ABSTRACT

This thesis details a journey of three teachers and eighteen grade six and seven students as they explored a curriculum that valued and interpreted lived experiences. Entitled Living Inquiry, this curriculum invited participants to attend to their being-in-the-world through an inquiry into four guiding, existential themes. The intention of this phenomenological/hermeneutical study was to interpret the participants’ responses to Living Inquiry and further, to begin to understand the possibilities and vulnerabilities of Living Inquiry as a pedagogical/curricular experience within an often imposing neoliberal teaching/learning context.

The teacher researcher is the primary storyteller as she documents her own introduction as a student of Living Inquiry, the impetus of the thesis, to the translation of the course for her grade six and seven students in a local public elementary school classroom, and finally to the research process of documenting, interpreting, and understanding this journey. Spanning over two years of classroom experience and formal research, Living Inquiry as Pedagogy brings together the voices of children, education theorists such as Aoki, Jardine, Smith, and van Manen, and teachers, including a professional photographer and a curriculum consultant/university professor, as they begin to make sense of the relevance and significance of Living Inquiry as a practice and a pedagogy. The study culminates with a discussion around the teaching implications and responsibilities of Living Inquiry as well as a consideration of how the inquiry served to transform the researcher’s thinking about the purpose of education and living well with children.
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DEDICATION

To my daughter, Eva
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I’ve always wanted more in life. To sail the seven seas, or climb a tree in the Brazilian rainforest. I’ve always wanted to experience moments like that. But I can’t, not now at least. With Living Inquiry you can realize that for now, in the present moment, there is always whatever you need. A white tree represents just that. It grows like nothing else, emitting not only beauty, but peace. You can really see how lucky we are. But, you see, a white tree is always hidden. You can barely ever find one. They stand in the places you never thought to be, but when you reach them it is the most perfect place on earth.

So, when you find a white tree, climb it.

Living Inquiry is a white tree, in all its entirety.

Trisha, Grade Seven
Learning at any age shouldn't involve becoming tranquilized. Rather it should involve becoming aware. My role as teacher is to create an environment that nurtures students’ capacity to explore the world as it is and to reimagine the world otherwise.


*Living Inquiry as Pedagogy* is a phenomenological/hermeneutical study of *Living Inquiry* as I experienced it within three contexts: as a student of *Living Inquiry* in my graduate class; as a teacher in my own classroom; and as a researcher studying how it was engaged and interpreted by my study participants. I am the primary storyteller throughout the work, accompanied by the voices of children and teacher collaborators. My research explores the participants’ experiences with *Living Inquiry*, situated as they are within a seemingly restrictive neoliberal education context.

*Living Inquiry* is both a curriculum and a practice. Informed by phenomenology and hermeneutics, *Living Inquiry* invited learners to attend to their being-in-the-world through the exploration of four guiding, existential themes: *Place*, *Language*, *Time*, and *Self/Other*. Each theme offered a framework to direct the inquirer’s attention to a specific quality of daily life. For example, focusing on *Place* encouraged us to consider our Earthly home, asking us to listen to our physical and social surroundings. *Language* promoted the study of communication and interpretation, as well as heightening our awareness of the ineffable. *Time* engaged us in discussions around the temporality of our lives, while *Self/Other* helped us to consider our prejudices and address our responsibility to the other, including the other within.

When exploring a theme, each inquirer was expected to capture their observation of daily life by writing a field note. Field notes appeared in the form of written words, media recordings, and visual images. For example, when studying *Place*, one child took a
photograph of their footprints in the sand. From there, the inquirer was asked to review their field note to pull out a “gem,” a quote or summary that highlighted the theme of their observation. Next, they created a question to provoke further reflection of the “gem” or theme, for instance, “What would the world look like if we could see all of the footprints that have ever existed?” In this way, the “gem” became an invitation to further research or observe, the impetus to “go deeper” into the inquiry. Finally, each inquirer crafted a rendering of their research, their observation, and their “gem.” In the footprint example, the child took a photograph of footprints on the beach and used technology to overlay these footprints on a globe. This image was then paired with their inquiry question and a written reflection. Inquirers used these projects or renderings to springboard further inquiry during small and large group Living Inquiry discussions; however, most of the documentation and rendering of the inquiry occurred outside of class time. Every photograph (or scanned image) in the thesis illustrates a child’s engagement with Living Inquiry.

Fig. 1.2 Photograph of documentation of field note, Living Inquiry: Place

The children’s engagement with Living Inquiry is central to my study and provides an image of school as an interpretive, creative, and dialogical event. Excerpts from the children’s portfolios, transcripts of classroom conversations, and quotes from interview
discussions are woven throughout the thesis to illuminate Living Inquiry and provoke further consideration regarding its pedagogical possibilities and vulnerabilities. The thesis opens with one child’s year-long engagement with Living Inquiry and culminates with a discussion of the responsibilities and implications imbued in this curriculum.

My research endeavour has been enriched by the work of both critical and hermeneutic educational theorists and researchers, such as Poole, Smith, Aoki, and van Manen. These scholars guide my thinking and engage me in conversation with both philosophical notions and practical dilemmas embedded in my work. I have chosen hermeneutics as a research approach because it offers me a way of thinking that promotes possibility and “new” understandings rather than a static or seemingly objective “answer.” Moreover, this orientation aligns with my pedagogical beliefs, helping me to read the data, and my relation to it, with a sense of responsibility and integrity.

**Research Focus and Questions**

The intentions of this study are twofold. Firstly, and primarily, it will inform my own teaching practice. I have articulated two research questions to focus this endeavour:

1. What are children’s and teachers’ understandings of their experiences with *Living Inquiry*?

2. In what ways, if any, does *Living Inquiry* intersect with and/or interrupt the mandated provincial curriculum?

Secondly, as the first master’s study of *Living Inquiry*, it will provide a language from which further *Living Inquiry* studies can be theorized.
Thesis Outline

The thesis is in itself a Living Inquiry: a documentation of my research journey in the form of field notes, transcriptions, and thick descriptions, followed by reflections that attempt to bring the work up close in order to see what is questionable and also, and maybe more importantly, what is possible. I differentiate the field notes, anecdotes, and reflections by use of textual spacing and fonts. For example, when I am describing a classroom event or transcribing a field note I use single spacing and/or italics. When I am reflecting on or interpreting an event, I use double spacing and regular font. The use of the two fonts and/or the change of spacing indicates my attempt to “tack back and forth between an ‘insider’s passionate perspective and an outsider’s dispassionate one’” (van Manen, 1988, p.77, cited in Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p.6). I trace my understanding of Living Inquiry through two cycles of exploration, bookended by four chapters intended to set up and culminate the inquiry respectively.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One: Introduction summarizes the intentions of the research study and provides an outline for the thesis. Detailing a brief introduction to Living Inquiry, including the documentation process, this chapter helps to situate the children’s work within a broader curricular experience. Further, Chapter One anticipates the inquiry by inviting the reader into a dialogue about the tensions between Living Inquiry and a neoliberal education agenda.

Chapter Two: A Child’s Engagement With Living Inquiry: Excerpts From Trisha’s Portfolio invites an encounter with Trisha’s thoughts, wonderings, and reflections as she explored her daily life in relation to the themes of Place, Language, Time, and Self/Other. Composed of field notes, artifacts, and transcripts, this chapter depicts an image
of *Living Inquiry* through Trisha’s binder and the photography of Sandra Vander Schaaf, a co-teacher and study participant. Sandra collaborated with students to conceptualize their inquiry topics using visual media such as photography. She was also responsible for publishing each child’s rendering of their *Living Inquiry* – a collection of images and written reflections portrayed as a poster. Excerpts of these posters are included at the end of each chapter beginning in Chapter Three.

**Chapter Three: A Contrasting Context: Neoliberal Curriculum Policy and Practice** offers a brief description and critique of the current context of teaching in British Columbia. Informed by critiques of neoliberal ideology, this chapter constructs an image of education that is restrictive, that commodifies learning and encourages stakeholders to act with certainty. This image juxtaposes the portrait of *Living Inquiry* offered by Trisha, creating a dynamic backdrop for the study and a space of indwelling\(^1\) for the *Living Inquiry* participants.

**Chapter Interludes.** The end of Chapter Three marks the beginning of chapter interludes. Here, and at the end of each subsequent chapter, I offer two to four renderings, entitled “*Living Inquiry* Poster Excerpts,” from the children’s final projects. Given the personal content of these inquiries, including conceptual and portrait photographs, and the ethical responsibility to maintain anonymity/privacy, I could not include the final versions. Every effort has been made to uphold the integrity of the work, including altering those photographs that depict a child but are integral to the poster. These poster excerpts are meant to illustrate children’s engagement with *Living Inquiry* and to provide a place to pause between chapters.

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\(^1\) Aoki, 2005e, describes indwelling as dwelling between two horizons.
Chapter Four: A Researcher’s Journey further outlines the context of the research study and begins to narrate the two cycles of exploration that I introduce next. This chapter conveys my understanding of phenomenology and hermeneutics as they relate to my research, as well my rationale for taking up this orientation. In addition, Chapter Four details a more thorough description of the process of Living Inquiry pertaining to my data generation and interpretative processes. I close the chapter by addressing the issue of research credibility.

Cycle One

Chapter Five: A Pedagogical Welcome launches the first cycle of exploration. I open the chapter with a field note describing my initial experience as a student of Dr. Karen Meyer, author of the university course Living Inquiry in Learning Communities. Following the field note, I offer my interpretation of the course and point to the subtleties that made Living Inquiry not only different from my prior (formal) education experiences, but also a provocation for me to (re)consider what it means to be meaningfully engaged in learning. Chapter Five culminates with my desire to carry the work from my graduate setting to my classroom.

Chapter Six: Navigating Emergent-cy: Themes from the “Pilot” Year is organized around four questions. The first (Being obedient or hearing the call?) explores my response to the conception of Living Inquiry in my classroom and considers this response through the notion of teaching as a vocation or calling. The second (Measuring the predictable or revealing the possible?) details my curriculum plan and anticipates the first class for my students. The third (Managing the danger or attending to possibility?) provides a thick description of the participants’ engagement with Living Inquiry through two classroom
events in the “pilot” year. The fourth question (What lives here?) presents my research questions and anticipates my foray into the theoretical underpinnings of Living Inquiry.

Cycle Two

Chapter Seven: Imagining Living Inquiry as an Abundant Space offers my conceptual understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Living Inquiry as informed by theorists such as Meyer, Jardine, Aoki, and van Manen. Here I depict Living Inquiry as an abundant space that invites inquirers to reflect on notions of worldliness and, for teachers, inspires a sensitive and tactful presence with children. Chapter Seven informs the subsequent three chapters by offering a theoretic lens with which to read the children’s and teachers’ understandings of Living Inquiry.

Chapter Eight: “Beyond Marks”: Children’s Understanding(s) of Living Inquiry describes my interpretations of the children’s responses to Living Inquiry as described in their reflections and interviews. Unpacking the children’s refrains that Living Inquiry is “about you,” “beyond marks,” and “out of the box,” this chapter juxtaposes their experience with a neoliberal agenda. Further, the students provide valuable insight into the question of “what matters?” in education.

Chapter Nine: Between the Burden and the Call: Teachers’ Understanding(s) of Living Inquiry explores the adults’ interpretations of their experience with Living Inquiry. The chapter opens with an event entitled “Just Trust Us.” This encounter with two students provokes me to question how trust may or may not play out in Living Inquiry and calls me to attend to the balance between leading children and being led. Further, this event helps to illustrate both the need for and the challenges of enacting pedagogical tact, as attested to by the teacher participants.
Chapter Ten: A Closing Discussion: *Living Inquiry in Abundance*? presents a summary of my interpretations around two organizing themes and outlines the implications and responsibilities of *Living Inquiry as Pedagogy*. Lastly, I detail how the study has changed me and what I continue to be challenged by in my role as a teacher researcher.

Poetically speaking, the thesis is about beginning and becoming. For most participants, it is a story about beginning to develop a consciousness that invites ongoing consideration to the notion of worldliness, the notion that we are positioned in a world that constitutes us and in which we are belated. For me as a teacher researcher, the research study also took on a pedagogical purpose. It asked me to contemplate what it means to dwell responsibly and tactfully in my life with children. In this way, the thesis is a story about beginning to see my role anew and becoming, renewing, and (re)orientating myself toward a sensibility that seeks to embrace multiplicity, uncertainty, and possibility.

*Living Inquiry as Pedagogy* asks us to attend to student voice, for this voice challenges our notion of school and what it means to learn and live in our world today. My hope is that the representations of *Living Inquiry* that follow will provoke thoughts and generate concerns about existing curricular practices and assumptions, and will leave you with the desire to dialogue about the purpose of education.
CHAPTER TWO: A CHILD’S ENGAGEMENT WITH *LIVING INQUIRY*:
EXCERPTS FROM TRISHA’S PORTFOLIO

It's a process of going deeper...

I write my field notes and then pick what I liked most or what I thought most meaningful. When I decide to present it my thinking carries on and I discover even more when I'm making my project. I then decide how I would like to present it (poem, photo, writing) and I pick the best one for the topic. Then I create it.

Fig. 2.1 Photograph and description of documentation process, Living Inquiry: Place
This chapter, composed of field notes, artifacts, and reflections, is designed to serve as a window into one child's engagement with *Living Inquiry*. My intention is to create an image of *Living Inquiry* by taking you through Trisha’s personal observations, interpretations, and wonderings as she engages with the *Living Inquiry* themes of Place, Language, Time, and Self/Other.

The first portion of this chapter consists of excerpts from Trisha’s *Living Inquiry* portfolio and a descriptive transcript of the Time Debate, a spirited classroom conversation. The transcript is included to situate Trisha’s experience in the broader context of the class inquiry into the theme of Time.

I interject mid-chapter to introduce the process of the final *Living Inquiry* project. I set up the content from Trisha’s portfolio as it reflects the chronology and process of her chosen inquiry, up to and including the gallery exhibition. Examples of Trisha’s engagement with this process follow, drawing upon her portfolio and images from the gallery exhibit. Finally, I offer concluding remarks on this chapter, wrapping up Trisha’s journey, and transition into Chapter Three: A Contrasting Context: Neoliberal Curriculum Policy and Practice.

Trisha’s portfolio precedes a thorough description of *Living Inquiry* and, as a result, I anticipate that a number of questions may arise as you walk through this chapter. These questions will be answered in the bulk of the thesis; however, it is my strongest desire that a child’s engagement with *Living Inquiry* be foregrounded. I invite you now into Trisha’s portfolio.
Place

Field note, November 24, 2006

My head rests back on the brown cushion underneath it. I look up through my glass ceiling and I see the pine needles blown off the tree and which have landed on the thick glass, with no feelings, or knowledge, well, not that we know of. Past the glass [is] the pale blue sky, clouds within it, and sunlight pushing through the dull horizon. Why is it we can never escape what’s already there? Straight in front of me the ocean lays, cargo boats, and behind them, downtown Vancouver. But what’s underneath them? What lies beneath the surface? The waves? The tide? We all know about the fish, and the sharks, and the whales, etc… How can you ever know what someone feels? In my opinion, no matter how many times they say it, no matter how many times other people say it, you can never know what one feels. So what about the water? Can we really ever know? Do we want to change? Do we want to grasp hold of feelings we can never really grasp, like beneath the water?

Fig. 2.2 Scan of Water poem, Living Inquiry: Place
Field note, December 9, 2006

I’m sitting here, in the same place that I did on November 24: the couch. Ahead of me is the TV, where “The Lord of the Rings” is paused. Upon the screen an urachi is screaming but obviously with no noise. But you can tell that he is in battle. No noise is present, but if you really focus you can hear the battle cries. I can hear my mum in the room beside me, wrapping presents. Once again, there is this unspoken language.

Just because there is either no sight or no noise does not mean you cannot know or feel the feelings which are within unspoken languages. Beyond the TV screen or my mum I hear my brother’s guitar on the CD player. He’s been recorded many times and his CD is playing, but I do not have a vision of where he was or who he was with when he was playing this. I can picture my mum because she is right beside me, and in presence. But sometimes we cannot recall visions from the past without being there. The song was recorded in the past but I was not there. When I hear it I do not have a picture in my head but I can feel it. Symphonies and other performances of that sort have the same effect. Last year, during a project called “Think, Tac, Toe,” you were asked to describe a song and explain what the lyrics meant. Instead, I did “symphony no. 5” and explained its feeling, and how it is played. When there are no words, sight, or sound, there is still language; it is just unspoken.
Time

Field note, January 1, 2007

The sound drifting through my ears is coming from the TV in the kitchen. It sounds like an old horror, with its dated spooky music and the ancient “footsteps in the corridor.” I wonder what it was made. The soft voice sounds like Grace Kelly. She’s dead now, I wonder what happened to her. I best she had a good life, being famous and all. It was only a matter of time before she left us. And it will only be a matter of time until every one of you will leave the world too. So, as Gollum said, time really does slay kings, or queens of acting in this case. But where do we go? What comes after death? Is it life? I seriously hope it will be.

Is time really real? Is it just us? Is time really there? Does it exist? Is this all a dream? I wish I could just know, I wish my question and all questions could just be answered. The someone or something or thing behind this, behind the world is the only one who knows.

What about immortality? Do you really want to be immortal? Never dying, and never really living because death is a part of life and it is better to be in the cycle of life than to be out.
Fig. 2.5 Scan of *Circle of Life* painting, Living Inquiry: Time

*Time Debate*

Trisha’s small group is standing at the front of the classroom with her painting as a centrepiece. Four children encircle the painting; their heads bend together then apart, bridging the rendering. Their voices flow methodically to the beat of opinions and rationales. Their hands flicker and twist, their arms direct the argument like passionate conductors of an opera. Fellow students are called to this opera as faces turn toward the voices. Bodies lean in to hear what they are saying.

I call the class together for large group debriefing and ask Trisha to summarize what’s happened in her group. I’m hopeful that we can join the conversation. She begins to reveal her theory on Time, and then Steven quickly interjects his ideas in an effort to elaborate on their shared perspective. Shane jumps in to challenge Trisha’s claims. Their opera begins again. A few children around the circle begin to ask for clarification; some strain to have their opinion heard.
Dr. Meyer: Whoa, I remember from last year that Time was very thoughtful. Right now I’m reading about Being and Time and the author is encouraging us to keep our mind perfectly quiet. This is total awareness. If our mind is busy, we don’t see.

Trisha and Steven (talking together almost as one): But you can’t quiet your mind because you’re thinking about quieting your mind.

Dr. Meyer: (laughs) … Well said. Living Inquiry is also about the awareness of listening. When you disagree, you learn about your own prejudices, biases. The point of Living Inquiry is to examine these prejudices. We are going to use some rules to help us to listen to each other. You can only speak when you have the talking stick. We will go around the circle so every person has the chance to speak. Okay, let’s begin.

Dr. Meyer passes the talking stick to Olen who is sitting close to Shane. They begin to talk together, echoing one another’s thoughts as they try to continue the conversation from where it left off in Trisha’s small group. Simultaneously, Trisha and Steven charge in with their arguments. Dr. Meyer intervenes again to remind us of the rules. She passes the talking stick to Nola.

Nola: Okay…(she smiles; all eyes are on her). Time flip-flops. There’s a “before and after.”

Kathryn: Yeah, um … I kinda think there’s a beginning of Time because … ah … there are stories about the beginning of Time but these … these are cultural reflections of Time.

Marlena: I agree. Time is also about Science and Religion right?

Kian: Yes, I definitely think Time has a beginning because it’s 2007 right? Yeah. So because it’s like 2007, so if we go back 2007 years ago that’s the beginning of time. (Looks confident then puzzled. He tries to grab the talking stick but the next person is already using it).

Kacy: No, that’s just someone’s perspective. Time begins when WE identify it.

Emma: Um… how could Time have always been there? Um … who would have created it?

Nola: Just cuz we didn’t know Time doesn’t mean, like, it wasn’t happening.
**Trisha:** If it started, who created it? Who created “that”? “That” is Infinity.

**Steven:** Time is beyond us right? Um…yeah. It matters how you define Time and how you perceive things.

I see Penelope get up and wander to her desk. …She’s grabbing her dictionary…

**Olen:** No, but, like there’s time zones right? Each country has a Time.

Penelope sits next to Kathryn. She is so close that her arm rubs up against Kathryn’s shoulder. She opens her dictionary and thumbs through…

**Kathryn:** Time is our minds because it moves slowly or quickly depending on how you enjoyed it.

Penelope nudges Kathryn to look at the dictionary and they begin reading the definition of Time aloud together. The bell goes and we are out of time.

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**Fig. 2.7 Photograph of children with talking stick, Living Inquiry: Time**

**Self/Other**

*Field note, February 27, 2007*

It’s Tuesday and I’m at my grandma and grandpa’s house. Anyways, they have a subscription to National Geographic. I was looking at one of the magazines and flipped to a picture of a boy, quite young, and black. He was in an Amazon of some sort. I think in Africa or Indonesia. The boy didn’t look Saudi Arabian or Middle Eastern (you know what I mean). It just made me think of why fate took him that way, and took me and you a different way. Why did he take the hard road? I almost wish, and it’s weird saying this, but sometimes I wish I could be them, except I would go to school. Still though, I want to know what it’s like
to run through the dry sands, and dig up the sand for clams and crabs to eat. I want to know what it’s like to live in a little house, go to a tiny school and use the water pump. My relationship with those people, is, well, I don’t even have one. But I do! I don’t know how to explain. I guess I don’t have a relationship with particular people, but with them, and my want to be like them. I want to experience their life, and I’m guessing that they would probably want to experience ours. Between us and the stories and photos that led me to the wanting of being like them. In between us is a life that could never be. (Trisha’s emphasis)
Fig. 2.9 Scan of collage, Living Inquiry: Self/Other

why is it that we can never be who we want to be?

Why is it that we have a life dream, and then when we reach it, it feels good and all, but it seems that it wasn’t what we really wanted? There is no way in the world to figure out what you really want, or what’s your favourite, unless you experience every little detail of everything in all history and present. It’s just that, sometimes I reach what I wanted, and I don’t feel what I expected. Instead I feel regret that I even tried, and then wish I had tried something else. You always have to be true to yourself, and if you know you really want something, just go do it, no matter if other people don’t desire to do what you want to do.

Fig. 2.10 Scan of text from back of collage (above), Living Inquiry: Self/Other
Final Project

The final project began with my invitation to children to decide on an inquiry for in-depth exploration. Some children selected an existing project from their portfolio while others chose something “new.” This inquiry became the focus of the final poster, a polished representation of their study. Living Inquiry poster excerpts are included at the end of each chapter from Chapter Three on.

To assist in finding focus and “going deeper,” I offered a graphic organizer with various prompts such as “I see ...”; “I hear ….” The graphic was created collaboratively with children and teachers in response to requests for guidance. The Idea Organizer presented a framework for the elaboration of the “gem” or theme of the field note. It invited the inquirer to engage their senses in playful wonder or serious contemplation.

![Image of Idea Organizer]

Fig. 2.11 Exhibit presentation detail, Living Inquiry: Final Project
The process of *Living Inquiry* invited children to communicate their inquiries in both text and image. Poems, prose, essays, and memoirs emerged. Through photography, collage, painting, drawing, sculpting, dance, and anything else their vivid imaginations came up with, children explored their topics visually. Text and image came together in a collaborative process between children and teachers with the goal of making learning visible. Sandra and I worked individually with each child assisting where requested. Examples of collaborative endeavours included proofreading and visual consulting (e.g., how a phenomenon may be captured through photography). Once the poster content and layout were finalized, Sandra used computer software to publish the poster. Each inquirer was consulted once more to ensure that the layout was consistent with their vision of the poster. Then the posters were printed and laminated on foam core.

Every child’s poster was exhibited at a local children’s art gallery and an opening night was held so the children and the public could dialogue about the inquiries. In my opinion, the exhibition of the posters furthered the learning experience by creating a public space where the boundaries of age and education were crossed with spirited interaction.

I now invite you to return to Trisha’s portfolio as an illustration of her engagement with the above process of inquiry and of preparing her work for exhibition.
Final Project: Finding Focus

Fig. 2.12 Scan of Idea Organizer, Living Inquiry: Final Project

Final Project: Creative Communication

Fig. 2.13 Scan of LOST poem, Living Inquiry: Final Project
Before the sun lifted I could already feel it. Even though I knew my time had come, I wish it hadn’t. Youth was with me.

On the day of March 15, 44 BC my circle was split. Never in my life had something like this happen to me, and it would only happen once. Dawn was upon me when I set out on my way. The way to the heavens is what I could feel. Heat overcame by body, as I was set in a trance the moment Gaius Casca stabbed me. Overpart of my body felt silenced, and my mind started racing. Suns, moons, I could see them all. Tricked to death, I was frightened. As I laid there I wondered, I really was dying, and I felt my life was not over, not at all. Rings of gravity took me. Staring into the sky I felt myself becoming lost to the world. I didn’t know what to do. Suppose I just rot in the ground, my superiors weep at my deceased body, and my soul is gone forever. What if I just stop? Heaven, Valhalla, The City of Gods, my secret paradise, I couldn’t tell where I was being lifted to. Eyes of all Gods flashed in my mind and I realized this wasn’t the end. Running tears come from fell from my skin. Every person and soul I knew to be dead was to be in the same place as me. I just rot in the ground. Suppose I just rot in the ground, my superiors weep at my deceased body, and my soul is gone forever. What if I just stop? Heaven, Valhalla, The City of Gods, my secret paradise, I couldn’t tell where I was being lifted to. Eyes of all Gods flashed in my mind and I realized this wasn’t the end. Running tears come from fell from my skin. Every person and soul I knew to be dead was to be in the same place as me. What if I just rot in the ground, my superiors weep at my deceased body, and my soul is gone forever. What if I just stop? Heaven, Valhalla, The City of Gods, my secret paradise, I couldn’t tell where I was being lifted to. Eyes of all Gods flashed in my mind and I realized this wasn’t the end. Running tears come from fell from my skin. Every person and soul I knew to be dead was to be in the same place as me and for some reason I felt that was...
a good thing. Immortality was not what I wanted, it was not what I needed, but I felt the dusk on my skin still.

Look right through me. And after, avenge me. Youth is beyond me now.

Fig. 2.15 Scan of refined field note reflection, Living Inquiry: Final Project

Final Project: The Poster

I present the content of Trisha’s final poster, a collage of independent pieces on the themes of Time, independently on the following page. Although the readability may be compromised, I offer the complete poster to give you a sense of the composition of the final piece. The poster includes the above text samples, such as the LOST poem, the Julius Caesar field note, the Circle of Life painting, and the refined field note reflection. In addition, it also portrays two conceptual photographs and a portrait photograph. The photographs have been edited to ensure anonymity. Trisha’s reflections on the final project and its process follow her poster.
I sit here, almost in tears, and my mind races.

All that comes to mind at this moment is a thing I think we all fear: death. The circle of life is upon us, and death is directly on our path, and I’m absolutely terrified. Are we supposed to live this Earth by dying? Do we even leave Earth? I can’t get through the thoughts. I don’t want to be immortal, but when I die I don’t want to be lost forever. I can’t imagine it. I would never want my life to end in just one go. And I’m scared that will happen. Because everyone dies, I know I’m not alone in these feelings; however, I think it’s different for every person. I desire that when you die, you leave for the place you want to be in, and the place you believe is there. Because how can something you know doesn’t exist really be there? To me, being in the circle of life, and dying, is much more natural than to be out of the circle, and to be lost. Shall we reincarnate, or shall we lie there to rot? Or maybe we’ll sail all the seven seas in our souls, and never quite be lost at all. The thing is, I want to go everywhere, see everything, and experience every little detail of life before I die, but it’s just not possible. I’m strongly passionate about history, and our past, how we got here, and how we’ll leave. I cannot get my mind off it. So, I propose that after I die I will be able to do the things I believe I shall.

Beyond the stars, and across the seas, there will always be infinity and forever.
Final Project: Poster Reflection

The Feeling and Reflection

It was amazing. I actually couldn’t close my mouth from smiling. My poster in its final form was so diverse, and it felt so distinguished from anything I’ve ever done. I felt so far from coequal. Last year I loved my poster, and this year I love my poster even more. I’m still feeling extremely lucky to be in the same class twice, to go through this journey twice is better than anything. I feel so deep whenever I look at my poster. Knowing that I came all this way to finish like this is the coolest feeling. It’s just how I wanted it. Everything flows from inside my head to the poster perfectly. My thoughts couldn’t be presented more fitting and parallel. But inside those parallel lines are deeper lines. Inside the perfection is even more; hidden secrets and lost thoughts. The whole entire essence is exactly what I portrayed.

I remember making everything; my process. I can still recall the dark night I wrote my ideas down. Everything came to my mind that night, everything I ever wanted to be recognized. I remember painting my art piece as well, and then redoing shortly afterwards. I needed myself and the painting to feel right, to feel true. And after repainting the whole piece I felt that, the honest feeling was being emitted.

When pitting my poster together I knew it must of definitely been hard for Mrs. Paterson and Sandra, obviously. I had so many things I wanted to share I knew it must have been difficult, extremely difficult, to put it all together. All the time it must of took to finalize it must be... beyond my experience. As for my pictures, they couldn’t be better. They capture me in the exact why I wanted them to: lost in life. I remember Sandra retaking and relocating my pictures countless times (and I thank you so much for that 😊) just to find what I really felt was going to be perfect. My pictures are just me.

This year has been amazing, my poster is amazing. I cannot believe this journey will actually end.

Fig. 2.17 Scan of poster reflection, Living Inquiry: Final Project

Final Project: The Exhibit

Fig. 2.18 Photograph of exhibition guests, Living Inquiry: Final Project
Summary

This chapter has offered an example of a child’s engagement with *Living Inquiry*. Trisha’s portfolio portrays the process of taking up four guiding themes, of documenting lived experience, and further reflecting on this experience through individual and
collaborative inquiry. Moreover it lends an image of school as an interpretive, conversational, and dynamic encounter with one’s being-in-the-world. This image is elaborated throughout the thesis and specifically in Chapter Eight: “Beyond Marks”: Children’s Understanding(s) of Living Inquiry.

Trisha’s work is located against the backdrop of a neoliberal education context, characterized by critics as restricting, dominating, and intrusive. The two images, juxtaposed in this thesis, provide a light and stark contrast of education today in British Columbia. I now turn to the task of describing a neoliberal education context more fully, including how this ideology is reflected in teaching practices and relationships, and lay out the argument that neoliberalism forecloses inquiry.
I learned that there has always been inquiry; it’s just that we don’t use it much. Everyone can do it; they just have to take the time to try to raise their awareness.

*Kiam, Grade Six*
Neoliberalism is the prevailing political economic paradigm in the world today and has been described as an ideological 'monoculture,' in that when neoliberal policies are criticized a common response is that ‘there is no alternative.’ (Ross & Gibson, 2007, p.2)

Research suggests that the world is in crisis. Concerned with “solving” these crises and creating “answers,” neoliberalism appears to be interested in mandating certainty, objectivity, and standardization. Moreover, as Ross and Gibson (2007) poignantly articulate in the opening quote, these modernist values are dominating social and economic discourses worldwide. Some education theorists are concerned by this development because not only is neoliberalism proving to be ineffective (i.e., the crises are still there), it has potentially dangerous effects, such as the foreclosure of additional discourses.

Critics argue that education has fallen prey to neoliberal domination. I understand through my readings that neoliberal education contexts can severely limit, if not completely reconfigure, political and pedagogical relationships, and, in turn, restrict inquiry and the opportunity for new understandings/ways of being.

This chapter attempts to answer four questions with regards to the current context of teaching in British Columbia, and thus informs my own teaching practice and inquiry: How is neoliberalism reflected in the current context? What has contributed to the development of a neoliberal education context? How does neoliberal ideology play out within and amongst political/pedagogical relationships? How might we respond to neoliberal domination (differently)?/ What are other (possible) discourses?

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2 Terry Wrigley, British theorist, outlines: “Humanity is faced [with] three kinds of global crisis: poverty and debt; a collapse of the planet’s ecosystem; and war (2009, p.62). He goes on to argue that these crises are linked to capitalism (p.62).

3 This statement will be supported throughout the chapter.

4 Because the purpose of the chapter is to simply provide a backdrop to the study, each answer is only a brief glimpse of the current context of teaching in British Columbia. There is considerable literature on the topic but an in-depth exploration is outside the scope of this thesis. Also, by using the term “answer” I acknowledge that I am offering but one interpretation of this context.
Neoliberalism as Reflected in Current Teaching Context

Scholarly articles, government-produced literature, and media reports include the following descriptors to speak of the current education context under a neoliberal regime: “under attack,” “failing,” “at risk,” and “lacking.” These words suggest that education is (or at least was at the start of the decade) in a state of crisis both globally and provincially. This notion is being discussed on two fronts: the dominant discourse of neoliberals, and the undermining voice of critics, such as the authors presented in this chapter. The current policies and practices put forth by the B.C. Ministry of Education paint the picture that education needs (or needed) reforming, and it is through capitalistic reform measures that British Columbian students will “succeed” in school and in securing employment – the final goal of a neoliberal purpose of education. Critics of neoliberal reforms suggest that it is precisely these reforms and, moreover, their underpinning values that create a crisis. Although these groups seem to be “at war” (Poole, 2007) they appear to share the underlying sentiment that the context of education in B.C. is complex and contentious.

Poole (2007) offers a synthesis of a neoliberal perspective on education and lists the key features of this instrumental orientation:

Neo-liberals conceptualize education as a commodity to be bought by customers (students and parents) and sold by suppliers (schools and others). From a market perspective, schools are training grounds for future workers and consumers, as well as a multi-billion dollar industry offering opportunities for profit. Efficiency, accountability for student outcomes (usually measured by standardized test scores and other measures like graduation rates), choice for parents (e.g., charter schools, vouchers, within-district school choice), privatization (e.g., public funding for private schools, user-pay fees, contracting with private firms to operate public schools, private-public partnerships for school construction, school-business partnerships), and attacks on teachers’ unions are hallmarks of neo-liberalism in education. (para.3)

5 The literature cited in this chapter points to a dualistic perspective with regards to the context of education: those “for” neoliberal orientations and those “against.”
My daily experience as a teaching vice-principal brings a lived quality to these neoliberal features. A typical day might include:

- planning outcome-based lessons;
- assessing and reporting student performance using Ministry-developed rubrics;
- documenting my planning in minute detail for future teachers and in compliance with our choice school’s regulating body;
- reassuring parents that our school’s FSA results (standardized tests) do not necessarily depict the quality of learning experiences provided at the school;
- negotiating with staff in regards to what extracurricular activities we might offer students (to compete with a neighbouring private school); and
- attending district meetings with my administrative colleagues to debrief the alignment of our school goals with district goals and receive updates on district business ventures (such as soccer or tennis academies).

Although I am purposely excluding details that would illustrate teaching as an ontological endeavour, when I reflect on the overall orientation of my daily experience, it is easy to see a strong, if not dominating, neoliberal influence.

**Contributions to the Development of a Neoliberal Education Context**

British Columbians, as part of a global community, have been, and continue to be faced with budget restraints and other economic hardships as a result of the ongoing economic crisis. Middle-class anxiety is prevalent (Biesta, 2004; Connell, 2008; Phelan, 1996). The message from the media and the government is clear: British Columbians (i.e., graduates) must fight for their place in the global market. The belief is that the logical place to start this fight is in schools, the ideal training ground. Consequently, government reforms were (and continue to be) set in motion to “introduce market elements into the provision of

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6 It is important to note that the B.C. reforms described in this chapter did not take place in isolation but were part of a globalizing policy environment (Appadurai, 1996; Ball, 1998a, 1998b, 1999; Levin, 1998, all cited in Fallon & Paquette, 2008).
public schooling by promoting consumer choice and competition amongst providers coupled with a considerable degree of public accountability and government regulation over policy making, evaluation, and curriculum” (Fallon & Paquette, 2008, p.5).

