OF STONES AND SILENCES:
STORYING THE TRACE OF THE OTHER IN THE
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND TEXTILE TEXT OF ART/TEACHING

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Curriculum Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
APRIL 2006

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ABSTRACT

This inquiry explores the play of the personal and the ongoing work of becoming a teacher as it opens up the artistic, autobiographic, and incomplete textile text of art/teaching. It examines what can be learned from the personal and the reciprocity between a teacher's living and art/teaching. It seeks to make teaching and learning visible, open it to critical discussion, and to invite others to enter into complicated conversations concerning the particularities, intimacies, and undoings that shape the text of teaching and the becoming of teachers.

Using Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of relationality as the frame for this inquiry I explore how teaching can story the trace of the other. And in particular, how vulnerability, suffering, irreparable dependency, silence, absence and loss press in and obligate a response. In doing this my purpose is to move beyond a focus on agency, emancipation, and self-becoming and to consider those who cannot, and may not ever be able to, represent or speak for themselves. This means a move towards receptivity and susceptibility where the utterance and proximity of the other takes a more central role. It means listening and giving attention to difference and dependency and creating the conditions to learn from and be changed by the other.

Through a/r/tography, autobiography, art making, and writing as research I construct parallel narratives in image and in text. I recount personal narratives of bereavement and disability, how these experiences shape, provoke, and open up my art/teaching, and the difference they can make in curriculum, pedagogy, and art/teacher education practices.

This study situates autobiography as an inquiry that focuses not on my identity, or how I might become a better teacher or understand more fully my own life and art/teaching, rather how other's stories can weave through my own and find their own presence – an irreducible presence that preserves their alterity. It challenges artist/researcher/teachers to consider meanings beyond self and beyond individuals as rational and autonomous beings. And it prompts teachers to consider more deeply the difficulties and intimacies of their own lives and to consider these as the very substance and structures of their art/teaching.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This inquiry is first and foremost an expression of thankfulness for my son Nathanial's life and the wonderful difference that is him.

It is also offered in thankfulness for:

- My mother who showed me how a life is worked in textiles
- My father who knew the names of the mountains, stones, and trees
- My grandmother who understood silence
- And my daughters Shaina and Caileigh who have made a home with me

Rita Irwin
Carl Leggo
Marla Arvay
Who generously gave invaluable encouragement, support, and insight

Stephanie Springgay
Alex de Cosson
And the early a/r/tography group

Anne Phelan who introduced me to Emmanuel Levinas
Nadine Kalin who provoked my teaching by asking so many questions
Gabriella Minnes Brandes who remembers to look for the things that are missing
Kirsty Robbins who graciously gave advice and technical help

Friends far away who understand the hidden places

And my students throughout the years who have taught me to teach and continue to extend so many generous offerings and re-turnings.
This dissertation is an a/r/tographic inquiry that seeks to explore the play of the personal and the ongoing work of becoming a teacher. It responds to Deborah Britzman's (2003b) question "What does teaching do to teachers?" as it opens up the artistic, autobiographic, intimate, and necessarily incomplete textile text of art/teaching. So much about teaching is hidden in private and personal spaces - behind classroom doors as well as in the living of teachers' lives. To entertain a scholarship of teaching and learning it is necessary to make teaching and learning visible, to open it to critical discussion, and to invite others to enter into complicated conversations concerning the particularities, intimacies, and undoings that shape the text of teaching and the becoming of teachers.

This study is an investigation into these intimacies and the ways they shape and provoke teaching. On starting out I was particularly interested in the personal difficulties that influence who one is as a teacher. I started by asking questions regarding the relationships of loss and pedagogy. I was interested how difficult experiences, loss, grief, and suffering worked their way in and through teaching. That is, how these experiences shaped one's pedagogical beliefs and practices and how one's teaching, or more specifically art/teaching, resonated into and gave shape to these personal difficulties. Yet questions change and journeys often take unexpected turns. As I wrote, continued to teach, and work artistically I found myself provoked by bereavement, disability and the silences of my son's life. I began to wonder, in curriculum and pedagogy what do we do with disability, death, dependency, and vulnerability? When disabilities are extensive and ungraspable difference marks lives? Where those who have died can only speak or be known through the memory texts and utterances of others? Too often pedagogical conversations highlight agency, emancipation, and self-becoming yet in doing so leave out those who cannot represent or speak for themselves and do not acknowledge that there are those who cannot, and may not ever be able to, construct or voice their own stories. Some lives are lived in silence, remembered in absence, and known only through the texts of others. If a focus on agency and emancipation is not enough, what is education to do? And so I began to wonder - what would happen if curricular conversations shifted to embrace dependency relations - not just inter-dependency, but vulnerability, irreparable dependency, and susceptibility?

In this dissertation my engagement with and journey toward these questions is told in image and in word. The images and written text construct parallel (Watson & Smith, 2002) narratives. That is they speak to, inform, interrogate, and resonate with each other, yet are
not meant to illustrate, explain, or directly correspond to the other. Thus I have included the images without typical markers or explanatory text. The images speak in silence. And there is silence between image and word. Listen to them both.

The shape of this dissertation began with strands of clean unspun merino wool, a stone, and a pedagogical encounter. For the past several years I have been teaching in the Teacher Education Program at the University of British Columbia. Most frequently I have taught introductory art methods for pre-service elementary teachers, a course centering around a children's art program, and a textiles studio course. While I teach the textiles class I generally hold an informal open studio time one morning a week outside of class time. Although I am there to help with projects as needed most often I use the time to continue with my own artwork. It was on one of those mornings, with only one other student present, as we talked about things other than teaching and textiles that I picked up a stone and began to wrap it with wool. Talking and concentrating more on the conversation and shared moment I dipped the wool wrapped stone in hot soapy water and began to roll it in my hands.

Rolled round and round in my hands, with warm water and soap worked through, the fibers began to felt and take the stone's shape. When the felt was firm enough the stone was released by tearing an opening in the densely matted fibers. The small felt sculptural piece was then fulled firmly which reduced its shape to a hard, round, empty nest. It was exciting for both of us to be witness to the emerging forms. Then again, another stone, more wool, and the processes were repeated over and over. The finished pieces resting in rows and in my hands like small momentary encounters, held tenderly and expectantly. I imagined the tiny sculptures hung from the ceiling by the hundreds, grouped together and alone, falling so the viewer can look inside and walk in/between becoming part of the story: The experiences worked through the art now living again in different ways through others' lives. The student who was present for the beginning of these artworks has since moved away. But I think of her when I look at the felted forms and our conversation and encounter still resonates though this work.

I began the felted forms at the same time as beginning to write this dissertation. While these particular artworks were never intended to illustrate or even inform my writing each came into being alongside the other, evolving out of similar questions as I inquired into the relations and disruptions of suffering, loss and grief and teaching. I had been inquiring into the relationships of loss and teaching for some time. Life with my son and the disabilities that marked his life had directed much of my work to this point. Absence, loss and difficulty were themes already present in my artistic and academic pursuits.

Art was also a familiar way of dealing with life’s troubles. At the time I started the stones project my parents had both just passed away and I had been deeply feeling their absence
and was concerned at how the disruptions of bereavement had discomforted my teaching. And so it seemed a natural thing to do to turn to art making as a way of making sense of life's experiences. Yet as I continued to dwell with/in and artistically respond to these experiences, my felted sculptural artworks at a deep and profound level began to shape how I viewed and thought about my writing. After a time the stones, wool, water, and felt, the small circularly shaped forms, the openings and releasings, began to speak to and shape the process, means, and substance of this inquiry.

The center part of this dissertation was written first, at the time of most intense disruption during the immediacy of my parents' deaths. I tried to preserve the difficulty of the living/writing/creating even as I wrote, re-wrote, and edited the chapter *Ways of being (undone)*. The remaining chapters were written later and worked and rearranged around this one like wool wrapped around stone and worked into felt: The experiences and layers of understandings written over and over in multiple turnings and re-turnings. It wasn't until after I had started writing these chapters that I was introduced to the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, which prompted further turnings and re-turnings as his ideas were worked through the text.

While I can't present this dissertation in the manner it was written as if to chart a journey from beginning to end I will ask that you stay open to the circular wanderings as you read: Each turning like stitchings repeatedly piercing and returning through the cloth, moving ahead and backwards again as the needle and thread work their patterns, or like wool turned and re-turned as it is worked into felt. Write in if you will your own imagings and imaginings and allow time for the thoughts here to work their way into your own stories as well.

*For perhaps we are like stones; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us, we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung.*

*Susan Griffin, 1992, p. 8*
I very feel fortunate to have entered into curricular conversations (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995) at this particular time and at this particular location. At a time when curriculum inquiry in Canada is emphasizing issues in social justice, hidden curriculum, phenomenology, hermeneutic inquiry, lived experiences, autobiography and narrative inquiry, personal and relational ways of knowing, action research, living practices, artistic and interpretive forms of inquiry, and multiple voices and experiences (see Chambers, 2003). Where there is "difficult and dangerous work" (Chambers, 2003, p. 224), where self is implicated in one's work, and where, according to Deborah Britzman (2000), those involved in curriculum inquiry cannot simply do research or write narratives of teaching/researching but must continue to interrogate their own teaching, researching, questioning, and narrative practices. And I feel particularly fortunate to have entered these conversations at this location, at the University of British Columbia, in the midst of the emergence of a/tography, innovative and artistic inquiry, and poetic and narrative curriculum explorations, and in Western Canada where curriculum scholarship resonates with the writings and teachings of Ted Aoki. His voice lingers and resounds in the conversations and inquiries that seek to understand curriculum as an in/between space and artistic/aesthetic text, textured with the ways of poets and artists: Illuminating curriculum as a tensioned and inspirited site of difficulty and space of generative interplay in/between curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived.

Although I only have met Ted Aoki on a few occasions his writings have caught my imagination as his work draws educators into lingering in the in/between and opens up possibilities for "(re)conceptualizing the forgotten spaces" (Irwin, 2005, p. xx). He provokes curriculum to come alive in a multiplicity of pedagogical encounters, attending to the lived worlds of teachers and students and to the "beingness" (Aoki, 2005/1991, p. 369) of teaching. He invites us to hear curriculum not just as a noun or a verb rather as a sound that "sounds and resounds in an inspirited way" (p. 369). This hearing allows space for composing curriculum as a polyphony of voices and courageous, generative conversation.

Such conversations were already in progress as I came into curriculum studies at university. In one sense I quite literally entered in the midst of ongoing conversations as I arrived a week late to my first graduate class and to a group fellow students who already knew each other. I spent most of my first weeks and months trying to orient myself to language, thought, and conversations that rendered art/teaching and curriculum uncomfortably strange and unfamiliar. I felt distinctly discomfited and out of place and it took me some time to join
in the conversation and locate a personal place from which to speak. Yet the conversations, grounded in inquiry, were open and inviting. They called out to the deep things of my heart and opened up and disrupted that which was familiar and secure. The conversations shifted and took shape through the voices that joined in and the questions and inquiries of others echoed into my own. Through these conversations I learned to value and attend to the personal and see curriculum as an in/between lived space. And I have been deeply grateful to those around me, particularly Rita Irwin and Carl Leggo, who have understood curriculum as lived/living, personal, autobiographical, artistic, and relational and encouraged me to take seriously what I knew and had experienced.

This was in distinct contrast to my first entry into education as an undergraduate student in the early 1980s. I began my studies in a four-year Bachelor of Education program with a major in art education a year after high school. The focus in this program was on teaching and what it meant to be a classroom teacher and my first surprise was to find how disconnected understandings of teaching/being a teacher was from joy in learning and children's experiences. In these contexts I was presented with methods and procedures for teaching curriculum as content and found little that inspired the artistic, aesthetic, personal, and relational connections that I sought. I had difficulty finding a personal place within which to create meaning and understandings of teaching, and other than a few art education classes, little stood out as memorable.

Of course I thought I knew a lot about teaching in those days as many pre-service teachers do (see Britzman, 2003b). I had spent a good part of my life to that point caring for younger siblings, and informally and formally teaching in a variety of settings. Even my earliest childhood games consisted of making my siblings, cousins, and any friends who wandered by attend the school I held each summer vacation in our garage. I would stand at the head of the class in front of a makeshift blackboard and make my students perform rituals and behaviours of schooling – spelling tests, workbook exercises, reading, and arithmetic sums. And I acted out the roles of a teacher – telling students what to do, disciplining errant students with far more harshness than I had ever been afforded, keeping careful control, and making sure everyone completed their homework. We acted out (and greatly exaggerated) behaviours of teachers and students and although sometimes we danced and created art and left some spaces for imaginings and artful renderings, in general we thought we had learned the ways of schooling. What it meant to be teachers and students had been scripted in stories and narratives told over and over again in numerous ways, in the books we read, in the stories we heard, and we knew (or we thought we knew) what schooling expected and what it meant to learn, teach and be students or teachers. I had been in schools since I was three, had watched many different
kinds of teachers, experienced a variety of educational spaces, and had assumed some kind of a teaching/caring role most of my life. As a result when I got older becoming a classroom teacher seemed like a natural thing to do. However I don't remember encountering anything in the education program that either engaged with or disrupted my personal knowledge or understandings of teaching.

At the same time as entering the education program at university I enrolled in a private Montessori early childhood teacher-training program that was held in the evenings at a local Montessori pre-school. I had hoped the two educational experiences would inform and enrich each other and I would find my way to understanding teaching in new an imaginative ways. The instructor of the Montessori program was an ex-Catholic nun who was passionate about teaching and life and inspired us to think holistically about education. She told us stories of learning (and not teaching or being a teacher) and imagined and lived the hope that education could become something more than it was already. She saw this hope in the students she taught and invited us to imagine, explore, create, and find joy in occasioning learning. Somehow she was able to pass on the intangible - like gifts given freely without expectation of return – joy, anticipation of newness, wonder, and respect for life. In spite of some of the constraints and didactics of the Montessori method my early entry into Montessori brought alive the heart or the "seed qualities" (Miller, 1999, p. 201) of Maria Montessori's ideas. That is to carefully listen and to respond to young children, to welcome them into environments of learning, and to see them as strong and capable learners. Teacher preparation was presented as a moral and spiritual endeavour that called for humility, compassion, and careful attentiveness to children and to learning. And I was deeply inspired by the promise that education could participate in re-creating the world, ideas that echoed Hannah Arendt's notion of natality as "the essence of education" (Levinson, 2001, p. 13). I also found an intimate attention to the particular and to the tactile, sensual, and material things of life - a connection to everyday life and the daily work of learning (see also Grumet, 1988).

My experiences at university were quite different. I tried to bring some of Montessori's ideas into conversations in the teacher education program yet wasn't able to find openings, invitations, or the necessary conditions of inquiry. Most ideas I encountered were too abstract and disconnected from my lived experiences and personal understandings. And I remember no opportunities for constructing understandings or reflecting on and bringing into presence things from my personal history or experiences. Of course the contexts were different and early childhood education quite naturally held connections to the personal, intimate, and private spaces of home. Yet at that time these were not presented to me as valid ways of knowing or coming to know in university teacher education contexts.
I remember it was late in the springtime, just before our first two-week practicum in the schools, and even now I recall the light breeze from the open classroom window, the distant fragrance of the blossoming trees, and the feelings of disorientation evoked in the memory. My classmates and I sat in a circle and our instructor, trying somewhat awkwardly to initiate a conversation, asked us to begin to articulate our personal pedagogies. I don't remember exactly what I said yet I distinctly remember realizing afterwards that this had been some kind of a test and somehow I got it “wrong”. What I said did not resonate with what my instructor had wanted to hear and I'm sure was too vague and impractical. Also I drew on personal experience and ideas outside of mainstream education for my inspiration when I should have referred to currently favoured theories and practices. I found out then, much to my surprise, that there was a “right” or acceptable way to think about education and pedagogy and that I should have been certain, ordered, structured, and had listened better to what I had been taught. I thought my task was to gather thoughts and ideas, figure out my own way, and develop a personally meaningful pedagogy that would see education transformed or brought to life in new ways. I expected to be able to make connections to personal knowledge and experiences outside of schooling but instead I had been expected to mirror back the truths and structures of the system. The conversations were already set and I could see no possibilities for change or openings for newness. At that time finding my place within the conversations meant echoing words already spoken. Natality was foreclosed and it became evident to me that I would have to take other routes into teaching.

Shortly after that event I transferred out of education and completed my degree in visual arts. The arts were more personal and there was space to pursue more ambiguous and connected ways of knowing – things I did not find at that time in education. And I was encouraged to ask questions, to “not know”, to explore, inquire, learn and continue to discover. However, this lack was not entirely the fault of the education program. I was young and inexperienced and many of the structures and ways of public education were unfamiliar to me. And of course, it may be that at that time there were opportunities for connecting to lived experiences but for some reason I didn’t see or appreciate the openings that were presented. It appeared to me that I had come into an educational world already fixed and determined and I did not know (how) I could speak back. I just knew something was not right, I did not fit there, and I was not able in that environment and at that time to connect my personal knowledge, hopes and wanderings to thinking about teaching. The language, thoughts, ideas, and imaginings that would later lead me had not yet been brought to my attention as possibilities. And I could see no space for wondering, uncertainty, or personal journeys of inquiry. While I could not find my place in the conversation at that particular time I felt
certain that at some point I would find my way back.

Over the years I made several attempts to return. After completing my B.F.A. in visual arts I spent a few years as a Montessori preschool/kindergarten teacher and taught extensively in galleries and art centers. I took occasional evening and summer education courses and applied for entry into various B. Ed. programs hoping this time there would be openings for change and personal inquiry (yet each time decided not to take up that journey). It wasn't until years later that I found my way back to K-12 public educational contexts in university as a graduate student. At the same time I entered teacher education, a place where curriculum is embodied and lived in multi-layered complexity, as I worked with generalist elementary and art specialist secondary pre-service and practicing teachers.

Yet as a teacher-educator I have always been very aware that I have come from outside of mainstream K-12 classroom teaching. Certainly I have had very personal connections and a deep interest in what goes on in schools as my three children have attended public schools, and the imagination of education and care of children and youth passionately concerns me. And I can say with some confidence that at this point in my life I have learned a great deal about teaching, learning, children, art, and art making. Nevertheless, my views of teaching, curriculum, and pedagogy have not been from the “inside”. While I have been in elementary and secondary classrooms as a frequent visitor, regularly taught art classes as a volunteer, conducted professional development art education workshops for teachers, completed various short practica, and have observed and taken part in classrooms as a researcher, I have never worked as a K-12 public school classroom teacher or viewed education from that position. In fact I never even went to public school as a child – I spent my preschool, kindergarten, and primary years at a small rural Montessori school, one year at a Catholic elementary school, and the remainder of my schooling at a small private girls school – the same school where my mother and aunt had worked as domestic help when they first arrived in Canada as refugees and stateless persons following the Second World War. Most of my experiences of teaching and learning have been in alternate settings. And what I have come to know of learning, teaching and being a teacher is not located in the contexts that most of my students will teach in.

So as a teacher-educator, preparing students to teach art primarily in public school elementary classrooms, my position has always been as an outsider trying to make sense of mainstream education, K-12 classroom teaching and what it means to teach and be a teacher. I find myself constantly trying to make sense of things that are not my experiences and that I can never fully know. My understandings of what it means to be a teacher in schools has always remained somewhat elusive, uncertain, and strange - understandings that are never finished and in a constant state of unknowing. Yet I continue to draw on this as a certain
advantage. Schooling is very stable, recognizable and constant (see Jackson, 2004/1968) and I am convinced outside voices are necessary for its re-imagining (see Kind, Irwin, Grauer & de Cosson, 2005). Being a teacher in schools also comes with certain expectations for certainty and knowledge and there is value in disrupting and opening up the given of teaching.

Also this unfamiliarity has meant I have not been able to fix teaching or being a teacher into a specific role. I see teaching as something that is held open, responsive, and changes with its contexts. It is not limited to the structures of public school classrooms but is far more fluid and permeable. It shifts with the contexts of one’s teaching and the institutional structures of that teaching. And it is made up of who we are, the substance of our lives, and the personal, intimate, intuitive, imaginative, and elusive. Rather than simply a role it is a way of being, or more specifically an autobiographic way of being-in-relation.

Understanding teaching as autobiography is often seen as the relationship between what I have experienced, my past, and history and how I teach or think about teaching – that there is a direct correlation between who I am and how I teach. Yet teaching is also what I am not and what I do not know. It is much more than recollection and self-knowledge (see Todd, 2003a). Yet how can I teach teachers and bring into being that which I do not know? To teach in this way means responding to the obligation and responsibility of the face-to-face with pre-service teachers – always listening, watching, trying to make sense of teaching so that I can “do right by” my students – their presence calling forth better ways of being, demanding of me to be a better teacher, to open up teaching, to help them make sense of teaching and find their way through it. Their presence reveals my own lack (that I do not really know classroom teaching) yet calls to me to be more than I am and to become more that I contain. Emmanuel Levinas proposes that this is teaching and learning – that learning is receiving from the other more than the self already holds. In this view, “teaching is only possible if the self is open to the Other, to the face of the Other. Through such openness to what is exterior to the I, the I can become something different than, or beyond, what it was; in short, it can learn” (Todd, 2003a, p. 30).

It is...to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation, is...an ethical relation; but inasmuch as it is welcomed this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain. (Levinas in Todd, 2003, p. 29-30)
In this sense learning does not come from me but emerges in response to my students as we are both positioned as learners and teachers of each other. As Claudia Eppert (2000) explains, "Levinas shows the real structure of learning to proceed not from the self but from one's encounters with the alterity of a unique other. The other thus becomes the teacher who teaches me a responsive/responsible relation with him or her" (p. 222).

And so I traveled far to return to the distant near place (Pinar, 2005) and found myself called back to this lived ground of where I am already – back to personal experience, artful explorations and renderings, connections, relations, and teaching inquiries. And back to contexts of classroom teaching and what it is to learn, teach, and be a teacher.

It understands such a place as a resonant place where emerging from the silence may be heard the movement of melody and rhythm – polyphonic voices of teaching. Where might such a place be? Paradoxically, the place is where we already are – a place so near yet so far that we have forgotten its whereabouts. (Aoki in Pinar, 2005, p. 77)

At the time that I made my way back into conversations on curriculum and education in graduate studies I found myself being invited into conversations that welcomed and encouraged personal connections, relational understandings, and artistic and aesthetic ways of knowing. I was drawn into the provocation of questions and invited to linger in artistic inquiry spaces. Yet while I have been privileged with rich, inspired, and artistic curricular conversations throughout my graduate studies I have found the school curriculum that my students engage with still coloured by the language of standardization, measurable objectives, predictability, control, compliance and accountability. Each year I send my pre-service teachers out into classrooms and teaching situations haunted by the ghosts of Tyler and Bobbitt. Tyler’s rationale still speaks between the lines of carefully ordered lesson plans and prescribed learning outcomes. My students still feel the pressure to fit learning into neatly ordered sequences. And teaching and learning demands certainty, sameness, similarity, and normalization.

Over the 8 years that I have worked in teacher education I have seen a slow but steady move towards standardization with the emergence of teaching standards as well as curriculum documents demanding greater control and accountability. There seems to be an increasing emphasis on curriculum as plan and as content. And over the years I have observed a growing anxiety in my students over the demands and structures of schooling and larger gaps emerging between what we imagine education could be and what is expected of them in elementary school classrooms. Of course, it may be that this gap is growing larger, or it may be that over the years I have become more acutely aware of the dissonances, hearing them in a multitude of ways.
as they constrain and silence the lived in, living, textured spaces of feeling, fantasy, imagination, memory, and relationality. And so I teach in this in/between space – between curriculum as lived and curriculum as plan, between teaching as lived and teaching/being a teacher as an already determined discourse, between structure and freedom, imagination and constraints. Between the given and the imagined, the saying and the said (see Levinas, 1969).

**Continuing conversations**

If we consider curriculum not as a noun or a “thing” (for example, content, courses, teaching plans, instructional methods or procedures) rather as a living matrix, system of relationships (Doll, 2002) and polyphony of voices, or *conversation*, then knowledge is conceived in personal terms and actual lived and bodied experiences and relations. It places communication and inter-relationships at the very center of educational experiences and emphasizes a “life of meaning, with ambiguities, and with relationships” (Greene, 2000, p. 107). Certainly students, teachers, and texts are elements that constitute curriculum. Yet, as Madeline Grumet (1996) writes, “What is basic is not a certain set of texts, or principles or algorithms, but the *conversation* that makes sense of things. Curriculum is that conversation” (p. 19). Curriculum is stories of connection and separation, of textured lives, and learning, loves and losses: a tangle of lives and lines (Rasberry, 2001) where there are no easy answers. Curriculum is the conversation (Doll, 2002), or more specifically, the *complicated* conversation (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995) of making meaning.

Thinking about curriculum as conversation takes on a certain informality and intimacy. Conversations weave in and amongst the theoretical, practical, professional, and personal, taking twists and turns coloured with imaginings and wonderings. Such conversations require “true human presence” (Aoki in Pinar, 2005, p. 80) and are always situated with/in the complex relations that constitute teaching and learning.

Conversation is oriented to developing meaning over time, in and through relations... a flow that is often recursive, picking up from previous encounters... Conversation is an occasion, an event fully contextual but irretrievable, present only in the moment, because the sound of the words is instantly gone. It is both sound and silence pregnant with past, present, and future – and more... Part of the rhythm of conversation comes from the back and forth as speakers respond to each other, but the other part is the rhythm within the speaker, between sound and silence. Silence is not simply the absence of speech: it signifies spaces, gaps, and discontinuities in conversation, which have significance in admitting the untidiness, complexities and resistances in real life...
Conversation is a process of making sense not of the words that are spoken (although it is surely this, too), so much as responding to “the other” through one’s senses. Instead of responding to words, one responds to the voice, the call. (Trueit, 2002, p. 273-275)

While conversation generally means an interchange of thoughts, words, discourse or talk, according to William E. Doll (2002), its more historical meaning refers to the idea of “passing one’s life, living or dwelling in or with” (p. 49), and from the Latin conversare, which literally means to turn oneself about. It has the same roots as the word converge, which means “to approach the same point from different directions...to tend toward a common conclusion” (p. 49). Thus conversation and convergence are bound together and through conversation we turn ourselves about and converge or come together. Conversation is a bridging (Aoki, 2005/1981) or coming together to understand more deeply our worlds, differences and positionings: To understand more fully that which is not said or cannot be said and to cultivate wisdom, understanding, and an awareness of being and dwelling together in educational spaces.

Hans-George Gadamer (1993) writes that true conversation is one that we do not choose, rather one that we fall into and become involved and immersed in: True conversation captures us.

...a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation...a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it - i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists. (p. 383)

Conversation is the often difficult process of coming to an understanding (Gadamer, 1993) and as we loose ourselves and give ourselves over to such conversations we are transformed (Doll, 2002). Therefore, our task is not just to speak with integrity, humility and courage but also to listen well and deeply so that we can hear back our own words and the words of others. As Cynthia Chambers (2003) insists, “those working/writing/teaching (in) curriculum must continue to seek ways and opportunities to speak and listen to another” (p. 229). And it is necessary to tell difficult stories, call into question other stories, find ways to listen carefully to the words, actions, and silences of others, and to hear the polyphony of voices even though
some may be some silent, so that the conversations can continue.

