry:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Youth today (born and raised in a postmodern world) might have different ideas about “knowledge” and “knowing” than many adults in their world (including teachers) and differences in their implicitly held meanings are likely to influence their ability to engage in inquiry together.</td>
<td>Key influences include Feminist philosophy (inclusive) Relational (e)pistemology (knowledge is situated and in relation) Eco-spiritual pedagogies (thinking is not privileged over more integrative knowing)</td>
<td>Inquiring with others disrupts the meanings we hold, setting “knowing” in motion.</td>
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| Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders … If I profess to know something yet can not or do not “do” it, can I say I really know it? For example, I say I know about the importance of recycling but I don’t do it in my home. Do I know about the importance of recycling? |

There are some days when I feel really sad or upset but when people ask me why, I can’t quite explain it to them. …But the more I think about, the more feelings I have that I can’t describe in words. It’s like no words have been invented for that specific feeling, and I feel lost, like it is beyond my knowledge. At the same time I feel a kind of power in knowing that not everything can be completely understood. – Frankie (female, 14 years old)  

DIANA (female, 45 years old) wonders … how often do the meanings of our own experiences elude even ourselves?  

I’ve always had many thoughts circulate in my mind, and this has made me want to express them. However, I’m not very good at communicating, so my ideas cannot be explained to others easily. This creates a problem where my thoughts are stranded in my mind. Often, I draw diagrams or give examples to clarify my thoughts, but this isn’t always possible. – Vladimir (male 17 years old)  

Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders … If we don’t have the words to express a thought, does the thought exist?

Having knowledge not only includes knowing something, it includes doing something with the information. – Jericha-Fay (female, 14 years old)
“Graffiting-ing” activity, continued, p.2…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In different cultures knowledge can be power. But if you grow up in Hollywood, for example, then you can get anything with money; knowledge doesn’t have much power there. –Paige (female, 18 years old)</th>
<th>When you know something, you expect everyone else to know it too; you think it’s simple. – Romeo (female, 17 years old)</th>
<th>Everybody knows but knowledge can sometimes fool us. The things we see can lead to assumptions that are not always accurate. – Ruby (female, 17 years old)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders… <em>In what cultures can you be poor but knowledgeable and have power?</em></td>
<td>Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders… <em>Do we value what other people know more than what we know ourselves because “our knowing” seems easy?</em></td>
<td>Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders… <em>Are there things we can do so that we are less likely to be fooled by knowledge?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You just can’t know someone or something just by the first impression given; knowledge isn’t a ten-second thing. – Pandora (female, 15 years old)</td>
<td>You have to be careful with peers that you don’t disagree too openly; people will think you think you know more than they do or that you think they’re wrong. – Pippen (female, 17 years old)</td>
<td>Knowledge makes me think of trees. Nature is a kind of knowledge but status in our society is not achieved through loving nature. – Payton (female, 14 years old)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana (45 years old) wonders… <em>How often, when people say they know something, are they really just guessing or assuming? What does it take to really know?</em></td>
<td>Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders… <em>Is it equally risky for males and females to be seen as “knowing too much”?</em></td>
<td>Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders… <em>Can knowledge come from nature or is knowledge always about nature?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can anyone know anything if they don’t know themselves? - Julio (male, 17 years old)</td>
<td><em>The activities …force a way of seeing?</em></td>
<td>Youth challenge ideas about who “knows” when they encounter…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana (female, 45 years old) wonders… <em>How does a person come to know his/herself?</em></td>
<td>Diana’s advisors at UBC said that the activities used in this inquiry set us up to see knowledge as “residing within a person rather than within the world.” What do you think?</td>
<td>- Experiences with racism, sexism, and adulthood</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Teachers’ stereotypes and assumptions about students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Parents’ “rigid” beliefs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Peers’ readiness to judge other peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Debriefing questions:*

What was it like to see how I had represented your words?
What about how this presentation was organized?
Was it useful in terms of prompting thoughts?
Did it resemble some of the key themes of our inquiry?
Researcher Reflection: “Graffiti-ing” activity
(approximate time spent doing this activity: 1 ½ hours)

This activity was another favourite of the youth. The youth seemed to really enjoy seeing their own words on the papers and recognizing things shared by others in the inquiry. The youth wrote quietly and intently, circling round the table repeatedly, for approximately 30 minutes before they appeared to slow in their writing. During the debriefing the youth stated that they were surprised at how much they had to say about what was on the papers but that as each person wrote something new it prompted new ideas about things they wanted to share. This activity was a great way to demonstrate how the youth were contributing to my thinking and how people create knowledge together.
The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Anthony Clarke
INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Curriculum Studies

UBC BREC NUMBER: 406-03712

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

N/A

Other locations where the research will be conducted:
Recreation centres in Greater Victoria area. Once room space at a local recreation centre is secured, an approval letter will be obtained from the participating site and forwarded to the BREC.

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Diana Nicholson

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
Living with knowledge: Youth explorations, perspectives and experiences with knowledge.

REB MEETING DATE: December 14, 2006
CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: December 14, 2007

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:

Date Approved: January 23, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Name</th>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent Forms: Parent Consent Form</td>
<td>V2</td>
<td>January 10, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent Forms: Youth Consent Form</td>
<td>V2</td>
<td>January 10, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements: Recruiting poster</td>
<td>v1</td>
<td>November 26, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests: Interview and discussion questions</td>
<td>v1</td>
<td>November 22, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter of Initial Contact: Project info for recruiting sites</td>
<td>v1</td>
<td>November 26, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Documents: Website content</td>
<td>v1</td>
<td>November 24, 2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A website has been developed to provide easy access to project information. http://www.youthknow.ca

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazazian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lyness, Associate Chair