However, not everyone subscribes to the belief that education needs or needed reforming. Some critics believe that governments manufactured a sense of crisis for the purpose of rationalizing school reform, as detailed by Wrigley⁷ (2009):

A sense of the crisis had to be manufactured, which took the form of a moral panic about “low standards.” This is not to say that there wasn’t a real economic and political crisis involving (internationally) a falling rate of profit and (nationally) resurgent trade-union militancy, but the ideological framework consisted in constructing this as a crisis of schooling and educational standards, and laying the blame on teachers and schools. (p.63)

Others, such as British philosopher Onora O’Neill (2002b), wonder if the crisis of education is part of a larger (and possibly manufactured) crisis of trust:

Sociologists and journalists [who are not always supported by public polls] … claim that we are in the grip of a deepening crisis of public trust directed even at our most familiar institutions and office-holders. Mistrust, it seems is now directed not just at those clearly in breach of law and accepted standards, not just at crooks and wide boys. Mistrust and suspicion have spread across all areas of life, and supposedly with good reason. Citizens, it is said, no longer trust governments, or politicians, or ministers, or the police, or the courts, or the prison service. Consumers, it is said, no longer trust business, especially big business, or their products. None of us, it is said, trusts banks, or insurers, or pension providers. Patients, it is said, no longer trust doctors (think of Dr Shipman!), and in particular no longer trust hospitals or hospital consultants. ‘Loss of trust’ is in short, a cliché of our times. (para. 9)

Whether the crisis of trust is “real” or not, public and private services are called to account in an effort to be transparent and to gain (or maintain) public trust. Schools (public, private, elementary, secondary, university, etc.) are no exception. As such, “accountability⁸ has become an integral part of the education system and the day-to-day practice of educators

⁷ Although Wrigley writes from a British perspective, I believe his arguments also apply to the B.C. context.
⁸ Biesta is careful here to distinguish the type of accountability underpinning neoliberal educational reforms (technical-managerial) from a (general discourse) interpretation of accountability as “being answerable to” (p.234). Managerial accountability is the overriding obligation in the “flurry of changes in provincial education policies [since the Liberal Election Platform on Education in 2001]” (Grimmett & D’Amico, 2008, p.6).
in many countries around the world” (Biesta, 2004, p.233). These policy changes towards increased accountability and competition have had profound effects on teaching and learning conditions in British Columbia, especially with regards to relationships between and amongst education stakeholders.

According to Grimmett and D’Amico (2008) and Fallon and Paquette (2008), B.C. policy changes have attempted to restructure economic and cultural education practices, including the professional side of teaching. Five policies in particular have attributed to the fundamental restructuring: *The 2002 Select Standing Committee on Education (SSCE) Report, Bill 34 (2002), The 2002 School Amendment Act, The 2003 Teaching Professional Amendment Act*, and the *2001 Skills Development and Labour Statutes Amendment Act*. At the heart of these policies lies the “idea that the educational fate of children should be shaped by the choices and decisions they and their parents make about how to journey through the education system, not by circumstances in which they happen to find themselves because of decisions of others” (Fallon & Paquette, 2008, p.16). Further, the authors of these policies believed that “establishment of a quasi-market in education would enhance learning possibilities and opportunities because parents know best what is good for their children” (p.11). A brief synopsis of each policy follows:

- *The Select Standing Committee on Education (SSCE) Report* “concluded that the system was over-regulated and encumbered by collective agreements, and called for greater accountability and more meaningful involvement of learners, parents and community members” (Grimmett & D’Amico, 2008, p.7). This report outlined many recommendations that informed the following three polices.

- *Bill 34* introduced “(a) an explicit statutory framework for creation of for-profit school-board business companies, (b) parental choice and school autonomy (through the creation of school-planning councils), and (c) a considerable degree at least ostensible public accountability (through school-board accountability contracts)” (Fallon & Paquette, 2008, p.4).
• *The School Amendment Act* detailed such aims as “establishing specific goals and outcomes to measure the success of educators in public schooling” and “devot[ing] more of each education dollar to improving the quality of education, and less to bureaucracy” ([Fallon & Paquette](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2008, p.27).

• *The Teaching Professional Amendment Act* “changed the British Columbia College of Teachers’ (BCCT) structure and required the College to develop standards of practice” ([Grimmett & D’Amico](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2008, p.9).

• *The Skills Development and Labour Statutes Amendment Act* declared education an essential service.

Many theorists, such as Wendy Poole (2007), suggest that these policies, along with neoliberal rhetoric about reducing input (e.g., fiscal and human resources) and expecting greater output (e.g., higher test scores and number of graduates) have negatively impacted relationships within the education sphere. I draw upon the arguments of a variety of theorists to help me make sense of the reconfiguration of relationships between the public and the state ([Biesta](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2004); teachers and the government ([Poole](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2007); teachers and parents ([Connell](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2008); teachers and their colleagues ([Bernasconi](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2004; [Grimmett & D’Amico](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2008); teachers and their practice (or teachers and themselves; [Phelan](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 1996); and teachers and their students ([Wrigley](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2009). The primary effect of the reconfiguration is, in my view, that educational relationships become about fulfilling a neoliberal agenda (mandate) instead of conversing, exploring, and inquiring about the purpose of education.

**Neoliberal Ideology Within Political/Pedagogical Relationships**

[Biesta](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3150/08-BCCT25.5?seq=1#metadata-tab) 2004) suggests that the relationship between the state and its citizens has been reshaped in the wake of ideological transformations, economic changes, and increasing accountability practices. He argues that

this relationship has become less a political relationship – that is, a relationship between government and citizens who, together, are concerned about the common good – and more an economic relationship – that is, a relationship between the state
as provider and the taxpayer as consumer of public services (most significantly, health care, education, and social and economic security and safety). The reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and its citizens should not be understood as simply a different way of relating. The new relationship has fundamentally changed the role and identity of the two parties as well as the terms on which they relate. Not only can it be argued that the relationship between the state and its citizens has been depoliticized, but one could even argue that the political sphere itself has disappeared. (p.237)

Pragmatically speaking, the “disappearance” of the political sphere means that the public cannot actively take part in authentic conversations with the government around the purpose of education. Instead, the public is left out of the “accountability loop” (p.20), and the government becomes the regulating body over schools. Biesta further argues “the current technical-managerial approach to accountability actually produces economic relationships between people and makes democratic relationships difficult if not impossible to establish” (p.20). What’s more, and many educational theorists agree, “accountability becomes an end in itself rather than a means to achieving other [and more democratic] ends” (p.241).

Consequently, (in a neoliberal regime) parents and students are reduced to mere consumers of education rather than agents of change, despite policies that seemingly promote their involvement such as School Planning Councils.⁹

Poole (2007) extends the notion that neoliberal education contexts strain political relationships when she describes the tensions between the government and teachers. In her analysis of the discourse and power relations between the B.C. Teacher’s Federation and the government, Poole concludes that the BCTF strongly opposes neoliberal ideology and in turn, the translation of this ideology into educational practice. Opposing neoliberal agendas

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⁹ School Planning Councils (SPCs) are comprised of three parents, one teacher, one administrator (usually the school principal), and one student (in secondary schools). Their mandate is to create school achievement goals (School Growth Plans) based on numerical data (e.g., FSA and other standardized test results) that must align with district and Ministry goals. The teacher’s union (BCTF) questions the authenticity of the progress, and thus in 2006 directed their members to withdraw their participation. To date, the SPC continues to meet and create student achievement goals in the absence of teachers.
including the privatization and commercialization of education and advocating for their sense of professionalism and autonomy, teachers, through the BCTF, have engaged in individual protests and collective strikes. Poole argues:

BC teachers are willing to engage in these acts in evidence of support for their union and their anger and distrust toward government. The BCTF successfully appeals to teachers’ sense of democracy, their frustration with underfunding of education, their sense of social justice, and to a definition of education that is much broader than an economic, competitive one (para.55).

With conflicting views regarding the purpose of education at the heart of the “war,” (para.20) between the government and the BCTF, it is no surprise that school, the place where policy and practice play out, has been described as “the trenches” (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 2006). It is a logical assumption then that these political interactions and conflicting ideologies would impact relationships between teachers and parents, especially when teachers are positioned (on the frontlines) as providers of a service of which parents and students are the primary consumers.

Connell’s (2008) research primarily explores the effects of the neoliberal regime on middle-class parents. Although she acknowledges that this regime has generated “new means of action for parents” (e.g., School Planning Councils), she critiques this action, claiming that the parents’ role has been reconfigured and is now defined as “market agent” (p.187).

Connell worries that neoliberalism sends the message that “being a good parent means [being informed and] buying the best services for one’s own children” (p.187). To help parents make informed decisions, the Ministry publishes student achievement results, provided by schools through their districts, so that parents can assess and compare schools. Websites such as AchieveBC (Ministry of Education) offer “school profile” searches where the viewer can access information regarding FSA results, demographic statistics (e.g.,
percentage of English as a Second Language learners), and Satisfaction Survey\textsuperscript{10} results.Connell argues that neoliberal messages and practices promote instrumental “investments in schooling” and put undue pressure on parents. Further, they contribute to anxiety and a “no cure neo-liberal depression” (p.190). Her article concludes with an acknowledgement that “the school cannot fix families under stress,” but she hopes that schools can “provide a setting for good human relations in which energies for learning (rather than for competition) are generated” (p.190). I wonder how teachers greet suggestions such as Connell’s when they themselves are caught in a mandate that forces a “focus on student outcomes [and] measurable results” (Bernasconi, 2004, p.9).

Bernasconi (2004) writes about accountability and accreditation in B.C. Although his work does not focus on professional relationships explicitly, I draw upon his research to explore the relationship between teachers, including principals and vice-principals, and their school districts.

As a vice-principal, and thus a member of a professional association and not the teachers’ union, the School District referred to me as a “manager of the board.” It was my duty to fulfill the District’s (or Board’s), and thus the Ministry’s mandates. In this way, it seemed that the District responsibility was to devolve the Ministry’s mandates onto the administrator(s) and then onto the teachers. My administrative roles included such tasks as collecting and reporting standardized test results and student demographic information, supervising and reporting on teachers, carrying out student discipline, etc. I had access to “ever more developed guidelines, manuals, tools, databases and software” and was expected use these to develop and exercise “management know-how” (Bernasconi, 2004, p.9).

\textsuperscript{10}“Satisfaction surveys, administered annually as part of the accountability cycle, gather opinions from students, parents and school staff on achievement, human and social development, and safety” (Government of British Columbia, 2009).
The B.C. school system appears to be comparable to a traditional corporate organization, which is a hierarchical system of various levels of management and their respective subordinates (i.e., as a vice-principal I was simply middle management). Coté, Day, and de Peuter (2007) suggest that neoliberalism perpetuates and multiplies various forms of interlocking oppression, “allow[ing] ‘populations’ to be divided and managed” (p.319). I would add that the role of teacher-as-manager intensifies working conditions for teachers and challenges professional activities such as collaboration. Grimmett and D’Amico (2008) support this view; I summarize their research next.

Grimmett and D’Amico’s research found that, under a neoliberal regime, both experienced and novice teachers feel that they are “working more with less.” However, what’s new is that while experienced teachers still believe that collaboration is an important component of “a collective responsibility to boost learning for students,” less experienced teachers “do not show a similar openness” to this kind of work (p.25). Further, in their previous research on teaching professionalism and attitudes (Grimmett, Dagneais, D’Amico, Jacquet, & Ilieva, 2008, cited in Grimmett and D’Amico, 2008), they found two contrasting discourses at work in B.C. schools: a discourse of despair and a discourse of hope (p.29). In the first discourse, teachers were affected by “political constraints of policy changes designed to make the system more efficient, and in some cases, bring it to heel” (p.29). What is promising is that the discourse of hope, “framed around professional collaboration on matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment,” remains “unaffected at this point” (p.29). However, because hope seems to primarily reside in experienced teachers, the researchers concluded that this discourse is at risk of being “seriously diminished” or even “disappearing” when more experienced teachers retire (p.29).
In my experience, inquiry, like collaboration, appears to be diminished under the pressure of fulfilling a neoliberal mandate. For example, the B.C. elementary curriculum, comprising eight required areas of study, each with copious prescribed learning outcomes, can become a type of checklist – a document to “cover” rather than a starting place for dialogue. In this light, students can be viewed as empty vessels to fill with such curriculum that can be later tested and used for marketing or reform purposes. I align myself with Phelan (1996) who writes: “An emphasis on performance quietens teacher inquiry. Calls for [technical-managerial] accountability require teachers to be certain rather than reflective about their practices” (p.340). Phelan further suggests that certainty promotes presentism\textsuperscript{11} and a view of teacher-as-technician “whose major concerns lie in the areas of classroom management and instructional strategies” (p.341). In this view of teaching, professionalism is reduced, passivity is emphasized, and epistemology (knowing that and knowing how) takes precedence.

If “teaching is about shaping individuals” (Carr, 1993, p.21, cited in Phelan, 1996, p.337), and if teaching is reduced to a depersonalized, routinized endeavour, then school learning can become “a kind of alienated labor, with the exchange value of extrinsic rewards (grades, merit certificates, etc.) compensating for the lack of a sense of use value” (Wrigley, 2009, p.72). Wrigley further summarizes the teacher-student interaction as an “economic exchange” resulting in the production of products with “no earthly use” (p.72). I shudder to think about how many of my classroom interactions could be characterized this way!

In this section I illustrated how educational relationships, under neoliberal domination, prioritize the execution of a conservative agenda over conversing, exploring, and

\textsuperscript{11} Phelan draws up Grumet’s (1988) definition of presentism: “Presentism refers to an emphasis on short-range goals and an identification with the immediacy of the classroom life” (Phelan, 1996, p.341).
inquiring into the purpose of education. Moreover, the arguments presented by the education theorists cited in this chapter have helped me gain an appreciation for the complexity of our B.C. context, and develop an understanding that dominating discourse is perpetuated through a layering of conformity.

Possible Responses to Neoliberal Discourse

As I learned from Grimmett and D’Amico (2008), there are other discourses already at work that attempt to foster multiple, flexible understandings of education and its purpose (e.g., Utopian Pedagogy [Coté, Day, & de Peuter, 2007] and Pedagogy of Hope [Renner, 2009]). Discourses such as these promote courage, possibility, ongoing inquiry, reflection, and critique through community dialogue. They understand teaching and learning as ontological endeavours that are contested and without guarantees. Furthermore, they acknowledge “that teachers are ‘centripetally located,’ right at the choke point of a system” (Renner, 2009, p.75), and appeal to teachers’ sense of agency. However, although some researchers suggest practical and often political acts of resistance to a neoliberal agenda (such as refusing to administer the FSA) and as part of an alternative discourse, most suggest a (re)orientation towards a new understanding of education.

Educational discourses aimed at resisting the current neoliberal context urge teachers to “consistently seek to craft more nuanced lenses [and] deepen their consciousness” (Renner, 2009, p.73). Teachers are further encouraged to “give up a kind of closure or certainty” in favour of a sense of responsibility “for [one’s] own views … as well as interpreting and understanding the views of the other” (Schwartz, 1989, p.63, cited in Phelan, 1996, p.339). It makes sense that this kind of understanding, as with any orientation, would impact curriculum and the stakeholders who work with it.
Wrigley (2009) offers some tangible examples of curriculum reform. He invites teachers and other stakeholders, such as policy makers, to reform curriculum so it “connects with pupils’ lives and experiences, but also opens up new opportunities and horizons … to ground learning in community experience and a local culture, but at the same time [involve learners in] developing a critical vision, [and developing] a degree of ‘authorship’” (p.70). Wrigley recognizes, as do other theorists, the role of history in constituting our present ways of being. He therefore urges teachers to shape curriculum in an effort to “defend history from marginalization [found] in [the] new ‘lean’ curriculum” (p.77) and to “develop a sense of openness toward the future – a sense that life can be different” (p.78). In this vein, one would expect that students and teachers would work collaboratively to break open existing (neoliberal) practices and cultivate additional or even alternate possibilities within their learning context.

**Summary**

In summary, I have offered the image of neoliberalism as a dominant and restrictive discourse in B.C. public school classrooms. This image is contrasted with the representation of *Living Inquiry* as illustrated by Trisha’s work in the preceding chapter and in the poster excerpts that culminate each chapter beginning on the next page. I propose the juxtaposition of these two learning contexts as a space of tension in which this study lives. Further, I ask you to hold this image as you read the remainder of the thesis.

The following chapters are dedicated to exploring the tensions and distinguishing features of *Living Inquiry* in a broader effort to make sense of the possibilities and vulnerabilities imbued in this curriculum. I begin this exploration in the following chapter.
with a description of my researcher’s journey. This journey introduces my three Living Inquiry contexts, the participants, and the two cycles of inquiry comprised by the thesis.
The plum has raindrops on the window, due to the altitude.
Raindrops have turned into beautiful water crystals and each crystal is unique.
I look through the window and see buildings and cars. They look like little baby toy trucks.
I can see different color fields that look like grass.

It is a different painting, the lower or higher we go.
The plane we are in is the bug moving around the picture.
The picture isn’t moving, we are moving.

I feel like a very small insect flying close to a really big painting.
When you move, the view is different because you can’t see the different angles of the painting.
The higher or lower or the further or closer you go, the more the painting changes.
because you can either see it with more detail or less detail.

If we were in space, we could see the earth but not the currents of the ocean.
If we were closer, we could see the currents of the ocean but not space.

We are landing soon. I can touch the water, I feel so close.
As we slow down I see cracks in the ground, cracks that would be impossible to see from the sky.

The closer we go, the more detail there is.
You can’t have too much detail or too little detail.
You need just the right amount of detail.
This is Living Inquiry.

Fig. 3.2 Zoom, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
Options

Without options, we would all be the same. Options create life. The nations of the world would have no meaning to us, they would be identical, same language to learn, no identity preserved.

Choosing from our options makes us “us”. Without options, what are we? I ask myself several questions now that the word “option” is on my mind. For example, without options, would everyone be treated the same way?

Our options may change when we get older, when we become wiser, and more knowledgeable about what is around us. As years progress, we have the same options but we see them differently. Just think about a trip to the beach. As a kid, you want to swim and play and build sand castles, but as an adult, you want to just relax and listen to the waves.

There are so many wonders, so many possibilities, so many chances, so many choices... All because of what this single concept can do for us. The possibilities are amazing!

...School is our beach because there are options that connect to everything. You can be a teacher, a doctor, an engineer, or an architect, just because of school, which brings us to the option of getting an education that can change our life. We spend most of our time at school, even if we are trying on roles that we may never wear. To me, school is a place to be open to new wonders. It is a place where I ask myself

What am I going to do today?

Delaney
What makes me think deeply?
What makes me think about the World?
What makes me an Inquirer?

My Awareness
Noticing, Knowledge, Interest, Details, Feelings, Consciousness

*Rebecca, Grade Six*
In asking after worthwhileness, we are asked to find our measure in such things that awaken us and our interest. We are asked to learn from such things, not just about them, and, in such learning, to become something more than we had been before such encounters.

(Jardine, 2008b, p.228)

*A Researcher’s Journey* describes the context and methodological considerations involved in the study. My thinking about and understanding of *Living Inquiry* have developed in three contexts: as a student of *Living Inquiry* in my graduate class; as a teacher in my own classroom; and as a researcher studying how it was engaged and interpreted by my study participants. The chapter unfolds chronologically to reflect my lived experience in these roles.

I narrate my journey through two cycles of exploration. The first cycle includes my introduction to *Living Inquiry* and my initial attempts to translate the course for my grade six and seven students. I refer to this translation year as the “pilot” year. The second cycle begins with my decision to formally study the engagement of children and teachers with *Living Inquiry* in my classroom, and introduces my research orientation. It is the experiences within this second year that constitute the majority of the thesis. In what follows, I describe my classroom context, research orientation, and interpretive process. I close the chapter by addressing the notion of credibility. The remainder of the thesis traces my understanding of this journey.
First Cycle of Exploration

University Context

Dr. Meyer’s course entitled *Living Inquiry in Learning Communities* introduced me to phenomenology and hermeneutics through the notion of paying attention to one’s lived experiences. As a novice to philosophy, and impacted by Meyer’s interpretation of phenomenology/hermeneutics as presented in the course, I became curious as to how I could bring my work in *Living Inquiry* to my school context. This curiosity promptly led to the translation of *Living Inquiry* for children and to a collegial relationship between Dr. Meyer and myself.

School Context

My intention to translate *Living Inquiry* from a university setting to my classroom began as an informal endeavour. I simply wanted to see if/how *Living Inquiry* could play out within the constraints of my classroom (e.g., timetable and supervisory concerns). I also wanted to learn more about inquiry as a teaching methodology. Dr. Meyer became a *Living Inquiry* consultant. Together we developed a curriculum plan including meeting times, classroom set-up, and the introductory “lesson.” Our collaboration enriched our working relationship and I soon began to refer to her as “Karen.”

I taught one of two grade six/seven classes at a local public elementary school in British Columbia, Canada. The school was situated in a forest setting in an affluent community. With 255 children enrolled, my school was considered to be a “choice” school because it offered an inquiry-based curriculum. The translation of *Living Inquiry* occurred a year after the commencement of the school’s curriculum reform initiative, from an inconsistent teaching approach to one where guided-inquiry was the primary methodology. In
the new approach, students were considered to be co-authors of each unit of study; their questions and provocations about the prescribed curriculum drove both classroom and individual enquiries.

_Living Inquiry_ was introduced to children as both an open-ended and structured way to examine a lived experience. Inquirers chose their own phenomena that they wished to explore, the language they used to describe it, and the way they conversed about it. As the teacher of _Living Inquiry_, I provided a structure through organizing themes under which various phenomena were explored through the writing of field notes and reflections through mini-projects and classroom conversations. These themes were Place (e.g., school), Language (e.g., body language), Time (e.g., time travel), and Self/Other (e.g., bullying).

Dr. Meyer and I intentionally used themes to guide the children’s explorations from more external or concrete topics to more internal or abstract ones. Exploration of the themes included processes such as library research, naturalistic observation, and/or interviews with relevant community members. Inquiries were represented in the form of a mini-project (artifact). Examples included a piece of artwork, a story, a skit, or a dance. Dr. Meyer visited our class for one 90-minute session per week to engage in _Living Inquiry_ with the children for the remainder of the school year. We devoted approximately one month to each theme.

Throughout the _Living Inquiry_ process, in my role as teacher I was available for guidance, while at the same time I promoted personal risk taking, use of descriptive language, reflection, and analysis. I provided descriptive, formative feedback on each mini-project that included my connections, reflections, and questions about the work. The purpose of my teacher-feedback was to model and affirm use of descriptive language, reflection, connection, and encourage perspective taking.
Near the end of the pilot year, Dr. Meyer invited the children to showcase their work at the university, anticipating a dialogue between the children and students studying *Living Inquiry* at the masters and doctoral level. Children chose either a piece of work from their portfolio to further explore or a new inquiry to delve into. It was during the preparation for this presentation that we requested the help of photographer Sandra Vander Schaaf to assist the children in developing their visual repertoire, thus supporting them with “going deeper” and rendering their observations in artistic ways. We also invited a poet/professor to work individually with children to enrich their writing. The year culminated with the university exhibit and a follow-up exhibit at the school for parents and school officials.

Throughout the pilot year, I collected informal feedback from children about their experiences with *Living Inquiry* including collaborating with guest teachers such as Dr. Meyer and Sandra. Descriptions such as “cool,” “different,” and “special” sparked further curiosity about this curriculum, its pedagogical implications, and its philosophical underpinnings. I decided to study these responses systematically, focusing on children’s and teachers’ understandings of their experiences with *Living Inquiry* and if/how *Living Inquiry* interrupted the mandated provincial curriculum. Therefore, I continued to translate *Living Inquiry* in my classroom for a second year; my lived experience and those of my participants in that second year became the data for this study.

**Second Cycle of Exploration**

*Research Context (Orientation)*

I began the task of designing my study by seeking handbooks intended for teachers interested in researching their own practice. Initially directed to action research, this orientation offered the image of a classroom as a laboratory and the teacher as a social
scientist interested in and able to research the subjects within that laboratory including his or herself. Teacher research was summarized in these texts as “the research that the practising teacher is able to conduct in the context of immediate professional practice” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.7).

From my reading, I understood that the role of teacher and researcher collapse into a shared identity: the teacher is always a researcher if a researcher is someone who asks questions about, is thoughtful about, and has the desire to instil change in the classroom within which he or she works. The aim of teacher research from an action research orientation seemed to be to evoke some kind of explicit change (e.g., implementation of a new practice that better teaches children to read).

Although at the onset of my study I was empowered by an action research methodology, because it offered me a guided approach to research with a tangible outcome, the orientation did not sit well with me. I worried about the focus on explicit, measurable change and the view of a classroom as a scientific lab, which conjured up images of impersonal routines and analysis. Instead, I desired an orientation more attuned to being and implicit personal transformation.

Coulter and Wiens (2002), informed by Hannah Arendt’s work, offered me an alternate perspective on the aim of teacher research. Borrowing Arendt’s language of actor and spectator to speak of the role of teacher and researcher, these authors suggested that education research aim to “foster more judging actors who can also be judging spectators” (p.22).

Rather than perpetuate the view that teaching is about practice and research is about thinking, Coulter and Wiens (2002) argued that “separate discussions of acting and thinking,
teaching and researching, are incomplete” (p.23). These authors proposed that teachers should try to become “both actors and spectators” in a greater aim to become “good judges” (p.23). Being a good judge translated into critical and meaningful engagement in thinking and acting. Practically speaking, and grossly summarizing, I understand that being a good judge means to work attentively, thoughtfully, and critically, both alone and in the company of others.

Coulter and Wiens have helped me to see my role as a teacher researcher as a type of fusion with the common aim of understanding the situation under exploration as an act of becoming. Therefore, I am not simply a teacher who acts in her classroom OR a researcher who studies her practice. I am a teacher researcher who is in a process of becoming a good judge, of developing a critical attunement towards educational practices, both my own and others.

Early conversations with my supervisor led me to read other inspiring authors such as David Jardine, David Smith, and Max van Manen. Writing about phenomenology and hermeneutics as they relate to pedagogy, I found a kinship between their perspective on teacher researcher and that presented by Coulter and Wiens. These authors promoted interpretive research as an act of responsibility.

According to Jardine et al. (2006), Smith (1999), and van Manen (1997), phenomenology and hermeneutics situate research in the world, taking up the subject of the inquiry, and subjectivity of the inquirer, as a worldly topic. Van Manen (1997) elaborates:

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to know the world is to profoundly be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching – questioning – theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become fully part of it, or better, to become the world.
Phenomenology calls this inseparable connection to the world the principle of “intentionality.” (p.5)

Hermeneutics acknowledges and values the relationship between the researcher and the world, and asks that we “proceed delicately and yet wholeheartedly” (Moules, 2002, p.15) in our interpretations of the world as it is read by us.

I understand that as a researcher I am inextricably linked with my data. Even if the subject of my inquiry was not my own practice, or situated within my own classroom, I understand that interpretive research is a creative act whereby the researcher and the text (or the data) come together in an act of engagement and understanding. In other words, “the practice of interpretation attempts to show what is at work … and, in the service of human generativity and good faith, is engaged in the mediation of meaning” (Smith, 1999, p.27). As such, the text under interpretation appears with its own history and biography, as does the researcher. There is no such thing as pure objective research. This argument brings me comfort, as I understand that as a teacher researcher I am “allowed” to be linked with my data, further that there cannot be a singular reading of this data in order to uncover one possible truth. However, I also understand that I must remain strong in my orientation to the data, taking it up with integrity as described in a phenomenological/hermeneutical tradition.

I lean on Gadamerian scholars such as Smith (1999), Slattery, Kransy, and O’Malley (2007), and Moules (2002) for their articulation of specific terms used to frame my research. Specifically, I want to situate the following words in a hermeneutical context: understanding, experience, language, and interpretation. I will now describe my understanding of these terms as informed by my readings.
Understanding

For Gadamer, as with other contemporary hermeneutical scholars, understanding is situated ontologically, rooted in the denouncing of scientific objectivity and the privileging of intersubjectivity. Gadamer, expanding on Heidegger’s notion of Dasein, suggests that persons are prejudiced beings. I interpret this to mean that prejudice and preunderstanding, comprised by history and tradition, inform and provide the starting place for each subject’s “horizon”¹² and thus the anticipation of understanding. Smith (1999) articulates this notion more clearly: “we can only make sense of the world from within a particular ‘horizon’ which provides the starting point for our thoughts and actions” (p.313). Because each person (or subject) interprets through his/her own horizon, “understanding between persons is possible only to the degree that people can initiate a conversation between themselves and bring about a ‘fusion’ of the different horizons into a new understanding which they then hold in common” (p.313). Smith (2006) further describes this fusion:

What I bring and what you bring to the encounter can be dialogically engaged to produce a condition whereby we feel that we understand each other. What is required for the process of understanding is an openness to my prejudice, not only to see clearly the way that my self-understanding emerges from a set of particular conditions, but also to see how my identity opens out onto that horizon of Other identities so that, really identity can only be something that ‘we are,’ not something that ‘I am’ exclusively. (p.111)

It is important to note that this ‘fusion’ is only temporary: “the work of understanding … can never by fully completed because there is always something new to be uncovered … said … or learned even of those [or that] with whom we may feel completely familiar” (Smith, 2006, p.109).

¹² “Horizon … is a clear and poetic metaphor, which according to Gadamer, represents a range of vision that includes everything which can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 1975, cited in Williamson, 2005, p.49).
The above notions are implied in Moules’ (2002) summary of Gadamer’s three central theses with regards to understanding. These are “that all understanding is interpretation, that understanding is integrally bound with language and that understanding is inseparable from self-application to the current situation of the interpreter” (Madison, 1988, cited in Moules, 2002, p.13). These theses are situated within the “hermeneutical circle” as summarized by Smith (1999):

From Schleiermacher on, three themes in hermeneutic inquiry have always been present: namely, the inherent creativity [bringing about of something new] of interpretation, the pivotal role of language in human understanding and the interplay of part and whole in the process of interpretation. (p.30)

I understand that the hermeneutic circle does not suggest a linear movement or method from interpretation to reinterpretation (through language); rather it is more an ongoing spiralling movement where language, creativity, and interpretation come together in a type of interplay with the aim of (new) understanding. I elaborate on the hermeneutic circle later in this chapter when I describe my interpretation process.

**Experience**

“According to Heidegger, human experience of the world takes place within a horizon of past, present and future. Understanding that which confronts us as new is made possible in the ‘now’ by virtue of the forestructure of understanding which is already in us though past experience” (Smith, 1999, p.33). Thus, one’s experience is not a bracketed event in hermeneutics but is a movement in the world. It is located and “integrated within the context of the lived-world experiences all around waiting to be discovered, uncovered, created, and shared in the hermeneutic circle” (Slattery et al., 2007, p.551). Therefore, although a “new” experience is informed by past events, experience isn’t static:
Each new experience adds to the accumulated meaning of experience for each individual and sets the stage for present and future possibilities. While the present is conditioned by the past, every moment is also full of future possibilities for change and new directions. (Slattery et al., 2007, p.550)

In light of these readings, I understand that experience in Living Inquiry is not bracketed or removed from the world as if it happened in a bubble, so to speak. Experience in my classroom context is meant to reflect the milieu of experiences that each participant brings to the classroom and thus the Living Inquiry context. What is interesting to me is that the content of Living Inquiry was a record or rendering of the participants’ lived experiences, which also reflected a broader history and context beyond the classroom. Also, the classroom itself was situated in a broader worldly context. Thus, experience in Living Inquiry appears as a layering or rich milieu of experience.

Language

Gadamerian hermeneutics suggest that interpretation comes through language, that language holds and shapes meaning. However, language is a construct of our history and our web of relations, and is in a way belated. Smith (1999) explains:

Inevitably I speak the language into which I was born, but my language already contains within itself in a sedimentary way the evidence of its own malleability and evolution, reflective of the political, economic and social changes in which my forbearers engaged through the course of their personal and collective lives. (p.33)

At the same time, language can be open and transformable because the “new” also comes through language. Once again, I draw on Smith (1999):

My language contains within it the evidence not just of the openness of my life, but, in a deep and subtle way, its anticipation of being transformed in the face of new lived realities. How I will be transformed depends upon my orientation and attitude toward what comes to meet me as new: whether I simply try to subsume or repress it within prevailing dispensations (a possible preclude to war or hostilities) or whether I engage it creatively in an effort to create a new common, shared reality. (pp.33-34)
It would seem that our worldliness appears through language as well as the assumption that I am able to change and thus my language can also change (the language of my ancestors reveals this). If I am to be transformed I must have an open orientation and sensitivity to the world, believing that new realities can be negotiated. In turn, I must be open to language, careful with its uses, and aware of its constraints and history.

The constraints of language are not limited to verbal exchange but must also be considered in textual interpretation. Gallagher (1992, cited in Slattery et al., 2007) explains: “While language does enable some access to textual meaning, it prevents absolute access to textual meaning. Interpreters never achieve complete or objective understanding because they are limited by historical circumstance, ideology, and language” (p.547). It seems that we can never extricate ourselves from our interpretations.

*Interpretation*

Interpretation, as I understand it, is a worldly, subjective, creative, and responsible endeavour that is bound by language. As an act of sense making, interpretation is present “always and everywhere precisely about the world” (Smith, 1999, p.32). As such, interpretation does not occur “‘in general’ as a rhetorical activity that bears no necessary connection to the world at large” (Smith, 1999, p.32). Further, the researcher is a subject of the world, bound by their experiences, language, history, and, as described above, constrained by their worldliness. Because interpretation is engendered dialogically, and each party (whether human or text) faces their own subjectivity, interpretation is an inherently creative, albeit somewhat limited, act whereby the subjects negotiate meaning.

I always interpret others from within the frame of our common language and experience so that whatever I say about you is also a saying about myself. Within the hermeneutic agenda, however, the purpose is not to translate my subjectivity out of the picture but to take it up with a new sense of responsibility-to make proposals
about the world we share with the aim of deepening our collective understanding of it. (Smith, 1999, p.42)

On one hand, hermeneutic interpretation seems risky, dangerous, or even “violent” (Moules, 2002), where I feel imprisoned by the constraints of language, by the realization of the inadequacies of my interpretations. Yet on the other, hermeneutics appears liberating when considered as a space that seeks multiplicity in understanding, and “emphasizes possibility and becoming” (Slattery et al., 2007, p.550). I understand that engaging in hermeneutics will not put me in touch with an original meaning or a singular definition of Living Inquiry but will instead enable me to read my experiences in Living Inquiry in new and informed ways. It is in acknowledgment of the dangers and the possibilities of interpretation that I take up my research study and do my best to maintain a strong pedagogical orientation.

Responsibility is foregrounded in all aspects of my study, from ethically generating the data, to interpretation and representation. I am drawn to hermeneutics because it compels me to act with responsibility, as Smith (1999) reminds:

We live in a world already heavily interpreted, with ideologies and fundamentalisms masquerading as forms of truth lying beyond the reach of interpretation itself. Indeed, in a time when the very act of thinking has become a target of intense commercial and political manipulation the need is great for persons who can meaningfully deconstruct what is going on and propose alternative, more creative ways of thinking and acting. (p.40)

As Coulter and Wiens (2002), Jardine (1998), van Manen (1997), and Smith (1999) argued, (hermeneutic) teacher research isn’t about leaving well enough alone. Instead, it is interested in becoming informed so we can do something, knowing full well that our actions occur in a web of relationships, and therefore impact ourselves and others in both visible and invisible, predictable and unforeseen ways. Hermeneutics, as I have learned from Aoki (2005) and Smith (1999, 2006), is interested in self/other relationships: learning to see our
differences, including the other in ourselves, and taking up these differences with the aim of building tolerance, and hopefully, reparation. I believe these aims are a necessary part of my teaching practice as I collaborate with the students in my care.