Autobiography and narrative inquiry offer "creative ways to enter such conversations while carrying on the interpretive (i.e. the creative, linguistic, and political) work necessary for the conversations to continue" (Chambers, 2003, p. 229). Narrative, poetic, artistic, and interpretive acts are necessary as they situate what and how we know in time and place (Grumet, 2000) and leave room for multiple interpretations and slippery, uncertain, and generative evocations. Artistic interpretive acts are necessary as they leave some things always unsaid and ambiguous, leaving openings for continued explorations and discoveries. In conversation, interpretations are coloured by the thoughts and understandings of others and are evoked in the company of others (whether individuals, texts, artworks, or others). As David W. Jardine (2003) writes, “Interpretation does not begin with me. It only begins when something happens to me in my reading of a text, when something strikes me, tears me open, “wounds” me and leaves me vulnerable and open to the world, like the sensitivities of open flesh” (p. 59). The possibility of such interpretive tales and autobiographical tellings is whether they can lead to more open and generous understandings of the lives we are already living and provoke creative and generative re-turnings and responses.

Listening as an ethical encounter and attending to the otherness of the other, is a necessary condition for keeping the conversations ongoing. Thinking beyond self and radical openness to that which is “other than” ourselves is essential in community and in continuing curricular conversations in meaningful and potentially transformative ways. Western conceptions of community and conversations have focused primarily on that which unites, or is the same as and has paid little attention to the value and contribution of difference. It is this respect for an other’s “otherness” which, according to William E. Doll (2002) is critical and essential in the ethical, political, and pedagogical challenge of postmodern education. Teaching and learning in the space of difference or heterogeneity rather than sameness, means rethinking our relations within in spaces of difference.

Conversations that are resistant to resolution, that generate understandings rather than finality, and are always open to readdress, provoke us to reconsider curriculum, teaching, and learning in new ways. Although true conversation does require seeking out some common ground, it does not reduce participants in that conversation to the “the same”. Rather it seeks out a common ground in the midst of difference, sustaining tensions (Jardine, 1998).

In our busy world of education, we are surrounded by layers of voices, some loud and shrill, that claim to know what teaching is. Awed perhaps by the cacophony of voices, certain voices became silent and, hesitating to reveal themselves, conceal themselves.
Let us beckon these voices to speak to us, particularly the silent ones, so that we may awaken to the truer sense of teaching that likely stirs within each of us. (Aoki, 2005/1992, p. 188)

Curriculum as a complicated conversation attends to personal understandings and to the voices and echoes of others. It attends to the non-human world and ecological relationships. And it attends to that which is beyond self. It is the inter-relationships, interactions and conversations with others and in community that forms the process of curriculum (Doll, 2002). Additionally, conceiving of curriculum in personal terms, as a conversation, and particularly as inter-textual conversations reminds us that “between the formal texts of curriculum is another kind of life, the life that mediates, announces, repudiates, or cajoles curriculum formalities” (Smith, 2003, p. xvi). It is in this in-between space that provides a ground for negotiating conversations (Smith, 2003), a space that is always relational, particular, and assumes an “other”. It is a tensioned place of perpetual incompleteness marked by openness, generosity, courage and ethical relationality. It necessitates trust, love, humility and faith (Friere, 1970), ethical action, and mindful participation as “the labor of coming to a mutual understanding...is never over, always ongoing, and sustainable only under the shadow of love” (Smith, 2003, p. 46).

I hope in these pages to provoke curricular conversations that unsettle teaching and the certainty of being a teacher and to see teaching as an autobiographic, personal, lived, relational and artistic way of being. I hope to give insight into teaching as an act of ongoing living inquiry rather than something that is fixed or closed. I hope these conversations in turn will provoke changes to the landscapes of teaching and learning so that we may hear curriculum in a new key (Aoki, 2005/1978) – not thinking we know or have found a certain and secure way through teaching, but taking time to listen, attend to, hear, and respond to the difficulties, tensions, and complexities of living the curriculum. This of course requires courage, humility, and an intimate attention to the humanness of teachers’ lives.

This dissertation is an invitation to keep the conversations going and to provoke new perceptions and understandings: To attend to the tensions and difficulties of living the curriculum; To draw education into a receptive space of listening to and learning from difference; To consider what listening requires and to take up the risks and disturbances inherent in careful listening; To hear the silent/silenced voices, and those that cannot speak; To feel the textures and complexities of personal understandings as they weave through, stitch together and undo the teaching; And to consider the work of teaching and learning as an ethical encounter and fine risk.
CHAPTER 1: JOURNEYING TOWARDS LOSS

The only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in.

Parker Palmer, 1998, p. 2
It has taken me a long time to get to this point of writing. It has been an extended, drawn out, sustained tangled time of living, questioning, teaching, and re-searching. I lived with the stories felt them in my bones and in my blood for many years before they began to take shape in image and in word. I knew them in intimate, intangible, and voiceless ways as stories of difficulty and loss often are known. Hiding between the lines of my life, weaving in and out, like threads stitching together fragments, piercing, gathering, and creating seams like scars.

It was my encounter with the visual that spoke to me first and began to give shape to the silent and private experiences. The images led me before I knew what I was looking for and before I was able to articulate the deep stirrings and difficulties that had taken hold of my life (Wilson, 2004, 2000). They opened up ways of seeing and experiencing and drew me back to times as a child sitting on the moss covered rocky bluffs overlooking the waters of the Juan du Fuca Strait, dreaming, forming stories in my mind, watching, feeling the sun and breeze, and drinking in the fragrant blackberries, sun browned grasses, and salty ocean air. They acted as a provocation to see, hear and listen and called me to linger for a while in stillness and in solitude.

The images spoke to me and led me in unexpected ways. The rounded out hollows worn by water and stone opened to secret places, offered glimpses into hidden mysteries, and invited me to venture further in. I encountered in the images promise and difficulty, remembrances of things long forgotten, and unforeseen possibilities. They spoke to me of loss and hope, of grief and joy, of expectation, generativity and the uncertainty of the unknown. And the ocean front landscape, once so familiar, was now rendered new and strange and drew me in to deeper explorations.

I went on frequent walks during the years of most intense shifting and disruption. Outside in the forest and at the beach, camera in hand I was urged on by a pressing restlessness and need to find something and make sense of my experiences. In my searching and wanderings photographs taken along the way began...
to make hidden knowledge visible. In the sandstone shoreline, sculpted worn and timeless, in the openings and crevices in/between the rocks, in the tangle of roots, fallen seeds and intricate and fragile skeleton leaves I began to see incredible beauty. My photographs made me stop, look, notice, and sit for a while, allowing the difficulties of the years to sink in and make themselves known.

With my camera as my guide and with photographs reflecting back the world around me I saw seasons and cycles. Birth, life, and death. Earth and stone that had seen the changes of centuries. Elements that were there long before I was part of this world, and processes that would continue long after. I felt my place small and insignificant beside the awe and wonder of the vast ocean and the mystery of the ever-changing natural world. And I found myself lost in time and taking time to listen, to breathe, to step into the cycle of seasons, connected to heart and earth (Leggo, 2001), learning, and re-learning to embrace the difficult, to release and let go.

Then words emerged out of the long wordless nights shaped through years of caring for my son through critical illnesses and severe pain. Dark and silent endless nights spent at his bedside watching death on his face and hearing it in his breath leaving me with stories whispered in secret and held in the private places of my heart.

If I were to write those years I imagine it would be in a book filled with blank pages, page after page dark, still, and empty except for the barely audible sound of his shallow irregular breathing and the heavy stale strangely sweet and sweaty odor of his body. The reader would sit in silence, listening and waiting. And when time had stretched out so long that there was nothing to do but wait and the reader had learned to be still and to attend closely to the nuances of the darkness knowing the differences between the times of the night and feeling in her bones the coming morning long before the first hints of dawn, then the stories would emerge.
Silence is the home of the word. Silence gives strength and fruitfulness to the word. We can even say that words are meant to disclose the mystery of the silence from which they come...Silence teaches us to speak. (Nouwen, 1981, p. 34, 35)

I spent years with that silence waiting. Waiting to see whether he would live or die knowing no future, only the present. What I couldn't see then was that it was an in/between time. In between what Arthur Frank (1999) calls the life before and the life after: in the chasm separating two worlds or ways of being. In times of significant narrative disruption such as these, life as one knows it is irrevocably changed and new narratives and understandings of self and one's place in the world must be written. I had been at this place first with his birth bursting in on the apparent calm of my life so that what I knew and how I understood myself was indelibly marked and separated into a life before his birth and a life after. He had been born with extensive multiple disabilities yet his birth was a relatively easy adjustment. It was the foreboding of his absence that was far more difficult.

In saying that his birth was easy was only by comparison. His birth came like a massive wave crashing into my existence and my perceived safe and predictable world. As the water subsided and the tide once more went back out to sea the landscape of my life/world had changed dramatically. I found myself a newly single parent of three small children, each with unique needs and one with profound physical and mental disabilities. My vision, imagined hope, and previous expectations were severely shaken and I was thrown into a time of reconstructing meaning about how to live. Psychologists name this an “erosion of the preexisting assumptive world” (Neimeyer, Prigerson & Davies, 2002, p. 246). Yet this sounds too clinical, abstract, and gradual for events that intruded harshly and suddenly.

Life, as I knew it, was beyond my control and events not of my own choosing were being played out. Long before I had read theories of self-determination and self-authoring I felt their limits. Control over one’s life and narrative storying as if we are able to author or write our lives from a position of autonomy or self-interest is a very privileged position – a position that undoes itself in times of deep illness (Frank, 1998), disability, loss, trauma, or bereavement. In times such as these it is virtually impossible to write story lines of our own choosing, or free ourselves from the demands and obligations that press in, and much of the deep rupture that such experiences bring is due to the profound destabilization (Frank, 1999) of identity and understanding of one’s place and agency in the world.

I have felt my son’s life press into mine in ways I still find impossible to write about. I have no words to adequately describe the difficulty, years of endless and intense exhaustion, agonizing questioning and often futile efforts to relieve his constant pain and crying. These
lines here say nothing of the demands of the years when his health was at its worst.

While his character, personality, unique and so lovely nature extends far beyond the limits of his body, bursting out in ecstatic giggles and shrieks, in a conventional sense he has no voice. He cannot write, speak, sign, or communicate in any typical sense. He is dependent on others to choose his clothes, dress him, decide what he will eat, feed him, move him, and determine where he will go. His dependence is not inter-dependence or mutual support. He is completely dependent on others for his very survival. And his “voice” is only heard in relationship through those willing to take the time and patience, to know him and to listen – not through his words, but through his melodic monotone humming, varying cries, silences, wiggles, refusals, rhythmic movements, and times of stillness – and through people who have let him press into their lives and demand something of them – to feel, to care, to let themselves be limited (yet at the same time greatly expanded) by his needs and demands.

**Authoring identities**

Increasingly I have felt deeply disturbed in regards to understandings of identity as processes of self-creation and of invention and re-invention. While on one hand I appreciate (and also participate in) such a position as my identity has been constructed, re-constructed, shaped and re-shaped by events and journeys in my life, and particularly after my son’s birth as I sought to re-story myself as a mother and what it meant to mother. Yet not everyone can actively and consciously participate in this ongoing “re-invention” of self. To teach, live, and to act as if everyone can, should, or is potentially able to actively and consciously engage in processes of self-creation and re-invention leaves out those who cannot by nature of ability, disability, or those consumed with the immediacy of survival.

For example, Elijah Mirochnik and Debora C. Sherman’s book, *Passion and Pedagogy* is a beautiful inspiring book. In the passage below they describe processes of self-creation. Yet in
suggesting that identities are formed as a deliberate, active, creative storying leaves out those who have severe limits imposed on their lives and existence. For example, they write,

In our new story, the self is made of the language we use to describe ourselves. And since our processes of making those descriptions are synonymous with the making of ourselves, we no longer need a preordained self awaiting our discovery. Within our processes of describing and redescribing the world and our experiences within it we invent ourselves. Within our alternative story of self and song we are free to invent ourselves in our own image because we have chosen to replace the notion that self can be discovered with the possibility that self exists only because we make it up in song, in dance, in painting, and in poetry...through the telling, through singing our stories of teaching, we will continue to invent and reinvent our selves. (2002, p. 35-36)

While I'm certain that this is not the authors' intention as deliberate exclusion is not reflected anywhere in the book, it leaves me with the impression that those who cannot consciously re-create themselves, who don't have the necessary self-awareness, self-reflexivity, creative ability, agency, opportunity, or voice are somehow rendered lesser selves. That those who can sing, paint, dance, write poetry, communicate, speak, dress themselves, choose their daily tasks, and have a measure of autonomy are able to take an active role in authoring their lives. This does not mean we should choose the alternate self-story line presented here and return to notions of a fixed self, rather enter into an understanding that some individual's stories can only be told or constructed by others – either through relationship and careful attentiveness or through other's words. While it can be argued that everyone has some language, it still privileges those who are able with some measure of autonomy or agency, and highlights interdependence, yet not dependence.

Eva Feder Kittay (1999) addresses this in her discussion on the politics of dependency relations. She argues that a conception of society as an “association of equals masks inequitable dependencies, those of infancy and childhood, old age, illness, and disability” (p. xi) and that dependency must be acknowledged as a more central component of social organization and relations. She speaks out of personal knowledge of her daughter Sesha and their journey together with her cerebral palsy. While understandings of co-appearing identities and subjectivities (Nancy, 2000) presents a more just and satisfying view, still lingering are unspoken assumptions of competence and autonomy, or at least mutuality. Not dependency, vulnerability, and responsibility.

Such perspectives assume that everyone has (or should have) a measure of autonomy.
and agency *without* acknowledging the complexities and lived realities of dependency. Yet it’s in these *different* story lines, ones that find few satisfactory reflections, that veer off and wander, that tangle and twist and lead places you are certain you do not want to go, that lead to generative openings and possibilities.

The *difference* of *disability*

In shaping this inquiry as an autobiographical engagement, I am faced with the difficulty of how to understand self and other, identity, subjectivity, and pedagogy in light of my son’s difference, disability, and dependency. In his very compelling writing, Rod Michalko (2002) addresses the question “what difference does disability make?” In the world of ‘the normal’ he says, it makes no difference; it is a “useless-difference” (p. x) marked by lack. A person may be without sight, without hearing, or without mobility yet none of these are seen as valid ways of seeing, viewing, or experiencing the world. These differences make little difference in the workings of the world other than accommodation and inclusion. Essentially the world runs the same, under the same principles and outlooks. He argues,

Rehabilitation and other forms of mainstreaming learn nothing essential from disability since, for them, disability represents only lack. What they do learn stems from the gathering of information of “what works” for the process of “fitting” disabled people into the mainstream of society. There is no exchange...(p. 103)

This lack of exchange troubles me. Within perspectives of relational identities and inter-dependence, there should be a receiving, giving, or sharing of understandings. Yet as Michalko continues,

This difference...inserts nothing essentially different into the world. Everything remains the same – the world
still sees, despite blindness; the world still hears despite deafness; the world still has places accessed only by stairs, despite people in wheelchairs; and parents still count the fingers and toes of their newborn. Blindness, deafness, and paraplegia are still unfortunate conditions that some of us have to suffer and are not (yet?) worthwhile and legitimate alternatives. They are not alternative ways of sensing the world and moving through it. Thus disability becomes a difference that should be prevented, not “lived-in”. (p. 103)

Yet my son’s difference makes a tremendous difference to me. How our family functions, the places I go and cannot go, the career choices I make and cannot make, and the activities I entertain, are all made with disability in mind (and in heart). In every decision I wonder whether the places I go will support his living and moving through the world, and I weigh the costs of spending time away from him. To hold disability, to make a home with it and let it flourish within our midst and speak to our relationships means our lives take shape in particular ways and our responses to the world take shape as responses-in-relation to disability. And this relationship is not essentially an interdependent one.

And so what difference does disability make pedagogically speaking? Does it make no real difference as Rod Michalko suggests? Other than inclusion of certain individuals with disabilities, does it change how we see, think, act, learn, and interact with each other? What difference does disability make in our understandings of identity? In curriculum and in the structures of teaching and learning? And I wonder what pedagogical difference disability makes when disabled individuals are not immediately present in classrooms?

My point is not to make up for the “lack” in understandings of identity, rather to re-position myself in-relation-to identity. So that disability and dependency issues aren’t seen as ‘one more thing’ to add to an already burdened curriculum,
or as an inconvenient (although necessary) addition to ways of positioning identity, but allows for a shift that learns from, with, through, and in-relation-to rather than just about disability and allows space for those who cannot speak for themselves.

As Rod Michalko (2002) notes, we tend to speak of disability as if it is located within the individual as an individual “problem” to fix. For example, current language speaks of disabled people as “individuals with disabilities” as if the disability is an individual issue attached to a particular body. Yet my son’s disabilities are not his concern alone. His disabilities are something I (and his sisters, and those who love and care for him) live as well – albeit in very different ways, nevertheless, his disabilities are also carried as our own. And there is a social location of disability (Longmore, 2003; Michalko, 2002; Wendell, 1996), which makes disability a social concern and responsibility, not just an individual problem. As Michalko challenges us, society must move from thinking about disability, to thinking with (or through) disability in order to learn from and be changed by it.

While disability studies are growing, the voices of mentally disabled are few and far between (Smith & Erevelles, 2004). These are still silent voices and there are real difficulties in their inclusion – if someone cannot speak for themselves in intelligible words, signs, or gestures, how can they be known? This is not only a problem of hearing and attending to these voices as valid viewpoints, but of being able to hear anything at all. So how do we acknowledge, include, attend to, and learn from those who cannot speak for themselves, where thoughts are “unthinkable” and imaginings unsaid?

So as I consider identities and subjectivities I remember my son’s touch, his hand reaching out to find mine, his smile, laughter and tears – storying identities and never wandering far from the touch of the personal and the demands his existence has placed on my own: In the “texts of everyday life” (Luke, 1995, p. 20) where meaning is articulated, re-articulated, layered, and at times, undone.
Birthing stories

My son Nathanial was born in the middle of winter, on a cold and bleak day in January. The first things I knew about him as I held him briefly before he was taken away to an isolated intensive care room in the special care nursery was that he was so very tiny and that something was very wrong. There was the telling absence of celebration in the hospital room and in its place caution, confusion and concern. Doctors and specialists came and went - explaining and defining him by his physical features, the shape of his nose and forehead, the number of irregularities, and the sound of his cry. They counted the things that were wrong:

1. His nose was too big
2. His head was too small
3. His eyes were the wrong shape
4. His palate was cleft

And the list went on. Other babies were spoken of in terms of being loved and wanted and celebrated as miracles. But this birth, in this medical environment, was not celebrated as a “miracle” but marked a mistake, a chance error, and a curiosity to probe and define.

There were words written and spoken that added to the growing list of things that were wrong. There were medical stories filed in the back of his chart kept on the ledge overlooking his hospital bassinette. Inside were photocopied pages from medical journals filled with stark photographs of malformed features and limbs accompanied by long lists of abnormalities that marked his genetic defects and disorders. The words on those lists still echo through my mind and I still wonder how they fit with how I know him now. And then one morning shortly after his birth a senior nurse took me aside and informed me that since he would never walk and would never talk they would understand if I decided not to take him home. She said others could care for him and it would not matter if I left him as he would never be aware enough to know me anyhow. It shocked me to hear the extent of his disabilities yet shocked me far more that someone could perceive
of his life as being worth so little. I still feel the reverberations of that conversation resonating through my life. 16 years later still resounding in people’s stares, in doors closing into his wheelchair, not seeing him, not noticing him, echoing in countless ways, that it would not matter, that he did not matter. And there were other words that I won’t write here: Words spoken out of ignorance and fear made to build walls against difference.

Yet I knew that all that there was to him was not confined by or even shaped by his body. I had known him before he was born in unspoken and intangible ways and he knew me in my voice and in my touch. There was a transcendent aspect to his life - his spirit. And he had been given the gift of life, a gift not contingent on his ability or disability or on my expectation and hope; a gift given to him and to me. And so ten days later I took him home - a tiny 4lb baby who could have fit into his sister’s dolls clothes. Where others saw difference I saw an exquisitely delightful little boy with quirks and anomalies that made every accomplishment huge and amazing. He was sweet and trusting, highly social and funny with a tremendous sense of humor and with a beautiful spirit and remarkable capacity for joy. And he never learned to contain himself – his laughter erupting and spilling out in loud shrieks as we went for walks together eliciting surprised looks from passers by as if not understanding how a child with so many difficulties could have anything to laugh about.

His birth in many ways was the beginning of my life. Through him I learned to see and attend to things so easily overlooked. I learned (and am still learning) to wait for things to grow and change in their own time and to keep a different pace. And I learned to walk at his rhythm. Not willing to trade the moments that one day will seem so fleeting for lines on my CV. I learned that to see change and growth you have to look for it and make room for it in other ways – to wait and watch for its emergence. I discovered a learning that “tastes sorrow” (Lilburn, 1999, p. 5) and is expressed in intimate renderings. And together we learned the difficulties of negotiating pain. Perception and
understanding not negotiated by language, but through touch, intuition and spirit.

So as Nathaniel grew his life shaped my own. So much so that I think in my life I will only have one story to tell, that of life and love and loss. Although there may be many tellings of this story the tale will be the same, as I cannot think of a story I would tell that does not have his life running as undersides through the pages and the sound of his laughter and his tears colouring my words.

Then years later I was at a place of deep shifting again. It began suddenly one winter morning with an accident precipitated by his emerging curiosity and impatience as he pulled a pot of hot tea over himself and was badly burned. Another day marked in indelible ink – a line drawn, marking me with the sudden truth that his life, at one time suddenly intruding, would also end. It marked the beginning of a long and difficult time. I still count the years backwards and forwards from this date: A life before and life after.

He had gone through several surgeries and many illnesses before, some critical and others typical childhood ailments. As a child with extensive disabilities prone to illness he had a tenuous hold on life. Death had always been a silent and faint, yet constant, presence in my life with him and I was aware that his life with me would eventually end. I didn’t have the usual parenting expectations of him outliving me, becoming independent and finding his own way in the world, or being part of the chain that connected my past to an ongoing future. He was with me for a time and I knew that one day I would go on without him. Yet until this point these were distant ideas.

Over the next several years in a series of events unrelated to his burns, he went through an extreme period of illness, surgeries, and difficulties. Due to a degenerative eye condition and the eventual result of frequent misdiagnosis (primarily because he could not speak or effectively communicate the location of his pain) he had both eyes removed leaving him completely blind.
no longer reached for toys that dropped and his world became dark and restricted. Where once he used to push himself around in a walker, giving therapists and myself hope that maybe one day he'd learn to stand and walk, he was no longer able to tolerate weight bearing and he lost the little independent mobility he previously had. Also, because of long periods of extreme pain requiring a level of care I was unable to give him, he was moved out of my home into specialized foster care, and later into a small pediatric group home for medically fragile children. Although he still comes home on weekends, his daily absence has been felt deeply. And I was confronted at a deep level with what it meant to mother, nurture, love, and care for him. So I set out to find a way to re-story his absence, an absence both present and felt daily, and future and anticipated in his eventual passing.

Those years when death hovered close by are still a blur in my mind. I don't remember specific days or times just that there was a life before and a life after and a long dark time in/between. Deep change does not come easily and is often brought about by events not of our own choosing. Perhaps it is so painful because we fight so hard to hang on to that which is known, resisting the letting go and the loss until resistance is futile and we finally release the familiar and begin to participate with the new. It is not easy to live in the tension between the known and not yet known. So I set out here to write about the in/between time. In/between the old and the new, the known and the unknown. In/between living and dying, stories spoken and things left unsaid. In the chasm, darkness and difficulty in/between.

While at its heart this dissertation is about my son, my life with him and the shadow of death colouring his life, it also is about the loss of my parents and a very real journey of loss that, in Madeline Grumet's (1988) words, both interrupted this work and made it possible. During the time I was writing this thesis both my parents died. In fact my writing bridged a season of death where several close family members passed away. These deaths interrupted and delayed my writing yet in doing so extended its scope far
beyond what I had initially set out to do. One can never know how long and difficult a journey may be on starting out. Yet it was exactly this difficulty that made this work possible.

While a central part of my writing is shaped around these more recent events, still running as undersides are the fears and questionings relating to my son's eventual passing. While I may not write directly about Nathanial's eventual death, it resonates through each encounter with grief and each touch of loss. Focusing on the immediate, on my parents' deaths and absences, has allowed me to entertain a doubling of the now and the not yet. And turning to the more recent events has allowed an unexpected turn into the immediacy of disruption and to see learning as a meditation on places and times of breakdowns in meaning (Pitt, 2003). To see learning as that which points to the "insoluble knot at the center of teaching and learning" (p. 114) towards that which is inarticulate and resistant to interpretation and understanding. Where the play of the autobiographical and teaching is far more complicated than personal attributes, interests, or stories of unproblematic experiences.

Each touch of suffering and journey into loss, grief, and bereavement is a journey into the unknown and I write to recover, re-story, record, ground myself, and re-present in the hope of finding meaning and mending. Still, there are many others who have gone through things far more terrible, with greater more extensive losses, with more difficult bereavements and traumas from which they may never recover. I may recover from the deaths, losses and bereavements I write about here, and one future day I may recover from my son's passing - but not from his life. His life has been written into mine, knit in with one strand overtaking another, bound together, and worked in as intricate and brilliant patterns. The beautiful parts are because of him.
CHAPTER 2: TURNINGS AND QUESTIONINGS

Mingled, stories more than double in value.

Susan Griffin, 1999, p. 9
I recently took Parker Palmer's book, *The Courage to Teach*, out of the library. The book was only six years old at the time of this writing and I was surprised to find it looking so ragged. The pages appeared old and worn and had become wrinkled and softened from use. There were multiple sections underlined with exclamation marks beside and comments peppering the margins. The pages were taped and re-taped, corners bent, cover bruised and fading, spine misshapen and stitching undoing. My own pink sticky tabs highlighting passages that resonated with my own questionings and longings poked out at the edges of the pages and joined in with the myriad others who had searched this book for courage and inspiration. My hands smoothed out the pages and touched the readings, yearnings and hopes of countless teachers.

There are many educators like myself longing for ways of being, teaching, and learning that connects heart, head, hands, and spirit. That responds to the call of the deep, the ways of the spirit, sings with open hearts, and welcomes both the troubles and joys of living. That generates hope, change, and renewal in the midst of discomfort and distress. That goes with courage into the difficult places and speaks with heart and from the heart.

Good teaching, Palmer (1998) emphasizes, cannot be reduced to technique but comes from the integrity and identity of the teacher and has "as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strengths and potentials" (p. 13). It is teaching that bears the tension of opposites (Greene, 1995) and finds ways to embrace joy and pain, hope and difficulty, comfort and despair and to live with open and receptive hearts in the midst of that which cannot easily be resolved.

