"TEXTUALITIES OF A TEACHER'S SCHOOL/ING: REFLECTIONS ON PEDAGOGY AS NEGOTIATION, PARADOX AND HOPE"

by

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This analytical narrative as educational study attempts to relieve various doubts experienced by the pedagogue who is distressed by the frequently unplanned curriculum as lived. It offers possibilities through reflection upon the enriching aspects of school predicaments. When the space between teacher and student is fraught with unpredictable, paradoxical school relations, teaching requires reflection that explores aspects of pedagogical uncertainty. By entering into multiple voices with a thoughtful and hopeful eye, teachers may reflect upon interactions around the language in a school as part of a continuing and challenging learning process for their teaching that questions certain schooling beliefs. The writing projects my teaching voice into voices in and around an inner city elementary school, where the opportunity to engage learners creates an unpredictable personal textual journey. Intertextuality is extended to encompass various interconnecting school—or school/ing—relationships. In turn, text is contemplated in the spaces of a school. Negotiating textual authority becomes a contiguous, connected action for exploring sites of linguistic indeterminacy and ambiguity of language that leads to discovery in the classroom. This intertextual classroom sensibility re/constitutes teaching and learning opportunities via an expanded definition of text in school/ing and education.
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DEDICATION

My words are dedicated to my mother, Audrey Anne Russell; to my father, David Russell (1918-1975); and to the frailties of the soul.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of completing this dissertation has reminded me to open my heart to learning. I am now encouraged to pursue writing in many forms, and for that I am deeply grateful. I want to thank my doctoral advisory committee members, who allowed my learning to occur in profound ways: Teresa Dobson, for her patience to see my ideas evolve, as well as offering invaluable advice; Carl Leggo, for his passion for words, his quality of voice and inspirational commitment to students; and Ted Aoki, who, by his heartfelt listening and teachings models an irreplaceable pedagogy, one that has energized my graduate studies for over a decade. Both June and Ted demonstrate an un/spoken grace to living, learning, and relationships. Past and present colleagues, and the vital community of the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction (including the “Group of Six”) led by outgoing director, Karen Meyer, have been inspirational. The coffee, contemplation and engaging acquaintances of Commercial Drive deserve mention. I send love and gratitude to my family members in the Maritimes and friends all over. I also acknowledge Gillian Thompson and Robert Cockburn, both of the University of New Brunswick, for introducing me to a dedicated scholarship of mentoring and integrity. My mother has taught me how to laugh, love, and maintain a firm sense of hope. As well, my daughter has shown a remarkable understanding of her father, often caught musing on ideas during Snakes and Ladders, or with his head stuck in a book as the bicycle path beckons. We’ll always laugh with love, Emi. You will all
understand how my balancing of words and deeds has been part of life’s larger spiritual negotiation, and worth every paradoxical minute.
STRAND ONE: LOCATING SCHOOL MEANING

IN PARADOX

Part I: Location

A. Entering Paradoxes and Pedagogy

This personal study begins during my final teaching year at a secondary school in British Columbia. After eight years of trying my hand at various subjects, my enthusiasm for preparing classroom activities had almost evaporated. I often arrived at work with a profound lack of sleep that influenced the rest of my day, including, inevitably, my relations with those around me. Students from previous years would have recognized, as current students increasingly did, that I was not the sociable teacher to whom they had grown accustomed. There was often a solemnity to my demeanor that students might have described as “moody.” Although I tried to make the curriculum engaging, I usually ended up hiding behind a basic delivery model of straightforward but stale tasks. I felt overworked because I had taken on entirely new courses in a risky gambit to a change from past subjects. I blamed my dwindling energy for teaching on an ever-shifting workload. During my final secondary school year, there was little latitude given for student choice or imagination. Some days it was all I could do to keep focused on instructions before leaving the students to attempt mundane seatwork. At a stage critical to my teaching, their previously unacknowledged voices would bring me back to my calling. I had entered a state of mind at work that some call “burn out.” I was
approaching a crisis in my teaching, but I could not discuss it with my students; nor could
I face the worsening consequences of my teaching ennui. The "I" was dominating my
thoughts and practice in new ways, but the result then was a deep agitation that
accompanied me in and out of the confines of the school. I was at the point of
questioning how much longer I could remain a teacher.

B. **Hope in Multiple Experiences**

Acquaintances or colleagues who appear to be pushed beyond their means are
sometimes described as burned out, but as with many of the terms in our language, a
flippant, idiomatic label does not allow us to get to the heart of a condition. Van Manen
(1986) reminds us how burn out is actually a misnomer for a teacher who is experiencing
a great deal of stress at a job and is essentially unable to enjoy it. Burn out is less a
symptom of overwork than a signal that we should question why we are teaching. As a
result, "the negativity of experience implies a question" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 368)
requiring a challenging follow-up. Combined with other factors, the demands of my
profession allowed little time to consider my predicament. My burn out was a state of
hopelessness revealed by my inability to shrug off various demands and distractions
faced in school every day. If thoughtful reassessment of my practice was necessary, I had
no idea how to initiate, then incorporate, this kind of reflection into my day. It became
more and more difficult to respond with my usual optimism to uncertainty,
unpredictability and frustration. Consciously and unconsciously, I may have made
haphazard attempts to regain enthusiasm for my teaching, but the voices that ultimately
motivated me to begin the journey back to a clear-sighted, caring and effective pedagogy were right in front of my eyes. A diverse collection of teaching voices was present in my classes all along.

Van Manen’s (1986) thoughts on hope in the teacher-student relationship allow me to begin to enter into the world of the child and to see the many ways in which that world can inform my teaching. For example, I have learned that labeling students can have extremely deleterious effects. Children in classrooms are grouped or segregated according to supposed skill levels or behaviours. These levels are often associated with labels (gifted, slow, problem, etc.) that may endure, in and out of the classroom, throughout the students’ school years and even into adulthood. Fortunately, when students form significant relationships with the teachers in their school, these labels may fade away.

Teachers who are burned-out may regain their enthusiasm for teaching if they become more aware of their students’ individual abilities, of the many traits and skills they bring into the classroom that make them fascinating teachers and learners. The presence of hope in our teaching provides us with the ability to know why we return to the classroom each day. I now accept that uncertainty is a natural part of teaching, and recognize that, although I cannot possibly meet all of the needs of my students, I can journey with them into a shared learning of confounding language issues.

This pedagogic longing/belonging to teach goes to the heart of the negotiation of words that form dialogue in my classroom. I shall portray emotions that reveal teaching to be an activity worthwhile in itself (Gotz, 1997), at times outside of a wider context of societal actions, values, or ideals. My reflection on my school relationships stems from a
desire to explore where I locate my teaching and how this mindfulness influences my interaction with students. I will address how institutional jargon may cloud my relationships with my students, making it difficult to enter into a learning process with them that is uninhibited by expectations. My intent is also to introduce my own version of school voices that surround me at work, as a means of enlarging my views on schooling and education. I offer my own *deconstruction* of familiar notions of schooling. This writing as conversation with my teaching self is a reminder that I need to listen thoughtfully to more than one voice, and that these voices can transform me:

> In true dialogue something emerges which transcends the sum of the two individual standpoints initially represented, as the horizons of each expand to take respectful and listening account of each other (Gadamer, 1999, p. 366).

I extend this idea to a wide range of voices in my teaching/learning imagination, that is, both within myself and within the school in which I teach. The conversations I write become a perspective of one view altering another, as well as a teacher’s personal text representing some of the interplay of voices in a school. It is here that my *intertextual* mindfulness becomes a description of my relations with students around language and text. (The term “intertextual,” which will be dealt with in greater detail in Part II, involves at heart the idea that any written or spoken text is not merely the voice of a single author, but a composite of numerous past texts, and, similarly, that the person who hears or reads that text interprets it in light of his or her own previous experience.) I propose that a proper appreciation of narrative and poetry includes elements of both the literal and figurative, and will call upon literary theorists to shed light on this topic. As narrator, my purpose is to present various reading processes as I struggle with presenting
a multiplicity of voices that influence my teaching day. Unpredictable and inconsistent
terms lead me to re/constitute ways of teaching and learning within changing linguistic
and social parameters.

My teaching mixes the personal and the academic while, at the same time, trying
to be responsive to the various communities that converge at the elementary school where
I evolve as a researcher-practitioner. The dissertation, therefore, also adopts aspects of
literary criticism, post-structuralism, critical theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology and
feminist studies. This list is not exhaustive, but it will become apparent which of these
fields influence me more than others. I echo Ellsworth (1997) who described the process
of re-conceptualizing her writing on education as

affirmative . . . without having an already known referent
for what it affirms. What is affirmed in deconstruction –
in the insistence that the teacher-student relation is
undecidable – is that teaching is . . . a continuing and
never finished moment of affirming and engaging in
ongoing cultural production (p. 141).

To further situate the personal crisis I have described, I offer Gadamer’s (1999)
description of the task of historical hermeneutics: “to consider the tension that exists
between the identity of the common object and the changing situation in which it must be
understood” (p. 309).

I am not taking a relativistic stance, but merely admitting that my connection with
various authors includes sometimes unpredictable reading and writing habits.
Consequently, I am influenced by my textual habits in ways that I can never fully know.
This is a personal intertextuality I will not trace exhaustively, though I will highlight how
this view of teaching and learning informs my participation in educational research. A
re-conceptualized relationship between *metaphor* and *metonymy* allows me to connect my intertextual discussion of issues of schooling and education with a reflexive personal pedagogy that includes learning and teaching with students. These terms lead me to reconsider the continuing interrelationship between the parts and the whole in the reflection, planning, and activities of my practice. That is, I move from exploring the relationships and language of my *school/ing*, towards reflecting upon the combination of negotiation, paradox and hope that help me to question my teaching habits and school relationships in meaningful ways. (Contained in my use of “school/ing” as a neologism is a tangible, daily relationship between my present school and my changing experience of teaching and learning in schools, or schooling.) My attempt will be to learn through aspects of my teaching history, mindful of how revisiting certain tensions may reveal ways my pedagogy is influenced by the texts and relations (the changing situations) I experience with students.

C. *Teaching Forms (of) Meaning*

In my teaching, I would like to appreciate how words, concepts, and meanings transition from present to future possibilities as they simultaneously contain messages of inherently historical and etymological pedagogical formation (Russell, 1995). This flux of meaning over time, a conceptual presence/absence to which learners must constantly adapt, rubs against attempts to capture language in print for posterity. Rather than proposing a framework that is soon thrown into question, I include authors in fields of various cultural, social and political studies to connect and complement the tone of my discussion surrounding meaning-making, educators and textual negotiation. A variety of
sources add credence to aspects of my teaching journey that are unpredictable and ultimately unknowable. To reiterate, I come to this writing wishing to explore some of the paradoxes and tensions of teaching. I reveal my experiences as part of my attempt to question my relationship with students in pedagogical predicaments. I attempt to negotiate and address these predicaments with hopefulness, while acknowledging that many classroom dynamics are outside of my ability to fully appreciate because of gender, age, upbringing, or other factors. My reflections involve intertwining my own teaching voice with the imagined voices of various students. I want to re-search how I might weave my teaching stories and hopes for learning into various intertextual voices/relations/texts of schooling and education at an elementary school. This personal appreciation (I have chosen not to use the word “framework”) leads my writing into school spaces where the individual and the community co-exist – to the experiences of staff and students as they learn, teach and live in an intertextual school environment. The steps I trace include the inspiration to adopt a narrative-analytical writing style that examines the two following areas of personal interest.

D. My Writing Aspirations

1. To introduce rhetorical forms that reflect classroom practice and to explore school relations through lived experience informed by a personal interest in post-structuralism.

2. Inspired by paradox and uncertainty in pedagogy, to re-search, re-write and re-situate voices produced by my school/ing as intertextual spaces of teaching and learning for educational research.
E. Pedagogue as Text in the Making

A door had been closed during my last year in the high school, where I taught Japanese, English as a Second Language, English, and Social Studies. I felt betrayed by a schedule of classes that had become more and more a race to cover and impart curriculum. I felt increasingly removed from school relations, and more a part of what is commonly and negatively referred to as an institution, that “establishment or organization for the promotion of an object” (OED). As a person adjusting to the customs of an institution, I was experiencing many of the feelings of isolation that van Manen (1986) suggests an adolescent feels when shuffled between rooms and classes, with no connection to, and without being seen by, teachers. Yet I taught in the same classroom during those years. Perhaps this stability should have led me to a greater appreciation of how to operate within the boundaries of my territory. It was, after all, “Mr. Russell’s room.” More and more I entrenched myself in a teacher-space, and students, familiar with this practice, stayed in their student-space. I consistently adopted the habits of the instructor who moves within a prescribed domain, figuratively and physically. Students assumed a defined role with which they were undoubtedly familiar from past classrooms. I remained connected to my room only as a physical and mental retreat from the responsibilities of my relations with my students. By injecting less enthusiasm into teaching and becoming a piece of the infrastructure, I was slipping into some form of supposed neutrality that attempted to meld my persona with the utilitarian purpose of tables, blackboards, desks and chairs around me. Little wonder that some students are surprised to see a teacher living “normally” in the community (shopping, enjoying a
coffee, boarding a bus) when much of the identity of pedagogy surrounds the goals and objectives of the established curriculum and the functioning of the school environment. I had become closer to my inanimate surroundings and often avoided opportunities to close the space with the young people who shared the room with me on a rotating schedule of bells, books and breathtaking boredom. Avoiding activities that would allow me to travel mentally with the class outside of the walls of the school, I was indelibly connected to the building in the minds of students who expected little more than chalk and talk followed by deskwork. *Authority*, defined as “teacher-space” created obvious barriers, and limited teacher-student relations. For this I must accept responsibility.

By combining expressive writing with the theoretical, I want to model an approach to intertextuality that portrays the inherent advantages of combining two genres. This potentially informs the dialogue on a hermeneutic study of schooling. There are experiences that have traditionally been described in theoretical language that can be captured differently through an expressive voice. Grounding theory in the experience of teaching will demystify concepts that have historically served only to widen the gap between educational researchers and the practitioners of pedagogy in schools. It would seem that there has been more than language separating these domains of research and practice. My task is neither one of forging a definitive intertextuality for schools, nor debunking ideas teachers may hold of certain literary terms. Rather, I hope to portray in my voices that it is the quality of our contact with children – the relationship with a child in a school setting – that creates the gulf between the knowledge of the academy and the experiences of educators. The dialogic implications of this discussion will therefore take me through the halls and grounds of the elementary school where I presently teach, while
also intertwining ideas from important figures in literary criticism and educational research. I want to create an intertextual dissertation that combines elements of my experiential schooling journey with thoughts on where the study of language positions teachers and students. My writing calls upon the experience of discomfort, tension and contradiction in an inner-city school.

A key part of describing my relationships with students is to accept an unpredictable and uncertain *becoming* in my teaching. Although the intertextual connections I enjoy are similar in some ways, this should not lull me into the false belief that I can rely upon universals. My challenge as a researcher-practitioner is to reveal the potential of learning through difference, a difference that is never static, always changing, and in many ways reflective of the language we use to describe our highly complex, idiosyncratic experiences. Rather than presenting concepts in a framework of confrontational binaries, my writing juxtaposes and explores the personal and the public/academic, the *metaphoric* (poetic) and the *metonymic* (prosaic) in relation to the student and the teacher. These terms, and in particular “metonymy” (Bredin, 1984, p. 45), have been under-appreciated for how they interrelate in our language and for the opportunities they create for discussing concepts like “identity” and “difference” in classrooms. The relational-oppositional predicament has parallels to some teacher-student paradoxes as well, so that metaphor and metonymy represent something larger for me in how I negotiate the ambiguous nature of language in schools. A discussion of metaphor and metonymy leads me to re-search further related concepts that inform my pedagogy – teacher/student, school/community, and so forth. A consideration of the
interrelationship of these two tropes allows me to explore a meaningful voice among voices for articulating my school/ing experiences.

I question whether the parts of my haphazard school/ing recollections form a metonymy of memory, allowing me to represent a much larger range of past experience. This combination of memory and experience constitutes an intertextuality that I recognize as integral to my ongoing pedagogy. I will cite and demonstrate writing that pursues a range of form as part of my search for an intertextual style, inspiring me to engage language on a level indelibly linked to my teaching experiences. I want to discover opportunities to articulate, in a meaningful way, personally transformative commonplace events, habits, and thoughts for teachers and learners. One result may be the creation of a space for my participation in critical and practical educational research. I also want to learn to lead students to shift between various teaching and learning roles in the classroom, signaling my trust in the abilities of others to participate in my pedagogy. My pedagogical hope sees students developing ways to initiate dialogue on knowledge as they negotiate the language of school/ing.

F. A Figurative Jekyll and H(i)yde

Jakobson (1956), a Russian-American linguist, has written the most influential work of the last century on the two tropes, metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor and metonymy, defined as “the substitution of a literal expression by a figurative one,” are classical terms. Metaphorically, the substitution is based on resemblance or analogy; metonymically, the substitution is based on a relation or association other than similarity (cause and effect, container and contained, instrument and user, etc). Camelot, as a
reference to King Arthur’s world, is a metonymy (of place), while the same word applied to the Washington of John F. Kennedy is a metaphor using analogy (Johnson, 1987, p. 155). Jakobson’s (1956) study was concerned with extending and polarizing the classical meanings of metaphor and metonym. His findings describe two main patterns of aphasia (speech disorder), similarity and contiguity. A similarity disorder comprises grammatical contexture and lateral associations without synonymity; a contiguity disorder comprises word substitutes without grammar and connectedness (p. 77). For Jakobson, the inability of a person suffering from aphasia to distinguish basic language usage required to express similarity and difference led him to further problematize metaphor and metonymy for linguists and semioticians. My interest here is not in how Jakobson portrayed metaphor and metonymy as figures of speech or placed them on a semantic axis of syntactic patterns, but, rather, in the light he shed on how discourse progresses from one topic to another. His theories came at a time when post-structuralists were beginning to question many of the fundamental beliefs underlying previous theories on narrative, discourse and the literary canon. I want to follow those theorists who have expanded upon Jakobson’s work, and imbue metonymy, the overshadowed, lesser-known trope, with elements of silence and uncertainty (aphasia). I acknowledge that my own struggle or burn out may have represented only a small part of my larger questioning of schooling. My teaching and learning, therefore, contain elements of the metonymic process, which allows one small detail to stand for a larger whole (Padel, 2002, p. 76). Discussing a re-considered metaphor/metonymy relationship allows me to emphasize intertextual school/ing details that bring attention to a pervasive aspect of classroom communication, a discourse of uncertainty.
A helpful sketch of the metaphor-metonymy connection appears in Johnson’s (1987) *A World of Difference*. Johnson reiterates the confounding nature of the relationship between the two closely linked tropes, with metonymy often superseded by an overall metaphorical umbrella. She joins others in reminding the reader of the hierarchical nature of the relationship, where historically there has been a much greater preference for metaphor over metonymy in literature (Johnson, 1987, p. 158; Bredin, 1984, p. 46; Lakoff and M. Johnson, 1980, p. 31). Metaphor is more consistently equated to comparative notions of identity and totality, making it the trope of privilege (de Man, 1986, p. 14). Metonymy exhibits a power of its own in allowing the reader to explore the uniqueness of the characters’ experiences, rather than viewing them as universal events. Established divisions between metaphor and metonymy are challenging for me to avoid when discussing aspects of how the two inform my notion of schooling. Narrative theorists in particular have taken up the implications of this potential binary in figurative language, and a number of writers have elaborated upon Jakobson’s original polarization of metaphor and metonymy (Bal, 1997, p. 43; Johnson, 1987, p. 159; Hayman, 1984, p. 139). These studies often take the tropes’ related syntactic extensions of poetry (for metaphor) and problematic or unnecessary narrative (for metonymy), and explain them in terms that can be placed on a graph similar to the one that follows.
Table 1: Four Poles of Language (Adapted from Johnson, 1987, p. 159)
This diagram represents for me the slippery nature of language, as any of these four distinct “poles” (Jakobson, 1956, p. 76) can slide into combination with other aspects of speech. Interestingly, silence could then become part of poetry or narrative, combining or substituting various ways of expressing experience. I include poems in this writing to portray some of my memories of schooling, cognizant that poets often consider concrete detail (names, voices, other specifics) to be more powerful than abstract nouns as a basic rule of poetic expression (Padel, 2002, p. 9). I am intrigued by how I might explore with students the advantage of considering more poetic, concrete language over prose that at times may rely too heavily upon more verbose explanation. My reflection-as-dissertation involves ways in which aspects of metaphoric and metonymic expression might complement each other in new ways in rhetorical modes that range from classroom practice to reflective educational research. The vertical-horizontal positioning of metaphor and metonymy are important markers for revealing the expressive choices made by authors in articulating meaning. Semantically and relationally, it is vital for me to explore a space with my students between the representational and the non-representational – a site of living pedagogy (Aoki, 2003, p. 5). Student voices motivated me to begin the process of confronting a difficult stage in my life. It was, nonetheless, an intensely personal recognition. Rather than privileging metonymy, I am using it as a vehicle by which I ask the reader to follow my attempts both to find an evolving pedagogical voice and to consider the benefits of re-viewing and re-configuring metaphoric devices in classroom relations and discourse. I also want to consider the notion of contiguity (“in contact, touching, near or adjacent” [OED]) as part of the
intertextual narrative that flows between my students and me as we dwell together in past, present, and future learning situations.

Near the end of Johnson’s (1987) chapter entitled “Metaphor, Metonymy and Voice” in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she makes a point that is central to my attempts to find one voice to represent the interacting of my experiences with student voices in the classroom:

There is no point of view from which the universal characteristics of the human . . . can be selected and totalized. Unification and simplification are fantasies of domination, not understanding. The task of the writer, then, would seem to be to narrate both the appeal and the injustice of universalization, in a voice that assumes and articulates its own, ever-differing self-difference (p. 170).

The seductiveness of universal themes is a notion that I feel has also privileged metaphor in our classrooms. More to the aim of my writing, it is unrealistic to expect that the reader will fully appreciate every experience about which I write. The search for oneness, and a universal reaction to text is an impossible one, a point made by numerous literary critics, such as Eagleton (1983). Yet, my notion of intertextuality involves texts as a starting point from which to discover the predilections and differences among readers, by creating a common ground for discussion in the classroom. This involves negotiation and sharing of language authority between teacher and students.

In the course of this textual negotiation around intertextuality of print and experience, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that some people may be incapable of participating in the process of negotiating language. As Johnson (1987) argues, the very existence of metaphor and metonymy presuppose that the subject is capable of
speaking. For her, the distinction between metaphor and metonymy is less crucial than that between speech and aphasia:

What has gone unnoticed in the theoretical discussions of Jakobson . . . is that behind the metaphor/metonymy distinction lies the much more serious distinction between speech and aphasia, between silence and the capacity to articulate one's own voice. To privilege either metaphor or metonymy is thus to run the risk of producing an increasingly aphasic critical discourse. If both, or all four, poles [metaphoric, metonymic, similarity, contiguity] must be operative in order for speech to function fully, then the very notion of an "authentic voice" must be redefined (p. 164).

Johnson reminds us that silence or loss of the ability to speak can be the result of unpredictable social, cultural and other forces. Her arguments make me mindful that as a teacher I must attempt to help students whose voices may have been silenced, to find their own voice.

I conceive of myself as a teacher becoming, as one who reflects silently upon hope, but also as one who is a pedagogical text-in-the-making. In order to personify "the greater difficulty, complexity, and multidisciplinarity involved in the construction of educational space for cross-cultural communication" (Edgerton, 1996, p. 9), I plan to invoke my own concept of intertextuality as a method of locating ourselves in school. This entails shifting authority from the knowledge and experience of the teacher to the inner qualities of the student in a fashion that echoes tenets of the New Literacy (Willinsky, 1990, p. 192). The term "intertextual" allows educators to broaden their understanding of discourse, mindful of where student languages and predilections for expression will take them.
Following this awareness of the multi-locational aspects of my work (i.e., in the academic world, the school, and the school community) and my position as a thoughtful pedagogue challenged by numerous binaries, I propose a metonymic sensibility to the teacher-student relationship. An awareness of metonymy as teaching action requires a review of my reliance upon the symbols in my midst before I can move beyond purely linguistic terms to a mode that helps me to articulate complex experiences. These events and moments of life constitute a world of becoming for my students, a “complex and dynamic interaction among social and individual subjectivities” (Edgerton, 1996, p. 8). My writing represents an effort to provide teachers and students with a tool for attempting to discuss the non-unified, discontinued text.

**Reflection: Questions for the Teacher**

No matter how long I might have avoided facing the consequences of my marital and family break-up, the emotional fall-out was written on my face, in plain view of my students most days. If I was ultimately able to broach the topic with a sincere voice (even if with great discomfort and loss of face), I credit this to my students who took an interest and showed concern for what I was experiencing. A predicament in my personal life undeniably influenced my teaching career. The greater, perhaps long-term, challenge was to become aware of its influence upon my relationships with my students. Would I be able to acknowledge this influence and change the nature of these relationships?

For the time being, I had a strong feeling of being overworked. I had lost enthusiasm for being among students and for being open to who they were and what they were experiencing (van Manen 1986, p. 29). I could no longer rely on the scant
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My planning often showed minimal continuity from lesson to lesson. The deceptively important catalyst – students' interrogation of my teaching – that led to a profound shift in my attitude, occurred midway through the school year. The earnest questions of students resulted in a genuine thoughtfulness in our classroom discussions. Numerous unexpected queries had brought these adolescents back into my sight by fracturing my approach to a lesson, or stopping my thinking in its tracks. There would be a pause following, “Are you okay today, Sir?” or “Do you enjoy teaching, Mr. Russell?” I would be caught in a moment of self-reflection on whether we could afford to take the time to address how I was feeling, questioning the space of the classroom – normally, an adult addressing teenagers – as a venue for discussing personal issues. Students questioned what was wrong with me during these past months when I had so often been distracted, forgetful and going through the motions of leading the class. The impetus for this concern initially came from a few students, and not in all of my classes, but as time went on it was obvious that this was a topic that interested many. My knee-jerk reaction was to downplay the gravity of the questions. As weeks passed, I was unable to pass off their concerns. It was as though the students could see a struggle happening, and sense my loss of faith in my role as teacher and my ability to deliver the curriculum.

I had no previous experience in confronting this kind of personal questioning while remaining honest and open. My indecision had no precedent because I had only ever related the most facile, uncomplicated personal experiences to my students. As a class we had not negotiated our way through this kind of topic. On that day, with little forethought, I gave them an abbreviated version of my marriage breakdown. I am certain
that my responses were unsatisfactory to their questions on how such a predicament could happen to me. Some students expressed surprise; others were unable to comprehend how a marriage breakdown could occur. I had run out of words that allowed me to circumvent a personal crisis in public, or what I felt was the far-from-private world of public school. I was in a predicament I had not anticipated discussing with students. There were no satisfactory answers; this was out of character for a teacher, or so I thought.

We continued with the lesson as planned that day, but in our later discussions of people in various stages of life and learning, I sensed that my students had a new perspective on the messiness of life, one that they were adding to their adolescent experience. For some of my students, I had revealed myself as a marginalized person, someone overwhelmed by an unexpected event. I was admitting as well that I was embarking on a new lifestyle, even though I was not comfortable or able to articulate this at that time, in that setting. My admission of my separation and divorce was an unplanned curriculum that brought out a personal story, ultimately “performing alternative meanings and ways of being in the world” (Edgerton, 1996, p. 39). I had hit upon a personal paradox in my relationship with my students: I encouraged and welcomed their personal stories in class, but could not confront some of my own.

Van Manen (1986) writes of “true” teachers entering a kind of paradox as they experience a child’s life as more important than their own (p. 15). While this may seem a statement difficult to quantify, I do agree that a transformation occurs as my relationship with a student causes me to take a closer look at my own life. My current position allows me the freedom to reflect consistently upon my relationships with students, and I
continue to wonder what it was about my previous teaching position that did not encourage this kind of thinking. I will give my current school the fictitious name Gardner Elementary in order to emphasize that not all of the experiences I describe were actual events and also to protect any participants who may be similar to those I describe. My writing will sometimes be a composite of the relationships I have formed at the school. The personalities I describe may be a melange of students. As a resource teacher entrusted with meeting small groups of low-incidence learning-disabled students, I am able to approach topics in ways somewhat different from the main classroom.

Essentially, I teach a cross-section of students who at some time during the school year are unable to meet the learning expectations for reading and writing at their grade level. Most of the children I encounter are aged 7-12. The intimacy of my smaller room allows the majority of students to be open and frank about their school and home experiences; they relate many personal stories over the course of our times together. It is this atmosphere of trust that has caused me to see that I am learning with my students now, rather than solely leading them through the curriculum. In some ways this writing is my articulation of the transition I have experienced from teaching in a secondary school to teaching in an elementary school. (It was not until the end of my tenure as a secondary school teacher that I began to see the possibilities of being informed by my students.)

Most of my students seem to find comfort in participating in a community of shared values. The anecdotes of their school experiences that I relate attempt to portray the learning process at Gardner Elementary during my tenure there, and how this has influenced my pedagogy and educational beliefs. I now feel more connected to my place of work and my role as teacher, and this writing is in some ways an opportunity for me to
articulate these feelings. Perhaps this writing can serve as testimony for those who wonder why one would want to teach in an urban elementary school after working in a secondary school. The hopefulness I have found at this new position is an important part of what I want to portray with this writing. Students perk up and actively or passively participate when we talk about personal matters that include the many concerns people have in life. The stories include feelings of tension, contradiction and paradox surrounding the experience of teaching in an urban school. My accounts also embody an intertextuality of the voices of elementary students who greeted me, engaging a new teacher in his search for belonging after his move from a secondary school. I want to describe this as an intertextual relationship, and to do so requires further exploration of the term.

**Part II: Intertextuality in Theory and Practice**

The following passage summarizes the potential for the intertextual, and hints that this kind of approach, in spite of its many natural advantages, holds a challenge with which some teachers may not be entirely comfortable:

No text – either conversational or written – exists in isolation, it exists in relation to previous and forthcoming texts. But which texts are and will be related is not a given. . . . People, interacting with each other, construct intertextual relationships by the ways they act and react to each other (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1998, p. 7).
Having intertextual awareness challenges teachers to be constantly mindful of how they are interacting with their students. As a negotiated process, intertextuality in the classroom raises issues of voice, knowledge and authority that I will touch upon only as it relates to the shaping of teacher-student relations. A central goal of my writing is to identify and highlight the factors that weave together divergent experiences so that teachers can begin to view their classes as an interchange of textual knowledge. The interchange promoted by intertextuality is not one with which all teachers will be familiar, but it points to an ongoing mediation with students that fosters a dialogue around the concept of a wider world of texts than we have commonly imagined. Writing that distinguishes, explores and embraces both the public and private worlds in which we live models a teaching journey that does not shy away from potentially contradictory issues of emotion and intellect or public education and academic knowledge. This tone also accepts the influence of text and relationships upon my personal philosophy of education that necessarily evolves as my own ideas change. The mantle of teacher authority discourages many teachers from revealing to their students those experiences inside and outside of the classroom that have changed them. We cannot productively continue to view ourselves as objective transmitters of the curriculum, any more than we can expect to discuss such concepts as culture with no complications for students. My interpretation of the teacher's tenuous role in a challenging personal and professional environment will develop into expanding the borders of what constitutes negotiating knowledge with my students. With a keener eye to what informs the utterances around us, we can learn to explore fundamental ways of coming to terms with (finding the terminology to describe) complex issues in society. It will also encourage educators to
look for fresh approaches to discourse with and among children within the current contexts of curriculum, thereby creating meaningful learning opportunities with adult guidance.

As a term, “intertextuality” provides an example of how many words gradually evolve into more widespread usage, with no certainty of a commonly-held definition. Teachers can appreciate how curriculum directives often use terminology (e.g., *Guided Reading* or *Scope and Sequence*) in ways that simply offer new labels for established teaching methods. It is perhaps a more difficult matter to see that many of the concepts within curricula form historical texts of ideas in opposition, words that change meaning and continue to evolve in ways that influence the practice of teaching. Part of the motivation for my writing is to challenge teachers to re-define for themselves how various conceptions of “text” might influence the classroom and school:

The great virtue of the extension of the notion of text beyond things written on paper or carved into stone is that it trains attention on precisely this phenomenon: on how the inscription of action is brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on what the fixation of meaning from the flow of events – history from what happened, thought from thinking, culture from behavior – implies for sociological interpretation. To see social institutions, social customs, social changes as in some sense “readable” is to alter our whole sense of what interpretation is (Geertz, 1983, p. 31).

In order to broaden the concept of “text” to include aspects of voice and relations in the school, I formulate an intertextual notion of my classroom experiences. The linguistic and conceptual becoming of intertextuality in the Western academy motivate me to explore what I see as important implications for educators. There have been
numerous references to text in educational works (Rosen, 1984, p. 33; Fox, 1993, p. 97; Oyler, 1996, p. 59). These studies consistently assume a strict interpretation of the term as those times in class when the teacher connects student readings or other experiences to what is being read or discussed by the class. Importantly, authors emphasize that a classroom story presumes the existence of previous stories, and that for both reader and listener “threads of connection exist, threads of many different kinds” (Rosen, 1988, p. 33). I am not addressing the issue of the originality of a text but, rather, placing classroom discussion around terms such as “author,” “voice,” and “story” into a wider context for teacher-student consideration. My intention is to participate in the ongoing formation of a text that appears increasingly in educational research, with a hope of grounding this discussion in examples of what I see as intertextual experiences at my elementary school. Opening up the concept of “text” may help teachers and students to enrich their classroom discussion and improve the relationships between them.

### A. Bakhtin and Language

The term “intertextuality” continues to evolve as a concept beyond Kristeva’s (1980) influential explanation of how “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations ... the absorption and transformation of [one text by] another” (p. 66). *Intertextual* filters into educational research accompanied by a lasting postmodern ambiguity that lends a certain flexibility, shaped and defined by the needs of the writer who chooses to use it. Kristeva’s coinage, to suggest the implications of the interconnectedness of all texts, is apparent in how the term informs recent research (Oyler, 1996, p. 61; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1998, p. 7). She coined the term in the context of introducing a re-reading of
a relatively unknown Russian literary theorist, whose ideas have evolved into some of the most important in this area during the twentieth century (Allen, 2000, p. 14). While Bakhtin's work centers on actual human subjects employing language in specific social situations (1986, p. 65), Kristeva's work centers more on written text. Her later work suggests that "transposition" may be a better term to describe the phenomenon of intertextuality (1984, p. 60); however, "intertextuality" is the more widely recognized term to describe the interconnected nature of all texts.