Attending to life with children is something I share with van Manen, Jardine, and Smith. In this way, their work is a natural fit. These authors are concerned with how best (and this is an ongoing, spontaneous, improvisational event) to *be* with children, and to continually stay pedagogically oriented. Further, they seem to be devoted to *listening* to children and representing their voices with care:

It may be that the meaning and place of children in our lives is the most important consideration to be taken up in education today, not just because the voice of the young has been translated out of any meaningful involvement with the powers that be, but also because the question of the young (their conception, care and nurturance) devolves precisely on so many of the defining issues of our time, such as the structuration of power, gender relations and matter of how we might learn to live more responsibly within the earthly web of our planetary home. (Smith, 1999, p.28)

Lastly, I have chosen phenomenology/hermeneutics as a research orientation because it demands rigour but does not necessarily find significance in frequency. Instead it seems that hermeneutics, from my readings, is interested in the particular or the singular. As Jardine (1998) writes:

We can legitimately speak of the “fecundity of the individual case” [the chapter title from which this quote is taken] insofar as it is allowed to wind its regenerative tendrils out into the “old growth” from which it has erupted – insofar, that is, as we do not begin our work by severing precisely these regenerative tendrils of sense…. particularity can have a generative, transformative effect that cannot be duplicated. It is this resistance of the particular to simple, powerless subsumption that helps interpretive inquiry from simply being a reiteration of conservative, traditional understandings. Those shared and contested understandings in which we live are *called to account* by this instance, made to “speak,” change, accommodate, and, so to speak, “learn” through [the] encounter. (p.42)

If I understand Jardine correctly, it is my job to trace the tendrils of my case and to see how these tendrils help *Living Inquiry* to come up anew. Further, my interpretation of this
“new” understanding is called into account (and vice versa) by the already recognized meanings of Living Inquiry. Moreover, I am called not only to interpret my participants’ engagement with Living Inquiry, but also to learn from it.

Research Context (Interpretive Process)

Van Manen devotes much academic writing to the notion of lived experience. In Researching Lived Experience (1997), he outlines six steps to phenomenological/hermeneutical research, used by various practitioners including nurses and teachers, to guide research that is rooted in the practical or the lived.

Although I do not follow a precise method, and van Manen himself does not suggest his six steps as a strict or linear procedure, I lean on his guidance to frame my inquiry as an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of teachers and students. The six steps offer me a tangible framework to engage in the backward, forward, pendular, and circular motion of the hermeneutic circle.

I draw on Smith’s (1999) argument that hermeneutics does not follow a strict method but rather the subject of the inquiry informs the inquiry method. Further, he points out the importance of gaining understanding as the aim of hermeneutic research:

The mark of good interpretative research is not in the to which it follows a specified methodological agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what it is that is being investigated. And ‘understanding’ here is itself not a fixable category but rather it stands for a deep sense that something has been profoundly heard in our present circumstances. (p.41)

Based on Smith’s (1999) interpretation of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, I understand that the hermeneutic circle is an engagement between part and whole. This means that the “whole” comes into view by studying the particular and its reference to the whole. For example, I can begin to understand Living Inquiry as a phenomenon by studying each
participant’s understanding of Living Inquiry, as well as inquiring into the collective (if there is one) or shared experience of Living Inquiry. Each participant engaged in a hermeneutic circle as they shared their understanding of their lived experience in Living Inquiry.

Data Generation

Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.

I entered the second year of translating Living Inquiry in my classroom with the understanding that I would be formally studying the curriculum and experiences of consenting children and teachers. After obtaining ethical permission from the university, I invited my students and guest teachers to participate in the study. This process is included in Appendix A. Eighteen children came forward and both guest teachers agreed to be included in the study. In addition, I invited three children to be interviewed as well as observed. These children were members of my classroom for two years and therefore had engaged in Living Inquiry for an extended time. Two children consented to the interview process. The interview protocols are included in Appendix B. A brief biography of these two children follows.

Trisha

Trisha is a grade seven female, aged thirteen (at the end of the study year). She has lived in the local school neighbourhood for the duration of her childhood. Trisha is considered to be an exceptional student although she does not have a gifted designation. Described as passionate, athletic, and creative by her peers and teachers, Trisha is dedicated to her studies, her sports team (soccer), music (piano), and drama (school plays). She maintains a busy academic, athletic, and social schedule.
Steven

Steven is a grade seven male, aged twelve (at the end of the study year). He has lived in the local school neighbourhood for the duration of his childhood. Steven is a dedicated student who is considered friendly, reliable, responsible, and “fun” by his teachers and peers. An avid soccer player, Steven maintains a demanding school and soccer schedule, as well as sharing his time with a large group of friends.

I presented the *Living Inquiry* curriculum to children in the same manner as in the pilot year, however, the involvement of some key participants changed. The three children familiar with *Living Inquiry* became peer helpers. For example, they added their own interpretation of the curriculum to the explanation of *Living Inquiry* during our introductory lessons. Dr. Meyer’s involvement was greatly reduced in the study year. Her classroom visits, although few in number as compared with the pilot year, were strategically planned so that she could be included in the launch, in a few mid-year classes, and as part of our culminating gallery exhibition. During the study year, Dr. Meyer became much more a consultant than a co-teacher. Finally, Sandra increased her role in *Living Inquiry* by conducting weekly arts-based lessons commencing mid-year. In addition to art lessons, her responsibilities included co-planning and supporting the *Living Inquiry* curriculum, including individual consultation sessions with children regarding their *Living Inquiry* assignments, and photo documenting the engagement of *Living Inquiry*, including the production of student-generated posters. Sandra was NOT responsible for evaluation.
Data Interpretation

*Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.*

Studying the curriculum experience of Living Inquiry from a research perspective altered the way I conducted myself during Living Inquiry events. In addition to being present with children in a teacher role, I became conscious of formally documenting my engagement and observable children’s and teachers’ responses. As such, my notes, classroom discussions, and the children’s projects became data to formally interpret and consider alongside my philosophical readings. I used my observations and field notes as a teaching aid to inform ongoing instruction as well as to generate data.

Attending to the notion of Living Inquiry as it was became very difficult for me because I wanted to record **everything** that occurred during Living Inquiry times, and also be present, attentive, and responsive to my students. While documenting, I attempted to record my observations using descriptive, experiential language based on what I was seeing, hearing, etc. When I “slipped” into documenting my interpretations, I tried to pull myself back and record only what was happening, attempting to bracket myself from the experience, and recording my interpretations as a separate document. I also kept a record of my own interpretations of planning and implementing Living Inquiry. My journal was divided into various sections and reflected classroom conversations, personal reflections, planning details, and personal memos. It contained information regarding all students; however, only assenting student information was used as research.

I gathered student artifacts from the eighteen child participants in the form of photocopies and photographs of student assignments (mini-projects). The thesis includes at least one excerpt from every participant. These excerpts, in the form of quotes and
photographs, are used to illustrate the thematics from the study. Further, the photos were used as stimuli for discussion during student interviews and to glean information about how students engaged with *Living Inquiry* during the school year.

During the interviews, I used a Dictaphone, an electronic recording device, to capture precisely what was said, so I could carefully attend to the language used to describe *Living Inquiry* and trace its etymology later. In addition, I was careful in my preparation of interview questions to use open-ended language that would be clear about the research purpose but not directive nor definitive, and would provide a generous space for the participants to bring and use their own language to describe and discuss *Living Inquiry*. Throughout the recording of descriptions (observations), interpretations, and reflections in my journaling and documenting, I wanted to maintain clarity and integrity in my data generation.

*Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon.*

I attempted to make meaning by using three approaches to interpret my data: a line-by-line approach, a highlighting approach, and a wholistic approach. I employed each of these methods at various times over a two-year span. I visited and revisited the data, asking myself, “What does this (notion, idea, sentiment) teach me about *Living Inquiry*?” and “How does this notion fit with what I see emerging in the data?” I will now describe my efforts within each approach.

**Line-by-Line**

This was my first approach to analysis. First I listened to the interview data for repetitive words or refrains. I jotted these down in a journal before I met with the interview
participants again. Once I had done two interviews, I presented the emerging themes to the participants for feedback. In this way, I felt that the interviews were hermeneutical.

I used the line-by-line approach many times when engaging with textual data. I read the texts, interview transcripts, and the children’s reflections of *Living Inquiry*, as the approach suggests, line-by-line, word for word, asking myself “What does this sentence, or sentence cluster, teach me about the phenomenon?” (van Manen, 1997, p.93). As I read closely, I began to notice reoccurring descriptors, words, and phrases that conveyed a notion, feeling, or illustration of *Living Inquiry*. Examples included “sacred,” “untouchable,” and “beyond.” At times, the words seemed to evoke a kinship, while at others they appeared contradictory. If I found a word intriguing or elusive, I looked it up in the dictionary or etymology guide to get a sense of its history or other meanings. This practice helped me to interpret the data, and often held an element of surprise. For example, when I was reading about the vocation of teaching and hermeneutics, I came across the notion of religious vocation as a call to the sacred, and, respectively, hermeneutics as interpretation of sacred texts. I wondered if the use of “sacred” by the children had any relevance to these instances of “sacred” from the literature. This wondering led to further questions and inquiry, and to the rereading of the data of related words that I may have previously overlooked.

When I could, I photocopied the text (so that I could I physically cut the words or phrases) and I would group like words or phrases together. Then I would either try to find a phrase in the data that captured that sentiment or would try to articulate it using my own words or words of a theorist or philosopher that best described the emerging theme. I would then revisit the text to “check” the integrity or “fit” between the articulation and the data. Here is where I often employed the following analysis approaches. Finally, I would map out
the groupings on chart paper to see if a larger theme was emerging. For example, words such as “walking beside,” “guiding,” “sensitive,” “trusting,” began to illuminate the emerging theme of pedagogical tact.

**Highlighting**

This approach was similar to the line-by-line approach, but I highlighted larger portions of texts such as sentences or paragraphs. I often used this approach after the line-by-line approach in order to summarize or articulate the emergent theme.

**Wholistic**

I employed this approach periodically after taking up the other two approaches. I would scan the data including interview transcripts and children’s reflections and projects, looking for a memorable phrase that captured the feeling, message, or significance of the texts as a group. In this way, I moved between the part (smaller sections of data) and the whole (a broader emerging theme). Two examples of children’s phrases that emerged as themes include “It’s About You” and “Beyond Marks.”

Once I had done some substantial cutting and pasting, and themes were beginning to emerge, I recorded these, along with quotes from the literature, on large pieces of chart paper and posted these on a bedroom wall in my home. I left coloured markers out and would dialogue with these emerging ideas, recording my thoughts, questions, and concerns. I found myself immersed in the data; it was always on my mind. I felt at times like I couldn’t escape it. However, the ever-present posters were helpful as sometimes I felt an “awakening,” “insight,” or “epiphany.” Often these occurred during mundane activities like showering. I would promptly write them down on a chart, sticky note, or scrap piece of paper if the poster
was not around or I was away from home. This scrap paper would make its way to the poster, adding to the collection of ideas.

Over time, the posters became saturated and I transferred the ideas to electronic charts or other graphics that I could more easily manipulate and organize. These turned into outlines and then into paragraphs.

*Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.*

I found the process of writing both comforting and frustrating. Writing presented me with the opportunity to express my understandings and my interpretations of the themes, somehow releasing them from welling up within me to a point of explosion. However, attempting to put the themes and, especially the participants’ understandings in words was incredibly difficult. I worried about representing the ideas and themes “accurately.” At times, I felt that what I was hearing in the data was ineffable. The literature was particularly helpful in these instances. As I read, I would come across a phrase that seemed to capture what I was trying to say in a clear, succinct, or even beautiful way. Additionally, it seemed to give credibility to my interpretations. At the same time, reading and rereading my writing, in light of new readings (both of literature and of data), challenged my interpretations, not allowing me simply to interpret once and be done with it. The more informed I became, such as with hermeneutics for example, the more critical I became of my interpretations.

I also worried about my writing style. Attempting to be careful with language, at times I agonized over word choice, checking the etymology guide, dictionary, and thesaurus with the aim of choosing the best word or phrase to describe or illustrate the theme, or represent a notion.
My supervisor and other informed readers were also very helpful in engaging me in dialogue around my writing. Asking questions such as, “How do you make sense of this?” or simply, “Really?” helped escalate my writing and challenge any generalizations.

In the end, I created a type of portrait or rendering that put words to the participants’ sentiments, understandings, and concerns regarding *Living Inquiry*. It has been important to me that the participants feel that my rendering is authentic.

*Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.*

Van Manen (1997) asks, “What does it mean to be an educator and a human science researcher” (p.137)? He suggests that “as we speak or write (produce text), we need to see that the textuality of our text is also a demonstration of the way we stand pedagogically in life” (p.138). With this question and provocation in mind I attempted to continually situate myself in a pedagogical relation to the study.

This study is about my practice but it is also about how the children in my classroom and the adult guest teachers experienced, interpreted, and understood *Living Inquiry*. Upholding the understanding that I am a teacher at all times, including when I am researching, helps me to try and remain sensitive and tactful even when children, or other pedagogues are not physically present to me. Knowing that my representation of the data will communicate how I stand, pedagogically, in the world means that I am called to be accountable to my statements. The text I produce will act as an extension of my pedagogical being and my representation of the participants’ beings, for the reader, when I am not present to defend or elaborate on them. Thus, it is important that I do my best to provide a strong (meaning continually pedagogic), rich (an attempt to capture the dialogic quality of the participants’ responses to the curriculum), and deep (that doesn’t simplify life or reduce the
experience to a generalization, but that speaks to the diversity of experiences and the openness and multitude of possibilities that the experience might hold) interpretation and writing of the study.

Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1997, pp.33-34).

Issues that I have addressed in this stage include such examples as how to illustrate Living Inquiry as part of a broader educational phenomenon, how and which Living Inquiry projects are displayed and articulated to best describe Living Inquiry as a deep experience, and how to lay out the thesis in order to best capture the journey. These questions focus on the movement between part and whole as decisions regarding one affect the others.

For example, if I chose to include multiple year-long inquiries in Chapter Two: A Child’s Engagement with Living Inquiry, instead of just one, the thesis would either be exceptionally long or the data would be watered down. However, by including only one child’s work in this chapter, I worry that other children, upon reading the thesis, may feel excluded or perceive that their work was not considered worthy. My hope, in this case as an example, is that the readers will see that the chapter, as with each chapter, is part of a whole story of Living Inquiry and that by including every child’s work somewhere in the thesis, and focusing on one in depth, a richer notion of Living Inquiry was achieved.

Summary

I have tried to conduct my research with a focus on responsibility, integrity, and credibility. Gadamer (1989), according to Moules (2002) “suggested that there are many interpretations, and though none are finite there are some which offer a better account and ring more ‘true.’ The readers decide for themselves if the account is believable and, in this
decision, there is often a seemliness, fitness, or sense of appropriate character in the work which is recognizable” (pp.19-20). Credibility, according to Moules’ summary, is obtained when the reader deems that the interpretation has resonance with the themes presented, with the research orientation, and with the data included. She suggests one way to strive for credibility is by “consulting participants and asking for validation of the constructions of the researcher (p.20). I am fortunate that Dr. Karen Meyer is part of my research committee. As such, she participated in the last stages of preparation before the thesis went to defence. Also, I have continued to work with Sandra Vander Schaaf on the photo documentation. Through our collaboration I have been privileged to consult with her and have obtained validation that the work has resonance for her. Unfortunately, I have not been able to meet again with the children and this saddens me. However, throughout the work, I have tried to maintain the integrity of the ideas presented to me; the attention spent on the poster excerpts, it is hoped, is one such example.

In what follows, I trace my understanding of my researcher’s journey as best and honestly as I can. Chapter Five narrates my experience as a student of Living Inquiry in Dr. Meyer’s classroom and anticipates the translation of the course in my classroom. Chapter Six details the pilot year around four thematics. Chapter Seven articulates an image of Living Inquiry as an abundant educational space as informed by theorists such as Aoki and Jardine. Chapters Eight and Nine describe my interpretation of children’s and teachers’ understandings of Living Inquiry respectively. Finally, Chapter Ten offers a closing discussion and returns to the thematics introduced in Chapter Six.
I was sitting, looking outside. Then I noticed something. Everything that I could think of was all related to language. Schools, stores, and even cars. Language. It was taking a big part in our life. I am writing and thinking at the same time, using language. I wonder if, all of a sudden, we all stopped using language at this very moment, what would happen? The Earth would be a soundless, mute planet. The technology would not develop anymore. Many things—like phones, TVs, computers, dictionaries, and books—will become useless and worthless. I think people would start using art for communication instead.

Was language just there, or did somebody invent it? I realized that language is hidden. We use it, but nobody really cares about language. No one really inquires deeply into this fascinating topic. I felt that the language was like the sun in the world. The world is full of language. Everything was somehow related to language.

Rebecca

Fig. 4.2 Landscapes of Language, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Language
Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt

Imagination

Sitting here in my peaceful bedroom, with music playing softly in the background, I stop for a sudden moment. Carefully taking notice of the words, I begin to think. Each of the songs has a different meaning and story to tell. They bring back unforgettable memories and take us to another place, a glorious place filled of wonder, knowledge and discovery. They all lead to something extraordinary, the creation of imagination.

Of course, music is not the only thing that kicks our imagination into gear. A lot of the time I am finding myself, at random, just thinking and daydreaming in my mind instead of actually focusing on reality. But imagining doesn’t always have to be creating a fantasy in our heads. It can be seeing or doing anything else in unique ways. Think outside the box!

Next time you are face-to-face with the exquisite white clouds, try searching for a neat figure, something that you might see in your everyday life, like a person or an animal. Once you try it out, you’ll realize how much fun you are really able to have. Test it out, because you never know when you’re going to learn something new and important to your life. All you have to do is use your imagination!

Laine

Fig. 4.3 Imagination, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
I remember not knowing anything; it is like I had so little knowledge of anything and I was really confused about what was required. When I started ... I didn't have, well, not only knowledge, but I also didn't have ... awareness. It felt so weird to wake up.

*Steven, Grade Seven*
My Introduction to Living Inquiry

I’m sitting in my first Living Inquiry class, perched on the edge of my rigid plastic chair awaiting the class to start. It’s 1:28 p.m.; two minutes to go. I rustle through my backpack to retrieve the necessary study materials, a pencil and notepad, securely placing me in the “ready position” to engage in learning. I open my notepad to a fresh piece of lined paper and even date the page. I leave the middle of the page, where the heading goes, blank until I hear from the professor what today’s topic will be. 1:29 p.m., one minute to go. I look around and see most other students have done the same, and now that they are “ready,” have begun quietly conversing. These whispering partnerships begin to form around the room. I presume that these conversations are confined to “small talk”; therefore able to culminate at a moment’s notice should the instructor arrive and start her lecture right away.

I check the clock: 1:30 p.m. – no teacher. This is weird. I begin to wonder why we are starting late. Ah, I am not left wondering for too long because the door opens and she has arrived: army hat and jacket, flowering skirt and fluttering blouse. She sets her backpack down at the front table near the board, opens it up, and begins rustling to find her instructional materials. I pay little attention to the titles of the books she is placing on the table; rather I’m noticing the tiny butterflies that have hatched in my tummy. The too familiar lyrics of “The Overachiever” begin to play to the tune of “Will You be Good Enough” in my mind. As if in a music video, images of failure begin to move like a group of enthusiastic line dancers. My attention is diverted back to the professor who is finished setting up her materials. I reactively pick up my pencil predicting that she will turn to the board and begin the lesson. She doesn’t. “Oh, okay, she’s going to tell us a little bit about herself first.” I relax in my chair. She doesn’t. She calmly shuffles over to the first student in our row, again, they both smile and seem at ease. “Oh, she must know these students from previous courses and she’s just being polite,” I think to myself reassuringly. “Still, doesn’t she know that she’s supposed to be teaching us right now – that the rest of the class is sitting idly – not doing anything?!” My attention is drawn to the growing lump of anxiety balling up in my tummy. Can’t she just start the class and let this end? ...

“Hi there.” This calm voice halts my nerves – all inner movement stops. My face turns away from the crisp lined paper with the date in the right-hand corner and the space for the heading screaming “I’m ready to learn” to a warm, tanned face with bright, smiling blue eyes. Stunned, I take a mental inventory: This is my teacher and she’s greeted me, she’s standing there smiling, and I’m stunned. I tentatively greet her back with a short “Hi.” She smiles and speaks again. “How are you?” Simultaneously, I realize that I’m replying to her query but that more effort is being expulsed trying to decode these actions and reveal some kind of pedagogical reasoning. I see her mouth move; she is speaking again. Like a good student, I shake off my inner reflective coat and attend to her words, and to the soft-looking hand that is approaching the top of my fingers that are resting on the desk. Her hand grazes
the tops of my knuckles – skin to skin for a second as she speaks: “Welcome to Living Inquiry. I’m so glad you’re with us.” Oh. My toes turn into floodgates and release the butterflies in my tummy. For an instant, security fills me with the purpose of the last eight minutes: She’s welcoming us. I have been welcomed.

I took the Living Inquiry course with Dr. Karen Meyer in the summer of 2005. Because it was a required course to complete my Master of Arts degree, I assumed the class would be “tough” with lots of papers and dull reading; however, the title Living Inquiry sounded intriguing and inviting. I read the following course description before registering for the intensive, three-week summer course:

**Living Inquiry in Learning Communities**

Recognizing the pedagogical role that “living inquiry” plays in our lives as educators, researchers, and human beings is integral to understanding our educational practices and ways of being in the world. Living inquiry critically and openly investigates the impact of our presence, our knowing, our language and action within educational contexts. Living inquiry also acknowledges the lived and shared experiences of learners within multiple spaces of learning. This course is designed to explore with students theoretical, relational, and experiential (re)presentations of communal practice, exploring and creating integrity between theory and practice.

Students will engage in a variety of theoretical and experiential explorations – bridging reading of theoretical perspectives with generative dialogue, as well as collaborative and self-reflective practice. Investigating relational, intercultural, and communal sites of learning, students will generate narrative, interpretative and collaborative experiences that give voice to lived experience and shared learning.

Reluctantly, I admitted to myself that I wasn’t any clearer on what to expect from the course after reading its description. Immediately, I began to feel nervous. Although I believed that being a learner meant learning something new, I still wanted to feel grounded in my studies. Reading the description, I became ungrounded: I wasn’t sure what was meant by
“lived experience” or what “experiential explorations” entailed. How was I going to do “it” if I didn’t even know what “it” was?

**Interpretations**

Dr. Karen Meyer created the course *Living Inquiry* to explore community and engage in an inquiry into our being-in-the-world.\(^{13}\) In my opinion, she was a living example of her practice, of her philosophy to attempt to live well within the world. Open, caring, welcoming, and nurturing, Dr. Meyer was different from other professors I had worked under because she was relationship focused. The fact that she took time at the beginning of every class to welcome each participant, to connect with us on a personal level, impressed and inspired me to do this in my own classroom. I remember asking myself, “Why don’t all teachers do this?” The small time devoted to connecting seemed so natural for a teacher to do yet so foreign to me. I recall feeling saddened that I had not benefited from this kind of interaction before and, moreover, that I was not practicing a welcoming ritual in my own classroom.

The other aspect of Dr. Meyer’s teaching that stood out for me as different in comparison to other teachers was that she positioned herself in the student-teacher relationship as “facilitator” rather than “expert.”\(^{14}\) Orienting herself in this way left me feeling that she was a support in my learning journey rather than being a judge of my academic growth. With this perspective, I felt that Dr. Meyer was learning alongside me, sharing ideas and beliefs, genuinely interested in learning together. I felt that our pedagogical relationship was authentic.

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\(^{13}\) A detailed description of (my interpretation of) the theoretical underpinnings of *Living Inquiry* is included in Chapter Seven.

\(^{14}\) This notion is picked up throughout the thesis and further considered in Chapters Seven and Nine.
The course was structured around four major themes to guide our “experiential explorations.” These were Place, Language, Time, and Self/Other. Dr. Meyer launched each theme with a provocation or an artifact that illustrated the theme. For example, when she introduced “Language” she showed a film about advertising and how language drives our desires and our vision of happiness. A class discussion followed where we challenged the perspectives shown in the film by drawing on our personal experiences or texts we had read (these didn’t need to be from the course). In my view, the themes offered a progression of concrete topics to more abstract ones. As a novice to hermeneutics and phenomenology, and an overachiever by nature, I appreciated having a structure; however loose, to organize what initially seemed to be free exploration.

Engagement with the course meant an exploration of exploratory and theoretical events intended to develop awareness. Inspired by Krishnamurti’s teachings, awareness was described as attending to what is, (which is severed from our dogmatic frames of interpretation). In other words, Living Inquiry was “an inquiry into how to live with the quality of awareness that sees newness, truth, and beauty in daily life” (Meyer, 2006, p.11). True to the role of guide, Dr. Meyer offered a concrete process to assist with quieting our minds, being present in the moment, and observing our daily interactions, and especially our interpretations of these encounters, in the world. We were encouraged to use thick description to record our observation (methods included: video, sound, sketch, etc), to capture, in detail, the embodied experience of paying attention to the phenomenon of our choosing. The phenomenon could be large or small, like the death of a close relative or the din of chatter in a coffee shop; the challenge was to capture the visceral experience through documentation. This documentation was referred to as a field note. The field note, or
recording of one’s practice with awareness, offered tangible data from which to work hermeneutically to draw one or more theme(s). I wrote the following field note shortly after my introduction to the course:

Field Note Day Seven
Theme: Time
August 4, 2005

The phone rings. I pick it up feeling annoyed that someone has disrupted my “quiet” time. It’s my mom; she asks me how dinner was. I run through a synopsis of meeting some extended family and how it was really nice to see them but I felt ashamed that my younger cousins had paid for dinner.

Time seems to equal responsibility (because we’re older, we should have paid). My mom thinks this is silly.

She goes on to tell me that she spoke with Virginia last night. The tone of her voice foreshadows the news. Bill has passed on.

Tears well; tightness fills the emptiness of my chest. I am pained. I exhale in an attempt to release the pressure.

Memories pull me down into a vortex of history – I have known Bill since I was less than a year old. Pause. I am aware of the elasticity of time: here I am busy with school and days ago he was saying goodbye to his family. His body deteriorating over the months, his will to live had ceased. Everyone goes on with their lives and for this moment I cross paths with the past.

What is a life?

I feel that Bill had a “good” life: he was a pilot, a sailor, a bike enthusiast, and most importantly, a loving husband and family man. He touched my life in such an important way – he was my “grandpa” when my biological grandfather lived far away. He was the man that, at age two, I had promised to marry. He was the man who shared his peanut butter toast, who bought me my first bike, who told me that I could do anything.

I hope that he was aware of how much he shaped my life. We are given our life to share and experience. It is a finite time, it is important, it is to be treasured. It is easy to be oblivious to these beliefs – it is easy to be oblivious to others as we focus on our own time here.

If time is a commodity, I want to be rich with time and generous with it. I want to live my life to the fullest potential like Bill did.

The field note became the focus for personal reflection by offering a text from which our everydayness could be interpreted. My reflection was often influenced by theoretical
readings. I reviewed my text (e.g., a field note on the loss of my relative) for themes, questions, and/or notions of Place, Language, Time, and Self/Other. Once the theme was interpreted (e.g., how time serves as a separation), I thought critically about my response, examining my biases, decisions, and actions. I would ask myself questions such as, “Why did I react that way?” or “Who decides when it’s time to die?” Finally, I would consider how to best render the field note and reflection in order to illuminate the theme in preparation of anticipated dialogue. This might be a poem, painting, or even a simple paragraph. Although very daunting in the beginning of the course, I found, in the end, that my process of observation, documentation, reflection, and rendering cultivated an increased sensitivity, or attention, to my being-in-the-world and helped me to see my life as my classroom. Consequently, the moments of practicing Living Inquiry became a way to live rather than a way to complete an assignment.

Lived experience data were augmented with theoretical readings. We had two core texts: Krishnamurti’s (1969) *Freedom From the Known* and the screen play of *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1989). Imagine my surprise that a popular text (and well known film) was mandatory reading! We were also responsible to choose two additional texts to support our exploratory work. These could be fiction or nonfiction, popular or scholarly. It was the first time that I was permitted to select whatever I wanted to read. I perceived the freedom to choose as “trusting.” We were being trusted to choose something appropriate and rigorous, to make a selection without supervision. For a moment, I was tempted to pick something “easy,” to “cheat” – after all, it was a three-week intensive course and I was taken two other courses concurrently. I had even wondered if the baby preparation book I was
reading would count. In the end, I realized that taking the easy way didn’t mean anything because the course was about my personal development.

I had the privilege of working with seventeen other students in addition to Dr. Meyer. Studying at the master and doctoral level, and from a variety of disciples, our heterogeneous group provided a rich environment for (re)interpreting our lived experiences. After spending all of my postsecondary time, prior to this course, with Education students and practicing teachers, it was refreshing to dialogue with Music, Nursing, Fine Arts majors (just to name a few). Working with these students introduced me to new discourses and perspectives embedded in their respective disciplines, thus prompting me to reconsider my own understanding (gained through my Education studies). I found my fellow classmates to be friendly, open, and willing to divulge their vulnerabilities and challenge their thinking. Within our three weeks together, we discussed “safe” topics such body image and media, and also “sensitive” ones such as a mother’s experience with the loss of a child. The combination of diverse backgrounds and topics, and Dr. Meyer’s open, nurturing approach created a sense of community that enabled me to engage in the course in a more meaningful way than I had experienced before.

Living Inquiry was not a solo endeavour. Sharing field notes and dialoguing about our work were critical to the practice. Therefore, once introduced to the guiding theme (e.g., Place), the following three or four classes, and much of our instructional time, was devoted to gathering, interpreting, rendering, and dialoguing with lived experience data. As we conversed in small, diverse groups and participants performed their thick descriptions and reflections through creative (re)presentations, we “struggle[d] continuously and contingently to extend our sense of what [was] at work [in these encounters]” (Smith, 1999, p.40). We
sought to (re)consider the implications of our interpretations not only by drawing upon Western grand narratives, such as the privileging of rational thought, but also those perspectives that speak to “the more suffocated narratives of our time, such as those concerning spirituality” (p.40). In this way, *Living Inquiry* helped draw my attention to the implications of language, fostering the belief that I am constituted by a world that precedes me.

Dr. Meyer was an active member in these small group discussions. My (initial) assumption was that she would sit in judgment, that she would use these times to make secret anecdotal comments on a clipboard that might be used toward our final grade. Instead, true to the notion of learning alongside us, she engaged in the dialogue and shared in our explorations by offering her own interpretations.

To culminate each class, we gathered together in a large group to debrief both our individual and collective inquiries. Just as the field note offered a starting place for thematic work, our dialogue generated further inquiry points, holding the investigative space open in hopes that the inquiry might be sustained. I believe that the sharing process enlivened the classroom and established a culture of care where its inhabitants felt safe to take academic and personal risks.

The last two classes of the course were dedicated to celebrating and showcasing our learning through *Living Inquiry*. We were asked to illustrate our insights through performance. Each student (re)presented their learning in a unique and creative way and was given a ten to fifteen minute timeframe to share their work. The class provided feedback (e.g., what stood out for the viewer and why) after each showing. Every performance was noteworthy: storytelling, slideshows, memory books, original songs, and dance performances.
took our stage in a fury of passion and insight. I was awestruck by the attention to rigorous reflection and to creative representation that each classmate put forth in his or her performance. The unexpected outpouring of emotion also disrupted me.

I'm waiting to perform my last Living Inquiry piece. The transparency of my work, the synthesis of my Living Inquiry journey (thus far), rests in my lap. I keep looking at it as a reference point while I observe the preparations busily unfurl around the room.

I have spent hours on my hand drawn map and short story. My best creative self is transposed in text and will be “out there,” revealed in critical light. Yet, unlike my classmates, whom I’m sure ooze confidence in their work, I’m convinced that mine is terrible, that I am a fraud, that my rendering is less than amazing and I’m just not worthy of being in the same presence as these artists. I wonder how you are supposed to put the notion of awareness, let alone your growth in the course, into a concrete product anyway. I’m just being self-consciousness, doubting the support of my community even though they haven’t given me reason to. Luckily, I’m third to last (to present) so I can enjoy the other performances first. I sit back, ready for the celebration to commence.

As the performances unfolded, the thematics of the course were brought to life through visceral and emotive (re)presentations. Most of the presenters illustrated their insights (resulting from the course) through a profound encounter from their lived experience. For example, the temporality of life was interpreted through the reflection of an uncle’s suicide and the relational quality of Place was explored through personal photographs and other (newly recovered) familial artefacts. The use of thick description and creative expression of the existential themes moved me. I found myself walking alongside my peers, temporarily, allowing their care-ful rendering to resonate within me, often bringing me to tears. For the first time, I am consciously struck by the power of hermeneutics to mediate differences and “lead to a renewed embrace of the Other” (Smith, 1999, p.32).

It’s time to share my piece. I try to mask my anxiety as I approach our makeshift stage. I read my story slowly and clearly, pausing at appropriate times for emphasis. The personal, hand-drawn map as my accompaniment, I detail my Living Inquiry journey: the disruptions, frustrations, revelations, and discoveries now exposed.

Sample excerpt from final project:

Rocks push through the soft soles of my feet; the incline of the path rips my muscles. This is the most difficult part of my journey. I contemplate T.S Elliot’s statement that life is measured with coffee spoons and suddenly I am struck with an epiphany: I measure my life in “scare”s.” I am a highly focused individual who sets goals and goes after them; I am a risk taker yet I have fear attached to the risk. I believe it is a fear of failing – but who I am worried about disappointing? Again Krishnamurti’s words serve as reminder: “Why do I
depend? Because in myself I am shallow, in myself I have nothing, in myself I have no source which is always full and rich, vital, moving, living. So I depend” (1969, p.62). What I know and what I feel and hope for cause conflict within me.

And that is all that matters in your life, yourself, your pettiness, your shallowness, your brutality, your violence, your greed, your ambition, your daily agony, and endless sorrow. This is what you have to understand and nobody on earth or in heaven is going to save you from it but yourself (Krishnamurti, 1969, p.121).

Tired and weary, I finally arrive back at the brook where my journey began. I have made my way through the rugged mountains and now, like Siddhartha, I rest and watch the river in quiet contemplation. Am I doing what I set out to do? Am I more aware? Alas, I know that there is no trying, there is only doing. I must be the person I want to be. I must be aware.

Truth is like the brook, it is never still; it is always changing.

I hold my breath upon completion, awaiting response. Enthusiastic clapping followed by warm affirmations fill my ears, as if I am being cradled in acknowledgment. Still, I can’t help but feel displaced.

Reflections

When I reflect on the final projects, and especially my own rendering, it seems that the practice of Living Inquiry was about working hermeneutically to see life’s events with a sense of textuality, and further, reading these events with the aim of bringing into question the “fixed” notions that normally went unnoticed and/or uncontested in our daily lives. For example, the last line in my story speaks to the realization that, in the hermeneutic tradition, there are no Truths, that “truth” is constructed dialogically. I understand that “truth” takes the shape of a temporary agreement between those engaged in its interpretation. To borrow the words of Smith (1999), engaging in Living Inquiry meant

shaking loose our own dogmatic (culturally predetermined) ways of interpreting the details of our daily experience, [and] trying to deepen our sense of what is implicated in the specifics of our thought and actions. [Further, it seems to] give voice to and show features of our lives ordinarily suppressed under the weight of the dominant economic, political and pedagogical fundamentalisms of the times. (p.40)

Thinking about my own feelings of displacement, I now believe that it was the opening up of (the [re]interpretation of) these lived encounters that left me feeling
vulnerable, transformed, and awakened to feelings once dormant. Smith (2003) states that “dominant culture disallows what it cannot allow, so most of the time, most of us become masterful at hiding our feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, fear and paranoia” (p.xvi). In contrast to dominant culture, *Living Inquiry* appeared to offer me (and possibly others?) a safe haven to not only explore these feelings, but also articulate them publicly.

Even though I considered *Living Inquiry* to be a generous and forgiving space, there were dichotomies at play within me – sometimes my work felt insignificant but then incredibly resonating, at times the community felt superficial but then extraordinarily real. I felt caught in a cycle of belief that this kind of work would lead to greater fulfilment and purpose in all aspects of my life, and pessimism that it was “airy fairy” and academically illegitimate. A mystic quality of the work intrigued me yet, because of its stark contrast with my other postsecondary experiences, I questioned its validity.