Other authors echo this understanding. Ron Miller (1999) describes a receptiveness and "teaching presence" (p. 201) that is at the heart of holistic pedagogies. Paulo Friere, bell hooks, Edmund O' Sullivan, John P. Miller, David W. Jardine, Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner (and many others) all hold a teacher's open hearted responsiveness at the core of their pedagogy. Although varied in their teaching practices, each supports a living holistic relational pedagogy that is connected to the complexities of living together in this world.

For the true teacher, pedagogy must be something living, something new at each moment. We could even say that the best pedagogy is one that the teacher continually forgets and that is continually reignited each time the teacher is in the presence of children. (Rudolf Steiner, quoted in Miller, 1999, p. 200)

Too often that responsiveness becomes static and focused on instructional strategies, techniques and methods – a focus on "what works" rather than an ongoing, changing,
evolving, receptive, open hearted pedagogy. So how do we keep a living pedagogy at the center of our teaching and learning?

To live well, Carl Leggo (2001) writes, takes courage and humility (see also Vanier, 1998). Courage to teach and to live well with students and with ourselves means being connected to heart and earth. The word courage is etymologically linked to the Old French word _cuer_ which means heart, and humility is derived from the Latin word _humus_ which means earth. Humility is keeping grounded in the daily struggles of living, walking carefully, and “acknowledging the physicality and materiality of pedagogical practice” (Pryer, 2002, p. 48). The humility that comes from being connected to the earth and from recovering a sense of the sacred is what makes teaching and learning possible (Palmer, 1999).

Humus and humility also suggests something alive, sustaining and generative; something out of which other things can grow (Jardine, 1998). Heart and earth/courage and humility are connected in a circular intertwining. In poetic rhythm Carl Leggo (2001) writes

I want to compose the lined and layered art of (a) life.
To seek to know the circular, circulatory, and curricular flowing of blood, life, and memory that constitutes the heart of a poet. To live well is to live rooted in the earth, energized by the heart, discerning with the heart. (p. 2)

What does it mean to teach well with courage and heart? Parker Palmer (1999) continues to explain:

The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven together into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require. (p. 11)

Keeping one’s heart receptive, responsive, and open, walking with
humility, mindful, connected to the earth and to the rhythms of life, embracing difficulty, and with a spirit of generosity and hopefulness. This is what courageous teaching requires. Yet what are the demands on teaching that necessitates courage? What calls to teaching and to us as teachers that requires courageous responsiveness?

**Turning to difficulty**

Teaching is often described as being a vocation or a calling (Heubner, 1999). I tend to see it, not as a call that goes out once, rather both as a calling and a responding, an ongoing relational act of responsiveness. It is a continuous calling that resonates and responds to the cries of the spirit, that which cannot be fully known, and to the presence of the other. That reaches out for meaning, for hope, for something more — something that cannot quite be named yet calls out and leads us on. This call, Elaine Riley-Taylor (2002) writes, is always present as an inner yearning or leading which intends to evoke an “awakening” (p. 6) of body, mind, and spirit.

Here is a call that yearns for what has been separated and one that also rings with a joy at the resounding rhythm of life. Possibilities are all around us — the empty, the full, and all that lies between — the choices among them are ours, a choice to wake up, a choice to hear the call of our own heartbeat. Surely we recognize the rhythm, the spirit that animates our deepest places and pulsates through every now moment, that rhythm which vitalizes our being from its prison of numbness. But do we feel that rhythm? Do we hear that call? (p. 2)

Both Elaine Riley-Taylor and Parker Palmer describe teaching as an inner calling leading to awakening and possibility. A calling also has religious meanings as in the idea that vocation, or calling, comes from a voice beyond ourselves, a “voice of moral demand that asks us to become someone we are not yet” (Palmer, 2000, p. 10). This kind of calling is understood as being chosen by God for a particular purpose: it is God that calls and the individual who responds. To respond to this call is to find one’s “true” way and enter a life of service or giving oneself to that call. Yet it is not an isolated or solely individual response. For as Henri Nouwen (2001) insists “If you are chosen in the heart of God, you have eyes to see the chosenness of others” (p. 134). This kind of calling attends to the sacred, the unknown, the not-yet known, and the transcendent, and allows for newness, awe, and wonder to emerge (Heubner, 1999). It originates in the heart of God, resonates with/in the heart of the responder, and echoes into the hearts of others so that it is a heart-to-heart relational responding and deeply ethical endeavour.
We can see the call of teaching as both within us and beyond us: resounding in the seasons and cycles of life, in its sorrows and joys, in our students' hopes and losses, and in our own multi-textured living: sacred, heart-felt, and relational. This call comes through our inner stirrings and through the voices and forces around us and we are invited to turn to face – to give response to – that call. In responding, teaching changes – whether towards a more holistic understanding of teaching, teaching as a moral or ethical responsibility, or a deeper appreciation of the worth and value of teaching – something new comes into being by responding to the “call of teaching”. And intricately connected to this is the understanding that as teaching changes so does the teacher (or vice versa). Additionally, the “call of teaching” is not heard as a general call rather as a specific call/calling to a particular teacher, at a particular moment and location. We do not come to know things in general rather in their specificity and particularity - in this situation, at this time, and in this place (Jardine, LaGrange, Everest, 2003). So that calling comes in and through the specific and the tangible, felt, immediacy of living shifting who one is as a teacher and how one situates oneself as a teacher in this world. Calling is deeply connected to one's being as a teacher.

In a very different, although quite connected stream of thought, Louis Althusser (1971) describes a call that hails a subject into being. This is an enactive call in which a subject is formed in submission to that call. He gives the example of a voice of authority that calls out to a passerby who stops and turns in response. The subject is called, turns around, and accepts the terms by which he/she is hailed. This interpellation hails the passerby into being, according him/her subjectivity and giving recognition. Judith Butler (1997) further develops this idea of being called or hailed into social life. She contends that the one who turns to respond to that call is compelled to do so as it promises identity. The turning back, or reflexivity, “constitutes the condition of possibility” (p. 115) for the subject to form. So that as an individual is called and as he/she turns towards that calling he/she is hailed or called
into being as a teacher. For example, as students enter education programs at university they are called or hailed into being as teachers in certain ways as they step into the discourses of teaching and being teachers in schools. Possibility of identity takes shape in the acceptance of the given of teaching and in the struggles to resist and/or speak back to these discourses.

Within Judith Butler’s view, all hails are to do with relations of power and answering involves a submission to power. But what happens when the voice of ‘author-ity’ is the voice of suffering and loss? When the voice that hails is not one of power but of vulnerability? When we are “faced with suffering, illness, death and weakness, there can be an awakening and a call to love and compassion” (Vanier, 1997, p. 249). Yet there is unpredictability in that calling and it is “never quite clear from where the “calling” might call and just what might be at stake in such a calling” (Jardine, 1999, p. xviii). Most often such a call takes us by surprise – a surprising thing in itself, as life is full of difficulty, sorrow, and struggle. Leavings, griefings, and losses are familiar marks on each of our lives. Yet this calling still comes as an intrusion and disruption, and invokes fear, resistance, and a desire to control, contain, or silence that voice. Perhaps waking us to the uncomfortable knowledge that ability, independence, autonomy, and wellness are only temporary states (see Michalko, 2002; Nouwen, 1994).

Mikhail Bakhtin also explores this idea of listening and answering. Self comes into being through the encounter between self and other and through responding to or answering the other. Bakhtin insists on “being as an event” (in Holquist, 1990, p. 25) and as an acting. As Michael Holquist (1990) writes, “the world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity. We are responsible in the sense that we are compelled to respond.” (p. 30). In this way, as suffering calls to teaching/teachers we are compelled to respond and our teaching and selves as teachers are authored in the answering. In an interaction of discourses – that
of teaching and that of suffering (and the particularities of suffering) - new discourses and new ways of being as a teacher are created.

So then, what if it is not the 'law' or forces of authority and power that calls and compels us to turn, rather difficulty, loss, bereavement, and suffering - what happens to us as teachers when we answer that call, when we turn to face difficulty and suffering and give a response? What happens in both accepting and resisting the terms of that call? And how is our teaching hailed into being or authored by that call?

These are the general questions that shaped the beginning of this inquiry. In this view authoring, becoming, or shaping of subjectivities and identities is always a belated response. We step into discourses already spoken and identities already given so that the answering can only ever be a belated authoring and teaching/a teacher comes into being only as a belated answering. That one answers and speaks back to the discourses already spoken depends to some degree on rational, autonomous beings with a measure of agency or ability to construct reasoned responses.

Emmanuel Levinas (1969) however, describes an in-the-moment emergence of newness and a responding that does not depend on rationality. He contends that all learning comes from the other. It does not come from me or my response to an already spoken word or discourse, rather appears in the face of the other. Knowing involves in-this-moment and face-to-face encounters as the subject is formed in the moment, in the presence of the other, in a pre-language impossibility of knowing. This is not co-being in the sense of mutuality, rather one of radical alterity. It is in this encounter that newness comes into being.

Levinas' ethics of the face-to-face means we are held hostage or captive to the call of the other which comes to us as a moral demand. "In the face-to-face relationship the individual experiences being obligated to the other person who is other than himself or herself" (Cook & Young, 2004). The other Levinas refers to is not the socially constructed or marginalized other resulting from social inequities but anyone who is other than myself. It is in proximity to the other, and in a proximity not "located in words uttered or deeds committed, but in the realm of sensibility that is not touched by consciousness, intention, or knowledge" (Todd, 2003a, p. 39), which signals the beginning of subjectivity and thus the coming into being as teachers.

My questions then become, how is teaching/being a teacher formed in the face-to-face presence of suffering and by the demands of suffering? In the proximity and touch of suffering? And what can teaching's response be to this knowledge? This thesis is my journey of engagement with these questions. In these pages I seek to understand the questions, to carefully attend to them, to find a place where they can be heard in their resonance, intimacy, and particularity, and in so doing give a response. There will be no answers. Just the journey and
the invitation to find yourself implicated along the way as I situate education "as a site of implication rather than application" (Todd, 2001b, p. 71).

**Attending to suffering**

In the fall before he turned 8 Nathanial went through an intensely difficult period. Something was distressing him and it was very difficult to figure out what it was and what could be done about it. He cried and often screamed for hours and days at a time, became determined to hit his head with his fist, and often injured himself from hitting so hard. He slept and ate very little, missed countless days of school, and when he did go was generally only able to stay for a few hours. During this time he forgot much of what he had previously learned and could not tolerate much activity or even playing with toys. This was distressing not just for him and for me, but also for his teachers and classroom support workers, as he had been doing so well before this. He had been learning many new skills - at his own pace and in his own time, yet he was learning and it was exciting to see him fulfilling the hope that education could make a difference in (i.e. make better) this child's world. He had been loud and funny and mostly happy, and had amazed those who worked with him with the things he was learning to do. But that changed suddenly with the onset of his crying.

I took him to numerous doctors, therapists, and specialists but in an absence of specific symptoms, and at a loss of what else to do, they looked at him in his wheelchair - non-verbal and completely dependant - and concluded that it was most likely just bad behaviour. All they could do was suggest he get a helmet to prevent injuries to his head and that I should get used to it. After all, I was told, children with disabilities could be difficult. It was nearly a year before the source of his pain was identified and they discovered that he had lost all vision and was hemorrhaging behind his eyes. His head hitting had been a clear intent to communicate the location of his pain.
As troubling as this story is, what moved me the most was his teacher’s response. He was in a low incidence class in a local elementary school (with one teacher, two full time educational assistants, and five other special needs children). At the time when he was at his worst, and his pain was so intense that he could not learn and could not abide much interaction, and he had lost much of what he had learned to that point – most of which he never regained – his teacher made a space for him. She said she’d keep the room dark and quiet and make him as comfortable as possible. She just wanted him to come. No expectations or learning or goals. Just his presence.

For the remainder of the school year on the days he was able to tolerate being at school, the lights were kept dim and sounds quiet. Teacher, aides, students, and any one else who came by entered this space of quiet, calm, and darkness. I still turn this memory over and over in my heart. It was one of the first events that provoked my teaching and still continues to resonate in ways I don’t fully understand. I had been uncertain whether he should even be in school and was deeply aware that he was not meeting education’s expectations for improvement, change, and growth as this time there was only a long period of perpetual loss and undoing. Yet his teacher made a space for him – a space uniquely in response to his distress, and one that the entire class entered. She welcomed his pain, his forgetting, his undoing and incessant crying and let him be. My words are inadequate for how deeply this touched me.

To attend to, listen to, and give space to the presence of difficulty, grief and suffering one must move beyond a rationalistic, objective, mastery view of teaching and learning and enter a view of education that welcomes ambiguity, uncertainty, and “unlearning” (Rogoff, 2000). Suffering cannot be controlled or mastered or even learned as curriculum content, rather is lived and experienced as it permeates a life. It needs courageous teaching that allows space for suffering’s voice. To come face-to-face and to attend to suffering means curriculum cannot be conceived as one even surface, seamless without bends and breaks or imperfections and stitchings. Suffering cannot live well within these frames, but needs open spaces where possibility can flourish and searchings, questionings, and journeys can be worked though in grief’s own time. It needs a holistic understanding with relationships at the heart of learning – within a pedagogy of personal and generative relations that allows for “the marginal, the liminal, the unconscious, and the embodied” (Morrell & O’Connor, 2002, p. xvii).

Edmund O’Sullivan (2002, 1999), in his writing on transformative education, offers three framings that shape transformative perspectives - education for survival, education for critical understanding, and education for integral creativity. Education for survival deals with how to live in times of death, disaster, or at the ending of times. Grief, loss, and death, uncomfortable subjects for education, are essential for its transformation. O’Sullivan contends
that the ability to enter into difficulty and deal with loss, grief, suffering and despair is a foundational element for change, renewal, and for the continuance of living – that is, for living well with each other in our immediate relationships and as global citizens. Transformation also requires sensitivity, a deep respect for the web of life and the larger system of which we are a part, an awareness of the sacred, and the acknowledgement that knowledge itself is uncertain. An indispensable principle is that learning is central to teaching. The focus shifts from teaching to a receptive attitude of learning which often takes place in nonverbal, inarticulate, artistic and expressive ways as not everything needs to be understood rationally or completely. Transformative learning draws on emotions, dreams, images, the senses, imagination, creativity, and artistic ways of knowing and often takes place unconsciously. Transformative learning requires courage to embrace mystery, un/certainty, and un/knowing. It engages emotional and intuitive ways of knowing and personal subjectivity and finds a place for arational knowledge as well as rational and critical modes of thought. It highlights humility, respect, compassion, and gentleness and provokes response and action.

Jack Mezirow (1991) introduced transformative learning as a change process that transforms one’s frame of reference and the structures and assumptions through which we understand our experiences and shape our understandings and perceptions. He maintains that transformation frequently results from disorienting dilemmas triggered by a life crisis or major transition, or interference. For example, suffering and difficulty can result in acute destabilization and therefore can provoke occasions for transformation (Frank, 1997, 1999). The process of embracing transformation can have a darker side, as it requires stepping into that which is unknown, unfamiliar, and often profoundly difficult. Thus transformational learning is a complex process involving emotions, thoughts and feelings; soul-based learning; and imagination, creativity and intuition (Baumgartner, 2001; Palmer, 2003, 1999; Miller, 2000). It depends to a certain degree
on otherness - on that which is unfamiliar, strange and not easily apprehended. Transformative learning and teaching is open to deep and fundamental change in how we understand ourselves, our relationships, and ways of living with each other. “It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 11).

Therefore, exploring the ways that suffering informs and initiates the rhythms and relations of teaching and learning cannot be accomplished in a straightforward linear story. Rather, the questions need to find their place within a complex system of living: Within an ecological perspective of webs and wanderings, intertwinnings and overlappings. Like tangled stories that weave in and out or sorrows that seep in like dyes creeping under the bands resisting the pigments, colouring, and marking the fibers.

Grief cannot be rushed. To participate with grief one needs to slow to its pace and follow the threads of its stories. Grief and suffering take their own time and make their own way through our lives. Like gaining wisdom and following the tempo of slow learning it requires being attuned to a rhythmic, slow and steady pace (Selby, 2002). It acknowledges the recursive rhythm and the ebb and flow of tidal time rather than linear and sequential time (Mol & Law, 2002) and involves repeating, going back, remembering (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kappler, 2000), turning and re-turning. It invites many returns and reworkings, acknowledges disequilibrium and that our lives are in a constant state of change and flux.

As William E. Doll (2003) describes, each element, occasion, or story is always involved in a nexus of connections or matrix of relationships which forms a three dimensional web or networking of past histories, present interactions, future hopes and imaginings. Thus, “learning is enacted in a fluid, often turbulent social setting. Multiple and constant interactions continually reshape that body of learning. It is this activity, this enaction of shared experiences and knowledge that constitute creative learning” (Collins, 2002). In addition, transformative teaching
and learning is participatory and evolutionary in nature and is not primarily about acquiring information, rather is concerned with keeping pace, or keeping time with one’s changing and evolving circumstances (Davis, et al, 2000). It emphasizes relationality and occasioning or creating the conditions for transformation, change, and newness.

**A/r/tographic multiplicity**

As I set out to inquire into suffering, grief, and loss and find my way with/in the private, intimate, hidden, silent, and tentative places of living and teaching I begin my inquiry in the midst of things, in the places of living the research. So that suffering is tangible, felt, and lived. It is not felt or experienced in general. It is specific and particular with many nuances and textures. I begin in the midst of my teaching, art making, writing and multiplicities of living: within a/r/tography and the living practices of art, research and teaching – hence the a-r-t in a/r/tography (see Irwin, 2004). I start from a place of familiarity, with what I know now, and how I understand and see the world, like art materials I have worked with many times before - wool, fiber, thread, pigment, water, and stone, and in the engagement find that each are transformed and become something other than they were to begin with. With/in a/r/tography art making, questioning, and teaching intertwine and bring into conversation things hidden, silenced, and unspoken.

Art educational research, or a/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004), is an arts-based educational research methodology that is rooted in artistic contexts, materials and processes, and in the physicality of making/creating. It speaks from outside traditional research frameworks and is in a unique position to make knowledge visible, raise questions, and create an interpretive and interactive space for the reader/audience to co-create meaning and understandings. It is research that intends to disrupt, evoke, question, and offer alternative possibilities for understanding and action.
To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through a process of art making and writing. It is a process of double imaging that includes the creation of art and words that are not separate or illustrative of each other, but are interconnected and woven through each other to create additional meanings. Irit Rogoff (2000) explains that visual and textual encounters are not analytic of each other. They are not discourses laid on top of one another in the hopes of transferring meaning from one textual realm to another, but interconnections that speak in conversation with, in, and through art and text such that encounters are constitutive rather than descriptive. (Springgay, Irwin, Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 899)

As an aesthetic inquiry approach a/r/tography is conceived of as embodied and lived understandings and exchanges in/between art and text, and in/between the roles of artist/researcher/teacher (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Wilson Kind, 2005). As such, a/r/tography is inherently relational and is a process that dwells within the tensioned and difficult in/between spaces. It explores contradictions and places where “knowledge resists” (Carson, 1997, p. 87) and views ambiguity and discomfort as vibrant places of learning and becoming. It emphasizes experience rather than particular practices, and becoming rather than doing. Like postmodern action research (Sumara, 1999; Sumara & Carson, 1997), autobiography (Norman, 2001), autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2002, Ellis, 2004), and other forms of artistic inquiry and arts-based research (Barone, 2001a; McNiff, 1998b; Slattery, 2003) it provides rich descriptions, constructs evocative and artistic texts, offers new views and perceptions and encourages dislocations and disruptions. It is poetic, self-reflexive, and attends to a multiplicity of experiences, emotions, and ambiguities. And it is attentive to the sensual, tactile, difficult and unsaid aspects of artist/
researcher/teacher’s lives and to uncertain and silent ways of knowing. The text of the research, the teaching, and the art, intertwined as a textured, textual, textile, text. It is research that is “vulnerable, evocative and therapeutic” (Ellis, 2004, p. 135) in that it enters into emotional and difficult experiences, generating understandings that has the potential to both break and mend hearts (Ellis, 2004).

Sarah Pink (2001) argues for reducing the distance between the discipline and its subject of study, between research and representation. Through a/r/tography each of the art, researching, and teaching are brought in close proximity to each other as each are understood as living practices. For example, teaching is understood as an autobiographical act (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Grumet, 1992; Pinar, 1994). A teacher constructs an autobiographic, living text in and through her teaching/living, creating a living pedagogy. For artists, art is also a living practice. Art making is a creative, generative, living engagement with the difficulties of living and being in this world (Mc Niff, 1992) and the text of textiles, my primary art medium, speaks of women's experiences, of silences, loss, woundings, and mendings. In a/r/tography each is researched, represented, interpreted, and understood, in relation to the other, each intertwined and intextricably linked. As a living inquiry each element cannot be discussed or understood separately rather is considered in the midst, engaged, and entangled. It is much more than the sum of the parts as it transcends, extends, exceeds the elements.

In doing this a/r/tography enlarges the space of the possible. Like other forms of arts-based research it empowers and changes the manner through which research is conducted, created, and understood. The arts have a distinct role in opening imaginations and entertaining previously unthought of possibilities (Greene, 1995). Through provocative, performative, poetic, creative, and artistic means understandings are enlarged.

The arts offer unique insights, ways of knowing, and modes of understanding (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Diamond & Mullen, 1999; Eisner, 1991). Although a/r/tography embraces all forms of artistic inquiry (poetry, music, performance, etc) here I explore visual art as a way of knowing and being. In a/r/tography art making is understood as processes and instances of inquiry and art works as works of theory (see Springgay, 2004). Studio-based teaching and art learning practices are viewed as scholarly inquiry so that art practices undertake creative and critical research and create interpretive spaces where the text itself, the artist, the context, and the position of the viewer/audience are all essential elements of the inquiry and art production process (Sullivan, 2005). It is not research that is separate from the lived experiences of the artist/researcher rather the artist/researcher becomes part of the emerging text (Pink, 2001). The researcher as artist and as teacher is situated in personal and intimate spaces of living inquiry, giving presence to questions and experiences not generally attended to in scholarly
research. The arts open up the kinds of questions that can be asked and disturb taken for granted assumptions of what counts as knowledge and what it means to come to know.

Equally significant is the t in a/r/tography. Although teaching and what it means to be a teacher may be conceived of in many different ways, a/r/tography is inherently pedagogical and educative. In the same way as it understands art as research, a/r/tography also situates teaching and pedagogical moments as processes and instances of inquiry. Rather than research that inquires about teaching, a/r/tography facilitates inquiring through teaching – that is, engaging in teaching as an ongoing act of inquiry and as an artistic practice. This builds on Eisner's (1994) conceptions of teacher as artist and teaching as an art yet extends it so teaching is an ongoing creative, artistic, studio practice, and living inquiry – in essence, a/r/tographic practice.

A/r/tography is situated in/between theory and practice, in/between teaching as plan and teaching as lived, in the difficult aporetic (de Cosson, 2004) praxis space. It is a contiguous methodology where interweaving threads of theory, practice, and poesis are woven throughout. In a/r/tography, to ask a question opens transformative possibilities.

To ask is always a repetition of the “why” or “how” for example, as the play between what we know and don’t know, between the thought and the unthought, and always between the said and the unsaid...a question is an invitation to the play of multiplicity that operates between the given and the virtual....when we ask why...we are opening a space in which there are an indefinite number of possible answers for us to choose...This space and its indefinite creation is precisely what allows and ensures different possibilities to spring forth. (Martusewicz, 1997, p. 99,100)
Rendering a/r/tography

As a form of living inquiry, an entangling of art and text, and an interconnection of artist, teacher, and researcher roles, a/r/tography is enacted through six renderings: contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess (Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind, 2005). These renderings are not separate or distinct, rather are woven throughout the process, practice, and text of the inquiry. They are at once the substance, shape, and process of the inquiry. These renderings are constitutive encounters and interconnections that speak in conversation with, in, and through art and text.

Contiguity

A/r/tography is a coming together of art and graphy, or image and word. It recognizes the processes of art making and writing as interconnected and complex processes of meaning making that resist transparent readings (Aoki, Low, Paulis, 2001). Contiguity is illustrated both in the side-by-side and interwoven relationship of image and word throughout this dissertation. Contiguity is also emphasized through understanding the roles of artist/researcher/teacher and the practices of art making/researching/teaching as living, relational inquiries. Each of these roles and activities are dynamic, shifting, transitory, and are interrelated and enacted in relation to the others.

Living Inquiry

In a/r/tography, visual, written, poetic, and performative processes are enacted with/in the living practices of art making, researching, and teaching. This is similar to Sumara and Carson’s (1997) understanding of action research as a living practice. These artistic processes are not merely activities that are added to one’s life, but are the processes by which one’s life is lived so that “who one is becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does” (p. xvii). The issues in question may permeate a life and engage emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, embodied ways of knowing—all aspects of one’s being. And as a living inquiry a/r/tography takes up the a/r/tographer’s concerns, living and ways of being-in-relation to others. The inquiry is shaped by the a/r/tographer’s living, and her living shaped by the inquiry.

Metaphor and Metonymy

A/r/tography as a methodology infuses understandings of metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor for instance is where one thing represents another like stone for sorrow and wool for comfort. Metonomy is typically understood as the relationship of part to whole. It also signifies meanings that are constituted in spaces of difference (Pollock, 1998) and in interplay of the in/between (Aoki, Low, & Palulis, 2001). Ted Aoki (2005/2000) describes metonomy as the space between representational discourse and non-representational discourse where there is a persistent interplaying of form and formlessness, knowing and not knowing.
Openings

As a practice of meaning making, a/r/tography relies on sensual and textual ways of knowing. It is attentive to that which is seen and known and to that which lies beneath the surface in hidden and silent places as it searches out ways to bring into presence the invisible, intangible, and unthinkable. It seeks out openings as in absences, losses, ruptures, disturbances, and disruptions and attends to undersides and undoings. The text invites participation as it opens to others and invites a shared participation, which compels evocative and emotional resonances with the art/text and opens up conversations and relationships.

Reverberations

Reverberations within a/r/tography call attention to movements and rhythms that shift other meanings to the surface (Aoki, 1996). It enters the perpetual motion and unsettling of difficult experiences and the interplay between what is known and what cannot be expressed and what continues to resonate and disturb in unpredictable ways. Research thus becomes an act of unsettling and being unsettled. The openings and invitations for shared stories and meanings create an active and tangled co-labouring (Sumara & Luce-Kappler, 1993) so that “there are other texts called and recalled in the research text” (Luce-Kappler, 1997).