Bakhtin, meanwhile, coined a number of influential neologisms concerning the unavoidably dialogical discourse of the novel. He touched upon similar topics at various times in his career, with the result that he sometimes presented new ideas and at others contradicted earlier findings (Coulter, 1999, p. 5). One of Bakhtin's (1984) main ideas is that of the monologic voice in the epic novel. Characters in this kind of novel cannot avoid representing the narratorial voice and its predilections, representing a single world and reality that is ordered and complete. A dialogic novel, however, offers a number of voices as languages that carry on a conversation with the narrator (p. 290). I consider my dissertation and its attempts at multi-vocality to be caught between an omniscient narration and a dialogism I am attempting to represent of my own school/ing experiences as teacher at an elementary school. The notion of heteroglossia — literally, "different languages" — represents the competing languages in a text such as a modern novel (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291). The educational implications involve the convergence of voices in a school and classroom. That is, I would like in my teaching to be more cognizant of student speech predilections, as well as my own, and how they come together to influence dialogue that strays from the planned curriculum. Bakhtin uses examples from the novels
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of Rabelais and Dostoevsky to describe three strategies for uncovering the author’s monologue or ideology: polyphony, chronotope and carnival. Carnival, for example, involves a distinctly anti-authoritarian humour that Bakhtin (1984) describes as “an outlet for the disgruntled lower classes of medieval times” (p. 45). Various social or professional groups and genres are therefore potentially embedded within a single narrative voice. For education, it is interesting to consider the competing languages in a text, but more importantly here, how undeniably social the speech act is. Our language adapts to audience but is also informed by the language we assume is expected of us, conditioned by accepted public opinion (in narrative sometimes called verisimilitude).

While complex, Bakhtin’s notion of speech languages shows how speakers who use social languages, perspectives, and frameworks considered antithetical may nonetheless create truth together through dialogue (Coulter, 1999, p. 12).

Bakhtin’s theory of the inherently social nature of language moves us beyond attempts to explain language as a synchronic system. A century ago this kind of abstract objectivism was seen as a revolutionary change from the formalist approaches that looked at the literary qualities of works (de Saussure, 1959). By the 1920s, Bakhtin and his colleagues were proposing the fundamental importance of the “social specificity” of all of our speech utterances (Allen, 2000, p. 15). Bakhtin’s essential view of language is that communication necessarily exists in specific social situations and is thus bound up with specific social evaluations. The spoken or written utterance captures the human-centered and socially specific aspect of language that other approaches do not consider. His writing, then, illuminates meaning as possessing infinite potential, unique to the extent that it demonstrates a linguistic interaction of specific individuals or groups within
specific social contexts (1981, p. 63). What then, of implications for the classroom? *Dialogism*, as the socially specific nature of language, has become widespread beyond Kristeva’s interpretation, and strangely, was never specifically cited as a concept by Bakhtin. Bakhtin’s theories enjoy extraordinary influence upon a range of disciplines outside of literary theory and criticism. Dialogue is evolving into a potential research tool for educators, and it is well I bear in mind Bakhtin’s theories before proceeding. These theories influence my desire to present in my writing a dialogic collection of voices that help me to reflect upon the influence of teaching and schooling experiences. While I am solely responsible for the construction and mingling of the voices, my hope in presenting a variety of languages and perspectives is to demonstrate a dialogic rather than a monologic tone for my work.

**B. An Evolving Intertextuality**

Dialogism encompasses not only the ways in which language responds to previous utterances and to pre-existent patterns of meaning and evaluation, but also the ways in which it promotes further responses. One cannot understand an utterance or even a written work as if it were singular in meaning, unconnected to previous or future utterances or works. The phrase “all utterance” – encompassing all oral and written language – suggests the extent to which Bakhtin is attempting to illuminate fundamental aspects of language. This, in turn, informs how I view the voices of the school. Words are seen as relational in Bakhtin’s world, and all speaking and writing is dialogic because the resulting meaning and logic they combine to create are dependent upon what has previously been said and on how they will be received by others (1981, p. 91). For
educators, it is this otherness of our words that has potential for teaching the importance of intertext in the classroom. This is recognition of genre not as a structured, lock-step approach to language, but as a way of exploring how we must be flexible in our communication and open to various interpretations of the world. I am not speaking of understanding, but of a respectful stance toward views that I cannot hope to appreciate, as my students and I exhibit profoundly individual ways of describing and interpreting experience through texts. I have discussed the impossibility of the universal perspective. I equate it to the monologic voice that I sometimes sense in reading curricula. I can only attempt to appreciate how all utterances are double-voiced, or informed by previous utterances, and then learn more about the influences that inform how we view the world.

Bakhtin’s (1981) primary example of the mixture of voices at play in speech is the *polyphonic novel*. This is a writing that presents a world in which no individual discourse can stand objectively above any other discourse; all discourses are interpretations of the world, responses to and calls to other discourses. Bakhtin’s dialogic notions of human consciousness, subjectivity and communication, are based on how language embodies an ongoing clash of ideologies, world-views, opinions and interpretations. This has profound implications for how staff and students co-exist within the learning milieu of the inner-city school. We need to explore how to become more aware of this clash of world-views within one narrative, so that we can prepare students for the difficulty, indecision and uncertainty of communication in an increasingly international millennium. For some writers, intertextuality continues to be a term that can be easily molded to suit many purposes, highlighting the deconstruction of the concept of “text” in recent studies (Geertz, 1993, p. 83; Silverman, 1994, p. 56; Chang, 1996, p.
The trend in classroom studies, meanwhile, is towards finding ways in which teachers might make sense of text for students by accessing prior knowledge or innate tendencies in learners.

The nature of teaching itself has been described as an unavoidable journey into comparison (Gotz, 1997, p. 67), and intertextuality is steeped in this form of hitting upon and sharing common traits, topic, presentation, and form. Figurative language has had a profound influence on how we communicate in the English language. Teachers rely heavily upon metaphor: it is a central tool in attempts at universal, cross-cultural curricula intended to teach issues of globalization and multiculturalism. It is not my intention to outlaw or downplay the use of metaphor in the classroom; rather, I am suggesting that there has perhaps been an overemphasis on metaphor at the expense of metonymy. My intention throughout this writing is to return to teaching with a new perspective toward school language and text that I may have left unchallenged in the past. I seek a perspective that allows me to be mindful of the various ongoing individual discourses in my classes. I would also like to become more comfortable with the uncertainty I feel in introducing students to areas of the curriculum in which I may not be fully versed. How might I develop a better skill for creating and then building upon quiet moments in a class? For one, a disruption of the text, juxtaposing a reading of “Little Red Riding Hood” with a non-fiction book on the passive nature of wolves, is a way of achieving space for contemplation upon the popularity of a story versus the actual degree of truth found in it. A growing number of publishers are open to publishing a book that combines aspects of fiction and non-fiction, for example, printing fairy tale and fact on opposing pages in order to provoke a response in the reader. This allows a connection to other
moments of truth-finding for students, when long-established myths may be challenged or dispelled. Among readers, an interesting discussion might ensue concerning the respective merits of comparing two separate texts on one topic, or two texts within one book. Disruptions of this kind are bound to produce moments of contemplation for students, and I hope to grow more comfortable with allowing for silent reflection before I bring a group back to a consensus of direction and a hint of conclusion. I ask myself whether my recognition of various challenging, indeterminate and unanswerable experiences of the urban school can be explored in this space between teacher and students that I am calling intertextual. I also invoke notions of the paradoxical, reconsidered in light of what some of my teaching actions represent in my relationships with students.

At first, I was so focused on my own concerns that I had difficulty picturing adolescents awake at night worrying over problems of any magnitude similar to my own, but their writing was heart-felt and honest. I read with new eyes. Their voices changed for me – perhaps the students also felt this shift – and more and more I admired the compassion that I felt coming from them in large and small measures. Their sincerity brought me back to a state of mind where I could see and hear them as maturing young people, something I had been sensitive to in past years, but constantly struggled with in light of the other demands of teaching. The pursuit of knowledge as prescribed by the curriculum had become the centre of my practice, and it took some time to shake the sense that I could diverge at length from my intended topics if the students were willing to participate. I began to recognize that we were creating a space of understanding in our talks and in our writing, one that fostered an environment of trust within the classroom.
Some students were less comfortable than others in speaking about certain issues, but most provided very open written responses. I was increasingly uncertain of what was appropriate or comfortable to discuss in class, despite feeling a desire for openness. It was at these times I walked away reflecting upon certain paradoxes of my work. Our discussions continued in an unpredictable way, either satisfying or not, usually unfinished by someone's silence. Or so I thought. I became accepting of the paradox of struggling to articulate in speech what I could and perhaps should only have said with silence.

C. Trust as Ephemeral Bond

I want to return to what led me to search for some of the paradoxes of teaching. At one point I considered these to be contradictions, but was advised and then able to see that contradiction is not a particularly generative word – literally, "against speech." "Paradox" is perhaps a more revealing concept than might be suggested by the confused, complex, or negative way in which is often portrayed. On the one hand, the concept describes the state of stasis and repetition in cultural saturation as well as in stereotypes (doxa). On the other, paradox leads to the kind of questioning language that can upset a comfortable reliance upon inherently unsettled words (paradoxa). Barthes (1974) muses upon doxa and paradoxa as he links them to his description of the readerly and writerly texts (p. 19). The readerly text is the kind of writing that is predictable, requiring only a surface consideration by the reader. It represents a single voice and meaning that for Barthes undermines the intertextual with monologic aspirations. The writerly text, however, challenges the reader to a point where one must ask what is clear and acceptable language, what is linear narrative, what is not. It ultimately challenges a
reader to question how a text is read thoughtfully. I am intrigued by texts that somehow incorporate elements of both the comfortable and the disruptive, containing, if you will, a textual paradox. In common parlance, paradox is used to portray an occurrence that is somehow beyond clear thinking. It also implies closing off a subject. A return to the roots of the word (para – “alongside, past or beyond”; and doxa – “popular opinion” [OED]) might reveal a means of articulating the act of negotiating the messy state of relations in a world of colliding texts and indeterminate, complex cultures. A historical sense of paradox can guide me in my teaching to “unsettle” established patterns in my relationships with students, moving our habits beyond popular convention into realms of our past experiences in schools, aware of how we have interacted with others. “Doxa” and “paradoxa” are two terms that allow me to connect notions of intertextuality with what I see as a space between a binary of metaphor (related to the doxa) and metonymy (related to the paradoxa). The terms also allow me to interrogate my own reading of curricula, though there is a binary that is difficult to avoid between the texts represented by the curriculum as a whole and the way I in which I put ideas from this text into action in the classroom. I then find myself a researcher-practitioner engaged in questioning the language of my teaching and learning environment – my school/ing is interrogated by self-reflection. Fundamentally, metonymy is thought of as a continuing knowing but not knowing, an uncertainty that opens concepts to further investigation while paradoxically throwing established binaries into question.

I am pursuing my own definition of metonymy in order to reveal a personal intertextuality in a prevalent binary in educational research, the student-teacher relationship. The form of my writing attempts to link narrative, praxis, and theoretical
voices into a personal version of what Bakhtin (1971) describes as neither the first nor last meaning among other meanings, but ultimately forming a link in a chain of meaning (p. 37). This continuing re/constitution of my teaching approach is the very act of engaging my students and learning with them. That is not to say a re-defined trope of metonymy places my thinking between all of the binaries in education, only that it allows teachers to take the fundamental step of recognizing patterns outside and beyond those theoretical boundaries. Metonymy, as the figurative trope that allows one concept like “crown” to stand for another, separate idea, produces a literal connection that has the potential to link ideas across time in different ways. For example, thinking metonymically is a habit of bridging classroom experiences between teachers and students so that one idea becomes intergenerational common ground for classroom discussion. Created and shared stories, perhaps involving the age-old figure of the teacher standing at the front of the class, develop into an important connection across generations. I offer a poem I have written about the space I inhabit between the blackboard and my students.

**Act I, Scene I**

My hand caked in white
Letting go
Of an instrument of letters, words
Timeless palimpsest
Traces of my body
Other bodies
My clothes
Other clothes
My movements
Other movements
But distracted by motion
Interrupted rhythm that had me lost
Perhaps my own turn from faces
To face words
Among air that is full of dust and life
Wanting to break out of a room
To express a personality
Running out of time
When really we all grow up
Too slow
Revealed in the pedantic
Cadence of my voice
Changing timbre as I talk
Up, down, around
Especially here
Enclosed in walls of fact
Evaluation
Subjective
Objective comments
For a file
A single file
Smiles, jeers
Stares of many at the one
Standing on stage
With the voice
Of reason
Shame
Understanding
Anger
Sympathy
Remembrance
Envy
Admonishment
These tones from every level
Of non/sense
Accompanied by eyes
Which also speak
But may or may not express
Distance, a mode of address
Space between
Within impersonal boxes designed
For ingesting words
Part of a machine
Living institution of
Bookshelves and bodies
Texts of paper and flesh
That struggle to intertwine
While mercifully
Some human traits
Break through
A noise as it hits the ledge
The wait for the final sound
So un/predictable, ephemeral and delicate
An occasional eloquence
Stops everything
Causes wonder or longing
Or laughter
When chalk hits floor.

Johnson (1987) reveals the intertextual nature of poetry by describing the inherent advantages it has for harbouring various texts. Poets, affording their work an originality and dynamic quality, have long employed textual interrelationships. Poetry seems to have free license to be influenced by otherness, as Johnson indicates:

One might say ... that for modern theorists of intertextuality, the language of poetry is structured like an unconscious. The integrity and intentional self-identity of the individual text are put into question in ways that have nothing to do with originality and derivativeness, since the very notion of self-contained literary ‘property’ is shown
to be an illusion. When read in its dynamic intertextuality, the text becomes differently energized, traversed by forces and desires that are invisible or unreadable to those who see it as an independent, homogeneous message unit, a totalizable collection of signifieds (p. 116).

In light of the number of figurative devices employed by the poet, it is interesting to consider how metonymy informs the symbolic in a way that is beyond metaphor. For my purposes, metonymy becomes a view of the interconnected nature of the texts with which students come into contact in class. Our predilections are parts of the interpretive whole requiring careful illumination and re-assembly in order to guide us to a personal consideration of a text’s importance. This occurs when students are able to see how commonalities between textual characteristics (font, captions, headings, illustrations, etc.) become a larger metonymic view of the text. A reader’s ability to continue to learn from continuous contact with text is a metonymy of learning that is part of a process of ongoing, intertextual contact with books and expanding language proficiency. The flexibility I am investing in metonymy also allows me to find a voice for my school experiences. These events of my memory have a concordance that takes me beyond the symbolic. My expanded notion of a literary term is partially an attempt to connect my memories of school to my teaching. For me, this involves acceptance of the need to negotiate the important topics and stories of the classroom. I prefer to think of this as a non-linear approach because, while learning in the present, I am going back in time to access what the children have enjoyed, as well as eliciting what they would like to encounter in future readings. Metonymy among texts is often an unspoken unity with a whole that can never be overtly unified; it is recognition of personal predilections,
unpredictability, and spontaneity within the reading choices we make. This lends a powerful connection to the metaphor/metonymy interrelationship.

The intertextual relationship we have with texts lies somewhere between these two statements to which I ask my students to respond. Which one might they struggle with more?

"The thing I like best about this book is . . ."

(Textual in-between: How we view the text)

"I think this book would be better if . . ."

Hidden somewhere within these statements, whether completed or not, is an evaluation of how effectively I have assisted my students in approaching reading and writing. Yet, it is not easy for me to see beyond the immediate impact of an exercise like the one above; I only look to see if they have finished the task. A teacher needs to grow with the good and bad aspects of a completed lesson, and this is a sensibility that develops over years of teaching. Part of accepting the evolution of the time spent with my students is to consider that there I can learn from both the positive and negative aspects of class. Viewed in the long term, it is more helpful to consider that we have been evolving as teachers, and will continue to learn from our relationships with our students. Without addressing all learning as a linear progression with the curriculum, metonymy reminds me that my own learning is part of the classroom. My memories of schooling, my
glimpses of my own student habits in present students are a view of part of my past and present schooling. This perspective allows me to stop and reflect upon some links within what may seem a disjointed, unpredictable school day. There is surprise in how my memory brings me back to a schooling I share with students. I move through many of the expectations (doxa) of the classroom and curriculum to create a unique learning experience (paradoxa) with students. To my mind this is a generative space in which to study the paradoxical art of teaching. Accepting unpredictability and the indeterminate means that we are closer to learning with our students. The margins of linguistic boundaries take us into complicated but educationally revealing relationships with our students. I am suggesting that metonymy allows me to consider the intertextual in memories of schooling. The following quotation represents the potential a metonymic sensibility holds for pedagogy:

> Intertextuality is not itself that which produces what Barthes and Kristeva call *jouissance*, the loss of unity and even identity experienced by the reader when confronted by the plural, polysemous, non-unified text. Intertextuality is an important term for describing the radically plural text, and is a crucial technique in the work of those writers who eschew notions of the unified work, yet it is also potentially what creates a sense of repetition, cultural saturation, a dominance of cultural stereotypes and thus of doxa over that which would resist and disturb the beliefs and forms and codes of the culture, the *para-doxa* (Allen, 2000, p. 90).

### D. A Return to Paradox and Pedagogy

The writings of Barthes self-consciously explore and embody a clash between *doxa* (again, the cultural code of discourses, stereotypes, and clichés that ultimately undermine individuality) and *paradoxa*. I see the two as tensions within my teaching, but it is not
enough to simply locate them and make choices about them (Allen, 2000, p. 76). I recognize my work as a process of becoming a pedagogue, and I want to represent the clash of ideals that can lead to burn out or hopefulness, even within a given day. The voices present in my writing are part of a struggle to balance certain long-held images of schooling that my students may be unable to appreciate. In intertextual terms, *doxa* are present in the majority of activities I choose for the classroom; they lull me into a sense of control over school behaviour, language, and outcomes. In reality, these assumptions create a sense of uncertainty as teachers negotiate with students over the paradoxes of pedagogy. What follows are some of the "impossibilities" that provide some sense of the teacher's predicament (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 17):

- **We teach, with no knowledge or certainty about what consequences our actions as teachers will have.**

  *This statement is a confirmation of how much of my daily work is open-ended, yet part of what my classroom is becoming, particularly those decisions I make that influence the kind of relationship I have with my students. Teaching is a calling that asks me to join in a student's journey, but ultimately one I must acknowledge as a personal process I hope to see through to the end. I hold the hope that students will not stop pursuing curiosity either.*
At the heart of teaching about and across social and cultural difference is the impossibility of designating precisely what actions, selves or knowledges are 'correct' or 'needed.'

In light of the above, I begin to consider the parameters and teachings of the impossible in our lives. Difference offers many ways to introduce the discomfort of experiences we either find difficult to re-visit, or perspectives that are completely new to us.

Pedagogy, when it 'works,' is unrepeatable and cannot be copied, sold, or exchanged – it's 'worthless' to the economy of educational accountability.

I waver from the impossible in reading this statement, confronted with the "unrepeatablility" of pedagogy (standing on its own like a good haiku). A mysterious combination of forces in our approaches and relations with students also serves as protection against those who feel we can commodify the kind of behaviour necessary in given teaching situations. There is great appeal in a powerful, unpredictable force that cannot be bought or sold. It is also heartening to consider that an "economy of educational accountability" remains grounded at the personal level owing to the slippery nature of the teacher-student relationship.

Pedagogy is a performance that is suspended (as in interrupted, never completed) in the space between self and other.
With a growing collection of literature attempting to call upon "self" and "other" in ways that reveal more of the personal, a difficult duplicity occurs to me regarding how I present myself to my students. That is, how can I avoid the trap of offering them more than I have to give? I am aware that I have the option of presenting myself as someone who I am not, while the more sensible approach is to allow students to see who I am as a person as well as a teacher. Both options have challenges, but the latter is the only way to stay true to demonstrating (and perhaps ultimately passing on) the passions I have for knowledge and learning.

- **Pedagogy is a performance that is suspended in the time between the before and the after of learning.**

This suspension of teaching moments is indelibly connected to the first quotation, in that what we offer students is the dynamics of our time together discussing ideas, skills and knowledge. There may be an infusion of the past and future influencing the classroom at any time, but the journey together is always an ongoing movement of the continuous present grounding us in those other possibilities.

- **Pedagogy is a performance suspended (but not lost) in thought – it is suspended between prevailing categories and discursive systems of thought.**
With words like “difference” and “paradox,” I want to explore the productive features of a state of suspension. A reflective mood indicates a mind wavering between thoughts, categories, and so forth. Surely we can become more comfortable with the potential of the interdisciplinary, even if we do not embrace these approaches as our own. We are witnessing the fusing of many categories and systems in our texts, and we can look at such possibilities as an increase in collaborative teaching to challenge classrooms on new levels.

Ellsworth (1997) also comments that the unpredictability of pedagogy is what saves it from being “completely closed, permanently othering, lifeless, passion killing, and perverse in the sense of already knowing what is good for us” (p. 9). While I do not employ all of her deconstructivist theories surrounding modes of address, I do feel that educators require direction to breech unpredictable, incorrigible, and disobedient topics and emotions in classrooms. As a teacher, I can create instructive ways to reveal how paradox leads us to the unpredictability of language.

**Reflection: Contradictions of Communication**

During that final year at the high school, there were days when I was more businesslike and less personable than I would have liked, following an almost managerial style in my teaching. By June, however, the students had restored my beliefs in schools and the importance of student-teacher relations. I was at the very least restored to a presence of mind that allowed me to recognize that while a change was required, it would be possible to find a hopeful position in the teaching field. The experience has motivated
me to articulate what I feel is part of entering into a thoughtful learning relationship with my students. It is this hope that allows me to enter with children into various spaces that constitute a middle ground for us. It is not an uncomplicated area of learning that we step into with them: concepts such as “communication” are being problematized by many authors (Chang, 1996, p. x; Edgerton, 1996, p. 57; Ellsworth, 1997, p. 14). I want to give attributes to the undefinable teacher-student relationship that is subject to tension and paradox because of the ungroundedness of many classroom situations. My reflections acknowledge “the strategic and moral necessities to participate in attributing meaning to ‘teaching’” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 141). By attributing meaning to classroom relationships, I create a personal pedagogy. My approach reveals particular moments that remind teachers and students that we co-create intervals of learning, sharing in events that are unplanned because of the way we bring so many different interests to our reading, writing, or discussion. This unpredictability requires a re-conceptualization so that teachers might be able to better incorporate various student interests in the classroom. How can I create a space in my pedagogy, my lessons, and my conversations that encourage me to reflect and act upon my relationship with a student?

Part III: Contesting Knowledge, Bridging Experience

While the classroom may seem as though it is the teacher’s space, and many styles of teaching construct relationships from an adult point of view, I have witnessed many educators helping students feel welcome in school. It is a challenge to gain the trust of students within the parameters of the schedule of a large high school. Students
shift classes often, and the institutional setting can make it easier to treat each young person impersonally. This was part of the ongoing, deep-seated personal predicament I faced in the high-school. The coming and going of those students with whom I was unable to establish a connection had a more profound influence on me than I realized or was willing to see. My subsequent move from the secondary school to an elementary teaching position has helped me to see this. I sense a change in my relationships with students. I see a difference in the faces of primary students in my presence, based on more than an image of the very young as less inhibited and prone to acting and speaking spontaneously in a group setting. To a large extent, my shift to primary grades has been a very positive experience because I encounter children who feel comfortable in the building as a whole. I want to speak to the paradoxes I have experienced while mentally connecting the two buildings, the thoughts of an adult dwelling amidst youth, trying to understand and empathize as a friend (as is my style) yet one who acknowledges the authority and paradox of my position. I constantly feel the many similarities and differences, the experiences I do and do not share with students as we negotiate the customs of the school.

A. Contesting Knowledge in Public and Private

My approach to student inclusion in class discussions has taken on new meaning in the primary grades. To highlight a shared use of authority in the elementary school classroom, particularly in allowing students to contest teacher knowledge, I borrow a scene from Oyler's (1996) *Making room for students: Sharing teacher authority in room 104*. Student interruption is a complicated matter in any school. Consider the following
description of a primary class environment in light of the students’ correction of the
teacher’s (Anne) interpretation of a picture book:

Anne is clearly not the sole authority in the classroom regarding interpreting the gender of the illustrator’s photograph on the back cover of this book. The children questioned the teacher’s authority by interrupting her explanation and correcting her. They were persistent in this correction – repeating “That’s a girl” three times before Anne acknowledged them. They clearly felt confident that they were right and she needed to be corrected, which Anne then reinforced by thanking them. And Henry’s retrieval of another Robert Munsch book to check his photograph, too, can be seen as a desire to check for textual proof that this was indeed the picture of Robert Munsch. Rather than view a child seeking verification of what the teacher said as a distraction, disturbance or defiance, Anne pointed out to the group how Henry had contributed to their understanding. In fact, he even received thanks from another child for his efforts (p. 70).

In my experience, it was a more challenging process, though certainly not an impossible one, to nurture an open classroom interchange in secondary school. While not the focus of my study, the combination of older students, and what I interpreted as the demands of the curriculum, weighed upon my teaching. I had not taken consistent steps towards a negotiated learning process. Open discussion was a hit-and-miss affair. The primary grades have allowed me the freedom to negotiate more comfortably textual authority with students. As Oyler shows, Anne has developed this kind of textual exchange with the students. They in turn as readers, writers, listeners, and speakers take risks without fear of judgement of their mistakes. “A teacher who actively models that an authoritative stance may be incorrect and invites children’s correction creates an atmosphere of both critical thinking and safety of risk taking so essential to active
learning” (p. 19). I recognize that the demands of teaching and the development of the teacher as curriculum expert make it more challenging to foster this kind of risky interchange. Yet, I acknowledge this paradox: in launching secondary students into a world of adult expectations I sometimes robbed them of the joys of more spontaneous learning commonly associated with earlier grades. Adolescents, like their younger counterparts, benefit greatly from this kind of classroom environment.

A second paradox concerns the ways we encounter/experience private space in public domains of both elementary and secondary schools. This can be seen in the ways I am able to walk through the elementary schoolyard, welcomed into the play activities of children who see me as a teacher, yet accept my presence among them. In this role I enjoy the privilege of watching children interact, or I may choose to actively participate in their play, which is my way of mediating various kinds of playground predicaments. It is not a consistent part of the secondary school culture to casually engage students outside of the building as they socialize with peers. I now relish forays into the world of children as they take a break from the world of classes and desks. My continued school/ing leads me to use more immediate language than I have before, words that seem appropriate to describe the ways students return me to memories of my own childhood.

**Another Kind of Suspension**

Staring at a tire  
Hanging above water  
Puddle as obstacle  
Black, dangling magnet for little feet  
Daredevils imagining the freedom  
Of swinging over danger  
Smiling at the thought
Relishing the power of
Laughing at fear
Approaching the chains
Like Houdini
While the cautious step back
For a demonstration on
How to leap
Over and into one of life’s
Schoolyard risks.

My adult conundrum in moments such as the one described above is whether to derail the children’s time of play with an authoritative voice. A difficult decision, as part of me wants them to experiment with the tire as friends, without a teacher’s interference. My classroom sensibilities realize how most teachers want no part of dripping-wet students squirming and complaining during afternoon classes. I might find the opportunity to broach a moment like this and eventually discuss it in connection to class topics. I rarely took this approach with secondary school classes, perhaps owing to the pressures connected to the need to “get through” the text (and curriculum). I allowed texts to stand as the arbiters of experience and often assumed a passive voice designed to complement the supposed neutrality of these books. Similarly, I did not seek out intertextual links as I often do now. If it is possible to link schoolyard behaviour with classroom topics, I do so in ways that I am coming to see are a negotiated process. I am balancing my expertise with the initiations and experiences of students. It is a sharing of authority that is possible in literacy activities through encouraging intertextual connections in texts. Consider the ways to raise this issue in the classroom.
1. Before we begin our work this afternoon, I’d like everyone to listen to a tricky situation I spotted on the playground. Neither you nor your parents want you at school with soaking clothes. Right? But this was a neat choice that some students faced.

2. Troy and Ben found a really interesting situation on the playground at lunch. Can you two tell everyone what was different with the tire swing today?

3. Let me ask you: Have you ever had the feeling of looking at something risky or dangerous, but feeling pretty sure you could handle it? What choice did you make?

4. Why do some people enjoy risky or dangerous things? Do you think they feel mostly scared or excited by what they are doing?

5. Do you remember a book you read about someone who was trying something for the first time? I’m talking about something they really wanted to do, but weren’t completely sure about because it was their first time. You know, kind of exciting and scary at the same time.

This second paradox reminds me how the habits of the secondary school made it more challenging for me to include classroom conversation as an intertextual link to what inevitably becomes the communicative text of our classroom relationship. More often my talk centered upon other ways of introducing a topic or the day-to-day management of the curriculum. My conviction is that older students would enjoy the advantages of a teacher’s expertise that includes the students’ initiation of knowledge, and ultimately a
shared approach to the learning agenda and authority in the classroom. As Oyler (1996) states:

When teachers act on the belief that students construct their own understandings and do this as part of a social process that is mediated by both students and teacher, the work and talk in classrooms are bound to change. To build on student understandings, the teacher must begin by making room for student initiations (p. 51).

Part of my struggle with an inclusive pedagogy has been to allow students a freedom to form their own understandings that involve negotiation of voice, knowledge and authority in the classroom. The aspects that continue to challenge me are paradoxical, but my hope is that they will no longer be out of my reach with students in various settings. I have long desired to acknowledge student input in class, but it is truly helpful to see student initiation as an ongoing product of the kind of interchange I want to foster.

**B. A Predicament of Place**

The challenge and potential of these paradoxes reveal ways in which teachers might enter positively into the physical and emotional spaces of children and maintain a clear thoughtfulness for the pedagogic role. That is, what spaces are there between the “Curriculum as Planned” and the “Curriculum as Lived” (Aoki, 1985, p. 4)? I want to remain open to where moments of unpredictability and ambiguity can guide the class. Events that take me from the planned curriculum may or may not comfortably re-connect to the goals of a lesson. We may be left with open-ended, unanswerable responses that do not satisfy a question in the traditional sense. Discussion may lead to an “undecidability” (Ellsworth, 1998, p. 140) between teacher and students that “both urge
choice and prevent the choice from being made” (Chang, 1996, p. 51). I reiterate the predicament I found myself in: my experience of being questioned about my personal happiness as a teacher caused a pedagogic breach for me.

The thoughts provoked continue to take me back to another building, to think of an intertextual space between the two schools that students also traverse as they progress from Grade Seven to Grade Eight. I think of how students attempt to negotiate a comfortable space in a new setting. At the time of my difficulty with my teaching role, a spontaneous query had me standing in front of my students with no comfortable answer for them. I was caught between answering truthfully that personal matters had greatly influenced my work, or giving the pat response that I was simply having an off day. The following definition helps me reflect upon a personal pedagogical moment that took me into the space between my teaching personality and the inquisitive students:

Predicaments are problematic states of affairs that admit no easy solution; they may even have no solution at all, being by nature paradoxical; they characterize the teaching enterprise and range from the mundane necessities of dealing with misbehaving children to the philosophical demands for the meaning of it all (Gotz, 1999, p. 346).

**PREDICAMENT** (Late Latin) – from **praedicare**, “to preach,” combined with **-ment** as a suffix indicating “the result or product of action or the means or instrument of it” (Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology).

Teaching assumes a monologic voice when we unwittingly assume the role of expert, while not allowing for student initiation and expertise on a topic or text. My
reflective writing of classroom practices is leading me to surmise that classroom conversations require a sensibility directed by a negotiated authority and expertise surrounding the ways text moves us. Pedagogy is a much different calling than many educational theories and practices allow for. Establishing a relationship with a student can also be a messier, more inconclusive undertaking than teachers readily admit, posing tensions and dilemmas that can never be completely resolved or settled (Ellsworth, 1997). The personal predicament that I described earlier, my inability to broach a personal topic, was due in part to the fact that I was caught up in wanting to provide some kind of answer. What was needed, however, was a shared – that is, a negotiated – response to student curiosity from which I could also learn.

C. A Metonymic Breath

With time I have grown more comfortable with the words I choose to develop my relationship with students, but those words I choose not to say are also vital to this changing process called the school year. My attempt is to connect my actions over time in the classroom and relate them to how I foster relations with students. Some of these connections are the indecipherable aspects of my teaching practice – those moments that linger without the need or desire for further articulation. By recognizing the futility of taking on the predictable paradoxes of my practice, I can evolve as a teacher by learning to live with the discomfort of my calling. Facing predicaments is part of the range of possible emotional experiences when I enter into hopeful relationships with students that do not attempt to answer all of their social, emotional and academic needs. That is, I am constantly re-discovering how to exchange my enthusiasm for learning with children in
various unpredictable contexts - some new, some a return - and this leads to a continuing transformation as a learning teacher, a teacher who is taught. Curriculum research continues to emphasize the construction of meaning based upon a problem to be solved, that is, how people as social agents are pushed and pulled by constraining social structures. In my writing, I portray my teaching role as unsettled and uncertain as long as I continue to rely upon supposed stable concepts to guide the learning environment. Essentially, the resulting lack of focus upon forms of slippery, shifting language means that “unlike in the humanities, in educational research the processes of signification, representation and reading are rarely seen as problems in their own right” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 11). Despite all of the images that accompany teaching, pedagogy requires a continual re-thinking and re-conceptualizing. The paradoxes inherent in the relationships formed around pedagogy fire part of this need of regeneration. I therefore link pedagogy, paradox, and intertext in ways that I intend as hopeful and inspiring for teachers dealing with


This exhalation of breath is mentioned in passing in the context of van Manen’s discussion of thoughtfulness and hopefulness in the teacher. It strikes me that in the moment before a teacherly sigh occurs, our feelings are at a crossroads. A sigh may appear before, during, or after class, a tangible summation of an experience that instantaneously becomes a positive or negative image for the (usually) tired teacher reflecting on what has just passed. For a moment I enter into an acknowledgement, admitting with a breath that many of the tasks of teaching take a toll.
The sigh may well be a reaction to a positive yet taxing experience, or follow a stream of events that constituted teacher's time with students. I envision a multitude of sighs forever occurring in the world of pedagogy. Whatever this thoughtful pause is a reaction to, it is all we can do to comment on what has transpired and what lies ahead. As a teacher, I know that the two modes are indelibly connected. They are the past and the future of my time with my students. I may react to this reflective intersection with resignation, or at least with recognition that the task at hand, based on what has transpired, and the road ahead, will require a great deal of energy outside of my experience and ability to anticipate. This is a metonymic moment encapsulating an acknowledgement of my role in the classroom. It is a space of past certainty (Fatigue, Finality, Forgetfulness, Frustration, Fear, Fury, Freedom, etc.) mixed with future uncertainty (Time, Text, Testing, Trust, Tenderness, Timidity, Trouble, etc). I am left with the present in which to act thoughtfully and hopefully, recognizing what brings me to the moment of the sigh. This acknowledges that my relations with students require time, energy, and a thoughtfulness that prompts me to strive to maintain my responsibility to them. The sigh is the teaching habit indicating how I live and breathe in a classroom of thoughtful relationships. My view is one of seeing and experiencing school through vocal and textual practice that attempt to articulate momentary pauses – be they public or private interstices – in a teacher's time with students and colleagues. It is grounded in a custom of negotiating shifting classroom relations. I am attempting to explore these spaces of opportunity through my own conceptions of how I might address intertextuality and paradox in the classroom.
Reflection: Entering Uncertainty

Exploring new ground with students is a process involving hopefulness, thoughtfulness and observance of how our students interact with our leadership. It is also the paradox of pedagogy. By entering into activities with students, I establish a contract with them that I will be engaged in learning with them, rather than simply delivering the curriculum. I am at once teacher and learner. Here I combine two of Ellworth’s (1997, p. 139) statements on the difficulty of pedagogy (in italics) with my own feelings on how this kind of space relates to an intertextual appreciation that creates hopeful meditations on the position of pedagogy.