My questioning and embedded insecurity provoked me to turn to education theorists, such as Biesta (2004), Ross and Gibson (2007), and Levidow (2007) in hopes that their insights might illuminate the perceived juxtaposition between *Living Inquiry* and my former educational experiences. What I came to understand through my readings is that my former postsecondary education experiences, and my current public school teaching endeavours, for that matter, were steeped in a neoliberal\(^\text{15}\) context. Neoliberal regimes rooted in a positivistic and rationalistic ideology, and focused on outcome-based, measurable, and transparent learning, view education as a utility, in which “the free market, private enterprise, consumer choice, entrepreneurial initiative, and government deregulation are fundamental principles” (Ross & Gibson 2007, p.7). Consequently, neoliberal ideology, along with significant global

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\(^{15}\) Neoliberalism is “a complex of values, ideologies, and practices that affect the economic, political, and cultural aspects of society” (Ross & Gibson, 2007, p.1).
changes (e.g., economic crisis), has reconfigured the relationship between the state and its citizens from a union that works toward the “common good” to one that is economically profitable (Biesta, 2004). This transformation is reflected in university operations. For example, marketization strategies\textsuperscript{16} are now employed by universities to draw students (revenue) and compete in a global market (Levidow, 2007). Levidow describes an increase in educational reform initiatives (e.g., development of standardized curriculum and ICT developments) aimed to commodify education. Further, he argues that “prospective students are represented as customers/markets in order to justify commodifying educational services. Knowledge becomes a product for individual students to consume, rather than a collaborative process for students and teachers” (p.251).

With the above understanding in mind, it makes sense that prior to Living Inquiry, I had experienced knowledge as a reduction of the world: a severed, isolated, and somewhat tangible object. Required to memorize “facts” and theories, I considered knowledge to be scientifically proven, something definitive, something to possess, and something that could be delivered and received in concrete, fragmented pieces. Moreover, I learned that others hold real knowledge, not me. Through my studies, I learned to accept another’s authority rather than my own inquiry (Meyer, 2008, p.6).

Living Inquiry seemed to authorize an alternate way of knowing, one that was not as tangible, reproducible, or commodifiable. Further, I learned that this kind of knowing is no less “true,” as Jardine (2006b) points out:

There is a “truth” to be had, an understanding to be reached, in the provocative, unmethodical incidents of our lives, a truth that is despoiled and thus left out of consideration by the methodical severances requisite of empirical work. (p.156)

\textsuperscript{16} For a detailed description of marketization strategies, see Levidow (2007).
Thus, *Living Inquiry* wasn’t about collecting itemized, scientific knowledge by passing it down a hierarchy from teacher to student, or doctoral student to master’s student. Knowledge wasn’t something possessed by some and absent in others. Instead, we were considered to be “knowers” upon entry to the course, each with interesting stories to share, each equipped with the potential to take up new ways of understanding ourselves and others, while acknowledging that “the full truth of things can never be the conscious property of any one person or group” (Smith, 1999, p.42).

**Summary**

It was precisely the juxtaposition of *Living Inquiry* to my previous educational experiences and the subsequent challenges and the disruptions I faced in the course that propelled me to investigate this curriculum further. As a teacher, I wondered if *Living Inquiry* offered a way to legitimate our personal experiences in a neoliberal school context and if it were possible for children to take up their own encounters with the world in a hermeneutical fashion as part of our curriculum. I anticipated that if my students found *Living Inquiry* to be as provoking as I did, we might, together, work toward developing a sensitivity to the world that embraces possibility.

The following chapter offers my interpretation of the first year of translating *Living Inquiry* in my classroom; it is organized around four provocations. Each subheading is phrased as a question to frame my inquiry and communicate my uncertainty as I take up the task of understanding my early experiences as a *Living Inquiry* facilitator. Rather than begin the chapter with an introduction, I immediately detail the conversation with Dr. Meyer that led to our collaboration and the launch of *Living Inquiry* with my students.
I am special because I want to learn, help people, and make people happy. I want to do this because I can gather knowledge and I can think in my own creative way. I like to learn about other cultures and countries. I want to go to more countries and learn all I can.

I've traveled to Japan, China, America, Thailand and the Philippines. In these countries, I've seen many different things. For example, when I was in the Philippines, I went scuba diving and saw the coral reefs. They were beautiful, and there were also nice people. I was able to understand the music and some of the languages I heard. But I could see and feel that there were problems there, too.

When I look at my family, I usually know how they're feeling. I'm special because I'm sometimes attuned to their feelings. When I go through different countries, I like to understand the people and help make them happier, better, and smarter if they are sad. I want to be able to help other people. I want to be a nice person and be happy. I want to go to many countries, meet many people, make many friends, share my knowledge, understand, and help them.

As I look out the office window of my house, I think about the meaning of life and what the true meaning really is.

I ask my dad what life means to him and he says, “You should appreciate it while it lasts”.

My mom says, “Don’t waste it. Be careful and use it wisely”.

I say, “Let life be fun and prosperous and let it be yours”.

I’m concerned by the fact that the real meaning of life might never be found.

Why are we here? What is our purpose in life?
Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt

A Driving Desire

Curiosity, a human’s natural instinct. Questions are everywhere, some spoken and some just passing through our heads. When you’re curious, you feel like you need to know more. You feel questions pop into your head wherever you go.

Why is curiosity so important? It is important because every intelligent living thing on earth is curious. Does intelligence somehow connect to curiosity? Curiosity helped develop humankind. I think many people believe that curiosity is nothing and we could live without it, but think about it. When you’re sitting on your couch watching T.V., talking on the phone, or eating microwave popcorn, curiosity made all those things. Curiosity drives people to create more advanced technology and causes our intelligence to advance.

Very few people are aware of the huge role curiosity plays in the world and life. Why are we all curious? Does curiosity guide us through life? There are pros and cons to curiosity and they balance each other out.

Finally, my last and most important question: What is curiosity? A few definitions I’ve heard are: a thirst for knowledge, a survival instinct, a natural instinct, and, lastly, a driving desire. I’m curious, What is the true meaning of curiosity?

Kathryn

Fig. 5.3 A Driving Desire, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
For me Living Inquiry is looking into a subject and going as deep as you can. Even if you find an answer you still keep going. The going deeper process helps me find something I have never noticed before. I can learn what is around me. I can learn to be aware.

*Cody, Grade Six*
**Being Obedient or Hearing the Call?**

*The more aware one is of what one is doing and its possible meanings, the more attentive and prepared one will become as a teacher.*  

(Hansen, 1995, p.151)

**The Event**

At the same time that I was taking *Living Inquiry* at the university, I was also preparing to lead a transformational shift in pedagogy at my work site. As vice-principal, I was responsible to coordinate professional development opportunities to assist staff members with learning more about inquiry methodology in order to implement a new school-wide program. After being awakened to a new understanding of inquiry, I anticipated that *Living Inquiry* could offer a model of teaching and learning that would align with the goals of our new program: to foster student-initiated inquiry with teacher in role as an inquiry facilitator, to establish a collaborative community that develops the individual and the collective, and to encourage diversity and authenticity in thought, feeling, and action. I knew it wasn’t possible for the teachers to enroll in *Living Inquiry* at the university, but I thought I might be able to bring it to them in hopes that they too would *live* inquiry and thus have a new appreciation for this type of teaching/learning.

After dialoguing about my ideas with Dr. Meyer, we agreed that my original plan was inappropriate (at least at that time). Always generous and gracious, she didn’t point out the ridiculousness of my idea, but instead wondered if I had considered translating the course for my students.

*My inner dialogue:*

*Hmm – cool idea, I never considered this. Why hadn’t I thought of this? Should I have thought of this? ... How would it work? Would it work? I would need time to take time away from the other (required) subjects and it would take additional planning time on my part...*
hmm, that’s a lot of time … If I’m going to spend considerable amounts of time on this, how will I assess and report on it? What about the small group discussions? How can I let students have so much freedom when I am responsible for their behaviour and productivity – will they actually listen to one another or be climbing in the trees? I can’t possibly supervise all students if they are going to have the autonomy over choosing their discussion locations and topics? What will students do when I’m not watching them? How can I control the conversation if I’m not present? What will my principal think… or the parents for that matter???

Dr. Meyer seemed to be waiting quietly, intently, for my response. I think I said something general like, “Hmm, I didn’t think about that before but, yeah, it sounds really interesting.” I was also thinking:

Being a VP means being a model teacher, but can I really take this on with everything else I have to do? What does it mean if I don’t do it? I don’t even know what Living Inquiry really is… Still, won’t I look silly saying “No, Dr. Meyer, I don’t think your idea will work”? Am I convinced that it won’t work?

Before I had formulated an answer to her question, Dr. Meyer expressed her interest in collaborating in an informal way. Her support and credibility (as a university professor and inquiry “expert”) translated into two meaningful, yet somewhat juxtaposing advantages. One: I could market our endeavour to the students, parents, and school community in a powerful way… (Misty lands the opportunity for her students to work with a university prof … talk about being a “model” teacher). Two: it could open up the possibility to learn from an inspirational pedagogue in an intimate way and for a sustained period of time (because Dr. Meyer would be in my classroom). I promptly accepted her invitation.

A First Response

I entered Dr. Meyer’s office with a desire to be a “good” vice-principal. Being “good” meant acting with certainty (i.e., having the answers) and leading teachers to the answer. I hear Aoki’s (2005a) words as if they were my own: “If I can but identify the components of effective teaching and if, with some concentrated effort, I can but identify the skills, maybe
in a three or four [week course], my teaching can become readily effective” (p.190). With intentions steeped in instrumentalism, I had hoped that Dr. Meyer would provide me with a golden key to her teaching; that through our discussion she would (and could) somehow reduce her pedagogical being to a manageable skill set that I could miraculously embody, and then transfer it to teachers so that they too could “do” inquiry. Inquiry, as a teaching methodology, was an elusive concept that was causing much anxiety on staff as we scrambled to get our hands on some resource that would define it and instruct us in our practice. In short, I believed that I would, through speaking with Dr. Meyer, find the way, or the method, and would be able to reduce some of this anxiety. However, my initial plans were jolted, redirected. I found myself presented with an unexpected opportunity, one that would engage me in a dialogical journey that is now this thesis. It is the significance of that encounter, and my understanding of it, that I wish to engage in now.

**Framing the Encounter as an Act of Obedience**

Clifford and Friesen (2008), practicing teachers and education researchers, call into question the “goodness” of teachers and students when they critique our obedience to the institution of school. School is interpreted (by these authors) as a fixed, dominating construct that imposes a conservative worldview and attempts to regiment behaviour (reminiscent of a neoliberal critique as described in Chapter Three). In this model of school, Clifford and Friesen suggest that students and teachers are praised for doing what we are told, quietly and without question, that we “have to ‘be good’ in order to survive” (p.80). Consequently, these educators believe that teachers often succumb to the pressure to conform, to fit into the status quo, even if we have the desire to engage otherwise.
When I consider my history as a student and teacher, I have always been a “pleaser.” For example, I was the kind of learner/teacher who would sit in the front row at professional development workshops, take copious notes, and implement the given strategies the next school day, without question. I was the kind of administrator that respected her position in the school (aka corporate) hierarchy, and took seriously her role to manage and to perform. Therefore, it seems plausible, maybe even likely, that Living Inquiry served as a type of professional development workshop; that Dr. Meyer was simply a model teacher, and my desire to apply my learning was yet another example of submission to an institution, or act of being a “good” and obedient teacher/student.

However, proclaiming my acceptance of Dr. Meyer’s invitation as merely an act of obedience is a premature response. It forecloses an inquiry into the possibility that something else was at play … something curious … something spirited … something ineffable. Framing the encounter solely as an act of obedience doesn’t breathe a sense of wonder, engagement, or disorientation; it doesn’t give life to the event. Instead, it seems to reduce Misty to a neoliberal archetype, a faceless teacher/administrator who simply does what she’s told. Although my actions may be characterized as obedient, and without denying my self-proclaimed desire to “please,” I would however like to offer an additional possibility, one that attempts to “cultivate [my] apprehension of ‘being in uncertainties, [m]ysteries, doubts, [and attempts to bracket] any irritable reaching after fact and reason’ (Keats, 1958, p.193, cited in Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p.5). Further, I would like to offer an interpretation that intends to “keep the conversation going” (Rorty, 1979, cited in Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p.5).
Framing the Encounter as a Response to the Call of Teaching

Hansen (1995), education theorist, explores the notion of teaching as a vocation, reminiscent of a response to a spiritual calling. He traces the etymology of the term vocation: “The Latin root of vocation, vocare, means ‘to call.’ It denotes a summons or bidding to be of service” (p.1). As I reflect on my desire to take up Living Inquiry in my professional life, and in light of Hansen’s work, I turn my attention to the urge I felt to walk up to Dr. Meyer’s office in the first place, and invite a conversation with Hansen to make sense of the encounter in another way. Drawing on D. Emmet’s (1958) work, Hansen suggests that vocation presupposes an ‘inner urge’… to ‘venture and devote oneself in working in a first-hand kind of way’ (p.255). Those terms are carefully chosen. To ‘venture’ forth raises the image of an adventure, a plunge into an activity whose outcome will be at least to some extent uncertain and unpredictable. To ‘devote’ oneself in the doing of it recalls one of the original meanings of the term vocation – to commit oneself in an enduring way to a particular practice. (Hansen, 1995, p.5)

I was determined to extend my Living Inquiry experience, to open myself up in a spirit of adventure, even if in a limited (and somewhat obedient) way. Might I understand this initial urge as a type of calling or an enactment of my sense of vocation? Hansen (1995) argues that

vocation is not something the person ‘possesses’ and can ‘choose’ to ‘apply’ to a particular kind of work…rather it is a set of impulses that are outward-looking and outward-moving, focused on what is calling one to act. The idea of vocation presupposes a social practice in which to enact one’s inner urge to contribute to the world. (p.5)

So, assuming that I had a sense of vocation, I understand that this sense was already present before my experience with Living Inquiry, before my promotion to vice-principal, prior to being a certified teacher? I turn to Hansen (1995) for clarification:

Inner motivation is socially rooted … the call to teach comes from what [someone] has seen and experienced in the world, not solely from what they many have ‘heard’ in their inner heart and mind. The sense of being impelled to act from within is coterminous with a sense of being called by something without. (p.6)
The call of teaching is not a bracketed phenomenon; it is a relational construction? If so, can I suggest that my experience in *Living Inquiry*, and my subsequent conversation with Dr. Meyer might have reinvigorated this calling as part of my professional milieu? Hansen (1995) offers:

An individual who is strongly inclined towards teaching seems to be a person who is not debating whether to teach but rather is contemplating how or under what circumstances to do so. (p.9)

But how can I make sense of my uncertainty and initial hesitancy to take up Dr. Meyer’s suggestion to translate *Living Inquiry* for my grade six and seven students?

The notion of being ‘called,’ or having something distinctive to offer teaching, does not imply a kind of blind faith in one’s capabilities or desires. Rather, teaching as a vocation goes hand in hand with questions, doubts, and uncertainties, some generated by the nature of the work, some by the sheer fact that the person treats the work as more than a routine task. (Hansen, 1995, p.15)

Even though my intentions may have been originally oriented in a conservative paradigm, thinking about the encounter as a response to the call of teaching invites consideration of the encounter as a type of beginning… as a possibility to (not only) see my relationship with my teaching context in a theoretical way (as practiced in the course) but also in a practical way. However, as Hansen suggests, answering the call is not a turning away from my (neoliberal) mandate, for I am obligated to balance these duties and their respective context with a desire (even a subtle one at the time) to explore new and possibility alternative orientations. Furthermore he, like other education theorists, urges me to try and understand how I am constituted by my context and its history, and to interpret my interactions within it.

Teachers…will always have to come to grips with their convictions about their role, and to have the courage to make the intellectual and moral judgements that comprise teaching. But they will also have to be mindful of the social ethic – their public duties and obligations – embodied in the practice of teaching as it is played out in institutions (Hansen, 1995, p.143).
In the spirit of responsibility and reflection, I ask Hansen to lend me his notion of “vocation as a mirror,” to help me further (re)interpret the encounter in question and also to anticipate future encounters in the thesis.

To explain the notion of vocation as a mirror, a metaphor that serves to invite critical reflection and understanding, Hansen draws upon Tolstoy’s “The Three Questions.” In brief, the story is about a king who searches for the answer to three questions only to find the answers where right in front of him. They were revealed, albeit subtly, through his careful responses to others within his journey (to seek the answers). Hansen draws on this story because it “reveals the educational value of holding one’s experience up to the light of self-reflection and questioning” (p.149). Further, and because, teaching is a practice and not simply a theoretical construct, he advises teachers to evoke the notion of teaching as a vocation in the moments when we are seeking answers (e.g., How can I teach this child? What is the best approach? Or even: How can I teach Living Inquiry?). He compels us to use our questions, and our intent on answering them, as type of mirror to see ourselves in the encounter and to engage our inner voice in critical interpretation of the encounter. Hansen elaborates:

The idea of vocation … can be a mirror for teachers, especially when they face hard questions about how and whether to carry on (p.151). ... ‘[L]ooking in the mirror’… can better position teachers to perceive what the work involves. It can enable them to begin the task of balancing the obligations built into the practice with their own hopes and aims. It can assist them in anticipating the moral, the personal, and the intellectual aspects of the vocation…. Such reflection can be valuable, not as a blueprint for what to expect or for what to do, but to sensitize and alert one to what is taking place, in oneself as well as in the classroom. In short, it can be useful from the very start to develop the habit of critical reflection, so that the habit, rather than, say, one of uncritical acceptance of the tried and known guides one’s efforts. (p.152)

17 The three questions are “What are the most important things to do in life?” “When is the right time to undertake them?” and “Who are the right (and wrong) people to deal with in so doing?”
If I apply a vocational mirror to my encounter with Dr. Meyer, what do I see being reflected back to me? I see Misty the VP who wants to please; Misty on a career path; Misty who is young in years. I see Misty who has been teaching in a neoliberal context for close to a decade, who has encountered a practice that intrigues her, that calls to her. I see Misty seeking guidance and support to engage in this new practice within her familiar professional setting. I see Misty who may be at the threshold of developing a habit of critical reflection.

Aoki (2005b), curriculum theorist, teacher, and scholar, urges teachers to hearken to “the call of the calling” (p.213). Adding to Hansen’s work, and in summary, I interpret this to mean (re)locating the inner voice that reminds us of our vocation, that engages us in our role as pedagogue. To my benefit, Aoki, like Hansen, doesn’t outline the criteria for the call – he does not and cannot provide me with a checklist for which to tick off boxes that determine “you have been called.” Without a checklist I am forced to live with uncertainty, to dwell in an ineffable, inspirted place, which seeks adventure and understanding. It is this adventure that begins to unfold next.

What seems urgent at this time in understanding what teaching more truly is, is to undertake to reorient ourselves so that we overcome mere correctness so that we can see and hear our doings as teachers harboured within pedagogical being, so we can see and hear who we are as teachers. (Aoki, 2005a, p.197)

Planning the Predictable or Preparing for the Possible?

The first year of Living Inquiry for grade six and seven students began in January 2006. I had five months to put together an initial curriculum plan that would enable the practice to take a familiar shape in my classroom and live amongst required subjects such as Language Arts or Math. I wondered what existing school structures might provide me with a framework with which to translate Living Inquiry, but would not, at the same time, consume
it or absorb it as “one more thing to do,” nor dominate the teaching/learning experience such that the students and I would lose ourselves in trying to accomplish the plan. In short, I wondered how to honour the integrity of *Living Inquiry*, to let myself be uncertain and open to the possible, and at the same time, fulfill my duties as a public school teacher by measuring the predictable. Hansen (1995) speaks to this tension and helps me situate it in a broader context:

> There will always be tensions between the allegiance teachers have to the terms of their practice and to their respective institutions. Those tensions come with working in schools, and do not in themselves call into question the validity of either the practice or schools …. schools always constrain what teachers can do. Yet they also offer valued forms of community and of professional support. In this light, the challenge teachers must address is how to balance their personal aims and judgement with the public obligations embodied in the life of their institution. (p.140)

The following details my attempt at this balance:

> At the onset, I viewed *Living Inquiry* as an additional “subject” to engage in during our school week. As such, the logistics of my curriculum plan overwhelmed me. My tasks included: scheduling time to engage in conversation, reducing the amount of homework in other subject areas so that students had time for *Living Inquiry* observation and field notes, (and consequently increase the number of mandated curriculum objectives covered during instructional time), and considering a way of assessing the work so that I could account for it. These were immense responsibilities because they had direct influence on the students and therefore the parents. Making room for *Living Inquiry* was not a minor undertaking and was highly risky given the current accountability climate. In order to minimize the risk, I believed I needed to legitimize *Living Inquiry* in recognizable ways. This translated into the following:

- Crafting a concrete process that aligned, where possible, with the outcomes of other subject areas such as writing in Language Art or drawing in Fine Arts,
- asking the students to create tangible products that could be made public so that others
could see the process,

- and, most pressingly, creating assessment procedures that accounted for the progress made during *Living Inquiry*.

Creating a step-by-step version brought some ethical challenges to bear: on the one hand, I wanted a tangible schema for the students to hold onto but, on the other, I wanted to stay true to the open nature of the work (after all, what would be the point of doing *Living Inquiry* if it didn’t offer an interpretive way to explore our being-in-the-world). Karen\(^{18}\) and I brainstormed ways to negotiate these desires. When we reflected on my interpretation of the *Living Inquiry* process we decided to keep the elements that we thought would orient the work in an interpretive and existential way. We liked the guiding themes (Place, Language, Time, Self/Other) because they provided an overall structure and were concepts that would resonate with the students. We also wanted to keep the field note because it offered a concrete way to record lived experience and could serve as a jumping off point for further reflection. In addition, we were committed to creating a space for dialoguing about the work. I knew that my students would need something to reference as part of their conversations; I believed that having a tangible item, such as a piece of writing, would anchor their dialogue and help them to maintain focus on the ideas being shared. Our brainstorming culminated in the following process:

1. Choose a space to engage in an observation or choose a phenomenon that you want to pay attention to.

\(^{18}\) Taking up Dr. Meyer’s invitation to collaborate seemed to quickly transform her from my professor, a formal and somewhat distant role, to my colleague, a less formal and more intimate role. As such, she became “Karen,” someone I considered to be not only a mentor but also a teaching partner.
2. Write a rich description of the observation – this is called a field note. Hint: Write in first person, present tense, and try to use all of your senses to capture the experience.

3. Reflect on the field note(s), pull out a “gem” (something that you think summarizes the “essence” of your field note; something that calls for further inquiry) and establish a critical question about the “gem” (something for you and others to discuss).

4. Create a mini-project to showcase your “gem.” Hint: Think about the best medium to share your “gem.” What would showcase it in a way that “brings the “gem” to life? Maybe a poem, or photograph, or painting, or writing….

5. Debrief the experience, using your work as a starting place for dialog, in a small group. You will be invited to share in a larger group.

6. Submit your work in for teacher feedback.

7. Display your work on a bulletin board or in your portfolio.

With the process loosely determined, including a plan for making learning visible, we contemplated how to assess the work. It was this task that I found the most onerous and the most troubling.

We first needed to establish the intentions for Living Inquiry. I wanted students to feel more aware, to be more sensitive to how their actions and the actions of others affect the world, to invoke passion for learning, and to possibly experience some kind of awakening as I did. Even though I knew that these were intangible goals, I was compelled to find a way to mark the work; I wasn’t ready to incur the great risk of engaging in an inquiry that I couldn’t account for.
Jardine et al. (2006) help me to further understand my desire to quantify something unquantifiable. Offering a critique of the current accountability climate, they suggest that we are caught up in a paradigm where significance is found in frequency. As such, in our efforts to account for progress and determine effectiveness, worldly experiences are reduced to specific, measurable fragments, in hopes that we can isolate these incidents, recreate and measure them. It is through this recreation and measurement that the significance of the incident is deemed and thus legitimized. However, Jardine et al. believe that our values are misplaced and that we should reconsider what we deem significant. Biesta (2009) summarizes Jardine’s argument and warns me of the danger involved in my practice when he claims that “we end up valuing what is measured, rather than engage in measurement of what we value” (p.43). Although I agree with Jardine and Biesta, I envy the safe distance from which they can advise: They were not in my classroom facing the students and parents, and they would not be the ones reprimanded for deviating from their mandate. I was.

_Living Inquiry_ could not be broken down into easily assessable fragments of performance so I promptly decided to place the assessment emphasis on what I felt I could mark: writing, observing, reflecting, and representing skills. My students were familiar with using a four-point rubric (modelled after the Ministry Performance Standards) to provide and receive feedback on their work so we set about operationalizing our expectations. In this way, Karen and I could provide students with a model\(^{19}\) for “exceeding, fully meeting, minimally meeting, and not yet meeting expectations.” We agreed on the following aims:

- Detailed observation leading to greater awareness
- Critical questioning resulting from observation
- Discussion between students and adults about their question(s)/observation(s)

\(^{19}\) See Appendix C for sample rubrics used in the “Pilot” year.
With procedures and assessment ideas in place, I finally felt ready\textsuperscript{20} to plan the first class. Having already agreed to use the four existential themes, Karen and I chose "Place" as our starting point. We believed it was concrete in nature and would, therefore, be "easier" than a more abstract theme like “Time.” Considering the school to be a familiar site rich with observable opportunities, we thought students would feel intrigued in the proposed \textit{Living Inquiry} process and successful with their beginning efforts if we started with a critical question: “What makes school “school” (“school” is the phenomenon of being in school)? Dr. Meyer had been a part of a high school exhibit where students had used narrative and photography to examine and report on their experience of school. It was a powerful way to exercise their voices and investigate their relationship with school. Inspired to see what my students would take up in their inquiry of school, we planned for our first sixty-minute class as follows:

1. Meet Dr. Meyer and give biography of course (5-10 minutes)
2. Dr. Meyer explains \textit{Living Inquiry} including our prompting question: What makes school “school”? (5-10 minutes)
3. Students find a spot, choose an aspect of school to observe and record observation in a field note (15-20 minutes) (not too long because students will lose focus)
4. Regroup; invite students to share (10 min)
5. Debrief; give homework: choose another place to write a field note (10 min)

\textsuperscript{20} Use of the term “ready” speaks to an arrangement, a preparation, and a convenience. This is an interesting term to use because it hints at my planning as a type of packaging or reduction (look how I use the word “easier”). The planning also reveals my attempts to prepare myself for a pedagogical engagement.
Looking back on my “readiness”\textsuperscript{21} for this lesson, and for the inquiry as a whole, I question what I was really ready for. Although I wanted to be open to the possible (e.g., surprise, wonder), I expended most of my efforts on what would be measurable, and as such, I worry that my curriculum plan actually reduced the capacity for the possible. When I reflect on my plan, and its focus on activity and product (i.e., what students will do) I can see that it is

imbued with [my] orientations to the world, which inevitably include[d] [my] own interests and assumptions about ways of knowing... These interests, assumptions and approaches [were] implicit in the text of the curriculum-as-plan, [and were framed as] statements of intent and interest [laden with] the language of ‘goals, ‘aims,’ and ‘objectives.’ (Aoki, 2005b, p.202)

Here I am reminded not only of my neoliberal context, which “tempts us to uncomplicate the world” (Scott MacArthur, 2003, p.52) and places students and teachers in role as producers and consumers, but also of the limitations the curriculum-as-plan, or at least a positivistic view of this plan. Is there another way of seeing this plan? What might seeing it differently engender?

Aoki (2005b) suggests that the curriculum-as-plan, especially a curriculum steeped in instrumentalism, has been so prioritized that the dominant curriculum context can now be described as an “arboreal landscape [where] curriculum related activities such as ‘instruction,’ ‘teaching,’ ‘pedagogy,’ and ‘implementation’ become derivatives in the shadow of the curriculum-as-plan” (p.204). Although he argues for the legitimacy of the lived curriculum (a curriculum that often “disturbs the traditional landscape” [p.204]), he is careful not to position these two curricula dualistically, as separate identities. Instead, he asks us to consider a “curricular landscape of multiplicity,” where a new understanding of

\textsuperscript{21} Readiness is bracketed in quotations in an effort to communicate a change of understanding. Now, I do not believe that one can be completely ready, if ready means to be certain, finished, or closed.
“multiplicity” and “identity” take shape (p.205). Aoki suggests that we (re)position these nouns as verbs, as “production[s], in the throes of being constituted as we live in place of difference” (p.205). He offers an example: “according to this understanding our identities as teachers or curriculum [planners] are not so much in our presences; rather our identities, who we are as teachers and as curriculum [planners], are ongoing effects of our becoming in difference” (p.205). Drawing from Deleuze’s 1947 Dialogues, Aoki (2005b) explains the notion of multiplicity as “the between, a site of relations which are not separable from each other … multiplicity grows in the middle” (p.205).

So how does this help me to see my curriculum-plan in a new light? In consideration of Aoki’s suggestion, I would like to offer that the plan detailed in this subchapter was a framework that awaited response. In this way, it would seem that the enactment of the plan could be a site of production, and thus could have the potential to invite multiplicity if the participants were open to legitimizing the emergent, lived curriculum (e.g., the student’s field notes: documentation of their lived experience, and the encounters that would occur within and outside of class). I must stress that the “if” here is slippery and, like Aoki warns, was vulnerable to a paradigm where the plan and its instrumental intentions dominates. It is this slipperiness that I describe next.
Managing the Danger or Attending to Possibility?

[Opposing] the techni-scientific language of planning ...is the language of the lived curriculum, the more poetic, phenomenological and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and languages people speak and live. These two discourses are different in kind; they resist integration.

(Aoki, 2005b, p.207, my emphasis)

In the following section, I offer two classroom events. My aim is to illustrate the living of Living Inquiry, and, further, offer an insider’s view\(^{22}\) of the slipperiness (or tension) experienced between the lived/planned curriculum and what I would now understand as a phenomenological/hermeneutic-oriented curriculum and a neoliberal curriculum context.

The first description details the introductory class where Karen was welcomed and our curriculum plan (as described in the previous subchapter) was enacted. The second description portrays a Living Inquiry event that took place mid-year. I would like to stress that these are only two of many evocative events and that the tensions nuanced within the events are not limited to these particular encounters. A brief\(^{23}\) interpretation follows each description that attempts to further reflect on the event and, in a subtle way, foreshadow the thematics that I will take up in the latter part of the thesis.

January 2006 – A Wonder/ful Beginning (First Living Inquiry Class)

*Okay everyone; please meet in our meeting area.* Our bodies form a circle. Our community has been established; we attempt to embody our classroom agreements: treat each other with respect, listen to others openly, share or pass when it’s your turn, and respect your work and the work of others.’ We sit cross-legged; smiling faces express eagerness and wonder. Karen and I sit side by side.

\(^{22}\) A note about use of tense: I switch back and forth between present and past tense in each description. I use present tense to give the reader a sense of presence and past tense to summarize or, at times, reflect on the event.

\(^{23}\) I have chosen to keep the interpretations in this section brief because a further and more detailed interpretation follows in the subsequent chapters.
Thank you for taking your places so quickly. It is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Meyer. She is a professor at the University of British Columbia. She works with student teachers and also with Masters and Doctoral students. I met Dr. Meyer this summer when I took her course called: Living Inquiry. This was one of the most impactful courses I have ever experienced. Given that we are starting our new inquiry-based program this year and that we will be learning through inquiry, I asked Dr. Meyer about doing Living Inquiry here. She has agreed to work with us for the year, which means that we will be doing similar work that is done at the university!

Karen began to introduce Living Inquiry as a way to pay attention to how we live in the world. She used many specific examples; she translated the interpretive, ambiguous quality of work into a concrete, tangible practice. For instance, I recall her describing how easy it is to walk the same route (to work or school) completely unaware of our surroundings, living mindlessly in that moment. I remember her saying that Living Inquiry was about being mindful; it was about being present in the moment by paying attention to the world and how we live it in, to develop our awareness so that we notice our biases, our prejudices, our way of being. She suggested that we develop our awareness by quieting our minds and by engaging in a close observation of the world. She also said that it was through this close observation that we might see something new, something that before went unnoticed. Finally, Karen shared the importance of reflecting on what we noticed and dialoguing about this reflection as a way to inquire into the observation more deeply. In this way, we could become even more aware and more mindful.

Adding a tangible example of sharing our observations to promote further inquiry, Dr. Meyer went onto say that she was a part of a high school exhibit where the students rendered their perspective on their high school through text and photographs. She commented on the effectiveness of the presentation, especially the visual component. Recalling that one student took a picture of a padlock on the door; another took one of a broken water fountain, she believed that their work really expressed what was happening in their school and because it
was from the students’ perspectives, from their eyes, it was so powerful. She said that these students expressed something about their school that was unique; that only a student could share.

Karen took a short pause from her description so I took advantage of this by trying to soak in the students’ response. They seemed intrigued, curious to find out more. It felt like, within this short introduction, they were with her. I recall the directness with which she looked at each student, engaging them through the conviction in her eyes and seriousness in her tone.

Karen then posed our key question for the lesson: “What makes school school?”

“So we know that this is a school, right? Right away, you could drive up and you would know it’s a school. What makes it a school?”

Many students raised their hands, eager to share:

*The playground – yeah, all of the equipment*

*The classrooms*

*The office*

*The teachers and the students*

*The fence*

*The flat roof*

*The flagpole*

*The parking lot*

Karen and I smiled, acknowledging each offering with a nod. When the sharing was complete, she continued to describe Living Inquiry:

*One of the things we do in Living Inquiry is to observe the world very closely and then we write down what we observe in a field note. Keeping the question of, “What makes school “school” in mind, we’d like to invite you to find your own space and write a field note about what you observe. Then we’ll come back together and share.*

The manager’s voice24 in me kicked in right away. I felt compelled to add:

*So you can choose to go either outside or inside (Karen and I had talked about my supervisory concerns prior to the class and decided that she would go outside and I would stay in). Remember, Living Inquiry is about YOUR observations, not your neighbour’s. You need to find a place that works for YOU to concentrate. Try not to think about it too much. Let your mind flow and then go to the place that you are drawn to right way. Once you choose it, you need sit down with your paper and pen, be quiet, and focus on exactly what*

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24 The logistics were primarily my job – my part of the collaboration. Karen offered the theoretical piece as well as her practical expertise. As a result, I didn’t think I could “do” Living Inquiry without Karen; we were a team. My later shift in confidence was not just a result from doing Living Inquiry for two years alongside Karen as a guide; it was also due to my growing understanding of the practice and theory behind Living Inquiry.
you are observing. Try to write down as much detail as you can. We aren’t going to give you a long time so you’ll need to use your time wisely. We’re going to meet back here in ten minutes. Ready, go!

The heavy, yellow double doors separating the classroom from the forested playground were adjacent to my rear classroom door. The air was heavy and thick with mist, and even though it was a cold January day, many students rushed out (I suspect that this was partially because the choice to work outside was a novel one). Only a handful stayed in. Karen wrapped her long grey coat gently around her shoulders, donned her cap, and eagerly followed the students out. Before she walked out the door, she turned around and we smiled at each other in anticipation, as if to say, “Well, here we go …”

I began cruising down the hallway with a curious feeling. I felt brave and honourable; here I was trying something “new,” something that I believed no one else was doing. On the other hand, I worried that it would bomb, and I would have a myriad of behaviour problems to deal with, especially from some of the students who bolted outside (one or two might have been empty-handed). I imagined my principal questioning me: “Well, why didn’t you go outside?” Or, “What were you doing outside anyway?” Trying to put my concerns aside, I turned my focus to the children in my care who were now busily finding a special spot to sit.

A few selected their observation places right away. Perched at the edge of the stairs leading to the primary wing, crouched at crack of an open door to the library, and sprawled on tummies in the hallway, the children worked with focus, their eyes scoped the space and their hands scribed the moment with quick flicks of their wrists. Through the large office window in the main foyer I saw a mess of blond peeking over the tall counter. I gingerly bent my body around the doorframe to see Tyler’s head bobbing up and down as he recorded his observations. I discretely glanced at his paper and skimmed his detailed notes about the massive filing cabinet. His eyes caught mine and he whispered though a proud smile, “Hey Mrs. Paterson, I’ve got the best spot”!