Excess

Excess references that which exceeds boundaries, regulation, control, and mastery. Janet Miller (2005) for example, describes excess in teaching as the “examples of daily lives and identities that leaked out over the edges” (p. 218). This may be grief, sorrow, and other intimacies, or places of rupture and where meaning breaks down: Things that refuse to be contained by yet are inextricably linked to the discourses and practices of teaching.
A/r/tography as relational practice

Foundational to a/r/tography is an understanding of relationality. That is, each of the a/r/t touch, relate to, speak to, inform, enrich, and enliven the other. A/r/tography, as relational acts of living inquiry, is embodied in and through the complexities of relational aesthetics, relational research, and relational learning and teaching (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, in press). A/r/tography, as other relational acts of living inquiry, is participatory in nature and deeply informed by our perceptions of the world and by what it means to be in relation with others. In this inquiry I situate a/r/tography as a living autobiographical practice. Dependent on this is how autobiography is defined, understood, and engaged in, and on conceptions of the self, other, identity and subjectivities. These things profoundly shape what it means to be in the research and teaching and art making autobiographically. For instance, what it means to work autobiographically is often positioned as either working with others or researching self as if the two are separate or as if one or the other needs to take center locus. While here I work autobiographically – and necessarily so as my work is intended to open an invitational space for others to engage with/in and the nature of loss and bereavement being intimately emotional, sensitive, and tender needs an ethical situating of invitation – my work does not situate self (or even selves) at the center. That is, it is not research about my self/selves or about my lived experiences. It is research that enters into teaching in the face-to-face of suffering from a personal and intimate perspective. It is research that uses one’s “own life as a site of inquiry” (Chambers, 2004, p. 1) rather than the subject or focus of that inquiry.

An objective view of the world sees the world as composed of “separate, independent, discrete, bound, [and] therefore measurable entities called objects” (Bai, 2003, p. 23). Self and other are viewed as separate and bounded units. A/r/tography however, takes a relational view similar to Heesoon Bai’s perspective that “we are our relationships with each other and with the world” (p. 23). Therefore autobiography as a/r/tographic practice must always be about self and other – autobiographical perspectives may evoke a more personal and intimate rendering but within a relational view still must be social and inherently includes others. It is research that cannot take a singular voice and does not situate self as singular or as authority. It understands Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) claim that one’s voice is always coloured by the voices of others.

The relational other

For the most part, in a/r/tography, relationality has been understood as a folding/enfolding that is situated in spaces of similarity and difference with reference to Merleau-Ponty’s theories of relationality as difference within a totality of sameness (see Irwin & Springgay, accepted; Springgay, 2004). However, as a living inquiry, a/r/tography must also
take up the a/r/tographer’s philosophical understandings of what it is to be and live in-relation-to others, that is how self and other and the nature of the relation is conceived and whether self and other are intertwined or irreducibly other.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) writes of an intertwining between self and other, inside and outside, where the seer and seen become folded together in a porous encounter. Perception is not embodied in perceiving the sum of all parts rather it is distinguished by and within the fold (see Springgay, 2004). This means “the bodies of others are not objects; they are phenomena that are coextensive with one’s own body” (p. 118). One example that is frequently given is that of a handshake: As one hand touches, the other touches back illustrating self and other as dual elements of a singular intercorporeality (Vasseleau, 1998). There is a fundamental indeterminacy of self and other which is reflected in Merleau-Ponty’s statement, “I borrow myself from others; I create others from my own thoughts” (Merleau-Ponty in Vasseleau, 1998, p. 36).

This has been a very useful framework for understanding the contigious and relational nature of a/r/tographic research, whether in self-study (Bickel, 2004; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) or in collaborative pedagogical spaces (Darts, 2004; Irwin, Grauer, Beer, Xiong, Springgay, under review; Springgay, 2004). However, when I think through the personal, that is think of Nathaniel and issues of dependency and vulnerability, I have great difficulty with this as the only frame for understanding relationality. I am very aware of how much violence has been done to him by others ‘creating him from their own thoughts’; by others thinking they know him and understand his ways, by viewing him through their own interpretations and understandings. Moreover, the coextensive relationship of the seer and the seen does not account for Nathaniel who can neither physically see nor articulate how he does “see” (or perceive). Even if he could articulate his “seeing” it would be radically different from the seer’s seeing because of his blindness (see Michalko, 2002) and even be inconceivable.
as a valid viewpoint because of his difference. Which is what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls the differend; that those immersed in the dominant discourse cannot hear or comprehend the difference. Nor does Merleau-Ponty’s theory of relationality acknowledge that due to his vulnerability and susceptibility, even in touching his hand does not “touch back” as mine might as often the “touching” of others can be invasive, frightening, and violent even in its good intentions.

Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) describes identity as “co-appearance”, that we are beings with one-another in a singular plural of being. In other words, each individual identity is brought to being through encounters with other beings in dynamic, interacting systems of beings-in-relation. Yet he does not give insight into how this coming-into-being might take place in light of disproportionate relationships.

While these authors do give very important insight and shape to understandings of a/r/tography and to the imaginative and responsive play of relational possibility, as I used my own life as a site of inquiry I was disturbed by how these perspectives silenced the difference I knew so intimately and the deeply felt difficulties and struggles of not knowing and the impossibility of knowing, and did not acknowledge the obligations of dependency relations. They did not adequately address the relations between power, subjectivity, and dependency and the inequalities that could not be overcome through knowledge, intention, or voice. That there are those who “cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Spivak, 1994, p. 71). Leading me to agree with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that in these frames the “subaltern cannot speak” (p. 104).

There are issues and instances that require an ethical situating and recognition that the relation of self and other may be inherently and irreparably disproportionate. So again, this time through a/r/tography, I turn to Emmanuel Levinas, the French-Jewish philosopher, to try to understand how one might think through his views of ethical relationality.

Born in Lithuania, Levinas’ primary work took shape in the aftermath of the Holocaust in relation and response to unspeakable suffering and trauma and great personal loss. While Merleau-Ponty positions self and other within a totality of sameness, Levinas, in an effort to resist assimilating the other into the same understands relationality as radical alterity or absolute otherness; as “otherwise than being” or an exteriority that is unrelatable to self. Relationality is characterized by proximity, touch, and radical openness so that self and other come together in their irreducible difference and each faces the other in infinite unknowability. The other is always perceived of as “higher” or in some need of protection or help. It is a relationality characterized by dependency and vulnerability.

Merleau-Ponty’s image of two hands touching according to Levinas would be seen
instead as Nathaniel's hand reaching out for mine and the lightness of his touching a gift. The emphasis would be on my responsibility for him and obligation to him. And the touching (or reaching) as a gift that is not mutual rather tendered without expectation of return or exchange. Silvia Benso (2000) describes this tenderness or tendering as being deeply rooted in attention, which is "the respectful (and humble) attitude of a mind (or body) that waits for the other to make the first move" (p. xxxvii). As I sit beside Nathaniel on weekends when he is home with me his hand frequently reaches out to find me. In his touching I am never quite sure if he needs something or what it is that he might need. It is never initially clear if he's asking for help, comfort, interaction, security, food, or something else, and it is also quite possible that I will never know what it is he intends. Yet in the act of reaching, before I have any sense of what it is he needs or wants, I am summoned or called to respond. This is how for Levinas "one's life and one's awareness of being here are dependent on being singled out to answer and provide for a need which is not one's own, but upon which one's own life and existence depend" (Vasseleau, 1998, p. 102).

So what happens when we engage in a/r/tography from a position of alterity? When we think a/r/tography through ethics and alterity? When relationality is not based on sameness, similarity, or folds, but on irreducible difference? If a/r/tography is not something one can simply apply as in a series of steps or methods, rather is a philosophical situating and methodology then how might it shift in embracing different philosophical perspectives of what it means to be human in relation to others? Can we see this coming together of self and other as radical exteriority as if each are irreducibly "other" and infinitely unknowable? And so their coming together opens spaces of infinite possibility into that which can never be fully said or explained. Where the knowing or understanding that emerges is ongoing, ever saying, never finished or closed and the possibility is in the difference of self and other, in their radical exteriority and otherness that can never be fully known.

I will take up these ideas in greater detail in the next chapter as I think ethics through autobiography and teacher inquiry and consider how, "to teach (perhaps especially to teach teachers) is to share with others the exhilaration and the difficulties of opening oneself (and others) onto this limit space, of stepping out to a precipice, and confronting the unthought" (Martusewicz, 1997, p. 100).
CHAPTER 3: AUTOBIOGRAPHING TEACHING

All that we lose, and all that we love works its way into our language

Susan Griffin 1992, p. 8
Teaching takes shape as an intricate knitting together of personal and public, of past, present and future, of stories of schooling, of home, and history so that it is hard to say where one ends and another begins. Teachers’ stories weave in and out, are written in/between the life and the text, situating teaching as an autobiographical act and an in/between praxis space. It is in the autobiographical that theory, practice, story, and experience intermingle in intertextual tanglings. Like fine golden threads, both warp and weft, worked in complex and multifaceted ways, my teaching has been informed and shaped by the joys and difficulties of parenting, by bittersweet remembrances and sorrows of losing, by my son’s disabilities and illnesses, by the demands of care-giving, and, in the past several years, by the actual interruptions of deaths and funerals. And of course there are many other stories as well.

My early school beginnings were spent in a small rural Montessori primary school situated on a spacious ocean front property in Southern Vancouver Island. The schoolhouse was a large white house with red steps surrounded by flower and vegetable gardens, fruit trees, fields, and rambling blackberry bushes. There were shrubs and overgrown thickets that we made forts in during lunch hour and recess, and there were pathways running alongside that led down to the rocky beaches. Our three teachers lived upstairs and I was very conscious of being invited into their space for our learning. I remember occasions on returning to school with my mother late in the afternoon to pick up some forgotten thing being invited to stay for tea and sitting at the kitchen table with their old brown betty tea pot in the middle, my teachers in their faded floral aprons, surrounded by the aromas of dinner cooking. Our schoolhouse was also their home, which meant my earliest language of schooling spoke of both the personal and public, intimate and academic. This language opened up the spaces of learning so that teaching and learning were not just occasioned in the classroom. Each took shape as encounters and engagements outside at the beach, in the yard and gardens, in the kitchen, and always in some sense, tinged and coloured with the personal and intimate, and the texts of the everyday.

I attended the Montessori school full days from the time I was three until the end of the third grade. Our school days were divided up into “schoolwork” and the creative arts. Mornings were devoted to reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious instruction – rituals of readings, music, and celebration - and the afternoons were filled with art, nature study, dance, and drama. We had a full time art teacher who was an artist herself and the walls of the schoolroom held several of her paintings and her weavings and pottery were scattered throughout the house. The arts were taken as seriously as the more academic work and I don’t remember ever having them treated as extras or frills. To me (and to my teacher and many of the children there) they were the substance of life.

The five years I spent at the school left me with a deep love for learning and for the arts
and I'm convinced played a significant role in my pursuit of art/education and Montessori teaching later in my life. Imprinted on my living and teaching in multiple ways are memories of working with clay dug from the local riverbanks, spinning and weaving with wool from the neighbour's sheep, gathering stones and watching the sea anemones dance in the blue-green tidal pools while painting at the beach, and drawing the flowers in the gardens that surrounded the schoolyard. I re-imagine the pleasure every time I work with young children. Coming back as evocations called up through present interactions. In teaching pre-service teachers it's there in the imagined children they will teach, going forward, speaking into the future as well as in my re-call of the past. It's in the smell of oily unwashed sheep wool and in the lure of the loom. It's in the salty ocean air, the birdsong, and the faint warmth of the early spring sun. I return and repeat many of these experiences in my own teaching - under different circumstances and in different contexts - but I still take my classes outdoors to paint or draw or create at the beach in the sun and wind and ocean air. Returning to the early things that fed my spirit. I re-call and remember and invite other students to engage with the peace and pleasure I used to feel.

And along with these stories there are present ones of parenting, of losing, and grieving that weave their way in to my teaching as well. Stories, both told and lived, of my three children, of mothering, and being mothered. Of joys and pleasures. Of disabilities, illnesses, deaths, and sorrows. And there are other even earlier stories that made their way into my life through my mother's unspoken life/stories of war and trauma.

My mother had been born in Lithuania and had left with her family shortly after the Russian occupation at the beginning of the Second World War. Since my grandfather was of German descent their family left for Germany to escape the Russian occupation under the promise that any land or houses they had left behind would be regained in Germany. They left just months before the mass deportation of Lithuanian people to Siberia in 1941 and never did see the fulfillment of that promise. Their family spent the war years in camps in Germany before coming to Canada. Although many of the details of those years remain hidden running through my life are hauntings of things I have never known – things that are carried with me as constant yet silent questionings and searchings. My grandmother, aunt, and mother, women who lived through those years, have all died and there is no one left to disclose their stories. So running as sub-text to my living/teaching are these questions and searchings, prompting countless, not so evident, pursuits. I find myself always attentive to things that may reveal their secrets. Always watchful for difficult stories, and to trauma and loss as I had learned at an early age that these stories need careful attention and would make themselves known in other, not so evident ways.

At the same time I learned to live alongside others' stories. My mother, aunt, and
grandmother were mostly silent about what they had experienced during the war years. Only occasionally would their stories spill out, angrily interrupting an afternoon’s activities and so I looked elsewhere for insight. It was difficult to find books written by women from the Baltic States or to find out what life would have been like for them and most of the histories I found were of dates and treaties and revealed little of the traumas and violences they had known. So I looked elsewhere and read Holocaust stories and other wartime traumas and learned to look in the in/between: Not finding the answers or understandings I sought in the written narratives, but somewhere secretly hidden in/between the lines, underneath the stories, and in the silences of things that could never be said. These weren't their stories or experiences, yet in/between these other stories and the silences I found faint traces of their lives. And so my teaching bears these traces as well - traces of other stories that are not my own.

The personal and the autobiographical

Teaching is a very individual endeavour. It is rooted in the personal, influenced by prior experiences and is an expression of one's life/stories. We teach out of who we are and what we know (and do not know). What we believe and think, how we perceive ourselves and others, the events of our lives, our histories, and the people that have played a part all shape the text of our teaching. These stories may be re-told through teaching as in illustrations and examples, they may be enacted in our actions and behaviours, may lie beneath the surface, or be there silent in unspoken and intangible ways – in our attitudes, interactions, perceptions, in our pedagogies and beliefs, and in our insights and imaginations. Knowledge is not separate from the knower (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985) and what we know, how we teach, how we understand ourselves as teachers are shaped at a fundamental level, by our biographies and how we situate ourselves in the world.

Becoming a teacher is a life long process of learning and growth rooted in the personal and inquiry into our autobiographies is foundational to understanding ourselves as teachers (Grumet, 1991, 1992; Pinar, 1981, 1994). Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles (2000) describe teaching as "a dynamic expression of the self" (p. 26) and as an "autobiographical act" (p. 22). To teach is to construct an autobiographical account, to develop a living text...teaching is autobiography" (p. 22). Ted Aoki (2005/1992) makes a closer connection so that one's life/ways of living and understanding of one's self are the teaching as he writes, "He is the teaching; she is the teaching" (p. 197). So that teaching is not just a role an individual steps into but is an active, living, dynamic manifestation of the self. Self is inseparable from teaching. And how one comes to be as a teacher is closely tied to how one comes to be as a subject (or how one perceives of themselves as coming into being).
Yet even with evident understandings that one's autobiography shapes and forms one's teaching, the autobiographical is far from being a transparent practice. So if teaching is autobiography, how is it autobiography? If autobiographical inquiry is foundational to re-imagining teaching, then what can be the shapes and forms of these inquiries? How does one become oneself as a teacher through autobiographical inquiry? How can one create the conditions for inquiry and the responsiveness that such inquiries require? And what are the implications for the living practices of teacher education?

Autobiographic renderings

It is generally acknowledged that autobiographical inquiry should do something and effect some kind of change. Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (1996) write that autobiography should “broaden our horizons and awaken our capacity to care” (p. 26). It should open to new worlds, new ways of thinking, and to the multiplicity of human experience, acting as a mirror (Norman, 2001) or as a window into life providing space for the reader and writer to re-imagine ways of living (Neumann, 1997). Through reading autobiography we “allow another person’s world of experience to inspire critical reflection on our own” (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p. 22). And writing (imaging, or otherwise imagining and narrating) one’s autobiography opens the author to new ways of understanding, thinking, perceiving, and being. Autobiography is intended to provoke, change, and re-imagine one’s teaching practices and ways of viewing teaching. Like any art media – paper, paint, wool, clay – it becomes something once it is acted on. It does something and claims something of the artist/author and the audience of the art/text.

Autobiographic inquiry is much more than giving or collecting information and narrating experience. How one composes one’s life/stories has as much to say as the content of those stories as meaning does not just come from the narratives themselves but also in how they are constructed (Ochberg, 2003). So the challenge is not just to tell stories (for example, of Nathanial, of difficulty, loss, and grieving) rather to create the conditions for those stories to be constructed, attended to, and continually interpreted and interrupted. And to look deeper to the meanings, implications and ethical obligations that such personal narratives require.
Excessive re-presentations

Autobiographical text (whether written, spoken, imaged, enacted, or otherwise artistically rendered) functions as self-representational practice (Gilmore, 1994) and refers in some way to an individual’s life history as it takes shape in time (Brockmeier, 2001). It is text that reveals, illuminates and illustrates aspects of a person’s life and the meanings that are made or produced from it. The autobiographical text is not intended to replicate one’s life, rather re-present and re-story it. The text marks, selects, emphasizes, and omits certain elements and constructs certain versions of self. Each textual rendering can only ever be partial and incomplete and there may be many readings and interpretations. Such renderings emphasize life as process, always in flux, changing and temporal and all memory as selective, interpretive, and coloured by the present. And they show how “the stories we remember and tell about our lives reflect who we are, how we see ourselves, and perhaps, how we wish to be seen” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 119).

Autobiographical re-presentations generally begin with what is known and remembered, with the immediate events that stand out. Once the stories are told they can be re-worked, re-told in other ways and lead to other stories and understandings. Re-presenting one’s life/stories creates a place of grounding and location from which to go out from and to re-turn to. It helps us identify and draw out what matters in our lives. It also is a way of coming to know that which compels us as teachers – not just that which shapes our lives and teaching, but that which drives and compels our learning and continued explorations. For example, a story I re-turn to frequently in considering my own situating as a teacher is that of my early school beginnings in the Montessori school/house by the beach. Each telling takes a different shape and form and each re-turn illuminates different aspects of the experience. Each telling situates it more in the present and less in some distant past. It brings it forward, gives it “voice” and a presence so it can resonate more consciously through my living and
As an “act of remembering” (Watson & Smith, 2002, p. 9) autobiography retrieves memories in order to re-present and re-invent one’s life/teaching. This idea, for instance, frames much of Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell’s (1999) work. Autobiography and self-study is understood as a pedagogy of reinvention, as a process of seeking meaning in the past and re-storying it for use in the present.

As teachers we want to study and recreate ourselves, rather than be the object of someone else’s study... We use the term pedagogy of reinvention to describe the process of making both the immediate and distant pasts useable. It is the process of going back over something in different ways and with new perspectives, of studying one’s own experience with insight and awareness of the present for the purpose of acting on the future. (Weber & Mitchell, 1999, p. 8)

In this way autobiographical re-presentations are always much more than they seem. Even in their simplest forms autobiographical narratives can invite multiple re-turns and re-readings and so they become more than they initially set out to be. They become something else in and through each reading/writing as we aim to uncover, dis/cover, and find ways to undo, recreate and restory our teaching and selves as teachers. The problem however, is that many autobiographies do not move beyond a single or singular telling. They tell tales of unproblematic experiences, seamless stories, and authoritative or uncomplicated teacher identities: Stories that reinforce notions of the stability of teaching and the coherence of what it is to be a teacher. In these stories the self appears stable and certain and the narratives do little to engage with or question the taken for granted of teaching. In these linear tellings there often is a direct relationship between past experience and the substance of one’s teaching and one’s
These narratives contain meanings rather than open up, provoke, and question. I appreciate that such stories can create a sense of comfort and security and provide a grounding and stability of sorts and can be invaluable starting points for further inquiry. These narratives and explorations are important as they help us know our selves and others in deeper ways. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to only create renderings of uncomplicated experiences, illustrations of “good” teaching, instances of caring and nurturing, linear representations, and straightforward transformations— that is narratives that describe how one used to be and how through autobiographical writing/imag(in)ing one is changed and transformed into being a “better” teacher (see Miller, 2005). It is also necessary to explore the ways teaching exceeds its own limits and to engage with textual renderings that disturb, disrupt, displace and question teaching and what it means to be a teacher. To take the stories in their telling and open them up and to hold them long enough to feel their contours, attend to the undersides and silences, and hear the tensions and contradictions.

As Madeline Grumet (2001) critiques, currently in educational literature there is a proliferation of teachers’ stories illustrating the connections between the personal and one’s teaching: An abundance of stories that open up the personal as if the “risk of confession and the discomfort of disclosure” (p. 173) were enough. Such texts are seen as expressions of the author’s identity, containing aspects of one’s self and are often not opened to critical discussion. This prompts her to question: “What is the point, I want to know. What can I make of this? What difference does it make to education?” (p. 173, italics added). She looks for autobiography to be something more, to make a difference, to matter, and to connect to some existential meaning and greater purpose. In short, questioning how autobiography can work with education’s mandate for social action and change rather than primarily for individual teachers’ becoming. So what difference do our stories make?

Janet Miller (2005) raises similar concerns. I was particularly interested in her focus on “excessive moments” (p. 111) of teaching, research, and writing. She highlights the concept of excess in autobiography in order to call attention to what is contained by particular discourses of teaching and what is repressed or excessive to them. She explains that educational practices of research, writing, and pedagogy are typically representational practices, that is, they are practices that generally produce and contain meanings. What is repressed in these discourses and practices generally returns as excess creating a supplement which makes multiple readings, interpretations, and resistances possible (see also Phelan, 1993). Representation always conveys more than it intends to convey and inquiring into the gaps, fissures, and excesses can open possibilities for resistance and change. Additionally a juxtaposition of narratives means
autobiographic representations can be encountered in new and often surprising ways, giving insight into what is excessive between stories as well as repressed by them. This encountering opens autobiography to ways of speaking back to discourses, structures, and the given of teaching/being a teacher rather than primarily re-presenting the personal in teaching or constructing one's self in teaching.

For example, in this dissertation I juxtapose narratives and experiences of disability and bereavement. This is not to illustrate similarities or commonalities between them but to open up the text of teaching, to move away from linear tellings, and to consider stories of wounding in their relation. Additionally, I write, image, and re-construct narratives not just to re-present and re-imagine ways of teaching/being but to attend to an ethical demand to let the stories speak back into my life, teaching, writing and researching and to have their own presence. To encounter them again as something other than myself and self-representational practice. For example, as I wrote the first chapter I found it grounded me in profound ways. I returned again and again to the stories of my life with Nathaniel and in so doing the shape of my inquiry took a turn I didn't expect. Writing the stories opened me to that which compelled me, brought me face-to-face with the untold questions that resonated through my living and teaching and to the demands of disability and dependency. Re-reading the stories allowed a deeper resonance with each re-turn and I found myself responding to the claims they placed on me and on my teaching. These were stories that compelled an ethical response and required something of me.

Re-writing life writing

Autobiographic re-presentations are inextricably entangled with what it means to be human – with issues of identity and subjectivity, with who we are and how we come to be as human beings and come into being as teachers. Autobiography as life writing understands one's life/story and teaching as an ongoing creative act. Writing (including also imaging, creating, and otherwise artistically constructing) is a process of knowing and coming to know. As we write we appropriate that life and at the same time form and shape it and give it style and character (Silverman, 1994). So that “we write our teaching. We write our learning. They write us” (Neilsen in Raspberry, 2001, p. xi).

In the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive and recursive relationship between living, telling, re-telling, and re-living one’s life stories which opens to re-imagining ways of being. Each narrative composes certain versions of self (Bateson, 2004, 1990) and reflects self in a constant state of becoming. As we remember, bring forward, re-present and act upon stories of our lives we construct possible plotlines for the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Autobiographical inquiry as life writing not only records,
repeats, and re-stories that which is known and remembered, it draws on that which is unknown and hidden giving it life and a presence. It is a creative act. It brings into being.

The living of life [or writing of life], in my view, is each being's journey along pathways toward personal "awakenings". This is not to suggest there is a static, actualized state buried deep within...but rather, our being is in a constant state of becoming. There are qualities of awareness that can always be fine tuned and further opened onto broader vistas and clearer understandings of who we are. It is these awakenings that increase human capacities for negotiating life’s passages. (Riley-Taylor, 2002, p. 61)

It is through the writing (creating or imaging) that we can discover what it is we want to say and meanings emerge through the process of writing and creating (Munro, 1999; Richardson, 2000). For the author, autobiography is a process of discovery with self-knowing and self-becoming closely interwoven, and as we create our own storylines we can effect change and create opportunities for personal transformation and renewal (see Irwin, 2004). In this way the author, writer or creator comes to voice; that the process of self-representation is also one of self-construction, agency and empowerment.

In this way autobiography reflects certain ontological perspectives, or theories of being. Strong ontologies reflected in modernist tales of teaching, image self as stable, fixed, and constant, while weak ontologies acknowledge that all conceptions of self, other, and the world are open to question, and so must disrupt themselves and give no absolute certainty. Charles Taylor (1989) in his book, Sources of the Self claims to tell us something about what it means to be human as he frames four basic human essentialities: language, finitude, natality, and source. He acknowledges that we are languaged beings, with an awareness of our eventual deaths, with the capacity for newness or "radical novelty" (White, 2000, p. 9), and that our lives are set against a "source", that which compels us and evokes awe or wonder and reverence.

Weak ontologies are not just cognitive understandings and structures, but are also affectively, emotionally and aesthetically shaped (White, 2000). This means they don’t just describe ourselves, others, our worlds, and our teaching but also produce certain sensibilities that are both descriptive and constitutive. As Stephen White (2000) explains, “the embrace of a weak ontology has a tentative, experimental aspect; one must patiently bring it to life by working it into one’s life” (p. 10). Thus ontological perspectives are enacted and embodied. They cannot merely describe their shortcomings or indecisions rather must be worked through and rendered in one’s life. As White continues to explain, the act of articulating that which compels and sustains our lives means we are put in the position of seeing and experiencing our
lives in new ways and envisioning new possibilities for living. This then is not simply a matter of expressing stories already within us, rather finding them formed in the act of expressing, telling, and/or imaging.

The process of constructing a life/story and creating new understandings of self is particularly evident in stories of trauma, illness, loss, and difficulty (see Frank, 1997; Lather and Smithies, 1997). In these stories autobiography does much more than simply re-present a life and an individual's experiences it is the means by which self is constructed, destabilizations worked through, and new story lines and identities brought into being (this will be discussed further in the following chapter). In the pursuit of meaning and understanding memories are brought forward meanings are created and acted upon, which in turn acts back into our lives.

Life writing also reflects a search for natality, that is, for something new in teaching and for new ways of being. It reflects self as an intentional agent with self-awareness and reflexivity, a sense of the one's own history, and the intentionality to develop one's own story.