- *The teacher’s ‘authority’ lies in textual knowledge – and yet she has no mastery over it: Textual knowledge knows but does not know what it knows . . . (while texts continue to help us to teach and learn through habits that show that the text is not the ultimate authority).*

- *Teaching about and across social and cultural difference is not about bridging differences and joining us together in understanding, it’s about engaging in the ongoing production of culture in a way that returns yet another difference (and participating in learning is a form of culture, an example that society is ever-changing, as is our knowledge of ourselves as teachers and learners living with uncertainty).*

In my recognition of teaching as interminable, meaning as indeterminate, and self as a slippery process inextricable from world and others (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 158), I sense that I am becoming more at ease with situations that position knowledge as
indeterminate. Understanding can mean that some topics are more challenging even when closure is invited or sought after. Teachers continually face the challenge of deciding which student initiations may need to be ignored, which politely acknowledged, and which taken up as a part of the product of learning. Students do the same with my forays into class discussion. These are attempts to capture the imaginations of as many student as possible.

"Today we’re starting a very exciting topic…"

"There’s a story I’ve been wanting to tell you about…"

"The other day I was really surprised by…"

"Raise your hand if you’ve ever wanted to travel in space."

"Who has ever been afraid to try something new, but had no choice?"

"Tell me something you counted already today."

"I saw a really quiet crowd the other day, and it seemed strange…"

"What’s the longest word you’ve ever seen?"

"Why do people like to receive letters in the mail?"

Initiating topics in this way is a tangible acknowledgement that authority is shared, but also one of the underlying causes of an ever-present indecision in teaching. I am willing to introduce concepts in this way, but not always certain when to trust the expertise of my students. I want to tap into the knowledge of my students that manifests itself in their learning interests, while searching for ways to help them to communicate
those needs. It is no longer a matter of hiding behind or becoming more comfortable with the canon. I want to introduce terms heretofore unmentionable in teaching, though shared with students, emotions sometimes seen as defeatist or antithetical to the role of the pedagogue. Above all, I strive to engage language at the same time as I admit its unpredictable nature. How many voices (similar to Bakhtin's "languages") can one text contain? With such a question I reveal for students how we carry ourselves in the larger world, negotiating competing, not-always-trustworthy, texts and ideologies. One aspect of good teaching is revealed by one who paradoxically finds ways to give what he or she does not have, revealing the future as undecidable and possibility as indeterminable. I hope to model productivity in this uncertainty. The next strand begins with a description of an event in numerous voices, as a way of allowing divergent perspectives on school experiences to take their place in an intergenerational and intertextual becoming.
Part I: Inner-City Polyphony

PUNISHED PORTALS

An opening

Barrier, perhaps

Symbolic of optimism

Daily protection, welcome

Into the present, an intimidating

Unavoidable, heavy past, pushed away

But others pull them with a future weight

I hesitate, wonder, “Will they close on their own?”

Now, the experience of a strikingly public transformation

A shape-shifting, powerfully private entrance

Into slippery school/ing as revisiting
This space where familiar scenes
Confront us as opened, and,
Closed memories.

A. Entering a Building: Doors and Voices

Approaching the elementary school where I teach, a set of newly installed lacquered oak doors draw me into the building at the start of my workday. They are difficult to ignore, and I think of their larger significance every time I use them. Deeply etched aboriginal carvings distinguish this portal, but the beauty of the curved lines and the brilliant shine of the doors seem somehow out of place in this neighbourhood. It is strange to feel that something is out of context in a setting with which I am so familiar. The images on the doors are an important acknowledgement of the prevalence of First Nations' families in this transitional section of the city. They are also a reminder that this kind of fine adornment is more often reserved for locations that seem like they exist in another world – various government-funded agencies, university buildings or high-end gift shops of this city.
Figure 1: School Entrance Doors
I see potential for compromised voices emerging from sites of tension and
disappointment into spaces of hope via lesson planning that informs my desire to find a
forum in which to discuss, reflect upon, and express the lines separating diverse
schooling experiences. The daily routine of a school typifies how various people view
one scene differently; my desire is to reveal divergent experiences as an interconnected
metonymy of the teacher-becoming. I am exploring the value of delving into pedagogy
of difference, rather than staring into the looking glass of metaphor and its frequently
convincing slide towards the commonality of universal experience. As I describe my
relationship to imagery, my language does not, and in fact often cannot, escape the
metaphoric. So what is to be the result for my teaching as I recognize the push-pull of
factors leading me to approach various aspects of similarity and difference of experience
with students? As I recognize the lingering nature of many of my own intertextual
images (the potential of cliché to enter my speech, for example), I begin an investigation
of pedagogic self that might result in an opportunity to encourage a broader view of
dominant or dominating themes in texts and literature. I also want to establish new
patterns for the class to articulate their experiences through discussion and exploration of
text. My teaching sensibilities find it challenging to escape the view of the doors as
(above all) a welcoming entrance to the building, even as I present the prominent
symbolism and arrangement of wildlife displayed on them as an unmistakable signature
left by the carver. Yet, I cannot continually portray the doors as a secure, comfortable
beacon of schooling when I recognize the hardships many youth in my classroom face in
and around the building. Part of the classroom negotiation is – coming from a process of
self-reflection and a consideration of the environment in which the class dwells –
witnessed by how I decide to create spaces of openness around difference. This
recognition brings me closer to desiring a shared learning, though I want to be aware as I
plan, supervise, and evaluate activities that I am unable to experience events from the
perspective of my students' ages, backgrounds, upbringing, and so forth.

I wonder how the carver experienced the process of designing and constructing
the doors in the confines of a school. He spent two months in our woodworking room, at
times on his own, on other days assisted by apprentices. Occasionally, those children
whose classes were permitted to see him at work visited him. In my workspace, I reflect
upon ways to allow my students to experience the results of his efforts when they enter a
revitalized entrance countless times during a school year. How might they react to
approaching the doors differently during a learning activity of my design, possibly
blindfolded while they feel for a distinct, grooved symbol on the otherwise heavily
lacquered pine?

Consider my approaching the history of the planning, construction, and
installation of the doors through a metonymic pedagogy that leads to a classroom
activity: I am hopeful I will become more aware of some of the reactions of those who
enter a school. Yet, I cannot adopt their sensibilities to help me to do so; I can only
create an activity as a forum for thoughts, emotions and a group/individual articulation
within a space of language learning. My writing at present involves aspects of this
mindfulness. This entails careful consideration of how to explore the reactions of staff, students, and community members to the action of entering a schooling space. I am not describing my attempt to understand experience but, rather, articulating my steps towards a growing appreciation of the range of emotion and memory which carry the players in a learning community to the present. Perhaps the strongest move I can make in this direction is to talk directly to them about their experience, and begin to question some of my assumptions about their thoughts. Admittedly, there is also potential for launching an insightful series of interviews that honour the participating voices of the school and community.

For my present writing, however, I focus upon the preliminary stages of mapping a metonymic journey in learning that allows me to acknowledge that I am evolving into a reflective researcher-practitioner. How then might my writing lead to meaningful contact and activities with my students around a topic such as the symbols on the doors that invite those who enter the building to observe and ponder? This desire to engage my class takes me to a difficult space of decision making. I am hopeful that it will be possible to broach the subject in ways that honour the carver’s experiences and challenge the elementary school children to consider other perspectives on schooling and education. Additionally, by comparing and contrasting educational experiences both in and outside of schools, I will be able to question the limitations of my own standards and expectations, opening the class (including myself) to new possibilities of what constitutes valued/valuable learning. It is in this way that a metonymic lesson plan takes teacher and students into possibly uncharted areas of knowledge shared in highly personal ways. If
so, I want to learn more about this form of inter-generational self/knowledge along with my students. The metonymic shift is initiated when I ask, “How will I engage my students individually with a topic that will lead towards a group effort on notions of some of the images on our school doors?”

My task begins with an approach to my students’ interests: I will ask them to review the doors they pass through every day. While the entrance is a relatively new adornment for our school, I suspect that in their young lives, entering the doors has taken on a predictability that is taken for granted, like many other areas of the building. We all experience this familiarity with our school, but this is not to say that we cannot appreciate the significance of the work and consider the symbolism etched upon the doors. The school, its doors, and the photograph of the carver in the adjacent hallway serve as tangible tools for my teaching plans. They are mere steps away for us to view, ponder, and sketch or write in front of. It is in this space, confronted with the beauty and strength of the doors, that I might begin to discuss with my class the images of various wildlife in First Nations patterns. I will then encourage each student to focus upon a personally significant animal or design on the doors. After returning to the classroom, I try to establish a dialogue of our viewing experience that allows students to elaborate upon their individual choices. The possible range of expression at this point, from writing to painting to dance, may be very wide depending upon the skills of the class. It may also be limited to two or three options with clear models that help younger or less experienced students reach a decision with which they are comfortable; the experience is no less exciting or enjoyable in the latter case.
During this stage I have guided the class from viewing and discussing general forms of imagery, perhaps drawing heavily upon metaphoric symbols in popular culture and the immediate community, into an individual exploration of the ability to isolate spatially a part of the whole. There may also be value in discussing the materials of the doors, in particular the wood, by providing scraps of pine that the children can handle and contemplate as they think of the reasons behind its choice by the carver. This can become an activity highlighting an exploration of the materials available for door construction, or serve as a bridge to the symbols etched into the wood. The carved doors become a vital teaching/learning material to either process.

This activity informs my teaching because it helps me to become more comfortable both in allowing various student efforts to develop independently of my desires, and in having the patience to see them come together in unsuspecting ways. That is, I want to avoid a structure to my planning that takes away some of the students’ ingenuity and imagination and also leaves no room for surprises that have something to teach us as a group working together in uncertain ways. It is with a similar mind that I waited for the carver’s final creation, unable to see what the final result would be until the doors were finished and installed during the ceremony.

My next teaching objective is to allow my students the opportunity to play with possible metaphors for the symbols they are beginning to see etched on the doors. Throughout our discussion and actions, I imagine how I want to bring their efforts
together metonymically to construct a class product that involves one possible overview of the meaning within the doors. By this I mean the ongoing process of exploring the doors’ utility and symbolism, not student images of the doors that may be full of figurative references and, in combination, a kind of class metaphor of what the doors mean to the school. There may be little or no mention of metaphor and metonymy with my students. I may use language of comparison, of similarity and difference, to help them express what is personally meaningful about their choices. It is central to my thinking, however, that I avoid filling in spaces of silence for them with my own preconceived notions of the doors’ meaning. I want them to experience this process and potentially make it meaningful with their own self-reflection. Sometimes it is useful to resist the allure of the universal metaphor, or at least those easy references we may too readily provide for our students. Students have experiences that I cannot appreciate, but can learn from if I allow them the time and space to explore their memories first. At the end of this kind of activity, the final class project (potentially, a collage of class work) may be less important than the activities that take us there. It is a learning process throughout, enhanced by classroom interaction and reflection on key elements of the experience.

Upon entering Gardner Elementary School – any school – I experience mixed, often complex feelings of nostalgia, uncertainty and hope. My reaction to our new doors has been no different. I am proud of what they stand for, and yet my discussion has so far thrown my assumed grasp of metaphor (including metonymy) into some question. The contradictory nature of stating this has a generative influence upon my work and my
writing. It would be very interesting to ask my students to discuss, then write about, how a class door collage speaks for and to us. Yet, the desire for written expression is coming from a teaching adult, and may not be as beneficial for some of my class as earlier activities in the process. Certain emotions accompany me because I am cognizant of the building’s history, including its fight for school district resources and the struggle to maintain a consistent staff in a neighbourhood many outsiders see as underprivileged. Knowledgeable staff or community members who understand the experiences of First Nations in the school system may join the process as visitors to our class. In this activity I want to personally acknowledge that I have attempted to be open to new teachings from a range of North American aboriginal cultures. Aided by the act of writing this dissertation, I see the doors as representative of the hopefulness I want to be certain exists in my teaching and in my relationships with the staff, students, and families of the school. These positive feelings of staff and community members towards the children (simultaneously youth of the community, school, and other locales) are not always clearly articulated throughout the school year. They are often ephemeral thoughts that come and go during a hectic school day, found underlying an endearing tale from the classroom told in the staff room, or a brief pause during class to remark thoughtfully to myself about a student’s progress. These fleeting reflections are central to my school/ing; they contain an interest in the future of a child that at times takes me beyond the symbolic to a place of an individual experiencing his or her educational journey. Participating in my students’ “becoming” makes me conscious of my evolution as a teacher and learner.
This replacement of an equally decorous entrance that withstood the elements for almost ten years will hopefully continue to surprise those who initially wondered if vandalism or lack of funding wouldn’t scuttle the original plans for the project. In my few years at the school, I have watched the original veneer doors crack and peel. The new set of doors may potentially represent some equity in displaying the well-known talent of original West Coast nations’ artistry across more locales; their presence at our school is a continuing point of pride for this neighbourhood. Hand-carved especially for our building, they display powerful symbols from nature, represented by salmon in various stages of the life cycle, as well as ten ravens. The latter constitute a signature of the master-carver’s original name. His grandchildren attend Gardner Elementary as his children once did. An adolescent granddaughter-apprentice has studied and aided her grandfather’s artistry during the carving of the doors. Today she stands next to her teacher and, one assumes, mentor in carving. She is possibly already a graduate of high school, or is close to it, and this makes me realize how her education is continuing in a profound way.

Many administrators and educational philosophers use “education” and “schooling” interchangeably, belying the fact that placing young people in schools is a societal system with a relatively short history compared to the act of becoming educated. Our memories allow us to mark the day when we first attended school, but do they allow us to pinpoint when our education began? There is a metonymy between the school and one’s education that is not often explored. Education and schooling are two words that
have drifted too closely together without sufficient thought given to how they are significantly different. I therefore sense greater potential for helping teachers and students identify ways in which schooling and education connect and intersect, while at the same time being cognizant of how to approach continuing education in our lives beyond and outside of schooling. Somehow the space between these concepts is one that policy makers and curriculum planners do not feel compelled to address. I think about how education and schooling are metaphorically infused, but also metonymically connected from within (standing alone) and without (in relation to each other). It causes me to wonder how the master-carver of the doors feels about education and schooling. I would enjoy interviewing him on the topic. For now, I offer my own version of what his granddaughter may have been thinking that morning.

B. A. Granddaughter's Thoughts

I didn't expect so many people here today, and all to see the doors we have worked on. Grandpa has really done something special for this school. I'm so happy for this day, and the smiles, the good feeling here today. I'm so proud of him, and I know that he has had some hard experiences in life, yet he can stand proudly next to the speakers. I knew he wouldn't say much today, following custom. If you know him, it's obvious how he feels about the attention to his work. The doors, like his other work, show how important carving is to
him. His work always represents so much to people. The kids are being good too, and the weather couldn’t be better....

Passing through the doors and entering the school, I am reminded of a day in late June when I witnessed the ceremony under an increasingly hot sun. Along with the staff and students who would be using the doors, it was a time to bless the new addition to the school through established First Nations' tradition. When staff had a meeting with one of the community leaders, I recall the stress upon following established First Nations' habits and customs. The word used was “protocol.” With more than fifty percent of the school population claiming First Nations descent, the importance placed upon these matters is understandable. It reiterated to me, however, the numerous voices meeting at the ceremony. As a teacher in attendance with students, parents and staff, joined by our guest district administrators and aboriginal elders, I was then and continue to be struck by the event as indicative of the polyphonic, dialogic world of Bakhtin. It was a time linguistically charged with my own competing dialogues surrounding education, but inevitably also those school and community texts of which I sensed the importance. Upon returning to the classroom, I have found it challenging to pinpoint clearly the longer term value of this reflection.

Metonymically, as a teacher attempting to gain a more profound connection and overall view of my work with individuals and groups, I am able to sense a significant evolving process for my school/ing perspective. A growing sensibility towards the
history of my school, and the roles of students and community, daily carry me through my teaching career. This does not presume that I can always prepare to engage my students productively on similar topics of concern for our school or their schooling, or consistently find the spaces in the curriculum that allow me to do so. These challenges provide an opportunity to infuse a hopeful dimension into my changing teaching role with students as we take part in an ever-developing schooling story.

There was a hesitancy that surrounded how the components of the ceremony would all come together as a cohesive event. I saw it on the faces of the adults, and it grew tangibly as time passed and we waited for late visitors. Despite this uncertainty, I think that most of the adults had faith in the participation of the children. Their youthful presence would be its own answer to whether those in attendance would see it as an important morning. The contribution of youth to the ongoing values of the school was valorized by their inclusion. Below, I imagine some possible thoughts of students as they waited for the ceremony to begin that morning.

C. Re/calling Student Voices

Man, that was a slow walk around the school – these doors must be really important. What’s on them anyway?

Someone said Johnny is going to dance. I wish the speakers would finish what they have to say.

What are we doing standing around for so long?
Are we going to be able to use these doors?

Why have so many people come here today?

I wish I had my skateboard, 'cause I'd take off down that hill.

Those are nice costumes. I like the drums. Hey, that dancer is Johnny, in Grade Five. He's really good.

It would be really cool to carve something like that.

Stacey'd better stop staring at me or she'll get it later, that's for sure.

I couldn't lift one of those doors if I tried.

It must be so cool to carve something so big.

Okay, this is crazy. The sun is boiling hot. How come those guys are allowed to stand in the shade?

The drumming sounds nice – I'm glad the speeches are over.

I was struck by the range of voices, texts and interpretations of events that I saw on faces lit by bright sunshine. There were obvious unspoken words to express the significance of the ceremony, witnessed by the discomfort with the heat to the excitement at seeing the doors hung for the first time. It was an event involving a simultaneous dialogue between and among communities, and I felt as though it was all taken for granted when in fact, it was an important representation of the values at play in our school. I later saw the gathering as a congregation of various Aboriginal discourses.
extending beyond the Northwest Coast. All in attendance could claim a connection to the school, yet I considered this a rare gathering in the history of interacting voices, this official (centripedal) and unofficial (centrifugal) speech convergence connected to the language and texts we encounter every school day. The school has long been a place where immigrant children have gathered to learn. As those populations have shifted and evolved, does that somehow lead to the question of who is “original” to an area? Here in bright sunshine was a morning beyond metaphor in the sense that so many voices met in the space of dedication. It was a time beyond origin, to a moment of honouring. This brings the narrative to a conversation as a diversion, a hypothetical discussion that may have occurred between two participant/observers that day in late spring.

D. An Imagined Conversation Between Metaphors

A: (A passerby) Wow, those are beautiful doors. What’s going on today?

B: (School staff member) The school is dedicating new doors to replace the old main entrance. We’re very proud of them.

A: No kidding – they’ve got beautiful detail. The finish really makes them stand out on the street, too. Who’s the carver?

B: A grandfather of two of our students. Another granddaughter was an apprentice during the weeks it took to carve them.

A: Nice story. Indian art, eh?
B: Yes. First Nations. The carver has his own name represented by some of the figures as a kind of signature. Other animals honour the hereditary chiefs of coastal nations of this area. So, there's more than one story on them.

A: The salmon really jump out at you. What are those birds?

B: Ravens. The salmon are part of the artist's way of saying how important it is to respect the cycle of life, and one of the speakers said today, that we need to recognize that education is handed down from generation to generation.

A: Very symbolic for the school, right.

B: Sure, you can't ignore them as you enter the school, and I kind of like that idea. It gives you some sense of the place you're entering. We have a lot of students who come from a First Nations background, and some classes teach almost exclusively about the cultures.

A: I noticed that there were a lot of native kids here. That gives them a source of pride.

B: I agree with the speaker who talked of how the doors represent the hopes of both the school and the community, and hopefully they will stand as a constant reminder of the importance of the relationship between the two.

A: So the customs of the school and the customs of First Nations kind of complement each other.

B: Maybe all of our students can draw a little pride from them.

A: I mean the history of the Residential Schools and all...
A Building for Schooling and Education

B: Definitely. I often think how tough it must be for some parents to put the past to rest and enter a school with hopes for their children. And that could be any parents who've had negative experiences with school that stays with them.

A: We all want our kids to do better than we did.

B: I agree that that's natural, but we're hoping to be as welcoming as possible to parents, show them ways we are trying to teach and learn, so that they can carry on some of that at home. I think the more we get involved with our kids the more likely it is there'll be some healing and understanding of how schools help us.

A: That can't be easy in this neighbourhood.

B: You can see today that there is a real interest in what students are accomplishing.

A: So the doors are a metaphor that represents the school's welcome to the community.

B: For me, they represent what can happen when you enter a school. It is a world of learning, I think, that we need to honour. They stand for a connection between the school and the community – they remind me that this building is an intersection of so many hopes. Something we can really work towards.

A: Well, seeing everyone here today is a nice start.

B: I agree. I'm really taking this all in and remembering it for another day.
This was a hybrid event that combined past, present and future images of the school and the communities, constituting a profound partnership in teaching children. It was an attempt at a unified recognition of the symbolic importance of the doors, while a very real statement of hope that the doors would be respectfully used and taken care of over time. At the same time, it was a gathering with more differences than shared interests, and it is challenging to describe some of the tensions and concerns at my school in a voice that can ameliorate my place within this setting. I am attempting to find a personally new way of engaging students, a rhetorical style that is consistent with what I want to portray at an urban school. I have therefore called upon voices that allow me to represent how my thoughts are influenced by the immediacy and complexity of my teaching role at the school.

**Reflection: The Search for a Voice**

I hope to cross some of the borders separating academic discourse and public conversations surrounding issues in education. Educational researchers need to be cognizant of the importance of reaching as many listeners and readers as possible. Carlson (1998) intriguedly describes the main rhetorical styles he feels run through “the emergent progressive voice of the academy” (p. 343). By this he means that the new types of writing emerging from the academy have a historical basis, a potential for change in education. These attempts at renewal, however, continue to be face dominance by the traditional rhetorical form of voice he calls “logos.” At the same time, logos is one of the voices he feels has a place in the future intermingling of voices presently at
odds within some academic circles. His method of labeling the origin of these voices does not interest me so much as the potential he sees for the academy in mingling the three perspectives. They include, *logos*, an analytic voice associated with science and philosophy; *thymos*, a marginalized, disempowered voice raging against injustices and inequality; and *mythos*, a personal voice covering a range from storytelling to literature (p. 344). I relate the three voices to my writing of the door ceremony in the following imaginary portrayals.

**Part II: Finding Symbolic Textual Voices**

**A. Ceremonial Commentary in Three Voices**

LOGOS – *“This was a wonderful event that showed the spirit of rejuvenation of First Nations culture, and a recognition that the school district can work with the community to insures that many cultures are honoured in our schools.”*

THYMOS – *“We’ll see if these doors and this school can help put aside some of the past injustices that so many of the children in this neighbourhood continue to deal with.”*
MYTHOS – "I want to relate my experiences here today so that I can give others a sense of what we are attempting for the students at our school. A sense of pride goes beyond politics and symbolism. For me, these doors represent more than a beautiful entrance."

To my mind, an ever-present logos as by-product of modernism has dominated academic discourse to the extent of silencing other more personal and less analytic voices that are none-the-less important to teaching. With Plato’s inspiration, Carlson (1998) summarizes his view of where a new style of rhetoric may lead writers within the academy. It is a perspective I appreciate as I find myself at a crossroads in attempting to represent events like the door raising ceremony. As I attempt to describe my experience of the potentially conflicting effects of my thoughts during the ceremony, I sense a tension of teacherly voices that echoes Carlson’s description of logos, thymos and mythos. The paradoxes involve a personal attempt to ameliorate and articulate my shifting role as teacher, community member, parent, and the like. I seek some resolution and I begin to recognize that these conflicting perspectives cannot be neatly reconciled. However, I can search to find voice(s) to describe my experience in a way that is mindful of the influences and resulting self-reflection Carlson describes here:

The postmodern project, in these terms, involves the resurfacing and revalorizing of aspects of the human voice that have been suppressed and marginalized in the modern academy and in a [sic] American public discourse. The new postmodern academic voice is a hybrid voice that crosses
borders, one that interweaves voices of the logos, thymos and mythos and that shifts back and forth from analysis to anecdote, from theory to personal story-telling, from principled talk of social justice to personal and positioned expressions of outrage at injustice. I realize that such an interweaving of voices presents its own problems and may, if we are not careful, lead to the marginalization of the voice of logos, even as the voice of logos once marginalized other voices. But I think it is a risk we must take, bearing in mind that in order to better integrate these various aspects of voice progressives will need to engage in a good deal of self-reflection. (p. 345).

I write as a form of self-reflection but, keeping in mind Carlson’s statement describing the challenges of interweaving voices, I shall attempt to take on a voice representative of my teaching tensions amidst hope at an urban elementary school. This portion of the dissertation constituting my observations on the morning the doors were raised is an attempt at a personal integration of voices. Perhaps I am offering an unwieldy portrayal of a ceremony analogous to the classroom as an integrated carnival of communication, a grand intertext with which I want to become more comfortable. Rather than an aside that hints at a flaw within a multi-tongued discourse, I strive for a new literal meaning revealed by this complication of genre or voice. In the same way, my hope is for students to see the various ways in which texts are not as open or closed as they may at first appear.

B. The Text of the Symbol

The doors of my school serve as a metaphor of the pride First Nations’ cultures contribute to our learning environment, and stand literally as a welcoming portal by
which the community and school show their respect for the building. Many First Nations people would agree that their communities are in need of finding ways to open doors to a recovery of pride in their traditions in order to enable their children to find their own way of participating (or not participating) in the larger society. In this inner-city school, I believe staff can only hope to incorporate those people from the neighbourhood who are willing to complement the values of the school as they are agreed upon and evolve. Teachers should also be mindful of school as an intimidating signifier for many who will come through the doors. They enter with the hopes of their children, while they are reminded of the difficult experiences they had during their own schooling. I deeply respect this hope for their children; it feeds my own hopefulness.

Imagine the mix of apprehension and hopefulness for many adults who have not returned to a school since the days when many bad memories were created. In the meantime, the hopefulness felt by the door raising is tinged with the kind of tension many of the staff of the school often feel as they work closely with children who struggle to successfully participate in learning. The theme I have chosen for this strand of the dissertation is one of an educational entering into various elements of the school. In this section, I want to consider the ways that we enter aspects of the learning environment — that is, arrive, introduce, penetrate, begin, join, note, record — elements of the school. A solid beginning to a teaching moment allows a pedagogical event to promote learning for those students who are encouraged to enter into a meaningful relationship with the instructor. When the introduction captures attention in positive ways, both teachers and students have made a connection that can grow stronger as they spend more time
together. Paradoxical situations typify teachers' work, particularly in light of the predicaments we encounter in schools. Think of the teacher who must find a way to begin a class despite (perhaps suddenly) having little enthusiasm for the planned topic. Somehow this pedagogical uncertainty is communicated to those young children accompanied by tentative parents and guardians as they enter the school.

Because children and adults come to the school with layers of pre-established language of education and schooling, I ponder ways of connecting challenging school and community issues though intertextual perspectives. Unplanned events requiring immediate attention can confuse or suspend the issues of fairness and consistency for the individual child, or the whole class. A tenuous hold on authority and an unpredictable but constant need for decision making characterize the teaching day at Gardner School. I present a partial list of classroom interruptions in Strand Three. Interacting with children in a space of uncertainty and tension forces me to question established notions of a meaningful work day in an environment that is potentially far-removed from their own schooling experiences. My attempt to portray my own tensions will call my teaching into question, but my motivation is to start at the beginning and consider how we enter new spaces that are never as de-contextualized as we seem to plan for.

C. A (Non) Metaphor of Difference

I describe my relations with students who feel connected to the school in its confines, but become distant as soon as they exit. Despite my close proximity of residence, I do not feel entirely a part of the surrounding community. It is in my attempts
to establish a relationship with students that these similarities and differences are magnified. Teachers cannot assume that our school exists in a community of shared concepts; some positive starting points are necessary in order to preserve and foster opportunities for professional growth in an environment of diverse experience and expectations. How can I thoughtfully invite students to join in activities that are highly intertextual and address sometimes unpredictable, disruptive language that is not commensurate with the curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1993, p. 4)? Often students’ experiences in the community leave them feeling far removed from the world as presented by the curriculum, and teachers are influenced by these impressions of what the school and the streets have to offer. Students dwell in more than one community. The intertextuality facing educators is the experience of connecting and rationalizing these converging environments, when many of the events in the neighbourhood may teach values that are incompatible with the teacher’s learning goals. It will become apparent that my choice of intertextuality to highlight some of the interactions between adults and children is based on my view of the many influences upon our interrelationships. My hope is to reflect upon how to remain open to negotiating the use of knowledge students bring into the classroom, rather than asserting authority when there is a perceived challenge to my teaching role.

After a long, restless wait for the final guests to arrive, fidgeting students switch to circling the grounds as they follow the doors to the main entrance. At the front of the school, amidst the speeches and drumming, children from kindergarten to grade seven
come to the end of their march and shift on their feet or sit on the benches provided by
the roadside. Still others crane their necks and squint into the sun to get a view of
successive speakers. The biggest challenge for their patience is yet to come, in the form
of the talks that elders and administrators will present to the gathering huddled together
with no shade for relief.

Such a setting of patient anticipation mirrors the experience of many classrooms,
so it was not new for the students to be expected to remain still and listen to adult
wisdom. As I spend more time at Gardner Elementary, I am coming to question who
decides how knowledge is constructed in the curriculum and how far this categorization
of concepts in society is removed from the experiences of our students in the community.
They are placed into a middling position between the values of the school/curriculum and
those of their parents/guardians without options for the kind of language that might help
them to negotiate the contradictions between the two settings. It is also important to
consider that while the event is part of the students’ schooling, it could have taken place
independent of the school. As such, in another location the ceremony would have
occurred outside of the curriculum as an educational moment in, by, and for the
community. Assuming that interaction is the foundation of the teacher-student
relationship, I ponder what kind of dialogue is necessary for an inclusive, nurturing, and
productive learning environment. Silence can serve as a powerful arbiter of
indescribably poignant moments when it is best to leave things unsaid. How do I
articulate these understated moments to myself, and raise them as personally meaningful with students? The quiet has a special quality for Bakhtin (1986):

Silence – intelligible sound (a word) – and the pause constitute a special logosphere, a unified and continuous structure, an open (unfinalized) totality (p. 134).

While teachers are careful in their word choices for the sake of the lesson plan, we also need to model a kind of dialogue that is reciprocal and interactive, including the understatement. The dialogue I envision would recognize potential differences in the backgrounds of teachers and students, while fostering challenges to textual authority that allow students to speak as "expert" discussion participants. I am speaking of their expertise of individual experience that relates intertextually to the new text in class. My discussion with them is neither intended to lean towards a conclusive totality, nor to assume a universal perspective of the author's intentions or characters' thoughts and feelings, for example. The literary theory I favour holds possibilities for opening up language so that learners participate in a process of searching for their voice in the same way in which this dissertation is allowing me to do.

The dialogue of the ceremony continued as we listened to introductory remarks which comprised both a reminder of the suppression of art and culture that Aboriginal people have had to endure in Canada's past, and a description of the symbolism behind the images on the doors. The children were exhorted to remember to continue learning about their culture in order to maintain and protect this knowledge for the future. I
thought of the many world cultures in attendance and the slippery notion we call "multiculturalism." That day I witnessed a respectful recognition of the contributions of the Northwest Coast Aboriginal ethnic groups which comprise much of our school's population. Many of the children are city born and raised, having little contact with more organized celebrations of First Nations cultures on distant reserves. Such skills as carving are now presented to them as a living artifact, to be cultivated and honoured today as a link to the past. By displaying the doors, the school is participating in this process of preservation, and while the significance of the gathering may have been beyond some of the children, I could sense their desire to show respect for what took place. The calling to protect something to which you are still being introduced is overwhelming, however, and I sensed that the moderator, with his ceremonial tone, risked taking on strong characteristics of the monologic voice. I refer to the kind of communication that is almost entirely one way, falling back on a practice that is all too familiar in schools, but at times necessary to the task at hand. It is the case of an adult agenda offered to children in an adult tone and adult voice. It is celebration usurped by solemnity and tradition. I do not have the answer for how to ameliorate these forces of emotion and time, but I do know that it will be left to the younger generation to negotiate inclusive forms of communication among First Nations groups and others. Adults do not need to relinquish an opportunity to teach simply because they open up a space to dialogue that acknowledges a range of discourses already present in the classroom. Dialogue is a reciprocal process that I do not want to take for granted as a teacher concerned with the experiences of my students as we communicate in class. With the best
intentions, some people hold ideals of preserving culture that are nonetheless full of assumptions about the kind of world the students will choose to create and participate in, and the kinds of interests they should value and develop. In so doing, the speaker is really saying, “Listen to whoever your teacher may be, for whatever knowledge they have to pass on to you is important.” I wonder how we can create more spaces where students teach us through interaction.

One of my frustrations is that I continue to address the curriculum in ways that lead me to fall into, as well as witness, teaching situations that involve dehumanizing, passifying and disempowering discussions. The authority of the curricular language continues to pull me into a future, rather than a present view of who my students are becoming. I want to avoid the authoritarian tone of a teacher constantly referring back to a curricular or literary canon. This is another paradoxical, contradictory situation for my teaching when the language I choose supports my pedagogic view of a hopeful future while at the same time permitting no description of being with children in the here and now (van Manen, 1986, p. 28). In response to my predicament, I refer to the critical framework of Freire (1970) that describes certain kinds of teaching as oppressive. This is how he sees the banking concept of education, wherein oppressors dominate the oppressed by attempting to change their consciousness, rather than the situation. According to Freire:

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards people as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing deposits entrusted to them, the less
they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (p. 58).

It seems to me that these forces of curriculum and management are what keep student-teacher relationships from taking on an empowering form of dialogue. We are continually "depositing" curriculum in our students, hoping for an active listening, when in fact we know from the non-verbal interaction of the classroom that a teacher's mode of address often creates passive learners. I acknowledge that at times I speak and address my students from outside of their own context.