Very pleased with myself (possibly taking credit for his enthusiasm), I began to think this lesson was fail proof until I saw Sally roaming the halls. “Hey sweetie, what’s going on?” I quizzed. This seemed to be the opening she was looking for because the rest of the time was then spent fielding her concern. She’d repeat, “I just don’t know what to do,” and I’d respond with “Just find a spot and do an observation” and, “You’re almost out of time!” When our allotted time finally came to an end, I gathered the inside group and asked them to quietly return to class. Phrases such as, “That was fun but I don’t know if I did it right” and “I wish I had more time, I wasn’t finished” were shared in hushed tones as we clutched our notes and headed down the hallway.

To my (pleasant) surprise, Karen and the outside group were already settled in the classroom. I asked the class to once again meet in our Meeting Area. Forming a circle with field notes in hand, we put forth an invitation to each child to share their work, under the overarching question of, “What makes school “school”?” The following is a sample of some of the responses:

- Did you know that there’s a massive hole in our forest [playground]? It looks like someone is cutting the trees down in there. Who makes that decision—who’s allowed to do that? They didn’t ask us what we thought.
I noticed that our fence wraps around the entire property. It’s like humans are intersecting nature. It’s the same with the concrete patches and our forest. They’re like opposites coming together.

There’s so much colour everywhere. Why is there colour in schools? Does it make us learn better or something?

The hallway is so long. It’s like a never-ending hallway! I remember thinking that when I started here in preschool. Do you know that I’ve been here for ten years?!

The teacher told the students not to talk but I saw some kids talking anyway. I don’t think she noticed but I wonder what she would have done if she did.

I looked at the photographs in the front foyer. There’s some that are so old! Why do we keep them?

Okay, there’s a gigantic filing cabinet in the office. I bet our report cards are in there. Who gets to look inside and is there something about each kid in there?

Immediately, I was impressed with the range of topics. Whether the students predetermined the focus of their observation (e.g., “I’m gonna write about forest because I love to play there”) or they let their attention flow and settle on something unexpected (e.g., “Whoa, there's a lot of colour on the walls!”), their topics highlighted aspects of school that were diverse, rich, dynamic. There wasn’t any topic that could not be investigated further. I was also struck by the variety – no two children chose the same topic. I was really surprised by this. I anticipated that friends would partner up and choose something together that they determined would be “cool.” In this way, the breadth and depth of their field notes led me to believe that they took up the work in a serious way. Although this impressed me, I questioned why the lesson seemed so successful and "easy" for most students. I also thought it was interesting that during the debriefing time, students articulated that this curriculum experience was different that what they normally experienced. At the time, I chalked it up to superficial reasons such as having a guest teacher in, being able to work in the halls or
outside, and/or being able choose the topic of their writing. I now realize that the difference lay far beneath this surface.

I recall that both Karen and I were inspired and motivated after this lesson but now, upon reflection, I speculate that it was for different reasons. As described above, I was excited because I witnessed passion in my students. They seemed eager and engaged with the lesson, and for this I credited good planning. At the same time, I recall a distinct feeling of fear, not simply the worry that not all students had enacted my curriculum plan precisely, but more of an underlying sense that something was being undone.

I would speculate that Karen interpreted this lesson from a different vantage point, one that better reflects the theoretical underpinnings of Living Inquiry. I suspect that Karen saw a glimmer of promise that these children were (already) able to hold the world, specifically the phenomenon of school in this case, up close in order to bring consciousness to something formerly unnoticed. Moreover, that they were able to observe closely and reflect on their work, leading to further inquiry into what might be questionable in this world. In other words, these children were able to do Living Inquiry; this informal pilot project would work.

March 2006 Guest Appearances

We had been exploring Language. Students had chosen a variety of topics to discuss such as body language and how ninety percent of what we say is how we say it, sign language including how and why Braille was invented, slang and how “bad” words have

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25 I now suspect that this “something” might have been a beginning for “the diminishing legitimacy of the master stories about ‘progress’ (progress is always good for us); about ‘goals’ (we as humans are driven by goals); about ‘rationality’ (by sound reasoning we can arrive at all truths); about ‘truth’ (somewhere there is a thing called ‘the truth,’ which, by our striving, we can discover); about ‘unity’ (unity is not only possible but desirable; hence we should strive to connect things and people into a totality); about ‘ends-means’ (our world is striated technically; everything boils downs to ends-means)” (Lyotard, 1984, cited in Aoki, 2005b, p.208).
changed over time or how slang can be unique to an area (like Compton, USA, for example), and how the media uses language to convince us that we need certain products to make us happy. Glancing around our sharing circle, I saw a variety of representations: many students had word processed text glued to construction paper, a few had magazine cut outs, one child was holding a Dictaphone, another a CD to play in our portable stereo. I was pleased to see some risk taking and diversity when it came to their mini-projects; in the beginning the work consisted only of notes scribbled on loose-leaf or typed on the computer, the occasional photograph mounted in a collage on thick paper, or other “typical” student projects. “Yes, they're getting it!” I applauded myself.

By this point in the year, we were familiar with our routine: we greeted Dr. Meyer and then drew names from the class jar to form our small discussion groups (I had each child's name on a Popsicle stick. Students often encouraged me to use this method to create partnerships or to select students for special jobs, etc.). Karen and I chose the two groups we would join. Usually this was based on the needs of the groups and whom we thought might benefit most from adult participation. Allotting ten to fifteen minutes to discuss the mini-projects (students articulated that this was “enough” time) we set out to engage in a Living Inquiry.

Participating in the groups was always an exciting but somewhat challenging experience. I loved hearing about the topics the children were drawn to, their perspective on the encounter, and the evolution of conversation. Engaging alongside children allowed me to experience, first hand, how each child viewed their being-in-the-world and how their peers connected to the experience through their own interpretations. I felt privileged being invited into, what felt like, a secret world. When the conversation flowed freely, which was often,
one of two wonderful things happened: either the children forgot that I was there or treated me as fellow inquirer. If I was asked to contribute, it was for my opinion rather than for advice. In this way, it was like I was a special guest, hearing insights, ideas, questions, and connections, without the formalities normally experienced in our school setting. Moreover, I was able to engage in the wonderings of a child in a personal way.

Although I worked with these students everyday for large portions of time, the intimacy experienced through conversation was unique to *Living Inquiry*. Instruction is supposed to be about engaging with children, but sadly I felt that this kind of dialogue was a rare part of our school experience. I wondered why this was.

One possibility was in the way I situated myself in the student-teacher relationship during our regular routine: It was so easy to get busy with all of the “have tos” that I often felt like a taskmaster. Another possibility was that I didn't know *how* to engage with children as a co-inquirer: I wasn't trained to investigate the world *with* the children in my care; I was taught how to lesson plan, how to motivate students, how to manage behaviour, how to deliver outcome-based lessons. Further, I was practiced in how to bring the world *to* my students but not how to open a space where we can dwell *in* the world with wonder. Perhaps van Manen (2002) is right that “wonder is a state of attentiveness that can only be induced indirectly. A thoughtful parent or an effective teacher is not necessarily one who can construct or control a child’s every experience. But a thoughtful educator might be one who can catch a question and deepen it with a quiet gesture” (p.21). Maybe engaging in these ways with children was just about *being* with them.

Although it was a pleasure to be a co-inquirer, the challenge was to be present in my small group while feeling responsible for all students. Being a part of a small group meant
that I was absent from others. This was difficult for me because I had an authentic interest in each inquiry; I wanted to know how each child engaged in their work and how they arrived at an end product. Often the verbal accompaniment to the mini project was far more in depth, rich, and thought provoking then the rendering alone. Dialoguing about the work was impossible once it was submitted to me and I was reading and responding to it from home. By choosing to sit in one group, I felt that I was missing out on the richness of the inquiry in the others. Also, without adult participation, many children were still stuck in the usual model of sharing their work: “show, share, pass,” meaning “I show my project, I talk to it (literally by looking at it the whole time), then I pass to the next person.” Unlike conversing about the work by making connections, asking questions, etc., each person was “done” in a matter of minutes. Fifteen to twenty minutes was like an eternity in these cases.

Understandably, these groups would often signal to our mixed adult and child groups that it was time to move on, to get direction, to be engaged in some kind of instruction. This is not to say that these children were not doing anything, it’s just that they were not doing anything in my curriculum plan – and this would always prompt me to wrap up the conversation I was a part of and call us together to form our whole-class debriefing circle.

On this March day, Karen sat in on a conversation that we would both revisit in the years to come. Her small group included four students, two of whom were International students: Maya from Mexico and Rebecca from Korea.

Maya had done her project on dreams. She had been experiencing some unusual dreams and was beginning to record them in a journal. She had read about dream analysis and thought it might be a useful and fun tool to explore the content of her dreams. As she shared her project, she confidently disclosed that she could talk to God through her dreams.
Being from a Catholic family, the topic of God was not taboo but rather one that was encouraged.

A practicing Christian as well, Rebecca was also familiar with discussing her perspective on God. Karen, as with all of the inquirers, nurtured the conversation, probing deeper thinking. Thus, I understand that they engaged in a meaningful dialogue about the presence of God and how to speak to Him.

I don't recall whether it was Karen or one of these students who shared a summary of their conversation with the class but I do remember the feeling of alarm that rose in my chest upon hearing the word “God.” Instinctively (although now I question whether it was instinct or condition), I wanted to blurt something out that would redirect the conversation. Although I didn't know how to best handle the situation, I worried that the evolving conversation would surpass the (perceived) boundaries of my control, that somehow it would cross over the invisible, foreboding “appropriate” line into forbidden territory. Everyone knows you don't talk about God in public school!

At the same time, the Living Inquirer in me tried to keep these feelings at bay. I wanted to encourage the conversation for many reasons: by now, the class was deeply engaged, I believed that Living Inquiry was about troubling our biases and this conversation might invite us to do that, and, especially, I wanted Maya to feel that I was honouring her ideas and heritage – that she was nurtured in a welcoming space where her offerings would not be shut down. I tried to rationalize the situation, to reassure myself that my decision to keep the conversation going would be acceptable. After all, don't we teach World Religion in high school? Rather than actively listening to the unfolding dialog, I was preoccupied, trying to plan out what I might say to a parent if they questioned me on this later. I imagined a
punishing tone exclaiming, “I don't want you teaching my child about God!” and “Who do you think you are?!”

It just so happened that this debate occurred at a remarkable time in my graduate studies: I was enrolled in a graduate course entitled *Theorizing Knowing* where we were problematizing a legal case involving a gay teacher and his decision to bring what some parents considered to be controversial material into the classroom. As part of our theorizing class, we were challenged to consider the possibilities and consequences of the notion of “freedom of speech” within the regulated environment of school. I don’t know whether it was my understanding of the mandate of public school (that we don’t engage in religious education) or my university course (regarding the importance of freedom of speech) that influenced me more, but I found myself faced with an opportunity/challenge/dilemma to put my course work, or the theory, into practice, where I needed to act in an informed way.

Believing that I had the power to nurture the conversation or terminate it placed me in a powerful yet uncomfortable position. At that moment, I saw myself located in a position of judgment, with little time to ponder my decision. In an effort to come to a resolution within myself I asked, “What kind of teacher am I if I let this go on? What kind of teacher am I if I shut it down?” Fortunately, or unfortunately, the recess bell saved me.

Maya and Rebecca provided us with more than just an opportunity to explore our personal religious perspective, their invitation pointed to a greater exploration into the relational quality of *Living Inquiry* and how inquiry has a movement all its own.

When I went home to assess Maya’s project later that night, I expected to read about God. There was no mention of Him! I can only conclude that her relationship with God was revealed through the small group conversation. I wondered what other connections were
made and what other impressions were formed. Unfortunately, I will never know. I remember being struck with an epiphany: It’s not the fact that God was in my classroom that made me uncomfortable, it’s that I didn’t invite Him.

Reflecting further, I realized that the uniqueness and the beauty of *Living Inquiry* were captured in this fact: that the inquiry could not be predetermined or controlled. It was spontaneous and emotive. Twin affects were presented in this realization: because *Living Inquiry* was open, it allowed topics outside of the curriculum to appear, to enter our instructional space sometimes without warning. Also, through discussion, it allowed these topics to live through and amongst the inquirers. Moreover, these conversations had the potential to envelop the group in wonder, intimacy, tension, and kinship. In this vein, inquiry was an incredible gift, a welcomed change from tradition or the “norm.” However, this gift didn’t come without a price.

Words like “possibility,” “abundance,” and “potential” evoke feelings of joy, of warmth, and of positivity. For me, a discomfort lurked beneath these sentiments often associated with *Living Inquiry*. This discomfort was foregrounded in my teaching experiences, such as the ones described in this section. Why was that? Why did I spend most of my efforts warding off potential threats of being “found out” that I was doing something different instead of relishing the joy of the inquiry and in trying something new?

The anecdotes shared in this section not only provide a glimpse of classroom inquiry, they also help me to reconsider my role as teacher. Although, initially, I may have thought that I could hide behind Karen, as leader and creator of the course, I was ultimately responsible for those children in my care. I was their teacher: *my role* was to ensure that they were safe, that they were learning, that they would finish their year mastering the prescribed
curriculum of that grade and being prepared for the next. Living Inquiry began to shift my expectations of school and what it means to teach. Jardine (2006c) offers a compelling image when he writes:

Imagine the work of teaching as the work of exploring what it is that is so abundantly inviting regarding a particular curriculum topic and practicing the art of such invitation here, now, with these children. Because, of course, the students we face will have something to say about the nature, limits, and efficacy of that invitation. (p.59)

He was right. Learning through Living Inquiry was more than simply ticking off outcomes as “done.” The engagement of opening a topic and exploring it rather than trying to master it was compelling. Consequently, the children did have something to say about Living Inquiry. Described as “cool,” “different,” and “special,” Living Inquiry stood in contrast to other subjects. Still, I couldn’t put my finger on what exactly was at play during these sessions, but I knew the work was worthy of further investigation.

And possibly, just possibly, there might be a new language in the making – growing in the middle – a language with a grammar in which a noun is not always a noun, in which conjoining words like between and and are no mere joining words, a new language that might allow a transformative resonance of the words paradigms, practices, and possibilities. (Aoki, 2005b, p.215).
Posing the Question “What Lives Here?”

By the end of June 2006, I was deeply passionate about Living Inquiry and how it was unfolding in my classroom. I needed to know what was happening; I wanted the security/certainty that I believed would come by naming precisely what was taking place during these classes. I wanted tangible results that proved that Living Inquiry was “working.” I was on fire with excitement and pride.

A pivotal meeting with my graduate supervisor occurred shortly after the celebratory presentation of the children’s final projects held at the university in late June 2006. Describing the event and preparations leading up to it in detail, I told her of the excitement experienced when we brought on a professional photographer to assist the children in creating a top-quality poster of their most intriguing inquiry (from their year’s work), how passionately they worked to deepen the inquiry, how they unwrapped their posters with such vigour and joy as if it were Christmas morning, and how they couldn’t wait to share their work with the special guests we had invited. In short, I was desperately trying to express how valuable the work was. I was also trying to convince my supervisor that there was something special about it worth researching.

My supervisor listened attentively, honouring my ideas, and acknowledging that, yes, there was something about the work that called for further study. However, she was sceptical of my orientation, calling into question my intent to reduce the work to a model of Living Inquiry that could be applied to other institutions. Through the remainder of the conversation

[26] Karen had worked with Sandra in preparing high-quality posters as part of a book launch. In this work, Sandra was responsible for taking photographs that would capture and extend the essence of Karen’s text. Very satisfied with the outcome, Karen suggested that Sandra collaborate with us as a way to “take student work to the next level.” Our hope was that, through a polished presentation, the children’s inquiries would stand out and, from the perspective of an adult viewer, be worthy of serious contemplation. Further information and discussion of the posters is provided in Chapter 9.
and in subsequent meetings, she drew my attention to hermeneutics, to the work of Aoki, Jardine, Smith, Arendt, and others. I found resonance in these readings, and to their respective orientation.

In the spirit of the literature, I (re)positioned my interest in *Living Inquiry* to a more Aokian orientation, as described below:

‘Interest’ comes from ‘inter/esse (esse – to be), being in the ‘inter.’ So ‘to be interested’ is to be in the intertextual spaces of inter-faces, the places where ‘betweens’ and ‘ands’ reside … a place of difference, where something different can happen or be created, where whatever is created comes through as a voice that grows in the middle. This middle voice is the sound of the ‘interlude’ (inter/ludus – to play), the voice of play in the midst of things – a playful singing in the midst of life. (Aoki, 2005f, p.282)

With the aim of developing my research questions, and in an effort to situate myself intertextually, I began by reflecting on specific moments that stood out for me, asking myself what it was about these moments that made them *good* but also challenging, that invited contradiction, ambiguity, and vulnerability.

Thinking about my experience as a student in *Living Inquiry*, I recalled the welcoming ritual, the freedom of exploration in our small group discussions, the feeling of being treated as an equal and someone to be trusted, surrendering to an openness of emotion and movement of an inquiry, and the pull of holding (an aspect of) the world up close, sometimes in awe or in critique.

As a teacher of *Living Inquiry*, I thought about the thrill of trying something new, of engaging *alongside* children, of witnessing compelling arguments when they represented a passionate inquiry, of the struggle of attending to the world and the pleasure and pride shared when a “discovery” was made. In summary, I recalled *living* the work and savouring its emotiveness.
Holding my lived experience in mind, I (re)turned to the literature to assist me in articulating my research questions. I resonated with Jardine’s work (Jardine, Friesen, & Clifford, 2008) that spoke to my growing suspicion of the restrictions of a neoliberal context and my hunch that other discourses were possible. He offered the understanding that we do not have to dwell in an impoverished institutional landscape, that there are classroom encounters that are worth taking time to while over. As such, I savoured his image of school where intimacy and care are privileged, where the inhabitants of the classroom believe that curriculum experiences are worthwhile (that is worth whiling over). Adding to Jardine’s pedagogical sensitivity, I was drawn into Aoki’s (2005f) concept of a decentred view of curriculum and pedagogy where the “teacher, subject, and child form an irreducible triad that is at play in every pedagogic situation” (p.282).

In addition to offering provoking images of education, and specifically pedagogical relationships, these authors helped me to understand that hermeneutics, as a form of inquiry, is the practice of interpretation (or meaning-making) for the purpose of exploring the question “What is at work here?” I lean on Jardine (1998) to describe hermeneutics, and its resonance with education, more fully:

Hermeneutics incites the particularities and intimacies of our lives to call these traditions to account, compelling them to bear witness to the lives we are living. Hermeneutics demands of such disciplines and traditions that they tell us what they know about keeping the world open and enticing and alive and inviting. And, to the extent that such disciplines and traditions can no longer serve this deeply pedagogical purpose, to that extent they are no longer telling, no longer helpful in our living, no longer true.

Thus, hermeneutics sits squarely on the same cusp as education itself: the roiling space between the established and the new, between the young and the old. A sometimes dangerous, funny spot. (p.2)

I looked forward to accounting my experiences and those of the children and adult participants in new and meaningful ways. Hermeneutics, as gleaned from Jardine’s
description, offered me a research orientation that would not only engage me in systematic
inquiry but also assist me in communicating the ineffable quality of *Living Inquiry* that I
strongly wanted to articulate.

**Summary**

The pairing of my academic readings and my lived experience in *Living Inquiry*
spurred my desire to understand the relational, dialogical nature of the work being done in
my public school classroom. Instead of gaining empirical proof, I became interested in
developing a hermeneutical sensibility. Further, I wanted my research, and thus myself as
teacher/researcher, to be pedagogically oriented. As such, the broad question of “What lives
here?” was articulated in two more specific questions:

1. What are children’s and teachers’ understandings of their experiences with *Living
   Inquiry*?

2. In what ways, if any, does *Living Inquiry* intersect with and/or interrupt the mandated
   provincial curriculum?

Engaging in the literature also revealed the necessity to better understand the
theoretical underpinnings of *Living Inquiry*. I quickly realized that it would not be enough to
inquire into the pedagogy of *Living Inquiry* from a practical standpoint; I needed to return to
Krishnamurti and others, to read about philosophy grounding the practice and, from that, its
pedagogical possibilities and vulnerabilities. It is the synthesis of this quest that I turn to
next.
I see angry business men wearing nice suits and shiny shoes, screaming into their phones because they missed the ferry and their meetings. Their frustrated faces send shivers down my back. They're not from Bowen. I worry the Vancouverites are scaring the locals. This would make Bowen like Vancouver with everyone stressed, rushed and busy.

As I hear a roar of laughter my thoughts change to the true Bowen Islander. They have a different approach to the situation. They head to the local cafe to grab a coffee and a dish. They talk to each other and enjoy the sunny morning. When the next ferry comes, they meander back to their cars with cold coffees. They've talked instead of sipping their drinks, but feel enlightened with the conversations they've had. I think the locals have it right.

I feel relaxed as I inhale the clean fresh air. I recline in the comfort of my dilapidated SUN. I feel happy to be alive and well. This is the life! I almost jump out of my seat as I hear a loud scream from the car behind us. My thoughts are disrupted.

I can tell the driver feels frustrated as he hastily dials a number into his small, not-so-high-tech phone. His facial expressions give away that something is wrong or that perhaps he is trying to hide his mistake. I conclude that he is trying to make up an excuse. A loud voice comes out of the phone. His body language changes.

My focus moves to the smiling faces around me. Laughter is coming from the coffee shop as several men and women in casual clothes are telling jokes and stories. It seems like they are having a party. Interesting. I realize we have a choice in how we handle situations.

I wonder what would happen if the whole wide world were like Bowen? No stress, people committed to building relationships and not in a rush all the time. What would the impact be? Maybe not enough work would get done, but we'd never know.

Kiam
What Are We?

What if we are ants, and there is a “giant” staring over us now, thinking about how little our world is, feeling sorry for us that we can’t experience a real life, that we’re captured in such a small world? What if right behind us there were something about to crush us with one footstep, ending the world we know and love. Our whole life could be destroyed with one step, with one crash or bam or snap.

We could die, along with our issues, our hopes, our dreams, our passions, left with nothing, no trace, no way of re-finding them. Gone.

Just One

We are all one, one colour, one race, one person, one soul, one passion, one face, one friend, one name, one daughter or son, one laugh, one heart, one voice, just one, one world, one planet, one galaxy, one place, one star, one speck, one mystery, one space, one giant, one ant, one future we don’t yet know, one crash, one burn, just one chance to grow, one fantasy, one dream, one faith, one wish, one love, one tear, just one single kiss, one angel, one god, one life to soar, one hope, one need, one want for more, one love, one time, one memory of life, one child, one adult, one husband or wife, one pain, one cry, one emotion, one tear, one passion, one glory, one triumph, one fear, one past, one future, one story, one me, one gasp, one breath, one try just to be, one, just one, just one more to know, just one tiny dot, on a light that can’t glow.

So amongst all these colours, well just what are we? One ant, one pebble, one journey, to be. A place among such largeness, so wide and so vast, such skies and such stories, so many questions to ask. But the biggest question consists of only three words, It changes how you live, lets you fly like the birds. A question to ask, the answer can’t be set free, We will ponder the forever the question, “What Are We?”

Kacy

Fig. 6.3 What are We, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
Fig. 7.1 Scan of Dreams Drawing, Living Inquiry: Language

When someone asks you what Living Inquiry is or is to you, it’s actually a difficult answer. You can only say so much that explains it but it’s really not your definition – there’s so much more to it. It has opened my eyes to the world. I see differently but not completely.

Dana, Grade Seven
**Living Inquiry** is a curious practice. I have tried to reduce it to a secure, reliable definition but even after years of work, I still struggle to answer the question: What is **Living Inquiry**? I think it is because the practice brings together two active notions that cannot seem to be pinned down, that continually come up anew: Living and Inquiry. These concepts are emotive, they are embodied, and they are generative. **Living Inquiry** is complex and transformative. I cannot pigeonhole it, label it otherwise, or force-fit it into a particular theoretical camp. The best I can do is to follow its movement and play in-between, attempting to live well in its open space.

Abandoning the definitive question of “What is Living Inquiry?” and replacing it with “How can I understand my **Living Inquiry** experience?” I hear my supervisor ask, “Who can help you to think about these things?” Once again, I call upon education theorists and philosophers to assist me. Meyer, Jardine, Aoki, Levinson, and van Manen have answered my call, at times echoing larger questions posed by Arendt, Heidegger, and Krishnamurti. I invite this collection of minds into a conversation about my experience, the (possible) theoretical underpinnings of **Living Inquiry**, and more broadly, about what matters in education today.

Through our conversations, the theorists offer me helpful ways of thinking about the learning spaces of **Living Inquiry**. I understand these spaces to be inspirted locations of tension, metonymic spaces (Aoki, 2005c), where we dwell between two or more notions. The spaces I wish to draw upon are Aoki’s space of **indwelling** (2005e), Meyer’s space of **awareness** (2008, informed by Heidegger and Krishnamurti’s work), Levinson’s (1996, 2001) interpretation of Arendt’s **natality**, and van Manen’s image of **pedagogical tact** (1991).
For me, these notions come together under an overarching perspective: Jardine’s view of curriculum as abundant (Jardine et al., 2006).

**Curriculum as Abundant**

Framing their encounters with philosophers, teachers and students by reconsidering the curriculum as abundant, Jardine et al., ask us to open ourselves to a rich interpretation of school, and specifically the curriculum (Jardine et al., 2006). Seen as abundant, the curriculum offers infinite opportunities to inquire into the world. Within each curriculum topic are relational spaces of complexity that are not severed, fragmented, and doled out rapidly by the teacher but are, in comparison, contemplated, considered, and questioned. They claim that if curriculum is viewed in this light, it can be an invigorating, fascinating place, but also a place rife with uncertainty and risk. Just like *Living Inquiry*.

I agree with Jardine (2006d) when he states that “presuming abundance is a precondition” (p.98) to teaching and learning. *Living Inquiry* could not exist without this special attitude. It requires a belief that we sit in relation to the world and that it is our responsibility to inquire into this relationship: to see its complexity, its depth, its richness, and its possibility for newness. Both as a practice and as pedagogy, it becomes “a way we carry ourselves in the world, the way we come, through experience, to live in a world full of life, full of relations and obligations and address. It [requires] a deeply seated belief about how the world fits together in its deepest and most vigorous intellectual and spiritual possibilities” (Jardine, 2006a, p.100). Approaching the task of teaching *Living Inquiry* from this perspective means that the curriculum is explored relationally. We spend our time, alone and with others, inquiring into our being-in-the-world, contemplating what it means to be human amongst other humans, other life forms, and our nonliving natural and human-made
world. Considering the *Living Inquiry* curriculum as a conceptual representation of the world, it is, naturally, filled with an infinite number of topics. Thus, I view it as rich, dynamic, moving, and bountiful.

Jardine (2006a) not only considers the curriculum as abundant but also the relationships that are working with it (students and teachers). In this way, the movement between the curriculum, student, and teacher, or the teaching and learning experience, also has the potential to become abundant. Simply put, classroom inquiries under the belief that the curriculum is abundant means that “whenever you come upon even the seemingly most trivial of things, it can be experienced, or taken up, or read, or treated as a way into the ways of the world” (p.100).

There are significant implications to seeing the curriculum as abundant. For example, we (teachers and students) can really delve into a topic and connect with it in personal ways. The topic, and more specifically the inquiry into it, becomes alive: living, breathing, and moving within each inquirer. In other words, the inquiry becomes a part of the inquirer; it is embodied, and at times, transformative. The intrinsic quality of inquiry is essential to the development of awareness. Becoming aware, or cultivating opportunities for awareness is the intention of *Living Inquiry*.

Another implication is that students and teachers can become co-inquirers together (because the teacher cannot be an expert or know everything there is to know). The possibility for reciprocal teaching opens up. In this way, the student is transformed from a general subject, someone who is only required to master isolated learning objectives, into a child, a fellow human who is knowledgeable and insightful. In short, the child can be perceived as a person from whom we can learn. I attempt to make this distinction in the
thesis when I share my personal experience of this transformation by use of the two terms
student (when I perceive a learner as a general subject\textsuperscript{27}) and child (when I perceive the youth in my care as someone with whom I am a co-inquirer).

As a consequence to seeing the curriculum as abundant, we can become invigorated but also overwhelmed. Being in the midst of abundance makes it difficult to navigate inquiry in a predetermined way. Instead, you need to approach a topic holistically, go with the flow, and be in the moment. In this way, teaching results in a greater shift from planned curriculum to emergent, lived curriculum. This in itself has a significant implication: the absence of a predetermined plan or scripted lesson means, as teacher, you risk being unprepared. You are open, vulnerable to the unexpected; you can be pleasantly surprised or uncomfortably alarmed. Surrendering to classroom inquiry means that you don’t know what’s going to happen; you many have an inkling but you can’t know for sure. This vulnerability, this movement into a not-yet-determined space is, in my opinion, genuine inquiry.

During an inquiry, the inquirers busy themselves with interpretation, coming in and out of understanding their topic. In my experience, this is often done through dialogue. This method of learning has further implication to teaching because, without recording the conversation(s), there is no tangible end product. Without a tangible product, you can be left wondering if you’re meeting the learning objectives, in addition to not having anything to prove that learning was happening. Consequently, when reporting on lived curriculum you may find that the powerful, transformative inquiry wasn’t measurable (in the ways you are practiced in)! Now what are you to do? This uncertainty can create fear that serves as a possible barricade to taking up an inquiry at all.

\textsuperscript{27} At times, I have used the term “student” for clarity purposes. Here it is not meant to reflect my pedagogical beliefs.
O’Neill (2002a) believes that fear is perpetuated by both real and perceived reports of suspicion, in the current “crisis of trust.” She draws our attention to the supposed remedy: a “new accountability [where] … performance is monitored and subject to quality control and quality assurance” (para.4). In an effort to be more accountable, trustworthy, and competent, teachers are stripped from their autonomy to carry out their charge of introducing the young to the world and are replaced by central curriculum developers. These developers are responsible for planning a curriculum that will be present in every public school (in the province). Thus, this curriculum plan “assumes a fiction of sameness” (Aoki, 2005b, p.203). Furthermore, if we consider the curriculum as a concrete representation of our being-in-the-world, then the world, and our experience within it, is reduced to tangible outcomes or learning objectives, in turn, further reducing the curriculum to a lengthy to-do list. Our world becomes fragmented, watered down, into pieces that can be delivered to the student, mastered by the student, and reported on to the public “in pretty minute detail” and “with supposed precision” (O’Neill, 2002a, para.4). Thus, tangible, measurable learning becomes dominant. What’s more, as Aoki (2005b) points out, the “teacher knows the uniqueness of the student fades when [we are] condemned to plan for faceless students”(p.203). It is devastating when we feel we have lost the richness of our curriculum and our relationships.

In the face of doubt, in times of uncertainty, and in moments of surprise, we are called to trust. I must trust the curriculum, the inquiry, my students, my fellow teachers, the public, and, most importantly, myself. And each party must reciprocate this trust in turn. Yet, how can trust play out in a practice that I cannot define, control, or measure? I agree with O’Neill (2002b) when she claims that “we may need trust, but trusting often seems hard and risky” (para.1). It is within the space of trust and risk that I find myself. It is in this dynamic
location that I dwell alongside my students and fellow teachers as I work to understand our experiences in *Living Inquiry*.

**Indwelling**

Indwelling is a term used by Aoki (2005e) to describe the movement between two or more notions. In particular, he speaks about indwelling between two curriculum worlds: the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived. He considers indwelling to be an inspirted place that offers critical tensions, inviting reflection and interpretation. I like this concept because I think it speaks to my lived experience as teacher, the narrative portion of this thesis. Furthermore, I propose that the term indwelling be used to describe the living that occurs in the between spaces of *awareness* (conditioning/authenticity), of *natality* (belatedness/newness), and of *pedagogical tact* (child/teacher).

**Awareness**

*Living Inquiry* is a practice that aims to develop awareness. Awareness, as a notion, relies on two embedded concepts: worldliness and authenticity. Worldliness stems from our being-in-the-world. Meyer (2008) interprets Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world as an engagement with the world that we are born into, a world that creates us. Like an actor on a stage, we cannot sever ourselves from the world; the world constitutes us as humans, just like the stage constitutes the actor. A difficulty presents itself in this relationship: as we engage within the world, we become forgetful of our worldliness and instead get lost in our social interactions, our day-to-day living, or what Meyer calls our “everydayness.” To summarize her argument: We can disappear into our daily life, going about our endeavours without careful attention to our producing, destroying, and consuming the world. We pay little
consideration to nature as our manmade world keeps us at arms length. Consequently, we are absorbed in ourselves and no longer mindful of our relationships; we become conditioned beings. Our being-in-the-world becomes inauthentic. Authenticity, in contrast, occurs only when we become aware of our conditioning, when we are “confronted with our worldliness” (p.5).

Meyer (2008) believes that “awareness involves seeing ourselves authentically beyond our circumstances and the snare of conditioning that has made us secondhand human beings (accepting another’s authority rather than our own inquiry)” (p.6). Considered in another way, awareness is the space where conditioning meets authenticity: the moment(s) when we see the world as *it is* rather than through “ready-made” interpretations (conditioning). It is important to stress that Meyer is not suggesting that we can extract ourselves from our interpretations, but rather to challenge those interpretations that appear as given or indisputable, or that seemingly go unnoticed.

Krishnamurti (1969), a prominent figure in Meyer’s work, suggests the possibility of a freedom from the known, from our conditioning so that we can see clearly. This freedom requires complete silence or the stillness of the mind; we can only achieve freedom through awareness. Heidegger (according to Meyer) called this space of awareness a clearing. He argued that we cannot create these clearings; the most we can do is try to provide a space for clearings to occur.

*Living Inquiry*, as a practice, aspires to foster awareness. This stands in sharp contrast to the current goals of the prescribed curriculum, which, it seems to me, perpetuate our conditioning. This is not to say that we should abandon these goals completely and replace them with those of *Living Inquiry*. However, I believe we should strive for more of a balance.
With an unreasonable amount of learning objectives to cover, we are left with little room for inquiry (as described earlier), for new ideas, and discovery. The curriculum imposes itself onto the new. Instead, pedagogically, *Living Inquiry* is concerned with awareness, with attention to clearings, because it is within these spaces that the possibility for newness is located, where the potential for natality is found.

**Natality**

Hannah Arendt, noted philosopher on politics, education, and the human condition, considers natality to be “the capacity of beginning something new” (1958, p.9). She suggests that although we are preceded and constituted by the world, we are not necessarily fated by it. I understand natality to be a space where we are called to examine our positioning in the world, to look at how others see us, how we see others, and how our actions affect others. Furthermore, it is a space where we see our own conditioning and its impact on the world; where we are faced with a choice: to take responsibility for our positioning, our conditioning, and attempt to transform ourselves or not. Reminiscent of Heidegger’s notion of clearing, Arendt suggests that we cannot create natality, force it upon another, or control it. In contrast, she argues that the role of education is to “preserve newness” (Arendt, 1968, p.193).

Natasha Levinson, Arendtian scholar and education philosopher, applies Arendt’s notion of natality to the classroom. She states that “the classroom is not the place where we decide what the world will look like; it is at best a space in which, as teachers, we can attempt to create the conditions of possibility for the rejuvenation of the world. Our task is neither to teach as if the world were new, nor try to bring the new into being” (1996, p.2). If I understand this aim clearly, as a teacher, I am to teach the world as it is, to create opportunities for the children in my care to recognize their conditioning so that they may be
motivated to take responsibility for this world, even though they did not choose to enter into it and may not yet see how their encounters with the world perpetuate their own conditioning. If I present the world otherwise, or how I might wish it to be, I may leave the children with the impression that the world is already changed or that the world is being transformed possibly on their behalf. This takes away their ability for action (Levinson, 2001) or the possibility for natality.

Undoubtedly, teaching to “preserve newness” or “creating conditions of possibility” is a daunting task (Levinson, 2001; Meyer, 2008). The task becomes all the more difficult when we consider the challenge of belatedness. Belatedness speaks to the state of being born into a world that both precedes and constitutes us (Levinson, 1996). Instantaneously upon birth, each one of us is defined by our gender, race, social status, nationality, etc. In this way, we are already belated upon birth, despite being a newcomer: someone who requires introduction to the world. Ideally, this introduction includes opportunities to recognize one’s belatedness, for it is our sense of belatedness that propels social action, change, reimagination, or renewal. This recognition is not easy, however.