The self, then, is both the product of complex processes and a complex process that participates in its own making. The self arises amid established forms of knowledge as it participates in making new knowledge. The self is both invented and inventing, created and creating, product of learning and agent of learning. (Davis et al, 2000, p. 178)

In this way autobiography is constantly shifting as identities are always in flux and in process. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith (2002) describe autobiography as a performance that enacts self. It involves remembering and returning, negotiating life experiences, critiquing cultural narratives and discourses as we are always embedded in the world in which we live, and is a process of constant becoming. As our selves and identities are constructed by culture and society as well as individual choice and intentionality, autobiographical re-presentations, life writings and re-writings can encounter and interrogate cultural meanings and practices. Through autobiographical renderings it is possible to write back into the cultural narratives and discourses that have scripted and shaped us as particular beings and invite the reader/viewer to co-create meaning and understanding. They write;

Autobiographical acts of narration, situated in historical time and cultural place, deploy discourses of identity to organize acts of remembering that are directed to multiple addresses or readers ...Autobiographical narratives, then, do not affirm a "true self" or coherent or stable identity. They are performative, situated addresses that invite their readers' collaboration in producing specific meanings for the "life"...the
autobiographical is a performative site of self-referentiality where the psychic formations of subjectivity and culturally coded identities intersect and “interface” one another. (p. 11)

Autobiography as a performative act “constitutes subjectivity in the interplay of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency” (p. 4). It is an individual and “cultural practice whose limits, interests, and modes of presentation differ with the historical moment, the conventions invoked, and the medium or media employed” (p. 8). As an a/r/tographic inquiry autobiography takes place in the interface of writer/artist, reader/viewer, image, art and text. In this intertextuality and complexity ambivalences, uncertainties and the incompleteness of stories and identities are worked through. Meanings repeatedly move in/between image and text as a way of interrogating the complexities of knowing and the multiplicities of language, thought, intention and action, acknowledging that interpretation is always incomplete and interminable.

The difficulties of authoring

Again as I consider autobiography in light of my son's disabilities there are two interconnected concepts I would like to interrupt. The first is autobiography as coming to voice, and second is autobiography as self-representational practice.

Autobiographic inquiry is frequently referred to as a process of coming to voice: of speaking silences, illuminating hidden experiences, and speaking back to oppressive discourses (see Norman, 2001). Certainly in constructing autobiographies and inquiring through autobiography the writer, author, or artist is changed by the constructed life/story. My difficulty is not with this invaluable effect of autobiography, rather with what is missing from this orientation. By focusing on speaking, telling or constructing life/stories and coming to voice and understandings of one's teaching/self we have neglected what it is to listen, attend
to, and be changed by the voices, presence, and absences of others. Additionally, we have not acknowledged the possibility that some silences cannot ever be broken or life passages storied and some individuals may never come to voice or be able to represent themselves; that no amount of knowledge, education, opportunity, or emancipation can fix or mend this lived reality. This of course is very troubling for education: that some things cannot be mended, repaired, or made right. This is not to say that there is nothing for education or autobiography to do in these times rather to say that as a relational engagement that acknowledges the voices and presence of others and does not only speak from a position of self-interest, autobiography must find other ways to respond.

For the most part what I have discussed about autobiographical inquiry in this chapter describes subjects capable of deliberation and intention, with a degree of intelligibility, and capable of being active participants in the creation of one’s life/story. Yet it leaves out those with limited capabilities. Although I realize I am framing autobiographic inquiry within issues of becoming a teacher and it is highly unlikely that we would find individuals like Nathanial registered in teacher education programs or positioned as teachers in schools, my point is not to include Nathanial (and speak within frames of inclusion/exclusion) but to understand subjectivity in such a way that listens to, attends to, and learns from disability concerns and does not require mutuality, a measure of intentionality, independence, or agency. That is, to consider autobiography as an ethical engagement with the personal and other than self-representational practice.

For example, if agency in performative autobiographical narratives, creates conditions for individuals “to change existing narratives and to write back to the cultural stories that have scripted them as particular kinds of subjects” (Watson & Smith, 2002, p. 10) how are individuals without agency, that is vulnerable and without conventional rational autonomous markers, inscribed as subjects? I could perhaps see Nathanial’s life as a performance scripted by cultural narratives and story lines of disability, illness,
middle born child son and so on, yet without the ability to write (i.e. script, direct, create) his own stories he is left passive and at the mercy of others to tell his story for him or else only constituted by the narratives and discourses of others. If I choose not to speak for him, taking his voice and writing it for him, then where is his voice or presence to be found?

I could speak of his life within stories of othering and being othered, of borders, centers, margins, inclusions and exclusions, but these are not the stories of him I want to tell. As in telling these stories, in naming and resisting I also inscribe the very subjectivities I seek to undo (see Todd, 2001b). I want to find a way to speak of his living and his difference outside of stories of oppression and to tell that which I know intimately yet inarticulately and the ways they are written on my being. I want to find a pedagogical place that speaks of the wonderful difference that is him, of the tensioned and terrible places of not knowing and being unable to know, and the vibrant and rich understandings that can come from these. To see his (and others') difference and dependency not as problems to be remedied rather as that which comes to us as gifts.

So instead of looking at how teachers can be active authors and writers of their own scripts, I turn to see an/other side of things - to consider the demands of the other, how autobiography can story the trace of the other, and how vulnerability, suffering, dependence, disability, illness, trauma, bereavement and loss press in and make their demands. This means a move away from agency and an autonomous subject to receptivity, susceptibility, and vulnerability to where the utterance and proximity of the other takes a more central role. So that autobiography can be conceived of as something other than self-representational practice. And as it stories how the personal presses in, calls to teaching, and summons a response it becomes an autobiography of responding and attending-to rather than coming to voice and self-understanding.

In this way autobiography in teacher inquiry focuses not on my identity, or how I might become self-fulfilled or actualized,
become a better teacher, or understand more fully my own life and teaching, rather how other’s stories can weave through my own and find their own presence – an irreducible presence that preserves their alterity. For Levinas this is what is ethical or nonviolent: an attentiveness to and preservation of the alterity of the other (Todd, 2003a). Attending to otherness in autobiographical inquiry and the act of “making meaning in relation to something outside of the self” (p. 18) is what can make it an ethical responsibility and ethical engagement.

Other stories

If we are to think of the relations of autobiography and the ethical, we need to think beyond agency and an autonomous intentional subject invite other forms of autobiographical inquiry that do not foreclose alterity and speak only in languages of exchanges, mutualities, and similarities. In order to explore this idea I will turn again to the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

Foundational to Levinas’ views is the understanding that the self’s encounter with the other is inherently relational, and that inter-human relationships are fundamentally asymmetrical or disproportional. The relationality he describes is marked by attention to the unassimilable and unknowable alterity of the other. For Levinas, the other is anyone who is other than myself. The other is always higher, not graspable, and does not have the same status as self – that is, the other is perceived as coming from a higher place (Levinas, 1969), is vulnerable, has a need, and that no harm should be done to him or her. Thus his work explores the obligations and responsibilities we have for others. Additionally he vigorously disputes the autonomy of the self as a foundation to life with others contesting that belief in the self’s autonomy is one of the primary obstacles to living well with each other. At a profound level he challenges the “human portrait that accentuates the rational and autonomous features of life” (Oppenheim, 1997, p. 11) and the underlying belief in self-consciousness, self-realization, and individual intentionality. He insists that is not self-consciousness that establishes the “I” but one’s inescapable and undeniable answerability to the other.

The first of Levinas’s principles, which I introduced at the beginning of this dissertation, is that we are obligated to the other, not to oneself. Obligation is the innate moral demand in relationships, also described as a face-to-face relationship. So we write, story, image and imagine, not so we can “be better teachers” and improve or know our selves, rather we do so in response to the demands of the other and out of our moral obligation to the other. As Levinas (1969) writes, “The face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation” (p. 201). Responsibility for the other, or being-for the other (which is not the same as Jean Luc Nancy’s being-with others) means that the self is no longer a self-regulating autonomous agent, rather is left open, exposed, responsive, and passive (see Todd, 2003a) with a passivity marked
by receptivity, active waiting and listening, and tender attention to the other.

Contrary to popular belief, that we must know the good in order to do it, Levinas posits that all beliefs are a result of the face-to-face relationship. In this face-to-face relationship with the other we experience a moral demand prior to knowledge, and based on this demand we come to knowledge about how we should act. Much of education, tends towards the initial positioning – that if we write/image a story of our lives and re-imagine ways of being or learn about teaching, then we should be able to apply these to or integrate these in our teaching practices. If we learn about teaching in teacher education programs then we should know how to teach. Or if we learn about children, appropriate developmental practices, and principles of caring then we should know how to act with children. That is knowledge of the “good” comes first, then the application of it.

This is not to say that these are not important things to know, however, Levinas asks us to consider knowledge as an ethical question (Todd, 2001b). Rather than learning about something we learn alongside, through, and from it and consider the relations and conditions that are necessary in order for knowledge to be possible. And what is necessary is an orientation of receptivity and radical openness, that is an openness to something completely new, unthought, and “totally other beyond the self” (Todd, 2001b, p. 68), an ethical relation to difference, and susceptibility to alterity. This requires decentering self and centering alterity. It asks “What can I learn from the other?” “How can I respond to the other’s demand? And “What can I do for the other?” (Todd, 2001a). This responsibility is not something one can learn as knowledge or curriculum content rather comes into being through one’s response to the other and the face-to-face moral demand. Learning from and learning through means being changed by the other.

**Autobiographing teaching**

The second of Levinas’ principles that I will discuss here is the concept of the said and the undoing of the saying. According to Levinas (1969) the said is our representation of what the speaker has said to us, or the content of his or her speech, and the saying is the actual person speaking to us. The saying can never be fully captured. We may write down, record, or reproduce what others have said but we cannot ever fully capture the experience of the saying. The saying signifies something beyond the said and thus is never finished or closed and is always ungraspable. The said may also be understood as our representation of the other in language, beliefs, and systems of knowledge. While these representations are necessary for thinking and communicating, according to Levinas these representations always imply judgment and therefore are always lacking in understanding. Because of the inability
to fully know the other, the saying is never finished or closed. Each encounter with the other potentially interrupts the said and where there is disruption there is the possibility of change.

[The] Saying is precisely nothing that can be said; it is rather the perpetual undoing of the Said that occurs in running against [the Said's] limits...[T]he Saying can only be comprehended in its incomprehensibility, in its disruption or interruption of the Said. (Critchley in Cook & Young, 2004, p. 345)

The said may be our prior knowledge of children and the saying the interruptions of a particular child speaking to us in a particular encounter. The said may be what we know of teaching, and the saying the being of a teacher at a particular moment in an encounter with an other. Teaching in the saying can only ever be known in the interruptions and disruptions of constantly running against the said's limits, that is we only come to knowledge of the saying in the disruption of the said which comes through encounters with others. This has the effect of constantly putting our pedagogies into question as we are called to enter difficult spaces of interruption and disruption.

Marla Morris (2001) discusses this in her book *Curriculum and the Holocaust* as she struggles to understand these traumatic experiences at the same time as running up against the limits of understanding. She describes being obligated by memories that are not her own as she is summoned by the other, or the memory of her ancestors. This summons comes to her as a moral demand to be heard, and she finds herself required to respond.

The call that has addressed me to do work around the Holocaust continually announces itself in the interferences and ruptures. I am continually unsettled. Doing interpretive work around these texts causes unsettling ruptures in understanding and ruptures in representation. In working toward understanding these difficult memories, I realize how little an outsider to this event can understand. I stand outside this event because I am not a Holocaust survivor and thus am always looking at the event through the memory texts of others. At the moment I think I grasp Holocaust memory, this grasp is ruptured. (p. 26)

The possibilities are not in fixing, mending or making better but in the potentiality of the ruptures, interruptions and displacements. These kinds of undoings can undo our understandings of teachings as well and interrupt the already said storylines of what it means to teach and be a teacher. And so autobiographing teaching, as an active in-the-moment engaging,
takes place in the ruptures, displacements, undoings, and in the times when meaning comes apart. Autobiographing teaching as an engagement with the saying looks for those disruptions and destabilizations, lengthening and drawing them out, entering into them through writing, art-making and imag(in)ing— not waiting for the difficulties and interruptions to pass but provoking the openings and finding ways to think through them.

The given and the said of teaching and education are fiercely stable places so to continuously undo these, to write new stories of teaching and becoming teachers we must enter the places and times of instability and find ourselves taking shape there. And so I look into the emergence of difficulty and inquire into sites of wounding to try and understand how one's being as a teacher is written in the midst of it. I write, image and imagine in the midst, in the entanglings, in this risky place where knowledge threatens to undo.
I call the greater scheme of things, finiteness, change, imperfection, uncertainty, and vulnerability mysteries, because they challenge us in ways ordinary problems do not. They are constants in life, persistently provocative, and too important to ignore.

Thomas Altig, 2001, p. 45
CHAPTER 4: WAYS OF BEING (UNDONE)

Whatever is produced from this condition of loss will bear the trace of loss, but how will it bear it? In what form?

Judith Butler, 2003, p. 468-9

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I begin to write by knitting. I gather my thoughts and try to locate a starting point as I sit with my girls in the evening knitting, mending, and constructing. Strands of deep burgundy possum fur-merino wool run between my fingers. The click, click, click of the needles soothe and draw me back to times spent knitting with my mother. I learned to knit when I was seven and I can still see my mother’s hands flying as she knit and hear the stories she’d tell of socks and sweaters and the people and places they belonged to. My mother passed away this past year and the last things that I had knit were begun at her bedside and finished at home, worn for her to see the day before she died. I wore the long olive brown sweater coat I had made, stitching on the buttons and tidying up the inside on the ferry over. “You’ll have to watch you don’t snag that” was (nearly) the last thing she said to me. I was irritated then as I wanted to hear some wonderful words of encouragement and love but what she gave me were the more, obvious I thought, practical bits of advice. But I smile at it now as I say similar things to my girls on their way out the door and realize how few people there are left around me to attend to snags and runs and wandering threads.

My grandmother had died the year before and I count off the months and deaths that followed like rows.

Knit one, purl one, decrease at each edge. Keep the rhythm.

It was the day following my grandmother’s death that my mother was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer. We lived with her cancer for a year. Death moved in slowly and in the last month took over steadily issuing in an intense period marked by four other significant deaths: First my mother, three months later my aunt, a day later my great aunt Silvia, and then four months later very suddenly and without warning my father. In the space of one year and seven short months a history, a childhood, and many of my familiar supports were gone.

I feel disoriented most of the time. It must be a bad dream. Sometimes I think they’re just gone somewhere and if I look hard enough I’ll find them.

I begin to knit and stop to unravel several times as I don’t know exactly what I’ll make before I begin. I want to make something that feels right and fits comfortably, but I have no pattern to go by. Piles of unraveled wool lie in tangled wavy heaps before being knit again into another segment with the un-doing still marked by the memory of the constructed piece. In my knitting I feel an urge towards warmth and comfort. An urge towards mending, finding comfort, making meaning and finding hope. Towards healing and making whole again. Textiles have long been linked to warmth, comfort, caring and nurturing (Bachmann & Sheuing, 1998; Jeffries, 2001). So I knit comfort for myself. And I need hope to ground me.
Traces

Most of my writing takes place at home at my dining room table surrounded by the everyday chaos of living. As I write I drink tea from my mother's china mug, a watercolour painting of the Queen Charlotte Islands that came from my father's office hangs on my wall, the wool carpet my parents had bought in Switzerland when they were first married is under my feet, and my aunt's loom and spinning wheel sit empty in the corner. Serving dishes, breadboard, spoons, soup ladle, their everyday things colour my kitchen. There are traces of their lives scattered throughout my house. Each object a reminder of my living with them. Their deaths making their lives more present in mine.

My mother's death had come slowly with enough time to wait for it. But my father's death was swift and unexpected, and left me undone. Each of their deaths had come during a term of teaching, interrupting, displacing, and marking my teaching, changing things so I could not seem to regain my previous comfort and ease and leaving an indelible mark like a constant reminder. My father had been on his way to visit family in Switzerland when he had died suddenly from acute heart failure as he bought his train ticket on his arrival at the airport. For the first weeks back in the classroom after his death I could not shake the image of him lying alone and cold on the ground. He had died instantly and his fall had passed unnoticed. I could not fathom how no one could have seen him fall. How could such a significant event happen so swiftly and so silently? The image was there vivid in my mind as I spoke, in my conversations with students, as I went over details of lesson planning and got them started in their paintings, crowding out and displacing my thoughts.

My head feels like it's stuffed with dense wool. I can't concentrate or think clearly and as I teach all I see in my mind is the image of my dad lying dead on the cold floor in the Zurich Airport...I can't shake it. It's there when students talk and give their presentations, hovering over me, intruding...
into my thoughts, heavy, vivid, and disruptive. I feel enclosed in this— the shock of his death still echoing through me. So it surprises me as students press in. Their eagerness to learn, discover, and engage with art seems so foreign. It’s not how I’m feeling. Their interest and eagerness conflict with my own dense heaviness as an unwelcome intrusion.

Deborah Britzman (2003b) writes, “Enacted in every pedagogy are the tensions between knowing and being, thought and action, theory and practice, knowledge and experience, the technical and the existential, the objective and the subjective” (p. 26). Each is shaped by the other. These are understood as elements in tension, a balancing, a dialectic and reciprocal give and take between each element. But what happens when experience, the personal and emotional interrupts loudly, interferes and displaces so that it overshadows and overtakes everything else? What happens when loss and death invade and overturn? And what when experience takes you to a place you do not want to go? When there is resistance to knowledge and experience itself? How does education and teaching continue in times like these?

Britzman (2003b) also emphasizes that the process of education and the process of becoming a teacher needs to be rendered problematic. Although I have been a teacher for many years now, I still consider myself in the process of becoming a teacher. I am still learning to teach (see also Clandinin, 1995). In thinking of teaching as an intellectual, social, relational activity rather than solely as a technical enterprise, teaching is positioned as an always-in-process act of learning and becoming: An endeavour that can never be fully mastered or settled. So with the reverberations of loss running through me and through my teaching I continue to learn and re-learn what it means to teach and be a teacher, and to discover what it means to teach in “times of losing and being lost” (Britzman, 1998, p. 135).

I find myself struggling (and learning) to listen to the anxieties, conflicts, resistances, and difficulties. Resisting my impulse towards mastery, certainty, comfort and conclusion and at times resisting learning itself as I allow the anxieties and unsettlings to surface and become known and echoing through it all the hope of how “investigation of learning at its most flawed moment might allow for a different kind of insight into learning” (Britzman & Pitt, 1996, p. 119).

According to bell hooks (1994), an engaged pedagogy involves a reciprocal exchange between teacher and student. She argues, “Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (p. 21). Teachers then, cannot expect students to do what they are unwilling to do.
themselves. As a teacher-educator I expect students to reflectively and critically engage with past experiences and personal knowledge, and construct meaningful pedagogies. This is my turn. So here I am, exploring how my teaching bears the traces of loss and learning what it is to teach in difficult times.

**Undersides**

Like the lining of a dress at the hem or the lapel - mourning is thus likened to the material of clothing, the material that is mostly hidden, that is suddenly, even unexpectedly, felt against the flesh... This is a presence, a proximity, that undoes what appears, that is counter to the effect of appearance, but is also part of the realm of appearance itself...It tinges the appearance; it suggests an “underneath”, but is still part of the appearance, it's frame, its artifice, its suggestiveness and potential undoing. (Butler, 2003, p. 470)

The surface of teaching is often reflected as a presentable “teacher” image. A “good” teacher is organized, knowledgeable, caring, helpful, and supportive, disciplined, in control (Walsh, 2001) and projects an image of professional competence. Becoming a teacher is also made up of learned expectations from years of watching how teachers act and behave. Deborah Britzman (2003b) describes that for many beginning teachers “pedagogy is not rooted in the production of knowledge but rather in its public image...the taking up of an identity means suppressing aspects of the self...becoming a teacher may mean becoming something you are not” (p. 27). Such images of teachers however, subvert the actual struggles of teaching.

I wonder if
I’m failing as a teacher as
I can’t seem to keep things together.
I feel so disorganized and scattered.
My edges (and center) are fraying, unraveling, opening, and undoing.
I don’t know how to be a competent, prepared, attentive teacher and live with/in these openings.

Beneath the competent exterior there is an “underside of teaching” made up of the inner worlds, unsettlings, doubts and anxieties of teachers, and of “the private struggles we engage as we construct not only our teaching practices and all the relationships this entails,
but our teaching voices and identities" (ibid, p. 25). I write things here I hesitate to say in class, revealing, writing it once, reading and re-reading my doubt, and writing back into it a more complicating reading: Concealing and revealing myself as I choose what to reveal and what to keep hidden.

In the same way, the surface of pedagogy is made up of hope, possibility, growth, and change. The language of education speaks of progress, advancement, expectation, excitement, joy, pleasure, openness, engagement, limitlessness, adventure, generativity, and transformation. In its essence, education expresses a hope for betterment, change, and growth. But on the darker side - the underside - there are anxieties, conflicts, woundings, sorrows, losses and tensions, that seem to conflict with growth and learning. There is an underside to teaching and learning – a place where knowledge resists and difficulty resides displacing and appearing to contradict the work of teaching and the role of being a teacher.

I spent the afternoon trying to prepare for today's class but e-mails keep coming in regarding my dad's service, obituary, and people's remembrances of him intruding my thoughts, and filling my heart and mind until there's no room left to think about teaching. I can't seem to be in the experience of loss and in the role of a teacher at the same time. It's too difficult, it demands too much of me, so I lean into the loss and let teaching care for itself.

However, like mourning (see Butler, 2003) these resistances and anxieties, are still part of the structure of teaching, "it's frame, its artifice, its suggestiveness and potential undoing" (p. 470). Resistance can be viewed as the limits and ends of knowledge beyond which students are not willing to go, or more positively, as a force disturbing and disrupting the known and familiar, acting as an invitation to renegotiate and relearn.

Resistances do colour the everyday experience of teaching. For example, bell hooks's (1994) description of an early morning class is a familiar one:

Time was just one of the factors that prevented this class from becoming a learning community. For reasons I cannot explain it was also full of "resisting" students who did not want to learn new pedagogical processes, who did not want to be in a classroom that differed in any way from the norm...though they were not the majority, their spirit of rigid resistance seemed always to be more powerful than any will to intellectual openness and pleasure in learning. (p. 9)

My own students' resistances have puzzled me as well. Every year I have students in my
classes who move to the edge, who feel the tension and unsettling of new ways of thinking and being, who stand at the threshold of possibility yet refuse to engage with the invitation to change and will not step into the unknown and experience the joy and pleasure of the adventure.

Where am I going? Where will this take me? Who will I be without the comforts of the familiar?

A focus only on pleasure and adventure in learning shuts out the actual experienced discomfort and difficulty of change and growth. Knowledge and ways of knowing that requires a shift in ways of being, that challenges and disrupts previously held notions of self and ways of locating oneself in the world interrupts the comforts of the familiar and often can require more of us than we feel we are able (or willing) to give. A desire for certainty, stability and control makes this interruption and disruption an intensely uncomfortable and unsettling experience. As Dwayne Huebner (1999) writes, “All knowing requires openness and vulnerability...To have new forms emerge, old forms must give way to relationship” (p. 350). There is a giving way, a release, letting go, and a dying so new forms can emerge.

Education is calling out for new ways of learning and being with each other and is longing for new meanings. “It feels choked, out of breath, caught in a landscape wherein “curriculum” as master-signifier is restricted to planned curriculum with all its supposed, splendid instrumentalism” (Aoki, 1996, p. 14). Yet in responding to this yearning and in moving towards a more “inspirited” curriculum, engaged pedagogy, and holistic understandings and engagements, it must be remembered that what is there to be learned may require a great deal of the learner.

In my students’ resistances I see my own story reflected back and returned to me. And I am implicated in their resistance.

I don’t want to go there. I don’t want to learn these lessons.
Cut, seam, rip, tear, wound.

Fabric cut and torn and stitched together again in different renderings.

Pieces displaced and opened up.

Threads fraying and edges undoing.

Red threads stitch the seams and mark the wound.
Difficult knowledge

Resistance appears to be in opposition to and in contradiction of learning. But what if we viewed resistance as a condition for learning? Deborah Britzman (1998) describes education as an act filled with difficult knowledge, conflicts, resistance, and inconsolability and argues that at its heart education is about interference. Education aims to interfere and disrupt, as the dynamic of destabilization is central to pedagogic encounters. She writes, “For there to be learning there must be a conflict within learning” (p. 5) noting that it is not the conflict or the resistance to learning that is problematic, but rather a refusal to learn from this resistance.

To consider the vicissitudes of learning from difficult knowledge, educators must begin by acknowledging learning as a psychic event, charged with resistance to knowledge. The resistance is a precondition for learning from knowledge and the grounds of knowledge itself. (p. 118).

Irit Rogoff (2000) also explains, “learning and transitional processes are not so much the addition of information as they are the active processes of unlearning” (p. 3). This kind of learning though, that is aimed at interrupting the familiar (Sumara, 2002) and at undoing and unlearning stable and fixed ways of viewing the self and world, can be a very disruptive, destabilizing, interruptive event.

I need to write yet resist the writing. It’s hard to stay with it. In the writing I return again to see my dad on the ground and re-live the struggle of teaching. I feel the loss again and for days after the writing leaves me undone. I want to write a more hopeful story instead, one that comforts not disrupts.
Terry Carson (1997) insists that we take note of the places in which knowledge is resisted. He maintains that rather than searching after more knowledge and information on how to teach, education should turn its attention to the places where knowledge resists and locate its inquiry within the tensions and moments of disruption. Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt (1996) also emphasize that the problem is not with the “dynamic of destabilization” (p. 121) but with the teacher’s impulse to control the destabilization, maintaining control and self-mastery. The resistance reveals a conflict between what is and what is not yet, between the known present and the possible unknown and unfamiliar future, between the comforting and dis-comforting. Being in the resistance, moving between the new and the old, the stable and the uncertain, being in both yet neither, in between and in listening to the resistances, dis-comfortings and unsettlings, education takes shape as a difficult endeavour.

I move between the safety and security of the known to the discomfort and uncertainty of my emerging stories. It’s much easier to write other people’s words, to echo their ideas and theories. I want to avoid my own story, to hide and conceal it behind someone else’s words. I see it again, reread my life from a different perspective, and I am disrupted again.

Yet it is in these places of difficulty that there is hope for something new to emerge. The unsetting and destabilization and can lead to renewed ways of understanding self and teaching if time is taken to listen and to dwell in the discomfort.
The wound is a strange thing: either I die, or a kind of work takes place, mysterious, that will reassemble the edges of the wound. A marvelous thing also: that will nonetheless leave a trace, even if it hurts us. (Cixous, 1997, p. 16).

Baby blankets, wedding dresses, funeral suits.
Fabric, thread, and fragments evoke memories and stories of my two daughters as babies and my son born with multiple disabilities and my complex life with him. Stories of my mother, my grandmother and aunts, and their lives.

Of mothering and mothers and fathers,
Of life and death
Repair and disrepair.

I run my fingers over a square of clean soft white flannel and think of my babies’ diapers, receiving blankets, and first nightgowns with ties at the back and their tiny little feet curling out at the bottom. I’m reminded of other flannel too — the flannel of my mother’s nightgown as she was laid out peaceful in her home in the room she had died in.

Birth, life, and death.

Changes and passages written into the texture of the fabric. I look for a fragment of my mother’s handwork to layer over top of the fabric square in my hand but I can’t bring myself to cut into something my mother had made so I find another old, stained, worn piece and I cut a hole.
I cut a hole through a piece of beautiful white cutwork fabric. It looks like an eye. I stitch red thread around the opening and it looks like a wound gaping open and bleeding. I layer gauze under the white cutwork and stitch though all the layers.