D. A Boy and His Audience, Scene I

Mercifully, it was left to the principal to briefly sum up the administrative presence, praising the efforts of the artist and the role the doors would play in unifying community spirit. With the raising of the doors, we were treated to some drumming and dancing by various students and family members, which lent an added feeling of warmth to the day. At this stage in the ceremony, a poignant event occurred that I'm certain many in attendance clearly remember. Following a selection of drum songs, an eleven-year-old First Nations boy danced to the drumbeat with the doors as a glimmering backdrop. He wholeheartedly matched the beat with his body, which clearly spoke of his enjoyment in the opportunity to lose himself in the fluidity of his body, leaving his audience watchful, but decidedly outside of a personal journey into following drums and
movement. His performance was of the kind that transfixes onlookers by the confident earnestness of a dancer’s body, but in this case the onlookers were also transfixied because they saw a personality they knew well from one context transposed into a completely different world of ceremony, regalia and music. The student, so transformed, spun round and round with deftness and a beaming smile that captured the sense of optimism surrounding the installment of the doors. His movements embodied my sense of hope for our school’s future.

The staff and students knew the boy flowing gracefully with the drumbeat as a challenging personality at our school. This student struggling with the symptoms of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome could physically carry himself with the pride of a youngster approaching adolescence, but in the classroom he had been unable to follow anything but a highly modified curriculum. He was a well-known face in the hallways and on the school grounds, a mischievous smile or loud voice that demanded attention. Chronologically, his age placed him in Grade Five, but he displayed the literacy skills of a kindergarten student. He had wavered between attempting to dictate his own schedule for the school day to connecting with, and respecting, a very finite number of staff members. Often one Special Education Assistant was specifically assigned to him. To varying degrees, his audience on this day knew personal things about him: how he clearly advertised his mood when he came to school; his complex emotions related to losing his mother to AIDS two years ago; how in a special class this year he made great progress in social and other basic skills; and his habit of playing with much younger children at school. He was the leader of his younger playmates in many ways, though
they often viewed him as a bully. He danced very personally in a public space, and I wonder how I often try to do the same with my students, asking them to join me in sharing private stories in public school.

For this official gathering he displayed a pride in dance that was a fitting culmination to a relatively successful school year, likely the most successful of his six spent at Gardner. It was etched on his face. There was joyful silence as everyone watched his movements, a momentary loss of the discomfort from the heat, a pride in what this student had accomplished through dedication and practice. A dance learned in the community became a gift to our school. There was an understanding between this boy and his audience, an unspoken gesture where his movements connected us all. His smile, his closed eyes and peaceful expression said, “You can also take pride in your accomplishments and enjoy the esteem that comes with this happiness.” I imagine what it would feel like to be a boy placed in this position.

E. A Boy and His Audience, Scene II

Wow, everyone is here today. My dad and sister are dressed up too. Everyone is happy. The drums are starting. No problem – I’ve practiced this so many times. Here we go. This feels so good. My friends see me. There’s the principal! My auntie is singing. I’m going faster, and
everyone is clapping. It's getting louder. The drums booming now. I want to spin forever. I wanna fly above the school...

My fear is that my classroom texts presume or assume a student understanding that I have not worked to foster – and yet in one way my writing at this stage is an attempt to appreciate the importance of student voices in school. It is a contradiction I acknowledge in order to move into new areas of exploring classroom communication. My imaginings of school voices are my attempt to counter assumptions I hold of language and experience in teaching and learning. Our classroom relations and exchanges have not prepared students to take ownership of what they learn, and to share it among peers. Ellsworth (1997) feels that a great deal of teacher dialogue purports to be neutral, but has an agenda that students will learn the “proper” cultural competencies, intellectual skills, or moral virtues:

The relationship between curriculum and student in terms of understanding and misunderstanding, means that, in practice, most educational texts address students as if their pedagogies were coming from nowhere within the circulating power relations. By presenting themselves as desiring only understanding, educational texts address students as if the texts were from no one, with no desire to place their readers in any position except that of neutral, benign, general, generic understanding. And understanding doesn’t really count as a positioning of students sought through mode of address because,
supposedly, understanding is both neutral and universal (p. 47).

My intent in subjectively portraying the events of a poignant ceremony is to lead into a personal study of what understanding school relations entail, and then to discuss what it means to live and teach amidst the problems of textual understanding. This was not a contradictory space of talented, troublesome boy, happily dancing in front of warm inner-city school audience. Note the possible binaries in the previous sentence that often characterize how we label and classify. On their own, such terms do nothing to portray what I felt that morning, for there was a doubling of pride – dance as symbol, dance as statement – evident on a child’s face with the help of a supportive school and a simultaneous display of his heritage. The event seemed to cut through time and image in many ways, to counter what is known about the inner-city school. His prowess transformed the entrance into a stage and perhaps made the school a less intimidating one for many of the adults present who hold difficult memories of schooling, just as it softened his personality for many of the children watching intently.

**Reflection: An Inner-City Name**

My efforts at reflection are directed towards forming a renewed perspective of pedagogy for teachers caught in the compromise of mediating image and reality in an inner-city setting. As a term, “inner-city” inconsistently connects labels like *urban, at-risk, and underachieving*, conjuring up many negative images for those who hear it. It is not my intent to deconstruct a widely used phrase that possibly influences the staff,
parents and students of my school. “Inner-city” in fact flattens the textual and social fabric of schools, but also confuses the issues and challenges that all schools share. It is not an exclusionary term in my writing, but a locational marker of sorts. I use a pseudonym for my school for ethical reasons, and this entails a loss of the historical tradition the name carries for those who know it well. “Inner-city” allows my writing to retain some small sense of the challenges faced by the staff, students and community. To describe Gardner School as “difficult” for teachers is not an abandonment of the spirit of optimism seen, heard and felt at the door ceremony. That morning encouraged me to pursue a sense of pride in place that fosters a pursuit of knowledge and a spirit of hope with “disadvantaged” children.

The practical result of the usage of an “inner-city” designation is that it makes it possible for selected schools of my district to apply for extra funding based upon set (though admittedly discretionary) criteria. These school district or provincial government descriptions are in place before a teacher or student begins their first day in the building. They become part of the personality of the school’s reputation, and certain expectations follow. It would seem that once the financial justification for a label is established, there is no reason to question what the language means for the school, only what kind of impact the loss of the extra money would have upon the learning conditions.

Understandably, many teachers would not want to consider how different their work would be without the extra support they receive in class. Terms such as “disadvantaged,” “impoverished,” and “economically depressed” are long-standing labels for those marginalized in our society. These words identify many of the families at our school.
The phrase “inner-city” is sometimes seen in a positive light, associated with a rejuvenation of a neighbourhood. However, the very name of our school conjures up difficult images for those inside the immediate community and anyone familiar with the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, it is a school with concerns and challenges similar to other schools of its size, no matter where it is located.

Gardner Elementary was named after a prominent family of the early twentieth century business elite of central Canada. Though some schools of the district have adopted a First Nations name outright or added one that is used in conjunction with the original, Gardner has so far not chosen either option. The school continues to operate under the shadow of media attention received a few years ago, when a number of sex trade workers frequenting the streets adjacent to the school provoked the ire of parents, neighbours and community activists. Community members subsequently started an intense campaign that successfully lobbied for more school board and municipal attention to the needs of the school and adjacent neighbourhood. Police pressure soon forced illicit trade to relocate to streets a short distance away. Some of the more dubious, even dangerous, addresses across from the school were also cleaned up, but the school image as troubled was raised to another level among the broader public. The building and schoolyard still have occasional intruders during and after school hours, adults or youth who could pose a threat. The small size of the school and grounds counters most of these activities. It is a cohesive staff whose members know almost all of the students on sight. Nevertheless, what had been seen as a difficult school to work in was now seen as a potentially dangerous, unsightly one. Such labels remain over the course of years. It
follows that my writing is greatly influenced by what I see as misinformed ideas about teaching and learning at Gardner Elementary. In reality, most staff members and visitors see it as having a very rewarding and enjoyable working environment. Many parents also express their satisfaction and appreciation of the school atmosphere, and remark that they are pleased with their child’s progress and enjoyment of learning at Gardner. These views contribute to the apparent paradox of my schooling.

At the end of the ceremony the visiting adults file through the new doors to the meal that awaits them in our gym. The students of our school wait for them to pass, and then return to classes for a short period before the start of our regular lunch schedule. I have a sense of pride and community that feels as though it will outlast the sun today. The spirit of the boy’s dance has made us proud for him, leaving thoughts of the heat behind for a short time to reflect on the sense of hope mixed with pride during the events of the morning. This collective sense carries us as children and staff re-enter the building.

I acknowledge that urban schools face specific challenges, but my narrative is focused upon hope. The purpose of my writing is to highlight the tensions felt in the school through my own experience, thereby offering insight into how this can be a generative space of mediating among discourses and images of learning and understanding. It is not a question of providing solutions to difficult issues of culture, class and socio-economics. My intention is to portray some of the complexities of the
compromises I work through with students as a way towards practicing an awareness of curriculum as negotiation. Adapting curricula leads to unpredictable experiences that nonetheless hold possibilities for those prepared to express feelings of openendedness, difference, and contradiction.

Part III: Entering Another Performance/Performing an Other

A. Entering a Teaching Performance

I think of myself as an extremely improvisational teacher. Despite my teaching plans for the day, I often end up in a spontaneous role that keys off a habit or event in the school or classroom leading up to the time of the class. Some might call this spontaneity an unorganized, risky approach to beginning a lesson. I have always felt a keen desire to somehow personalize a lesson for students so that we are engaged in the act of exploring a topic — sometimes separate from the text or curriculum — so that we have an interactive relationship in learning. I am beginning to see this as a desire to involve students in sharing expertise and knowledge in the classroom. It establishes how I will respond to their questions about the validity or necessity of the text or lesson. Ellsworth (1997) writes of the performance embedded in how we speak to students, a mode of address that has undeniable overtones of authority, no matter how inclusive we try to structure the dialogue in classrooms. The suspect nature of classroom communication is one area I hope to shed some light on as a reminder that I cannot always be certain of the effect my words will have upon students. Yet, if my words raise as many questions as answers, I
ultimately want to equip students with the skills to form their own questions around voice and text.

For decades, educational research has invited teachers to become part of an academic dialogue surrounding aspects of knowledge and voice. We have been asked to join other researchers in an established field of inquiry and debate as “researcher-practitioners,” though the combination of these two terms is fraught with complexities I will not address in this dissertation. Rather, as I have mentioned, I sense conflicting voices at play in my practice and choice of readings. These choices have led me to find that in education both knowledge and voice are ambiguously intertwined, creating a slippery understanding of where to direct our work in ways that improve the dissemination of “research” from the academy to schools.

I am echoing writers who feel that “the emphasis needs to change from the generation of knowledge to dialogue about what counts as knowledge” (Coulter, 1999, p. 4). Primarily, I would like to move away from substantive domains into more perceptive domains of tolerance, respect, and self-learning. The kind of prose I choose for this dissertation is a conscious effort to incorporate authors from divergent disciplines that may not appear compatible on the surface. Moreover, it will become clear that the paradoxical choices I make to substantiate many of my experiences are intended as such: paradoxes inhabit our teaching.

According to Ellsworth (1997), several paradoxes inherent in teaching point to the difficult space the teacher occupies within “the uncontrollable fecundity of paradoxes – examples that (productively) intensify their incongruities” (p. 17):
The paradox of social agency, as in the taking of action that is affirmative without positive reference, without knowing what good the action taken will do;

The paradox of authority and power in pedagogical relations;

The paradox of the pedagogical event, which leaves no visible trace of its happening;

The paradox of pedagogy as performative – as a taking of action that is, nevertheless always suspended in the space between self and other; and

The paradox of pedagogy as a performative act that is always suspended in the undecidable time of learning (p. 150).

It is these difficult conditions that pull me away from a repetitive doxa of the larger popular culture, allowing for a play with the dizzying overabundance of signifiers for identity and meaning in today’s world. My writing pulls the focus away from an emphasis upon facets of knowledge towards the location of voices within and around the individual in an elementary school, and the interconnected texts upon which a teacher draws.

**B. Entering a Text**

Intertexual notions of “connections” and “initiations” have been taking on new meaning in classroom approaches (Oyler, 1996, p. 28; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1998,
It is possible to build upon this awareness by allowing for teaching approaches that create opportunities for a wide variety of student responses to text and voice. Barthes (1981b) provides an illuminating description of the intertext:

The text redistributes language . . . . One of the paths of this deconstruction-reconstruction is to permute texts, scraps of texts, that have existed or exist around and finally within the text being considered: any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture (p. 39).

This positioning of language and experience informs the voice of my narrative as negotiation within an intertextual location. My writing allows me to combine current understandings of text with what I see as a profound need for educators and students to discover how they are physically connected to the words they choose to live by in the classroom. My focus is upon how “text” in the classroom adapts according to my interrelations with others – a living text in constant formation, influenced by the dialogues and discourses that I hear and conduct in the learning environment.

Whether or not there is suitable time to reflect upon our practices, we can discover new ways of articulating how our interrelations with colleagues, parents and students inform our teaching. It might then be possible to have a clearer understanding of how to help students describe their own relations with others through what they read and write. I will describe this as a kind of educational intertextuality in the making that involves practicing awareness of how the habits of other people and texts influence us. That is, mindful of the linguistic fabric of wordplay, as well as the social implications of such
devices as voice, audience, and setting, I offer my writing as evidence of a personal process of "becoming" in a highly individual version of a personality concerned with private and public pedagogy. This includes negotiating together the habits of the personalities of the teachers and students who comprise the school. Approaching the curriculum in terms of future goals does not always permit the opportunity to consider our lives in relation to the ways we read and write. Through my notion of the concept of the intertextuality of place, I want to approach perceptions of what is considered text in schools. Paradox and metonymy are tools to represent many of the relations at an inner-city school. My portrayal involves teacher and student memories that are a non-linear negotiation of voice, text, and knowledge, existing in a shift among communities. My emphasis is upon the individual's part in issues of evolving language and the many complex relations of the school that are often beyond traditional forms of articulation. It is this struggle to define many of my dilemmas in challenging teaching situations that leads me to pursue this line – a writing space of tension and mediation for my teaching environment that requires new proposals for reflecting upon my experiences. I want to be aware of how entering a text is not an easy task for all children, as the following poem attempts to portray.

C. Entering the Text of a Poem

Done on Page One

Slow down.
Slowly look over the covers
Take in the packaging
Don't rush to focus
On words
You think you can trust,
Attacking a language
You don't pronounce
As real
Those letters
Larger, more common than others
Changing sound
You can listen to voices
You've perhaps heard before
Why your friend didn't like it
When they all went home
To their parents
While you still hoped
The entire class might
Move away from familiar streets,
Your neighbourhood,
Float above this big city
Explore the unknown
While pushing yourself
To read the book again.

D. Entering a Pedagogic Space

It is here that my employing of "enter" takes on connotations of the seemingly omniscient voyeur, but my intentions in drawing closer to the child are not driven by a need for power or control in the classroom. My desire to be more aware of the student becoming results from a hope to adopt a habit of observance that reminds me of my role.

Van Manen (1986) has written eloquently on the need to engage a pedagogic
thoughtfulness where the teacher develops a certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding that produces the kind of tact necessary for nurturing our relationships with students. This includes the habit of modeling, making teacher habits a large part of what we do in the classroom. Researchers have focused on how the early reader initiates a sense-making process that constitutes a continual layering of texts and meanings. Good readers are able to determine the interrelationships among texts by applying their memories of other texts. They encounter a number of visual signs, and assign meaning based upon their own experiences, perspectives and the particular context of the reading event. This growing but relatively recent discussion encompassing intertextuality portrays an entire text or collection of images as a sign, which some writers juxtapose with the term "intratextuality," an individual illustration or word explored as a sign. My intent is to position intertextuality in the domains of literary criticism, educational research, and an elementary school in East Vancouver. The tone of my prose intertwines the experience of teaching and learning at an inner-city public school with the potential of placing many challenging concepts for educational researchers within an intertextual framework. I combine expressive with theoretical voices as my intertextual approach to the inherent advantages of various genres. Ultimately, I want to portray this as meaningful to the teacher who is interested in a hermeneutic study of an educator's role.

**Reflection: Entering a Teacher's Voice - A School Relationship**

Currently, one aspect of my position as Resource Teacher is to help students who are struggling below grade level expectations. I assist them in their regular classroom or
teach small groups outside of class. The emphasis is upon helping them to approach or achieve a level in language arts that is appropriate for their age. One student I have frequent contact with is an eleven-year-old boy, born in Masset, Haida Gwaii – which he refers to as “the Charlottes” – now in Grade 5 at Gardner School. I will give him the fictitious name of Cyrus. He watched the door ceremony with me that June day. My focus upon my relationship with him is an attempt to show a human intertextuality as we interact in the learning environment, exchanging stories in and around classroom activities. Cyrus is in his fourth school in our district since moving south to Vancouver with his three brothers over two years ago to join his mother. His mother had little or no prior experience as a parent before the boys arrived in the city, and likely had scant notice of their arrival from their father’s care. When asked about her children upon registering the boys for school, she had some difficulty remembering some facts of their upbringing, but indicated that she was now assuming more control of their care. It became evident over time that this challenging transition would be a very difficult one for her. Cyrus is the youngest sibling and he has a 12-year-old brother, the next eldest, who attends our school in Grade 7. Both boys are very dependent on each other to negotiate the streets and neighbourhoods that bring them to us. One of the numerous apartments they have lived in was in our catchment area, and though they have again re-located (dependent upon their mother’s fragile income) they have been permitted to continue to attend Gardner. It is possible that our school is the most stable environment in recent years for Cyrus. The boys are very good-natured and likeable, to the point where their demeanor strikes me as that of country souls overwhelmed by a large city. They live with two older
school-aged brothers, and also have a teenage sister and a sister in her twenties who spends much of her time in another nearby city.

Cyrus has expressed how he misses the Queen Charlotte Islands because they are quieter and more fun than the city. He talks of having all members of his family living in close proximity, as he has little or no contact with his older siblings. His father’s absence is also a big void that his brothers only partially fill. Cyrus is more capable in many areas of the curriculum than his older brother, so while he is often able to hold details better, they both rely on the support of their older brothers and the little stability they can find at home. One problem is a sleeping schedule that is far from typical of the ordinary youngster who comes to school sufficiently rested to learn; I have yet to find a way around a fatigue that cuts concentration and recall to a bare minimum. To be honest, I suspect it is the traits of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), more than the change of schools and lack of sleep, that keeps these two boys from progressing in the face of the serious schooling challenges confronting them. I also sense that it is Cyrus, assessed as less severely learning disabled and showing more drive to learn, who will one day become his older brother’s keeper. The challenges facing him rush over me with most force on those occasions when I have visited the dark basement apartment where he lives with his mother and siblings. So strong are these feelings that I feel relief to have him consistently in a more structured school environment, all the while knowing we meet only some of his needs. I heard that his sister had been injured in a late night altercation in the city’s downtown eastside, and felt compelled to see how the family was coping with this. I recall how I was launched into a new phase of our relationship when I entered
the apartment. I reflected upon a Saturday visit to his home by writing this poem. It
recalls the emotions involved, and what I later struggled with as Cyrus and I reconvened
in the school setting.

*Flowers and Coke*

A tentative look in the door
Suddenly layers of regret
Hit me and peel away
Revealing injustice,
Hunger and poverty
For children I know
Across desks of pencils, erasers
Now crowded onto a sofa
Midday in a dark apartment
The spring sun of a shining,
Green, lucrative city blinding
Tired faces in my city, their city
Where our hesitant,
Meaningful greetings mingle
Drifting softly
As old leaves
In a quiet forest swirl and rise
Following the storyteller’s words
The drumming of traffic
They tell me stories
Of impersonal streets,
Attitude, violence,
Safe harbours
Where you can laugh
At every one, everything
With some food in your mouth
– a community centre hotdog –
Digesting it all like a familiar joke.
So they locate some of their youth
Salvaged as it were
Among dumpsters and blue boxes
Now the boys’ eyes follow
A floating cartoon image
While I think, “Jesus,
If I were an evangelist
We’d be on our knees
Praying for so many things
In this dark basement
Heated by the stovetop
But mainly because
They are sad today:
Their dear, beautiful sister
Was cut up last night
Losing a part of herself,
A finger, an accusatory finger,
No one could save.

My frustration in working with children who may suffer from a lack of sleep,
poor diet, or unhealthy hygiene has meant that I need to constantly mediate between my
teaching ideals and the day-to-day struggles of these youngsters. Their hopes, fears,
interests and personal habits have become part of the fabric of my experience at the
school, all playing a part in my forming a pedagogic role. I am suggesting that such
habits as attitude, gesture (doodling!), body language, voice and appearance all present
themselves as texts of the school day, becoming intertextual as they co-exist with more
traditional writings as actions in and out of the school. Equally so, the same habits teachers display are texts that students read and interpret as part of the role they enact on a daily basis. These are the ways I dwell in my school relationship of observing and learning with this student, leading me to question the fundamentals of my teaching. As mentioned previously, I am constantly learning to negotiate the kind of intertextual exchange that allows students to participate in their own understanding of voice, knowledge and authority in the classroom. The process begins with honouring and including the intertextual connections they share with the class. This discussion, the topics and mixture of voices, becomes its own classroom intertext worth reflecting upon from my teaching position. I have attempted to frame this in the inherent paradoxes of various aspects of my own teaching experiences. The next strand encompasses linguistic and theoretical paradoxes I have encountered while composing this dissertation.
A. A Teacher's Discourse

Imagine a teacher in a school designated as "difficult" who begins to ruminate upon two primary concerns in his daily walk through hallways and classrooms. One is the concern he perceives as a personal struggle to maintain a connection to the world of his students. The second surrounds the many students that he feels experience difficulty seeing any continuity between the values accompanying the spirit of learning in the school and the codes that operate in the surrounding neighbourhood, that is, on the streets and in the homes of the immediate community. These are two tensions that the teacher identifies in himself and in two distinct groups who dwell in often separate communities despite how much time they co-exist in the learning environment – the staff and the children. For the staff, this tension manifests itself as a certain feeling of futility and, for the children, it is the bewilderment of living in a world of what they see as inconsistent adult behaviour. It is facile to address the complexity of emotions and issues surrounding this environment by saying that the school is a microcosm of the community. Certainly, children enter the school carrying many of the values and attitudes of homes in the neighbourhood, but as I write of these contradictions I want to work through these values and attitudes in order to establish a learning environment more
representative of where I teach. I consider the school as a convergence of my voice joining those of the students and staff members from various “communities” returning to homes near to or far from the building. How am I to ameliorate the many competing discourses that can be found in a school? What theoretical knowledge can the academy lend to the local pedagogue in need of some thoughtful approaches to issues that do not always have a solution? By the fifth and final strand I will ask how I might honour the voices included in the classroom that will never communicate in ways that teacher training programs and the curriculum tell me they ought to. This is my attempt to sift through notions of classroom relations so that I might articulate the importance of teacher-student negotiation around aspects of authority and knowledge. It also reveals my recent experiences in an elementary setting as the impetus to describe the evolving pedagogy of my teaching role.

Despite the studies on forms of classroom discourse by communicative theorists who attempt to explain how to design activities to structure understanding in school (Chang, 1996, p. 225; Ellsworth, 1997, p. 45), many students are not prepared to discuss openly many issues in their lives. A sense of place grounds educators in the kinds of difference we are encountering in our classrooms (Edgerton, 1996, p. 137). Students often have difficulty cooperating on the most basic levels, when issues of classroom management and teacher survival become foremost on the day planner. After a period of time spent watering down the curriculum or casting aside plans for the day, I begin to wonder about the amount of learning that can be accomplished during the school year. I combat these undercurrents and immediate demands of the school by attempting to
provide a safe, consistent environment that focuses upon mutual respect and learning. These are values operating as loosely-acknowledged morals surrounding child-care and learning brought into the school and community. That is, I sense that I add my own teaching and learning values to a range of backgrounds among staff members, uncertain of how the various texts we introduce in the school mix together for our students. Some of these sentiments can be found in the school’s mission statement:

- **COOPERATION**
- **UNDERSTANDING**
- **SAFETY**
- **RESPECT**

Concepts such as these pose interesting learning opportunities. As more students become familiar with them, some of these ideals benefit the school environment. As the teacher begins to take an inclusive approach to classroom discussions, this familiarity can move from the abstract understanding of concepts – including “environment” – to active examples of these concepts in the life of a school. A classroom approach to such ideals entails more than simply making time for student input. This dissertation is my theoretical and narrative blend of a range of intertextual voices that speak to a negotiated learning environment.

**B. Breeches of the Teaching Day**

At Gardner Elementary I sense a cooperative spirit among staff concerning many of the official and unofficial goals for the conduct of a small, urban school. It is a non-
judgemental façade that is necessary in order for successful combination of scheduling, teaching, learning, and negotiation. At times the tension in the school is palpable. I find it remarkable that it does not surface more often than in the occasional signs that a staff member is having extreme difficulty with a child or colleague on a given day, an indication of the challenging relationship that likely exists between the two. My stories represent a modest testament to the patience and dedication of people who work in a challenging but rewarding learning environment. This comes from the many surprising ways in which I learn from children and continually hope to discover ways of subtly or overtly providing contexts for their voices. Certain incidents – flashpoints in the everyday life of the school – come and go with a regularity that reminds me that tension is part of the normal course of the day. I want to consider all of the unexpected moments of the school day as part of the larger social text of teaching and learning, so present this break from the larger text.

**Interlude One:**

**Externally Imposed Classroom Interruptions (A Partial List)**

- Intercom Message delivery
- Specialists
Unspecified visitors Other Teachers

NURSE VISIT

Other students Parents

SCHOOL VISITS

Telephone Administrators

Fluoride program

Student Council activities Assemblies

Caretakers Celebrations

Student services

Extracurricular activities Power/

failures

Fundraising Tardy students

Lunch orders
I see school relations and our habitual reaction to them as the grander text in which we co-exist with so many personalities and voices. We alternately become disturbed by, or simply ignore, interruptions. If teachers can view the classroom and learning activities as an intertextual space they are required to mediate, then there is better preparation for the convergence of texts and voices that will influence their plans for the day.

C. Intertextual Negotiation in a Classroom

The existing tension partially derives from the challenges of “delivering” or “transmitting” the curriculum, or at least in assuming the mantle of sole arbiter of this knowledge. It also results from constantly questioning and re-evaluating how best to
teach the fundamental skills that students need in settings that challenge many of the curricular symbols. How, for example, do I discuss a concept as basic as “home” when many students may have no strong sense of such a place in their lives? This kind of challenge faces teachers in many schools.

The starting point, I believe, is to gain confidence in my ability to respectfully incorporate student experiences from outside of the classroom. In this way I valorize what the students offer to discussion and the learning environment. Beginning in the primary grades, I introduce a range of texts on a subject, and bring out the students’ abilities as explorers seeking intertextual links from inside and outside of the classroom.

T: All right, boys and girls. What kind of homes can you see in these books?
S: Nests! Doghouses! Holes!
T: Yes, and what makes them homes?
S: They protect. They cover.
T: And is that like our own homes?
S: We stay safe from the weather, from the cold.
T: Exactly!
S: Our cat has lots of homes.
T: Can a person have more than one home?

By modeling a negotiation of connected language, I hope to help them to see the importance of articulating fears, frustrations and desires as a way towards understanding
that not all dialogue has a conclusion or a solution. A variety of genres, voices, and narratives come together into a reading of knowledge that involves an intertextual dialogue between teachers, parents and children. The door ceremony of the previous strand was a portrayal of this from my perspective.

D. Bakhtin’s Textual Carnival

Bakhtin’s theories are central to a textual hermeneutics of educational voices, and as I am hoping to reveal through my writing, related to a greater connection with voice in the classroom as well. Essentially, Bakhtin’s notion of monologue portrays a dominant voice that does not take into account various speech genres. Bear in mind that for Bakhtin (1981), “dialogue” or “the dialogic” implies that which occurs between languages – ways of speaking, traditions, and customs – under the right conditions. If curriculum is a monologic representation, it distorts communication in two ways: by privileging one speaker (or group of speakers) in decontextualized communication; and by assuming that experience can be organized into a coherent system (it is an incomplete truth that pretends to completeness). The unpredictability and tension that leads to contradictions in an inner city teaching environment has motivated me to explore the influence of a negotiation of voices in my midst. This requires an ability to, at times, live and work with incomplete and unresolved experience. Voicing experiences rather than conclusive opinions is a starting point for relieving the pressure to have an answer for all student questions. By incorporating this view of my experiences, I want to consider how language develops in an opposition of voices and contexts, locating the school between
centripetal or unitary forces of rhetoric and centrifugal narrative that honours diversity along with eventness. In other words, we must strive to maintain a dignity and pride in learning that includes both the texts that the school values and the texts that the surrounding community values. This is a mediation of texts that involves listening to various voices and respecting different notions of knowledge. A classroom is based on negotiated knowledge. What must enter the text on a constant basis, in subtle and other ways, is a sharing of voices.

I propose negotiating authority and curriculum in a space of being aware of how we structure the opportunity to participate in discussion. It is left to me to determine if I am creating an opportunity for dialogue, or simply establishing a continuing monologic discourse that tends to silence all but the dominant generalizations of life. Educators continue to search for metaphors that allow us to generalize from individualized experience. We speak to our students of community roles and cooperation when they often do not see these curricular values modeled at home or in the neighbourhood. The dialogic searches for ways to broach topics that are uncomfortable. Tales of broken promises, disappointment and ultimately a sadness that follows certain events within the school or surrounding community are already present in notebooks and journals. Children also must learn to ameliorate open-ended, incomplete stories for reasons that become evident in an inner-city setting. The challenge I see is to frame many of the locations, experiences and questions in a language of difference – children are not blind to tension and contradiction, after all. They have the ability to move with the teacher across and beyond the facile binaries and dichotomies of the popular doxa of forces such
as the media and the culture at large. Students are capable of appreciating the need to negotiate identities that challenge, fascinate and teach. The implications for my teaching in light of Bakhtin's influential work can be summarized in how I see two of his better-known concepts.

E. Intertextual Truth: Chronotope and Polyphony

With his notions of "chronotope" and "polyphony," Bakhtin exemplifies how the voices of dialogue should reflect the actual experiences of individuals (Coulter, 1999, p. 9). Part of his theory indicates that the barometer of a novel's ultimate truth is directly related to the development of the history and the context in which characters find themselves. It also holds that educators can do more to incorporate into their lessons the meeting ground between curricular truth and the experiences of students. As a concept indicating "truth" or "realism," chronotope originates from an analogy capturing elements of Einsteinian physics to portray a time/space explanation for reality. Consequently, the importance of eventness highlights particular images that lead to a context for new kinds of narratives our students might explore. It is these pieces I am referring to as intrinsically metonymic. As a whole they undoubtedly combine metaphorically, representing, say, the sum of a class's efforts. Yet I want to re-configure the process, including the students' contribution, that has led to the parts of this collage coming together. Thus, I have provided a classroom example of an approach to the doors of my school. It is not a question of whether literary studies attempt to pull us away from linear approaches, as recently they do. Metaphor habitually emphasizes "timeless" themes in
education. It is literary figure that refers to a totality of identification through comparison. I hope students can gain satisfaction by writing on a personal level while, at the same time, hoping to be read by an appreciative audience; despite the fact that their poetry or prose may diverge from subjects traditionally discussed in strictly chronological and plot-driven language.

As a relational trope that comes through chance (Johnson, 1987), I propose that metonymy stands for the unpredictable connection linking me with my students over an (un)foreseeable length of time. This relationship is something I want to be cognizant of among other school/ing pressures. I want to help students address contradictions in their lives, and bring the backgrounds and attitudes of teacher and students to a closer understanding by revealing my own concerns with curricular language. I see my role as negotiating curriculum with students through conversation that leads to a shared authority called for by challenging, intertextual topics. I encounter students who come from backgrounds of transience, who are shuffled between communities and schools at an alarming frequency, in some instances returning to our school in the same year. They can relate to continuity in ways that are far-removed from what most students experience as a stable family environment. Consistent symbols and comforting events in the lives of these children can be rare. By using their fragile, unpredictable experiences as a backdrop to the theoretical notions of Bakhtinian “carnival” and “educational intertextuality,” my hope is to heighten the awareness surrounding what we all bring into the school environment: an ongoing struggle of centripetal and centrifugal forces. I am describing my hope to be aware of the monologic and dialogic utterances that intertwine
with our teaching and learning lives. The discussion leads to the paradox of the transience of voices and experiences within my inner-city school day, and this leads me to a convergence with others. I want to contribute to the promotion of a learning community combining valued voices in difference. My belief is that there are obvious tensions created in an environment where teachers and students accept pre-established roles and language that must somehow meet expectations of successfully navigating the curriculum. This tension is a result of the ideals we bring to the classroom as educators, and the resulting contradictions we experience when it becomes apparent that we cannot meet curriculum goals, which are often overshadowed by other concerns. This is the space described as mediation between the curriculum-as-lived and the curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1993, p. 4). While my teaching habits are often a response to the attitudes students bring to the classroom, my teaching style-as-practice frequently adjusts to fill a gap between planning and reality.

**Reflection: Curricular Mediation, Compromise and Negotiation**

Cyrus easily slides into his role as student in my teaching realm, but as a young boy he has no idea of my linguistic expectations or what constitutes accepted behavior among his new, anticipated but as yet unknown, peers. My inability to fully appreciate his experience and his difficulty in fitting into a comfortable role at our school constitute important aspects of our relationship. This accepted/unaccepted role is a personal metonymy for Cyrus. It is a paradoxical situation in terms of my attempts to help him improve his skills because I see that emotionally everything is a defense mechanism as he
moves through so many unpredictable locales. Each move forces him into a continuous mediation of where he has come from, where he now attempts to find a home in a new school. He unconsciously strives to perform and please, surrounded by trial and tribulation, inadvertently growing into the role of keeper of his older brother. Meanwhile, he grasps at scant morsels of love offered up by a frenetic, inconsistent and preoccupied adult world.

For me, this is Cyrus' Bakhtinian carnival: a chance to rebel against inflexible authority by using many of the voices he has in his arsenal. He is playful with school language as a way of surviving the demands placed upon him: he throws it back at me in twisted, humorous ways that force me to question where the initial language I have used actually stems from. As much as I struggle for his attention most days, I am grateful he has an innate sense of humour. This subversive mirth helps him develop a personality and maintain a sense of himself in class and in his relations with others, but also points to his frustration with his schooling. I wonder if he had a comedic streak at his host of previous schools. A school staff of concerned adults counter and in small steps fill the myriad of damaging experiences that form his developing personal world, while he becomes the sole arbiter of the dizzying number of influences that might truly touch the voices forming within him. He embodies a “ceaseless flow of becoming” by the ways in which he is so heavily dependent upon structure but able to forge a memorable personality from his experiences. The facets of the school schedule help him to learn basic academic and life-skills, while mirroring the haphazard life of his upbringing as a way of coping with the severe physical demands placed upon him by a marginalized
existence outside of school. When fatigue, hunger or anxiety overtakes him, he rebels against routine and chooses a personalized approach to schooling. Overwhelmed and disenchanted by most work at his grade level, he represents for me a personality that is struggling to make learning personal. I am often unsure of how to break through his unpredictable patterns of nutrition, sleep or hygiene. I want to consider Cyrus’ life thus far as a carnival of intersecting dialects: of the words and messages (from Masset to East Vancouver’s streets and schools); of priorities, (place, parenting, alcohol, bingo, and schooling); of history (the fallout of discrimination against First Nations people); and of circumstance (his parents’ intertwining life histories). This outlook is reflected in how I negotiate my shifting assumptions and remain optimistic that Canada can be a just society, that it can more equitably distribute the variables influencing our diet, hygiene, speech, clothing – all of the things that influence my teaching day.