Levinson (1996) writes that, “for most of us, our initial sense of belatedness with regard to the world as a whole is largely a source of wonder at all that has been built and discovered prior to our arrival” (p.22). However, following this wonder are realizations that we are treated like “we’ve been here before” (p.5). We experience our positioning in the world with newfound awareness. The world can appear fixed, unchallenged, and overwhelming. Here is a crucial space where we can feel paralyzed and powerless to do anything, or inspired to reimagine the world anew. It is in this space that natality can present itself. If the teacher is to “preserve newness,” then she must also be located in this space.
However, the teacher, another being-in-the-world, is also conditioned and faces her own belatedness. Therefore, each member of the class is called to attend to their own belatedness. This is an awareness that is realized at different times, in different ways, and with different affects, if realized at all! Not unlike awareness, becoming conscious of one’s belatedness cannot be planned for, directed, or imposed. In fact, it is not even guaranteed. If we do realize our belatedness, it is a personal experience that occurs in our own time. Levinson (1996) addresses the challenge of belatedness when she writes about the “asymmetry” (p.6) of a classroom where some students are weary of the burdens they experience in the face of their belatedness while other students appear naïve. As I teacher interested in belatedness and the notion of “preserving newness,” I wonder how I can seize these critical moments of awareness if they are invisible? How can I teach with belatedness in mind? How can I work with children who are at varying stages of belatedness who have yet to realize their natality? Can Living Inquiry address these questions?

Levinson (2001) summarizes:

The challenge for teachers consists of creating spaces in which students can confront their sense of belatedness without feeling immobilized by it. Ideally, such spaces enable students to live out the wonder of being a newcomer to earth, not by attempting to soar above their social positioning, but to reconfigure it in a meaningful way. (p.26)

The data shared with me during this study suggest that Living Inquiry has the potential to create such spaces. Children speak to the wonder of discovering the world and their being-in-it. With the care of teachers as facilitators, children are lightly held in a space

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28 I had originally used the term “guide” but, in light of hermeneutical readings, chose to change it to “facilitator.” The use of “guide” reminded me of “tour guide” – someone who knows the territory and is simply leading others around it. It is impossible and, moreover, undesirable for the teacher to know the territory of life; the teacher is a participant in life herself and thus can only share her temporary insights in a negotiation of understanding. Thus, facilitator is meant to suggest someone who can assist with bringing about insights. At the same time, I want to illuminate this tension here. If we agree with the notion that children are newcomers to the world and are in need of introduction to it, the elder (teacher or parent) is charged with the responsibility of
where they are asked to pay attention to their everydayness, to their relationship with the world. Pedagogically, it is the teacher’s responsibility to nurture the child in a way that does not prohibit them from experiencing the world; that does not protect them from the possible feelings of confusion, tension, or even paralysis that can result from “confronting [their] belatedness.” Thus, the teacher must be informed so that she can create classroom conditions (e.g., facilitate discussion) that will inspire debate, critique, wonder (e.g., asking a critical question that disrupts a “fundamental truth”). Further, the teacher must engage in her own inquiry into her belatedness/worldliness/conditioning, and to continually dialogue with others with the aim of developing new understandings so that she is always becoming. Lastly, the teacher must be tactful in her relations with children for it is the relationship between children and teachers during Living Inquiry that transforms it from a practice to pedagogy.

**Pedagogical Tact**

Van Manen (1991, 1999, 2002) writes extensively about pedagogical relationships. He believes that the relationship between child and adult is special and unique because the adult is guiding the child in their introduction to the world. In a pedagogical relationship, the adult must carry the burden of respons-ability to lead the child in a way that enables them to discover the world, to be an active decision-maker, while at the same time, does not undermine the child or perpetuate the belief that they are “the center of all things” (1991, p.139). To do this, van Manen suggests that the adult must be pedagogically tactful. He explains that “to exercise tact means to see a situation calling for sensitivity, to understand the meaning of what has been seen to sense the significance of this situation, to know how and what to do, and to actually do something right” (1991, p.146). In other words, the teacher knowing the world in order to provide such introduction. However, as initially stated, the adult is in a state of becoming themselves; thus it is understood that this guidance is always already out of joint.
must be skilled in being with the child, to know how to act in order to support the child in their development and in their own being-in-the-world.

Van Manen (1991, 2002) understands that teaching is an active, improvisational role. As a pedagogue, I live my job. I do not step in and out of being a teacher. I am always a teacher; it is my way of being. I cannot simply say “I’m going to be kind today.” I must embody understanding, empathy, sensitivity, etc. Although teaching claims to a reflective practice, much of the practice happens in the moment. Therefore, I must always be spontaneous in a way that assists the child. Van Manen claims that “tactful action cannot be planned or charted out beforehand – it always realizes itself in concrete and unexpected or unforeseeable situations in which one finds themselves and in which one must serve, help, respond to another person” (1991, p.144). Reminiscent of awareness and natality, pedagogical tact requires a lived quality that is attuned to possibility.

Summary

In summary, I have suggested that Living Inquiry requires that a teacher enact a special attunement: one that sees abundance and one that is interested in exploring notions of awareness, natality, and pedagogical tact. I have put forth the idea that these three concepts are cornerstones to Living Inquiry as Pedagogy. Borrowing the Aokian term indwelling to speak about the relationship within each key concept, I have suggested that Living Inquiry is rendered in this indwelling. However, indwelling does not encompass the whole notion of Living Inquiry as Pedagogy; an additional term is needed to speak to the movement that connects the theoretical notions lent to me by Meyer, Levinson/Arendt, and Van Manen. I have chosen another Aokian term for this work: interplay. Aoki (2005d) lends me a powerful image when he states that “the interplay is the creative production of newness, where
newness can come into being. It is an inspirited site of being and becoming” (p.420). To me, interplay evokes a further image of relationship, of movement, of connection, fluidity, and improvisation. It is not a fixed image but one that is always changing, shifting, and reorienting itself. The inter-play (playing in between) encourages me to pay attention to abundance, to possibility and to promise. It reminds me to try to live well in open spaces, spaces that cannot be controlled, predetermined, or directed. It is within this image of interplay, of indwelling, that I suggest Living Inquiry as Pedagogy takes shape and comes together as a holistic experience. Living Inquiry as Pedagogy is the indwelling within and the interplay of an abundant curriculum, of Awareness, Natality, and Pedagogical Tact. It is the story of a lived experience rife with tension but also with hope.

In Chapters Eight and Nine, I take up the philosophical notions described in this chapter as a lens for answering my research questions. Once again, these questions are:

1. What are children’s and teachers’ understandings of their experiences with Living Inquiry?
2. In what ways, if any, does Living Inquiry intersect with and/or interrupt the mandated provincial curriculum?

The children’s understandings of Living Inquiry are explored first, in Chapter Eight, followed by the teachers’ understandings in Chapter Nine.
"Land ahoy! Land ahoy! Captain, come on deck!"

You slowly walk out of your quarters.
You take the first step of the day as you are called to the front of the ship
You begin to gaze upon the uncharted land.
You begin to realize that you have discovered what we know today as Vancouver.
You have started the evolution of the third largest city in Canada.

Your city will begin to grow even as you pass away.
You stare upon the Spanish ships anchored near the beaches of Spanish lands
You tell the crew to sail as you record your territory by naming the bay after the English.
You have began the rapidly expanding evolution of Vancouver.

the evolution of a city

Have you ever walked through a remote area
and wondered if anybody had been there before you?
You may never know.
You may always wonder.
Looking far into the past is like looking far into the future; it is unpredictable and unanswered.
We can only wonder about the past and hope for the future.
The evolution of Vancouver has been recorded
step by step, playing itself out through time.
If it is a unique process that should be, and has been, treasured.
From the native totem poles to the towering skyscrapers,
the evolution of Vancouver is truly an amazing testimony to the progress of life.

Fig. 7.2 The Evolution of a City, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
**Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt**

**History: What happened where we lay?**

History is something that we live by each day. It carries us along through our lives and is what makes up this life. Your life may go though dreadful moments or cherishable moments which will give you memories each day.

We, as humans, are so oblivious to what has happened around us and where we lay. It is important to be aware because if we know the history of the places where we lay, we may behave differently around that particular spot. It would probably have a huge impact on us and would probably change our perception and enhance empathy in our daily life. Where we lay, twenty-four seven, has importance to somebody in the world.

If we didn’t have history we wouldn’t learn anything from our past mistakes. You would not be able to live and learn if you had the choice to go back in time and change the results of every little mistake. I wonder if we would change it if we could? If we did, we would never learn the value of some important lessons.

Everybody’s history is completely different, like no two fingerprints are the same. We all have different experiences and interactions, and create occurrences in our life which make each of our lives very unique.

History is the world around us and is the starting point of life, and nothing is able to change that because it is what makes up this life.

**History can be put in stone or it can be forgotten. It is what makes up this life and is a very important asset to our everyday existence. It may consist of cherishable moments or may enable us for the next chapter of life-- a new beginning.**

**Mind Map:**

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**Fig. 7.3 History, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place**
CHAPTER EIGHT: “BEYOND MARKS”: CHILDREN’S UNDERSTANDING(S) OF LIVING INQUIRY

Fig. 8.1 Dancer’s Meditation, Photograph of child’s performance, Living Inquiry: Self/Other

People think there is a box of school and a box of life because it is a set time everyday. I wouldn’t call it a box, you’re not trapped obviously, but it’s the same kind of thing. I think some people think you are so much more free, not free but you can sort of do whatever you want at home. But at work, there are certain things you have to do. They think it is life but I don’t think they know the definition of life. I would describe life, I mean probably there is a definition of life and your body and everything, but I would describe being alive is not exactly being free but being aware... because, if you are not aware, you can’t be aware of life, but if you are aware, you are aware of everything.

I think awareness sort of is life.

Steven, Grade Seven
The Art of Living Inquiry

You’re walking along the street, headed toward the bus stop. You notice the cars passing by, and the bikers stopping to have a drink of water. But you don’t think about it; you just keep walking, your mind and thoughts stealing your attention. You arrive at the bus stop bench, and sit down. But I wonder, did you notice when a leaf past your feet, or when the crisp cold gave your cheeks goose bumps?

That is called being oblivious. The definition of oblivious is “the state of being unaware or unconscious.” Is that how you want to live your life? Unaware? Unconscious? Well, until now, you have been living in this world completely oblivious to what is around you. Yes, you may have noticed the cars or the bikers, but did you really think about it, did you really go deeper?

This year, our class started something called Living Inquiry. The art of Living Inquiry is to notice what is around you and take it in and think about it. Just like when you smell something cooking: you sniff the fragrance, then try to locate where the delicious scent came from. Our entire world is one big kitchen, there are things to locate everywhere, and more baking in the oven, or boiling on the stove.

You can’t grade Living Inquiry, or give it a mark out of ten. It comes from you, and what you notice. No one can tell you that your work is right or wrong, messy or neat. It is your own, and no one else can change that.

That is what is so fun about Living Inquiry, it all comes from you. But in our class we did have a specific process. First, we go somewhere or just sit down right where we are and take field notes on what is around us or what comes to our head. Then we pull out something that we call a gem, which is like a main idea, or something we want to focus on. After that we create a showcase, or mini project to present our ideas. That can mean we can make a mobile, or an essay, a poster, or anything necessary to communicate our gem. Finally, we show it off to our classmates, teacher, and Sandra, our “Art Teacher.” Once in a while, we would meet with Dr. Meyer too. She is the Living Inquiry professor at a university.

Now, next time you walk down the street, don’t just notice the cars or the bikers, think about it. Don’t be oblivious, life is meant for inquiring.

by Nola
Grade 6 Student
Living Inquiry is special … Living Inquiry is different …

Ugh, people keep asking me to explain Living Inquiry. It’s too hard to explain. It’s too long to describe. But the really hard part is that I wanna explain it… but Living Inquiry has that feeling that is hard to explain… a feeling like a majestic weight to it, like something you do not get to do. That is what really stands out because you do not get to do it in normal school and so when you are doing Living Inquiry it feels like you are doing something way out of the box. (Trisha, interview)

In the early stages of analyzing the children’s interview transcripts, I found myself highlighting phrases, such as the one above, that attempted to define Living Inquiry. As I worked through the process, I discovered that when children talked about their experiences with Living Inquiry, it was often in comparison to their experiences in the mandated curriculum. As such, Living Inquiry was a unique, special experience, especially when compared with the mandated curriculum or “school.” Whether they used the word “special” or “different,” it was clear that Living Inquiry stood apart from their perception of “normal school.” “Normal” school was considered to be a familiar or regular routine where they, as learners, engaged with a prescribed curriculum, often explored through teacher created projects, under related disciplines. Children said that although there were elements of “normal” school in Living Inquiry, engaging in this practice was an extraordinary experience, one that was “out of the box” and “beyond marks.” The process of Living Inquiry contrasted with “normal” school for two reasons:

1. The children felt privileged; they believed that the opportunity to engage in Living Inquiry was unique, especially when contrasted with normal curriculum.

2. The experience of engaging in Living Inquiry was personally meaningful.

Trisha elaborated:

Living Inquiry is special because you don’t get to do it in normal curriculum and I feel that a lot of people would never think of doing it, even in their own life. So to be presented with it in class, is even more special because no one else is doing it and because you will never get to do ever again, as presented in grade seven.
When you are doing *Living Inquiry* you know that you are not going to know. Like, you know when you are in school that you are not going to make a poster that is going to be like in a Gallery or make tons of mini projects that are going into a portfolio. *Living Inquiry* is a special kind of thing. It just feels good too. (interview)

Trisha not only summarizes why she believes *Living Inquiry* is special; she draws attention to the possibilities and vulnerabilities of this pedagogy. This chapter is dedicated to listening to the children’s voices, such as Trisha’s, and representing their interpretations around the two research questions. Most of the quotes are taken from my interviews with Steven and Trisha. I take up the question of the ways in which *Living Inquiry* interrupts the mandated curriculum first and then summarize the children’s understanding of *Living Inquiry* second, under the subheading (and repetitive refrain of) “It’s About You.”

*Living Inquiry Interrupts the Mandated Curriculum: A Question of Subjectivity?*

Upon first reading of Trisha’s quotes, the phrase “get to” grabbed my attention. In my classroom experience, I found that children use the words “get to” intentionally. Usually school is a “have to,” a mandated experience, even when it is also described as “fun” and “interesting.” Use of the phrase “get to” signifies a privilege and is worth attending to. Students have used this phrase when they experienced something they perceived to be exceptional or desired: “We get to have an extra fifteen minutes of recess!” When students apply the phrase “get to” to a curriculum experience, it seems as though they perceive an opportunity.

As evidenced in the above quote by Trisha, *Living Inquiry* was a “get to.” She believed that choosing her topics of study, “presenting” her work in “creative, open-ended, meaningful” ways, “publishing” her thoughts in a gallery and “going deeper” into her learning and, more importantly, herself were excluded in “normal” school. Moreover, they were elements she couldn’t expect from “normal” school.
I was surprised by Trisha’s comments. I felt that I put an exceptional effort into our regular routine and related assignments; that the work would be considered interesting, creative, open-ended, inspiring. What I now realize is, no matter how “fun” learning in school is, it is still “school,” it is still a “have to.” So was it simply that Living Inquiry, at least our version of it, was a special project and therefore something that was not being done anywhere else – other than the university, of course – that made it so unique and “beyond marks” in the eyes of the child? Rereading Trisha’s opening comment, I believed there was something more. I returned to the interview data with the questions of “Why is Living Inquiry a ‘get to’?” and “What might this sentiment teach me about Living Inquiry as a phenomenon and/or my teaching practice?”

Early on in the interviews, Living Inquiry was emphatically described as “different” and “beyond marks.” I asked Trisha and Steven to explain how Living Inquiry differs from “normal” school, hoping that I would discover how they perceive school and why Living Inquiry was described as an “extraordinary” experience. I expected that they would name the posters or working with a professor or artist as the main distinction. Surprisingly, they pointed to the practice of inquiry:

Trisha: Living Inquiry is different than school. In the way school is, well you have to research, you have your project, but Living Inquiry…

Steven: …is clean…

Trisha: …well school is clean but Living Inquiry is like when you have an inquiry, it doesn’t compare to this.

Steven: It is more you; it is like you can’t just read it out of a book.

Trisha: You can’t do research, well, you can research like John Lennon…

Steven: …you can research stuff, but Living Inquiry is very open-ended and stuff.

Trisha: Yeah …

Steven: …because it is about you, so I think in that way, it is um, it stems a little bit more from experiences. Because it is not just facts, it is more.
Trisha: Sometimes in school I think it is not about experiences though, it, if you are learning about…

Steven: …while in math probably not, but like Egypt or something…

Trisha: …well what if you haven’t been to Egypt before?

Steven: Yeah, well that is still stemming from experiences, new experiences, ummm… but if you don’t have much experience… um, well, if your Dad went to Egypt on a vacation…

This conversation offers a window into a tension between the Living Inquiry and the prescribed curriculum by drawing attention the nature of inquiry and knowledge construction. According to these children, “clean” inquiry seems to involve subjectivity, what I think they are naming as “experience.” However, as witnessed in their struggle to define inquiry, what constitutes an experience is also in question. Both Trisha and Steven agreed that experience is valued in learning but struggled to make sense of how personal experience, or one’s subjectivity is valued in each curricula (if at all).

Their question leads me to reflect on my practice and ask: How does personal experience play out in curriculum and what might distinguish Living Inquiry as “different”? Is it the value of subjectivity or working phenomenologically that deems Living Inquiry as a “get to”?

Although both “school” and Living Inquiry provided a structure to review our world, the two curricula seemed to offer a distinctive difference in approach to inquiry. Trisha and Steven perceived “school” inquiry to be impersonal: These inquiry questions framed the world as an isolated notion, something extracted from human interpretation. Privileging an empirical approach to research, the “answers” could be located from an outside source/authority (e.g., the Internet) and concrete, objective conclusions could be drawn. Echoing the critics of neoliberalism as it is reflected in school settings, “normal” school inquiry was described as a box; a “set” experience that happened at the same time everyday
through positivistic disciplines that were taught and graded by an expert. In this “box” of school, according to children, there appeared to be a hierarchy of value with regard to knowledge. Facts that were “proven” or empirically stated by another, preferably an adult-author were located at the top while personal, child-authored opinions fell at the bottom.

*Living Inquiry*, in comparison, was perceived as more open-ended, multi-faceted, relational, and I would suggest, abundant. Unlike “traditional” assignments, *Living Inquiry* called attention to the personal relationship between the subject or phenomenon and its researcher, and asked that participants work hermeneutically to interpret this relationship. The teaching/learning approach to curriculum, and the subject matter under investigation appeared to be key differences between engaging with mandated curriculum and *Living Inquiry*. Respectively, *Living Inquiry* flipped the perceived hierarchy of “experience” on its head, placing value on developing awareness, the attending to and the interpretation of lived experience, and especially the emotive quality of this attending. Trisha elaborated:

I think the difference is really between facts and opinion because when you are looking at *Living Inquiry*, you are seeing yourself and others in-the-world. For example, if there was an earthquake or something, you learn history, factual history in school. But when you are looking into *Living Inquiry*, you are looking into yourself, like the opinion of you and others, which you can’t learn in ‘school’ school. (Trisha, interview)

Trisha highlighted an important distinction between how “experience” is perceived in the mandated curriculum and how it is taken up in *Living Inquiry* when she used the phrase “you are looking into yourself … which you can’t learn in ‘school’ school.” The mandated curriculum appeared to keep “experience” (one’s subjectivity) at arms-length while *Living Inquiry* asked the learner to embrace “experience,” to feel it, embody it, and connect with it on an emotional level. It seems that the mandated curriculum, or at least my delivery of it, attempted to bracket personal experience, to turn away from it, and approach the world (as
[re]presented in the curriculum) objectively. Alternatively, *Living Inquiry* promoted an understanding that we are not separate from the world, that the world constitutes us as beings-in-the-world. In this way, students were asked to BE in the moment rather than research ABOUT the moment as summarized in Steven’s argument:

*Living Inquiry* is about being in the moment and, if you are just researching about the moment, you are not in the moment because it is just facts about the moment. But if you are actually there, then you have all these feelings and emotions and it is sort of like being in the moment and being aware of everything around you. (Steven, interview)

The second part of Trisha’s comment “which you can’t learn in ‘school’ school,” draws attention to curriculum content: what is privileged, what is ignored? Echoing the arguments presented by some education theorists, I would concur with Trisha that learning about oneself through an interpretive approach attuned to *living* was rare if existent at all in our regular routine. Therefore, concluding that “get to,” at least in part, is about inserting oneself back into the curriculum, I wonder: is there something significant about attending to subjectivity that calls for further attention? What might be the danger in attempting to extract subjectivity from learning?

Slattery et al., (2007) suggest that taking up our subjectivity in a hermeneutical fashion, as part of classroom life, is crucial if we are to avoid the reduction of teaching/learning as a dogmatic event. I draw on their arguments, as informed by hermeneuts such as Derrida and Gadamer, to help me make sense of what the children may be teaching me.

In schooling, hermeneutics concerns itself with the ambiguous and ironic dimensions of classroom experiences: an unexpected question triggers an exciting or provocative tangent; the changing moods and emotions of individuals create a unique and often perplexing life-world in the classroom; the same methodology is not always successful with every group of students; the atmosphere of the school changes. Teachers cannot predict the ambiguous and ironic nature of life itself, especially in the classroom. Thus, all educational discourses reflect interpretive and hermeneutic endeavours. (Gadamer & Derrida, 1989, cited in Slattery et al., 2007, p.541)
In this milieu, the focus of hermeneutics shifts from inert and objective data to the community of interpreters working together in mutually corrective and collaborative efforts to understand texts and contexts. The entire educational experience is open to reflection because everything requires recursive interpretation—a sustained conversation. Without this perspective, Hermes the trickster constantly deceives, and the focus on inert objective information threatens to render the dialogic monologic as educational discourse becomes a ‘self-sufficient and hermetic utterance,’ imprisoned ‘in the dungeon of a single context,’ unable ‘to exchange messages with other utterances; it is obliged to exhaust itself in its own single hermetic context.’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p.274, cited in Slattery et al., 2007, p.541)

Reading the data with the above argument in mind, I believe that one of the significant differences between Living Inquiry and my delivery/taking up of the mandated curriculum (even if through an inquiry approach) is the presence and privileging of multiple interpretations. When I delivered the mandated curriculum, I often looked for one “correct” interpretation (or truth) that aligned with a master narrative (e.g., Western aid relief assists those in developing countries). As such, inquiry in our regular program was predetermined, planned to arrive at a fixed end. The data remind me that a fixation on predetermined outcomes, although important at times, can result in a type of isolated learning. The danger here is that curriculum topics (as representations of the world) risk losing their lived quality and sense of worldliness, as Jardine (2006b) warns:

Without living instances, [any topic] would no longer be a living feature of our lives; it would no longer be something that concerns us, that provokes us, that entices us. … It would simply be a lifeless concept or the name of some object that “stands apart” from the life we live, couched in some textbook, an object of indifference. (p.158)
Listening to Slattery et al., and Jardine, together with Trisha and Steven, the interruption that *Living Inquiry* offered seemed to be the opportunity to pay attention, or to *listen to* the living aspects of our inquiry topics and to the practice of challenging one another to find the abundance in these topics, and in our selves. It is here that I may find my answer to why *Living Inquiry* was considered to be “beyond marks” and a “get to” – attending to lived experience was thought to be a turning towards a curriculum that takes up the subjectivity of the inquirer. According to the children, attending to our subjectivity and our conditioning in the hopes that we might develop our awareness was not about a numerical score or mark. The practice was about our own living, and living, as the children expressed, is not “for marks.” Further, the intentions of *Living Inquiry*, for children, were articulated by the following (repetitive) refrain: “It’s About You.” I communicate my understanding of this refrain in the next section.
“It’s About You”

Whiling ‘breaks open the being of the object’ (Gadamer, 1989, p.382) and we begin to experience how things are not simply arm’s length objects in which we have no stake and we are not worldless subjects living inside our own experiences. Such a belief in the being of things and the nature of our selves is simply an outcome of how they have been treated. Rather, in whiling, things start to regard us and tell us about ourselves in ways we could not have experienced without such whiling. And we become selves that recognize themselves in the recognition of the world. (Jardine 2008, p.234)

Living Inquiry begins as an individual, embodied, and emergent practice. Understood accurately, this inquiry has the potential to move the individual though the dynamic and critical space of becoming. However, if misunderstood, the inquiry loses its lived quality and instead, stagnates within the individual. Thus, you are the starting place for inquiry because it is you that is observing, growing, and imagining.

Living Inquiry was presented to children as a way to develop awareness within oneself through the inquiry into one’s everydayness. Children understood this to mean that Living Inquiry was about looking at how you live in the world. Consequently, the observation of mundane tasks, such as taking out the garbage or walking to school was taken up in order to note elements within this routine that drew attention (e.g., how much waste is accumulated in one day, or the crispness of the air against warm skin on a fall morning). Although these are such small, and seemingly insignificant moments, the attunement of paying closer attention to them enabled daily life to become a smorgasbord for inquiry, or, to borrow Sandra’s phrase, “Life becomes your classroom.”

Attending to daily encounters was appealing to the children in this study because there was no “right” or “wrong” answer. Instead, the individual’s experience was appreciated and taken up. Steven explained:

People can’t have the exact same experience because there is always something that makes yours unique and makes yours special in some different way. Like if I sat on a
certain seat on a roller coaster and someone said, ‘Yeah, I sat on the exact same seat,’” but they weren’t you, right.’

Or, in the words of Arendt, “we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (1958, p.8). If we pair this notion with the act of inquiry, we may see that everyday life presents us with moments from which we can inquire, and because each person is unique and experiences the world from their perspective, the possibilities for inquiry are endless and worthy of special attention.

Trisha agreed:

You can choose to look into yourself and others and everyone is different. With all the differences, you have so many choices to look into. There are so many things out there for you to do and Living Inquiry is about everything.

This openness and the bounty associated with Living Inquiry was both compelling and overwhelming for some children. In the beginning, many stated that they “just didn’t know what to do,” finding the practice “frustrating” and “confusing.” I felt particularly tested during these times and especially grateful that I had a handful of experienced inquirers who believed in Living Inquiry and took it upon themselves to serve as peer mentors. I was also reassured that my decision to abandon any numerical assessment was the right one as this seemed to translate into a sense of freedom – that it was “okay” to take risks in the work. As such, the work was “allowed” to be personal, emotive, and spontaneous. I suggest that these qualities were necessary in order for some children to name the growth experienced in Living Inquiry as wisdom.

Children in the study understood that Living Inquiry was enacted within the participant, and, as an embodied experience, it became something not only unforgettable but desirable. Steven qualified:

To me Living Inquiry is like a living awareness. It is like an awareness that you keep all the time, that you always, and sort of will have, because once you have done
Living Inquiry, you are not going to forget it. It is something that will stay with you because once you are aware of it, you will always keep doing it. It is competitive.

The notion that Living Inquiry was “competitive” was a surprise to me. I asked Steven to unpack this for me. He explained:

You are so unaware of everything – I kind of think of Living Inquiry as freeing yourself from, freeing yourself from what you don’t want, what you are not aware of, and it just makes you that much more aware. In the Matrix, Neo was not a member of the Matracter. He had no idea of what was going on, until he was made aware of it. When he was made aware of it, he stayed with them just like um in Living Inquiry. [Living Inquiry] definitely affected me. But not just in school; if you have learned to be aware, then you can be aware somewhere else, in everything, then you can’t NOT be aware. It definitely impacts your relationships and it impacts the position in your mind and how you think about things, in a good way.

I understood that it was a newfound sense of awareness that was desirable. Further, if Living Inquiry could evoke an experience of awakening or freeing oneself from something undesirable, it was worth ongoing effort.

The notion of “being made aware of something” was prevalent throughout the data. Interestingly, and as hoped, awareness wasn’t seen as a result from an imposition but rather from personal “discovery,” as illustrated by Trisha and Steven in the previous section. Because Living Inquiry was personalized, some children articulated that they became more in tune with themselves. Trisha offered an example:

I have discovered that I have a really big passion for life – I have discovered what I am really interested in, what I am going to do. I just feel like cued to what I want to do and where I want to go.

When I asked the children to unpack the notion of discovery, I learned that Trisha believed that Living Inquiry didn’t create knowledge or meaning but rather uncovered, or revealed it. In order to reveal knowledge and become aware, one must allow an experience to come into one’s life (like a gift) and then go deeper into it. Going deeper meant inquiring beyond the given or obvious, as Steven attested:
More or less you are trying to see the beyond and see what you can’t see. Going deeper, like an iceberg, means looking beyond what you would regularly think. *Living Inquiry* really helps to show that.

Further, going deeper wasn’t just a matter of simply viewing the experience at arms-length but rather embodying the experience fully:

**Researcher:** How would you describe “going deeper”?

**Trisha:** Observing

**Steven:** Yeah, I think that is exactly what going deeper is.

**Trisha:** Yeah, observing is like looking at something like at other things, but going deeper is like …

**Steven:** Observing is using what appears. You think it is just seeing but seeing is the sense we probably use the most. Observing is using everything you can but seeing is just a quarter, a fifth of it. It is no way near observing. Observing can mean so much.

**Trisha:** Can you observe math? Like you can’t observe subjects and when I think about going deeper, I am not going deeper into a thing, I am going deeper into a theme: Time, Language, Self/Other, and Place. It is like going into yourself, going into a section … I don’t know it is hard to explain.

**Researcher:** Is it like a concept?

**Trisha:** Yeah yeah, so when you observe…

**Researcher:** Is there a word you would use to replace “observe”?

**Trisha:** Um …

**Steven:** … Inquiry

**Researcher:** “Inquiry” – you mean “to inquire”?

**Steven:** I think so.

**Researcher:** How would you define inquiry?

**Steven:** Define inquiry. Do you have a dictionary?

**Trisha:** It is hard to put into words…

**Steven:** … I think inquiry is using your senses to not be aware but going deeper, so I think going deeper and inquiry is sort of the same thing because they both require going deeper, more or less, it is hard to say.

Reminiscent of Heidegger’s clearings, discovery cannot be forced. Instead it is engendered when knowledge/understanding/awareness appears through the practice of inquiry. In order for discoveries to occur, one must spend time cultivating a space for
awareness. Here is where the intentions of the practice can be misunderstood and take a
dangerous turn.

*Living Inquiry* could be accused of breeding narcissism, anthropomorphism,
modernism, and elitism. This idea will be further discussed in the following chapter, but I
would like to take it up from a child’s perspective here. If the participant interprets
themselves as the centre of all things, their experience and subsequent inquiry, becomes self-
centred. It is not the centring of the self that is necessarily problematic but rather the
interpretation of the self; the theoretical location of the “I” is crucial. For example if, as a
child, I were to perceive *Living Inquiry* as modernist and elitist, I might see it this way:

*Living Inquiry* is about *me*. I observe a phenomenon that catches *my* attention. *I* write
in first person present tense so that the reader could walk with *me* in *my* experience. *I* am
provided with one-on-one attention where adults, experts in their fields, take *my* ideas
seriously. *I* am considered to be the author of *my* ideas. *My* work is showcased in a
professional gallery; others take *my* work seriously because they could learn a lot from me.
*My* teachers tell me that *I* am important and worthy of a voice. *I* have something to say that is
worth hearing, worth whiling over.

If we reconsider Steven’s sentiments (from this chapter opening) through this elitist
lens, they sound self-centred, expressing a belief that we are individuals, entities all to
ourselves. Further, the underlying notion that *I* am the author of this encounter and, that the
phenomenon is there because *I* made it happen or because it was “discovered” by *me*, is
nurtured by *my* teachers. Here is an important pedagogical realization: Left unchallenged, the
danger is that the individual is situated, within their observations, as a creator as opposed to
an observer.
Aoki teaches me about the implications of a modernist perspective. He warns me that centring the child in this way perpetuates a false view of the world with the “I” being central. This “I” is seen as independent in the world and the primary force in any given encounter. Others become secondary, insignificant, or invisible because this “I” is ignorant to life’s relational nature and the impact of each being on the other. If fostered, the individual becomes further removed from the world and, in turn, allows or even engages in destructive acts. Smith (2003) stresses that “each of us must learn to identify the specific Others that define the specific tensions in the middle of which we claim to be living a life, otherwise the result is solipsism, narcissism” (p.xvi).

As a teacher/researcher, I acknowledge these concerns and am troubled by the dangers that a misinterpretation of Living Inquiry can perpetuate. However, I wonder if we can label the work of Living Inquiry simply as “narcissistic” or otherwise. The data suggest that children exhibit layers of self-interpretation, therefore, it would be erroneous to claim that all children demonstrated the same theoretical perspective (of themselves) for the entire practice. For lack of a better metaphor, I suggest that one’s perception within Living Inquiry operates on a sliding scale: An individualistic (and “dark side” according to Aoki) sense of self is located on the far left, and a divided subject\textsuperscript{29} is located to the far right.

Let me explain: when reflecting on the gallery experience or the privilege of doing Living Inquiry, most children exhibited a romanticized view of the modernist self where, in Aoki’s (somewhat playful) words, they were “a bunch of ‘I’s’ [become] a groupy ‘we’” (Aoki, 2005f p.287). This interpretation is no different than the individualistic one. Here, many children in the study would be located on the left side of the scale. At the same time,\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{29} Kristeva, according to Aoki, believed that “each subject is inhabited by both self and other” (Aoki, 2005f p.288).
there were moments in the weekly practice of *Living Inquiry* where some children touched on the awareness that we are beings-in-the-world, that we are constituted by the world, and as such we are located in sensitive network of both human and nonhuman, living and nonliving entities. In these encounters, inquirers move closer to the right side of the scale as they explore a further understanding of self in relation to others. Consequently, they shift closer to (my understanding of) the intended orientation of *Living Inquiry*. The following field note provides an illustration of a child’s awareness of the nuances of communication:

*Language Field Note by Kiam, Grade Six*

*My mom has been especially endowed to speak without speaking and communicate with her body alone. When she is disappointed, her arms and legs cross making me feel worried because I don’t want to get punished (sometimes if someone else does, I feel lucky). She has a straight face. It makes me feel bad about myself and it takes a while for me to cheer up. She just stares at me silently; this makes me reflect. My mom has body language that easily replaces words.*

*When she is happy there is a twinkle in her eye and then they widen like an owl on a winter night. It makes me feel warm inside. When I see it I never quite believe it; not many people can change your day without talking. She gives me a no-teeth half smile. I feel special and it gives me a spiritual lift. My mom uses these tools when I feel down. When I get teased and feel low and I want to hide in a dark room, she gives me a half smile and a hug. I feel wanted and needed. People can refrain from showing feelings through words but it is difficult to hide feelings shown through body language.*

*Living Inquiry* aimed to be a transformative practice. As such, it was suggested that children write their field notes in first person, present tense, as a way to locate the child in the experience rather than holding it at arms-length. We had hoped that prejudices, biases, and other forms of conditioned responses would come into view and, through reflection and subsequent inquiry, be challenged. This practice had positive consequences for us as teachers because it meant that most children were really engaged in their work— they claimed it, took ownership over it. The work, and writing in particular, was often superior to other classroom work because, as many children claimed, “It’s about me so I don’t want to whip it off.” The
children in the study appeared to feel empowered and thus motivated to continue, even in the absence of letter grades. Trisha summarizes:

When people just don’t care and they’re just like, ‘Oh, whatever, it is something to do in school and I don’t really care about it,’ they should understand that this is what they could do to help themselves. It is not like they should do it to get their mark up; they should do it to help themselves, discover themselves. People need to do things to discover themselves. So, when you don’t really care what you do, it is like, “Well you don’t really care about finding yourself”.