It doesn't seem that long ago that I watched the nurse change the gauze bandages wrapped tightly around my son's head and was shocked to see the place where his eye had been protruding and bulging several times it's usual size. I had already changed bandages through many other surgeries. Over the years I had wrapped and unwrapped lengths of fine cotton gauze strips first white then stained with blood and body fluids sometimes stuck to his skin. Then this surgery, and I had sat at his bedside and tearfully insisted to the impatient surgeon that I couldn't be expected to change this bandage. Not this one. Not another one. But of course I did. Later at home I dutifully followed the daily routines of unwrapping and wrapping.
I remember the stale, unpleasant, sterile, medical smell of the hospital that penetrated my son's clothes, hair and skin. The same smell I could not seem to wash from my own skin and hair. The same smell on my aunt and in the room as I visited her in the hospital as she lay dying. I had carefully combed her grey tangled waist length hair much like she had done for me as a child, discarded the strands of hair that seemed to come out in bunches, and folded her clothes into neat piles as she needed to know that they would be there for her and ready if she needed them.

Cut.

I cut out a hole from my aunt's worn tablecloth. I cut a fragment of her story out to make it my own.

I cut it out not to hide it, mask it, or make it disappear, but to highlight it and so others can see it.
I trace my finger along a seam in fabric left over from the wedding dress my mother had made for me nearly 18 years ago. The seam ran the length of a sleeve that didn't turn out right and was discarded. I stitch hair between the layers of silk.

Three seeds tucked in a circle of thread.

And another open hole.

Another seam, this one running the length of another tablecloth that had belonged to my aunt. The cloth was made up of two lengths of linen joined by an obvious rough seam. My mother had stitched tablecloths out of similar fabric — fabric they had taken off the straw mattresses they had slept on in the camps during the war. These strips were narrower and likely came from their pillowcases but my aunt had died just months after my mother so I couldn't ask either of them about it. I cut out another hole and stitch around it.

I hold the rough textured linen in my hands and stitch along the seam. My grandmother, like many other women in Lithuania, had grown and spun flax and woven it into linen on the big floor loom they had kept in the barn. My mother had told me stories of how they had harvested the flax, beaten and spun it. I wish now that I had listened more carefully so I could know those things for myself. I should have asked more while I had the chance. But I thought there would be time. The memories are woven into the linen now and only the threads know the stories.

One day I'll set up my aunt's loom and weave my own linen.
Significant difficult events such as bereavement, disease, disability, and trauma frequently represent turning points in individual's lives, as they are crucial events in one's efforts to individualize a life (Bruner, 2001). Such events are openings and opportunities for narrative restructuring and are occasions for autobiography (Frank, 1997). Arthur Frank (1997, 1998, 1999) for example, discusses illness as narrative disruption and describes how people may return from deep illness (as in potentially terminal conditions where the individual may survive but may never be fully released from disease as in cancer in remission, diabetes, or certain heart conditions), but things may never return to what used to be normal. The illness disrupts the individual's life story so that the life after the event can never be the same as the life before.

The illness story begins in wreckage, having lost its map and destination. The story is both interrupted and it is about interruption. In the illness stories what begins as the breakdown of narrative -life's interruption by illness-is transformed into another kind of narrative. (1997, p. 164)

As new stories are constructed new meanings and ways of living are negotiated. The self is both told and formed in that storying as it is through the process of constructing new narratives that the self is re-constructed (Wortham, 2001). In this way, autobiographical work becomes a means of repair and performance where the self becomes the product or effect of the story (Lanegreiter, 2001). There is an undoing and a constructing as one narrative breaks down and another is written in to being.

People make sense of their lives via story lines or narratives that are available at particular cultural moments. No life fits neatly into any one plot line and narratives are multiple, contradictory, changing and differently available...some help us tell our lives well; some break down in the face of the complications of our lives and times. (Lather and Smithies, 1997, p. 125)

The reader of the autobiographical story is invited to enter in to the space of disruption allowing him/herself to be disrupted too. As in Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) book, Troubling the Angels, there is no easy reading of that story. Entering requires effort as the reader is asked to enter as a participant and step into the space where AIDS runs its course through women's lives. Arthur Frank (1999) writes, such "autobiographical work is not a spectator study but a relation" (p. 22), a dialogic relation of self and other.
Cathy Caruth (1996) describes trauma as “the story of a wound that cries out” (p. 4). The wound and the story are inextricably intertwined as the story is “released through the wound” (p. 2). According to Caruth, trauma is not just an experience of a traumatic event but also the survival of the event so that trauma is both a “crisis of death” and a “crisis of life” (p. 7) as well. One’s story then, is not only about the effects of the illness, bereavement or trauma but also about the enigma of survival and how one’s life continues with, in, and through the disruption. At the core of such stories is a “double telling” and, as Caruth explains, what is required of the reader of such narratives is a listening or witnessing of impossibility. For as Dori Laub (1992) writes, “There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech” (p. 63).

Re-writing teaching then to include teacher narratives of loss and bereavement also requires a writing that allows for impossibility, uncertainty, undoing, breaking down, displacing, and losing and the difficulties of witnessing disruptive stories.

**Complicating teaching**

The disavowal, or the refusal to engage a traumatic perception of helplessness and loss, often pushes educators to the opposite spectrum of affect: the focus on hope and courage as the adequate lesson to be made from difficult knowledge.... When the vicissitudes of life and death cannot conform to the idealization of a life that should surmount the difficulties, it becomes very difficult to live with, or in, loss. (Britzman, 1998, p. 119, 120)

As I explore loss and teaching and look for ways that loss works its way through my teaching, I find I have no script to go by. I try to find my way through unfamiliar landscapes with few markers and companions. Bill Pinar (1992), in *Cries and Whispers*,

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writes beautifully of how death brings this life into focus. Margot Rosenberg (1997) discovers new connections between teacher and student as she opens her teaching to include stories of her mother’s death. Yet even while discovering new connections, she lives in the disturbance of the difficult in/between spaces of teaching and grieving. Mary Hallet (1999) in Personal Effects references the death of her partner as she gathers in students’ papers for marking. Nevertheless, most often when grief and loss are addressed in educational settings it is the students’ losses that are discussed with the teacher assuming a caregiver role. And as in Hallet’s writing, stories of teachers losses are frequently turned around to discussion on students losses as if a teacher’s grief must find its meaning in students’ stories. The teacher gathers in and cares for the students’ stories instead of (or as) her own.

There are very few teacher stories of loss and grief. It would appear then that bereavement, loss, and grief disrupt and disturb the nature of teaching and one’s teaching identity. A teacher must be composed, professional, and controlled (Britzman, 2003b) and is generally seen as one who gives care, not in need of receiving care. Making room for grief and loss in teacher’s stories would necessitate an un-learning and un-doing of one’s understanding of what a teacher is. In remembering teachers from my past I realize that during my school years I had never known teachers to grieve. My teachers had displayed a variety of emotions: anger, frustration, impatience, joy, pleasure, and excitement, but never grief. While some personal stories had made their way into the classroom, stories of my teachers’ griefs, losses, absences, abandonments, disappointments, and sadnesses were generally not among them. Stories of a teacher’s lack - her losses and absences - were whispered quietly, kept hushed, spoken like secrets, and kept outside of the classroom as if their entry was dangerous or disruptive. A teacher’s grief generally was seen as a private experience having little to do with the act of teaching.

Traditional and conventional views on bereavement have also viewed the journey through grief, loss, and bereavement
as a private, individual, inner, emotional process. Within these perspectives, individuals are expected to go away to grieve, to take time off and remove themselves from public life reinforcing the idea that a teacher's grief should be kept outside of public educational spaces. Such views have primarily discussed bereavement in terms of stages which reflect the grieving person's journey through the process of acknowledging the loss, adjusting to it, and releasing the loved one in order to reconnect with the world of the living (Atig, 1996; Rando, 1986). Most of these stage theories reflect Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' (1969) widely popular and influential work on death and dying, which outlines five stages of grief: shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Detaching from the lost loved one and moving on to reestablishing connections with the living and restoring or recovering "normal" ways of living has been seen as the primary work of accommodating a loss. Therefore it would be expected that the nature of teaching as a relational and social endeavour would preclude a teacher's grief and conflict with dominant views on what it means to grieve and "work through" a loss. There would be little room for bereavement and grief within teaching.

In more recent years however, research has opened up alternate understandings of bereavement. Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) argue that stage theories reflect modernist understandings of self as separate from other and reinforce Western values of autonomy, individuation and independence, leaving little room for multiple interdependent human relationships. Klass et al maintain rather than severing attachments, bereaved persons in actual practice tend to continue connection with the deceased, and although the relationship does not exist in the same form, finding ways to continue to remember and stay connected is emphasized rather than detaching and letting go. They propose that grieving is a "dynamic part of human life that has no end" (p. 349). There is no end point when grieving is over rather there is an acceptance of life and death as part of each other supporting the paradoxical relationship of the lost loved one being both present and absent, and connected and severed at the same time and allows for continuing connections with the deceased.

Additionally, recent views on bereavement position loss as an intensely difficult experience that engages all dimensions of one's life (Hagman, 2001). It is a socially negotiated, relational endeavour rather than a private inner experience and reflects a view of self that is socially embedded, dialogic, interdependent, rather than closed or individualistic. Grieving emerges as a process of "re-learning" the world (Atig, 2001). As bereavement shatters taken for granted ways of living it necessitates a re-learning of one's self, identity, history, and the way one acts, lives, and locates one's self in the world. Grieving is also viewed as a process that may not end or be resolved but may continue for a lifetime. The bereaved person learns to move from being consumed by the pain and loss, to finding ways to accommodate it, to carry it alongside
as a constant remembrance and companion that enriches and enlivens one's life in multiple ways and learns to live with loss and learn through it (Harvey, 2002). Mourning becomes a creative transformative process that is open and evolving and can include beauty, joy, and pleasure rather than only sad and painful emotions.

While this view allows for a teacher's grief work to enter the classroom spaces it still does not account for the difficulty of loss and how the nature of loss conflicts with the nature of teaching. Loss is by nature ambiguous, difficult, and uncertain. Teaching, or a teacher, is expected to be none of these things, rather certain, concise, and clear. In embracing a view that opens to uncertainty, ambiguity, and ambivalence it creates a pedagogy in tension. Trauma, loss, bereavement, and the work of grieving cannot be reduced to a "simple mastery of facts" (Caruth, 1996, p. 111) and as Deborah Britzman (1998) writes, "How does anyone come to love a knowledge that knows no mastery?" (p. 61).

I hold the cloth

in my hand and breathe in the faint musty familiar odor. I take more out of the closet and out of drawers and sort it into piles, some for giving away, some to take home, and others to be thrown out with tomorrow's trash. These are my parent's clothes still hanging where they left them. I take my father's coat off a hanger – the one he wore home from work, the same one that we had leaped on as children everyday at six o'clock as he opened the door, jumping onto it from our hiding place behind the wall. He never failed to be surprised. Even grown he still welcomed me with the same warmth and pleasure. One last touch and the coat is carefully placed on one of the piles. I find in it's pocket a crumpled handkerchief and later as I cut into it I can hear my mother's impatient mutterings: "why can't he use just use Kleenex and throw it away like every one else?"
I cut into a slip left in my mother's drawer the smell of her body still lingering there.
I cut around the edgings and lace and wonder what she'd say to seeing fragments of her underwear framed and hanging on the wall undersides exposed.
Maybe I should add in some of my own just to be fair.

Edges.

I leave the edges cut, raw and frayed.
I need to live with these open edges for a while.
Sewing them up would make it seem too easy
as if all I need to know was contained within these squares.
Sewn up, closed, and certain.
I leave them fragile and undone.

Mendings.

I hold the finished squares and read back their stories. I lay them out side by side and consider the ways I have been cut and stitched together with the fabric.
Working through teaching

It is only in the pedagogical relation that one begins to encounter one's self as a teacher.
(Britzman & Pitt, 1996, p. 118)

I had been absent from teaching for two weeks following my father's death. On my return I found a message waiting from the students in one of my classes asking if they could stop by one afternoon as they had something for me. I was working in my office when they stopped by with a large box tied in a ribbon. I was a bit taken aback at the size of the box and after they left opened it to find a beautiful blue flowered box filled with objects of their care – packages of spaghetti, tomato sauce, soup, crackers, cookies, candies, scented candles, and even a video for my girls. I was overwhelmed by their thoughtfulness, their care, and their generosity. It was a beautiful intimate act of mothering and care-giving extended to me. But I was surprised at how uncomfortable I felt with it. I believed in reciprocal learning. I enacted it (or so I thought) in my classroom. I considered myself always open to learning and receiving from my students. Yet as care was extended to me, and my story of loss returned to me in this box of comfort I felt dislocated. This box disrupted and dis-comforted me in ways I could not have anticipated. I would have been comfortable with a card and flowers as they were "acceptable" offerings for someone who had been recently bereaved. But I saw this as an act of mothering – something my mother would have done in similar circumstances – and I was undone by it.

I thanked them later at the end of the next class we had together, my voice breaking and near tears. But the disruption of it stayed for a long time. In that box I saw my story of loss and my desire for teaching as an engaged reciprocal act returned to me and along with it, a question asking "and now what"? After spaces have been made for stories of teachers' and students' undoings, what then? What does it mean to make room for this within teaching and learning? How will it change me and change my understanding of what it is to teach and be a teacher?

Being open to learning from my students leaves me open to being displaced and discomfotred with my own questions returning to disrupt me again. We take indirect routes to know ourselves (Salvio, 2001), knowing ourselves through others as "our stories utter another" (Pollock, 1998, p. 89) and return to play out, repeat, work through, and be returned again in other forms.

Learning, it turns out, is crafted from a curious set of relations: the self's relation to its own otherness and the self's relation to the other's otherness. This is forgotten when
the adult's desire for a stable truth, in it's insistence upon courage and hope, shuts out the reverberations of losing and being lost. (Britzman, 1998, p. 134)

This complicates teaching and disrupts my understanding of what it means to teach and be a teacher. I expected engagement in teaching and learning to be a warm, hopeful, comforting, generative place full of possibility, but instead I find myself uncomfortably disturbed, disrupted and unsettled.

As I trace my fingers over the openings in my textile pieces and remember the cutting I find my art resonating into my teaching and into my research. So in a circling back through my art I set out to discover what it means to deliberately and actively create holes and openings for the personal, the difficult, and each of our stories of woundings and mendings exploring what it means to open up to loss.
Textile, textural, and textual texts.

Opening up the text, pulling apart

the words
like strands of thread, letting it unravel, spaces

seen and felt, waiting for others’ stories and understandings

to be written back in

In this dissertation I use textiles, fiber, and fabric as metaphor and means of understanding. The art materials and processes inform, direct and shape my work. I cut, highlight, and stitch openings. I unravel, undo, and open up. Openings, for example are a foundational element of the cloth – its fibers woven and strands joined together with spaces in/between. There are openings like holes worn over time reflecting the fragility and temporality of memory. Other openings are cut deliberately and act as invitations to enter in and look through offering new views and perceptions and encouraging dislocations and disruptions. I look for openings- searching for and exploring the unstable and uncertain, leaving the edges fraying and in the process of undoing and unraveling.

Just as “becoming a teacher entails working through narratives of experience that are fraught with difficulty and inconsistencies” (Carson, 1997, p. 85), textile work also illuminates
intimate experiences and the processes of cutting and seaming are reflected in and through the text. Textile work takes place at the intersections, at the seams, holes and ruptures, and in the places of tension and difficulty. In quilting for example, the needle is worked through layers of fabric, and in that act the quilter works through her own difficulties and disappointments as well (Gustafson, 2002). In stitching the needle pierces and re-turns through the fibers in rhythmic movement enacting wounding and difficulty. Pin pricks, drops of blood, broken threads, tears, and missed stitches mark the sewn and mended cloth. Like the movements of needle and thread as they make their way repetitively through the surface of the cloth, piercing and re-turning, or the circular turning and re-turning of wool worked into felt there is as a continual process of questioning, layering, and re-interpreting. Loss fractures representation (Butler, 2003) situating knowledge as always partial, incomplete, and in need of re-understanding. Thus artworks and artistic workings find their place where language hesitates and falters (Rogoff, 2000; Rose, 2001) and the ambiguity and interpretive nature of images leave openings for other questions and responses.

Contemporary fiber/textile art is situated in this “entredeux” (Cixous, 1997), in the openings and passages between knowing and not knowing, between life and death, comfort and wounding, connection and loss, repair and disrepair. Textile processes are located with/in the past traditions of female material work and the innovative practices of contemporary arts. Textile work, with its craft roots, is embedded in ceremonial, symbolic, and everyday practices (Rowley, 1999). It contradicts the notion of the isolated, individual artist and represents the social and relational nature of our being together. It functions as a “sign of alternative possibilities for social identity and community” (p. 16) and references the daily struggles of living and being.

The rhythms of textile work are generally slow and reflective. The repetitive gestures and bodily rhythms of knitting, stitching, weaving, and felting can be meditative, soothing and
healing. The textured textiles, the tender touch invoked in the warmth of the fibers and wool re-call emotional and felt connections. As Kay Lawrence and Lindsay Obermeyer (2001) discuss, textile work as contemporary art practice offers rich possibilities for exploring loss, negotiating life's passages, and making sense of life's experiences. The cadence of the processes and the sensory engagements with the fibers prompt textile artists to deal in different ways with difficulty and life's disruptions. Through textile work they find themselves knitting and weaving parts of their lives together again (see also Sparrow, 1998).

Textile work has long been linked to comfort, to the maternal and nurturing, home and family (see Warner, 2005). Fabric is warm, textural, tactile, and sensual. Quilts are used as metaphors of connection and community (Irwin, Stephenson, Neale, Robertson, Mastri & Crawford, 1998) and memories of the comforting textures of cloth evoke desires for reassurance, consolation, belonging, and security. In textile work the fabrics and fibers draw us closer (Gustafson, 2002), inviting us to draw near, beguiling us to touch and interact through our senses. In encountering a work in cloth or wool we remember our own tactile and emotional connections with the materials and fibers such as the familiar worn textures of a favorite shirt or dress, the feel of a warm sweater on a cold winter day, a cozy blanket wrapped around a sleeping child. The materials, processes, and structures evoke remembrances and desires of home, belonging, comfort, and connection.

In any artwork meaning is not found only in the visual appearance but also constructed in the act of creating, in the touch, smells, sensorial/sensual engagements, in the memories and meanings with/in the art materials, in the stories that run silently through the fibers, and in the responses and returnings. Textile work in particular holds an immediate visceral appeal. There is an intuitive and emotional knowing in the textile encounter rendering the works "utterly familiar and yet eerily strange" (Folland, 2001, p. 43). Yet when only one story is told, that of connection and comfort, it misses the actual cutting, opening, and wounding that are integral to the textile processes. Experiences of loss, grief and disturbances echo silently through the fibers creating stories without words, holding memories of unspoken histories. There are stories and images evident to the viewer in the surface design and construction of the work, yet other stories silently weave their way within and through the threads, fibers, cut and torn fragments. The material retains the memory of the actions performed on it (Wada, 2002) and bears the marks of the individual who works with it, so that the processes of stitching, knitting, binding, felting, cutting, and seaming always reference more than the images intend to convey. As Sue Rowley (1999) describes, the rhythms of making resound with the heart beats of human sociability and mark the "pulse of human time" (p. 15).
Dis/comfortings

Recently I came across an image in the March 2004 issue of FiberArts magazine showing what appeared to be three small bodies standing side by side enveloped in one finely-knit large armless sweater-like covering. The "sweater" covered their heads and hugged their bodies and only glimpses of their legs and feet were showing. Clare Qualmann conceived this Knitted Cover for Three Kids out of a desire to protect and shelter her children on their daily walk to school. The image echoed the desire a knitter has to bring comfort and love to the one she knits for and to keep harm away by the warmth and coziness of wool. The artist Lindsay Obermeyer explores similar ideas in her work Connection, in which she constructed two red hand-knit mohair sweaters joined together by shared 15' sleeves. A photograph, reproduced in Reinventing Textiles, Volume 2, shows the sweaters worn by the artist and her daughter as they walk across a city street, connected by the long, flowing arms. Another photograph shows mother and daughter wearing the sweaters lying on the grass, encircled and embraced by the red extended arms. Obermeyer made the garment as a response to her daughter's trauma and illness and out of a desire to alleviate her suffering and create connection out of disconnecting and alienating experiences. As she knit comfort and hope for her deeply troubled and grieving daughter the materials and processes of garment construction evoked her longing to hold, console, help and heal.

Janet Morton, a Canadian artist with a wonderful sense of humor and sense of the ridiculous, has also knit coverings such as a multi-coloured sweater for a bicycle, a cardigan for a giraffe with an elongated neck and 75 buttons, covers for furniture and appliances, such as a TV, vacuum, chairs, table, telephone, and house plants. She also constructed a covering for a tree, disguising a 70-foot maple tree with a painted birch covering. Her best-known work is Cozy, a collaborative project of hundreds of previously used, recycled, and reconstructed sweaters stitched and knit together to cover a house. More than 800 white and beige sweaters were used to create a casing or close fitting tea-cozy-like cover that entirely covered a house on Toronto's Ward Island. Cozy emphasizes and exaggerates comfort and protection and the desire to keep out harm. Her excessive exaggerations interrupt knitting and wool works as intimate, private, and domestic activities and brings them into the public domain (Morton, 2000).

Aganetha Dyck also plays with the transformation of domesticity. Her work, 65 Shrunken Sweaters, resonates with the other artists discussed here as she contorts and distorts multitudes of knitted sweaters, which are generally thought of as objects of comfort and warmth. Repeated washing and felting renders the sweaters shrunken beyond use. The familiar elasticity and yield of the wool is rendered stiff, motionless, and stable so that the
strands cannot unravel. The fibers no longer have any give or play and would appear to choke the wearer. No longer useful or comforting the altered sweaters appear alien, bizarre and disturbing. While textile arts reference hope for comfort, belonging and security, in *Knitted Cover for Three Kids, Cozy, and 65 Shrunken Sweaters*, the absurdity of the images speaks to the impossibility of this desire. Beautifully illustrating that when only comfort or connection is emphasized, teaching and curriculum, like these artworks, become distorted, absurd, and impossible. When I look at the images of Dyck’s small, shrunken, distorted sweater bodies huddled together in the center of the gallery floor I think of schooling and the impossibility of fit between children and teachers lived experiences and teaching and learning that emphasizes only connection, hope, and comfort.

Wendy Lewington-Coulter in her quilt *Home Sweet Home*, aimed to create comforting images of home through stitching together conventional log-house quilt blocks. On the surface it looks like a traditional quilt yet on closer viewing one can read statistics of domestic violence inscribed on the fabric. The inscriptions interrupt the placid design and the gentleness of the cloth which leaves the viewer unsettled and disturbed. The conventional meaning of textile work is that of comfort and security, projecting warm thoughts and images of cozy homes so no one really expects textile works to be uncomfortable, difficult, or disturbing (Grace, 2002). Barb Hunt investigates this further with the juxtaposition of concepts of consolation and danger. In her *Antipersonnel* installation, a collection of hand-knit landmine replicas, she plays with the preconceived ideas viewers may have of textile work as domestic, nurturing, and comforting and the dangers and violences that intrude and ravage. Made out of varying hues of pink yarn at first sight her sculptural objects look like baby toys or harmless rattles yet they are life-size replicas of landmines. As an ongoing project her work yields nearly 250 different varieties made to scale. The power of these works is in the play of the expected and the unexpected and the disruption of stereotypical notions by actual lived difficulties and traumas.

Anne Wilson plays with these textile and material perceptions as she highlights losses, openings, undoings and dis/comfortings. She creates fragile, beautiful, and disturbing images as she stitches hair around holes and tears in old family linens evoking the presence of hidden and silenced experiences. Some of the holes are cut deliberately and other were worn over time yet each are opened further and made more evident by the sensitive stitchings. Her work references the comfort of home and family gatherings yet highlights the woundings, losses, traumas, and sorrows that run through and colour family histories. Her *Areas of Disrepair* series with human hair stitched around the holes and worn openings in unraveling fragments of white damask cloth emphasize the difficulties, tensions, and undoings within collective lives and experiences. Stitching and mending, acts of connection and repair, accentuate the holes.
and losses. Tears and openings are dis-repaired (Ferris, 2001) so that vulnerability and fragility are brought into view. Although initially very unsettling, her textile works are evocative and inviting, rendering a delicate and disturbing beauty.

The arts have a tremendous capacity to create understanding (Sullivan, 2005). These artists and artworks, play with conventional conceptions of textile work juxtaposed, exaggerated, and interrupted by lived experiences. They speak to and inform similar struggles in teaching and curriculum: that education is meant to be hopeful, classrooms should be happy places, and teachers are meant to help, nurture, and console. That education should make right, fix and mend. Yet lived experiences and histories may tell a different story.

Chika Ohgi, a Korean artist, creates delicate installations of finely woven, nearly transparent sheets of white silk suspended from the ceiling as if floating gently over rolling waves. Playing underneath the silk are even more delicate shadows in hues of elusive grey. In her work I imagine another glimpse of curriculum - seeing an image of teaching and learning in the surfaces, shadows, and undersides. In her work pauses, spaces, and absences have their own presence (Reuter & Kawashima, 2001) and the shadows are an integral part of the whole.

Bruce Uhrmacher (1997) describes curriculum shadows as that which curriculum disdains, for example, sorrow, loss, undoings, and wounding. Yet it is necessary to consider these neglected places, to look beneath the surface, to listen to the undersides of experience, and to the undoings and openings of losses and grievings, and create to conditions for these shadows, openings and losses to come into view.

Several years ago I began an Extraordinary Bodies series. I washed, felted, and reconstructed a number of second-hand sweaters into nearly life size distorted bodies with extended arms. On the smallest body I hung tags with text from out-dated books describing children with disabilities. A larger body had 10' extended arms that echoed my own longings to protect and mend. Yet these arms were not long enough, could never be long enough to hold, comfort, help, or make better. Lindsay Obermeier’s work creates a hopeful image, one that evidences possibility of healing and helping. Her arms connect with her daughter’s creating an image of safety and connection as if consolation and help were possible, even though her story tells a different more desolate tale (Lawrence & Obermeyer, 2001). I could never make my arms long enough. Even if they stretched longer and longer until they reached out the door, down the road, across the bridge and into my son’s care home, they still would not be able to heal, mend, make better or make things “right”. There are times when sorrows cannot be mended, wrongs cannot be righted, or undoings fixed. Loss and absence remains.
In times of losing and being lost

Places are lost—destroyed, vacated, barred—but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, never can be the first. And so there is an impossibility housed at the site of this new place. What is new, newness itself, is founded upon the loss of the original place, and so it is a newness that has within it a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of thus being fundamentally determined by a past that continues to inform it. And so the past is not actually the past in the sense of “over” since it continues as an animating absence in the presence, one that makes itself known precisely in and through the survival of anachronism itself. (Butler, 2003, p. 468)

The losses still reverberate through me and likely will for some time still. I still deeply miss my dad’s care and my mother’s warmth. I miss their love and support, their practical advice and ways of doing things. I miss my mother’s Lithuanian intonation and her wonderful way of rolling her rrrs. I miss her history and how I was connected while she was here. I miss my dad’s Swiss-German melodic and rhythmic sound. I ache to hear again his spontaneous bursts into boyhood songs as we hiked the Swiss Alps together and dreamed of other hikes before we had even started the one ahead of us. I miss the stories that were so familiar but can’t seem to remember now. I miss my aunt’s eccentricity, her adventures, and how I belonged when they were here. I miss my home and place of grounding. I miss who I am not now, who I was then, and how I could see myself growing older in their graying hair and wrinkling hands. I miss how my past, my future, and my present were all tangled up with them.