**Part II: Barthes and a Shifting Perspective**

**A. A Third Form for a Schoolyard**

Cyrus is similarly forming a complex notion of what *just* behaviour is among peers and adults. He is operating in the vague metonymic space between the two. As a metaphor for the intellectual hardship of attaining knowledge in a marginalized, shifting world, Cyrus is a voice of the school and neighbourhood, yet not of the community of professionals who attempt to meet his academic needs. The absence of his voice in this work exposes some limitations to my portrayal of school/ing experiences from a teacher’s
perspective. Despite possible shortcomings, my writing strives to be reflectively and reflexively intertextual, informing my pedagogy via the past, present and future of my relations in school. I am attempting to address some paradoxes of my recognition of negotiation and hope in my classes. Cyrus is an outsider among most of his peers, one who brings a distinct voice/dialect and upbringing of a distant northern isle to our school, in addition to the experience of schoolyard survival learned from other Vancouver schools. It is astounding to consider how our perceptions of the new child in our midst change over time. The comprehension gap is apparent in the voices teachers use to comprehend and change what is communicated to them by children. This lack of connection is also present in the metaphors we invoke to inspire, but have nonetheless positioned and valued in contexts outside of our students' experiences. The impetus of my writing lies in my view of the young boy struggling to be accepted, to gain some measure of self-worth and belonging in an uncompromising environment. His school/ing interrogates my approach to knowledge and practice. I console myself with the thought that staff members create a nurturing environment for him, but I know that there are no language arts activities that guarantee he will feel better outside of school. While the school doors welcome Cyrus, entrances to other locations of learning and opportunity may be closed. I must accept my physical absence in his life outside of our building but remain hopeful in our on-going relationship in school/ing, learning, and paradox.
B. *A Photo: Intertextual Instrument*

What teaching sensibilities of mine could possibly be attracted to a book entitled *Roland Barthes on Photography* (Shawcross, 1997)? Essentially, the author sheds light on my search for a personal pedagogy in a discussion of the theoretical and personal aspects of the later writings of Barthes. Shawcross' study confirms the ways in which Barthes' style represents a key to the pleasure of finding one's relationship to text. In his last published work, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (1981a) writes of more than photography. The reader enters a process of viewing text and image along with Barthes, as he attempts to locate a voice to express his relationship with words and experience. Shawcross (1997), meanwhile, defines the metonymic qualities of the photograph in very intriguing ways and reveals Barthes' writing on photography as a "Third Form" of prose style positioned amidst the analytical and the expressive (p. 67). She describes Barthes' writing on photography as creative expression that addresses a philosophical problem, a decision that allows him "to embrace and to shatter paradox at the same time and to elude reductive conclusions while achieving a personal resolution" (p. 71). This informs my school/ing by aiding my search for a practice that encourages students and me to see connections in school lives, so that we can together acknowledge the process of valuing knowledge and skills. This form of writing also allows for a thoughtful discussion of a topic that incorporates the known/not known of language irregularities as part of our learning. "Third form" discussion and writing opens the possibility of an instructive, personal interpretation of an event's meaning but avoids an essentialist conclusion. My intertextual school/ing process concerns the uncertainty of planning a textual experience
for my students, and walking with them through the metonymic knowing/not knowing of an author’s intentions. The image can take discussion to many intertextual possibilities, while it bridges uncertainty involving classroom consideration of events that involve both the connected, relationship-oriented language of our lives and the hidden meanings and fate-nuanced experiences that hint at other worlds or ways of knowing/being/becoming. A thoughtful choice of image also encourages reflection leading to meaningful discussion and writing, or potentially, other possibilities for this process.

One result of making time to reflect is that I cannot be certain of how my thoughts will influence my teaching. This state of mind is similar to my reaction to an unpredictable reading or writing by a student. I want to guide students to recognize that an often unpredictable transformation occurs through our contact with texts, as we re-connect with personal knowledge in a process forming a mysterious continuum of its own (other worldliness). Possibly this individual revelation, a continuing self-pedagogy, involves a curious mix of metaphor (whole) and metonymy (part) because of the individual nature of becoming in my education. Therefore, both the whole and the parts within realms of knowledge suitably represent the ephemeral, chance nature of so many of our experiences. The view of an education (not schooling) is at times a fleeting moment that is incomparable to the experiences of others in the same ways that no two photos (or one might say, two views of a photo) are the same. Barthes (1981a) presents a model of a writer enjoying his craft, slipping into and out of comparison without fear of ruminating upon a range of textual voices that on the surface have little in common:

Then I decided that this disorder and this dilemma, revealed by my desire to write on Photography, corresponded to a
discomfort I had always suffered from: the uneasiness of
being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive,
the other critical . . . (p. 8).

Barthes’ style fuses aspects of the personal, the incisive, and the performative. His writing demonstrates an appreciation for the portrayal of a moment that can be experienced as an individual event. This ability initially drew me to him as a writer who captured the attractiveness of the seemingly mundane in everyday Japan in Empire of Signs (1982). Barthes’ language play was inspirational, and on numerous topics his book allowed me to re-visit a country through the eyes of a playful theorist. Both “familiar” and “different” now quaked as supposedly stable concepts for describing another country. It was an intellectual igniter involving a sudden passion to explore why this initially superficial writing (e.g., delving into the mundane) appealed to me, brought on by a philosophical expressiveness that deconstructed a highly personal journey into a very different culture. How could so much meaning be inscribed in normal occurrences? These locations and implements of Barthes’ narrative, fragments of which are below, challenge me to think beyond the immediate meaning of the words and the experiences they describe:

- *The Stationery Shop* - “Everything in the instrumentation, is directed toward the paradox of an irreversible and fragile writing, which is simultaneously, contradictorily, incision and glissade . . . ” (p. 86).
• **Chopsticks** – “In all these functions, in all the gestures they imply, chopsticks are the converse of our knife (and of its predatory substitute, the fork): they are the alimentary instrument which refuses to cut, to pierce, to mutilate . . . .” (p. 18)

• **Haiku** – “Here meaning is only a flash, a slash of light: *When the light of sense goes out, but with a flash that has revealed the invisible world*, Shakespeare wrote; but the haiku’s flash illumines, reveals nothing . . . .” (p. 83)

• **Giftwrap** – “Yet, by its very perfection, this envelope, often repeated (you can be unwrapping a package forever), postpones the discovery of the object it contains – one which is often insignificant . . . .” (p. 45).

• **Bowing** – “Why, in the West, is politeness regarded with suspicion? Why does courtesy pass for a distance (if not an evasion, in fact) or a hypocrisy?” (p. 63).

• **Bunraku** - “The voice (and there is then no risk in letting it attain the excessive regions of its range) is accomplished by a vast volume of silence, in which are inscribed, with all the more finesse, other features, other writings” (p. 54).

In re-reading *Empire of Signs*, I participate in Barthes’ attempt to shake his visual habits. He also re-constitutes figurative language into universals of difference to describe his journey, symbols he had previously relied upon in his work and knew were linguistically tied to the West. I am provoked to ask my teaching self, “In what ways do I invite but also mistrust the overly polite student?” It is this sense of breaking free from predictable language that I want to emulate in describing my classroom experiences.
C. A Metonymic Eye

Photography is one area that educators might explore further for possibilities of moving beyond the metaphor-metonymy division; that is, for delving into topics that reveal multiple, potentially unending stories that students can appreciate as part of the process of developing a personal interpretation of experience. It may be that fresh insight into the pedagogic aspects of the metaphor-metonymy relationship will reveal a useful intertextual interplay of part and whole for symbols and concepts in the classroom. Photographs are often introduced as flat, unproblematic visual references in textbooks and the like, but they provide clues as to how the images produced by our society – cues that influence our attitudes and writing – should not be taken for granted. I am searching for the skills to allow me to reveal the doxa of a culture (including the profession of teaching) and begin delving into the paradoxa of students and teachers teaching and learning together. These terms used by Barthes (1974) exemplify an intertextual exposure of natural writing as decidedly cultural and ideological (p. 139). Returning to the saturation of images today, I see the open-ended nature of the photograph – its potential for limitless interpretation – as a way into some of the paradoxes of language that students and teachers practice in schools. As Shawcross (1997) observes:

Unlike a metaphor that seeks its connection with a subject in terms of an imaginary resemblance, the photograph functions like a metonym, which draws its figurative expression directly from the object, usually from some part of its physical characteristics. The process, therefore, of transformation is an inherently limited one in
photography; some physical phenomenon will have always preceded the photographic image. Whatever ‘art’ may be rhetorically grafted onto a photographic print by photographer or critic, it can never completely eliminate the photograph’s literal connection to reality (p. ix).

I see a calling to the teacher who can delve into events that juxtapose the common and the uncommon. I have been inspired to be more aware of metaphor, and to participate in learning as a teacher rhetorically grafting images upon language.

Curricular Trap
The charisma of youth
Settles on the room
Lifted eyebrow
Furtive, spreading smile
The hook
An entrance to the past, suspended
Catching whoever bites
While surrounding pencils move
Tired, knowing feet
Shuffle towards a desk
A pupil palimpsest
Overflowing with stifled energy
Contained unnaturally
Already bristling
With the victory
Of blissful unpredictability.
I enter classrooms that contain many uncovered images. Educators need to ask themselves why they have become immune to many of the "mythologies" that Barthes (1972) described decades ago. Students and teachers alike have become accustomed to viewing images with an uncritical eye, and I feel that Barthes' description of a photographic intertextuality, tinged with Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, allows me to open up the potential of communication around common images in the classroom. Also, I need to create spaces for voices commonly heard and described as inarticulate, and texts that are lacking in insight because they do not have the clarity educators look for in evaluating communication. I want to learn to honour knowledge of a world of larger texts, of meaning I did not know existed, through a shared negotiation with students of the stories brought to class, as well as the books we read together.

A metonymic view begins with the traditional metonym as simultaneously part of, and subordinate to, the metaphor, and leads to an intertextual appreciation of classroom relationships that calls upon the utility of both tropes. It fosters the outlook that a universalization or simplification of experience is not always possible in today's world, but acknowledges that metaphor has an established allure a teacher should not take for granted. There are profound reasons why metaphor, used in an attempt to universalize experience, has appealed to Western cultures. However, it is possible that in connecting experiences and events in concert with our students, in promoting a universal appeal of comparison, I have sought and planned for the more comfortable approach to representation. My reflections cause me to want to learn to avoid the assumption that I can always introduce a story students will connect with. By contrasting metonymic
pieces of a larger whole, I hope to give them more than one way in which to interpret the larger image, concept or experience that so often comes to us in metaphorical language. This returns me to a metaphorical view of a student as an intertext, a weaving of personal predictions, choices and becoming in school. My sensibilities lead me to say that an integral part of the student’s experience is a struggle with the linear structure of the classroom, just as I grapple with a carnival of student needs and desires.

D. Shifting Lives, Shifting Language

I strongly rely on a centrifugal perception of students in the beginning of our classroom relationship – this is a metonymic moment of becoming in a structured environment. A new face stares at me from a previously empty desk and I react with both official and unofficial responses. While the child tentatively becomes accustomed to a naturally intimidating environment, I choose when to be officious, when to become more informal. My school, in particular, experiences a great deal of transience during the school year, and it is understandable that most of these children who come to us have their share of emotional fragility surrounding the reasons why a move has been necessary during the school months. They bring with them the expectations of their families, but also the customs and skills learned both formally and informally in other schools and communities. This constitutes a human intertextuality of which I want to be more cognizant as the year progresses. A conscientious social demographer would do well to track the shifting population of a school like Gardner with a view to providing an additional snapshot of the changes that take place within the community. The voices,
hopes, desires, and habits of new school members who are added to the social mix of the school influence how I conduct my day with my students. I sense a symbolization of the transient family between communities, tracked by an official documentation (i.e., legitimized by a mandatory bureaucratic paper trail) but also operating at an unofficial level, mediated by a mix of discourses that seep down to the lived experience of the child.

Bakhtin and Barthes are influential and useful to my approach because they offer intertextual models that help me to recognize and articulate ways of incorporating more fluid curricula, and of moving away from static, one dimensional concepts of planning and evaluation. As important for me, however, is how this written journey will present a range of theorists adapted by my teaching view of intertextuality, and specifically, imbue it with a literary appreciation targeted at the experience of intersecting languages and roles in our schools. I desire to be actively located within the school with the knowledge that an ongoing movement of voices, texts and languages helps me best in this moving space. Bakhtin and Barthes present challenging concepts for theorists and researchers because their respective writings span an extensive and influential period of the last century. I cannot know how they may have viewed a teacher's struggles to express the tension between the expressive and the theoretical. It is my hope, however, to use the inspiration of their theories as catalysts for my own exploration of contradictions between the ideals and practice of my (inner) pedagogy at an inner-city elementary school. Ultimately, I want to infuse the academic with the social, and vice versa, to search for an expressive-theoretical middle ground of education evolving among concepts that helps me to address the contradictions I encounter in my daily teaching and learning.
Barthes proposes writing in a “style” with a sensibility to the event that constitutes a form of cultural decoding. His views on the photograph, I feel, explore the literary and the world of binaries beyond multiculturalism. This kind of writing allows me to approach eventness in ways that are “not exclusively anchored in a cultural response,” leading to the aforementioned Third Form (Shawcross, 1997, p. 67) that takes my hopes for teaching and educational research into realms of combining personal expression with an analytical edge. My impulse is to find a tool by which I can delve into the implications of a Bakhtinian world of competing voices. Barthes’ musings on his usage of language, at once open-ended and revealing, allow me to plunge into the measure of an event in its retelling; I am inspired to use the voices of my teaching from within and without. This constitutes a re-collection of thought incorporating both analysis and expression. His autobiographical musings also re/present a model that allows me to explore areas apart from photographic concepts that interrupt established approaches to writing in the classroom. I am reminded of a hermeneutical situatedness within an event of tradition (Gadamer, 1999, p. 309) that is also complemented by this reminder of why I attempt to situate portions of my work outside of a traditional narrative structure:

The hermeneutic argument implies that literary studies are most fundamentally not ‘scientific’ and linear in nature but historical and circular (in a non-vicious sense). They are historical not merely in that they are concerned with the past, but also in that they address the historical consequences of the encounter with the art work (Hoy, 1993, p. 93).
The writing voice I engage also intends to invite a reader's *entrances* to the text at various points throughout the dissertation, not only at the very beginning or the first page of respective strands. This intertextual departure from my established writing practice leads to a healthy *fracture* of teaching strategies. My language choices do not entail an abandonment of curricula, but a way of engaging the concepts propelling them.

**E. A Contextual Voice**

I begin a re/constituted learning process by asking myself how I intend to allow for learning opportunities outside of history and the language of contextuality that has established some of the temporal and expressive biases of the curricula. This goes beyond a bridging between abstract and contemporary concepts. Writing in a Third Space from a teacher’s perspective involves mediation between voices and texts at play. For example, as I will discuss in the next chapter, how might a seemingly informative and accurately chronological collection of documents regarding the progress of one student potentially mis-lead? Fundamentally, I refer to developing the teaching habit of promoting the skill of negotiating and interpreting intertext with students, so they may participate and develop the habit of engaging in similar forays into language connections.

My teaching experiences also lead me to the conviction that respective discourses provide intertextual links to other discourses. This can occur through the voices we use in particular settings. Bakhtin wrote of human subjects utilizing language in specific social contexts, and he spoke to the fundamentals of how spoken or written texts can never be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality out of which they are
formed (Holquist, 1980). As a teacher, I place Cyrus within a hierarchy of means, attitudes, and a competition for the resources that lead individuals to self-sufficient education. This is a reflection of who I am and how I instinctually respond to pre-established, structured events that are a product of (yet simultaneously an influence on) a particular school environment. An important question arises: “Do I, the classroom teacher at any stage of a productive career, learn from my individual experience (that schism, that interstice created by my initial meeting) with the child?” Despite the potential of juxtaposing the two categories, they inevitably elude a binary positioning because they are constantly present in the many unpredictable conversations that surround the intertextual in the classroom. Instead, I might formulate a list that strays from categorization to questions of how to enter the space between the teacher and student. Barthes (1982) has utilized “seism” in Empire of Signs to represent a break from the predictable experience and the language that follows it. Sitting with students in a small group is this kind of breach of school norms, for they have no idea what type of discussion might ensue before getting to the task at hand. We are outside of many of the parameters of the larger classroom. There are times during which it is possible to pursue a conversation that has fewer defined boundaries. This may constitute a foreign event for them in the course of their day, but somehow becomes a moment of allowing me to recognize more tangible student participation in class discussion.

For Barthes, the search for language to describe the happening we have never previously experienced is a vital disruption of memory. We might be visiting an area of the world for the first time (such as Japan in Empire of Signs), or simply thrown from an
Ingrained routine by the seemingly mundane. A chance event can produce the loss of an ability to recall prior experience, taking us to sites of profound learning. The "seism" for Barthes (1982) is a flash of knowledge causing a loss of (accepted) meaning:

This situation is the very one in which a certain disturbance of the person occurs, a subversion of earlier readings, a shock of meaning lacerated, extenuated to the point of its irreplaceable void, without the object's ever ceasing to be significant, desirable (p. 4).

Following this initial foray into a questioning of language, Barthes then describes how this leads him to dwell in an interstice that causes him to ask how he will communicate when he is caught between meaning and experience. This causes me to re-consider the goals I have struggled with in my relationship with my students, but turning them around to include my role in the question. The "interstice," as an ongoing consideration of our interaction with each other, helps me to see a class of individuals becoming. I represent the shift in my mindset with the chart below.
Will this student fit into the goals of my classroom?
Will he learn to cooperate with his classmates and other students?
Will she challenge my approach to learning?
Will he achieve in ways that I hope and come to expect he can?
Will she make my classroom less predictable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEISM</th>
<th>INTERSTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What might we learn from each other?</td>
<td>What does this student bring that speaks to my need to learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What differences will we see in texts, symbols and pictures?</td>
<td>In what ways do students reveal to me more about my teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What and where are the spaces we can explore between the commonalities and differences in our experiences?</td>
<td></td>
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Table 2: Seism and Interstice

**F. Losing and Gaining an Other**

This child I have named Cyrus displays a Bakhtinian otherness that has turned itself upon him in such a way that I ponder if he hasn’t lost sight of who he is becoming or might become. He is for all intents and purposes viewed as an inner-city student by the school system, including the staff at the school he attends. A temporality of the present dominates him, forcing him always to seek basic needs and desires, though he misses the pastoral setting in which he is more comfortable. He responds as anyone
would to rewards and other forms of gratification. *Just* and *unjust* are the major players in his operating system. His brother is an even stronger symbol of this state of mind, yet they both wear their respective emotions at the forefront of who they are. In today’s world, does this make them transparent or opaque? And what does it teach us when we answer this? As I watch Cyrus read, I look for any loss or opening of meaning beyond his struggles with the phonetics of a passage.

This loss and gain is somehow an important part of his reading style, despite my teacher’s hopes that he will improve at a faster rate. I marvel at how much story children retain as they struggle with the phonetics of a word that seems inconsequential to the plot of a very short primary reader. He somehow maintains an overall personal meaning despite struggling at what I see as a slow reading rate. And yet, artists quibble over the smallest detail of a painting, a chorus, or a climax. Writers split hairs over the adjective that seems out of place within a promising passage. Speed aside, children learn the price of paying close attention to detail, while grasping that there is so much to consider in reaching overall meaning. Bakhtin’s ideas have encouraged writers to move beyond Saussure’s “*langue* as difference” to the circumstances and ramifications of the concrete utterances of individuals in particular social contexts (Eagleton, 1983, p. 117). Educators would do well to be aware of language they fall into that generalizes the experience of the individual child. The terms of Bakhtin may be appropriate in an inner-city school environment, but his ideas have the power to exist under other names. They emerge in the language of negotiation used by teachers and students, individually and as a class. Often they are obvious in the goals and concepts of curriculum writers, school board
officials and administrators, yet as a teacher I know that they are infused with life by the relationships I have with students. These words are spoken by student voices that inject humour or surprise or a calculated, feigned interest as a means of breaking teaching monologues. While this sometimes feels like an attack of youth on an older, wiser and knowing teacher, I bear in mind memories of my own attempts to participate in speeches spinning away from of the realm of my attention. I think of times when I have approached students’ desks as I tried to suppress my own smile. My amusement at their predictable and surprising actions is part of my continuing schooling, and undoubtedly informs my education on things human. As such, integral parts of the school year as metaphoric journey are metonymics events of a teaching/learning day.

Dialogism is perhaps most prevalent in a school through the modes of address that teachers employ. Ellsworth (1997, p. 49) feels that communicative dialogue, a liberal-minded attitude of inclusion in classrooms, actually masks the power structure of the teacher’s voice. As a consequence, students are persuaded by the teacher’s rhetoric of conversation when all the while classroom talk meets the needs of the educator. I sometimes rely upon age-old aphorisms that make siblings cringe when they hear them repeated again. These utterances are spoken for the ghosts of past students who have matured beyond the ideals of the institution, or the bodies that one day inhabit well-worn rows of gum-encrusted desks, sensing the language they encounter “occurs in specific social situations between specific human agents” (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 282). I might be doing students a disservice if I did anything other than prepare them for the role of passive (or active) agents of various discourses – but I ask myself how am I to honour all
of the speech acts during my contact with students? Is to be prepared as a citizen of our
country not also assuming a communicative adaptability when encountering other ways
of speaking and thinking? More importantly, I want to be mindful of a teaching myth
that would hold me responsible for addressing all of the challenges of dialogue that a
student may encounter in her or his future. This includes what has been described as
resistance to an “arrogance of discourse” of the dominant systems of language and debate
that attempt to construct our notion of reality through apolitical speech (Barthes, 1972,
p. 139). My writing as reflection reveals the challenge I face as a teacher confronted by
curricular language that is presented to me as neutral, but strikes me as charged with
paradox for my own school/ing and that of my students. While certain theorists inform
my discussion of the complexity of dialogue and the influences upon the choices I make
in my school/ing, it is writers like Barthes who will help me explore how and where to
locate my teaching in the uncertainty of language.

Reflection: Teachings of a Child’s (In)Consistencies

Cyrus is not unlike many of his classmates who have moved to Vancouver from
reserves or small towns. The city is at once exciting and terrifying, depending on the
support network a child has to guide him or her during the time of a challenging life
transition. His sense of humour is a welcome element in my small groups, but also a
wildcard indicating his complete inability to focus upon my learning goals. My attempts
to convince him that they are also his goals are the metonymic space of my learning
mediation. Wonderfully, he is often accepting of his role, without realizing how he is
teaching me about my own. At times Cyrus becomes my instructor on life’s survival skills. Underlying his quick wit and ready smile is a lack of proper diet and sleep that turns the playful side of his personality into a giddy class participant. On many mornings he wants only to lay his head on his desk.

At these times Cyrus’ expression takes on a solemnity that, it seems to me, is beyond his years. His hygiene is poor; he often wears unwashed clothing to school and by look and odor does not bathe regularly. The school’s breakfast and lunch programs, as well as its focus on hygiene, have led to an improvement in his diet and clothing in his second school year with us. An aunt who lives upstairs from the family has taken on more responsibility for her sister’s children, mainly, as she expressed to me, out of concern that the Ministry of Social Services may remove the boys from their mother’s care as they removed her own at one time. Their mother is often not at home, either job training from very early in the morning or maintaining other responsibilities.

Part III: Intertext in Teaching

A. Unpredictable Discourse

The discretionary powers of an educator are great. I am able to discuss topics spontaneously that influence me on any given day. We need to acknowledge and embrace the fact that the arbitrariness of the curriculum-as-planned is framed by so much centrifugal or unofficial language. Our students inevitably enjoy it and in fact attempt to
engage us on the level of the unexpected. I feel that Bakhtin would see this kind of rapport of the surprise as a healthy antidote to the omnipotence of abstract language. It is a rhetoric I continue to struggle to weed out of my own writing. The contemporary speech act should be so honoured in ways that reflect learning with the evolution of words. Most powerfully, teachers might reveal themselves as enamoured by text as practice and personality, and invest aspects of their personal lives as models of the same. This personality-of-the-text/text-as-personality forms the basis of an intertextuality that links the class readings with the writings of individual lives in the class. The ways in which teachers foster this relationship as they connect with students determine the degree to which the teacher-student(s) methodology can be called “intertextual.” The intertextual is the collection of various discourses, crossing temporalities, genres and personalities, with the narrative we choose in order to tell the stories we feel are in need of telling. These intersecting intertexts are recognizable to the speaker/writer, yet are often not considered as convergent within a theoretical perspective. Who, then, legitimizes a “single” narrative? A combination of voices beyond our intentions is not only an acknowledgement of listening with new ears and seeing with new eyes, but a recognition of the promise of opening up spaces of unexplored modes of expression and form in humanities curriculum. In describing this polyphony of unpredictability, my intention is to propose a writing sensibility that re-define literary playfulness and humour.
B. Barthes' Notion of Intertextuality

Barthes’ writing in the last decade of his life typifies for me an idiosyncratic pleasure in a personal relationship with the text. His mixing of passive and active voice, and his experimental play with autobiography in his de-mythologizing of culture contribute to exploring communicative skills for the post-modern ambiguity of the late twentieth century spilling into a new millennium. Decoding a culture is not unlike learning to read with students who struggle to reach a fundamental milestone in a literate society. Phonics, syntax and diction can seem incredibly foreign to them. Many of the students possess an arbitrary sight vocabulary based upon previous classroom experiences and the language they encounter in the community. These words return to them in unpredictable, profoundly metonymic ways. The students are following a profoundly personal path through language. They connect to known patterns that guide them onto new words. A growing store of words then becomes part of the linguistic toolbox to which students refer when connecting text. This greatly helps students in checking out or authorizing the information that texts provide. That is, students are led to engage in a personal exchange with the text: Do they match? What are the similarities and differences? The intertextual explorer is juxtaposing two texts as the teacher plays a powerful role in sharing the negotiation of intertextuality with students. Teacher validation helps a student claim expertise by initiating responses to the text from inside and outside of the class. Oyler (1996, p. 23) describes this as a negotiated process representing an important indicator for examining teacher authority. In the meantime, Cyrus’ humour helps me to remember the child’s habit of willing to recall events over
concepts, which becomes an indelibly human trait as we grow older and reminisce about days gone by. This is recognition of how we have together negotiated various forms of text.

The intertextual strand in Barthes’ writing is fundamental to an idea of decoding the teaching moment so that we can appreciate when our reaction to knowledge has moved beyond the metaphoric “Eureka!” to the metonymic sense of continuity of who we are and who we are becoming. This insight brings me closer to the learning experiences of my students by positioning my teaching in a hopeful rather than disillusioned state of mind in the face of very human challenges. I am not attempting to downplay the unexpected, sometimes brief, spirit of the epiphany. Rather, I would associate these hopeful moments with a longer view of my pedagogy. I need to ask myself what the “flashes” of Barthes description mean to my teaching over time.

As a resource teacher, I constantly look at methods of re-configuring the curriculum to suit the needs of my students with various learning difficulties. My small group instruction is a privileged one that I know all students would benefit from, but the setting allows the opportunity to do more than teach these low incidence learning disabled. I am able to honour their learning styles, those idiosyncratic methods that do not allow them to keep pace in all subjects of the larger classroom. In many cases they are able to return to their classrooms with more confidence in their strengths, and some knowledge of how to work through weaknesses. Interestingly, those students who are considered more independent learners are not always able to learn to be attuned to their strengths, weaknesses and overall study habits within the demands of the regular
classroom. That said, my position allows me to collaborate with classroom teachers to address this issue.

I refuse to see my work as a watering down of knowledge. My approach is to apply life skills to any curriculum area that allows for such an adaptation. It is a selective teaching method that has the ultimate goal of keeping my students attuned to the school and the act of learning. As a teacher, it is my opportunity to see the kind of plan necessary to continue the process of staying connected to these students and their resilience in the face of the forces that would have them lose interest in a consistent education. We meet in the space between our different socio-economic backgrounds and interests, and yet find moments that bring us closer together. For Barthes, these are the "flashes of meaning" in language play, mixed with our appreciation for the event. I hope that I never overlook the fact that my desire as teacher to meet the goals of the curriculum informs how I create a learning environment. And yet we need to understand, to prepare ourselves as teachers, for the many ways in which the classroom environment might be appreciated – like a text – as a mediated space between the hopes of the teacher and the needs of the students.

C. Inner/Outer City Intertext

Many of my students are considered to be on the edges of society, but I know that their stories have value and that the meaning they hold in the telling is "a product whose meaning is not final but progressive" (Barthes, 1982, p. 26). By including some of their stories in my own words, I hope to show that there is an interstice between teacher and
student that requires more research, a space or mediation requiring an intertextual view in action. Many of my students are eager storytellers. Seated rather comfortably around a table in the intimacy of a smaller room, among a group of five or six people, they act upon an urge to share. What often comes forward is at the forefront of their emotions. Whether a hesitant child, or outgoing prankster, students all have events to describe on a daily basis. The experiences they enjoy passing on to schoolmates could be about an evening, weekend or summer. Perhaps they want to relate something about the morning’s walk to school. I try to indulge them, and this affords me a view of their personalities that the classroom teacher often does not see, as these children may be very quiet in the larger setting. When I need to cut their tales short, I make a not-always-successful attempt to connect their topics to what I hope to accomplish with them in class. When I am able to do so, a powerful bond is formed between what they have learned and experienced that also honours how they led us into the discussion with news important to them. This strategy legitimizes their storytelling, choice of setting and language, as it also connects their personality to the group. It is representative of the connection linking the community and classroom and, in fact, how students are living conductors between these spaces we sense as very divergent entities. Perhaps it is their education in action – as separate from schooling – that reveals an unpredictable balance between school and neighbourhood.
Reflection: Listening for Difference

As often as we talk about the importance of teaching reading and writing, it has also become clear to me that I am a significant model in listening and respectfully speaking as I engage my students during and following these moments of storytelling. Despite our different mindsets, we all want our words respected. As I listen to their stories, I also experience the dynamic of a switch in the ownership of knowledge, especially as even the most random tales of life in our school neighbourhood are appreciated by a peer group of listeners. This is how connections occur between and among students. Teachers empower their students when they listen along with them, causing a seism in the patterns of the predictably traditional classroom. As a teacher, I want to create a space of discussion that pulls all participants into un/familiar territory, familiar owing to its experiential nature, yet unfamiliar in the language used and how it gets to the heart of the personal process of growing while becoming. To my mind, this is one way in which children learn to sense what it feels like to have someone truly listen to them. I wonder and want to pursue further how we as teachers work at developing this bond between all classroom participants – a trust – so that we develop confidence in listening and in speaking. I want them to know they will be heard, and transfer this sensibility to the larger classroom when at times I find it difficult to acknowledge all voices that want to be heard.

Life by nature is dialogic. Whether students’ stories are questioned, affirmed or potentially ignored by me in my teaching role, the powerful residue of valuing the act of storytelling itself develops. A habit of engaging a text in this way can be retold and re-
explored in the students' notebooks in personally meaningful ways, and typifies for me a way to show we are listening for differences of voice and experience in the classroom. This is my description of Bakhtin's notion of "dialogue" in an elementary resource room, a fruitful child-adult language connection because it strays from a monologic ordering of communication by one voice. Dialogue in this sense does not privilege one language or a prearranged speech act over another, but is a shared expression of how we experience life. To live means to participate in a dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life. Many of Bakhtin's ideas centre on a framework for understanding speech acts of the modern novel. Their potential for my teaching is apparent when I consider how the classroom can do more to acknowledge that I should not see myself as a language role model. I could become a tour guide in a world of multiple languages inside and outside of linguistic boundaries established by an ever-growing number of forms of speech genres.

Stretching our concept of predictable signs means that the students increasingly will be able to experiment with words. Educators must search for teaching methods that present concepts as open to adaptation and full of potential. This will involve discussion based on the interests that I have long thought appeal to the student mind in richly metaphorical, but at times limiting, perspectives. The language and concepts we choose in our school documentation are potentially problematic if we unquestioningly assume our usage and reading of them brings us closer to the experiences of the child. Examples exist for teachers in the documents that pervade and often compartmentalize our work.
Standardized personal student files, for one, can be unifying forces in a society of transient families. I have relied on these papers to learn more about a child’s background. While I can potentially read and comprehend a report on a child from many school districts in Canada, the language contained can be as removed from the child as the file cabinet in which the documents are stored. I explore issues of revealing a child within a bureaucratic intertext in the next strand of the dissertation.
STRAND FOUR: CHILD AS INTERTEXT

Part I: File as Textual Object and Instrument

A. Personal Filing Lessons

My view of the child as text-in-production is a result of what I read and write as I carry out my work in a small public school. It is also a result of the consequences of my contact with the collection of background and annual evaluation documents required to be kept for each student in the Canadian educational system. As evidenced in previous strands, I am attempting to cut into metaphorical language and experiences in order to rupture my habit of assuming universality that may not encourage reflective questioning of an individual’s schooling. This writing method as a search for a voice discovers spaces that have no comparison, and calls for an articulation of pedagogical experience as part of a teaching career and a view of the teaching profession. What follows are some thoughts I have filed away for inclusion in a dissertation at once analytical, theoretical and self-exploratory.

For each child registered in the school where I presently teach, a Personal Education File is kept in a file cabinet in the main office. It contains standard biographical information that legitimates the child’s attendance at an appropriate school in our district based upon the address of his or her residence. I am portraying the contents of these files as a series of textual voices that are invariably “speaking” in
isolation, similar to how they sit collectively in their numerous colours and thicknesses. I intend the final strand as a series of voices within the school. The file contents contrast sharply with the clash of voices and texts of the classroom, overlapping and contesting who will carry the moment with what prerogative or instinctual need to be heard or be helpful.

B. Finding a Voice Between Evaluative and Personal

Each file contained in the cabinet includes a copy of the student’s birth certificate, the provincial Personal Education Number, and a student number for the school district of residence. There are also semi-annual progress reports, growing in number as the child moves into higher grades. These typically indicate whether a student has successfully met the expectations of the curriculum for a given grade. Progress reports immediately draw the eye of whoever opens the file, and understandably so, as within the educational system it is commonly expected that the classroom teachers should best know their student during a given school year. What strikes me is that among these documents it is difficult to get behind the genre of the language used to describe students’ strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. Quite often there is no voice of the child — it exemplifies an adult text attempting to assess the needs of the young learner. Teachers often choose their comments from a list of possibilities — often they are strongly encouraged to do so by administrators, as it promotes “consistency” of reporting across the grades — but even within these parameters of language, I sense a subjectivity that slips away from this standardized writing. I sometimes wonder if parents have the same problem as I in trying to pick out something particularly personal about their child among a list of seemingly
generic language. After reading enough of these forms it is possible to discern a range of
writing styles (or should I say language preferences) that may or may not reveal a
relationship between student and teacher. I ask myself why the majority of the comments
strike me as a series of dry, formal sentences often leading to a more congenial, “Good
luck next year!” or “Have a great summer!” I surmise that this overall tone is the result
of a need for convenience. Some may suggest this is the unavoidable result of a search for
an objective voice to evaluate a child’s abilities in school. The phrases can also be
devoid of the first person. As a secondary classroom teacher, I often feel myself floating
above the terminology, disconnecting myself from the student via a comment that
addresses them distantly: “The student has displayed . . .”

C. De-contextualized Dialogue

This kind of language creates a muted tone, whether a comment of evaluation is
one of admonishment, concern, praise or congratulation. Some language mentions a
child’s name in a way that somehow removes the teacher from a grounded connection to
a shared role in learning, implying that the child is the sole participant in his or her
schooling. This explains why many teachers opt for comments of their own making. I
ponder why I should feel compelled to use aloof comments when I participate in and
witness so many of the meaningful relationships that teachers establish with students.
The language often underplays the relationship with adults and emphasizes how the child
interacts with selected skill areas, almost personifying the activities of the classroom as
though the student walks through things on his own. The overall tone of a student file is
of this kind as well; often written in the third person, the passive voice comments on the abilities, behaviours and attitudes of children, perhaps in relation to classmates, but lacks reference to teaching grounded in and reflecting on an enriching adult-child relationship. By "relationship," I mean my comfort level with the student, including to what degree I have come to know the child and make my pedagogic intentions clear to him or her. This is one area where the texts of the file begin to diverge, particularly if we compare the comments from different school years.

In addition to these mandatory forms, there might be summer program evaluations of various kinds as well as evidence of contact with agencies inside or outside of the educational sphere. Here begins my sense of discontinuity – or, in Barthes’ terms, “fracture” and “erasure” – when viewing the paperwork. Yet, the unifying genre is one of detachment and objectivity that seems to reach for legitimacy by choosing language as neutral and as removed as possible from the writer’s relationship with the child.

“Double-voiced discourse,” to use Bakhtin’s own description of an element of dialogism, is exemplified by a dependence upon competing, conflicting voices. I continue to write through a struggle to find an academic voice that allows me to articulate the interests, fears and inspiration of my school experiences. For me, the forms of the file, and many of the comments therein, are trapped in a feigned neutrality that often takes the reader further from knowing the child in the learning context. These generic codes and comments are dialogic in the sense that they fail to convince me that I am reading and hearing an utterly clinical voice. Traces of a beneficent adult are evident in the writing no matter how objectified the words chosen to go into print. The writers display the
habits of a monologic voice because they “objectively” fill in spaces on pertinent school district documents. I know that most often the writer does personally care for the child’s well-being, and this makes these writings profoundly contradictory for me. Meanwhile, the papers of a file exist as a growing dialogue in search of an audience. The recommendations in the writing, for example, expose an earnest attempt to personalize a learning program or make specific suggestions for the child, but many times this language is couched within the context of a bureaucratic genre. This official “otherness” of the bureaucracy, prevalent in schools, is the kind of intertextuality we should try to demystify. My attempt at revealing and disempowering this kind of language involves proposing a challenging but generative intertextuality for education. These confidential texts, directed towards assisting the child, stream discussion into professional evaluations and away from hopes and fears of a more personal nature. The collection has a superficial textual interrelationship, and often nothing more. The aftermath of a reading places me in a space of query similar to Barthes’ (1982) in Japan:

The unknown language, of which I nonetheless grasp the respiration, the emotive aeration, in a word the pure significance, forms around me, as I move a faint vertigo, sweeping me into it artificial emptiness, which is consummated only for me: I live in the interstice, delivered from any fulfilled meaning. How did you deal with the language? Subtext: How did you satisfy that vital need of communication? (p. 9).

I add to this: how am I to contribute to this discourse on/of/by/for a child? Where and how do I find my place in its supposed objectivity, and find a way to address the
child, no, a child? In closing the file and returning it alphabetically to the file cabinet, I am reminded that the information will always be missing one extremely important variable. I must remain aware of whether I may or may not develop a teacher-student relationship with the child. That it is a conscious choice informs how a student will react to my instruction, and ultimately, if he or she will engage in the voices and texts of the classroom.

**D. Figure of a Child in Paper**

Roughly seventy percent of the children in my current school have contact with a provincial Ministry of Families and Social Services counselor or social worker. This gives them a special designation in the system of classification established by the Ministry of Education. They are flagged as students in need of contact with a counselor to help them adjust to the demands of school. Gardner Elementary is fortunate in having a Ministry of Social Services counselor situated in the school. This status adds to the file's combination of paperwork and an array of texts, writing styles and voices that weave together a picture of adult contact with a child designated in need of extra support. The compilation strikes me as a particularly powerful example of a shifting educational intertext. It contains a quality of gesture, agitation and flow that takes us beyond the transience of the child’s family or the number of school staff who may handle the file. The number of forms collected over a few years can be truly intimidating. As a fluid and evolving text, the file represents a heteroglossia of voices that have had a range of contact
(some extremely brief) with the student, in ways ephemeral yet central to how the school system attempts to meet individual child needs.

Bakhtin (1981) writes of heteroglossia (from the Greek combination of *hetero* "other" and *glot* "tongue or voice") as language containing many voices, including one's own. To my eyes, the forms of the file represent various voices at play, because they contain language that is attempting to encapsulate a relationship with a child while showing the unsuitability of objectified words to help us see the human side of the learner. Inevitably, the file becomes the ubiquitous text that generally follows a student wherever she or he goes. The lifespan of a file in a school district entails a complex schedule of appearances and reappearances that only a bureaucracy of impressive scale could justify in the context of sudden periods of intensive reading followed by extended dormancy. The file shows how levels of institutional discourse are potentially intimidating for anyone who attempts to read in order to take in the whole of the file contents. My experience has been that it is a challenging text to integrate into my relationship with a child, but the file was never designed as anything other than a container of documents. It allows itself to be opened (fractured) at any given page as one might delve into a confidential journal or scrapbook. The reader may take one document as a whole, of course, but this is a risky tactic if certain criteria are missing. I often find myself searching for the one writing which will be the most illuminating. Will that be in the most recent school year? Perhaps not, since I approach a form (and inevitably, the forms of a file as a whole) with an intertextual reading habit that means I am aware of
which kinds of documents have been useful to me in previous files. It follows that I prioritize the importance of certain papers over others.

**E. Sifting Through a Hierarchy of Voices**

My awareness of the status of documentation represents a sense of a hierarchy of professionalism serving as a subtext to who has most thoroughly evaluated the needs of the child. That is, readers recognize which writing collected in a file is either (a) most representative of a child’s experience; or (b) clearly assesses a child’s needs. When a school is struggling to teach a child, the entire collection of a file seems like it is full of gaps created by adults trying to help a developing student. In this hierarchical view of paperwork, an outside professional’s evaluation of a child can take precedence over the words of staff members who have a more established relationship with the student in the classroom. My view of these collected writings inspires me to wonder what Bakhtin would make of all of the converging voices and texts in such a file. I suspect he would be interested in the reasons for certain kinds of language and documents taking precedence over others. There is something of the dialogic, of honouring certain genres over others, as I think back on the files I have sifted over for a glimpse into how to address a child’s needs.

One anecdote I am reminded of is how a class of students reacts in varying, sometimes highly personal ways following a teacher’s reading of a novel. Perhaps they are interested by the tone of the writing, or by the inflexion of the reader’s voice. It may be a word or event that captures their attention. Others may be simply too tired at this
stage of the day, and barely able to follow the narrative. This is a not an uncommon gathering around a single story. Intertextuality comes into play in how the teacher is able to lead into the story, tie into previous knowledge of the students, choose a novel appropriate for their age and skill level, and so forth.

Following a class brainstorm activity, an intertextual approach considers the history of a word, but also the contextual habits of a concept like “culture.” I hear my voice in an intermediate classroom as mixing with the sound of shuffling feet and other body movements behind me as chalk moves across the blackboard to reveal seven letters:

Cwl-twre/

We’re beginning to see it is a complex word. The root is Latin, from cultus, meaning “care.” Keep in mind “care” as you learn more about the different sides of culture. This is a word that can apply to humans, a person, plants, and even bacteria. (Lee, if it’s the washroom you want, wait until I’m finished with these instructions.) All right everyone, please find and write down an example of each of the possible definitions with the help of your dictionary or textbook, and then we’ll discuss how each might be used. For those who finish early, consider this question: ‘What is meant by a cultured person?’ Questions? (What is it that you don’t understand, Kevin?)
Note that this approach to learning a new word creates the potential for the discussion to cut across disciplines so that we allow students to take responsibility for some of their own future construction of knowledge. On one level the approach is interdisciplinary as well as intertextual, but it is also introduced with a very intertextual brainstorm that includes as many of the class voices as possible. One of the most important tasks in this kind of activity is to begin to walk through shifting categories with students. It is daunting to consider various forms of a word. It is less intimidating, however, to pursue an environment of discussion and writing that values the importance of words while acknowledging that they slide through genres and texts with the residue of where they have last been written and read. It is not a question of nailing down a definition, but of looking at the staying power of certain language habits. Far from limiting and confounding, this kind of language slipperiness allows us to engage words on a plane of intertextuality that reflects our own search for a distinct voice.

Back in my small room in the elementary school, Cyrus and I engage in a sentence game of shifting cards and demonstrate how any combination of the proper noun, verb and subject fit together. Silly sets of three cards ("the spider drinks cola at the circus") lead to laughter, combined with pleasure in the unpredictability of the structure he has warmed to. He wants to create more sentences and he can read and write them with growing confidence. When I start to ask more and more questions about the cards, and the combinations he has made, we step into longer descriptions of the event. I see him reaching back for stories he has heard, cutting and pasting in his mind, while hoping to be as humorous as possible. At times he comes up with entirely new mini-plots for the
choices he has made, and the activity becomes a mix of old and new texts, forming highly individualistic, intertextual stories. I think of the many obstacles he faces (internal and externally imposed interruptions). I then begin to realize that it is the relationship he will form with language that takes precedence over what the file of information has to offer. It is interesting that this relationship is not represented in any substantial way by the contents of “his” file. Similarly, I continually learn how to conduct myself in classroom situations as I balance which texts and voices from the past carry me into future relationships with my colleagues and students.

Reflection: Signatures of Experience

For many students, the basic biographical data and a series of annual evaluation reports comprise all or most of the information in their school file. In an inner-city school like the one in which I teach, however, these obligatory forms of a school system are only a partial introduction to the student’s history within the educational system. For example, if a child has received any extra support or attention following a teacher’s request to assess social, emotional or academic difficulties, a host of documents requesting contact with specialists will likely follow. This process may take the child to staff connected to the school system, but often brings him or her into contact with other government departments such as the Health or Family Services Ministries. Many of the authors of the documents will not have seen most or all of the writings that compose the collection, and yet each makes a contribution to “knowing” the student. Who the student is as a young personality is more easily constituted by the many spoken and unspoken
actions outside of a rather im/personal file. As adults, we treat the file as confidential within the educational system, assuming it is personally relevant or representative.

My intent is not to argue what constitutes a well-written document. Nor am I concerned with how to collect or view a complete set of pertinent evaluations that will or will not help those ultimately responsible for working with the child in a learning environment. It nevertheless strikes me that the file is intended to provide a reliable composite of a child located in the school system. Yet, as a resource teacher, I have learned that no amount of documentation can reveal all of the facets a child brings to the learning environment. As a teacher, I look to the judgements of professionals to help me unravel the child, knowing it is difficult to know immediately how these will inform my future practice. These papers are indelibly intertextual to me, full of institutional meanings and catchphrases, revealing a great deal about how I interact with my students and colleagues as I balance a professional and private pedagogy. My fear is that I am conditioned to look for a monologue within the file. In fact, the contents are a polyphony of voices and opinions, traces from the past, that simultaneously struggle to catch a glimpse of how a young person’s journey through the system might become more personally meaningful.

I encounter various signatures in the file of a child like Cyrus, ranging from his kindergarten and primary teacher (one and the same in the small community he was in at the time) to a growing number of specialists. These include the following: (1) a school district psychologist; (2) a district speech pathologist; and (3) a pediatrician from a provincial health centre for children. The latter confirmed a Fetal Alcohol Effects
condition that in my experience is a less physically obvious form of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, though diagnosis still involves a checklist of severe traits. Somehow all of the voices represented by the file contents, the school district and other agencies in contact with a child, form a continuous attempt to reach the needs of the student, but it is impossible to ignore that there are gaps galore in this linguistic, bureaucratic carnival. It is difficult to locate the voice of a child in certain areas of a school, and the file is an example of this situation. Who the student is becoming may more easily be constituted by informally spoken or unspoken texts, rather than the words contained in an im/personal (not sacrosanct or invested by the individual) file of documentation. As an adult I acknowledge it is a confidential collection, but to what extent does that make it personally relevant or representative of the child’s ongoing education? I view these papers as unavoidably intertextual and full of meaning for the ways in which we educate ourselves about our students, and consequently approach our students’ potential to learn. This community of paperwork as the personal education file is but part of an intertextual framework underpinning a child’s “progress” through the system, and as haphazard and human as the variety of voices that converge in dialogue in any community. Perhaps the file’s arbitrary nature is representative of a child’s approach to knowledge and the inescapably informal qualities of a life’s education.
Part II: Escaping a Figurative Allure

A. Intertextual Teacher

If I were to write of my continuing journey into educational research in a style truly representative of what I have experienced since my days enrolled in a teacher-training program, the endless variety of genres and approaches would be considered at best “non-traditional.” In other words, it would entail a search for any text I have consciously read for knowledge or pleasure in the past 14 years. There is no firm boundary between the two modes, and I would be happy if my students some day feel the same way. In my experience the lines have always been blurred: my earliest memories of scanning historical sketches were certainly enjoyable, or I would not have taken the initiative to read them. I was gaining knowledge by reading them, but a distinct motivation for entering a text is not always clear.

My notion of an intertextual teacher is one who is willing to incorporate various experiences of students through a thoughtful approach to the literature and textbooks of the school. In addition, I want to expand the notions of what a text is so as to include more voices and seeming ambiguity. This involves viewing the school experience as a text that is “read” in many different ways by those who contribute to the learning environment and resulting experiences at an elementary school. The intertextual teacher is conscious of the ways in which schooling and education are re-written. The blackboard is not the only palimpsest in the room. I witness elementary teachers as they effectively, thoughtfully, re-visit important voices and text for the sake of our students.
Primary teaching has also shown me examples of how open youngsters are to re-reading a book. This creates new ways of interacting around text, forging school relationships. These conversations between teacher and student incorporate the surrounding communities we bring to the building. The polyphony of voices at a school includes those captured in books as sure as those echoing down the hallways on any given day. The texts of the school are also more than simply those books designated as Ministry-approved; we learn from sources that range from the voices we hear to the text that we see in so many different venues. They come together on school days, a staff and student polyphony of language that has the ability to teach as "text" any one of us dwelling in the school atmosphere.

B. Intertextual Reading

Undertaking a collection of all the sources with which I have come into contact would be a daunting task – an impossible one – requiring a return to works of academic writing, as well as re-visits to a vast number of works in the margins of more rationalist studies. This would include literature, poetry, art, story-telling, ritual and pop culture. I thoroughly enjoy the act of reading. I frequently model this enthusiasm in silence or by reading with students. A return to many of these texts would be a pleasure, but just as many would be a difficult re-visit in ways similar to my re-opening of students’ files. The collection would in fact include my sifting through these files in the last few years. Some readings would cause me to wonder why I had read them in the first place, while others would hold more for me upon a second or third reading by revealing thoughts and
events I had forgotten or had not appreciated previously. I think of my habit of delving into academic articles and books by sifting through from middle or even the end of the text. The fragments that initially catch my eye are read and re-read linearly, but I choose my own course through the author's organization of the book, often not reading all or, at least not the entire writing, from beginning to end. I allow parts of the text to sit with me, open to where this leads into other areas of the whole. In this way I develop my own pattern of understanding for the author's themes and arguments. To my mind this is a form of intertextual – and perhaps, as well, hypertextual (Mai, 1991, p. 49) – reading, particularly when I am weighing the author's ideas against what I have already encountered in the academy, in schools, or in my personal life. In the author's established approach of citing various writers as the text weaves its ways through a thesis, I also see the obvious markings of an intertextual representation of ideas. Johnson (1987) describes an intertextual movement between readers in texts and readers in societies that connects histories and memories:

In disciplinary terms we form a ground usually covered by literary approaches to one more familiar to historical or sociological competences, but the common new element here is the ability to handle a mass of co-existing determinations, operating at many different levels . . . In everyday life, textual materials are complex, multiple, overlapping, co-existent, juxtaposed, in a word, "inter-textual." If we use a more agile category like discourse, indicating elements that cut across different texts, we can say that all readings are also "inter-discursive" (p. 67).

My discursive relationship with texts of school is indelibly marked by influences I have encountered throughout my life. This means that I will have expectations for certain
genres, and also that as a teacher I need to be aware of the milieu in which a text is read and the voices we choose to accompany the reading. My interest has also been in the figures of comparison we choose, and how we assume they will affect our audience in pluralistic, universal ways. What follows is an example of my encounter with a reading that I found both intertextual and non-metaphorical.

C. A Novel’s Non/Figurative Intertext

I recently re-read the novel *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje (1992). I rarely set out to re-read texts except for scholarly work that is either captivating or too complex to fully understand the first time through. Because of my preoccupation with metaphor, metonymy and difference, Ondaatje’s prose was revelatory for me in new ways. The combination of history, romance, and the conflicting personalities that float among his locations captured something in me that brought together many of the themes with which I have been grappling in my writing. Here I place myself amidst a Barthian “jouissance” and a Bakhtinian “carnival.” I knew I would enjoy the text again, but was not prepared for the force of its pull and how I wrapped my heart – the spirit of my historical and amorous sensibilities – around so many aspects of his characters’ actions. Perhaps it was sympathy for a part of each character that I connected to some part of my own life and personality. The descriptions of the five characters (three men, two women) who are more fully developed than the others led me to experience a deepening sense of heartfelt concern for who they were to become by novel’s end. I was also gathered into the milieu that surrounded the interrelationship of uncertainty and tension, a palpable
texture that brought the five (four, physically – one is present only in flashbacks) together as one force within the confines of a crumbling Italian monastery at the end of the Second World War. Of the many profound ways the novel spoke to me, I will elaborate only upon the method by which the author portrays the interdependencies of these characters.

Ultimately, the way in which I consciously re-examined one of Ondaajte’s central metaphors was a personally intertextual experience: how the characters, brought closely together by the circumstances of history during an intense period of cohabitation and co-existence, saw their personalities collide, chafe, and leave indelible marks on each other. Yet, Ondaatje chose a path of non-reconciliation and for me avoided a play upon intellect, love, or other traditional routes to a conclusion. He chose to take the reader beyond and outside of a sweeping saga of time, place, and relationships. I mention here a lack of intellectual resolution because I am struck by how his choice of metaphor in the final section did satisfy my sensibility towards metonymic forces surrounding his comparison. As I will explain, it is this displacement from the metaphoric that allowed me to experience the novel’s conclusion in a personally influential way.

**Interlude Two: Dialogue of a Child**

Cyrus is a pre-emergent reader and speller with a basic knowledge of phonics that helps him to break down a store of a few hundred sight-words. He is a meticulous hand writer of beautiful letters. He executes them very deliberately, though he has increased his speed with the encouragement of his classroom teacher and me, thankfully without sacrificing too much of the hard-won style. He is proud of his handwriting, and
tends to enjoy the success that activities in this area offer; however, he needs to move into higher level work if he is to make progress toward the curriculum goals at his grade level. As his reading and writing increase in speed and fluency, he is moving beyond the aesthetic goals to a personal learning style centered on meaning making. At best, he still functions at a Grade Two level, not unusual at our school, as many students are performing two or three grade years below where they normally would be placed given their chronological age. He is a child who has one of the most consistently enjoyable personalities in the school, from the way he greets well-known staff members to his attempts to inject jokes into a lesson on long division. His smile for me is often an acknowledgement that we are co-conspirators in keeping the pursuit of knowledge a light topic. I know that at times his language play is giddiness from a profound lack of sleep, but as text in the making at our school, he is one of my great daily pleasures. I forgive him his disruptions to the routine while admonishing him to stay on task or get to bed at a more reasonable hour. His facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language as he attempts to control when he will participate are, for me, part of an educational text surrounding the learning limits of a ten-year old facing physical, emotional and environmental challenges to his learning. How he interweaves this living text with the educational/situational text and the text of memories and concepts he brings to school all constitute his own intertextual becoming.

Cyrus is the slowest reader in a small group that visits my room, but he takes a great deal of pride in the empowerment of completing, understanding and enjoying text. The challenge for our teaching staff on a curricular level is to find and use age-
appropriate materials for these intermediate students who are essentially showing the skills (but often not the mental age or interests) of primary students. He loves to relate stories of his daily life in our city and in the north of the province. Many of these anecdotes come from his upbringing in a small community, stories that seem to remain strongly imbedded in his mind, despite his other battles with memorizing schoolwork and retaining concepts. At times he shows a love of learning and a determination to succeed that leave me in awe of his patience with his disease, full of optimism for his future. He does remarkably well, considering the challenges he faces in different areas of his life. This is partly a testimony to his will to remember happy moments in the past, while finding it so difficult to forget the sadness. The frustrations with life – lack of food, rare meetings with his father, and a crowded home – come to the surface when fatigue or hunger overtakes him. While he shows the amazing resiliency of childhood in usually bouncing back from a slow start to the day, I am saddened to witness Cyrus increasingly sensing and relating to some of the harsher realities of the school neighbourhood and how his life weighs unfairly upon him. The school is a haven for him, but by mid-afternoon the inseparable and familiar pair of brothers is on its own again to weave its way through more than one neighbourhood.

I acknowledge that students’ daily home-school routine has an influence on how I view my work as a teacher, reinforcing that I must mediate my frustrations with family or community dynamics that may thrust children into a precarious upbringing. As a teacher I must remain optimistic about Cyrus’ chances at establishing a life of fulfillment while approaching his academic weaknesses with a pragmatism that allows me to meet his
needs. This attempt to maintain a positive, focused state of mind in the school setting is an intertextual balancing act in itself. It requires moving beyond the label of “inner-city,” while confronting the realities of the child’s voice and skills in a confluence of communities. Admittedly, it does seem as though Cyrus has been cut adrift in an intimidating area of the city, his brother his only consistent companion. Despite his apparent learning disabilities, he is growing up far faster than I feel a child should be required to, and yet there is a resilience in children that allows them to persevere. Also there are families that maintain a loving environment, despite ups and downs. My reaction to Cyrus’ struggle therefore, should not take me from the goals of our classes together. These goals must be placed in the context of my assumptions and reactions to what I see, and cannot be based upon a walk through an entire day with Cyrus. I want to work through my intertextual idiosyncracies that involve socio-economic, historical, and other factors as a way to see that my feelings are not only uncertain, but as much a part of my past experience as Cyrus’ current state. At times, he is saying in thoughtless words and careless actions in my presence that “I’m just a kid trying to have a little fun.” On many occasions his defeated body movements express the fundamental issue for him, a facial expression silently asking, “Why is this happening to me?” I shudder to imagine how powerfully societal forces of underprivilege sometimes provoke this 10-year-old boy to display resignation at his predicament, but my innate teacher’s desire is to return to a hopeful view of what Cyrus and I are becoming in our school. This is the world with which I am familiar, the setting wherein we have established our relationship and relationships with others, and despite un/certainty in both of our lives, we are integral
parts of the whole constituting Gardner Elementary. The sounds, activities and memories
of the school, returning daily to influence me in unpredictable ways, carry me hopefully
into each teaching/learning day.

D. Metaphor, Metonymy and Uncertainty

The final chapter of *The English Patient* begins with a metaphorical rumination
on memory:

Now where does he sit as he thinks of her? These years later.
A stone of history skipping over the water, bouncing up so
she and he have aged before it touches the surface again and
sinks (p. 299).

In this passage memory acts as arbitrator, leaving communication – partially a
limited oral discourse between Kirpal and Hana – as an understated foreboding of how
the survivors of war carry on with their lives. They have an almost physical sense that
their own histories will be irrefutably influenced by the weeks they have spent together.
This condition of past meeting future involves more than only metaphoric description in
that we cannot compare the experience of one character with another. The characters feel
the pull of history in different ways. Ondaatje constructs a conclusion of no easy
solutions or comfortable soliloquies, but of deferred remembrance, uncertainly
introspective and swayed by impenetrable forces of (non)memory. This forms a
strikingly beautiful ending to me, but with questions about the use of symbolism. The
reason I have chosen this text is because it represents in a number of ways how metaphor
overshadows metonymy. If you will, this metaphoric dominance – whether intended by
the author or not – creates a situation whereby the prevailing doxa of literature win over our senses. His words appeal to me in ways that do not allow for the open sign of narrative and as a result shut down the potential of the paradox to engage the reader.

The first point I would like to highlight is that the historical, psychological, and emotional portrayal of Ondaatje’s words constitute more than highly personal ramblings. The experience of learning through this novel is one that will forever influence my work, just as writing about the importance of my reaction is also pedagogically reaffirming. Secondly, incorporating as many of my past readings as possible (recalling how they constitute many texts considered in and out of the scholarly community) would comprise a set of references as important, influential and productively intertextual as they would if my reading were to remain confined to educational theory. Speaking strictly intertextually, any list of references is a far-ranging collection of voices, but – and my choice of tense here is key – I am attempting to align myself with studies that seek to expand the established boundaries of more rationalist, possibly essentialist, writings.

As popular literature, few novels attain the critical and public accolades that The English Patient has enjoyed. Sumara’s (1996) description of incorporating this novel into a literature circle of educators is intriguing and helpful. The research group explored personally insightful moments of the literary and pedagogical, revealing how influential Ondaatje’s work has been. A later article (Laidlaw & Sumara, 2000) reminds me of the power of Ondaatje’s reference to a commonplace book used by a character in the novel. This “intratextual” book within a novel becomes a structure where multiple histories converge, revealing past, present and future possibilities (p. 10). It is hard not to draw a
parallel to the characters themselves. I would describe the dynamics of history, localism, and personalities as influencing how I shape any rereading or rewriting of this novel.

Ondaatje skillfully intertwines difference with history. It is how I react to difference with uncertainty that interests me here. My sense is that many readers would react with a universal emotion assuming all of our personal histories are ultimately a struggle with difficult events that unexpectedly play upon our memories. I have described in a previous strand my interest in how metaphor and the pervasiveness of symbolism (a comfortable, pluralistic, universal variety) has overshadowed the metonymic trope to the extent where we more easily fall back upon language of comparison. Rather than exploring the often difficult prose of knowing/not knowing, non-linear temporalities, and inconclusiveness, classroom writing often attempts to replicate a canonical model. The metaphor/metonymy opposition offers as yet undiscovered ways to teach educators about the self-division within the pedagogue, a state of paradox requiring writings that move outside of the metaphor’s totality of identity to more problematic, complex educational research. In writing about my school/ing, I am getting closer to being able to articulate and experience “the power of voice.” I believe part of this lies in asking questions of my students, rather than talking to them constantly. In the past I have not been willing to relinquish some of the myths of teaching that convince me to honour the decorum of the “profession.” I am attempting to return to some of the places where I have learned, as a way of un-learning, certain universal attitudes about knowledge that my students may not share. It is not an easy decision to relate these stories to my students, nor is it always possible to see my own schooling
successes and failures as educational. Ondaatje’s positioning of personalities in conflict within and without helps me relate to the perspective that Edgerton describes as a value of rereading and rewriting. This is a writing habit infused “in its possibility of reconstructing a place (historically, psychologically, geographically) through which I might examine my present relations to others, to myself, to place – relations having a direct bearing on my teaching notions of knowledge” (p. 145). Edgerton relates how her experience with one novel has raised issues of desire, guilt, privilege and domination that continue to inform her relations with students.

**E. A Novel’s Duality: Ambiguity in Conclusion**

My purpose at this juncture of concepts – metaphor, metonymy and uncertainty – is to examine the ways in which I read the concluding chapter of *The English Patient* upon my recent return to it. How did the prose speak to me in ways that might be called intertextual? Ondaatje’s choice of a metaphor near the conclusion positioned the wartime-sapper/peacetime-doctor Kirpal as a voice of the memories developed by the aphrodisiac-like collision of the book’s events. My enthrallment with these characters comes through in how I found myself equally swayed by their individual attempts at ameliorating personal and larger histories. These sympathies extended to David Caravaggio as well, arguably the least likable of the group. I was struck by the masculine and feminine attributes of each character in ways that I cannot entirely know or clearly articulate; I could sense them as I was increasingly persuaded by the complexity of the person becoming. I moved closer to a personal understanding of the utter loss of control
of those things for which we have a deep passion, and I grew increasingly involved in the narrative. From a Bakhtinian perspective, I was drawn into the heteroglossia of vocal difference. The power of their depictions took me back to moments of my life, those memories that unpredictably come and go from my thoughts. These are my far-from-definitive musings.

KIP – duty, loyalty, difference, disillusionment

PATIENT (COUNT ALMASY) – loss, lingua, geography, place

CARAVAGGIO – regret, love, intimacy, treachery

HANA – death, loss, duty, displacement

The concluding chapter of the novel presents us with a metaphor of a stone skipping on water. The ripples created are likened to stirred memories that we cannot hope to control or know the course or destination of. Kirpal (returned to India, he is now “Kirpal,” no longer the “Kip” of the Italian scenes) experiences this remembrance after the war in a brief moment. A brief memory of Hana flashes through his mind during a day when he is consumed by his roles as father, husband and doctor. The flash for Kirpal is as though something “has brought the stone out of the water and allowed it to move within the air towards the hill town in Italy . . . . This is a limited gift he has somehow been given, as if the camera’s film reveals her, but only her, in silence” (Ondaatje, 1992, p. 300). Beyond a debate of whether this is strictly a metaphoric or metonymic employment, or possibly both, it is important for me that the stone is the transporter
across time. The stone’s metaphoric aspects end here, at least in terms of how I access
the events of the novel. Kirpal is experiencing a metonymic moment in the same way
that the description of place and memory take us as readers beyond a comparison of
events in our lives and haphazardly enter our thoughts. This is metonymy at work – not
as a trope, but as an intertextual mode – because this experience takes me on a course and
composition of the memories that return me to my own life. In contiguous fashion, my
memories of working with Cyrus are a reminder that it is ultimately beyond my ability to
predict how the knowledge that has remained with me from lived experience will surface
in the future. Fragments of seemingly simple chronology return as linear pieces but in
non-linear recall just as Kirpal/Kip testifies for us. When I stop to reflect upon the
importance of the connection between intertext and temporality, I sense the possible
profundity of these in my own past, present and future. While Kirpal’s metaphor is a deft
usage of a master trope, my reaction to it takes me to the margins of symbolism to
locations where I begin to feel challenged by the histories at play in my life. I am
subsequently inspired to wonder how the other protagonists would look back on the
relationships they had with each other. Metaphor is not the only way to articulate how
events return to us in future years. For me the next step is to acknowledge that metaphor
and metonymy often work together, and possibly forge a relationship that is an
unforgettable way of intertwining individual experiences across language, distance and
time.

I also wonder – not only for those wholly or partially unfamiliar with the act of
skipping stones – how Ondaatje might have expressed Kirpal’s mental state without
resorting to metaphor. How might such a writing have influenced me differently? Would it have been more, or less, powerful? When skipping stones, I need to search the shoreline for a rock of suitable weight and shape, and cannot be certain that if I throw, the state of the water and the wind speed and direction will allow me to enjoy a satisfactory launch across the water. The wind, water, and my mind should probably best be calm to produce a good throw. Finally, I experience either a satisfying sensation of accomplishment should the rock glide sleekly over (not entirely in or on) the water’s surface. I might also continue to throw stones based upon this success, or continue in the belief that it is a good opportunity for testing our fortune. Similarly, an unskilled throw or poorly chosen rock might cause some to stop throwing, while a more determined person might continue until she or he achieved a satisfying skip. Of course, each of these scenarios could be made into a metaphor and applied to a variety of situations around learning, practice and perseverance. In attempting to view the act of stone skipping separately from symbolism, I am reflecting upon a metonymic uncertainty in my readings. My depiction moves from a novel’s metaphor into reality, and my purpose in so doing is to maintain a thread that runs through my argument. Metaphor, while pleasant and familiar, has not always served to complicate issues that I want to delve into with the uncertainty of trying to explore the importance of an author’s textual fragments.

Ondaatje centres his conclusion upon the forces continually influencing our lives, but he does so in non-metaphoric language after he uses the breech of a familiar metaphor to re-introduce a key theme in the novel. I find it more challenging (and interesting) to pursue how he describes Kirpal’s thoughts of Hana after the stone-skipping device. He
doubted his decision to leave her correspondence unacknowledged, and to move on with other life choices. There are aspects of Hana’s character that he cannot completely let go of, that will

always reflect a present stage of her character. It seems every month or two he witnesses her this way, as if these moments of revelation are a continuation of the letters she wrote to him for a year, getting no reply, until she stopped sending them, turned away by his silence (p. 300).

Again, finding a metaphor or metonym in the passage is not the point. This seeming lack of resolution, combined with a resolve to continue his responsibilities, is for me a powerful juxtapositioning of the heart. Kirpal’s remembrance raises many issues that potentially launch readers into their own locations of self-re/discovery. It may well be that metaphor has had the illusory effect of allowing us to think that we somehow evade or position ourselves outside of history in order to view the influence of experiences and events objectively. The difficulty with such a view is that it does not help us to make further advances towards discussing issues of difficulty until we bear in mind the part that history has to play in forming the tensions surrounding difference. Edgerton (1996) surmises that this is ultimately a conservative move indicating an act of hopelessness, of abandoning social and political action and retreating into self. As she points out, leaping outside of recorded official history might lead to a productive self-conscious turn at a powerful unwritten history. This is part of the paradoxical process of living with and between difference, so that we avoid traps that have us stuck with a static image or mantle of the teacher who must maintain a sense of infallibility in order to garner respect from students. Approaching a connection to students with humility is advantageous, but I
want to strive to be an example of a lifelong learner inside and outside of myself. A response is not always needed so much as some reflective silence. Cyrus, as so many of the children I come to know, will continue as a memory of the present for me, though I will picture him growing up, his laugh taking on a deeper timbre among future teachers and classmates.

Leading a class through challenging topics involves confronting certain teaching insecurities. No matter how I remind myself to be more inclusive, I often find that I slip into the expectations I have created. This is also the result of students being conditioned to view the teacher as an instrument of the curriculum (not as a person who might need to shop at the local grocery store). As a teacher I want to be mindfully aware — watchful in a way described by van Manen (1986) — of who I am becoming and how I can positively, pedagogically increase the opportunities for making connections with students. This, I believe, comes when I articulate and explore the complicated relations among staff and students that I experience both personally and professionally within an educational system. I think of Grumet’s (1988) description of the reproduction of the female teaching population. As she relates, North American elementary schools have long been spaces of overwhelming female teaching staff led by male administrators. My experience in moving from the secondary to elementary teaching level causes me to wonder how my difference affects my understanding of school/ing relations. There is more to be learned about being bodily mindful as a teacher from educators who have experience in a variety of grades. This sensibility also requires me to attempt to participate in educational research in a way with which I am comfortable and inspired. “The elements are so
Child as Intertext

F. Child as Elusive Pedagogue

The carnivalesque file, to borrow from Bakhtin, reveals in various written forms the challenges of meeting the needs of students and communicating with colleagues. It represents linguistic and other difference within our profession. This dissertation is an
attempt to represent some of the voices I use in my work, and others that I perceive influencing my teaching. As constructions of my own, they become part of my voice of teaching. This voice offers my perception of the differing experiences I have had in classrooms and the conflicting views of a child whom I hope to help. Also present are the variations in how I stem emotions to help me find an objective voice for an official document.

In December I learned that Cyrus was sexually abused while visiting one of the adult drop-in centers (for recovering addicts, single-mothers and others) that his family frequents. Aside from further evidence in the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development’s case file documenting his parental neglect, the incident has had a devastating effect on me. My immediate reaction took me back to when the boys arrived at our school. Not long after their arrival I met them on a bus heading for a downtown movie. They were carefree then – even though in my remembrance slightly out of control, with mom and auntie at the front of the bus. I did not know at the time I would soon speak with their aunt on matters of children and custody. My mind now flashes closer to the present, and how after the recent horrifying news of Cyrus’ abuse I wanted to drive this boy, his brothers and sister and just keep going until we hit a small town that might become a new oasis for us all. Yet, I was somehow not shocked at the news of his betrayal, as though I sensed his personal violation coming, almost felt an accessory to it – this horrible incident occurring in only the second year that I have known him. My fatalism threatened to overshadow what we could accomplish together at school. Last school year it was I who made the original call to the Ministry of Children and Family
Development. Various staff began to agree on the alarming state of Cyrus' sleep deprivation, hygiene and potential malnutrition.

This provincial government Ministry wields substantial powers: what other government agency could possibly consider taking our children from us at a moment's notice, with no chance of a full hearing for as many as six to nine months? This entails surprising discretionary decision-making. As I mentioned earlier, their aunt fears that her sister's children, like hers, will be removed from the home and placed under protective custody. She told me how she hopes to pitch in as much as she can to avoid this from happening. Cyrus' aunt has other demands in her life. My relating these circumstances is not a judgement of the parenting involved, but an acknowledgement of what I learn and mentally weigh as a concerned teacher. This reflection causes me to admit that my focus must remain on Cyrus' schooling -- I am not his parent, or a family member. By confronting this I will not abandon hope for him in or out of school. I had not thought through the possible consequences of my original call to the Ministry. I wanted some action, but I wasn't sure what that meant, and was not ready for what I learned of how the "system" works. I was unprepared to process the information imparted to me concerning the entire family or at least any member of the family that was listed in the government computer. Similarly, I was not prepared for the deep-seated, subdued sobbing that met me and shocked me out of my reverie as I returned to the school following the winter break one year. Cyrus and his brother were overtaken with grief at a sad farewell earlier that morning following a brief visit from their father. As we met on the sidewalk, I barely existed for them. Like so many other things, they were sharing and focussing
together at this time of mourning. I have hopes for helping Cyrus to improve basic skills; I coach him soccer, and drive him on occasion to or from school. He insists on the front seat during these times, revealing a real power of persuasion in outtalking older teammates. My image of him continues to be one of an overwhelmingly gentle, humorous and needy child. We will work perhaps with each other in the coming year or at the very least I will see him at school. We will talk and joke as I cajole him into settling down to class. Yet my overwhelming feeling is that there is no sicker, more deflating feeling than knowing a child has been damaged. I continue to reflect upon how this will change me as a parent, a teacher, and a person in a learning environment rife with contradictions. It is a paradoxical emotion that pervades my relationship with him.

Reflection: A Boy One Year Later

Cyrus and his brother have not returned to our school for the new school year. Rumours have circulated among our staff that the boys have been reunited with their father, now in Alaska. A school district in Alaska has requested the boys’ files, and the intertextual collections for both have moved even farther north now, passing ancestral Gwaii Haanas along the northwest Pacific coast. The papers will join the boys in crossing international lines even as they stay close to or remain within the First Nations cultural area of their background. If I remember correctly, they were members of the Eagle clan. Are there totem poles of personal significance where they reside?

The emotions I have concerning Cyrus’ education come down to two wishes – that he is happy with his siblings and father, enjoying a smaller community more than a
large city, and also that I will one day be able to meet with him and again share some lighthearted moments. Presently, I have no information to go on. I would like to see his smile and a look of surprise at how Mr. Russell from Vancouver would care to re-connect after the passing of time. I miss the relationship I had with Cyrus, and I know colleagues who feel the same way about the boys' presence as a tangible influence in our school, now transformed into an absence. Neither of the two states of pedagogical (or maternal/paternal) concern is complete. The memories created join the long list cemented by relationships in the history of Gardner Elementary School. They exist somewhere in the many lasting facets of this building. Students continue to mature as intertexts between relationships, learning, and becoming adults.

If I were to meet Cyrus today, my wish would be to be reassured that he no longer inhabits a dark, overcrowded basement apartment heated by a stovetop. In his new environment, I would like to meet his eyes in the mutual understanding that important relationships endure in the meaningful stories that are created through shared experience. Within these stories are opportunities to share a highly personal connection that can be balanced by public acknowledgement of how to move on positively in life, buoyed by a spirit of hope. Children have an incredible ability to teach this kind of attitude, even amidst trial and tribulation. When I think of Cyrus there is also an anger and sadness that I struggle to bury. This can come over me even as I hear everyday voices and conversations during my teaching day. I must remember that the majority of schooling experiences I have had with Cyrus are positive. Similarly, no metaphor is needed to describe what I experience as I walk around the spaces of the school on a typically busy
day and sense a fleeting reminder of myself as a child, playing on the swings, laughing, listening to the teacher or reading a book. How often do the voices of students take me back to my youth? Should I be concerned about the distance I choose to maintain between their childhood and my own? I am learning more about schooling by continuing to ask questions like these. I look at a photo of myself clutching a kindergarten graduation award (see page 184). Our class spent the first (and optional) year of schooling in a converted basement of a neighbourhood house. Emerging with perfect attendance on a bright morning, a new decade awaited my hopes and desires. I was recently sent a newspaper article describing my former teacher’s retirement after 35 years of cookies, juice and colouring books. Looking at the photo, my eyes are drawn to a snap-on bowtie, plaid sports coat, and well-shorn hair. A gap-toothed smile reminds me of many students I have met. My memories of distant and more recent times are metonymies that somehow inform my pedagogy, forcing a question: Who does the school-aged boy re/present? There are events in my past that I connect with in Cyrus’ upbringing, but I need to also remember the circumstances that have brought us to our school and school/ing on vastly different paths. For now, the sensation of the expanding/contracting gulf between myself and a young Haida boy influences my teaching days and reminds me to continue to learn, to find hope, in my place among children living with resiliency in the inner city.
Figure 2: Kindergarten Graduation. Millidgeville, Saint John, New Brunswick, 1970. Courtesy of the collection of Audrey Anne Russell.
Part I: Intertextual Voices as Image and Reality

Yet with all the various forms of appropriation of the term [intertextuality], one important initial (Kristevian) insight must not be forgotten: that literature is (also) mediated through extra-literary discourses – which constitute the actual challenge for intertextual studies of a distinct kind (Mai, 1991, p. 51).

A. Presence and Absence Amidst Isaac’s Morning

The morning has started with an abrupt pull on warm bed sheets followed by cool air hitting a child’s legs. Isaac’s mother looms over him momentarily, announcing something that always causes him to want to retreat to a quieter part of the bed. He is late for school. There is no time for breakfast. He takes in only part of his mother’s message before he has partially opened his eyes and he watches her housecoat exit through his bedroom door. While noticing that she isn’t dressed for work, it momentarily sinks in that he will be taking the walk to school on his own today. All or most of these details occur as he approaches wakefulness with the speed that only a child can. Shortly after turning over, he considers how quickly he needs to get out of bed to get going, but his eyes instead focus on a poster full of Pokemon characters long-attached to the ceiling directly above him. He recites a reflexive morning habit he picked up over the summer when there was more time to lie in bed, reading the large, colourful phrase under the drawings to himself. The mumble “Gotta Catch ‘Em All,” twice spoken to no one,
breaks the silence of the bedroom and helps propel him out of bed. After a bounce from
the hips aided by the spring of the mattress, he allows his feet to touch the floor nimbly
with a smooth landing.

Intertextual memory: As teacher-writer, I think here of my motivation for this narrative,
what brings me into a child’s home in an effort to understand him more, just as I recall
my own upbringing in a single-parent household.

From this spot, hesitating between bed and dresser, he is conditioned to his
mother’s instructions, and right on cue Isaac’s mother reminds him that he needs to put
on a sweat top with his usual T-shirt. Her voice comes to him from the familiar confines
of the kitchen, the only room with a partial view of the city. Their building is surrounded
by similar high-rise structures, so that few apartments in the area will have an
unobstructed view of anything remotely scenic. This school year Isaac is taking an initial
stab at dressing himself before maternal approval of his wardrobe selection. The criteria
come down to whether he will be (a) warm enough; (b) clean enough, or rather, not too
dirty; and (c) wearing something he hasn’t worn too often in recent days. Attempts to
satisfy this last condition often come down to time pressures, as does the chance to attack
his favourite breakfast cereal before heading out the door. He is unable to distinguish the
days when his mother is exhausted from trying to impress others at another temporary job
from those where she is otherwise preoccupied by the demands of her life. On most
mornings it is his mother’s habit to show more interest in his clothing just as he is
heading for the door. This has become a signal for them all that a day away from the apartment is about to begin.

Thinking of a boy leaving one space of safety for another, I acknowledge the privilege I enjoy in welcoming students with the blessings of their families; I sense a struggle to maintain some equilibrium with the emotions I experience.

Lately he has been trying to remember to grab his class reading bag because, for his teacher, Isaac’s being responsible for remembering his homework is a constant class issue at the end of the day. There is no doubt in Isaac’s mind that Ms. James is kind and fair (she has never done anything to make him think otherwise), but she doesn’t like it if you leave her books at home for too long. This week, an oft-repeated speech before the final bell that verges upon pleading, has been slowing down their departure home. Isaac remembers these moments well because his patience for listening at that time of the school day barely allows him to concentrate on anything except “freedom.” In other words, the timing of Ms. James’ talks is working on at least one of her students. The reading bag is a bigger bother to Isaac than borrowing books from the library. He senses he needs to be more aware of how long he has books in his bag and tries to remember to bring them back each day, but without much success. The responsibility of borrowed books (and bag!) is a challenge and he dreads disappointing his teacher, wanting to please her in any way his at times haphazard home life allows. Nevertheless, he is starting to enjoy the books at the apartment when there is time to
look at them with his mom. Recently Isaac is a little less concerned about the bag because he notices that others in his Grade Three class are also guilty of forgetfulness.

_An intertextual link between student and teacher involves the sharing of responsibility._

_As a teacher, I need to be mindful of what a child can reasonably accomplish, and to make an effort to share some of my classroom responsibilities._

Thoughts of the reading bag float to elsewhere in the apartment as Isaac commences pulling off his pajama pants. He reaches for the underwear his mom has placed on his dresser and glances across the hall as his sister comes to mind. She shares the other bedroom in the apartment with their mother. She must have already left for school. She was very concerned about being on time for her high school’s cafeteria program. So far, the way she describes her year sounds to Isaac more like having a job than going to school, at least for most of her classes. This is his sister’s second year in the bigger school since leaving Isaac’s, and she wants to make a major improvement over last year. As their mom puts it, his sister has no other choice. This year she talks a lot about all of the training she has to do, or at least that is the word Isaac can recall her repeating most days when she comes home from school. This is not a thought Isaac dwells upon for long, but he is clearly inwardly happy that she is much more upbeat than last year.
I want to honour the innate ability of my students to become intertextual weavers, collecting personal links from their lives and connecting them to the texts and voices of the classroom.

His mother’s face is bending closer to him, pulling the hood of his sweatshirt to his forehead and zipping up the front of his raincoat. It strikes him now that people know her by her name, “June”; she recently told Isaac that her father gave it to her. She was once apologetic with Isaac that he had so few opportunities to see his grandfather. At the time of that brief conversation, Isaac acknowledged only to himself that, yes, it would be nice to see his grandfather more often. This is mainly due to the usual lack of attention given to him in the presence of adults, as children are more apt to be ignored in the circles of friends his mother has in the city. He isn’t used to the kind words of his grandfather and his friends at the seniors’ home any time he and his mother manage a visit. Isaac has even gone to their apartment one or two weekends. He is treated to things and made to feel a warm presence among adults that he doesn’t question, enjoying the feeling like a precious, short-lived treat. The people of Isaac’s neighbourhood seem to be in camps of polar opposite attitudes in regard to how they view and treat children. Parents and guardians are either inundated with children in their immediate surroundings, responsible for them to varying degrees within a stressful schedule of co-parenting, or aren’t certain how to conduct themselves comfortably among kids and become the caregiver they would admit in their heart every child needs. For Isaac’s part, it is a matter of negotiating adult-controlled spaces. These are rooms where he not so much knows but senses he will
either be welcome to play with a friend or should keep his visits brief. An instinct sharply attuned to past experiences warns him when he is in a household harbouring unpredictable adults. In the meantime, he looks forward to but cannot count on playtime lasting as long as he would like. In this way, his time with friends can be unpredictable periods he neither counts on nor discounts completely.

*Teacher validation: I need to recognize that it can be a difficult task for children to be at ease in the presence of adults, while encouraging them to play a part in checking out and authorizing the texts I introduce to the class.*

Isaac hears rain at the window now, and moving past the kitchen to the entrance he can also discern sounds down the hallway of the building, the muffled shuffles of one or two others preparing to leave for the day. He used to play with Jimmy, who lived on the second floor. They were in the same Grade Two class, but the family moved out of the neighbourhood during the summer. Now Isaac is older than most of the other kids in the building. Most of his opportunities to play with friends come from visiting addresses on nearby streets, and there are a lot of those. His mother is very aware of this shift in playmates, and it causes her much more concern than in the past because she feels a contradiction other parents in the neighbourhood may also experience. It stems from the sense of relief that her child has opportunities to play with age appropriate peers (mercifully some play time that is outside of their apartment), mixed with the fear that he is growing up and spending time with children
who she knows live with adults who may have unpredictable parenting skills. Her apprehension surrounding this aspect of her son’s life becomes vital to who she is, who Isaac is, and what constitutes their loving relationship. It is difficult to gauge if this is a concern that outweighs her anxiety over finding consistent employment, for these emotions co-mingle to a degree that one can only say culminates in her desire to be a good mother to her children. She frequently comes into contact with this same stern determination in the faces of friends and acquaintances in her neighbourhood. It can be a forlorn look of agreement that needs little articulation beyond exchanging the frustrations of the day or the week: “We’re doing this for our kids” pervades many chance encounters and conversations in hallways, store aisles, and streets.

As I consider this child, I think of ways I might better incorporate and nurture the skills of one who, while restless and unorganized, is independent and adventurous.

On this morning June is preoccupied. To Isaac she seems upset, but his mother is not a mystery that he loses himself in. In his way, influenced by age, habits and upbringing, his primary hope is that his mom will get a call to go in to work. Isaac senses she is happier in the evening when she has come home from working that day. At times though, he has mixed feelings about going to school. When Isaac is frustrated by his progress in class – lately reading and writing especially – he thinks of how nice it is to spend time with his mom at home. He doesn’t connect his lack of success to his
absences. June is sometimes between steady jobs and the phone calls may then come at any time during the day. This year, the teacher does not call as often as in the past.

Bridging communities is a delicate topic, but I want to develop an environment that allows students to claim expertise on topics in their neighbourhood, a learning space open to wider texts as a basis of a negotiation of shared intertextual authority.

The sounds in the hallway have disappeared with the faint closing of the elevator door, and his mother is now kissing him goodbye as she again checks the clock near their apartment door. Occasionally, on days she feels the need for a break from odd jobs, she lets Isaac stay at home with her, sleeping in, watching cartoons or just having a slow breakfast together. This is a time of learning together, one involving the importance of love, security and togetherness. Today this isn't going to happen. They both agree that he has no patience for the slow, creaky elevator. Most days it is not an option for a boy constantly full of energy. The panel and mirror interior smells, too. For Isaac it mainly represents an old person's conveyance offering a lot of strange odors, moving at a grinding speed requiring more patience than he can usually muster. It is useful only on grocery days. This attitude is a big shift from the days not long ago when he enjoyed the mechanical ride while pondering the tempting buttons that needed a decisive push. For now a snack bar is deposited into his coat pocket for recess — these sometimes are eaten on the way to school — and he is led to the stairwell where he will say goodbye before gliding down three flights of stairs, part banister, part concrete
in his body's wake. Isaac's state of mind now is carefree despite the fact that he has already recognized he is late.

Leading students to connect ideas from various texts is a way of validating a personal reaction to the text; it is a teaching skill of modeling a reaction to intertext by either legitimating or contesting the link that is uncovered.

Going to school holds very positive thoughts for him, and part of this feeling undoubtedly stems from the fact that he is heading to an environment that is full of the possibility of lighthearted encounters with his peers. He would admit that it is not all fun and games. Yet in an intangible way for him and others— as uncertain as Ms. James' misgivings concerning Isaac's attendance—this comfort he carries is key to an integral part of who he is becoming as a student. I recall Ondaatje's stone moving across time; such moments intangibly guide Isaac during moments of his schooling. The school is evolving into a place of adventure for Isaac, both in his opportunities to learn and in his relationships with others amidst the varied customs of the adults in that space. He trusts the predictability of his classroom, and generally thrives upon it when he is able to attend, while consistently injecting his own latent unpredictability. His boots pound the foyer and then the front steps of the building, where quick smacks on the concrete accompany heavy drops of rain. This is a familiar morning greeting from the elements. He has four blocks to cover— about ten minutes to walk— during which
time Isaac never considers whether this kind of winter weather may drench him before he reaches the doors of the school.

It is very challenging to consider incorporating student experiences into each and every school day. Intertextual connections allow me to acknowledge students’ ability to contribute to the texts of the classroom.

Fortunately the cars at the school’s main intersection come to a stop for his crossing almost as soon as he reaches the curb. This is a change from other years when he has stood with his mother or a group of schoolmates waiting for a break in traffic or for one or two drivers to acknowledge their waiting to cross. At those times either his mother or perhaps the collective momentum of the group would take the first tentative steps from the sidewalk, hoping for a slowing of speed and eventual stopping of cars. He catches sight of his reflection walking across the windshield of a truck, seeing in this overcast street scene the motionless, half-lit face of a driver in the cab. A hybrid view is displayed on the glass of the vehicle, of adult and child staring at each other for the briefest of moments. A child entering a classroom sees who he or she might become, whereas an adult entering a classroom experiences the momentary flash of a childhood memory. Teachers have their share of these flashes, breeches across time of the role they have come to fill. Whatever else the effect, Isaac experiences a momentary twinge of growing up as he traverses the crosswalk alone and reaches the other side of the curb with no one else around who is connected to the school. He feels
the eyes of the few drivers who wait for him; he is beginning to take the stares of other adults in his life for granted. This may have to do with how he is learning that the looks of older people do not always lead to words. With kids, he can usually count on a conversation that follows eye contact, but this is a comparison of which he is not fully cognizant. This school year he is also feeling as though there are many more children who are younger than he. That is not to say that there aren’t many students Isaac’s age and older, only that he has taken note of the larger number of younger students this year. Perhaps as he grows a little older he is sensing a change in his position at the school in ways that are similar to the dwindling number of kids his age at the apartment building. Now, the looming, growing presence of the school building is his primary sensation.

*A generational intertext: How are the shared interests and differences of adults and children in the school ameliorated? I try to remind myself of how my students bring back my childhood and take me to spaces where I learned and continue to re-learn.*

His delays on the short trek to school are dependent upon many factors outside of his control, occurrences above and beyond the impulsive nature of an eight-year-old: circumstances such as encountering other children (less likely on mornings he is late), a cluster of unforgiving traffic at the crossing near the school, a forgotten umbrella or a sudden gust of wind that sends more rain onto his path. These might all converge any given morning, or for a number of unseen reasons completely spare him during the next
downpour. Understandably, Isaac doesn’t keep track of such commonly accepted happenings, and as fleeting moments, they don’t become details over time. Then, of course, there is the chance he may have time to shoot a few baskets or kick a soccer ball before the bell starts the school day. Those mornings are rare for Isaac, again owing to his struggles to arrive on time. Somewhere inside he misses the fun associated with these early morning opportunities for freedom on the school grounds. He doesn’t articulate this to anyone, or dwell on it other than, perhaps, with an occasional wistful look at the empty playground as he rushes by on his way to the entrance. There is no sense in looking around for other students when the school day has already begun. He feels very late, though he can’t be certain because, unlike his mother, he took no notice of the apartment clock when he was leaving. The abstract skill of calculating hours and minutes using a clock is still a shaky concept for Isaac, so that estimating a block of elapsed time is a luxurious missing link in his child’s repertoire.

Juxtaposing two texts is akin to comparing the school with the neighbourhood. How does the school change us as we enter the doors? In what ways are we the same inside the school as we are on “the outside?” How might children recognize some of the similarities and differences?

Approaching the school entrance, he prepares himself for a solitary walk to his classroom and considers what his teacher and classmates may be up to at this time of
the day. With no definite sense of how much time has passed since the bell, it is hard for him to know for certain. It could still be silent reading time or the class may have moved on to another activity. Isaac’s apprehension increases as he thinks of what his teacher’s mood might be, a vague force that is inextricably tied up in the work the class is doing now, how the class is behaving, and especially, Isaac feels, how late he may be today. This fatalistic reasoning of a young boy is countered by the consistent image of Ms. James as fair, kind and almost always friendly. She has encouraged Isaac to improve his attendance, but really, he has no idea what to expect this morning. He is unable to stop and consider whether he might be able to improve upon his tardiness and absent days. Despite their weight and age, the doors open quietly for him.

To a degree our voices in conversation form a text, and it follows that the words repeated before our own, the speeches we use again in new situations, are an intertext. I look for a more active way of learning from language I have heard and used before, knowing that children approach language in this way.

Although his teacher is one who rarely raises her voice over mistakes or misbehaviours, in those steps leading to the second floor stairway Isaac decides on an approach that is common sense in this situation: enter the class so quietly you might not be noticed. While Ms. James is a sympathetic adult in Isaac’s world, he has no idea that his teacher is running out of ways to help him to improve his skills when he misses so many days of school. He cannot know Ms. James is experiencing a growing sense
of frustration and fatalism in trying to address Isaac's situation. Just as she seems to be making progress with him in, say, mathematics, he is absent yet again for a day or two. It is not a case of her sympathy for his situation bottoming out, but that she has other students who require as much attention as Isaac. Her energy for a class of eight-year-olds has boundaries, and Isaac is slipping behind not only in basic skills, but also in how much attention he can reasonably command given his haphazard, sudden appearances. He is a demanding student, no matter how silently he occupies his space in class or how much promise he may display, because he requires more modification, review and diligence than Ms. James can consistently hope to have. While his attendance is mainly out of her hands, Isaac also represents a challenge to her teaching that requires a modification to her personal philosophy of education, which concerns the hope a child can in time see the promise she or he possesses. Ms. James continuously makes conscious and unconscious adjustments related to this philosophy. Her relationship with Isaac lies somewhere between these two states of non/obvious concern, a result of the knowledge that one of her charges is both her bane and her saviour amidst all of the demands of her teaching.

*I need to remind myself of the ways I can share some of the responsibilities of learning with my students, so they understand that in fact not all authority rests with me no matter how much I care for them. My expertise does not extend entirely into their lives.*
Isaac encounters his generally intimidating gym teacher just after entering the school. A bad start, but as luck would have it Isaac needs to endure only a frown of disapproval before Mr. Gregg continues at a steady pace towards the gym. On the way upstairs he encounters the school custodian coming in the opposite direction. He shifts between that part of him craving a friendly welcome or conspiratorial smile, and that side of him that simply wants no reaction from this adult who so often silently floats through the hallway, unexpectedly blurting out inaudible comments at students. No abrupt mumbling this morning. Isaac keeps his eyes down and the man doesn’t even take notice of him as they pass. His gait slowing, he arrives at his classroom door and pauses. The small window at the top of the door is too high to be of any use to him, so his curiosity and apprehension lead him to listen for any sounds inside. There is a shuffling of feet that gradually diminishes as his teacher’s clear, friendly voice rises above all else in the room. Her tone is definitely a good sign for Isaac and he works up the courage to try the doorknob. The door is locked.

It is interesting to me to consider the ways in which children learn instinctively to cross over from personal to public spaces without always knowing or discussing the many ways to engage others and the implications for who they are becoming.

At this time Isaac’s determination to stick with the inspired course he has decided upon shines through the dark clouds of the morning to, one might even say, light up the otherwise dim hallway. Isaac continues to ponder his best entrance as he
listens to the polite voices that signal for him the very normal and consistent environment of his classmates responding to his teacher's questions. He is very familiar with Ms. James' style of asking easy questions, and really enjoys answering correctly. There have been many moments so far this year when he has relished the opportunity to do so. Isaac also knows very well that his teacher likes the class to pay close attention to her when she is sitting with them in the listening circle at the back of the room. He is used to the habit from past teachers, whose classes had a piece of carpet for these times in the day. Ms. James doesn't have one in her class. It is one of the other intangibles that Isaac is unaware are accumulating to give him a sneaking sense of maturation in and around this school. What he is most aware of, hand letting go of the presently useless doorknob, is how frequently Ms. James has registered her dislike of the kind of interruptions he feels he cannot now escape from perpetrating. They have already established an understanding that he will try his best; he doesn't want to disappoint her, changing how she might treat him hereafter. Isaac has already been late numerous times at this early point in the year.

_I want to address why this move from private to public spaces through various texts is not an easy transition for many educators despite the willingness of young students._

It is tempting to say that a small part of Isaac, again in spite of his age and other factors, registers a certain anxiety at how past actions may already be creeping up to sabotage this school year and thwart his best intentions. In what ways this frustration
might grow and manifest itself at home and in school only time will tell. There is even
the possibility that a teacher of Ms. James’ nature and experience may be predisposed
to recognizing this side of Isaac’s life that is connected to both home and classroom. In
the course of her busy day she is likely to give only brief credence to how his evening
and early morning have gone, in acknowledgement that the classroom is where she can
have some influence on his life. She may in fact have further positive ways of
approaching Isaac on this and other difficult topics. Nevertheless, certain nervous
thoughts converge and weigh upon Isaac to cause a further pause in his actions during
the continuing murmur of noises beyond the door. His method is apparent as he waits
long enough for Ms. James to finish speaking – to him a natural strategy – before
knocking lightly on the door.

*I learn more about my students when I hear the inevitable changes they experience in a
sensibility that does not draw a firm line between the interplay of the private/public,
presence/absence of home/school.*

Momentarily the door opens slightly and Jenny appears. She is one of his
smaller classmates, one of those who literally look up to him. She doesn’t need to open
the door very far in order to see who is knocking, affording Isaac no view of the
interior so that he might confirm what he assumes the class is up to. An interesting
flash now passes between these two Grade Three students. As they initially make eye
contact, Jenny smiles slightly because Isaac is a likeable guy and also because she is
having a good start to her day; the book Ms. James is showing the class has some really
cool pictures and funny animals. Isaac doesn’t know what to make of her good mood.
For his part, there is no reason to smile, nor any time to appreciate what the class is
engaged in. Following this momentary flash between peers, he brushes past Jenny and
glances over at the listening circle while avoiding his teacher’s eye. He can see that
she is in the midst of holding the picture book open for the class. This action of his
teacher’s is yet another factor that proves to him how consistently kind she is. You can
always see her picture books when she is reading the story. Of course, today there is
no hesitation in his step as he heads to the cloakroom and hangs up his coat along with
his reading bag. He is intensely hopeful that Ms. James has noticed he remembered the
reading bag, but for now he sees it as his unbearably important mission to quickly and
quietly join the listening circle. This is no time to stray from his original strategy. It’s
very simple to him even if he cannot expect his classmates to appreciate the magnitude
or importance he attaches to his plan. With any luck Jenny will not screw things up.
To act as though he is hardly even there just makes sense. It is time to stick to the plan,
and this thinking gives Isaac a clear idea of what he needs to do.

*It is possible to spontaneously connect the feelings of one student to the others of the
class by touching upon a current and common experience. In so doing, I acknowledge
that the day does not always go as planned.*
Isaac makes for the back of the listening circle with a neutral expression and a cautious step. He conspicuously continues to avoid his teacher’s gaze, but on seeing the grinning faces of his regular and notorious friends peering sheepishly at him, he forgets his promise to himself to remain unnoticeable. He grins back at them, but before he has a chance to sit down and enjoy a light moment that would normally lift his spirits and set a tone for the morning, he is assailed by a sinking feeling that the change in his features has done him in. Ms. James has called out his name for everyone to hear. He stops in his tracks, or that is, freezes in the crouch that was an optimistic lean towards taking a seat on the floor with his class. Hope, quite honestly, is fading. Upon further rapid consideration it strikes him that his teacher’s tone is not angry. He breathes again. She asks him to join Mr. Russell. Hearing the name of another teacher, he now notices the second adult in the room sitting opposite Ms. James on the other side of the group.

B. A Boy Enters an Uncertain School Space

The following conversation stems from my desire to appreciate the voices of my students as they engage with me. In many ways I am more comfortable writing of their experiences from a perspective of omniscient narrator who ultimately has his reasons for re-discovering childhood. Whether wholly successful or not, I have my memories of uncertainty at school, and relive these moments in my work with children. The voices contained in the sections constitute a much greater challenge for me. My writing is an attempt to understand some of my teaching habits from more than one point of view.
This intertextual reflection on my work tries to find a way to articulate how my relationships develop in school.

Isaac and I are entering an opportunity to experience and learn together in schooling, as we also negotiate an uncertainty that will continue to influence our meetings, that is, the development of our school relationship. In some ways I represent this feeling in Isaac by revealing a “flash” as his classmate opens the door for him, a time involving anticipation of fun, but also fear of entering what he perceives as a space primarily controlled by his teacher. Will his teacher (and similarly his classmate) sympathize, punish, or ignore his predicament in arriving late for school? His reaction is there for all to see but is interpreted and internalized in varying degrees. There are students with whom Isaac enjoys a rapport, those he can count on for a positive reaction to his entrance. In the meantime, his reaction to my presence, another teacher, is closer to the one he may have with the girl who opened the door.

My relationship with Isaac has aspects of this anticipation mixed with uncertainty. So many of my school relations begin in this way, and I suspect apprehension is the decisive feeling in many. When is fear the controller of my school habits? I want to learn to experience this as a natural aspect of who I am as a teacher, hopeful but aware of the challenges facing my schooling with students. Uncertainty is a significant, and not necessarily counterproductive, part of my role as teacher. Consciously and unconsciously I initiate or continue to develop school relations that involve positive and negative aspects for students. A relationship is established as we experience the unpredictability of our respective predilections, knowledge, and
experience. The uncertain space between us, informed by the ways I draw upon and refer to fragments of school/ing memories, becomes part of our intertextual relationship in practicing a study of language. Our contact, and resulting connection, is at once contextual/institutional, physical/corporeal and textual/communicative, to the point of being indelibly intertextual in terms of the co-mingling of our respective school/ing. As a child encounters an adult, entering a world of new language expectations, the apprehension is felt on both sides of the curriculum. It may begin with an introduction considered ordinary by most in a school.

"Mr. Russell has some special practice to do with you, Isaac, so please go with him until recess."

Isaac shows immediate physical relief as he exchanges grins with Mr. Russell. No mention of arriving late. He follows this teacher out the door of the classroom, and his pace lightens with every step. So far, in a weirdly unpredictable way, his strategy for getting in the door has paid off. Isaac is familiar with Mr. Russell, his room not far down the hall, and the kind of work they do there that is often pretty fun – and easy. They trade greetings. He responds to a question he is used to.

"Good morning, Isaac."

"Hi!"

"You look a little tired. Did you have a good sleep?"

"Yup."

It dawns on him now, walking slightly behind Mr. Russell, that it is a little strange to be the only kid going to this room so close to his own. He has visited before
only in a group with his classmates. This thought turns to apprehension when they both stop at the door and he hears the next question.

“You’re a little late today. What’s up?”

“Just my mom woke me up a little late.”

“That’s too bad. Do think you could do anything to help your mom make sure that you get up on time?”

Isaac has never been asked to think about this particular problem, or at least not for some time, and it shows on his face. His brow registers surprise, accompanied by brightness expanding his eyes. The subject makes him nervous because he doesn’t have any idea what might be the best way to answer. He takes a shot in the dark, though he would prefer not to.

“Maybe I could.”

“Well, that would be great. Ms. James, you, and I could talk it over with your mom.”

Isaac’s face again shows sudden transformation, making it obvious that such a meeting would be a very bad idea as far as he is concerned. He replies cautiously, “I don’t know . . . about that.” He is relieved to hear the conversation move on to other things.

“Guess it’s something we can talk about another day – but being on time for school is really important. It helps you get a good start to your day.”

Sensing they will now move on to other things, Isaac’s impression of Mr. Russell as a fair teacher is confirmed and he relaxes as he approaches a chair. He is
able to concentrate on asking himself what they will be doing in his room today. In
taking his seat, Isaac allows some differences in this smallish room to wash over him.

On the one hand, the Resource Teacher’s room strikes most who enter it as a small version of any classroom. A great deal of wall area is covered with colourful letters, words, and pictures. For a child of Isaac’s age and sensibilities, however, the most distinguishing feature of the room is its intimacy. The table in the middle of the room usually holds only three or four students, to a maximum of seven, with the teacher sitting and leading the group through work similar to what they know from the larger classroom. The twist – the adaptation that the room affords and the impression Isaac does not forget – is that the Resource Room activities include games and interaction that are generally more frequent than in class. Consequently, the room has a good reputation among the ranks of the school’s younger inhabitants. There is a well-known comfort level here, which leads students to assume that they can at least try to socialize and perhaps joke around more than in class. In taking a seat, Isaac is aware of these potentially positive aspects of being with Mr. Russell. It is a great stroke of luck if any of his friends happen to accompany him for a class of “fun stuff” down the hall.

On this day it must be said that other feelings begin to touch upon Isaac as he sits down and faces Mr. Russell. He is used to adults being around him, either at home or where his mom takes him. There are many occasions when his mom, and even his uncle, take him places. If asked about such times, he would speak of shopping, visiting other homes and adults (maybe homes with other kids on a lucky day), or even seeing a movie. Despite all of these occasional opportunities to be in the presence of adults,
Isaac is not used to engaging with an adult. This does not fully enter his thinking as he looks across at Mr. Russell. This adult is looking at some papers, but Isaac knows that some kind of practice is about to begin. His teacher looks up and meets the curiosity in the student’s eyes with a kind smile.

“We’re going to try a simple test today, Isaac. It will be easy for you, so don’t worry about a thing.”

Upon hearing this, Isaac’s senses react in a sort of battle stations panic mode, and his thoughts virtually scream the word inside his mind: “TEST!!!”

His emotions are no puzzle this morning, and Mr. Russell attempts to soften the blow by adding, “Just a few questions, that’s all.”

At this point, it might serve the reader well to consider the voice that accompanies Isaac through what is rapidly turning into a roller coaster experience of meeting the challenge of a late start to his school day.

C. Isaac’s Voice in the Presence/Absence of a Teacher

Questions? What questions? I heard him say “test.” Definitely he said test. Is he confused? Am I understanding him? Usually Mr. Russell is easy to understand. How can a teacher say there is going to be a test and then change his mind? Teachers don’t do things like that. They do what they say they’re going to do. Period. Last year Mr. G said no drink in gym class and he only changed his mind ‘cause Dylan Risk got all red and puffy. And only Dylan got a long drink. The rest of us were timed for three seconds. Test? Why do I need a special test?
What did he say? It’s not a real test? Oh, it’s easy. Can I fail or does it matter? What kind of room is this anyway? Why isn’t Mr. Russell a real teacher with a big class and lots of kids? There’re all kinds of words and pictures around his room, but this feels different. He can see everything I do at this table. It was fun practicing some reading in here before, but I don’t want a test. Why do I have to be in here on my own? Oh no, what is this he’s showing me to read? He’s gonna really see that I’m a crappy reader. I know I am. Look at those tough words. This looks much harder that the books I have from Ms. James. I’ve never seen this book before. This is bad. I don’t want to stay here until recess. I’m already in trouble for being late, now it’s bad reading. Why can’t we just play a card game like before? Did I get called in here because I was late today?

The text works what? Language. It deconstructs the language of communication, representation or expression . . . and reconstructs another language . . . having neither bottom nor surface . . . but the stereographic space of the combinative play, which is infinite once one has gone outside the limits of current communication . . . and of narrative or discursive verisimilitude (Barthes, 1981b, p. 37).

I refer back to Barthes in an attempt to remind myself that I am playing with language when I work with students. I require their participation in order to create a listening to (the “stereographic”) that has no limits when I listen to their journeys into words that they are discovering. At a young age, children actually create scaffolds of language along with me, and I come away with a new sense of what it means to
deconstruct and build again. In connecting texts we have a common knowledge that is unpredictable and leads to a new personal knowledge. I would therefore add to Barthes' words that text "works" relationships. I hope that my own reflections will remind me of the partnership I have with children, even though as teacher I have a powerful role in determining how we share language expertise and authority as we encounter text. My own voice is not always certain how to reconcile the play I want to experience with the knowledge I must use productively.

D. A Teacher's Voice in the Presence/Absence of a Student

A rainy day and these kids still show up with the same high energy. I could barely get a word in with Susan before the bell rang. It never ceases to amaze me how many comments and questions come at us to start the day. No surprise, I guess. Some days I imagine I'll walk in and the kids will be subdued by a string of cold, wet weather and want to go home. Yet I know there's not a chance of that happening. Looks like a few kids are missing today as usual. We'll have a better idea by the end of silent reading. Who will be away for the day? Is Isaac in the cloakroom? He's having trouble making it to school on time this month. Did Susan tell me that his mom is between jobs and sometimes keeps him at home when she has a free day, or was that another kid? I see in his file that attendance was also an issue last year. Let me see. It was raised at a School Based Team meeting. Yep, he was causing a lot of concern. Around 50% of classes missed. Where's the date on this thing? Here it is. The meeting was in February and the situation was discussed with his mom at a parent-
teacher meeting in March. No record on what her response was, but that often goes unaccounted for. I'd better check with last year's classroom teacher. Susan has a few children absent today, so I'll observe some students who are on my list to see how they are doing. Maybe Isaac will make it to school with enough time to test before recess. This is one class where I need three or four back-up plans in order to make sure I move ahead with these assessment requests. Okay, there's Maria, and Kelvin, Carey too. She seems unhappy about something, but when I saw her reading to herself she was doing really nicely. Just making the transition to the listening circle opens up possibilities for a little confrontation. Susan may know what's going on with her. George is still having trouble keeping still on the floor. It's as though his hands have got to keep moving for the entire day. I haven't been able to get him to open up on how he feels about school. His file may have something to tell me about that. He's been doing really well following instructions when he isn't distracted by something. Problem is, he seems to be providing his own distractions when most of the class is listening to Susan. He's a pretty bright kid and I hope his reading scores will continue to climb this year. His attendance has been consistent, so that's really positive. Meanwhile, he's being very evasive about his attendance, or at least is uncomfortable talking about it. Not a big surprise. I wonder if he can be here consistently so that we can really see his potential to improve his low reading scores. Today is really only a check on his phonetic abilities. It'll help me to pinpoint areas we need to work on.
**E. Ever-Present Uncertainty**

Damn, now I’ve done it. I shouldn’t have called this a test. Isaac is looking a little more uncomfortable. Is it something I said? Is he worried we’ll be going to the office to talk about his absences and lates? I’d better not mention that again. But maybe he needs to talk things out a little. I don’t know – it feels kind of out of our control already, even at this point in the year. That’s part of his history at our school. Okay, I need to get away from that and move on to other things. Maybe he’s not reacting well to being here on his own. He looked nervous about arriving late and now I’m springing this on him. It’s more of a phonological awareness “assessment” anyway. I’ll probably be one of the only staff to ever seriously take a look at the results, unless I decide to put it in his file for future comparisons. What can I say to help him to relax a bit? I’m not sure about this, but I’ll try something neutral.

“I know I called this a special test, but really it’s only practice with some sounds, like rhyming. Really, it’s not a test. Have a look at some of the words we’ll be using.”

*Confronted with my teaching voice, I am reminded from past school days of my own apprehension at the approach of an adult. I return to those times in the poem below.*

**Classroom Presence**

The unknown always inhabited the front of the room
Occasionally drifting into a centre we thought of as our own
Minds of many hearts unfamiliar with the proximity of authority
Hopes melded to desks in a succession of rooms
Accustomed to the predictable silence following a scheduled walk
Through halls that would call your name so differently
Piercing adult tones that could embarrass, harass, silence.

Part II: A Teacher's Voice(s) of Evaluation

Okay, what's next on my priority list today? I'd better get down a few
impressions of Isaac. Report cards are due soon and some anecdotal comments will
help me to stay on top of things. There might even be some aspects I can include to go
home with him. For now I'll write a few anecdotal notes for a strategies intervention
form.

A. Student Strengths

Though he is not yet meeting the learning expectations in Language Arts in his
classroom and is on a modified program, he made very good progress on his Reading
program in the Resource Room this term. Isaac is persistent in doing tasks and solving
problems. He states ideas and opinions clearly. He seeks or asks for information to
understand a situation or an idea. He recognizes potential consequences of his actions.
He shows imagination and creativity. Isaac is able to identify the main idea of a story
or class discussion he hears. In a classroom listening situation, he identifies and
discusses pertinent details. Isaac's performance on a recent test of phonological
awareness indicates that he is able to produce and discriminate various grade level rhymes, as well as distinguish and isolate phonemes in the initial and final positions.

That last sentence was a mouthful. My spell checker tells me, "VERB CONFUSION," but I'll stick with what I have down for now. It should be comprehensible to those who'll potentially read it, and to the point. The test information is obviously more useful for his file but will take some reworking when it's time for a report for home. My use of the word "test" is troubling me. I promised Isaac what we did was only practice. But what will work? I'll go back and change it. I'm starting to think that "test" is a much more serious word for kids than teachers. All I know is that the word is full of judgement, finality, and (dare I say it?) misrepresentation. No wonder for students there is nothing worse than this kind of surprise.

B. Voice of the Test #1

Matching Section. Total: Six marks. Based on the above Language Arts evaluation of Isaac, place the number of one of the descriptors from the right-hand column beside the most appropriate verb in the left-hand column. (Hint: FIRST SAY A FEW POSSIBILITIES TO YOURSELF, BUT KEEP IN MIND, THERE ARE NO INCORRECT RESPONSES.)
C. Teacher’s Knowing/Not Knowing: Inner Dialogue #1

“Verb confusion?” How about “verb essentialism?” It strikes me that the verbs I have used to describe Isaac’s positive traits are interchangeable to a degree that shakes my intentions for what I want to convey about this very likeable boy. He shows so much promise and I do not know if I have properly represented that. Perhaps that is more of Susan’s domain as classroom teacher. He is an elusive student I feel could slip from the grasp of our relationship – the fragile, slippery bond growing between us – just as my choice of language is sliding into sentiments beyond my ability to describe objectively. Are my generalities even touching upon what I have established with him in the learning environment? There are no comment choices to call upon from the prescribed list that will help me out in this area. I am running across a lot of situations where the language at my disposal, the dialogue in which I am expected to participate with others in the school system, does not satisfy what I want to say about a child. By recognizing a Barthesian
“fracture” or “fissure” in the language that surrounds and informs my work, I engage in a process of reflecting upon the relationship growing between my students and myself. It is one of uncertain choices and results that form part of my relationship with Isaac, but increasingly it becomes a recognition that my teaching and learning cross over into his own negotiation of students and staff. We then build towards optimism in a shared school/ing when situated one-to-one or in a group setting. This is not an attitude or environment I ask my students to articulate for me; I create the opportunity for them to participate in literacy activities that foster confidence and skills. My planning and practice will allow us to enjoy and benefit from our time together, even as we encounter difficulties that we cannot always experience together. I want the hope of this approach to also influence Isaac in how he approaches texts, schools and others.

Uncertainty

Classroom relationship

Clinical language

Linguistic border crossings

Inner dialogue: personal/public

“Okay, here goes with another section of this form.”
D. Specific Areas of Concern/Need, Version I

Though Isaac is making good progress in his Reading Program in the Resource Room, he is not yet meeting the learning expectations of Language Arts. He often has difficulty sharing directions he hears with classmates. He struggles with the organization of his materials, and he has trouble contributing to ideas in a group. He rarely thinks about issues before responding or taking action. He is only sometimes able to discover patterns or relationships among ideas. It is a challenge for Isaac to concisely summarize information he hears, or to present important information in the correct sequence. He finds staying on task and paying attention very difficult. His performance on a recent test of phonological awareness indicates weakness in recognizing segmenting syllables and isolating medial phonemes. While this is not unusual for a Grade Three student, Isaac also experiences difficulty with blending phonemes.

I have managed once again to mix positive and negative comments into one sentence. It's a habit of filling in this kind of document, a foreshadowing of the report card. As for what passes between Isaac and me, the language simultaneously describes everything, yet nothing.

This conversation, in more therapeutic hands, becomes:
E. Specific Areas of Concern/Need, Version II

Isaac is showing very good progress in Language Arts. He is a great kid who shows a lot of enthusiasm for the books we are reading in class. In fact, I am most impressed when he adds to our class discussions other experiences and books that he knows. This helps his classmates and me appreciate other aspects of the books we are reading. Thanks for all of your ideas, Isaac. We’re going to keep working on your reading so that you can keep enjoying many kinds of books. Remember to choose books in which you know most of the words, and use the clues we have talked about in class. We’ll keep working on rhymes and sounding out words, so I hope you can do some of that at home, too. We’re going to have another fun term coming up, that’s for sure.

F. Voice of the Test, #2

True or False Section. Total: Five marks. Based once again upon the more “clinical” of the evaluations of Isaac immediately above, decide which (if any) of the descriptors in the right-hand column can be paired with a verb other than the one that has already been used by the teacher. To help you, the choices from the original passage, as well as an example, are shown for your consideration. DO NOT BE CONCERNED IF THIS DOESN’T BRING YOU ANY CLOSER TO UNDERSTANDING ISAAC’S NEEDS, AS YOU ARE REMINDED THERE ARE NO INCORRECT RESPONSES.
Difficulty with........ (sharing)
Struggles with.......... (organization)
Trouble with......... (contributing)
Rarely ........ (responding)
Challenge with....... (summarizing)

THIS LIST TRANSFERS, WITHOUT TRANSFORMING, INTO
(true or false?)

1. ____ Difficulty .......... a. (contributing)
2. ____ Struggles with ........ b. (responding)
3. ____ Trouble .............. c. (summarizing)
4. ____ Rarely ............... d. (sharing)
5. ____ Challenge ............ e. (organizing)

Your score /5

Reflection: A Teacher’s (Un)Knowing: Inner Dialogue #2

Re-reading how I have completed this form, I now realize I have simply reversed my opening sentence from the previous section and made “good progress” take on a much less positive tone.
“Though he is not yet meeting the learning expectations....”

VERSUS

“Though he is making good progress....”

Either phrase is a potential beginning to a section, and yet no matter what my choice, I feel as though my own words are working against what I would like to say about Isaac. I feel as though the descriptors I have chosen are interchangeable to the point of being meaningless. What is the connection between my discomfort with the language and the ability of the words I have chosen to keep the tone so general and elusive? They are my word choices but not my words. Nor do they represent my voice. Somehow I have lost the thread of clearly describing Isaac’s classroom habits.

Connection
Presence/absence
Negative/positive
Descriptors
Students
People

“It's so important to be pro-active in this final section of the form... not to mention accountable.”
Part III: Texts of Indeterminancy and Possibility

A. Adaptations/Action Plan

This term, Isaac will work on his listening skills.

Isaac will continue to attempt to raise his reading by one level.

Isaac will continue to develop his phonics skills using a wide variety of materials.

Isaac will continue to work on staying on task until the assignment is completed, managing his work time so all the work is finished in the designated time, and organizing his materials and work space.

Next term, working cooperatively and independently will also be very important for Isaac.

Listening
Reading
Developing
Work
Staying on Task
Time
Managing
Organizing
Cooperating
Being independent

B. Teacher Knowledge/Not Knowing: Inner Dialogue # 3

I wonder how Isaac is doing at home these days. His mother has her hands full trying to find work. He really has a wonderful imagination and entertains us all with his stories (true or otherwise), but I fear that he is really on a slow road to becoming organized enough to be successful in school. I'd better re-read his file in case there are a few more adaptations from the past I can incorporate to perhaps create a little more success for him. Still, if he continues to miss so much school time I really wonder how much Susan and I can help him this year. Relating my own words to the comments in his file – and those from other student files – I am struck by how negative or pessimistic phrases are couched in more generous comments or vice-versa. This is a kind of language reversal that allows one evaluation to balance the other, when we know that the force of such factors as a word's positioning, spelling or popularity allow it to predominate when it is obviously pointing to a concern in the child's learning habits. My hope in stretching the term “intertext” is to say, “Look, we need to recognize other influences upon the texts we read. In fact, as a teacher I want to expand the meaning of text for my students because my reading and experience, my habits of pursuing knowledge, holds potential for modeling learning in the classroom.”
Schools also need to honour the home-student relationship by devising and facilitating more opportunities for adults to participate with children in literacy-skills learning in the community.

C. A Review of the Author’s Attempts at Intertextuality

- A reflection upon location, doors as symbols, negotiation and the intertextual child
- The presence and absence of the intertextuality negotiated by a teacher and students in various locations of a school.
- Intertextual links
- Juxtaposing two texts (leading to any form including in-class writing)
- Intertextual retriever/retrieving
- Negotiating an acknowledgment of intertextuality (teacher’s powerful role in student sharing of authority: PARADOX)
- Bringing personal intertext into the public: one to one conversations, conversations with students or others outside of class
- “Checking out” or authorizing the other (connected texts)
- Teacher validation
- Public/private thanks (for intertextual retrieving)
- Legitimate or contest intertextual links
- Claiming expertise – sharing knowledge from outside the text

My emphasis has been:

- The ways in which class conversation is intertext
- Teacher talk (expertise) as text or intertext
- Shared authority encouraged by intertext
• A valid classroom procedure

• A negotiated process – a prominent marker for examining teacher authority

• Negotiation allowing for a sharing that unburdens the teacher (and frees/challenges students)

This now brings my narrative to the point of questioning the inter/text in class.

D. Intertextual Questions for the Informational Text

**Covertly Intertextual Quotation:**

A proficient reader is one in whom multiple neurological functions and relevant factors have worked together to promote the acquired ability to extract meaning efficiently from written language (Levine, 1994, p. 125).

1. *Was the student able to read and interpret charts, tables, diagrams, and pictures?*

   This is a very important variable in determining a commonly elusive state of mind among us all, namely, comprehension. It is a reminder that as a teacher I need to be certain that students have the necessary introduction to a text. I might re-introduce previously read (but sometimes quickly forgotten) books to review the features that are part of what makes a book unique. I may choose books that have similar and different aspects to the one I am about to read with the class. My habit has become one of making it very clear that every text, like a person, has a personality and features. The physical features of a text should not be considered as difficult, but as another way of entering into learning what the book is about. So, if certain charts, diagrams or other
features appear difficult, consider them a fun detour in the beginning and look for the small parts that can be understood before you worry about the whole feature. This connects to how I have approached learning words and sentences with the students, so I will be reiterating an established pattern. This I might call an “intratextual” sensibility to having patience with a new text.

2. *Did the student share any extra information that wasn’t in the text in charts, diagrams, etc. (general intertextuality)?*

   While students undoubtedly bring a range of ideas, comments and questions to their experiences invoked by the text, I want to remain faithful to my notion of an expanded intertext, so I will avoid the trite “extratextual” and describe this kind of conversation or writing as a general intertextuality. By this I am referring to an ongoing negotiation of the authority that speaks to a text introduced in class. This is because I want to view all experiences as a text for students to uncover for themselves. The ways in which we choose to apply some of these experiences or student knowledge to the new text is the kind of negotiated authority that I have described in a previous strand of the dissertation. I feel that the ways in which I negotiate the validity of books with students is a conversation that straddles the boundaries of text and non-text. The generative nature of our classroom relationships – individual and whole – is brought to life by the interplay of our interest in how print and text informs our lives.
3. Did the student indicate that he or she knew anything about the text before reading it (background knowledge)?

This is a critical stage in the introduction of the text. It is a way of provoking an increase in students' interest in the text, as well as preparing them for some of the thinking that might follow the reading. It can encourage more active reading from students and help them touch upon some aspects of reading, such as phonological awareness, paired association memory, and other factors that are essential in the development of a proficient reader (Levine, 1994, p. 141). I am preparing them to put their thirst for reading to use, and to acknowledge that their knowledge of texts, just as my own, is an ongoing, overlapping intertextuality. I am putting my predilections into action. The notion of overlap in knowledge leads to recall of Levine's reader task analysis as a shifting graph of interacting student abilities. To my mind it would be better to represent the attributes of reading (organized under accurate decoding and accurate comprehension) on a moving, constantly evolving landscape of the mind. A moving graph of this kind would more clearly mirror Levine's definition of automatization:

The simultaneous and automatic occurrence of all of the above conditions, carried out with great speed and with little or no expenditure of mental effort. When too much time and labor are required to decode the individual words, few resources are left for understanding sentences, paragraphs, and passages. Delayed or incomplete automatization is a common cause of poor reading comprehension in the middle and upper grades (p. 164).
4. **Did the student make a connection between the material and real life? (application)**

This question allows me to consider the approach I want to take to making connections for students. There appears to be a longstanding notion of the engaged teacher who is able to lead students to both bridging concepts and creating a bridge between the real and the metaphorical. In the above question I encounter the opposite effect, but nonetheless it establishes a situation similar to what Ellsworth (1997) argues is a tyranny of the teacher’s rhetorical dialogue. It is the approach to classroom conversation that always has a plan of returning topics back to the goals of the curriculum. I see the potential of intertextual “bridges” (to use the metaphor for my own purpose) as a less-metaphorically infused connection that leaves the space of thinking to the student, while leading to the space of comparison by the teacher. By eliciting textual and personal connections from students, be they similarities or differences. I believe we avoid some of the inherent dangers of relying upon the metaphors of others. In particular, for more local topics the classroom might move away from the experiences of those who have little connection to the communities of our students’ school and homes. This is the application of the intertext to their lives that the question does not fully address.

5. **Can the student connect the material to other subject areas?**

A powerful method of increasing student confidence in a range of subjects is to build upon the skills they have been learning in the primary grades. A growing knowledge of how to approach reading a text can be applied to other genres and
disciplines, ultimately allowing intermediate-aged students to explore and enjoy the freedom of personally negotiating how genres overlap and challenge the reader. Intertext holds many possibilities for showing younger children how ideas specific to a variety of subjects overlap in our lives. An intersubjective awareness is fostered. My emphasis is upon the features of a text that apply to books on a number of topics. With older students who have a foundation in both reading skills and textual features, an intertextual sensibility begins that involves a basic appreciation of the language and the forms of organizing knowledge for the purposes of various fields. Rather than emphasize the dominant rhetoric of subject areas, my textual predilection is to uncover a consideration of similarities and differences in a topic's formation. A reconsideration of textual habits is and should be a continuing process of assessing how we approach language with students at any level of schooling. I would ask how we are to connect the seeming multitude of print media, genres, and technology now available to so many readers, and whether the academy is doing what it can to point to personal ways of negotiating this intimidating terrain. A comment on the work of Barthes reveals him as an augur of the search for a meaningful productivity continually facing educators:

The major drawback of traditional scholarship, according to Barthes, is that its epistemological concern has always been with 'objective signification'. In contrast, the new textual practice is marked by signification, a ceaseless semantic productivity (Mai, 1991, p. 42).
Barthes' writing represents an attempt at a Third Space of writing, but also my calling upon textual voices of theory from the literary canon allows me to interpret past, present, and future in terms of the learning spaces I experience. Importantly, Barthes is able to "demonstrate an interaction between analytic knowledge and pragmatic practice, between descriptions of other people and a multicultural method of understanding and identity" (Saper, 1997, p. 69). His words lead me to consider my place in pursuit of language for schools to teach a questioning of text.
REFLECTIONS

Part I: Textual: Negotiating Presence/Absence in School/ing

This dissertation began as an attempt to appreciate an uncertainty with language in selected areas of literature, educational research and in the classrooms where I continue to learn as a teacher. It also represents a process of healing and renewal, both in and out of school, that allows me to move on to new stories and challenges. I have described the ways I embody this tension, experienced as a combination of choices and knowledge, in my relations with students. Despite my years of teaching, I continue to experience breeches with the curriculum as planned, while continually learning to question in the spirit of my students. Perhaps the reason I dwell in a space described as “in-between” (Aoki, 1993, p. 5) is because my direct experience with those I teach, and the act of living in a territory that constantly shifts from the curriculum back to my students, leaves me in my own textual discourse. The number of students for whom they are responsible can overwhelm teachers, and I negotiate a curriculum with students that somehow exemplifies the ways we are together connected and disconnected from these established boundaries of knowledge. Negotiating a curriculum can unite a class or reinforce the all too familiar line between teacher and students. Yet I explore unplanned areas of knowledge with them, assisted by a student sensibility and youthful authority or expertise only they could bring to our classroom. These moments create an intermittent, personal sense of a teacher frequently
re-introduced to learning. In my students' midst I am in a position of knowing and not knowing. My writing reflects a stance of gratitude, possibility, and a desire to learn. In addition, I have experienced profound dissatisfaction with the language parameters of subject areas and, as I have articulated, the documents of evaluation and assessment pertaining to "special needs" students. "Special education" strikes me as a euphemism living out its final days of usefulness in public school systems. As one who feels like a non-specialist in special education, called upon to negotiate the established terminology of a field involving a number of intersecting professionals, it also appears to me that there are experiences that require an interacting/writing/recording sensitivity that is not always present within schools. I am speaking of how we recognize the delicate balance of learning, language and authority that ultimately involves many different relations in schools. My approach has related how the relationships of the classroom are the amorphous human text that governs how we learn together in the school. I have touched upon "community" and forms of "dialogue" that govern interaction in my work. My writing is a reflective version of a teacher's inner dialogue of mediation between education and schooling, text, and voice. It is a voice that engages the language of a public school system while maintaining the hope that the experiences of my teaching – potentially similar to other teachers – may reveal ways of living mindfully and generatively in an inner-city school setting.

Underlying the tone of my writing is the call to be cognizant of the spaces of the school as charged by a reconceived notion of the word "text." These texts of the school are embodied in the connections I make with students when discussing books, but also
in the way we use voice, dialogue and memories to inform our own reading. The notes, essays, and letters of a person's life constitute a kind of intertext. It is a working intertext, an intertextual collection of an education. Many school children have a file under their name of which they have very little knowledge, constituting an intertext of schooling that holds more meaning than a bureaucratic set of documents. Through the course of my writing, "intertext" and "negotiation" have taken on new personal meaning. The work of memory and intertext in the classroom continue to be informed by the methods of instruction I choose, but I also acknowledge the interplay of student voices with my own in addressing the personal importance of a text. I experience an overwhelming sense of the intertextual as I attempt to arrive at an overall tone suited to the entirety of my writing as doctoral dissertation. This work represents a convergence of texts both a part of and apart from my immediate school experience. There is a competing progression here, too – my teaching as work in progress. I am referring to those ideas, beliefs and actions that contribute to the complexity of my daily interaction with teaching and learning. This writing has evolved as a form of pedagogical learning, manifested as yet another linguistic contradiction. The words I choose to express my ideas represent both my past teaching and what I continue to learn with children. Voices are texts that hold traces of other voices. In a sense, I textualize the school and in the process the school has textualized me.
Part II: Vocal: Voices into Texts into Voices

The speaking subject speaks - but not always. The speaking subject is embodied, but that embodiment can be read as a text. Dividing itself and yet also bringing together difference, the speaking subject is embedded in difference between the semiotic and the symbolic or between indirect language and pure language (Silverman, 1994, p. 175).

Not all of these texts will touch that part of my soul that leads to the inspiration to teach. I do recall voices that have truly influenced me. Perhaps this leads to how a text is embodied, and I am in turn embodied by the text. Silverman’s eloquent intertextual melange – in his own words a fusing of Kristeva and Merleau-Ponty – reminds me of the many voices I hear echoing down the hallways of a school. They carry out of the doors to the environs I inhabit outside of the school. They inhabit my poetry. In many ways I cannot predict when memories of experience will return to have an influence on my life. Memories also cause me to address vulnerabilities in both my students and myself. Presenting poetry to the class, child readers reveal and remind me how vulnerable we all are. In these moments, it is never more obvious to me the ways in which students also require acceptance. In describing her choice of the word “translation” to represent the unpredictable, unfinished quality of language in curriculum, Edgerton (1996) explains that all memories, all human translations, must be articulated as speech or writing to be received or to have consequences. She feels that the work of memory and translation within someone is “received” both by those
who know the person and through the experience of living (p. 160). My hope as a teacher is to be mindful of how unpredictably lives in the classroom come together to form memories of learning. This fragility imparts aspects of the uniquely unpredictable and ephemeral qualities of teaching.

There is an ephemeral quality to poetry, but also a lasting one that captures something neither narrative nor theory has been able to capture for me. This has been a personal discovery. It may be that a poem is the most intertextual work of all, a form of expression that “designates [sic] the multitude of ways a text has of not being self-contained, of being traversed by otherness” (Johnson, 1987, p. 116). The author is describing intertextuality, yet these qualities apply equally to a meaningful poem. As well, figurative language has an appeal that will always make it powerful. My earlier discussion of bridges as metaphors reminds me that much of my teaching consists of guiding students towards appreciating a skill or facet of knowledge that touches their immediate life experience. I know full well that their personalities and interests will also determine how and what they remember. There are also uncomfortable topics, such as the highly personal one my students’ questioning once brought to the forefront of my pedagogy.

Images of students listening to my talks come to mind. In my teacher’s role I have become accustomed to various masks of the listener, at varying levels of interest, concentration, or boredom. At the same time, I am able to picture faces in those same classrooms expressing other thoughts and feelings, their eyes at times meeting my gaze in fleeting moments, but just as easily focusing elsewhere as their minds take an
opportunity to go off in thought. A teacher does not generally like to think of losing the attention of students. We have no way of knowing for certain where distracted gazes are taking our listeners. It is part of a teacher’s burden to attempt to capture the interests of a class and lead it to a meaningful conclusion while remaining fully aware that it is perfectly natural to daydream. In a space contradicting the state of the good listener, we go to a personal meditation perhaps brought on by the speaker. We have been provoked into thinking elsewhere. I also consider this diversion a form of bridging in the classroom, as important as providing students with metaphorical examples or models.

The tone of my writing throughout the dissertation represents an effort to bring together a series of reflections to serve as an overlapping convergence of text, voice, and memories. This combination opens up new possibilities for my relationships with students in pursuing appropriate facets of knowledge. As Johnson (1987) reminds us, this is not a matter of privileging either metaphor or metonymy in narrative’s search for identity, but rather a habit of cultivating an awareness of difference in place of simplification and unification in texts. This is itself the kind of intertextuality that Kristeva describes because it invites an awareness of the duality of writing. I choose which and what kinds of other texts exist, more or less visibly, in one artistic text. I also decide, based upon my students’ needs and predilections, how I will proceed with discussion. Kristeva’s early theories are also intriguing in their wider attempt at a politically transformative view of the text, calling the reader to question larger literary and social traditions (Mai, 1991). Latent political motivations aside, my writing began
with a personally transformational incident, and it has continued in this vein. The questions of my students surrounding my ennui were of a nature that produced more inquiry for the class, turning our language from the experiences of the teacher back to issues of difficulties in adolescence and life. Together we experienced an intertextual inquiry. While we remained physically in the building, my personal crisis gave way to class members whose imaginations and writing took them on journeys outside of the school. I unwittingly incorporate the surrounding culture of the school in ways that allow students to look into fragments of text that touch upon where their interests lie and, ultimately, who they are becoming. This must have conjured thoughts of break-ups other than my own marriage. The combination of student and teacher experiences, then, becomes a living symbol of the pedagogue I am learning to be. While students may pursue more obvious curricular goals, my own values inevitably concern how I am learning with them as a model of an approach to text. I am learning to reflect together with students even though we may often enter and exit the classroom holding very different views of the world. Through both similarity and difference, a shared learning space entails appreciation or respect of uncertain perspectives brought to the classroom. The thrust of my writing has not been a deconstruction of “paradox,” “tension,” or “intertext,” but rather the use of voices to highlight the contentious language I face with students as we search for a comfortable place in school. My desire has been to portray the reality of my teaching experience as a reflective struggle full of challenges to my ideals of the pedagogue leading students into textual negotiation involving levels of literary appreciation. It is my wish that these reflections provoke other teachers to
consider the texts and voices that intertwine and engage in the classroom, and to value the interplay of traditional and developing forms of reading and writing in schools as a continuing process of interrogating language.
REFERENCES


GLOSSARY OF SELECTED TERMS

aphasia – (Greek: Composed of a “not” and phanai “to speak.” A total or partial loss of the power to use or understand words, often due to a brain injury (OED).

contiguity – One of two disorders related to aphasia: “In manipulating these two kinds of connection (similarity and contiguity) in both their aspects (positional and semantic) - selecting, combining, and ranking them, - an individual exhibits his or her personal style, verbal predilections and preferences.” (Jakobson & Halle, 1956, p. 77).

exordium (Latin: “beginning”) – Also “entrance.” The first part of a classical oration. It catches the audience’s interest while introducing the subject. It was sometimes divided into the “direct” (Latin: principium) and the “indirect” (Latin: insinuatio). (Lanham, 1991, p. 75).

Haida – translated as “(we) the people,” this northwest coast Aboriginal group of North America traditionally inhabits Gwaii Haanas (Queen Charlotte Islands) and the adjacent mainland consisting of part of the southern panhandle of Alaska.

Gwaii Haanas – The larger, Canadian portion of the Haida aboriginal peoples’ the ancestral territory. For those familiar with the region, Gwaii Haanas is overtaking Haida Gwaii in usage, though the longstanding “Queen Charlotte Islands” continues as most cartographers’ preference. It is an archipelago of small communities, parks and nature reserves facing the northwestern British Columbia mainland across Hecate Strait to the east, and the vastness of the northern Pacific Ocean to the west. The islands are renowned for isolated rainforest, variety of wildlife and coastal water systems.

low-incidence learning disability – A phrase used in special education to denote students with any number of possible learning disabilities who remain generally well-focused and do not present serious behaviour issues or disruptions to the learning environment.
metaphor (Greek: "transference") – Changing a word from its literal meaning to one not properly applicable but analogous to it; assertion of identity rather than, as with simile, likeness (Lanham, 1991, p. 100). Singled out by Roman Jakobson (1956) as one of the two main rhetorical devices in language. Aristotle’s explanation of metaphor describes it not only as comparison between two elements but creation of a third, new meaning: “We all naturally find it agreeable to get hold of new ideas easily: words express ideas, and therefore those words are the most agreeable that allow us to get hold of new ideas. Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can get hold of the best results” (Rhetoric, III, 1410b – Ross, 1924).

metonymy (Greek: “change of name”) – Substitution of cause for effect or effect for cause, proper name for one of its qualities or vice versa, for example, “Crown” standing for the Government. “Perhaps metonymy has received attention in postmodern critical thinking because it is an affair finally of scale manipulation, and manipulating scale in time and space undergirds much postmodern art and music. Or perhaps, since collage has stood at the center of the postmodern art world, the juxtaposition of metonymy has been felt to be the central instance of the transforming power of metaphor” (Lanham, 1991, p. 102).

Ministry of Children and Family Development – At the time of compiling this list, the Government of British Columbia’s (provincial) portfolio responsible for a range of services including family and youth welfare as well as other aspects of community and family support, including child placement in foster homes. Frequently subject to variability in title and funding owing to a change of government or policy initiatives or both.

resource teacher – Generally, teachers designated to assist the classroom teaching role, either collaboratively or in smaller groups, possibly outside of the main classroom. In some districts the position encompasses assisting with language-related curriculum,
including English as a Second Language as well as students who display or are found to have any of a wide range of learning weaknesses or diagnosed disabilities. Maintaining student files and other documentation that involves or leads to academic testing and skills assessment is often an important responsibility of the position.