The goal of *Living Inquiry* is defined in a child’s terms: finding yourself. Unlike a traditional goal that can be achieved and then surpassed, finding yourself appears to be an ongoing pursuit. Moreover, it requires both a close attention to one’s “everydayness” but also a distant reflecting. Trisha and Steven explained:

Like most people just follow a general definition. If they actually thought about it, they would know experience is different for everybody. So you can’t really, exactly, I don’t know the word, but it is sort of like making people believe that is it. If you put it into a dictionary that is what everybody is going to think. Well, what they got to do is like step back, look at the bigger picture. If then people still don’t realize it, they just have to take a bigger step back, and be more aware. Wow, (pause) they just have to be more aware of what is going on. (Steven)

And I think if you were to understand something fully, you have to look at all the aspects. You can’t just look at one thing, like one point of view, you have to inquire. Sort of like: if you have become aware, I think that you have to change your view. You have to change; you evaluate yourself. It is only you inside your head, in secret with yourself; it is not like you have to make a statement.

I think only if people really want [to change] they will; like everything is up to you, right. Your actions are the thing you control yourself, so if you notice that you are stereotyping someone, I don’t know, say you are being racist, and unless you believe you should truly stop it, you won’t believe that that is the thing to do. You will automatically keep doing it. But if you are aware, then I think you have the responsibility to not do it, like to stop being racist. But, it is not like there is someone that is forcing you to do it, because it is only you that is realizing it, right. There is not complete force that is intending for you to do something. So it is hard, especially when you are doing it only yourself. (Trisha)

Both children point to the thoughtful, private nature of *Living Inquiry* and, more importantly, the responseability that these thoughts can engender. They also recognize that it is up to the individual to make a change; that others cannot impose personal transformation.
They know that this process takes time, sensitivity, and intuition. At times, it requires our foundation to crack so that we may see something new, for natality to come into being. Moreover, they understand that it is worth persevering through the difficulty of finding yourself because this is how wisdom is gained. Steven elaborated:

Grow, it always feels good to grow. It feels good to be more wise and more aware and go deeper and everything. [Looking back] makes you much more mature, hmm not mature … more wise; you have a different perspective and things and decisions in mind. Growth just isn’t about growing up. Growth is understanding.

I think Krishnamurti would agree, in part, with Steven. He claims that “wisdom does not come through fear and oppression, but through observation and understanding of everyday incidents in human relationship” (1953, p.64). I understand that wisdom is a special kind of growth that stems from experiencing our being-in-the-world. It comes from being in a network of relationships and trying to live well within this network.

Summary

I have unpacked the children’s understandings of Living Inquiry as inspired by the refrains “stepping out of the box,” “beyond marks,” and “it’s about you.” According to the children in the study, Living Inquiry requires an open, abundant landscape, one where trust must reside. However trusting is not always easy. Additionally, the tension involved in trusting, and experienced in guiding/walking with children in their learning journey, is a hallmark of the teachers’ understandings of Living Inquiry, the discussion of which I turn to next.

Chapter Nine opens with an event between two children and myself. Entitled “Just Trust Us,” this conversation characterizes the tension that I would like to discuss as a primary theme in the teachers’ understanding of Living Inquiry. I have named this tension/indwelling “Between the Burden and the Call.” Rather than answering the two research questions
separately, I take them up holistically by attending to this tension. Although the chapter represents the voices of all three teachers, it is rooted primarily in my experience.
What decides our fate in life? Is it God, is it chance or is it our own will? I think it's our own will as long as we have the opportunity. From when you are born until you die, you have started somewhere and ended somewhere. Lots of people end close to where they have started. For example, fifty percent of the time a rich person stays a rich person, a poor person stays a poor person.

Out of all of the things that determine your fate, does where you were born affect you the most? For example, if a person was born in Honduras (a very poor country) they don't have a very good chance of growing up to be a millionaire and they are very likely not going to be healthy. On the other hand, if you're born in West Vancouver (a wealthy place), you will probably grow up to be healthy and make a good living. This isn't always true though. For example, I know a lot of people who grew up in little apartments and now live in big houses. So, it does make a difference if you try in life and take advantage of opportunities.

I believe that what you do in life will affect you forever. If you have opportunities, then take advantage of them. What I am asking you is this: Is it chance that places us where we start and where we end, or is it ourselves? I think where you are born is chance but what you choose to do in life decides your fate so make the best of it.

Shane

Fig. 8.3 Fate, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Self/Other
think dance

I sit looking out at the foggy ocean before me. The image fades away as my mind takes over. I remember a joke from school that day. I giggle to myself then, embarrassed, thinking that there was someone else around with whom I could share the thought.

My thoughts trail off, I drift to sleep. But my mind stays awake. It takes me through a dark, thick forest, causing me to stir. Suddenly an image flashes through my mind. My eyes shoot open. I adjust myself, upright, left staring out at the misty ocean once again.

A dancer is a thought, flowing, moving, breathing. A dancer grows, and learns, as a thought branches and expands. If a dancer were to stop dancing, she would fade out. If a thought were to stop, it would float away.

A dance is a single movement. A thought is a single idea. No one can stop a dancer, and no one can stop a thought.

Like dance, the art of meditation is far more complicated than you think. It’s not just sitting cross-legged, fingers curied, eyes closed. It is to let your mind be at peace, to not think. But is it possible to let all those racing thoughts just stop? My thoughts dance around my mind and they never stop coming, one dancer to the next, and more waiting anxiously, as if backstage, waiting to perform. The adventures I go on, the dreams that I pursue, and all the things I imagine, begin from one thought that leapt out from behind the curtain, onto the stage, and danced its way into my mind.

Fig. 8.4 Think Dance, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Self/Other
I think *Living Inquiry* is not just answering questions but going deeper and really understanding what you have found out. It’s also about learning new things. You have to try to look at it in all different perspectives and explain your thinking.

You think about things differently and you can let your mind and imagination do all of the work: All you have to do is express it. Sometimes you can let your mind go to whole other places.

*Marc, Grade Seven*
Just Trust Us

It’s 2:55 p.m. An animated buzz fills our classroom. We are scrambling to complete last minute preparations before tomorrow night’s launch party for our Living Inquiry exhibit at the gallery. Feeling energized and excited too, I run through a mental list of all I want to accomplish before tomorrow night; the top priority is ensuring that the students are ready. Ready means that we have all of our materials together and that we can speak about our work with confidence. Each student was responsible to put their portfolio together so that they provided a clear visual of the process. These were checked earlier in the week: we did a gallery walk so we could review each other’s work and provide feedback. Some students incorporated the feedback by applying further finishing touches. In general, the portfolios are ready to serve their purpose: to make our learning visible. We also engaged in “gallery role-plays” by enacting a list of anticipated questions and improvising our responses. A few children took the initiative to prepare an opening statement to commence the exhibit. It’s hard to believe that within a forty-eight hour period, our Living Inquiry classes will come to an end.

I have been taking our preparations very seriously. Like a heavy coat, the hours that Sandra and I logged to ensure the posters were ready were weighing heavy on me. I am incredibly tired yet overwhelmingly excited. I believe deeply in this work and I really want it to shine. The kids have put so much of themselves into this project – I hope their energy, passion, and thought comes through the work and connects with the public. I don’t want anything to sabotage our celebration.

Ninety percent of the work is done. I feel confident that most students are ready but find myself in a difficult position with two individuals. I want them to take the work seriously but they don’t seem to be. They spent the last week side chatting during our class discussions and goofing off during our preparation times. They still don’t have their portfolios ready despite several reminders. Do I force them to complete the preparations that I deem important or do I let it go and risk that they might not “shine” in the way I want them to? I call them to my desk to find out their plan, doing my best to mask my annoyance:

So, you know the gallery opening’s tomorrow (I say, somewhat casually).

Yeah.

I still haven’t seen your portfolios. (my tone is now more serious)

We’ll have them ready, don’t worry.

Hmm ... you’ve been saying that for a while...

Laughter, eyes look down... yeah...we know.
How can I trust that you’ll have them done when it doesn’t seem like you’re taking this very seriously?... A lot of people have invested a lot of time into this project... I really want it to be a time for you to shine... Your work is impressive – don’t you think so too?... This gallery is a big deal... Your parents are going to be there, right? Do you feel like you’re ready? Do you know what you want to communicate? Are you clear on the details? Do you want to go through a practice run after three p.m. today?...
(I imagine I sound like the adults in Peanuts at this point)

Sigh.

Mrs. Paterson [pause for emphasis]...

Just Trust Us.

“Just Trust Us” stopped me in my tracks, compelling me to take a critical look at my agenda. When I revisited my Charlie Brown-like monologue of warning, I realized that the language I was using reflected a very different orientation to Living Inquiry, one that bore little resemblance to the course I was introduced to in my graduate program. Instead, it seemed to echo the instrumental orientation that I was trying to challenge. Further, (and this is difficult to admit) I seemed to be more concerned with protecting myself from possible embarrassment than I was in tactfully guiding children in their preparations for a public showing. This was disheartening and disturbing.

The directive to “just trust” inspired me to reflect on the pedagogical relationships at play during Living Inquiry and the role of trust within these encounters. I call upon Hansen’s “vocation as a mirror” to assist me in interpreting the role of “teacher” and how this role might impact the Living Inquiry curriculum experience.

The idea of vocation… underscores just how central the person is who occupies the position of teacher. It highlights the fact that the role or occupation itself does not teach students. It is the person within the role and who shapes it who teaches students, and who has an impact on them for better or worse. (Hansen, 1995, p.17)

Reflecting on the data, with help from the literature, helped me to see that trust is a foundational quality, essential to all relationships. Further, in order for trust to be
engendered, both parties must trust (trust is a personal quality). As O’Neill (2002b), drawing upon Confucius, convinces, “without trust we cannot stand” (para.1). I wondered, what facilitates trust?

I began to see, through my interpretations, that trust often required a letting go, or relinquishing control over the aspects of learning that I so often practiced controlling. For example, when and how a project was going to go, the content we were going to explore, how a conversation was going to be structured, etc. Further, I began to see that trusting required a shift in role, a different set of values, and an alternate perspective. This call to trust, voiced by children, reverberated in the space of indwelling between the burden of accountability and the vocation of teaching.

_Biography of the Posters – An Example of Indwelling Between the Burden and the Call_

The literature suggests that children’s voices are often silenced, ignored, or homogenized by adults, even when they are the topic of research (Greene & Hogan, 2005). Karen, Sandra, and I believed that the posters would offer a powerful mode in which to share the children’s inquiries, and, along with information about the process of Living Inquiry, would promote the children’s capabilities, and establish public trust in our pedagogical endeavours in turn. Thus, the posters were birthed from twin desires: one, to enhance students’ visual literacy in order to further their inquiry skills; and two, to promote (and I would argue legitimize) the work in the eyes of parents and other adults.

Operating under the belief that the work deserved to be presented as professionally as possible (rather than a “typical” school representation: think construction paper with cut and pasted clip art or poor quality images from the Internet), we, as teachers and facilitators of
the work, wanted to provide the children with opportunities to create a powerful, appealing, polished product. We had hoped that collaborating with the children, during the Living Inquiry process and intensely on their posters, would deepen their thinking and help provide them with a polished representation of their inquiries that might serve as a springboard for dialogue with others in public space. In addition, we believed that if the work exhibited a professional quality, the adult viewer would take more time to read the text, consider it, and ultimately connect with it in some way. We hoped that our audience would be inspired and challenged by our work. In summary, we wished that the posters would help the reader to reimagine student work by considering the content to be more than just “a school project” but rather universal concepts that are ageless, relevant, and timely.

The gallery opening (where children met with the public to engage in dialogue around the student inquiries/posters) was considered by the participants to be a great success. Children’s reflections indicated that it was a “highlight,” “amazing,” and “worthwhile.” I was both pleasantly impressed and equally troubled by the sense of surprise the adult attendees expressed. The public seemed to be astonished that students were capable of engaging with philosophical and existential questions (as the literature predicted?). Maybe it is that children are not always given opportunities to engage in these types of discussions with adults in a public space?

30 See Appendix B for rubrics and other graphic organizers used to facilitate the inquiry and poster process.
31 I must acknowledge the ethics around collaborating with children on this project. Collaborating was not always easy nor straightforward. For example, we troubled our approach to editing. We wondered how to maintain the integrity of the children’s work and guide them in their decisions around formatting. We worked alongside each child in our role as consultants, ensuring that they stayed the authors of their own work/design.
As described by the children, the posters (and gallery experience) were but one example of how *Living Inquiry* was different and special when contrasted with the prescribed curriculum. Karen also highlights the distinguishing differences between *Living Inquiry* and the prescribed curriculum. Additionally, she confirms the perceived need to legitimize *Living Inquiry* and offers one explanation of this need in the following excerpt (from the adult interview):

*Living Inquiry* is so much more open-ended. We don’t know exactly the way it is going to come out…it is a more emergent kind of curriculum as opposed to a curriculum that (most of what we do) is the prescribed… I think is important to honour this more open-endedness in part of the curriculum [because] it isn’t part of the curriculum.

They [children, public] are going to think what is valuable is what they usually see in the curriculum, for whatever reason. …They already know school culture very well, by this age, and they know when something is different. It is different enough, from the usual curriculum that you know you have to make it legitimate and I would agree.

So, how do you do that? It’s hard…. not put a mark on something like that. This, too, makes it stand out as being different. But that doesn’t mean that it can’t fit into the school day and the school culture because it is something that is a little bit different.

…I think one thing that does add to the legitimacy is having people come into the classroom and work with [children]. You know, myself coming in, at the beginning, and with Sandra coming in as a collaborator…

Echoing the children, *Living Inquiry* was perceived by the teacher participants as more open-ended, emergent, improvisational, and collaborative when compared with the engagement with the prescribed curriculum. Although we (teachers) believed that the work was important, we acknowledged the need to legitimize it, or to make it credible within a dominating context that we did not always agree with.

O’Neill (2002c) writing on the role of trust in the current “crisis of trust,” gives voice to our endeavour (to hold a public showing of the work/be accountable/develop or establish trust with the public) when she writes:
In judging whether to place our trust in others’ words or undertakings, or to refuse that trust, we need information and we need the means to judge that information. To place trust reasonably we need to discover not only which claims or undertakings we are invited to trust, but what we might reasonably think about them. (para.2)

Considering her argument that we need information in order to trust, I come to understand that the gallery showing (of the posters) was an opportunity to provide that information (albeit from one perspective). Further, I begin to see the possibility that I needed confirmation of the public’s trust in order to relinquish my own discomfort and fear described throughout the thesis. I wanted others to tell me, “This is good! It’s important that you do this work. It’s okay that you are taking risks.” In other words, I needed the public’s trust in order to trust myself.

At the time of the gallery opening, I considered the desire to showcase the work to be a noble undertaking. I was offering my students (possibly) a once-in-a-lifetime experience: to publish their work in collaboration with a professional artist and acclaimed professor, to dialogue about it with a broader community, and have it displayed in a public space. This opportunity required a great deal of risk-taking, thought, and planning. Upon further reflection, in the efforts to complete all of the mundane tasks required in this kind of exhibit, I recognize that I had internalized the work, and claimed it as my own. To elaborate: the number of hours I invested crafting idea organizers to encourage children to inquire more deeply, managing our timelines so that we could chunk the work and not get too overwhelmed, editing field notes and reflections for spelling and grammar, and engaging in other teacher-related tasks, influenced my relationship between the process of doing Living Inquiry with the children and creating the final product (the posters). I was seduced by the feedback I expected to receive: kudos that the work was fresh, rich, stunning, and impressive. Sadly, moments before culminating a year of interpretive work, I was privileging the end
product over the pedagogical journey. I had lost sight of the vocational nature of my role; I had lost sight of the inquiring *child* and what it means to work pedagogically. It was time to reorient myself.

**Between the Burden and the Call: A Place for Pedagogical Tact**

Van Manen’s work (1991, 2002) reminds teachers to question, reflect, and see an encounter from the child’s perspective. He compels pedagogues to *see* and recognize the child by “cultivat[ing] the ability to perceive and listen to young people” (2002, p.43).

Regrettfully, I didn’t do this enough in my daily teaching practice, especially outside of my *Living Inquiry* work. Much of my teaching time was spent considering instrumental outcomes. In most subject areas I privileged, as evidenced in my curriculum plan, what the children would do with the information they worked with. I constantly asked myself, “What will they have to show at the end?” In my desire for student accountability and productivity (a spin-off of what is expected of me as teacher), I pushed for a final result rather than encouraging a dialogue about process and its related interpretation. When I consciously valued the process, it was often after-the-fact, in retrospect. Despite nearing the end of this thesis, I still struggle with the question “How can I learn to prioritize lived experiences when I am so accountable to aims, objectives, and results?”

**Personal Journal, January 2009**

I just came back from a dinner party where I spoke with both practicing and retired teachers with whom I worked at the start of my career. Although ten years has passed since then and there have been a million life events we could have discussed, our conversation always returned to the challenge of meeting the curriculum and establishing, maintaining, and furthering a relationship with each child. It got me thinking about my past conversations with teachers. I realized that I have not yet met a practicing educator who does not feel restricted by the mandated curriculum, so much so that they feel it impacts their relationship with the children in their care. Further, we are daunted and disheartened by the amount of curriculum we are responsible for and the accountability we face to deliver it, not to mention feeling like we must produce students who can master it in a communicable way (FSA tests, report cards,
etc.). Interestingly, the only teachers I have met who feel more “free” are retired teachers (now employed as Teachers on Call) whom do not believe they need to comply with mandates; instead, they can focus purely on the children in their care. Why must we wait until we are retired to feel this way?

The Ministry of Education’s School Act (Government of British Columbia, 2008) defines a teacher’s role within two sentences. The first states, “a teacher’s responsibilities include designing, supervising and assessing educational programs and instructing, assessing and evaluating individual students and groups of students” (p.C-31). The second reminds us that we must fulfill these duties. I read this last line and feel an echo of “or else.”

Although a teacher’s role can be formally defined in one short statement, the translation of this statement into practice is weighty. Adhering to my mandate is an all-consuming process. If I am not careful, I can spend every hour of every day designing, delivering, and marking programs and not engage in a single moment of personal conversation with children. This is a terrifying realization! Hearing the comment “Just trust us” reengaged my growing discomfort about the dominating perception of teachers-as-managers and left me to question why accountability seemingly replaces trust, and how this drive distracts me from attending to a tactful presence with children. Hansen (1995) defines the role of teachers:

The Old English root word of teaching, taecan, means to show, to instruct, or, in more literal terms, to provide signs or outward expressions of something one knows. As typically understood, teaching means leading others to know what they did not know before… do before….embody before…believe before (p.1).

Teachers play a significant role in what young people learn, in how they learn to learn, in how they come to view learning itself. They can influence young people’s personal dispositions toward others, and toward their own futures. Their influence, for good or for ill, can extend well beyond the duration of school; anyone who remembers teachers they have had can readily attest to this (Hansen, 1995, p.9).

According to O’Neill (2002b), we live in an age of accountability because we are combating a culture of suspicion. Even though we may not actually be faced with reports of
mistrust (as in my case), we spend excessive amounts of time seemingly trying to prevent these reports (and, I would argue, instead of on relationships or the ineffable qualities of teaching/learning). It is believed that being accountable means accounting for every minute detail of our aim (even if it is, at times, misplaced), and publishing this progress in reams of informative communication. I agree with O’Neill when she suggests that there is incoherence at play in this culture and I apply this theory to my work in *Living Inquiry*. Really, I had no reason to suspect that I was considered to be untrustworthy by any of the stakeholders in my setting, nor that there was mistrust between and amongst my fellow teachers and our students. Yet, I spent extraordinary amounts of time worrying about how I might defend the practice should I face confrontation. Why? Was I really defending the practice to myself? It’s a disturbing thought that this thesis is an attempt to uncover the reasons why *Living Inquiry* is trustworthy!

Countering the push for ends-means education, there appears to be a growing body of literature devoted to viewing pedagogy as an intuitive, sensitive praxis, as evidenced in Hansen, van Manen, Jardine, and Smith’s work cited in this thesis. As they proclaim, and as experienced by the teacher participants, teaching is not a mere act of informative transference of fact-based knowledge but rather a delicate relationship between child and teacher. Although I critique my urgency for my two students to “hurry up, get prepared, and be excited already,” I also praise my attempts to nurture the layers of collaboration present in *Living Inquiry*, including the posters. Although the results of this relationship might not be quantifiable, measurable, or numerically reportable, they are significant. Sandra illustrates:

I am very proud of the pride that they take in their in their final projects. Up to this point in their academic careers, typically it’s construction paper and markers and magazine cut outs, or clip art. Here we are inviting them to be very, very personal; to really own how they express their ideas both with text and image, and of course those
examples with construction paper and clip art. I love that they have risen to that form of expression. I would like to think that they would be reluctant to go back to doing work that is just piecing together what someone else has created and hoping that it says what they want it to say; that they know they have the tools and the abilities and can communicate visually. (adult interview)

Her last statement speaks to an anticipation that a child under her tutelage might hesitate to just “whip something up,” echoing the children’s interpretations in “It’s About You.” She believes that she has influenced that child in a positive and lasting way. Sandra’s story resonates with the trust that she now has in her relationship with the children and her belief that, as a teacher, she has influenced a lasting difference in the life of a child.

I wonder: When the two children directed me to “just trust” them, could we not request the same in turn? Doesn’t each party need to trust each other in the Living Inquiry process? How can this trust be fostered as I fulfill my prescribed mandate and walk alongside the children in my care in a living, learning journey together? In other words, how do I dance between teacher-as-knower and partner-in-learning? How do I dance between the burden and the call?

Van Manen writes about the similarities between parenting and teaching, narrating the pedagogical difficulties of tactfully caring for each and every child in one’s care. I have noticed that, in my new role as mother, it is an ongoing struggle to know when to lead and when to be led. As my daughter begins to explore the world by crawling, I find myself hovering over her, my hands serving as bumpers in an effort to protect her from any possible danger. My fear is that she will have a debilitating fall and that this will result in a type of setback. When I consider the “Just Trust Us” event, I recognize a similar struggle and comparable desire to protect. But protect them from what? At the time, I think I wanted to save them from possible regret, and myself from potential embarrassment. I believed that if
they did not put forth their best effort then they would regret it (as would I). I recognize a
similar struggle in Sandra’s anecdote and her attempt to make sense of it:

Take Delaney’s experience for instance, and I don’t know her well enough to say, but
you know from my perspective, on the sideline, it was hard for her to commit to a
specific concept, because she wanted to pick just the right concept, a cool concept,
you know the one that she could really shine in. So when she picked it, and when we
talked about it, she was full of ideas and she had great ideas for a visual. When we
were talking, there was energy and spark. But [in our follow up meeting] she didn’t
produce that. I can only imagine that she got home, put pen to paper and found she
couldn’t do what she had envisioned. That shut her down.

I don’t know if I had been more present or more able to really
sit down with her
and give her the encouragement she really needed to do that if she would have come
through.”

The word “if” is powerful and provoking: “If I could be there more, if I could teach
more, if I could care more” ... on and on it goes. It was evident that Sandra cared for Delaney
and wanted her to feel empowered in her work. I often found myself in a similar situation. I
too wanted top-quality education experiences for the children. I also wanted them to embody
their learning and to engage in it with vigour, passion, and drive. Like Sandra, I believed that
I could be a positive influence in my pedagogical relationships, that educating is about
reciprocity.

When I teach from my heart I engage in a push-pull relationship between the
sensitivity inherent in guiding and the expertise embedded in taking over. How do I walk
with a child, see them for who they are, and relinquish the control that I feel is inherent in my
role as teacher? I raised this dilemma in an interview with Sandra and Karen. True to the
masterful pedagogue Karen is, she answers my call and articulates a way of being with a
child that is led by the heart. Reminiscent of van Manen’s address, her words resonate with
pedagogical tact:

There were times, from a whole year of doing [Living Inquiry], that we were all
probably a bit directive sometimes, but there were plenty of times that it was very
open too. The way I think about it is being able to stand next to the student and see
what they see, which means it is not exactly what I would see, but I can be in tuned enough that when they are describing something, [I can] say: “Yes, I can see that.” So I have to have a beginner’s mind because we are all in the subtleties of Living Inquiry. These are young people, who are just beginners of Living Inquiry, so standing next to them you have to be able to see what they see and describe [it]. So that takes something, and when you have twenty-five kids, that is difficult to do in a day.

And then the wisdom part, in a beginner’s mind tells you: “Ah, I see what you see,” the wisdom is, “Let’s hold this open for awhile and take me [on a journey], let me walk with you, and tell me a little bit more of what you see. And let me guide, so that they have somebody with them. That is sort of an ultimate thing that I think about teaching the individual student. But how that translates into the moment and when you can have a moment like that, with each of your children, in a classroom, you probably can’t be or do that all in a day because of what you are up against.

But hopefully, in the Living Inquiry somewhere, we all have felt that, with the three of us, at different times. That we saw what they saw and that we encouraged them to stay with it, in the safety of ‘I will walk with you.’

Karen suggests that wisdom is needed in order to walk with the inquirer and to see the world through a beginner’s eyes. Hansen (1995) also suggests that “a teacher may need in a very basic way to bracket his or her self-interest in order to see what a child is struggling to say, to do, or even become” p.5). As with van Manen’s pedagogical tact, Heidegger’s notion of teaching as a “letting learn” (quoted in Aoki, 2005f and Taylor 1991), suggests that pedagogical wisdom is relational, embodied, and emotive. It requires sensitivity, intuition, and presence.

Here is an important point (one that I continually need reminding of): this wisdom requires an absence. It involves letting go of, or “bracketing” our expectations and our conditioning, what we wish the child to be or what we want them to see in the world and, instead, helping them to see the world as it is. Like tact, Karen’s wisdom requires a special kind of interpretation of, and sense of immediacy towards, the pedagogical situation where the adult knows when to step in and guide, when to name the experience, when to support, when to provide safety, and when to let go. Taylor (1991) adds to the argument when she claims that
teaching as letting learn may be the most unsettling concept to grasp in pedagogy, but perhaps it is the most important. The attention and emphasis is on the student, who gropes his or her way toward personal understanding, who discovers, with surprise and delight, what it like to own knowledge. (p.351)

As I read the words “personal understanding” and “discovers” I think back to Trisha and Steven and their claim that *Living Inquiry* was about finding one’s self. I recognize that although the attention is on the child, the pedagogy happens in the spaces between the child and the teacher. It is within this space that wisdom and trust must be engendered in order for the space to be considered safe or trustworthy.

However, knowing wisdom’s requirements and enacting them are two different things. Letting go, when we care for and want to protect the children in our care, is complicated (and sometimes painful) as evidenced in both the “Just Trust Us” event and in Sandra’s encounter with Delaney. Further, hermeneutics suggests that we cannot bracket out our conditioning, that we see the world through our “horizon.” Attempting to guide the child in the absence of our own self interest is made all the more difficult when we are up against such accountability measures that we feel deprived of the time necessary to foster a relationship with our students let alone the wisdom required in pedagogical leading! The teacher participants understood *Living Inquiry* to be a designated space, within a dominating and often imposing context, where we would attempt to attend to the children in our care and to nurture their inquiries in a more personal, intimate way.

**Dr. Meyer:** You know that here is the space that is being created for that [attending to the moment and dialoguing about this experience with children] to happen. We certainly all [attend to the moment] in our own time, but we have all been through *Living Inquiry* yourself as adults, as well as teachers; so it’s kind of interesting to actually designate a space to say this is where we will practice something that could be valuable in our lives and um that is where we hold the space open, as teachers to do that, otherwise that space gets taken in by lots of other things.

**Sandra:** And in that regard, I would say like when [children] know that school is typically the place that very specific things happen and that they may feel that they have little control
over or direct input into that place. You, by holding this space open [help them to] learn that [Living Inquiry] can go anywhere… it is not an intruding thing; it belongs wherever you are… they get that too. I mean, if you look at the Living Inquiry pieces, some of [the children] stayed in the space… that was pivotal to them… That space, That place [Living Inquiry] gave [Emma, as an example] permission to be there, [and this] meant a lot to her.

The notion and importance of holding an open space to assist the child in discovering the world and being attuned to the idea of awareness (or, as the children might say, discovery) is echoed in Paul Friere’s address to students. Although Freire works from a different orientation (critical pedagogy), his students, like the child participants in this study, are also troubling a dominating, closed, ends-means approach to learning.

… in the world there are always hidden things; in life, there are always hidden things, and one of the roles of the educator is to draw attention to those things. Sometimes it is not even necessary to show the hidden thing, but rather it is about helping the student to know that there are hidden things for him or her to discover. (Freire, 2007, p.35)

I would see as the educator’s important roles and tasks then, those of opening up paths and of challenging, doing whatever it takes so that the students cannot fall asleep at the switch. Falling asleep here is not just meant from physical point of view, in reality, but rather from the standpoint to becoming uninterested. On the one had; to provoke, etc. And at the same time; to never omit. An educator can never hide before his or her students. He or she can never be ashamed of being an educator (Freire, 2007, pp. 36-37).

Upon reflection, Karen’s notion of standing with a child and trying to see what they see is precisely what was desired by my students when they urged me to “just trust [them].” Reading those three words now, it seems like such an easy and inherent part of educating – it seems stranger to NOT trust our students. However, in the throws of teaching (in the current context), it is easy to become disoriented, even when I am committed to holding an interpretive space open for the sensitive work of Living Inquiry. I appreciated Karen’s understanding of this, as I elaborated during our interview together:

I think, especially in school, there are layers of authority, there are layers of conformity, and, like you were saying, there are layers of directedness. Although I
believe in “holding the space open” for Living Inquiry, because it is in school, there are certain protocols in place; there are certain directives at play. I don’t know if they need to be there, but they are there, and they are still less at my school than a typical or traditional school. I don’t know if you can ever do Living Inquiry in a less formalized way, if it is in university or in school.

The importance and the distinguishing characteristics of Living Inquiry are marked by this struggle. For all three teacher participants, the intention of Living Inquiry was to work collaboratively, tactfully, around the notion of awareness, and the attempt to leave ourselves open to the new. Karen summarizes:

I would say the most important thing is to have a space that is open for a kind of inquiry around awareness. There is a lot of inquiry done, especially in the [school-wide] program, but I don’t think it really focuses on the notion of awareness. And that isn’t bad, and it certainly isn’t saying that we are not aware; it is just sort of looking at it and questioning things around our awareness. But I think it is interesting that our enthusiasm was there, and so forth, but we don’t explicitly say to kids: “This is the reason, I am teaching you this.” And we probably don’t do that in other curriculum either. (adult interview)

There is a lot of talk in Education about what matters. For the teacher participants, Living Inquiry addressed this question by attending to pedagogical relationships, of attempting to walk with each child on a project that foregrounded the child’s interpretations of their being-in-the-world. Karen elaborates:

It was all communicating their own ideas. That nobody is the same so that notion of expression, the sharing, and the inquiry gave them a scene, with the collaboration of an artist. I thought this was wonderful part of how Living Inquiry went into school culture. For young people, I think our collaboration really put them forward and you know, I think they knew they were listened to and so forth, where we may not, as adults, possibly not quite had that at the same stage. Certainly, as anticipated from the students’ perspective, to have people that want to collaborate with me, as professionals, outside of the school culture coming in was really quite valuable and an interesting part of this project.

Sandra, who reminded us that Living Inquiry was also focused on helping the child to develop a sense of responsibility, highlighted the reciprocal value of this collaboration:

Paying attention to each particularity of [the child’s] life is valuable for all kinds of reasons. For example, what you can learn from the conversation and challenge your
own thinking … attending shows your own weaknesses and strengths. [For the students], we also wanted to really underline that Living Inquiry offers valuable things for them to know whether they are taking calculus or physics or geography or social issues or anything because they are recognizing that their world is taken up in the classroom and they have not just a right, but an obligation to ask questions of the things that they observe. They are not going to be able to think critically about their world if they don’t, in the first place, pay attention.

Summary

Living Inquiry is the interplay between awareness, natality, and pedagogical tact. As I reflect on the participants’ responses detailed in this chapter, I am convinced that trust facilitates this interplay. Yet, trust is not a given and it is not always foregrounded in our teaching endeavours. Trust shares many similarities with the other foundational concepts of Living Inquiry: It cannot simply be created; it faces many barricades that can diminish or even terminate it; and it can appear or disappear without warning. And, like its fellow concepts, the important point to keep in mind is that it can be cultivated. I conclude with the words of van Manen, with the “Just Trust Us” event in mind, before offering a closing discussion in the following chapter.

Trustful hope is our experience of the child’s possibilities and development. …[It] is our confidence that a child will show us how his or life is to be lived no matter how many disappointments may have tested our confidence (1991, p.68). …When a child tells real-life stories of how he or she wanted to be trusted and believed by a teacher, he or she also touches on that deeper sense of trust and belief without which a teacher is no longer an educator. (2002, p.64)
Colour: the Beauty has Risen

Colour affects everything, and never goes away. I wonder.. Where don't you see colour?

Colour can mean liveliness, emotion, creativity, excitement, attention. Without colour, life would be boring. All you would see is black and white. There would be no more emotions, or colour catching people's attention, inspiring imagination. What I like is that each colour is different and looking at each one from different perspectives reminds me of a variety of different things.

Obviously everyone has favourite colours, but why? Maybe it's because we like the things that are a particular colour, for example orange flowers, oranges, candies, et cetera. Some people like dark things and others like light things. Can that also influence what colours they like?

Colour can also improve people's moods when they are either depressed or just sad. For example, if you were in the hospital recovering from just being in a car crash, you would probably be depressed sitting there recovering, but maybe some brightly coloured flowers would brighten up your day. Colour does everything. You may not notice it, but when you think about it, it really does.

Do colours have meanings? When I think of these following colours, this is what I think of them: red-energy, pink-love, yellow-happy, green-calm, blue-sadness, and orange-vibrant. People sometimes remind me of colours. For example, some people remind me of yellow when they're happy, or green when they're cheerful.

Colour has been a wonder all my life. When it comes to colour, I like to have fun with it; and make things as colourful as I can. Living in colour is exciting. Everyday, there's something new to imagine about it. You can do anything with colour, and paying attention to colour means you can always find something beautiful. Colour is life.

In my world, colour is me, everyone, everything, and the world.

I feel the warm sun shining right on me, keeping me warm. I start to look around...

A red tulip stands surrounded by the fresh green grasses. I walk over, and start to smell the beauty of this tulip.

Strawberries, apples, beach balls, clothes, holidays, hearts, Valentine's Day, candy, and Santa.. they are all red.

I start to wonder, this isn't any old tulip... It's beautiful, with a red shining richness to it, reflecting from the sun.

The beauty has risen.

Penelope

Fig. 9.2 Colour, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
As I stand on the pier, at first all I feel is cold and tired. I’m not paying attention to anything but the desire to go home. After standing in the same spot for about five minutes, I start to realize that most of the things that I am experiencing have a rhythm, pulse or some sort of pattern, like the lights rippling through the water, and the waves rushing against the dock.

I begin to pay more attention to the surrounding area. The clouds look very soft and layered, like a very high patch of mist. The clouds are almost the exact same shade as the water, and it looks like, if the land weren’t there, the water would just keep going on forever.

The lights from all the buildings, boats, houses and bridge all seem to come rippling toward me through the dark, cold water. All of the lights seem to be slithering through the water like a bunch of snakes coming to swallow me up. The lights are attracted to me like I am some sort of magnet. No matter which way I look, the lights are always coming towards me.
My Quiet Place

The thing about quiet places is that they are so relaxing, making you think of things in just simply a different way.
When you go to a quiet place, you think of things more thoughtfully.
Way back in time, in the year 2006, I did Living Inquiry for the first time.
Not knowing much about it, I chose a spot to sit that no one else had chosen,
and began to write. Instead of writing about just anything,
I wrote about what was around me. I looked up at the trees,
listened to the birds happily chirping on a sunny day,
looked closely at the rocks, and was aware of what was around me.

I wrote all of this down by hand and I had a great time. Besides all that,
that spot is what got me from term one to term three.
It is one of my favourite places for thinking and for sorting myself out and reflecting.

Sometimes when I am sitting in those places, I am wondering,
what if everyone else in the world had a thinking spot or
a quiet place where they can think? Would people appreciate things better?

As this happens, lots of thoughts go swirling around in my head,
leaving a big question mark, which I can only imagine in my head.

It seems as though thousands of millions of thoughts are busy swirling
within my head, and as much as I try, I cannot shake them out.