I pick up my needles and continue to knit. I’m still not certain what I’m making but in the knit piece I see the stories and threads of my past, the being of my present, the struggles of my writing and teaching joining together and taking shape. The emerging garment echoes my losses and the rhythmic clicking of the needles soothes my soul and I hold both disruption of loss and comfort in my hands. Loss it seems is inseparable from its remains. It is read, produced, sustained and known by what remains of it (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003). And absence remains as does memory as does the work of grieving.

There is no reclaiming. I cannot go back and rebuild or reclaim what was lost only go ahead and see what I find and discover what emerges. The losses call out for new ways of thinking and being. They call me to rethink and restructure ways of living and being as a teacher that I had taken for granted. They call me to remember and honor lives that are marked in my past yet surface as an “animating absence” in my presence (Butler, 2003). And call me to continue to consider my teaching where stories of the wound both call out and resist, within a double tension to tell and to resist the telling. Where the dead call out and surface through my living and teaching (Gilmore, 1994). Where stories of loss are told in and through teaching,
lying beneath the surface, hidden, sometimes silenced, sometimes voiced and attended to, both known and resistant to being known.

Education has denied its own difficulties for too long and has split experience into the dualities of good/bad, loss/hope, comfort/disruption, and learning/resistance disregarding human complexities (Britzman 2003). Instead education emerges here as a complicated endeavour and as an “impossible” movement in/between both.

But we are, as it were, marked for life, and that mark is insuperable, irrecoverable. It becomes the condition by which life is risked, by which the questions of whether one can move, and with whom, and in what way are framed and incited by the irreversibility of loss itself. (Butler, 2003, p. 472)

And yet somehow this is the hope of education. I find hope and comfort in the fact that my teaching bears the mark of my losses. That education and teaching can include loss with all its messiness, unsettlings, disruptions, mournings, and resistances is its hope for offering ways of living and being with each other that embraces wholeness and acknowledges the difficulties of being together in this world.
CHAPTER 5: LEARNING TO LISTEN

The teacher's story...

must pass through the story of the student.

Deborah Britzman, 1998, p. 15
I wake in the morning with a vague heaviness weighing over me as I have done most days since my parents died and slip on a pair of soft felted boots before going downstairs to put on a pot of tea. The boots keep my feet warm on this chilly winter morning as the cold air creeps in from under the gap at the front door. I had knit the boots out of bulky white Icelandic wool while my mother was dying, her hands reaching out to help mine as I struggled with turning the heels and later had felted them with repeated washings in the washing machine. I had intended to embroider them with brightly coloured yarn, covering them with flowers and cheery motifs to carry her into the next world. Not that her death was a happy event – far from it – but she was at peace with her dying and with spring coming it had seemed like a fitting gesture. I knew she would never wear them with her feet so swollen from the effects of the cancer but I had knit them for her anyhow and had tried to felt them as stiffly as the ones she had worn as a child during the long winters in Lithuania.

I never knew much about her early life in Lithuania, or about the war years that followed. My mother didn't talk much about those years and most of what I knew was pieced together from fragments of conversations, bits and pieces dropped in amongst a day's work, scattered comments, and from things not said. Yet in the months before she had died knitting and felting had worked its way into several of our conversations. Her stories about wool and socks and knitting told me many things about her life before the war and I began to see her life through hands that knit and through memories of wool, yarn and needles. And I found myself learning in indirect ways.

On this particular winter morning I try to shake the cloud that hangs over me but it won't budge. It's time to do something about this sorrow I thought. I didn't want to 'get over it' and move on, putting it in the past, behind me, leaving my losses here and turning away. Nor did I want to create some kind of memorial, fixing the deaths as an event and marking them unchangeable. I wanted to make this undoing into something, to honor my parents' lives and their deaths, and to value the grieving by attending and responding to it, and to find some personal relief from the weight of grief. My restlessness grows and finally I sit to write again and I pick up the threads of my art/teaching.

While I had found the first weeks back in the classroom after my father's death extremely difficult I had also known the hopeful generativity of teaching. I had known teaching as a generous, living, creative practice and what I believed about teaching was closely related to how I understood art and art making: both were emergent, living engagements and processes needing difficulty to provoke creative change and transformation. Shaun McNiff (1998a) encourages artists to trust the process, enter the unknown, stay in uncertainty long enough for something new to emerge, and remain in the difficulty or aporia space (see also Derrida, 1993;
de Cosson, 2004) in order to find one’s way through. This along with Alex de Cosson’s (2004) statement that "an artist knows that a point of disjuncture is a point of learning" (p. xiv) prompted me to expect the same of teaching. I was comfortable with art making as a place of inquiry and participating with the flow of creative thought (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and trusting artistic processes to help negotiate life’s passages. And so I was provoked to stay inside the difficulty of teaching and to wait and trust that something new would emerge.

Elliot Eisner (1994), in his book *The Educational Imagination*, explores the idea of teaching as an art and the metaphor of teacher as artist. He discusses four ways teaching could be considered an art: teaching can be an aesthetic experience and beautifully orchestrated performance; it calls for emergent judgments that must be sensitive to the tempo, tone and climate of each class: it requires creative imaginations and inventions; and is a process directed activity with emergent ends. While these (as well as many other qualities) are characteristic of artistry in teaching and may illustrate how teaching is like artistic practice, as **a/r/tographic** practice pedagogical encounters can also be understood as processes and instances of inquiry in their own right.

**A/r/tographic teaching** is artistic as the art, research, and teaching arise in relation to each other. Teaching, and particularly art/teaching, is informed by artistic ways of thinking, creating and being and takes shape (or ideally should take shape) as living relational artistic practice. **A/r/tographic** inquiry and artistic practices are also inherently pedagogical as the art/inquiry teaches, questions, and opens up conversations and understandings. Yet this primarily describes how an artist and teacher, or art and teaching are like each other and how each of the art, research and teaching are folded within a totality of sameness. In spaces of difference however, teaching as **a/r/tographic** practice can be conceived as distinct with unique contributions. **A/r/tographic** teaching thinks *through* teaching and understands teaching as instances of inquiry as well.
Throughout this dissertation as I have thought through and worked through Levinas' views, particularly his perception that teaching is receiving from the other more than the self already holds, I have begun to appreciate how the foundations of teaching can be learning, process, change, and becoming: foundations that are constituted in ethical relation to others (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). In this sense encounters, relationships, and conversations are the basis of pedagogy, knowledge and identities are co-constructed in the midst of dissymmetric relations, and “teaching” is shared. In spaces of difference, it is teaching that thinks through alterity, dependency, vulnerability and receptivity.

One of the closest examples I have come across so far that would help illustrate this can be found in the pedagogical practices of the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy. In these early childhood contexts young children use the arts as a central and vital source of inquiry. And from what I can tell having never (yet) visited the schools, only having read about them, the children are engaged in a/r/tographic practice - that is they use artistic means (or musical, artistic, performative, and other languages) to test emergent theories and inquire about the world.

The *atelier*, or classroom studio space, is considered at once an idea and a place (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell & Schwall, 2005). As a place it is an actual room or area aesthetically set up with materials and provocations for inquiry. As an idea it is a commitment to the arts as processes of meaning making and inquiry, to relational educational practices, and to an artistic, living pedagogy that is always kept open to new encounters and change. As Leila Gandini (in Gandini et al, 2005) explains, the true atelier is a mind-set. It is a way of organizing spaces, observing children, documenting and communicating, and understanding education as an ongoing creative process of discovery and learning – for children and teachers. Children’s art making is not viewed as individual self-expression as if ideas are held inside children and expressed in paint, clay, or other media, or delivered in teacher directed projects rather constructed in collaboration and community and in engagements with the materials and with others.

Teaching in these contexts in conceived of as an art and as an ever changing, ongoing, creative, relational act (Hill, Stremmel, Fu, 2005). It also is founded on principles of collaborative research, ongoing inquiry, and openness to continual discovery and learning. The teachers learn from, through, and alongside the children, working together on emergent ideas and inquiries. Research is not something added to one's teaching rather is essential to the processes and practices of teaching/being a teacher. For example a teacher spends an extended time listening to and learning from the children, documenting children's actions, speech, and processes of thinking and creating. This documentation is an “act of love”
(Rinaldi in Hill, Stremmel & Fu, 2005, p. 178) and an integral part of fostering learning and re-imagining teacher-learner relationships (Rinaldi, 2001). The processes of documenting, researching, and questioning try to make visible the intangible and inarticulate elements of teaching and learning. While most of the documentation has been focused on the children and the particularities of what happens to the teachers in the teaching, and how they are personally changed through their encounters with the children and their “a/r/tography” is mostly missing from the literature, it offers a partial yet very revealing glimpse into how a/r/tographic teaching could be enacted.

In addition, Reggio inspired practices, such as those described in the Stockholm Project in Sweden (see Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999), also draw on the work of Emmanuel Levinas and understand their learning communities in terms of ethical relationality and dependency relations rather than emancipation. Dependency is not understood as something to fix or to overcome and neither is it a sign of developmental immaturity. Rather, it is conceptualized as an ethical attention to otherness in a non-reciprocal relation. This is illustrated in Carla Rinaldi’s (2005) statement as she speaks about the responsibility teachers have for young children: “We should remember that there is no creativity in the child if there is no creativity in the adult. The competent and creative child exists if there is a competent and creative adult” (p. 172). This statement also illustrates Levinas’ pedagogical relation: that children’s creativity is dependent on the creativity and openness of the teacher. This dependency presents itself as an obligation for the teacher to respond and in return become more that he or she contains.

As Bill Readings (1996) describes, this time speaking within university education contexts, dependency relations are not based on mutuality or exchange, as if our obligations to the other could be settled, instead the pedagogical relationship is compelled by an obligation to otherness and the responsibility one has for others. This means listening to and learning from others, and not
just listening to the surface of what is said or to what can be said, imaged, voiced, or otherwise represented. Readings claims the "pedagogical relation is dissymmetrical and endless. The parties are caught in a dialogic web of obligations to thought...[and] thought appears as the voice of the other" (p. 145). Pedagogy then is listening to thought: to that which cannot be said yet tries to be heard.

Therefore, entering, waiting, and listening amidst the difficult a/r/tographic spaces of teaching is not a passive waiting or distanced observation, rather it is an expectant, receptive attention and living engagement with the difficulties and processes. It is waiting that maintains an open, welcoming expectancy for something yet unknown to present itself (see Benso, 2000) and calls for the imaginative capacity to "look at things as if they could be otherwise" (Greene, 1995, p. 19). It is to be still, to dwell with, to attend to, and to make time for the unexpected.

Working through

As the initial shock of my parents' deaths subsided I found again an active engagement and creative energy in teaching. Each class was a response to students, learning, content, issues and ideas so that there was movement, change, and growth (my own as well as my students) that was life giving and life affirming. I looked forward to teaching. I found it healing, soothing to my own mourning. I thoroughly enjoyed the studio times, the energy in the class, and students' experimentation, joy, discovery and art making. With everyone busy and engaged I was content. I felt their pleasure in the artwork they created, and their excitement fed back into me and I was happy. Immersed in the present of teaching I forget my own pain as teaching offered me warmth and comfort.

But the sadness was waiting for me as I closed the classroom door at the end of each teaching day. I missed my dad deeply. Reminders of him were with me in my walks in the woods, in the snow-covered trails, in the marks of other boots on the trails and in my own steps and I still felt the shock of his sudden passing. There were reminders of my mother in my hands, as I knit and
stitched, cooked, cleaned, and created: Memories in my feet and in my hands and I struggled with the disjuncture of grief and comfort, mending and undoing.

At this point I returned several times to read and re-read parts of my writing, particularly the previous chapter (which was the beginning of this dissertation), and like the warmth and textured tenderness of wool wrapped around stone each time found comfort in the discomforting renderings. I remember how difficult it was to teach and live in those times, and how even more difficult and disturbing it was to write it again. Yet narrating a story, no matter how difficult, tangled, or uncertain, gives shape to the experience and allows for hope that some sense or cohesion can be made (Berger & Quinney, 2005). Nevertheless, it is not just comfort that I need. Paula Salvio (2001) cautions against seeking comfort and consolation as resolution to difficult stories and losses as resolution that comes too quickly can interrupt the potential for such experiences to bring change. Melancholy and sadness can be productive and positive emotions (Goleman, 1995) as these states of being inform us that our losses were important and open opportunities to reflect on and redirect our lives. So I wait for grief to work its own way in and through my life.

Questions sent out

I have a stack of cloth handkerchiefs sealed in a large zip lock bag on my desk. I had collected them when we had cleaned out my parents’ home following their deaths. I had gathered these symbols of bodily excesses and tokens of grief and affection in the hopes of transforming them into something else. Some were my mother’s with intricate hand stitched flowers and pink and white lace edgings, their delicacy so unlike her prudent and practical ways. Her handkerchiefs had rarely been used but were kept as they had been given as gifts from various relatives and friends. The rest were my father’s, sensible pale coloured plaid bits of cloth with his odor still lingering, that he had used everyday. I found some stuffed in pants and jacket pockets as if expecting his return, others washed, pressed, folded, and laid out neatly in piles in his drawer alongside socks and undershirts. I carefully open the bag and touch their soft, faded fibers. In my mind I see them stitched, written on, cut open, and re-worked. Hung on a line like clothes fluttering in the gentle breeze, releasing sorrows and sending out mournings, losses, and griefings. I feel the wind move through me, and the familiar smells within the fabric locates me back in moments of my childhood on the seaside bluffs on Southern Vancouver Island.

The air on the Island was always moving. Even on the hottest days of August there was always a light breeze coming off the ocean, gently echoing through the treetops, bringing the familiar smells of summer and pleasant sun filled memories. But there were other winds too. I remember storms and gale force winds that brought the waves crashing over the roads, spraying up over the breakwater, leaving the taste of salt water in my mouth. And I could feel the winds
blowing through my center evoking memories of childhood fears that I would be carried up to the sky or thrown out to sea along with the storms that sprung up unexpectedly in the dark of night.

Typically in my artwork I let the materials speak. I start with questions not yet formed or issues that trouble me and see where the materials and images lead. At any other time I would take out the handkerchiefs, hang them up for a while, live with them, look at them, let them direct the process and I would follow. But when I open the bag the familiar familial odors will be released and I'm not sure I'm ready for it. It feels too important, too soon, and too risky – maybe this wind will be the one that actually carries me away and I'll be lost at sea. So I send out my uncertain questions and troubles in other ways.

The conditions of learning

This term I'm teaching an art education course for pre-service and practicing teachers that is shaped around an afternoon enrichment art program for children. We meet on Saturdays and for seven weeks of the term 30 children ages 5-11 from the community come for an art program. The adults registered in the course collaboratively team-teach the art sessions and provide a focus and frame for the afternoon's art activities. Although they are expected to facilitate one of the weekly art sessions the teachers' primary responsibilities are to work closely with one or two children, attend to their intentions and goals, offer support and hands-on help as needed, and to document in detail the children's work. The hour before the children arrive is generally spent discussing current literature and together we struggle over meaning as I lead them (sometimes deliberately) through difficult terrain and conflicting views. When I first taught this course it was structured in fairly conventional ways: in an "application" model where students learned about art, teaching, and children, tried it out in "real" settings, then reflected on and made meaning of their learning – in effect, learned about teaching by talking about, engaging in, and reflecting on teaching. However, I've become convinced that what really matters can't be accessed directly.
My goal is for teacher's teaching to be transformed. I hope their art/teaching will know the joys and struggles of art making and will bring a life of creative and artistic inquiry to the students they will teach. Yet I don’t directly focus on this. Over the six years that I have taught this course, and particularly while writing this dissertation, my focus has gradually yet steadily shifted from emphasizing teaching (what the teachers do) to learning (how the teachers respond to what they are presented with through the children). And my primary concern has become how I might best facilitate the conditions of learning. While each year I make alterations to the course readings, change the theme and art activities, adjust assignments and other aspects of the course, the most significant changes have been in the conversations that make sense of things. Thinking through the personal, working through my own grief and disruptions has profoundly dis/oriented and opened up this course.

Throughout the course I make every effort to keep the classes open and flexible. And it is an effort. Education it seems likes to move towards certainty and sureness. It requires constant attention and effort to resist the closures and unravel the certainties so spaces can be made and teaching and learning can move and breathe. This is particularly the case at the beginning of the art program until students start to get a taste of the spontaneity and responsiveness that is needed to keep the curriculum living and emergent and begin to appreciate that like any conversation the outcomes can not be known in advance.

We begin the art program with a focus and a commitment to create a positive and exciting art program for the children. Our first obligation is to the children and to supporting their efforts. And once the children arrive this needs little emphasis. As the children enter the university classroom on the first day with parents, younger siblings, friends, and the occasional grandmother, their bicycles, backpacks, toys, and belongings trail in with them and fill the classroom space confronting each teacher with their presence and immediacy. The teachers are paired with specific
children who will be their responsibilities for the duration of the program and suddenly the art program is no longer general, disinterested, and impartial – it is specific, particular and mediated through these children’s lives, histories, families, and belongings.

Before the class begins I generally plan a rough outline of what the art program will look like and wait for students to take up the particularities and details and work together to give shape to the inquiries. Like an invitation for a conversation, this beginning framework is intended to act as a provocation for inquiry and exploration. And as I begin to plan I struggle with how I might facilitate an art program that works within this praxis space of largely inexperienced artist/educators. For days I wrestle over these issues and one night just before sleep ideas come: we would draw and feel the boundaries of what we could see and touch; visit the Museum of Anthropology to learn from the worlds and histories represented there; respond with personal explorations and stories in clay and build sculptures to hold partial, intimate and collective expressions of identity; finally, consider intangible dreamings and hopes. I want the teachers to think about identities beyond typical school art collages that fix children’s selves into interests and activities that can be named and glued; to explore identity as relational, constructed in response to others, and open – thinking into the unknown as well as the known. Then I imagine silk banners painted with dreamings and wishes held and released to the wind.

As I wonder what kinds of dreamings and hopes the children will release I find my own questions and thoughts sent out as if asking the children what they think so I can write my own response. Teachers can be directors, artists, and creators, as they shape the curriculum that is taught and experienced in the classroom (Olsen, 2000) yet often the focus in creating is on the tangible elements of curriculum. But I’m far more curious about the intangible and invisible: The not so evident personal questions that are sent out in teaching.

Without grasping

One of the greatest struggles in art program is for teachers to take an attitude of waiting and listening to the children without knowing exactly what they are waiting and listening for; to not know and give attention to the not knowing and to wait for something to present itself. It seems to undermine the very essence of what they understand teaching to be. They worry that perhaps nothing will present itself. Perhaps they will miss it, not see or attend to it, or even worse it may not be good enough. Unless they have some certainty of what it is they are listening for and tangible evidence in a list, an outline, or a set of criteria, they tend to approach the listening and receptivity with great anxiety. Of course I worry about this too. In different ways and for different reasons as I wonder if I will always carry this sadness. All I can say to my students is trust me. It will happen.
I ask the teachers to wait and take a listening and receptive attitude in several different ways. The primary one is that of attending to and learning from the children. While the art program is in session, after an initial large group instruction and focus time, teachers and children work in small informal groupings, sometimes one teacher with two children, and other times larger groups of three or four teachers to five or six mixed age, mixed gender groupings, all the while watching out for and attending to the children that are their responsibility. I encourage the teachers to honor the children’s ideas and intentions and follow their lead rather than setting the direction or controlling the outcomes. For novice teachers who are used to planning lessons in detail in advance this can be an adjustment. Yet it allows for a more responsive and receptive relation where the children are supported as strong protagonists of their own work. It also engages the teachers with the difficult task of figuring out how to support this child’s intentions and processes. While it may be possible to find out what children in general need, the kinds of things boys or girls tend to create, or how children of certain ages are more likely to approach drawing, the teachers don’t know this child that they are responsible for and thus are required to listen and attend closely in order to support this particular child’s intentions.

Zygmunt Bauman (1993), in his book *Postmodern Ethics*, insists that taking responsibility for the other means not treating him or her as the same as us, rather the other must be recognized as being unique and unexchangeable, that is the relationship cannot be to a general other, but must be to a concrete, specific, and particular other. John Caputo (2000) also claims that in an ethical situation it is the singularity of the other that obligates me to respond. One cannot be responsible for children in general, but in the face-to-face with a particular child one cannot escape his or her uniqueness, “unclassifiability” and “unrepeatability” (p. 179) and are compelled to respond. Thus “when I am in a singular situation, faced with something singular, I do not have it, rather it has me” (p. 180). In this sense children do not belong to the teachers as
properties to manage or control, rather we belong to them.

David Smith (1999) writes that the ability to attend to our students depends primarily on “a form of stopping, and the creation of a space in which we can truly listen” (p. 98). And I encourage teachers to do this: to slow to the pace of the children, follow their lead, and respond to their purposes rather than imposing their own. This means teachers must listen carefully to children’s meanings and intentions and take a receptive attitude of not knowing.

Some children may be very silent while they engage with the art materials and don’t offer much insight into their processes or thoughts. Yet the teacher must learn to wait, to love the silence, and be at peace with the possibility that nothing will reveal itself (and sometimes this is the learning). When finally the child speaks or reveals something of their processes it can be received like a gift with tenderness and deep respect. Yet listening, as Bill Readings (1996) notes, is much more than attending to speech. It is careful attention to actions, silences, and thoughts – to that which is said and also unsaid and unknowable. Working alongside on the same art projects under the children’s direction with the teacher assisting opens up embodied understandings and non-verbal interactions and helps teachers “think beside” (Readings, 1996, p. 165) rather than about the children.

Nevertheless, this does not always work as smoothly as I would like. Teachers come to class already knowing about children. Some have already nearly finished their teacher education programs, others have been teaching for a number of years, and even those with little previous experience with children were children once themselves. It is not uncommon for teachers to hold certain generalizations and assumptions that can interfere with the listening and attending. And in this intimate setting there is the potential to do children great violence by teachers thinking they know beforehand what is best or right to do. I continuously find myself gently provoking openings, returning the teachers’ own questions back to them, and carefully prompting them to take an attitude of receptivity, openness, and listening. For “it is the self’s susceptibility to the Other, not knowledge about the other, to which education must address itself if it is not to inflict violence” (Todd, 2001b, p. 68). I encourage the teachers to record their own questions and responses and to ‘attend to their own attending’ (Simon, 2000) through visual journals and other reflective responses, and to question and interrogate their own listening and learning processes; to recursively question their own understandings of their observations and to look for places of interruption so that learning is always in some sense provoked and unsettled. At the same time I try to be very careful with the twists and turns and stay responsive to their understandings, anxieties and unsettlings.

Teachers are also positioned so they need to listen and attend to each other as well as to the children. As I continue to explore how teaching can loosen its hold on self-reliance
and individual competencies, and begin to embrace a greater dependency on others (or responsibility for others), I have shifted the emphasis away from lessons that can be contained by objectives, procedures, and closures, towards more responsive and open engagements. For example, groups of teachers take turns planning and facilitating the weekly activities, with one lesson building on the last and leading into the next so that the whole of the art program takes shape as an emergent collaborative effort. Each group only has some control over a part of the program so that the outcomes are left uncertain and emergent. To make this work the teachers need to listen for meaning, build on the previous lesson, and leave their own open so the activities and be interpreted and carried on by others. Again there can be a great deal of anxiety in having to give up the certainty of knowing where the lessons are leading. Every year I hear students protest that they could do it better on their own. Yet as a conversation, like “good improvisational jazz” (Smith, 1999, p. 39), the teachers must be “committed to staying “with” each other, constantly listening to subtle nuances of tempo and melody, with one person never stealing the show for the entire session...in a spirit of self-forgetfulness, a forgetfulness which is also a form of finding oneself in relation to others” (ibid).

The teachers are pressed at the same time by their obligations to particular children and a desire to help and not harm, to be tender and act carefully, and to act with love and it is this that makes things come together so beautifully. This presses in and summons the teachers to respond. It reveals their own lack, that they do not really know these children, their intentions in art making, or how they might best respond as teachers yet calls them to become more than they are, to be more than they contain. Their responsibility for and obligation to particular children and their growing awareness of their “unrepeatability” calls them to step into the uncertainty and the impossibility of knowing for sure. At some point in the program we all begins to relax into the impossibility of grasping and controlling the outcomes and the curricular
conversation takes on a life of its own.

Dreamings

One night I have a dream about my parents. In my dream they had just moved into a lovely large sunny friendly house. As I entered the house I saw my mother busy in the kitchen, and looking out the window, saw my dad in the distance, waving and smiling as he walked towards us. We began to celebrate as we realized that his death had been a mistake. That somehow we had heard he had died, but really he hadn’t, and here he was home and alive. As everyone was laughing and talking I walked downstairs trying to figure out how he was here when I remembered he had died. There in his office were his papers still filed neatly in rows of beautiful wooden filing cabinets and stacked in piles on shelves. Nearby there was a small shelf filled with hundreds of pink “while you were out” message slips filled with scribbled noted from people who had missed him. I wanted to ask him if I could have the filing cabinets when he didn’t need them anymore but I remembered that we divided his things up already and it had been an emotional and painful task. As I looked at the papers I imagined my sister’s tears – the ones she would have shed quietly as she sorted though his office at night on her own. How do I explain that, I wondered. I remembered we had dealt with his papers months before but I rationalize it thinking perhaps my sister had saved everything after all.

Still puzzled by the irreconcilable disjuncture of the memory of my father’s death and his living presence I turned to him as he walked though the door into his office. “But I saw you,” I said to him, “I saw your body in Switzerland – cold and still and in a long wooden box that made you look so small. I touched you and you were dead. We brought your ashes back and spread them on the lake you had loved. How did that happen?” Then all movement in the dream suddenly ceased. I walked around looking, trying to make sense of it all, while all around me everything had stopped like someone had pushed a pause button. I awoke soon after with the realization that I was trying to create another ending to my father’s death, but the one I had been trying to write in my dream didn’t work. I couldn’t write the ending I wanted to. His death couldn’t be re-storied. So I take a pink message slip out of my dream and transfer it onto one of his handkerchiefs. While you were out, it says, I dreamed you were here.

Inarticulate Learning

In the art program we begin to make painted silk banners that focus on the children’s hoped for and imagined worlds. One of the teachers takes the idea and shapes it so it becomes meaningful and tangible for the young children. She asks the children to close their eyes and takes them through an imagined morning as they lie in their beds and wake from sleep. Slowly they stretch, open their eyes, and see that something has changed. She tells them that one thing
in the world has changed for the better and it could be anything they imagine. The children open their eyes, begin to draw, and small tender personal stories emerge. These aren't grand narratives of world peace and ending racism or hunger (which I think many of the teachers had hoped and aimed for) but intimate insights into the immediacy of their lives and the people they cared for. One girl says if she could change one thing about her world she'd make more flowers grow in her grandmother's garden. Another child says that he'd get a German Shepherd puppy for his family. And another imagines everyone in her neighbourhood having castles to live in instead of houses. After the children finish drawing we begin to develop the ideas and transfer them onto white silk stretched on frames in preparation for making painted banners.

One young boy worked silently and intently on his banner. He painted a large side view of a grinning yellow dog with black spots in the midst of a blue and green landscape. Trees, clouds and a shining sun filled the background and the dog seemed to walk confidently across the silk surface. Yet he said little and gave little verbal insight into his thoughts, intentions and processes as he painted. The teacher beside him watched silently, quietly took some photos and notes, and responded by helping or mixing certain colours of dyes when needed. But mostly the interactions occurred in silence. When he had finished he found some paper and wrote about his hopes that if he could change the world he would make it so every person would have at least one dog. The teacher called me over to see his banner and she was obviously moved by what he had written, imaged, and called into being through his art. Something in the silence of his processes, in the moment of his shared wish, in the imagining of every person in the world happily caring for a dog and being loved in return, and the privilege of being witness to it touched her deeply. Even now in trying to describe and grasp that moment my words are inadequate for the lived, felt, opening and wonder that was evoked in the encounter: a moment that has stayed with me even years after and continues to resonate as an invitation to listen even more carefully.
This *saying* (Levinas, 1969) moment opened something deeply tender and inarticulate and evoked the presence of *this* yellow smiling dog and *this* young boy's longing and *this* other world he had created. The experience was much more than what could have been gathered through words, speech, or actions. This is what Sharon Todd (2003b) refers to as she writes,

Responsibility views communication neither as reciprocal nor dialogic in character, nor is it a form of speech amongst equal subjects. Rather responsibility involves a radical openness in communication and an attending to the (unknowable) particularity of the other that lies behind the words spoken, the deeds committed. (p. 34)

Todd continues to explain that it is the very ambiguity of communication that “allows for each one of us to exceed ourselves, to work across our differences, to become moved by and learn from others” (p. 34). It was in the teacher’s not knowing, the child’s silence, and the teacher’s waiting and receptivity that his art, ideas, and processes were given the space they needed to be heard.

**Risking failure**

We spent the afternoon drawing at the Museum of Anthropology. As I walk through the museum watching teachers and students drawing and talking about the works I catch bits of conversations, mostly life stories shared in small circles. Some groups are sitting in the dimly lit room near the Bill Reid sculpture. Others are seated around intricate carvings, on the floor in front of totem poles, and on benches with drawing pads and pencils on their laps. At the end of the class as we walk back to the education building one teacher guiltily remarked that he hadn’t been much of a teacher that day as all he did was talk with the children. His “failure” seems to eat away at him, and he was obviously bothered by “not teaching” and not doing what he perceived he should be doing. We talked briefly about teaching and the meanings of being a teacher and I encouraged him to continue to listen to the children as I could see he was deeply troubled by the disjuncture of what he perceived teaching “should be” and what this moment with this child asked of him. Yet I also felt that no amount of talking about teaching or knowing the bounds and discourses of teaching would change how he felt or erase his discomfort at his perceived failure. His “agony” stayed with me as I turned it over and over trying to make something of it. Again, like wool wrapped around a stone, turned over and over, becoming felt in the turnings and re-turnings, these momentary pedagogical encounters stayed with me even years after. They stayed with me in my heart and in my thinking, my teaching taking shape as responses to them.

Calvin Schrag (1997) writes that
The radical exteriority of the other as other needs to be acknowledged, attested, and assented to – and it is this acknowledging, attesting, and assenting that the geneology of ethics finds its source. This constitutes the ethical moment, in which one understands oneself as a self-in-community, implicated in an acknowledgement of an other who is not of one’s making, and to whose voice and action one is called upon to respond in a fitting manner.

(p. 100)

Yet this “responding in a fitting manner” is neither straightforward nor necessarily easy. It requires something of oneself, such as giving up certainty, stability and security and entering into the undoing and interrupting of the said (Levinas, 1969) of teaching. I would have liked to say that I recognized this at the time. But it wasn’t until much later that I began to notice this particular teacher’s distress and hear things differently. At the moment of our conversation during the walk back from the museum I had seen him primarily as a beginning educator with preconceived notions of teaching. I had responded to what I thought he needed to know in light of who I thought he was, rather than hear the vulnerabilities and possibilities of the moment.

Levinas speaks of a “traumatism of astonishment” (in Todd, 2003b, p. 36). Being traumatized is risking the security of one’s identity and the possibility of its altering. According to Deborah Britzman (1998) this is not just an effect of education but central to it. “Learning to become”, Sharon Todd (2003b, p. 19) writes, is an inherently violent and traumatic activity. There is much at stake in becoming teachers and especially in the transformation of one’s teaching particularly if that transformation means “failing” the given and the said of teaching. Yet in a sense this is exactly what these novice teachers must do to attend to the singularity of this child with whom they are with and to attend to the face of the singular other. And I began to wonder how much
room is made for failure in teacher education programs and in my own teaching. Do we work so hard to help education students succeed that we neglect to make room for the possibility of failure and for singular moments of failing the expected bounds of teaching? Amanda Berry (2004) for example, describes the hidden curriculum of teacher education as the tacit messages throughout the structures of a program that tenaciously reinforce traditional notions of teachers, teaching and education. Beginning teachers are caught between an allegiance to a program, institution, and the discourses of teaching and the invitation for newness that one child extends. Yet they must allow the given of teaching to be interrupted in order to re-imagine other possibilities. And it is encountering the otherness of others that "commands me to assume a responsibility beyond the care of my own self-preservation in being" (Trezise, 2004, p. 1). Thus there is great risk in listening, responding, and attending to particular others.

As I encountered and tried to understand this one teacher's perceived failure I found my own difficulties of teaching in the midst of loss resonating with his. My experiences were certainly not the same as if understanding should be based in empathy or similarity of experience rather it was based in an understanding that the concepts of disruption, opening and wounding are necessary conditions for change and transformation. This means not only focusing on behaviours or structures for optimal interaction, for example providing more time or opportunity for informal teacher-student conversations (although this is important) rather being attentive to the undoings, woundings, vulnerabilities, and risks teachers face in their relationships and interactions with children (and others). It means acknowledging and being sensitive to novice teachers' uncertain and vulnerable identities as they develop meaning in becoming teachers and acknowledging that it is their relation to otherness that provokes such vulnerability in the first place (see also Britzman, 2003a). It also means attending to the contradictions and tensions inherent in taking up the obligation of the other. In a desire to comfort,
repair, and end suffering it is too easy to try to remove the discomfort or to focus on how one "should" be as a teacher and to mend the wound through knowledge. Yet I am beginning to think it is far more important to tenderly make evident the wound, to carefully learn from it, and to attend to one's own learning and responding; to hold these wounds and failings for a while and let them speak. This makes teaching, and especially teaching teachers, a very delicate, profoundly risky, and ethical matter.

Release

I finally take the handkerchiefs out of the bag. I hold them close for a while, breathing in childhood and more recent memories of how my father smelled as he came home from work each evening, as he welcomed me with tight hugs after absences, how he was always happy to see me, how I had looked forward to his trip home after his last trip to Switzerland, how he was to be here visiting with me days after that trip, how he should have been at my brother's wedding, but instead we went over there to bring his remains home. I release the familiarity so that in the release it can become something else. I don't know how to release my desire for him to still be alive. It still disturbs me to think of him as being dead. Perhaps these handkerchiefs will speak and whisper what I can't.

Tendering other things

On the final day of the art program we host an art show of the children's work. This time we make an extended effort to make a space for the children's art - to attend to it, let it speak and have its own presence. After a significant time of attending to the artistic processes, engagements and interactions of the children this disrupts things in a different way. In a sense what I try to do is help the teachers make spaces between the art and the children: to see the art as other than children's identities and self-expressions and to take a step back in order to give space for the art and the children to continue to move, change, and become. Art displays in elementary schools typically celebrate children's efforts and not wanting to privilege any one child over another produce exhibits that are remarkably uniform and static. Moreover, young children's art is typically understood in contexts of creativity, imagination and self-expression as if these qualities are present in the artworks themselves or inherent in the children rather than brought into being through children's relationships and engagements with art materials, processes and inquiries. These are deeply rooted perceptions and drawing out spaces between the art and the artist allows both the children's art and selves to resonate in new ways. Vea Vecchi (2004) writes that young children's artistic engagements tend to be directed towards making sense of worlds that have different timeframes and impulses than adults' ways of working and thinking. To think we know what an image or artwork is about even after careful
attention to it inscribes meanings children may not intend and misses the wonderful and emergent ways children engage with art and living.

In giving the art a presence and creating spaces, the art can become more than we think it is. It also brings the art into the present rather than fixed as something created then, in the art program, for particular purposes or intentions. Irit Rogoff (2000) writes that no matter how much we know about a work of art and how it was produced it still inhabits a contemporary context and lives in the present relational moment of viewing. The art image or object functions as a sign to experience. It evokes, resonates, speaks to, yet always incompletely references the experiences. The art itself does not retain its original intentions and meanings (Atkinson, 2002) and children often attribute new meanings and functions to their artworks once they are displayed in different contexts. For instance as many of the children come in to the classroom on the day of the art show they engage with their images and sculptural objects in different ways, encountering them again and creating new meanings. A bowl becomes a boat, the story in a drawing changes, the imagined inhabitants of a clay house move out to make room for others, and meanings shift and change in the lived moments of engagement.

And so we wait, listen, and enter another space of dwelling with and attending to. Silvia Benso (2000) explores the ethics of things and the tenderness (etymologically connected to a-tending-to) that is rooted in attention and the respectful attitude that waits for the other to make the first move. Benso also writes that the original meaning of ethos or ethics, signifies a location or dwelling place. Ethics “opens up a space” (p. 130) and a spaciousness “where distance is revealed, where difference is maintained” (p.131), where the remains, traces, in process and emergent presences cannot be grasped rather act as invitations for further responses: where knowledge cannot be possessed only inhabited.

In the morning before the show the classroom is cleared out. The floor is swept clean, chairs are stacked, and crisp white
paper covers shelves and tables. The children's banners are hung in front of the large windows in the stairwell with sunlight streaming through the colours and paintings. Clay vessels line the room and children bring in objects from home to place inside or around their sculptures transforming their meanings. A colourful clay container is filled with treasured jewelry and is placed carefully on a favorite cloth. An unusual tower shape becomes an inventive menorah with the addition of candles. And a large bowl/table-like structure that had cracked and broken during firing becomes home to fossils and bone fragments. The children's art always manages to elicit a measure of surprise. Something happens as art is distanced from the children – in these spaces of difference the teachers come to realize that even after such a close watching, attending, listening and receptivity they still really did not know these children and their art: that they could not ever fully know and that not knowing held infinite possibilities prompting openings for continued inquiries in their own teaching. In this way coming to not knowing is a profoundly generative dwelling space as teachers realize there will always be more to discover and learn. And so the children's art and the art show was just a beginning not an (end) product.

A fine risk

Later in the week I finished sending off final notes and responses to my students and their terms work. I was deeply moved by two students' writing in particular – both new to education and had taken this course as an elective and neither sure if they would pursue teaching further. One student wrote that she started the course thinking she knew a lot about children and teaching. She had thought teaching was easy yet over the term had come to a new appreciation and deeper understanding of teachers. She had thought many of her past teachers were uncaring and uninspired yet had come to appreciate some of the complexity, difficulty and demands they had faced. Yet she wrote that she had decided not to pursue teaching, that it held too much sorrow, difficulty and responsibility and she saw her own lack and the possibility of failure. Yet I saw a “teaching spirit” in/between the lines of what she wrote and was moved by how she held that responsibility as if it were a rare gift. She concluded her writing by musing that perhaps what she had experienced in the class would go out and another day and in another time re-turn to her and lead her again towards teaching. I wrote to her that I hoped so and that good teachers learn to hold both the weight of education and its joy. Again, I would have liked to have been able to tell her at the time that this terrifying possibility of failure – not of failing one's self but of failing the other, of not being enough, of never being able to fully fulfill one's obligation, and the risk of one's own wounding, was what would make teaching possible. This possibility of failure both restricts teaching, pressing it to become certain, secure, and fixed, yet if met with courage and openness to that risk, makes it infinitely possible.
To love the questions

After the course was over and I had just completed the marking I had a dream. In my dream I was on a green and rocky hillside under the evening sun with my siblings and my dad, who was leaving on an extended trip and was saying goodbye to each of us. Finally he came to me, spoke to me for a long time and held me in one of his much too tight bear hugs. With tears streaming down each our faces, he wept and said a tender goodbye. I wept too but it was a good weeping. It was not the ending to the story I would have chosen, but it was a good ending, or a beginning, whichever view you take. And I saw the dream as a kindness returned. As I sent out responses and encouragement to my students they were returned to me in unexpected, yet deeply needed ways.

The questions I started with at the beginning of the course weren't answered as I still don't know how long grieving takes. I expect I will miss both my parents for some time still. Yet something intangible was extended and I could see how, over the past several months, my teaching, like the felt, had begun to hold the imprint of the stone, bearing the traces of loss and bereavement and finding its shape in dependencies and vulnerabilities. And I found other questions about who we are in relation to others and how our learning is dependent on otherness running as undersides in between encounters with students, children, and art works, prompting me to continue to inquire and to take other re-turns through art/teaching. These questions and inquiries shape the structure of teaching, and in particular shape the structures of a/r/tographic teaching. As Rebecca Martusewicz (1997) explains

To teach is to bring our questions to others, to share as teacher and as students in this process of thinking about who we are on this earth. But that means of course, facing the paradoxical space that circulates in our attempts to say or write or teach about this life and this earth, to face the constant and beautiful return of the question and our imperfection at answering. This means that teachers must learn to listen to and engage the questions posed by their students, even and perhaps especially when these questions are surprising or disconcerting...yes, teachers with their students must learn to love the questions. (p. 112)

And as I see the end of another course and my students heading out to other teaching and learning encounters the traces of their presence remains. The memory of momentary encounters - those described here as well as many others - provoke and prompt and incite other turnings and questionings. And learning continues.
CHAPTER 6: TOUCHING ETERNITY

Even in uncertainty we are responsible for our steps

Mary Catherine Bateson, 1994, p. 10
My mother died in mid February just as the crocuses and narcissus were poking up through the ground heralding the beginning of spring. Outside as they took her body from the house her garden was coming alive. There were snowdrops in rings around the trees and buds and shoots expectantly waiting for the warmth of spring. The days were lengthening and getting brighter bringing a strange hopefulness to the events. Later we buried her ashes under a tree in St. Mary's churchyard as the Easter lilies were nearly in bloom, masses of them carpeting the graveyard with birds singing overhead. Buds of crocus, daffodil, wild lady's slipper, columbine, grape hyacinth and trillium covered the ground and welcomed her return to the earth. She would have liked it. Her final leaving witnessed not by crowds of people but by the fragrance of the brown earth and by multitudes of delicate, wild flowers.

My father died in the same year at the end of September as the days were shortening so that the crisp nighttime air bore hints of fall and the leaves were turning to orange, rust, and brown. We spread his ashes on the secluded lake that he had swum in just weeks before. The fir, pine, sequoia, arbutus, and cedar trees watched from the surrounding hills and shoreline, their leaves and needles crunched underfoot as we walked the surrounding trails. Majestic Douglas fir that had drawn him to Canada as a young man now stood to bear witness to his journey’s end. We had a picnic on the cabin porch with a nostalgic sadness at the passing summer. My parents deaths located in place and time. Their lives remembered in the tangible, felt elements of the natural world, connected to the earth and to the rhythms of the seasons.

Ahead of me I anticipate Nathanial’s eventual passing. I hear his leaving echoed in the rocks and wind and in the silences of the early morning. Places we had walked together when he was most ill still resonate with the unsettling knowledge of how fleeting and fragile life can be. I feel the temporality of his life in the falling blossoms as spring turns into summer, in the hints of the coming autumn, and in the changing colours of the leaves: in each moment of change from one season to the next, in the turn of the tide, and in the turning from life to death and from death to life again. There are secrets written in the earth. Stones gathered from the shoreline at a time when I could feel the near tangible presence of death now give shape to this dissertation. Stones that now sit on my windowsill continue to whisper the resonances of other deaths, endings, and grievings that are carried with me, bearing witness to other disruptions, leavings and losses that tear openings in the seeming secure fibers of life.

Levinas describes death as an infinitely unknowable other and as “absolute otherness” (Toumayan, 2004, p. 46). He describes death as the “basic relation that cannot become a concept or a form of knowledge, both inevitable and ungraspable, in urgent need of comprehension yet resisting attempts to comprehend it” (p. 45). Death, as other, cannot be rendered understandable, reduced, or adequately conceptualized. It remains beyond our grasp,
always exceeding the ideas we have of it, questions of meaning still left open, and in need of understanding: the saying ongoing. It is known only in the stories, tellings, renderings, and memory texts of others. It is known only by its traces and remains.

The trace of the other

Tom Barone (2001b) in his book *Touching Eternity* considers the enduring and lasting outcomes of teaching. He inquires into the life and teaching of one teacher and looks for the impact of this educator’s life and teaching on his students. Barone considers the traces that remain and the ways the teacher has left his mark and traces of his self on the students’ lives. His inquiry gives a valuable and unique account of the enduring and elusive effects of teaching yet, it still highlights evidence of the self as evidence of the lasting outcomes of one’s teaching. While Barone does consider some of the long-term influences and traces the students have left on this teacher’s life it still primarily explores “touching eternity” from the perspective of how the teacher might live on and the individual and cultural influences that enable, or disable this particular teacher’s influence. His inquiry asks basic ontological questions of how the “I” or the effects of the self might endure. While questions regarding the effects of one’s teaching are important to consider I wonder what the outcomes would have been if different questions were asked.

Levinas, for instance, asks us to look beyond self’s motivations and becomings. Sharon Todd (2001a), one of the primary contemporary educational theorists to have taken up Levinas’ views, cautions against perspectives that reduces “the other to the same, reduces the other to the effects of the self, as if the only thing that mattered were how the other pertained to me” (p. 608). Similarly, Bill Readings (1996) strongly criticizes the lure of autonomy and the self-authorizing discourse of teaching. Readings argues that teaching should be re-conceptualized as something other than self-reproduction and self-representational practice and the pedagogical relation should be re-understood as an ethical relation and network of obligations. So that in teaching and learning what is brought into being by the face-to-face encounter of self and other is generative and enduring in a profoundly different sense. It is not the teacher transferring self to the student or the student carrying on the teacher’s joys, loves and desires. Neither is it seeing the “same” in students, and the other in self as in the fold or through the reciprocity of exchange. Rather it is the self’s encounter with the other that leaves the self changed so that teaching bears the trace of the other. It is teaching that takes up the obligation and alterity of the other, gives preference to the other, and resides in one’s susceptibility to another’s pain, suffering, and vulnerability. In this way “Levinas demands that thought be humble” (Cohen, 1986, p. vii).
I think of Nathanial. He has no name that will continue on as a legacy to his life and lineage. He won’t have children to continue his line or do great things that will be recorded or remembered. His name will not be written in any history books nor will he author any writing, theories or ideas that will live on after him. He will leave little that our society values and holds dear – no money, no possessions, no feats of greatness, strength or power, no heroic acts, not even any words written or spoken. His life will pass unnoticed to most. Yet in silence, humility, and insignificance he has extended an infinitely valuable calling to be touched and provoked by wounding, vulnerability, and the impossibility of knowing; a gift that I could never repay. Yet a gift that was never intended to be settled and an obligation that will continue long after his passing. It is a giving that exceeds exchange, and conversation that exceeds words, gestures, thought, and things (Critchley, 2002).

Thus, my art/teaching bears the traces and echoes with the resonances of others. The story of teaching that I write throughout my life is coloured by others’ stories and the particularities I encounter. This does not only mean the life stories, like those concerning Nathanial, or life changing encounters with death that will take a lifetime to work through. There are countless daily fleeting moments and instances that are marked by vulnerability, wounding, and dependency that easily pass unnoticed yet hold possibility for so much more. Those that are encountered not as traces that are incorporated into myself, rather valued in their alterity and met as encounters that continue to interrupt and disrupt the certainty of teaching. According to Levinas the trace of the other is ongoing. Each encounter an infinite opening: an opening without recovery so that the eternity, or infinity, is in the ongoing trace of the other. And the memories, remembrances, and traces as other, continue to resonate, provoke, unsettle, and speak.

Levinas asks us to consider not who am I, how does my life matter, or what is the meaningfulness of my life or teaching, rather his enduring question is who is the other (see Reed, 1986)? He
emphasizes “it is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual ‘I’. So that I become a responsible or ethical ‘I’ to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself – to abdicate my position of centrality – in favor of the vulnerable other” (Levinas & Kearney, 1986, p. 27). This ethical relation is “out of place” (p. 32) in this world. It disturbs, disrupts, and even insults, the autonomous, independent, rational, self-composed self.

Even the stones

Marked in the stones. Written in the earth. We enter a world already coloured by loss, grief, and suffering. Nathaniel’s presence and future absence, his disabilities and dependencies, my parents deaths, the silences of my mother, grandmother and aunt’s histories, and many other undoings and givings, call me to teach, live, and respond in particular ways. To take the obligations and responsibilities seriously, and to live with/in them well is in some sense always in conflict with dominant discourses and understandings. To live in responsive time to these undoings has been, and still is, immensely difficult. That I am able to write, create, and image stories of these difficulties and vulnerabilities is testament to the courage of the institution at which I work and study and the conditions of possibility that a/r/tography has enabled. Yet I still dream of a day and place where I can live the obligations without, or even with less struggle.

So in art/teaching I continue to look for other ways for education students to bring in personal stories, loves, and losses and to listen to their nuances and tempos. To find unthought of ways to imagine other worlds where the voices of suffering, disability, grieving, and vulnerability are attended to. To listen to the histories, dependencies, and obligations that are lived and the learning that happens along the way. To create a dwelling place where dependency relations take a more central role. And to continue to find and create artistic and pedagogical spaces coloured by the intangible and inarticulate things we hold most dear. Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) writes that most of the
learning of a lifetime never shows up in curriculum. How dry and uninteresting such curricular conversations must be if they rarely open to the heart of one’s lived learning.

Thus if we are to conceive of teaching and learning as locations or dwelling places of ethical practices then we “must seek to do justice to teaching rather than know what it is. A belief that we know what teaching is or should be is actually a major impediment to just teaching” (Readings, 1996, p. 154). To not know beforehand means we must wait for a while, listen, and take a receptive attitude. It means attending to the absences, silences, and missing and unspoken things; to the things that cannot be said, voiced, imagined, or even thought; to that which is excessive, difficult and unintelligible; to suffering, loss, undoings and failings; and to that which has to potential to break our hearts and cause us grief. For “only listening to that which is obvious and easy is not really listening” (Corradi Fiumara in Todd, 2003, p. 125). It also requires trust that something will come of the listening, a trust that is “born of the uncertainty of the communication (and one might say the ambiguity of the communication), where the vicissitudes of language yield unpredictable and unqualifiable narratives” (Todd, 2003, p. 125). This kind of listening puts the self at risk (Corradi Fiumara, 1990). Yet it is also this risk and the uncertainty of what might be learned and encountered and the possibility for new thoughts, ideas, and relationships that provokes the listener to persist despite the discomfort and difficulty of listening. For what is unexpected and unknown might be also necessary for our own change and transformation.

This kind of listening, attention, and attending-to can only be concerned with the specific and the particular (Benso, 2000). One cannot attend to suffering in general only to the particularities of this wound, not to children in general but to the face of this child, and not to issues of dependency in general but to the claims this one with this disability or this vulnerability places on me at this time (see also Jardine, LaGrange & Everest, 2003). It attends as well to the fragility of tenderness. Yet this “lightness of
tenderness" (Benso, 2000, p. 174) is not softness or gentleness as in a principle of behaviour to apply to situations, rather refers to the perseverance, firmness, courage, and strength that comes from “the tenaciousness with which tenderness pursues its ethical project” (p. 174) resisting totalizing and relentlessly pursuing the undoing of the said. It is courage, that is heart and humility, enacted in the moment of encountering. For it is through “the resistance tenderness enacts” (p. 175) that one risks violence. “Tenderness has no power to undo what has been done, but only to welcome it in a tender embrace that consoles but does not heal, inspires but does not deny, preserves but does not mend” (p. 176). It strives to attend, to listen, and to learn from and be changed by the vulnerabilities, silences, sorrows, and woundings it gives attention to. Through the otherness of death, and in the encountered particularities of vulnerability, suffering, and dependency; in the undoings, openings, and unknowings; in silences and hesitations, the calling and re-calling continues to sound and resound. To hear curriculum in a new key we are obligated first to listen.

And I wonder if we silence this obligation to listen, attend and respond because we are afraid of it? Afraid that we will be found lacking, that education is not enough? That teaching is an impossible profession? That it holds many grievings and losses, many of which will be the teacher's own? That it may require more courage that we already have? Taking up the obligation is no easy task. As Silvia Benso (2000) writes, “the place of ethics cannot be understood as a neutral field, coextensive or co-present with the I and the Other, in which I and the Other meet with no danger for either” (p. 19). Yet this risky ethical relation must be based in love and humility for it “stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness” (p. 24). And thus we meet in love, humility, and in radical openness. Taking a fine risk (Todd, 2003b) and risking all.

Levinas contends that the deepest most meaningful things in life come to us as gifts from others (Oppenheim, 1997). To be
receptive to these gifts we must learn to walk to the rhythms of responsive time. In a world that rushes by with excessive demands on time we need to find ways to slow to listen, to wait, and to follow the rhythms of the stones.

Never enough words or a last word

Thinking through Levinas’ ideas has left this dissertation unfinished with nothing to apply. For listening and giving attention to difference, dependency and vulnerability, and placing ourselves in a position to be changed by the other, is a process incompatible with the production of even somewhat stable and exchangeable knowledge (Readings, 1996). This, Sharon Todd (2003a) writes, leaves education with little to do. Except to begin. And in beginning, always beginning, continue to think ethics through the particularities of one’s everyday art/teaching/life.

And so this dissertation is only a beginning. It is a glimpse into one teacher’s teaching and learning and the particular dependencies, obligations, undoings, and disruptions that have shaped the autobiographical and textile text of art/teaching. It is offered as the start of other conversations. Yet as I bring this writing to a close, I am very aware that I only have touched the surface of Levinas’ ideas. In/between the stories here are the possibilities for many other openings, turnings and re-turnings. There are many more ways these ideas have and still continue to work their way through my ongoing art/teaching inquiries. And many questions asked along the way remain unanswered. There is much more I would like to say and much more I want to write but it will have to wait for another time.
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**Certificate of Approval**

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**CO-INVESTIGATORS:**

Wilson, Sylvia, Curriculum Studies

**SPONSORING AGENCIES**

**TITLE:**
Teaching in Times of Losing and Being Lost

**APPROVAL DATE**

Feb. 1, 2004, Consent form

**DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:**

Feb. 1, 2004, Consent form

**CERTIFICATION:**

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

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Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:

- Dr. James Frankish, Chair,
- Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair,
- Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.