Sometimes, if I’m at my quiet place later at night, I feel concerned
about the ocean waves in the distance. I think maybe bad weather is coming because
the wind is high and strong in my quiet place. Then I just try to remember that it is
not going to go over my head; I can relax again and enjoy my quiet place.

Emma

Fig. 9.4 My Quiet Place, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Place
To me, *Living Inquiry* means going deeper into something you want to explore. It means uncovering the things you didn't know you had inside you. I think *Living Inquiry* means to learn more than you thought you were capable of and stretching yourself to the limit.

I think awareness is central to *Living Inquiry* because you can't inquire about something if you aren't aware of where it stands in the world or where you stand with it in the world. It's also like the song in Sandra's slideshow, “Keep your feet on the ground and your head in the clouds.”

It means that you shouldn't lose sight of where you are, but that you should still reach for the stars.

*Kacy, Grade Seven*


**Living Inquiry in Abundance?**

This study was dedicated to investigating children’s and teachers’ interpretations of *Living Inquiry* and to exploring the pedagogical possibilities and vulnerabilities of engaging in this (alternative) curriculum. I began the study with two research questions and three anticipated intentions. I wanted to describe my participants’ understandings of their experiences with *Living Inquiry* and explore the ways, if any, *Living Inquiry* might intersect with and/or interrupt the mandated provincial curriculum. At the commencement of this inquiry, I hoped the study would inform my own teaching practice and the practice of others by highlighting a curriculum model that promotes intentionality, awareness, and appreciation of lived experiences. I thought this model could be applied within schools and university settings. I also wanted to provide a language whereby further *Living Inquiry* studies could be theorized.

Chapter Ten attempts to communicate my research in a way that both summarizes and leaves open the arguments I will put forth. In light of my (re)orientation towards hermeneutics (as understood and communicated throughout the thesis), I have decided to abandon the second intention, and only take up the first and the third. I no longer believe that *Living Inquiry* can be reduced to a model that could be turned out to each and every grade six/seven class (or any other setting for that matter). I have come to understand that reducing *Living Inquiry* into a replicable curriculum would change its very nature and thus, it would no longer be a *living* inquiry. The decision to abandon the second intention, in itself, speaks to my learning/transformation throughout the study. Yet this extraction should not suggest that I don’t believe in the abundance that *Living Inquiry* invites, as I would now like to explain. My hope is that my explanation will speak to my first and third intentions, with the
primary focus on the first: the way the study has informed my own teaching practice. I organize my thoughts around three guiding questions:

1. **What have I learned?** In this section I outline the pedagogical possibilities and vulnerabilities of *Living Inquiry* as I have come to understand them. I have replaced “possibilities and vulnerabilities” with “implications and responsibilities” because I believe the latter phrase better reflects my understanding of the teacher’s role in *Living Inquiry* as one of action and response.

2. **How have I changed?** Here I describe how *Living Inquiry* has impacted my interpretation of teaching and more specifically, who I am as a teacher.

3. **What do I still struggle with?** Lastly, I attend to four notions around the work that I find troubling or challenging. Here I do not try to solve or quell these concerns but instead leave myself open to living with questions. I have learned to see the value in uncertainty.

**What I Have Learned**

I have learned that my work in *Living Inquiry* is not free from assumption. The key thematics (drawn from my interpretation) are premised on the following: *Awareness* suggests that one is conditioned and has the capacity for awareness (to be wide awake) and authenticity. Authenticity is seeing our conditioning and recognizing our worldliness. *Natality* proposes that something new can come into the world; we (students and teachers) are “forces of change” (Donald Tapscott, 1998, cited in Smith, 2006, p.93). *Pedagogical tact* argues that teachers can know how to act and can act in a way that is helpful/responsive; they can be guides/facilitators. *Abundance* offers a belief in multiplicity, openness, and possibility; applied to curriculum, abundance offers a rich landscape for inquiry.
Living Inquiry, as I understand it, is taken up pedagogically when teachers attempt to enact the belief that Living Inquiry is a pedagogical engagement between child and teacher. Therefore, the teacher must “listen to [its] pedagogy so as to be able to act in a better way pedagogically tomorrow” (van Manen, 1997, p. 149). Teachers must be pedagogically oriented to each child in order to help/guide/respond/walk beside the child in a tactful way. Children are our kin. It is therefore the teacher’s responsibility to “understand them [and] … their kinship with them” (Jardine, 1998, p. 24). Living Inquiry aims to be more than a practice when a teacher of young people takes it up. It aims to provide a pedagogical space where children can take up inquiries related to being-in-the-world with an adult who will walk beside them.

I have found a language that summarizes my interpretations of the children’s and teachers’ understandings of Living Inquiry. These interpretations will be organized around two thematics based on David Smith’s (2006) positing of two directions for the future of education. He suggests that the purpose of education should (a) involve a sharing of the horizons of understanding and (b) be oriented to peace (p. 94). My thesis suggests that Living Inquiry invites participants to engage in both. Here, I am careful not to claim that these themes were enacted with all participants all of the time, hence the word “invitation” is emphasized.

I will now briefly describe each theme and the resonance I feel between the theme and my interpretations. Lastly, I will outline the pedagogical implications and responsibilities engendered in the pedagogy of Living Inquiry, with Smith’s themes in mind, and in response to my interpretations of the data. It is my hope that the abundant nature of Living Inquiry, meaning the presence of possibility, will be highlighted within my descriptions.
Sharing Horizons of Understanding

Explanation of the theme:

Smith (2006) defines the sharing of horizons of understanding as a coming together between the people involved in an inquiry. He posits that this coming together is “inherently conversational, open ended, and teleologically oriented to overcoming the alienation between human beings and between humans and the larger world” (p.94). Drawing upon Gadamer’s ideas, Smith explains that the engagement of sharing “horizons” is an act of understanding that aims to “clarify the relations between their own biographies and the respective research projects that hold their interest” (p.94).

Resonance between the theme and my interpretation of the data:

Meyer (2008) argues that “Living Inquiry provides a pedagogical space for young students to openly explore and begin to understand their own relationship with the world, and in doing so, conceivably resist the notion that they are always already determined and fated by it” (p.3). Understood through Smith’s notion of sharing of horizons of understanding, the teachers and students come to the relationship with their own biography, stories, and inquiries.

One such story is Trisha’s Self/Other field note. This field note, a rendering of her encounter with (her own) privilege or social positioning, appears to document her perception of her relationship with a boy depicted in the National Geographic magazine. Her biography as a white female with high socioeconomic status informs her interpretation of the event. This sense of privilege appears in other inquiries, such as Shane’s project questioning What decides our fate in life? and Steven’s poster on The Evolution of a City depicting an unproblematic, triumphant interpretation of Captain Vancouver’s discovery. These inquiries,
shared in class and/or at the gallery opening, opened up the possibility to examine one’s prejudices and privileges with the aim of calling these into question. However, this possibility seems to be realized (only) when the child’s interpretations are challenged in a sensitive, caring way, either by the child themselves or by another.

Referencing the children’s inquiries now, in light of my work in this thesis, I want to rewind time and somehow walk with these children in a way that interrupts notions of privilege and fate. I wish that I could help call into question the stereotypical viewing of the other and prohibit a loss of reality (Levinson, 1996) that occurs when we “lack [a] social understanding and [refuse] to take even the first step toward social transformation, which begins with recognizing one’s location in relation to others, and one’s implicatedness in a social system that attaches to one whether or not one wishes to face it” (p.5). But I meet my own limitations here: Even if I could go back in time, what could I say that would accomplish these aims without imposing my own views? Considering the sharing of horizons of understanding (as a summary of the thematics already described in the thesis), I recognize that my participation is limited to sharing my interpretation, constituted within my own “horizon” or the understanding of my shared experience in the world. I have learned that whatever response I construct, it will be both constrained by my biography and steeped in uncertainty.

Smith (2006) argues that the sharing of horizons of understanding is crucial in order for meaningful learning to occur, for coming together or knowing each other. This fosters mutual advancement, trust, and engagement. Believing that dialogue fosters mutual advancement, trust, and engagement, Smith suggests that, over time, sharing stories offers a “liminal reminder of the impossibility of corralling all of these stories into one conceptual or
interpretive schema, except of course the schema of difference” (p.94). Smith goes on to say that this schema of difference “brings people to an awareness of the deep need for tolerance and acceptance” (p.94). He encourages the breaking down of private spheres or “outing of difference” so that students can better see how their own history and their interpretation of others is historically constructed. I propose that this is where natality can be recognized. Smith offers the example of repair/renewal/recovery of relationships or “mnemonic reparation” (p.96).

Meyer (2008) echoes Smith’s argument: “Together awareness and inquiry promise something new to our being-in-the-world in terms of understanding inner and outer social forces and impulses” (p.7). In light of my reading (such as offered in the preceding quotes) and the data/interpretations shared in this thesis, I am suggesting that Living Inquiry invites opportunities for critical engagement with our own conditioning through the sharing of horizons of understanding between children and between teachers and children (it is unforeseen how the sharing of horizons of understanding may have, if at all, played out with parents at home or with the public at the gallery showing, or others).

From class discussions to the gallery opening, children and teachers were provided with a space in which to dialogue with others and share their own becoming, their own being-in-the-world. With this opportunity in mind, I now turn to the next (summary) thematic: Living Inquiry as an opportunity to be oriented to peace.

Orienting to Peace

Explanation of the theme:

The notion of being oriented to peace is explained by Smith (2006) in two ways: one, as “a kind of phenomenology of learning, which may be exemplified through attending closely
to the learning act itself” (p.94) and two, as finding peace in a collaborative effort to recognize that we (as humans) participate in a “mysterious unity” (p.97) or in a “commonness [that] transcends [both myself and the other]” (p.94). Smith elaborates on the latter point by arguing that “true learning means breaking the barriers that demarcate the line between what is known and what is yet-to-be-known” (p.94). He carefully outlines that learning oriented to peace does not translate into a “suffocation” of conflict (p.94) but rather invites reconciliation with the world, or an “entry into quiet wonder, a sense that as a human being one participates in an amazing and wonderful mystery” (p.97).

Resonance between the theme and (my interpretation of) the data:

Meyer (2005) has put forth that Living Inquiry is a participation in an inquiry that aims to see beauty, truth, and newness in everyday living. Although I have not committed the same energy to taking up this notion in my data interpretation as I did with the previous theme, I believe that many of the children’s inquiries, as evidenced in the poster excerpts, speak to the qualities engendered in the explanation of learning oriented to peace.

Referencing posters such as Emma’s My Quiet Place, Marc’s Rhythm and Lights, and Penelope’s Colour: the Beauty has Risen, I see a similarity to Smith’s (2006) exemplars that learning, oriented to peace, invites discovery of “the sheer beauty” of an experience and further, that these experiences “constitute a new kind of reconciliation with the world” (p.97). Being caught up in the beauty of a tulip (Meyer, 2007), or in the sway of twinkling lights, or in the pleasure of earthly spaces (Jardine, 1998) is a human, phenomenological experience. These ageless inquiries, in my opinion, speak to the “commonness” that Smith encourages because they draw us together in a shared experience. I recall Karen articulating this
commonness as part of the adult interview where we reflected on the “God lesson.” She poignantly remarked on the experience and the importance of these types of conversations:

She has dreams and I have dreams. Why can’t we talk about this? And imagine not talking about things that happen in the real world and people. I mean there’s that side that talks about it being dangerous and risky. The risk is not doing those kinds of things in the world. One person tells the story of what it meant to them, that is an opening up to where they can actually have empathy and you know they can actually listen to another point of view and they don’t all agree when we talked about some of these things.

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**Fig. 10.2 Think Dance Conceptual photo from student performance, Living Inquiry: Self/Other**

Smith (2006) offers tangible examples of learning oriented to peace such as reading a beautiful poem or playing a musical instrument. He describes these experiences, when, for example, the player, instrument, and score form a “mysterious unity … [when they] seem to participate in a reality, a truth even, that transcends any of the individual aspects. And it truly is a moment of peace, a moment of letting go” (p.97).
The field notes and projects included in the study suggest that the experience of peace could be documented as a living inquiry. For example, Nola often wrote about her experience as a dancer and how her passion to dance often overtook her. In her poster, Nola uses the concept of mediation to describe her interpretation of the relationship between a dancer and the dance. An excerpt from her poem follows as an illustration:

A dancer is a thought,
flowing, moving, breathing.
A dancer grows, and learns,
as a thought branches and expands.
If a dancer were to stop dancing,
she would fade out….

No one can stop a dancer,
and no one can stop a thought.

Reflecting and calling upon my own experience as a student of Living Inquiry, I recall that nature and the amazing aesthetic qualities it beholds was often the topic of my inquiries. Moreover, I found that my process of observation, documentation, reflection, and rendering of my lived experiences cultivated an increased sensitivity, or attention, to my being-in-the-world and helped me to see my life as my classroom. Consequently, the moments of practicing Living Inquiry became a way to live rather than a way to complete an assignment. Thus, in my own experience, I found that Living Inquiry was oriented to peace, and, to my pleasant surprise, in this notion I have found a language to express the mystic quality of the course that captivated me.

**Implications and Responsibilities**

The collaborative aspect of Living Inquiry has been highlighted throughout the thesis. Collaboration, in my opinion, holds the possibility for the thematics presented in this thesis to
be engendered. However, I have learned that the teacher’s role in the collaboration is vital, that he/she is not simply a bystander. The teacher must seriously and care-fully attend to the pedagogical encounter and be committed to considering/taking up the implications and responsibilities put forth in this discussion. If the teacher fails to do this, the work “can easily become stuck in a kind of self-aggrandizing narcissism if an effort is not vigilantly made to show how the dynamic at work in the pedagogical situation has reference in the broader world” (Smith, 2006, p.97). In other words, as a learner, I may need help to see how “my horizon is never just ‘my’ horizon, but one that opens out on to that of another, and as such is in a condition of perpetual revision toward a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the broader world” (Smith, 2006, p.97). Understanding and enacting Meyer’s notion of walking with the child is key.

In the effort to summarize the implications of taking up Living Inquiry with grade six and seven children, I will highlight three overarching suggestions, once again informed by Smith (2006) and flavoured by my understanding of natality.

“Outing of differences” (p.96):

Living Inquiry as a collaborative experience provided opportunities for private thoughts to become public. The possibility engendered here is that the inquirer may begin to understand that their opinions and assumptions are one of many interpretations, and that these assumptions are historically constructed and influenced by others (as articulated by Steven and Trisha). Further, the inquirer may become aware of the importance of troubling these constructs.
“Coming together” (p 96):

Sharing lived experiences evoked feelings of kinship (between humans or between humans and the Earth, including other earthly creatures) for some participants. Listening to one another, as Karen pointed out earlier in this chapter, served at times to build tolerance or even empathy towards others, cultivating the ground for reparation (although the outcome of this cultivation is not known and is beyond the scope of this thesis).

Reconciliation with the world or “finding oneself in the things of the world” (p.97):

Attending to lived experience of being-in-the-world appears to have the potential for the relationship between the subject of the inquiry and the inquirer to be foregrounded. In this way, our human worldliness, and the worldliness of the curriculum, can be recognized (or, in children’s words, “discovered”) as Karen attests: “It [the practice of Living Inquiry] really is paying attention to the world and I think that is a very different way to go into the world, with the notion of curriculum. It [Living Inquiry] is a very worldly kind of curriculum” (Karen, adult interview).

A teacher’s responsibilities during Living Inquiry are brought to life in the need for pedagogical tact. I have come to learn that a tactful presence is not something that one can simply establish and then maintain. It is a constant and continuous endeavour of becoming.

As a teacher charged with the care of children, and one who is committed to the notion walking with children (as described in the thesis), I must engage in my own Living Inquiries around my conditioning. I must continually try to be oriented to peace and to the engagement of sharing of horizons of understanding. Being informed and being open to the abundant nature of inquiry is key. For example, I must read about various phenomena in the world (e.g., my supervisor recommended Margaret Hunsberger on the time of text in
response to the Time Debate narrated in Chapter Two) so that I can take the children into
different spaces than previously explored. I need to be informed so that I can recognize and
open up the richness or potential of an inquiry. Being informed means appreciating and
seeking multiple interpretations, including those of a child, as Levinson (2001) instructs:

   To orient students to the world is thus not to impose a singular reading of this world
on them. Rather, it is to expose them to a representative sample of the many and
varied ways in which the world is experienced and interpreted by its inhabitants past
and present. (p.20)

   If these responsibilities were not all encompassing, I must also take up, in response to
the children’s field notes (Trisha’s Self/Other as one example) the “challenge … to create
spaces in which students can confront their sense of belatedness without feeling immobilized
by it. [Keeping in mind that], such spaces enable students to live out the wonder of being a
newcomer to the earth not by attempting to soar above their social positing but by
reconfiguring it in a meaningful way” (Levinson, 1996, p.6). How can I navigate this
challenge? Once again, I wish for a guidebook or instruction manual even though I know it is
impossible for one to exist!

   Krishnamurti (1969) reminds me that we alone can discover our own conditioning
and that it is futile to try to educate another while I myself am conditioned. Heidegger warns
me that I cannot produce clearings, neither for myself nor for others (Meyer, 2008).
However, as Meyer, Smith, Levinson, and others cited in this thesis have pointed out, a
teacher must be present, and be tactful, with each and every child and be committed to
walking alongside as he or she cultivates his or her own spaces for clearings to appear.
Teaching the world as it is and not how we wish it to be, to every child so that they begin to
recognize their own relationship with the work and take responsibility for it appears to be the
most important teaching responsibility. It also seems the most challenging within a neoliberal teaching context.

In my experience, I have often felt as though I missed opportunities or possibilities, either because I simply wasn’t there (reminiscent of my absence in some of the small group classroom discussions) or because I failed to recognize the potential of the inquiry. Unfortunately, with large class sizes, overwhelming amounts of prescribed curricula to “cover,” and countless other managerial tasks to attend to, attending to each and every child in the ways suggested in this chapter seems almost impossible. Finding the time to be informed seems incredibly daunting. However, I have found “pleasure in difficulty” (Jardine et al., 2006, p.x) and relished “the experience of having my attention drawn, of being whispered to, of having a calling” (Jardine et al., 2006, p.xxiii). As such, I cannot NOT take up the challenges that the work invites; I am compelled to continue.

**How I Have Changed**

*If we are alert enough to observe what lies along the way, perhaps when we return, as all pilgrims must, we shall find that there as been a change of heart.*


At the commencement of this study, as evidenced in my second research intention, I was ready to reduce *Living Inquiry* to a packaged curriculum that I could, at least in part, take credit for. Now, as I near the end, I have no such desire.

Understanding that *Living Inquiry* is not something I can pick up and replicate but rather something I can learn from has been paramount. One such learning has been about my own attunement to curriculum and to the children in my care. In other words, I have learned that I can’t box up *Living Inquiry* and market it, or transpose it onto students as the next
“answer” to the question of effective teaching, because then it’s not a living practice. Moreover, I can offer but one interpretation of *Living Inquiry*, and this interpretation will continue to evolve as I engage with others. Therefore, *Living Inquiry* cannot be put forth in an act of certainty because then it becomes something other than a *living inquiry*.

Further, in response to my desire to find “answers” or “best practices” through my graduate work, I have found that *Living Inquiry* is not the answer to teaching and learning; we shouldn’t abandon everything else and just do this. However, and instead, I believe we should strive for more of a balanced approach to instruction/curriculum/pedagogy, one that seeks multiplicity, as Aoki (2005b) describes. I anticipate that *Living Inquiry*, as part of my teaching practice, will help me in this endeavour.

Engaging in the study has influenced what I deem to be important in education, including my own learning. For example, I now recognize the importance and vitality in inquiring into my own belatedness, or attempting to *see* my worldliness so I can aim to take responsibility for my positioning and natality. By continuing to welcome inquiry and change, and attempting to *see* the other, including the other in myself, I am open to the small miracles that can and do happen all of the time (even when they go unnoticed). In this spirit, I acknowledge that the study has changed me in ways that I cannot yet comprehend, but I look forward to the “discovery.”

**What I Still Struggle With**

The thesis has invited me to recognize the gift of hermeneutics. I continue to be captivated by the readings addressing this orientation and struggle to make sense of living with uncertainty. I expect this endeavour will lead me on to future scholarly work.
It is important to confess that throughout the last year of the thesis I have been on an extended maternity leave. I have yet to reenter the classroom as a practicing teacher. I find myself both afraid of and inspired by the thought. I am fearful, not because I don’t want to teach but because I don’t want to conform. Additionally, I worry about pressuring my children to conform. In the words of Karen Meyer:

This is where we get down to the notion of conformity and where everybody conforms into this safe environment. It is very interesting in the day of a life of a student, which is a big part of the day, that we have so much conformity and so much prescribed things going on, you know in their daily life, that that they grow up to be good conformers. Is that what we need in education? Is that the point of Education? (Meyer, adult interview).

My engagement with the literature, especially around the discussions on neoliberalism as it is reflected in education, has reminded me to be concerned about the current (B.C.) education context. However, it would be irresponsible for me to deny the possibilities within this context. This study provides an illustration of the opportunity to engage with curriculum in abundance, in interpretive and “alternate” (Meyer, adult interview) ways within a prescribed mandate. What does that mean? Might this study in itself question the belief that a neoliberal context is fated in foreclosure? Might this study mean that the B.C. agenda is not so closed after all? At the same time, I cannot ignore the arguments that a neoliberal agenda is limiting and can reduce pedagogical relationships to commodifiable outcomes.

I anticipate a continued struggle to negotiate my understanding of a dominating neoliberal agenda, as an uncertain context in itself, and my philosophy of education. Pablo Casals captures my concern in the following quote: “Each second we live is a new and unique moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children?”
In addition, I continually worry about how to be present with each and every child in my classroom and not to succumb to dualistic notions (to trust or not trust, nor to subscribe to pedocentrism or adultomorphism). Although I believe that children need the opportunity to work alongside each other without the intrusive demands of an adult, I also understand that it is vital that a teacher guide children in the process of becoming. Negotiating the presence/absence involved in classroom inquiry will continue to be challenging.

Lastly, and this point connects with the first in this section, I find it both challenging and inspiring to (persistently) welcome the work with a beginner’s mind. Welcome, as I have come to understand it, and I borrow the words of Arendt here, is a gift that is “freely and gratuitously bestowed … because it is something we can neither earn nor deserve” (2007). A beginner’s mind, as Shunryn Suzuki (2006) professes, sees many possibilities, attending to and arriving at each experience as something new. In these ways nothing is ever completely understood nor attained.

With the invitation to welcome the work ignited by this thesis and to evoke my beginner’s mind in the spirit of new adventures, I call upon Dana’s advice from the following poster excerpt to guide me in my future endeavours, both scholarly and practical, and I leave you with her words:

Maybe things are meant to be a mystery and only the deepest thinkers will understand the true meaning, the whole picture of it all. It’s like the sayings “It’s not just black and white” and “You have to think outside the box.” There’s more to it. I think if we only live once, we should research and gain as much knowledge as we can and try to understand everything we see.

You never know, if you look twice, it could change your life.

---

32 Smith (2006) describes Kennedy’s (1983) concept of adultomorphism as “endeavouring to turn children into replications of the adult self to serve the needs of that self” (Smith, 2006, p. 93).
Behind the Scenes

A picture of a floating iceberg meets your eye. It shows the tip of the iceberg on top and, submerged, the bulk of iceberg beneath the water. Underneath the picture, in big words says: DISCOVERY. You see, above the water is a visible small iceberg but if you go deeper, beneath the surface of what you see, your outcome is different than what you expected.

There is more to life than what meets the eye. At least once in all our lives, we take things for granted and can't always see the 'big picture'. If you look beyond the surface and inquire more deeply, you will get a totally different perspective. If you think about it, it's like a movie.

"Lights! Camera! ACTION!" But what are behind the scenes? Makeup, actors, scripts, lights, directors, cameras, costumes, scenes and much, much more. It seems so real when you're watching it. But it's edited. Soundtracks and sound effects are added, scenes are cut to roll with each other. But in reality it's fake. Like movies, people edit too.

People make wrong and hurtful judgments on others without really knowing them, by judging from what they see on the surface. Unfortunately, we all do it, sometimes without thinking about it.

Maybe things are meant to be a mystery and only the deepest thinkers will understand the true meaning, the whole picture of it all. It's like the sayings, "It's not just black and white," and "You have to think outside the box." There's more to it. I think that if we only live once, we should research and gain as much knowledge as we can and try to understand everything we see.

You never know, if you look twice, it could change your life.

I remember when, as a class, we went to a museum. I would pass by artifacts and galleries of paintings, take one glance then walk away. I am reminded of an assignment we did with our class artist, Sandra. She gave each of us a magazine picture that was folded into several sections and clipped together. We unfolded the picture bit by bit. At each stage, we recorded our thoughts, feelings, associations, or predictions before unfolding it. Just a little more. My picture turned out to be totally different than what I expected. I wonder, what if we always opened the picture and we knew everything behind the scenes?

Dana

Fig. 10.3 Behind the Scenes, Living Inquiry Poster Excerpt, Language
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Student Recruitment Procedure

The recruitment procedure is a four-step process, carried out by the Learning Resource teacher (a third party). She is familiar to the students; she has worked in the classroom alongside the teacher during “regular” curriculum times.

1. Consent forms will be distributed to each child at the end of the school day. The Learning Resource teacher will briefly introduce the study using the following script:

*Mrs. Paterson has asked me to speak about her Masters research. As you know, your teacher has been working on a Masters thesis in curriculum studies. A thesis is a completed document of a study; it’s kind of like a book. This study explores what it means to be a student and a teacher of “Living Inquiry.” Ms. Paterson is interested in topics such as: how you create your work, how you talk about it, how you come up with your questions, etc. She is inviting each of you to be a participant in her study. If you and your parents agree THAT YOU MAY participate, your Living Inquiry work will be used as research. This means that observations of how you engage in “Living Inquiry” and pictures of your “Living Inquiry” assignments can be used in her thesis. An example of something she will include is a quote from a classroom debriefing session. I am giving each of you a form for your parents to read and sign. Please give this form to your parents tonight. Your parent is asked to return the form to me by this time next week. Feel free to discuss the study with your parents. If you parents agree to your participation, you will be asked to sign an assent form. We will discuss the form together at a separate meeting.*

The Learning Resource teacher will collect the consent forms and request a meeting with those students from whom consent has been obtained.

2. Assent forms will be discussed and distributed to students from whom consent has been granted. This will occur during a break time (i.e., recess) in the Learning Resource Centre. Students will have three days to return the assent forms to the Learning Resource teacher. The Learning resource teacher will read the following script:

*Thank you for your interest in the “Living Inquiry” study. To review, this study explores what it means to be a student and a teacher of “Living Inquiry.” Ms. Paterson is interested in topics such as: how you create your work, how you talk about it, how you come up with your questions, etc. She is inviting each of you to be a participant in her study. If you participate, your Living Inquiry work will be used as research. This means that observations of how you engage in “Living Inquiry” and pictures of your “Living Inquiry” assignments can be used in her thesis. An example of something she will include is a quote from a classroom debriefing session.*

Benefits to participating in the study include:

• Sharing your story about “Living Inquiry” and receiving feedback in classroom, and possibly interview, sessions
• Gaining a deeper understanding of how you learn

• Knowing that you helped to shape an alternative curriculum that may be used with future students

Participating in the study is OPTIONAL. Before you make your decision to participate or not, it is important that you remember that:

• You are not graded on your “Living Inquiry” work; therefore, participation in the study does not affect your grades

• Your privacy will be protected. You will be given a fake name in the thesis so that your work, comments, etc. will remain anonymous to the reader

• There are no negative consequences to not participating

Ms. Paterson is aware that you might feel pressure about this study in two ways. The first is to participate because she is your teacher. It is okay if you decide not to participate, or if you agree to participate and then change your mind. Participating in this study does not affect your relationship with Ms. Paterson. She will treat you in the same manner regardless of your participation. You will still be able to do “Living Inquiry” classes whether or not you are a part of the study. The second way that you might feel pressure relates to how you engage in “Living Inquiry.” You might feel pressure to share only positive experiences about “Living Inquiry.” Please know it is her job as a researcher to learn about various reactions to this curriculum. Regardless of your participation in the study, she wants you to be honest and to be yourself when engaging in “Living Inquiry.”

I will now answer any questions before handing out the assent forms. After we answer questions, we will read the assent form together. You may ask any questions about the form. Now that all questions are answered, please take a form, sign it, and return it to me in a sealed envelope within three days.

The Learning Resource teacher will collect the assent forms. She will request a meeting with those students from whom assent has been obtained, and that have two years of “Living Inquiry” experience. I will inform her of the three children who meet this criterion.

3. Three students will be invited to participate in the Interview portion of the study. These students were not previously recruited. Purposeful sampling will be used to explore “Living Inquiry” as pedagogy more deeply. Participants must have two years of “Living Inquiry” experience. There are only three students who meet this criterion. Parent Interview Consent forms will be distributed to these three students. This will occur during a break time (i.e., recess) in the Learning Resource Centre. Students will have one week to return the forms to the Learning Resource teacher. The Learning resource teacher will read the following script:
Mrs. Paterson is looking for Interview volunteers who have two years of “Living Inquiry” experience. Should you and your parents agree to participate, you will be involved in three, sixty-minute interviews. These interviews will take place at the school, between 3:15-4:15 p.m., sometime before June 29. I am providing you with a consent form to discuss with your parents. Please return the signed form in a sealed envelope, to me, within one week’s time. If your parents consent to your participation, we will meet one last time to discuss your assent form. I am happy to answer any questions before you leave.

The Learning Resource teacher will collect the Parent Interview consent forms and request a meeting with those students from whom consent has been obtained.

4. **Student Interview Assent Forms will be distributed to those students from whom Interview consent has been granted.** This will occur during a break time (i.e., recess) in the Learning Resource Centre. Students will have three days to return the forms to the Learning Resource teacher. The Learning resource teacher will read the following script:

*Thank you for your interest in the Interview portion of the study. Let’s read the assent form together so that you understand what is required of you. You may ask questions at any time. When you feel that all questions have been answered, you may take the form home to reflect on your decision. Please sign it and return it to me, in a sealed envelope, within three days.*
Appendix B: Interview Protocols

Sample Interview Questions and Protocols:

Interviews are intended to be semi-structured and open-ended thus allowing the researcher and the subjects to co-determine the interview topics and to probe for clarity during each session. The interview schedule is as follows:

- **One 60 minute semi-structured interview will be conducted with each one of the students who volunteered to be interviewed (0-3 students may volunteer)** to allow for individual reflections to be shared and feedback provided. The student’s artifacts (their original assignments) will be present to provide stimuli for discussion.
- **One 60 minute open-ended group interview with all students who volunteer to be interviewed (0-3 may volunteer). Participants will be asked to bring questions and topics of interest, relating to Living Inquiry, to discuss at the interview.**
- **One 60 minute semi-structured interview will be conducted with the artist-in-residence and curriculum consultant to share reflections and discuss points of interest, relating to Living Inquiry.**
- **One 60 minute open-ended group interview with the students who volunteer to be interviewed (0-3 may volunteer), the curriculum consultant, and the artist-in-residence to reflect on themes emerging from the study.**

The following are sample questions that will be asked during semi-structured interviews:

- What does Living Inquiry mean to you?
- We’ve talked about awareness as being central to Living Inquiry. What are your thoughts about that?
- Tell me how you engage in Living Inquiry (tell me about your projects).
- Has anything stood out for you when you reflect on Living Inquiry from last year? This year? If yes, can you provide specific examples? Why do you think those moments stood out for you?
- I’ve called “Living Inquiry” an alternative curriculum. What do you think?
- Do you think there is a place for Living Inquiry at school? If yes, where? If no, why not?
- Do you think I should introduce Living Inquiry to future students? If yes, how should that look? What would you recommend? If not, why?

At the end of the interview, I will ask the participants to bring any other thoughts, topics, or questions about Living Inquiry to the open-ended interview. Topics may include:

- Connections between Living Inquiry and metacognition
- Summative assessment and Living Inquiry
• The origin of Living Inquiry

The following is a script that I would use to commence an open-ended interview:

_The purpose of this interview is to talk and say anything we want about Living Inquiry. We can use the time to add to or change things we’ve said about Living Inquiry in past interviews. You can also ask me questions._
### Living Inquiry Weekly Project Criteria

_Given:_ That you will come prepared with your work complete and ready for sharing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>I did not put a lot of attention (awareness) into my work</td>
<td>I put some attention (awareness) into my work</td>
<td>I put much attention (awareness) into my work</td>
<td>I put great attention (awareness) into my work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The reader is left wondering where I was or what I was looking at</td>
<td>The reader has some idea of where I was and what I was looking at</td>
<td>The reader has a clear idea of where I was and what I was looking at</td>
<td>The reader actually feels as though they were with me while I was taking my field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creativity</strong></td>
<td>I did not put a lot of thought and effort into making my work visually appealing or demonstrate my message in a unique way</td>
<td>I put some thought and effort into making my work visually appealing and tried to make the presentation of my message unique</td>
<td>I put thought and effort into making my work visually appealing and I made the presentation of my project unique</td>
<td>I put much thought and effort into making my work visually appealing and tried a new technique when creating my product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Message</strong></td>
<td>I did not find any “gems” in my work</td>
<td>I found a “gem” but did not showcase it in my project</td>
<td>I found a “gem” and showcased it in my project</td>
<td>I found a “gem” and I showcased this effectively in my project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Living Inquiry Discussion Criteria

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<th>3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>I did not prepare a question</td>
<td>I prepared a close-ended question</td>
<td>I prepared an open-ended question that promoted discussion</td>
<td>I prepared a thought-provoking, open-ended question that promoted rigorous discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>I did not display any listening behaviours</td>
<td>I displayed few listening behaviours</td>
<td>I displayed some listening behaviours</td>
<td>I displayed many listening behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>I did not provided any feedback</td>
<td>I provided some general feedback</td>
<td>I provided specific feedback</td>
<td>I provided specific feedback that furthered the discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Listening Behaviours
- Nodding at appropriate times
- Asking for clarification
- Facial reactions at appropriate times
- Keeping hands free of objects
- Eyes on the speaker
- Saying “hm hm” at appropriate times

### Feedback Examples
- Saying “I noticed…”
- Saying “I liked”
- Saying “I’m wondering”
- Asking a question
- Sharing a connection
- Sharing a reaction
- Thanking the person for sharing
Appendix D: Sample Graphic Organizer Used in Study Year

**Fill in the following using your field note:**

**When I (location, time)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I’m concerned by...</th>
<th>I see...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My topic is...</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I wonder...</th>
<th>I feel....</th>
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<tr>
<td>What if...</td>
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<table>
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<th>I hear....</th>
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</table>

**Looking at this map, I want to consider more deeply....**

**This topic matters to me because....**

**I want this topic to matter to you (the viewer) because....**
Appendix E: Ethical Permission

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

<table>
<thead>
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<th>INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT:</th>
<th>UBC BREB NUMBER:</th>
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<td>UBC/Education/Curriculum</td>
<td>H07-00517</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Studies</td>
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INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

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<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>Point Grey Site</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other locations where the research will be conducted:
The study will be conducted in my classroom located at West Bay Elementary School in West Vancouver (SD #45).

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Misty Paterson

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
Living Inquiry as Pedagogy

REB MEETING DATE: April 26, 2007
CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: April 26, 2008

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:

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<td>May 12, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Consent Form</td>
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<td>May 12, 2007</td>
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<td>Parent Interview Consent Form</td>
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<td>Assent Forms:</td>
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<td>Student Assent Form</td>
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<td>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</td>
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<td>Interview Script</td>
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<td>May 12, 2007</td>
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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 Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</th>
<th>DEPARTMENT:</th>
<th>UBC BREB NUMBER:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne Phelan</td>
<td>UBC/Education/Curriculum Studies</td>
<td>H07-00517</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Site</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)</td>
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</table>

Other locations where the research will be conducted:
The study will be conducted in my classroom located at West Bay Elementary School in West Vancouver (SD #45).

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Misty Paterson

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
Living Inquiry as Pedagogy

EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL: February 12, 2010

APPROVAL DATE: February 12, 2009

The Annual Renewal for Study 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

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair