HOMeward BOUND: A JOURNEY TO CYBERSPACE AND BACK AGAIN IN MIDDLE SCHOOL FRENCH

by

LYNN COBURN
B.G.S., Simon Fraser University, 1990

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Department of Curriculum Studies
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date [April 2002]
ABSTRACT

Computer technology represents a new landscape for French teachers in British Columbia that is full of promise but barely explored. The purpose of writing this inquiry was to improve my teaching practice by examining my personal and professional life and to document how the decision to use technology influences pedagogy and impacts teaching and learning. Writing this narrative inquiry helped me understand the influence of my personal life history and the school culture on the teacher I have become, as well as how the development of personal practical knowledge led to my decision to learn to use technology to teach middle school French. By sharing my story I hope to offer insight into the possibilities that may be helpful to teachers interested in implementing technology in their French classes, and to administrators who are interested in finding ways to support teachers who are interested in implementing technology in their classrooms.

The narrative inquiry formed the framework for the thesis as questions concerning the writing process, the development of self, and the significance of the selected stories were considered in reference to my experiences in the computer lab. Stories were selected from my childhood, from my experiences of parenting and teaching in northern British Columbia, and from my experiences learning to teach French in the regular classroom and in the computer lab. The process of selecting the stories and researching the literature regarding the development of teacher knowledge concerning using technology in second language instruction took place over a span of three years. Field texts consisting of journal entries, story fragments, student surveys, email messages and poetry, samples of student work and personal reflective writing were rewritten as the inquiry progressed into the final research text.

The author concluded by recognising that although technology offers tremendous possibilities for second language teachers there are significant constraints to successful implementation which are inherent in our current education system and teachers' personal beliefs about teaching and learning. Further, the role of examining beliefs about teaching and learning is tantamount to improving a practice. Conducting a narrative inquiry is one way to further understanding, which is the key to improving education.
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Writing this inquiry finally led me home—to the place where we find what is constant in a life and where the heart dwells. From the beginning I knew that I wanted to write the story of implementing technology, which begged to begin with a narrative about my grandmother. I wish to acknowledge the integral part my grandparents played in teaching me the importance of the pedagogical spirit—an appropriate way of being and interacting with children. Without their love and support I wonder if I would have learned to see obstacles as opportunities.

Finally, I offer a heartfelt thank you to three friends who walked along with me on this journey. Ann Mitchell, a kindred spirit from the north, encouraged me to continue writing with her persistent admonishments to roar the word "YES!" even when I found myself wallowing in the mire. Tracy Clarke, a critical friend who read and responded to much of this work and whose determined commitment to becoming the best we can be as teachers and individuals will serve as an compass for other journeys. Beatrice Parker encouraged me to become a teacher in the first place, and continues to challenge my beliefs and assumptions by offering her perspective of life as viewed through a lens of faith, hope and love. Through her, I have learned to describe a world that is very different than what I would be able to see without her friendship and support.
Snuggled into an overstuffed couch, surrounded with pillows and a warm blanket, a cup of hot chocolate in hand and my Nana deliciously close by, I was secure in the knowledge that I would be enjoying her undivided attention for the entire summer. I should say I would enjoy most of her attention because during the evenings she was busy at her needlework. When she wasn’t counting stitches, we talked about family, history, fads, and my future. We managed to cover everything there was to talk about before summer’s end. My grandparents had raised me until I was three, so, in a sense my summer visits felt more like coming home than did packing my bags and returning to my parents’ house in the fall. Embedded in our evening conversations was a validation of the significant part that a little girl played in her grandparents’ lives. I knew, without a shadow of doubt that my grandparents loved and cared deeply for me.

Half a lifetime later, there I was curled up on my own couch, working a cross-stitch project of my own, while my thoughts wove their way back to those cozy evenings with Nana. Threads of conversations raveled around and about, causing me to lose count and stop to pull back a few of the threads. As I worked through the tangles, a smile tickled the corners of my mouth. There is a certain amount of joy in working through a project such as this, even when the going gets tough.

“You'll have to rip it back, just here,” she’d say, pointing out the spot. Peering up over her glasses after her inspection, she’d add something like, “But take your time now. In the end, you’ll be glad that you began again. Don’t give up, it’s going to be beautiful when it is finished.” She instilled in me a love of the art of needlework as well as an appreciation for a strong work ethic. (March, 2001)
Life itself is cross-stitched onto the fabric of time, each stitch marking a story or event of a personal life history. This story of time spent with my grandmother, for example, marks the color of love and determination in the very first threads that are woven into the tapestry of my childhood, which have served as an anchor for my character throughout my life history. The pastel hues of warm, summer evenings, quiet voices and hugs and my grandfather’s deep throaty laugh still linger in my memory, feathering out into my relationships with others and rippling through my approach to life. Each of us holds a needle threaded with the stuff of life and as we stitch, a tapestry unfolds before our very eyes. But unlike stitching a tapestry, the craft of living a life is never completed but continually worked, and improved upon. Living and learning are life-long projects.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Narrative Understandings

One way our mind makes sense of the world is through narrative. Our narratives include our insights, searches for meaning, and the connectedness we find in the world. We tell stories in order to see how others conceive of the world, and to share the journey of story telling with others. (Hobson, 1996, p. 6)

In this study, narrative inquiry is employed as the research method to tell my story, as a teacher with little background in electronic literacy, setting out to implement technology in a middle school French class. The impetus to inquire into my practice arose when I began teaching French at the middle school level where, for the first time, I encountered students with a negative attitude toward learning that I couldn't seem to do anything about. Motivating my students proved to be a formidable obstacle in my vision to create a constructive classroom atmosphere for myself and my students, especially since my previous experiences in elementary classrooms had been extremely positive and contrasted sharply with the apprehension and doubts I was experiencing in the middle school classroom. Believing it must be possible to recreate that space where my students loved to learn, I began to search for a way to improve my practice.

Good teachers ought to be able to draw exciting lessons from a tried and true bag of lesson tricks to entice students into learning but it didn't seem to matter which strategy I employed, the majority of my students viewed French class as a boring chore to be endured seventy minutes every second day. How could I find a space in the new era that Murphy (2000) identifies where classroom teaching and learning moves away from knowledge transmission and reproduction to a space where knowledge is constructed? Without a clear understanding of the process of language acquisition and the intricacies of the communicative approach to teaching French, and feeling overwhelmed by the middle school culture of bells and the myriad of young minds that demanded my attention, I found myself adrift in a sea of questions, confusion and doubt. What is required to develop a constructive learning environment, according to van Manen (1999), is "the development of a discipline that can be attentive to the manner that students experience their lives in classrooms" (p. 26). This proved to be far more difficult than it seemed. I looked to computer technology to provide the purposeful and meaningful
learning activities that I couldn't seem to draw from my existing repertoire of teaching strategies. Life is fraught with lessons and it is through examining experiences, reflecting on our journeys, and taking action in light of what we know, that we learn, grow and develop as teachers. When we decide we have nothing left to learn, or become weary of rising to meet the challenges inherent in teaching, we cease to grow. The process of my journey of change and discovery and the results of my search for a way to improve my practice by implementing technology are documented in the narrative that unfolds in the following pages.

The difficulty I was having teaching French was evident in the contradiction I was living between practice and belief. Conducting a narrative inquiry allowed me to examine the contribution of my life experiences to teaching. In essence, "teaching is so personal an activity that to understand it, it is vitally important to know what kind of a person the teacher is as a human being" (Estola & Syrjälä, 2000, ¶ 7). Understanding my beliefs about teaching and learning was crucial to improving my practice and transforming my teaching. Writing my story is an attempt to return to the very first stitches on the tapestry of my life, to revisit my notion of what it means to learn and to teach. This narrative progresses in chronological order from childhood, where threads of belief, knowledge and understanding are anchored in my personal and professional life history, to the fall of 1998 when I began to teach French at a middle school. Field texts consisting of journal entries, story fragments, student surveys, email messages, and samples of student work were collected over a three year time frame until the conclusion of my research in 2001 were rewritten as the inquiry progressed into the final research text. The impetus to document this journey emerged when I found myself confronted with a contradiction between what I purported to believe about teaching, and what was actually taking place in my French class.

Hunkered together in the stuffy, cramped confines of the office I ventured a quick glance at the student seated across from me. Her arms were folded across her chest and she sat slouched down in the chair, the trace of a frown across her brow. The air was close and warm and I could feel my heart pulsing right up into my temples. I felt nervously dizzy and completely exposed. We were seated so close to each other that our knees
were nearly touching, but our hearts were miles apart. On this particular fall day, the very first year I taught at a middle school, my mind was whirring like a gerbil, running in his wheel, in a cage. I had wandered so far from home to this place where everything was completely foreign and, truth be known, I was terrified. We had been summoned to the office to discuss the problem of behavior in the class. I had never before experienced class management problems but here I was facing a group of six girls who had decided to run amuck in my French class and I had run out of ideas that might impact their behavior in a positive manner. The young lady seated beside me was a member of the rebel forces.

We talked for awhile, Janie, the principal and myself. Quiet tones and questioning voices punctuated the meeting. We were all of us at a loss for how to remedy the situation. She was an honor roll student and had never had a mark below an A on her report card in all her years at school. I had awarded her a B and her mother was furious. According to Janie, the girls had formed a pact to create as much havoc they could during class while still maintaining high marks. The expectation was that I would crumble under the power of their popularity for they were members of the cool group. This was middle school, where being part of the group is everything to so many students. I was not part of the group. I was new, I was unsure of myself, and I was teaching French—a subject they admitted to hating but had no choice but to take since a second language is mandatory for grade eight students in British Columbia.

I was surprised to learn that Janie was here because she had volunteered to talk with us. Apparently she had approached the vice-principal herself and admitted to being part of something that she felt was
now out of hand. She turned to me and said, "It's not about you, you know. It's nothing personal. It's just that we hate French. We goof around a lot in all our classes. But you call us on it. Nobody likes that. Especially when it means our mark is going to be lower because of it. Nobody thought our marks would be lower. My mom is really mad. She thinks French is a waste of time anyway, but I need it for university so I have to take it. I need good marks too. She's going to come in to see you and she's really mad." (November, 1998)

Narrative is not only about telling a story, it is a chapter in a book of stories gleaned from a life of lived experiences. A narrative framework compels the researcher to unfold the layers of belief and experience that shroud intuition, which Noddings and Shore (1984) refer to as the "engine of knowing" (p. 65) that drives us to quest for understanding. In constructing a narrative inquiry the inquirer structures the narrative in sequence but the writing isn't just setting out events in chronological order, rather it is like a series of tiny stitches that blend together in the pattern that becomes the completed tapestry. Narrative "specializes in forging links between the exceptional and the ordinary" (Bruner, 1990, p. 47). We don't question the ordinary, but it is in the ordinary that we live our days. It is the exceptional that is the stuff of stories.

Pedagogy—a way of being present for my students, is rooted in the full context of a life and is the overarching theme in this narrative. One of the questions that this narrative inquiry examines is how implementing technology has impacted my pedagogy which van Manen (1999) suggests "may be defined as constantly distinguishing more appropriate from less appropriate ways of being and interacting with young people" (p. 19). Teaching is "a good deal more than the technical things we do in classrooms; it relates to who we are, to our whole approach to life" (Goodson, 1993). There is no easy answer to the question of why we teach the way we do. That is a question that is tangled up with "the essence of identity, of our place in the world—with the purpose and meaning of it all" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 2). The love and caring my grandparents showered over me in their home, my upbringing and teacher training in a small northern town, the challenges I faced in learning to speak and teach French, and my struggles in striving
towards an understanding of electronic literacy, are stories that continue to influence my pedagogy, as they are woven into the fabric of this inquiry and the identity of the teacher I am today.

We recognize “self” in the context of the stories we heard as children, when we identified with the hero or heroine, the lost child or the lonely traveler and we witness or tell various versions of those familiar tales throughout our lives. Self is the vehicle that transports each individual through life. The dragons one encounters on the journey may not be lumbering, four-legged monsters breathing flame and threatening to steal treasure, but there be dragons, just the same and we have known them. The dragon in my story first reared its head to challenge my pedagogy when I found myself wandering alone in the kingdom called “Middle School Core French.” We shape destiny by affording fate its proper place and seizing opportunities that chance upon our path. Through the telling and retelling of our stories of experience, "we come to know ourselves and our changing environments, and to transform both self and environment" (Beattie, 1995, p. 67). In sharing my story I hope to offer insight into possibilities that may be helpful to other teachers interested in implementing technology in their own classrooms.

Life, the act of being human in this particular time and place, unfolds as an interpretation of self which both limits and allows understanding. A narrative inquirer enters into this matrix where it is not so important in finding the truth as it is to develop understanding. Both the inquirer and the reader of the inquiry bring to the inquiry an interpretation of the stories that make up a life. Someone once said experience is the best teacher but in order to understand or learn the lesson one must first be able to interpret experiences. Interpretation rests on the particular lens through which one views the world and that lens is tinted with varying hues of experiences remembered and forgotten. One can gloss over experiences and never really learn from them but when understanding is grasped, changes occur and progress is possible. In this inquiry, I examine the journey toward understanding how my decision to implement technology arose from my personal life history, knowing full well that my stories may be told or interpreted differently at different points in time by myself or by others. For example: as a young girl of sixteen, my view of the conversations I shared with my grandmother was very different than my viewpoint at twenty-five and again at forty-five. When we return to the landscape of past
experience we travel hither and yon with an entirely different set of stories from which we read and retell the story of that landscape.

In living and telling life stories the self constructs a history that is unfinished (Freire, 1998, p. 58). That which is understood and considered critical today may be irrelevant tomorrow in light of what is learned along the way. Since I was a young girl, I have written myself onto a page in my journal as I worked through a problem or sought to record a special event. Writing allows me to understand my life—in comprehending action in context, and considering life in time and space and in interacting with others, at a cognitive and emotional level, my thoughts are frozen on the page for interpretation. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains, in her work on portraiture that “Our diaries become the stories of our journeys through life, stories that are both instructive and transforming in the telling and the listening. These stories, these myriad voices then serve to instruct and transform society, to add to the collective voice we call culture” (p. 111). Journals, personal narratives, surveys and letters have served as meaning makers and data and finally as written records for this narrative inquiry. When we write we set out on a journey, pen and ink guide our steps and we read our life history as it writes itself onto the page. Choosing to write a narrative for my thesis seems an appropriate genre for my research in that it extends my joy of recording my thoughts.

The Importance of the Temporal

In each moment one finds a storied past and a possibility for a storied future. Temporality is "subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time" (van Manen, 1990, p. 104) As I inquire into my life history I am better able to understand the significance of my beliefs and actions on my values and their impact on my future intentions. Like the floss the seamstress chooses to stitch each tiny cross into her completed work a narrative inquiry stitches words together from a myriad of story fragments into a research text. It was Clandinin and Connelly (1990) who wrote that "Narrative explanation and, therefore, narrative meaning, consists of significance, value, and intention" (p. 9). The past, present, and future are continually unfolding and enfolding and the "narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow" (p. 9). Conducting the narrative inquiry has helped me to construct meaning, resulting in an understanding of the relationship between my narrative history that influenced and continues to influence my actions and intentions.
As a child I sought the rough and tumble and I thrived on being in the wilderness. Weekends found me on my bike pedaling out to our acreage to ride horses. Riding bareback with a huge quarter horse stallion racing like the wind beneath me, was my idea of the perfect way to spend an afternoon. In my early teen years I maintained honor roll status and took part in sports, the Red Cross, the drama club, students’ council, skiing and church activities. I have been mother, wife, daughter, coach, friend, teacher, all of which have honed my belief in the importance of striving to learn and do more with life. After marrying, I moved from the city to the country where I learned invaluable lessons in autonomy, self-sufficiency and the importance of maintaining a positive attitude in spite of hardships. I have lived in middle class affluence in my parents’ home, and rural poverty with a husband and two children. I camped my way across Canada and back again, scuba-dived in the Mediterranean, skied the Rockies, hiked the Pyrenees and stood in the Babine river with spawning salmon running past my feet. I have encountered many a steep incline in the road ahead and thrilled in the breath taking view after gaining the summit. The effort expended in gaining altitude makes the view that much sweeter.

In 1995 my marriage of 19 years came to an end and I stood on the threshold of a wide open door with the whole world beckoning from the other side. My sons were grown and had left home and for the first time in my life I felt I was responsible to no one aside from myself. Taking a year’s sabbatical from my secure teaching position I moved to Quebec to learn to speak French, my intention being to become fluent in the language in order improve my ability to teach this language that is a mandated course in classrooms across British Columbia. The move required erasing time, in a sense, by leaving behind my reflection in the eyes of everyone who knew me and opening my eyes to a world of possibilities I had only dreamed of.

An identity is folded into the stories we hear and tell about ourselves over time. Freire (1998) writes of the importance of understanding that obstacles in life are not external. We can only be educated in the sense that we understand that there is always so much more to learn and once we embrace that understanding we become “eternal seekers. Eternal because of hope. Hope is not just a condition of grit or courage” (p. 58) it is the driving force that keeps individuals learning and growing. It is a condition of life because without just a spark of it one may lose the will to live. It is through hopes and expectations that we view a future that is constructed of whatever we have encountered in
the past. Our future is influenced by our past just as the pressures and influences of the present changes our perspective of the past (van Manen, 1990). Armed with hope and faith in a bright tomorrow I took charge of my destiny. In effect I was changing almost every aspect of life as I knew it by immersing myself in the French culture and language, in brand new surroundings with limited responsibilities aside from the pleasure of studying to acquire a language.

Moving across Canada provided one of most wonderful of gifts—the time to study and reflect and question my goals, while unfettered by pressing demands of work and responsibilities. Professional development has always been important to me and now I was able to seize the opportunity to focus on learning with the freedom to etch out a new life. But learning French did not progress exactly as I had anticipated. I was accustomed to studying a subject, achieving exceptional grades for my efforts and moving on to the next lesson. Learning to speak in a second language is quite unlike anything else I have ever tried to learn and I soon realized that being motivated to learn French isn’t enough to guarantee success. Time is a patient teacher. My own humbling experiences as a student, able to communicate in only the most rudimentary of phrases in a language class or on the street engendered a better understanding of both the process of language acquisition and the difficulties one undergoes in learning to speak a second language. I wonder if these experiences didn't also sew the seeds that blossomed into frustration as I found myself in the midst of a system of bells and exams that I found constraining. Through the passage of time and in spite of frustrations, I did achieve a proficient level of skill in speaking French. But upon returning to teaching and in implementing technology, I was required to critique my own mastery of French language skills. It isn't only content, the program or the tools that guarantee effective language teaching. A belief in self-efficacy and a certain level of competency is tantamount to good teaching in the second language classroom.

One can know the story, but not quite understand its implications for further growth and development. Narrative inquiry is the perfect vehicle to transport the inquirer from the field to field text to a research text and finally, to understanding. I hoped to make permanent changes in my pedagogy, which was based on what I will call unarmed curiosity. I wanted to move from a common sense approach to teaching, which is “knowledge extracted from pure experience” (Freire, 1998, p. 37), to being able to base
my teaching in what Freire explains as epistemological curiosity, which is more methodologically rigorous. The story that follows describes my temporal landscape as it documents the path that led to my decision to learn to use technology to teach French and attempt to understand, and put in perspective all that ensued along the way.

The Question of Validity

It is in telling the story, by engaging in composing a narrative that one organizes stories in such a way that they make sense for both writer and reader. This method requires a type of curiosity that moves me to dig deeply to what lies beneath those everyday stories that dissolve into the mist of time, to the germ of an idea or the gist of a problem. This, argues Freire (1998) is a “type of curiosity that can defend us from the excess of a rationality that now inundates our highly technologized world” (p. 38). It requires the researcher to suspend self while examining self. Herein lies a limitation of this method of research. Although the narrator is convinced of the integrity of the story, having lived it, one may wonder how telling a story constitutes conducting research? It is difficult to understand teaching by the retelling of one story, but within the context of a life history we may understand what it means to teach for this person at this time in this place for this reason.

This quest for understanding begins with my childhood, where my grandparents laid a foundation of love and caring in my life. It continues through my experiences as a child growing up in a home where I became a care-giver for my brothers and sister and my life as a pioneer in the bush of northern British Columbia where seeds of grit and determination blossomed. By returning to school later in life, I was able to satisfy a perpetual longing for personal development and a thirst for knowledge. Striving to try to make a difference in the education system I discovered a spirit of innovation and curiosity that compels me to see walls as challenges rather than obstacles and that allowed me to move across a country and an ocean to learn a language and experience a new culture. Finally, the narrative concludes with my adventures in space, the final frontier—Cyberspace.

It is always possible to interpret events differently. In qualitative research, however, one is not so concerned with finding proof for “what is happening” as for discovering “how is this important” in this particular context. Taken out of context a story loses its validity. Learning to use technology to teach French in a school where the administration
and staff are dedicated to working collaboratively to transform education, for example, is far different from working in a school where teachers work in isolation without support. Consideration of context is crucial to conducting narrative inquiry because it is “necessary for making sense of any person, event or thing” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32) and it allows us to show that objectives play a different role for different people in different settings.

Studying a teacher's life history is central to developing a thorough understanding of curriculum and schooling (Goodson, 1993). Simply studying a practice does not offer insight into how perspectives, location and time affect pedagogy. There are many critical incidents that occur in the scope of a teacher's personal and professional life that “crucially affect perception and practice” (p. 12). By reconstructing the story of that journey I reveal myself in relation to the school culture in space and time. It offers a glimpse of my life world as viewed through my teacher's lens. Goodson argues that in order to improve practice we do not need to focus on the practice, rather in research “the central ingredient so far missing is the teacher's voice” (p. 8). In 1998 a $125 000 000 program was launched in British Columbia (BC Education News, 2001) to connect BC’s students to the Internet. In light of this expenditure, it is reasonable and respectful to listen as teachers speak about their experiences and the role technology might assume in classrooms. “The password that will unlock the classroom door remains in the teacher's head; understanding what questions teachers ask, and what criteria they apply is essential to unlocking the door” (Cuban, 1986, p. 71).

Freeman (1996) remarks on an awkward silence that exists for teachers among the “doing, knowing, and telling” (p. 88) about their practice. “When we ask what teachers know in order to teach, we are crossing a great divide” (p. 91). Somehow, there exists a division between research findings and what occurs in classrooms, with neither informing the other. Fullan (1993) believes that “the main problem in public education is not resistance to change, but the presence of too many innovations mandated or adopted uncritically and superficially on an ad hoc fragmented basis” (p. 23). By conducting research in classrooms, teachers learn to examine and tell about personal experiences. Without working through the chaos that must accompany any movement toward change, we attain only a superficial understanding of experience. Fullan speaks of problems as being beneficial to our teaching practice because they present opportunities to bring
issues to the surface and I encountered many problems throughout the implementation process. In telling this story, I internalize what I have learned and as a result, whole-hearted change may be adopted or rejected. In either case, I will be acting according to informed personal practice. The question of whether technology is an effective medium for teaching and learning cannot be understood by watching others or reading about it in educational journals. Rather, it is up to individual teachers to work through the issues that surround its implementation and the subsequent changes to pedagogy.

Questions of what teaching is and of what people know in order to teach are absolutely central; to avoid them is folly for everyone concerned with education. When these questions are ignored, the immediate, daily, intimate knowledge of teachers and learners is belittled because it is overlooked and trivialized. Likewise, the work of policy makers and curriculum developers is jeopardized because their proposals are not based on a solid foundation. (Freeman, 1996, p. 110)

A few well placed stitches will not complete a tapestry, any more than one voice will tell the entire story of what it is like to incorporate technology into teaching. Bell (1997) believes that “language teachers possess a wealth of knowledge about language learning, which is still largely unwritten and unacknowledged” (p. 5). We must tell our stories in such a way that others will listen and become informed, but also so that what we know builds solidly on the existing literature. Richardson (1994) explains that writing a story is not only about telling the story, it is also about knowing the story and teachers offer the research world a unique perspective as authors of classroom action and interaction.

**The Influences of Childhood on Pedagogy**

What is a child? To see a child is to see possibility, someone in the process of becoming. (van Manen, 1991, p. 1)

Dewey (1916) defined Life as a self-renewing process. To answer the question of what it means to be a teacher implementing technology, I search for that which is constant in my character that carried me to this point in my life history and urges me onward. I draw on accounts of "social antecedents; a description of early surroundings, of the conditions and occupation of the family; of the chief episodes in the development of character; of signal and achievements; of the individual's hopes, tastes, joys and
sufferings" (van Manen, 1990, p. 42). In the study of education, a previous history of what an individual thinks or does under similar circumstances before is essential to know. The manner in which the story unfolds, "is what discloses the educational significance of events on the record" (Berk, 1980, p. 106).

Being raised in a small, northern oil patch town I was exposed to the boom and bust culture of the patch. The town lent itself to a transient population comprised mainly of young men who worked a season, made their fortunes, or lost them, and moved on. Working professionals and entrepreneurs also made the north their home and unlike many of the transient "rough necks," they often settled in the north to etch out a lifestyle of self-imposed isolation from the rest of the province in order to raise their families. Finding oneself in the midst of a particular era and culture equips each individual with a lens coated with unique experiences and strength. "As parents or teachers we never escape the influence of our own parents or teachers" (van Manen, 1991, p. 22).

My parents chose to live what my grandmother referred to as the "high life." Downing and Anzul (1997) believe "Researchers bring to their qualitative writing all that they are, and this includes what many refer to as their baggage" (p. 332). My parents were part of the social set and hard living, and partying was their lifestyle. In the words of van Manen (1991) "we are historical beings—we have life histories that give permanence and identity to the person we are" (p. 22). What becomes of childhood memories? Grace of my parents’ indulgences I learned to care for my own children and, later on, for my students in a way that I was never cared for. In this sense, I have transformed my personal problems into something worthwhile. But my childhood also created a tension of doubt about my self worth, which I struggle with even today and is also reflected in my pedagogy. As van Manen (1991) remarks, "adults cannot understand children if they do not understand their own childhood" (p. 22).

It had been such a long Sunday for a little girl. It was like playing house but for real. She made Kraft Dinner for lunch, and they played school downstairs for awhile, and then hide-and-go-seek in the dark with the flashlights later on. Bubble baths for everyone and Chinese food arrived for supper. At around five she phoned to ask her mom to come home. "I won't be
much longer," was the reply, and a click, and silence. A hamburger for Greg because he didn't like Chinese food. Being Sunday, Bonanza was on at 9:00 and since she didn't want to be alone she let her sister and brother stay up to watch the show.

They made milkshakes with the last of the ice cream during the commercials but couldn't find the straws so they had to use spoons. They drank them so fast they got a headache right between the eyes and giggled about that forever. David spilled the last of his down the side of the couch and started to cry because he knew there weren't supposed to be any drinks in the front room and he sure didn't want a licking. "Never mind David, we'll have it cleaned up and no one will know the difference." She told him that to squelch his fears but she doubted the brown stain would go unnoticed upon her parents' return home and she dreaded the discovery.

With Bonanza over and the kids in bed, tucked in, and the doors closed an absolute silence engulfed the house. She huddled with her knees drawn up to her chin and her skinny arms wrapped tightly around them. She was all alone, listening to the hum of the TV and the cars going by on the street outside. It was after 10:00 o'clock and she just wanted them to come home. She stood by the phone for what seemed like forever and finally picked up the receiver. It was 1:00 in the morning. Why she felt afraid she didn't know but her stomach churned and when she finally heard a voice in the receiver she could barely get the words out. "Can I speak to my mom please?" The voice seemed to fill the whole world with a roar "Midge, it's Lynn again!"

"Mom, you said you were coming home. When are you going to be here?" she knew she had already asked this question umpteen times today, but she didn't know what different words she could use that would make a
difference. A long pause, and then the slurring sound of secrets. "I won't be mush longer." A click and silence, empty silence except for the still small voice that told her, when they finally got home, she just knew, there was going to be a really big fight. That night she dreamed of coming home, but no one was there. The house was empty and she didn't know where to go (1968, rewritten, March 2001).

A fundamental mystery of childhood is that “in spite of some deep fears, we experience our parents as the solid ground, the home of our existence” (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). Memories of what it means to be a child, left alone and responsible for my little sister and brothers, impacts my life view. The sound of my childhood voice in my parents' homewas silence. My questions, my hopes, my fears were answered with silence and so I learned to keep my thoughts to myself and to develop a certain independence. “Remembrance,” observes Buchmann, (1992) “comes at irregular intervals; it unsettles the daughter's sense of who her parents are, who she is, and where she, and they, stand” (§ 7). I understand my orientation to care for my students as a result of “direct contact with those who need to be cared for” (Noddings, 1991, p. 164). I learned the critical importance of pedagogy, the act of caring for and being present for children, through its absence in my own life.

Pedagogy, in the context of this inquiry, is the act of being present for children and I yearned for parents who were present, caring and nurturing. van Manen (1999) refers to “the fragile spirit of pedagogy: the caring commitment to remain interested in the question of how to live responsibly and appropriately with children, not for our benefit but for theirs” (p. 17). Grace of my experiences in my grandparents' home, I had a clear image in my mind of what a "caring commitment" embodied and I couldn't let go of the hope that one day my parents would share that caring with me.

What hope gives us is this simple confirmation: "I will not give up on you. I know you can make a life for yourself.” Hope refers to all that gives us patience, tolerance and belief in the possibilities for our children. Hope is our experience of the child’s possibilities. (van Manen, 1996, p. 17)
The pedagogic understanding of being left alone “is that insight that permits me to make sense of the text of life and to be practically responsive, as author to the text of life” (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). In rising to the challenge of parenting my sister and brothers I chose a practical response to a serious problem and I also became my own parent. Narrators choose certain stories to explain lived experience, but to understand their relevance to personal identity the stories must be considered in the context of life history and the postmodern world. Teaching at a middle school afforded me the opportunity to remember that feeling of being alone and to examine my practice in light of my reaction to that feeling. Understanding teaching requires rigorous investigation of the ongoing process of developing identities. Goodson (1998) believes “we ‘story the self’ as a means of making sense of new conditions of working and being. The self becomes a reflexive project, an ongoing narrative project” (p. 4). I find evidence of a life history of striving to make things better and the notion of the critical importance of caring and being present for children has been constant, but I also find evidence for the seeds of doubt being sewn. Examining those doubts, the tensions between my vision for my practice and the reality of my practice comprises the gist of this thesis.
CHAPTER TWO: LEARNING ABOUT TEACHING

Deciding to Become a Teacher

Making a decision was only the beginning of things. When someone makes a decision, he is really diving into a strong current that will carry him to places he had never dreamed of when he first made the decision. (Paulo Choelho, 1988, p. 70)

As Noddings (1992) has noted in her work on caring and education, life would have been different for many women if they had the freedom to choose a path other than the traditional role of wife and mother. For myself, the choice to become pregnant was not made consciously but the choice to become a mother, and later a teacher, was. Choosing to become a mother increased my capacity to share that richness of life’s experiences with my students. As human beings we are the sum total of our choices, set within the context of our experiences. We live our life stories in the context of the consequences of our actions, in anticipation of an imagined future. The decision to be a mother resulted in one of the most profound changes of my life. I had created another human being. Someone to hold and love, to teach and watch and care for. This little human child was part of me, formed by energy from my body. Noddings (1984) believes that a mother’s relation to her children is governed by natural caring and she argues that a woman educator’s pedagogy is based on her knowledge of what it means to care and to be cared for. The grave responsibility of motherhood evoked awe and reverence, as my perspective as a young woman shifted to that of a young mother.

In 1978 my husband and I bought a farm 20 miles north of the small town where I was raised. Life on the land required a willingness to “rough it” and to adapt to a whole new culture. The transition from city girl to farm wife presented itself as a struggle to ground myself in a foreign land where I was my own tutor in the lessons of survival. The stories that emerge in working through the text of a narrative inquiry bring “into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life” (van Manen, 1990, p. 32). I became an author of my own manual of autonomous learning which many years later provided a point of reference to forge ahead and implement technology in spite of formidable obstacles.
Our tiny 700 square foot house was heated with wood that we gathered and sawed ourselves, and we joked that, “Sure, we have running water, we run and get it.” In the winter, after everyone had set off on their busy day, I set up the galvanized tub in the center of the living room floor and filled it with crystal white snow that I lugged in by the bucket load. Pots of melting snow hissed on the wood cook stove and the bath would be ready by the time the boys returned home from school. We ran for water for 10 years. Time was tabulated in chores completed versus chores left to do and there were always chores. Learning to “live off the land” reminds me of my struggles of trying to implement technology in my classroom in that in both instances I experienced the frustrations and satisfactions of learning as I went. It is in caring for my family and my students that I find the strength to strive to attain new heights.

In writing a narrative one searches for the epiphanies, “those interactional moments that leave marks on people’s lives” (Denzin, 1989, p. 15) and transforms experiences into life altering events. The following story illustrates such a moment. The day I decided to “go back to school” is profoundly etched in my memory of that northern landscape. Kneeling on the floor before my two sons, helping them pull on their boots and button their coats, I was struggling to find the right words to convince them that going to school was worthwhile. Clearly, they yearned for something different, something engaging and nurturing and for whatever reason, they claimed this wasn’t part of their experience at school. With eyes flashing, brows furrowed, and arms folded tightly across their little chests they argued that going to school was pointless.

Education is a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating process (Dewey, 1914) but my sons told me that their teachers didn’t care about them, and that school was nothing more than boring worksheets. Then, as now, I see how my conviction that it is so important for schools to provide a progressive education agitated my "capacity to act consciously and deliberately" (Berk, 1980, p. 140) in my own practice years later. They were describing a life at school that contrasted sharply to life at home where their ideas were discussed and valued and their daily responsibilities were valued as an authentic contribution to our life as a family. It occurred to me that no one cared to listen to them. Without a voice, how would they learn to work their way through problems? Gardner (1991) contends that people are not computers devoid of emotions. "Creating an educational environment in which pleasure, stimulation, and challenge flourish is an important mission" (p. 77).
Marching out the door that morning Wyeth called back over his shoulder, "Okay, we're going, but that doesn't mean we're going to like it!" Watching their little backs heading up the lane to wait for the bus, lunch boxes squeaking and one solid little step after the other, my thoughts raced on ahead to the drudgery they were anticipating. This experience, as Berk (1980) points out, was an antecedent to my concern that students are actively engaged in learning in my classes. Berk contends that the questions of education become "questions of biographical inquiries—questions of the relations of events in a particular life" (p. 99). That very day, I decided to become a teacher who would strive to create a classroom atmosphere where students loved to learn.

Expectations of our education system are rooted in feelings of loving and caring that are threaded through the identity of the woman and teacher I have become. Madeline Grumet (1999) explains that "there is a dialectical relation between our domestic experience of nurturing children and our public project to educate the next generation" (p. 3). In light of my sons' experiences at school, and the hard work and accomplishments of life on the farm, it seemed to me a change was in order. I felt helpless as I struggled to come to terms with the notion that not all teachers teach because they care for children. What I felt was missing in my sons' experience at school was that feeling of "transformational consciousness" (Grumet, p. 20) where children's ideas are valued and curiosity and questions are encouraged. Through the lens of motherhood I understood the "oppositions of home and workplace" (Grumet, p. 20) and I felt moved to try to change the situation. I perceived the crux of the problem to be centered in the quality of the rapport that develops between children and their teachers. According to Sarason (1996):

you can seek to change this or that aspect of the existing system, but unless those changes directly or indirectly change the student-teacher relationship, classroom learning will be unproductive, i.e., children will "learn" but it will not be learning that has personal and motivational significance for the learner. There is a world of difference between wanting to learn and having to learn. (¶ 5)

Striving for change awakened the notion of what might be. Freire (1998) refers to "the unfinishnedness of our being" (p. 52) as a central condition of life. I struggled to find a way to explain to my husband the importance of trying to make a difference in the world beyond our farm. An area of my life felt incomplete. In spite of the fact that we had everything we needed to subsist within the boundaries of our 160 acres, I felt a need to
search for more. There is a certain power in knowing and experiencing more than can ever be grasped inside a world that is enclosed by a barbed wire fence. Education means freedom and it makes boundaries evident, and gives us wings to fly. Hope can fill one with the glowing warmth of a belief that keeps one alive, moving and striving for more because even though things could get worse one also knows there are things that can be done to improve them (Freire, 1998, p. 53). Hope was the stallion that carried me forward all those years on the farm. The knowledge that life isn’t a given and that courage and determination can shape destiny is sufficient fuel to push on to higher ground. Without hope, one is doomed to a life of suppression, compliance and sorrow. I had decided to push forward to try to make a difference in the education system.

Knowledge Pushes at Boundaries

Though life is lived in the present moment, an identity is molded from the dust of the past. The day I went back to school I left something behind and reached for the horizon. The garden was tucked into the root cellar, the honey off and the bees almost dormant, the chickens were in the freezer, and the field were golden with promising harvest. Driving up the lane and out onto the highway that fall day, I couldn’t help but feel blessed. Reservations about hurting my husband’s feelings by usurping his power over my life faded in anticipation of navigating the exciting road ahead. Do individuals have the right to choose a path separate from the conditions implied in marriage vows of a happily ever after? We become different people over time, and as Bateson (2000) argues, "Everyone who pronounces ancient words of promise is likely to find himself or herself later reinterpreting those vows as part of a search for deeper meaning" (p. 141).

As fall faded into a shimmering, crystal clear winter, my studies progressed in spite of pressures at home to maintain the household. In truth, my focus on hearth and home blurred as my course work became more demanding and swept me away from a familiar landscape to a foreign land. The opportunity to study and engage in meaningful conversations with adults was exhilarating but family life underwent a transition as a result. The aroma of fresh baked cookies rarely welcomed the boys when they arrived home from school. Evenings found me at the kitchen table musing over a piece of literature, the fire crackling in the wood cook-stove, a pot of tea tucked into a cozy, and the house warm and still. Papers piled like drifts of snow across the table. Ideas were penned, scratched out, circled, reworked and added to the pile. I sometimes worked past
three in the morning while my husband slept alone in our bed. Life as we knew it was changing as surely as the changing of the seasons. This particular space in time was a curious mix of winter and springtime. Something died while another was given over to new life and promise. I hung up my apron and took up a pen and for better or worse I submerged myself in academic pursuits and reveled in my capacity to explore life outside of the home. I was torn by a tension that pulled between the familiar routines of mother and wife and the demands of this new creature with deadlines and ideas and a vision for the future.

A narrative is composed in the “midst” of things as one views an event in reference to: “the personal and social (interactive); past, present, and future (continuity); and place (situation)” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). These terms provide boundaries for the inquiry but life is boundless, limited only by our vision of what was and what will be. In the context of qualitative research, recording my recollection of an evening at the kitchen table is not simply a story, but what makes it research? Clandinin and Connelly contend the answer is to be found in the narrative itself, for “doing narrative inquiry is a form of living” (p. 89). In essence it is a means of seeking justification for our being one thing or another. These story fragments are part of an overall narrative and they make sense only in the context of the overall story. Jerome Bruner (1990) believes “the larger story reveals a strong rhetorical stand, as if justifying why it was necessary (not causally, but morally, socially, psychologically) that life had gone a particular way” (p. 121).

The memory of working late into the night at the kitchen table, writing reams of handwritten texts, draws me by a thread of memory to my first brush with technology. The college I was attending had equipped a computer lab for student access and typing papers promised to save time over copying them out in long hand. Although computers and word processors were foreign to my world on the farm I felt compelled to resurrect my typing skills.

Logging onto DOS (disk operating system) and booting up the word processing program was as complicated as firing up the John Deere tractor engine. Thick, blue diesel smoke swelled out of the exhaust pipe tainting the air, and the high pitched whine of the motor became a scream as it attained the optimum revolutions. The tractor belched smoke and quivered and roared
beneath me as I listened to the putt engine gaining momentum. If the clutch wasn’t engaged at exactly the right revolutions, the motor would die, and the whole process would have to be repeated, and there was always the very real fear that I would burn out the engine if I didn’t follow the prescribed steps to the letter.

My ignorance of the workings of computers was equally intimidating and if I hadn’t logged on for more than a few days, I completely forgot how to boot up the program. Nonetheless, I could see how using the computer to type my work might simplify the writing process, so I persevered and learned to navigate the program. I approached the challenge of learning to use computers in much the same matter of fact manner by which I learned to drive a tractor, grow a three acre garden, sew garments and care for animals. It seemed to be a necessary survival skill in the college culture, and so I set out to master it. (September, 1986, rewritten, March, 2001)

As foreign as using computer technology was to life on the farm, I could envision its potential to improve my educational experience then, as I saw its potential to improve my students’ learning in my French class years later. In the words of Freire (1998), “In the context of history, culture and politics, I register events not so as to adapt myself to them but so as to change them, in the physical world itself. I am not impotent” (p. 73). But there is a price attached to change and the price is knowledge. In reading and studying and learning, my perception of what life should be was undergoing a transformation and winter was giving over to spring in my mind. Freire (1998) says one doesn’t study for the sake of studying alone because knowledge of the world tells us that though we can’t eliminate problems, “we can minimize their effects” (p. 73). Studying must evoke questions that have everything to do with our daily lives and how we go about living them. Studying pushed me beyond dreaming of possibilities, to reading the world in which I lived. I realized dreams can become a reality but more than that I realized that possibilities will become realities only with a course of action. “Freedom is the capacity
to take initiatives, to begin” (Grumet, 1988, p. 55). The door was opened a crack but I wanted to push it wide and leap through to the world waiting beyond.

Lessons Learned and Taught: The Importance of Maintaining a Stance

The primary motive in teaching reading and writing and arithmetic is to produce the disciplined, that is, the docile and obedient, citizen. . . . It is only the born and dedicated teacher who can realize that this motive of adjustment to society, however benevolent, is an enemy to be fought. (Northrop Frye, 1988, p. 14)

At the college with my cohort of “teachers in training” we discussed our first assignment, which was to plan, teach, deliver, and evaluate a lesson for our colleagues. It is at this juncture of the text I began to realize how important authenticity in teaching is for me. Since it was not uncommon to hear members of my cohort uttering phrases such as: “I seen it before” or “Jenny and me are going to take the biology course.” I decided to teach the importance of using good grammar. I planned an experiential grammar lesson where my cohort would draw their own conclusions concerning the jarring effect poor grammar exerts on communication. I wrote a text that was riddled with errors and presented it to the cohort in the most grave of voices. Engaging the group with intense eye contact I paused at the end, regarded my audience with a lengthy stare, and then I explained that the lesson was really about grammar and asked them to identify some of the glaring errors in my presentation and how they felt about what I had written. Amidst much laughter (and relief for those who were appalled at the errors), they complied. I asked them to work together on a handout to identify the grammar errors and finally, I offered my perspective concerning the importance of using good grammar when serving as a model for children. To my mind, it was a lesson presented with a true pedagogical spirit that engaged my audience’s emotions and elicited much laughter and discussion, but I failed the assignment. This story provides evidence of a philosophy of education, which is centered on student needs and for which I find support in Freire’s (1998) contention that:

What is important in teaching is not the mechanical repetition of this or that gesture but a comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desires. Of the insecurity that can only be overcome by inspiring confidence. Of the fear that can only be abated to the degree that courage takes its place. (p. 48)
I failed the assignment. Failure. Years later I find I still think of that faculty associate's evaluation of my teaching when things go “bump” in my day as they often do. Was she right? Am I a failure as a teacher? Education has a moral purpose which is “to make a difference in the lives of students . . . and to help produce citizens who can live and work productively” (Fullan, 1993, p. 4). But education is so much more than digesting what the teacher dishes out. I listened silently while she explained the “correct” format for delivering a lesson but all the while I was thinking she had entirely missed the point. From the beginning of my teaching career I refused “the oppositions and limits” (Grumet, 1988, p. 28) which were placed on my teaching. Still, her evaluation of my teaching lingers in the dark recesses of my mind and rises to the surface when I tread new ground or step off the beaten track of teaching by the book to find my own way.

The lesson was effective, because it stirred emotions and because my “students” were free to support each other as they worked to extract their own meaning from my presentation. Maxine Greene (1988) points out the irrelevance of our concept of “education in what is described as our free society” (p. 12). Teachers are expected to “process the young . . . to perform acceptably on some level of an increasingly systematized world” (p. 12). A lock step system assures acceptable performance and efficiency. But is this procedure not dehumanizing, producing compliant educators and docile students? We want to believe that education stirs minds to attain greater heights and that through education we are empowered to become strong and moral individuals who care about ourselves and society. Greene contends that our current social system instructs children to believe that “human worth depends on the possession of commodities, community status, a flippancy way of talking, good looks” (p. 12). Education should provide a response to this sort of instruction. During our teacher training, many of our methods courses stressed the importance of considering the students’ needs, placing them in a central position in the curriculum but I fail to understand how following a recipe for a lesson would be any more effective than the lesson I planned. Indeed, my colleagues had likely suffered through countless previous grammar lessons yet their lack of mastery of the subject was glaringly evident. A new approach was in order then as it is today.

Sarason (1990) believes schools today are different than they were 20 years ago but the changes are cosmetic and not fundamental. He argues that reform is impossible
without addressing the need to change the power relationships within our education system. Teaching and learning does not come in a box with a "how to manual." Teaching is not just transferring knowledge (Freire, 1998, p. 49) rather, it is a form of intervention in the world and it is not neutral. "I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with ever greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition about where I stand" (Freire, p. 93). I want to draw a distinction between delivering a formula grammar lesson and the lesson I presented to my cohort. I want to be free of the constraints that are designed to meet the expectations of the status quo. Teachers who are in search of their own freedom "may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own" (Greene, 1988, p. 14).

Teaching is like having a bowling alley between your ears. Imagine the cheers erupting with each strike and the audible groans, over the inevitable gutter balls. The clamor as they are dropped, rolled, whispered to, cursed at, and returned with a "thunk" to be retrieved and bowled again. Consider the camaraderie of being part of a team and the pressure to get it right each time a ball is picked up—the relief when it isn’t dropped or flung into the gutter. Teaching sometimes bowls me over. I make at least 100 spontaneous decisions each day as I teach, never mind the decisions that have gone into the planning the day before. I sometimes change those lesson plans in the course of the day to take advantage of a teachable moment, or deal with the eruption of near chaos. The act of teaching includes "something that cannot be taught formally: the most personal embodiment of a pedagogical thoughtfulness" (van Manen, 1991, p. 84). During my teaching practicum I studied to glean wisdom from the authorities hoping to learn the right way to teach. But in spite of everything I read I actually learned to teach as I worked with children. The primary condition for growth, according to Dewey (1914) is immaturity but not in a negative sense. “When we say that immaturity means the possibility of growth, we are not referring to absence of powers which may exist at a later time; we express a force positively present—the ability to develop.”

Striving to Realize the Goal of Student Centered Teaching

Hold fast to dreams
for if dreams die
Life is a broken winged bird
that can not fly.

Langston Hughes
I enjoyed my work tremendously at the French immersion school where I began my teaching career, but my heart was really elsewhere. I taught a Kindergarten class in the morning and in the afternoon I taught English classes to the French Immersion students, as well as Grade 7 Drama and Art and Grade 3 Social Studies. It was a fine opportunity to work with a diverse range of students but I had not forgotten my dream to make a difference in our local rural school and I set my sites on transferring there. Finally, after much discussion with administration and the school board office, my application came through and I was transferred. My colleagues threw up their arms when they heard I would be teaching a class comprised of three grades, “How will you meet the learning outcomes for three different grades?” they asked. Truthfully the “learning outcomes” were not foremost on my mind. My concern was in trying to “see each student in as full and dynamic a way as possible, and simultaneously to create environments that nurture and challenge the wide range of students” (Ayers, 2001, ¶ 1). I considered the provincially mandated syllabus to be important as a guide for planning, but not central to my teaching.

It was a tremendous year for all of us as my students learned to direct class discussions and transfer what we discussed into the dynamics of our classroom. My students ran the meetings, which took time to develop, and required much biting of my tongue as they assumed more confidence in organizing activities and seeing them through, but time was in abundance and I knew, that given time, they would succeed. During the four years I taught in the country school I felt I was making as much of a difference in my students’ lives as they were enriching mine. Teaching was truly a joyful experience. Good teaching requires much more than “adherence to routine, formula, habit, convention, or standardized ways of speaking and acting” (Ayers, 2001). Six years later, I received a timely but unexpected email message from a former student:

Hi Mrs. C!

Remember me? One of your students at [school name] for many years? I realize now that your name isn’t Mrs. Chevalier, but I wasn’t real sure what else to call you, so I settled with Mrs. C.
Mamie had your e-mail address, so I got it from her. Believe it or not, she and I have become quite close friends in the past little while. She's a special person.

Last summer was the grade 10 grad for us. Pretty much the whole class would have loved to have gotten a hold of you to get you to come, but we weren't too sure where you were. I can say though that just about everybody thinks of you as one of their favorite teachers (second maybe only to kindergarten teachers, but then, they're pretty hard to beat!). You had a very positive impact on everyone's life. I really want to thank you for that! I'm not nearly as spoiled as I was, which is largely because of the "warm fuzzy, cold prickly" lessons we had. I could babble for a while, but I think it would be best if I just said "bye." This way I can be sure I really do have the right person. Please write back! (Personal correspondence, April 2001).

In the space for the “subject” of her email she wrote “Remember me?” In truth, I had forgotten and the reminder was timely because on this particular afternoon I was overwhelmed with self-doubt and worry after a long and trying day. During classes, I didn’t feel I was reaching the students, and I was wondering why I ever thought I could teach at all! Who understands serendipity? Call it the workings of the world, God’s hand in our lives, the Great Human Heart common to us all, call it what we will, it comes unbidden just when we need it most. The significance we place on experience radiates like ripples on the still pond of our humanness and from that pond the stuff of dreams is spun like magic if we allow it into our lives. If we ignore an experience and count it as insignificant, the dream fades and dies as the ripples are absorbed into that deep still pool of history.

I opened the email and her letter rippled through my life when least expected bringing completion to my years of teaching and caring for the students in that little rural school. Like butterflies dancing on the surface of the pool, her heartfelt words reminded me that “what we see depends on our angle of repose” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522) and that students often care more than we know. My dream was to create a space in the
school culture where students were enthusiastic about learning and her letter was evidence of a dream realized. My passion is in creating a comfortable learning atmosphere where students thrive. Nel Noddings (1992) believes “schools should be committed to a great moral purpose: to care for children so that they, too, will be prepared to care” (p. 65). When teachers pause, and give thoughtful consideration to what we want for our students, “then we can commit ourselves to enacting this vision for all our children” (p. 180). It is important not to lose sight of where we began and what we hoped to accomplish in the first place otherwise we may lose our bearings and wander from our true destination.

The Development of Personal Practical Knowledge

Did I have a particular vision for teaching French in my elementary classroom? I would like to write that I went forth boldly, mastered the language in a very short time and developed a theory about language learning, teaching strategies and the dimensions of language proficiency necessary to teach a second language effectively (Ramirez, 1995). But teaching a second language without the ability to communicate fluently in the language is an onerous task. I was an elementary “generalist” rather than a “specialist” and theoretically I was “qualified to teach all subjects in the elementary grades” (Carr, 1999, ¶ 7) In reality, I was uncomfortable teaching French because I couldn't speak it fluently. Stern (1977) observed that teaching a second language is exceedingly difficult and "the real culprit is the language itself, because it is so vast, so complex, and at the same time so elusive" (p. 5).

My approach to solving the problem of how to teach French in a middle school has been based on personal practical knowledge consisting of firsthand experience of my students’ learning styles, and interests and needs, solid classroom management skills, and a burgeoning repertoire of instructional skills. "Practical knowledge" argues Fenstermacher (1994), "is bounded by time, place, or situation. To claim to know something practically is to claim to know something about an action, event, or situation in this particular instance" (p. 28). Being an active member of the tiny rural community I had a sense of my students’ personal life histories and their parents’ expectations of the education system. My pedagogy was informed by my narrative history as a parent and my theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning and child development. Elbaz (1983) defines practical knowledge as “all kinds of knowledge...as integrated by the individual
teacher in terms of personal values and beliefs and as oriented to her practical situation" (p. 5). Personal practical knowledge, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1985) "is experiential, embodied, and reconstructed out of the narratives of a user's life" (p. 185).

Even though I "learned" French from a text book in high school, I "knew" that teaching using a commercial program wasn’t right for me. My most effective experiences with learning had been hands on and as such, I avoided using prepackaged programs to teach believing “the curriculum grows out of the lived experiences of the teachers and students, rather than something that is delivered to the teachers to transmit or implement” (Feldman, 1993, p. 763). I have always been at a loss as to how to fit my students’ learning styles between the covers of a text book. What did feel right, as we lived out our individual and collective narratives in the classroom, was the “overall rhythm of teaching and learning and the more detailed shifting kaleidoscope of knowing” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p. 176). Our classroom was bustling and noisy and full of games and activity as students worked in small groups or individually on different activities. Our classroom was an extension of home and one doesn’t require a text book to go about the business of living at home.

Here I wish to explore the relationship between Dewey's notion (1916, chap. 6, ¶ 3) of the mind as being a matter of "contents" and the "furniture" of the mind as being the mind, and my view of what it means to be an educator. Instruction should be geared toward encouraging students to move the furniture around in their homes. If there is a trick to being an effective teacher, it is embedded in how to encourage students to expend the effort to shuffle things around in the mind as new bits and pieces are added. Can we teach the importance of being engaged in education without modeling such a mindset ourselves? Dewey believed that the essence of education is that "vital energy seeking opportunity for effective exercise." A good educator strives to provide a learning environment that involves a personal sharing in common experiences by providing opportunities that engage that vital energy. He stated that:

All education forms character, mental and moral, but formation consists in the selection and coordination of native activities so that they may utilize the subject matter of the social environment. Moreover, the formation is not only a formation of native activities, but it takes place through them. It is a process of reconstruction, reorganization. (chap. 6, ¶ 7)
I was concerned about my lack of expertise in speaking French and I felt that in order to teach my students to communicate in French, I needed to be able to do so myself. To my mind, the demands of teaching French to my elementary students required intensive professional development to improve my inadequate language skills. I began to move the furniture. I took an evening course on French teaching methods from Simon Fraser University, which helped me begin to develop a theory about second language acquisition. Bit by bit, I worked toward improving my body of knowledge. I concur with Elbaz (1983) in her belief that “development is one of the hallmarks of knowledge that is formed out of and in response to the exigencies of practice” (p. 46). I also attended immersion workshops to improve my command of the language. The experiences of being an immersion student established the foundation for my ideas about teaching a second language as observed by Freeman and Richards (1993, p. 210) that the best way to learn a second language is to use it to communicate in a social setting. It also created consternation when I found myself in a setting where my students avoided communication in French. How best to address this dilemma haunted my waking hours.

The Importance of Struggling

Returning from an immersion course in New Brunswick marked the beginning of a new phase in my life and the end of a marriage of nineteen years. I recall my husband asking me why I couldn’t get an “A” in housework and a “C+” in teaching. The expectation to maintain the household while teaching full time was suffocating me. My response to his question was my still, silent voice. I kept my answer to myself because it would not have pleased him. In truth I loved my work as much as I loved him and I didn’t want to place it in a secondary position to home and family any more than I wanted it to take first place. Grumet (1988) recognizes that as women we are often reluctant to acknowledge our commitment to our work” (p. 86). I felt stifled by the boundaries imposed on me because of my gender and I longed for support and encouragement from my life partner in the realization of my dream to make a difference in education. How ironic that the very things I thought would make us so much stronger as a family such as an education and a dream realized, created a rift we could not tear back and restitch. The color of the threads for this section of my tapestry are sorrow, tangled with the hues of hillsides and open roads.
The profound rupture created by the shift from farm to city, from nature to culture, was never mended, nor was it left behind or outgrown. It too became part of urban life, glimpsed in the growing schism between public and private, work and home, men and women, adults and children. Workingmen were on one side of the line; women, children, artists, and teachers on the other . . . Women and children, subordinated to the family and the school, were muted in the sentimental images of their vulnerability, and teachers have yet to announce which side of the line we are on. (Grumet, 1988, p. 85)

As I studied and learned and grew, developing new interests and extending my knowledge, I had failed to excite my husband about the course I had chosen to follow and my belief of the importance of education. Does a wife have a right to expect otherwise? He did not share my vision of teaching and my passion for my work with children. His boundaries were clearly defined by the landscape wherein he dwelled. He was a workingman who preferred that family dynamics and culture remained frozen in time, like a familiar prairie winter. The wind blew into our lives, piling banks of cold white snow between us. Someone said divorce is like death only there isn’t a corpse. Retelling the story it is clear that both success and struggle fuel the learning process. “The need to struggle ensures motivation to learn, while a feeling of success and accomplishment provides the reason to continue” (Elbaz, 1983, p. 85). It is important, especially as a woman, not to deny personal experience and knowledge in narrative lest “our silence certifies the “system,” and we become complicit with theorists and teachers who repudiate the intimacy of nurture in their own histories and in their work in education” (Grumet, 1988, p. xvi).

The divorce wrenched a stranger from an identity that had been pressed into my being as a fossil is formed as time presses a leaf into stone. Bateson (1989) argues that "marriage, divorce, and childbearing become chapter headings in women's lives because of the way they produce—or demand—an entire restructuring of life around commitments to others" (p. 75). What is an identity outside of a professional life, without the familiar, the mundane, and the routines of wife, mother, or gardener—or are they one and the same? Although we may hope "that when there are competing demands on our time or strength we can find non-zero-sum solutions—not this replacing that, but this enhancing that" (Bateson, 1989, p. 328) we may find that life has a way of turning one
thing into another with the passage of time. It seemed this wanderer had come to a fork in
the road. How to choose a direction? A determination to improve my French language
skills influenced my choice.

Struggling to Learn French: Implications for Teaching

At the end of the school year I drove across Canada to Quebec to study French at the
university at Chicoutimi and to immerse myself in the French language and culture.
Learning French was very different from anything I had ever attempted to learn. I
struggled with anxiety and issues of culture shock as I faced the reality of the time and
effort required to acquire a language. Comprehension eluded me for the longest time and
I began to fear that I was too old or lacked the aptitude to learn a second language.

Becoming an adult student in a French immersion setting enhanced my
understanding of the difficulties inherent in second language learning as I began to
consider that which "makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the
conceptions and preconceptions" (Shulman, 1986, p. 9) that the learner carries through
life. Being anxious about having the ability to learn a second language "is not necessarily
a bad thing in itself" (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 172). It can, according to Allwright
and Bailey, spur one on to do better when convinced that there is no need to be concerned
with failure. On the other hand, believing that failure is a possibility and that no matter
how hard we try, we will fail, anxiety will make it even more difficult to achieve success.
Spending considerable anxious hours struggling to learn French and working through my
language anxiety, had a positive impact on my pedagogy in that I can be sympathetic
with my students in their struggles in the French classroom. "In sympathetic relations it is
much easier to accept advice, encouragement, help, suggestions, and directions for
learning" (van Manen, 1991, p. 98).

I took advantage of a myriad of activities and opportunities to use and improve my
French which included: enrolling in a dance class, working in a woman's shelter, joining
the French ciné club and volunteering in an elementary school. Gardner and MacIntyre
(1992) believe "motivated individuals develop strategies to promote further second
language learning" and I was keen to learn. My successes and struggles with learning to
communicate in French provide a response to Shulman's question (1986), "How does
learning for teaching occur?" As I improved my knowledge of content in grammar and
syntax, observed different pedagogical styles, and immersed myself in the culture and
language, I was building my personal practical knowledge as well as formulating a theory of language learning. As Thoreau (1854) discovered:

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. (Walden, 1854, Conclusion, ¶7).

My year in Quebec drew to a close with the end of the term beckoning like the morning star. It was naïve on my part to have hoped to become fluent in French in only a year and since “a job worth doing is worth doing well,” I steadied my bearings on my dream and journeyed to France to continue studying. So many highlights of my sojourn in France and learning to speak the language spring to mind but there are two that are particularly pertinent to this inquiry. The first was studying Literature, History and Geography in French. Using the language as a medium rather than the focus of the lesson was both challenging and extremely satisfying. This practical exercise not only explicated the relationship between language and culture but also evidenced that learning a language is an eclectic process with strategies and experiences drawn from every conceivable corner.

Also, there was a computer lab on campus, where I could write home to French speaking friends in Canada. Writing email messages in French helped develop my comprehension by providing a safe environment where I could engage in authentic communication without the pressure of being graded on my efforts. My positive experiences in the computer lab in France sowed the seeds of the idea to implement technology in my own French class when I returned to Canada in the spring.
CHAPTER THREE: THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LANDSCAPE

The Impact of Change on Teaching

Only the brave should teach. The men and women whose integrity cannot be shaken, whose minds are enlightened enough to understand the high calling of the teacher, whose hearts are unshakably loyal to the young, whatever the interests of those who are in power. (Pearl S. Buck, online)

I did not go bravely forth when I was offered a teaching position in a Middle School as a French and Home Economics teacher. It was two days before the beginning of the school year and that weekend was a wild scramble to read the curriculum guide, and peruse the French program that the teachers were using. Within the first week I discovered that no two students were at the same skill level so while some complained of being bored because the lesson was beyond them, others were claiming boredom because the lesson was beneath them. As Rivers (1997) observes, "One size fits all" is not applicable to the task of the French teacher (Principle 2, ¶ 2). The luxury of having all the time in the world evaporated as I found myself buffeted by pressure to conform to a completely different landscape than that of an elementary school classroom. The expectation from my colleagues, expressed during a department meeting, was that it would be best if we would “work on the same page” (personal communication, September, 1998). I agreed to try to cover the same material, but I preferred not to use the textbook and the program exclusively. Three months into teaching Middle School French I felt anything but “brave.” I understood the curriculum to be based on the communicative-experiential approach and I had some wonderful ideas that I felt were appropriate to the curriculum and my students’ needs. I looked forward to sharing my experiences of the French culture and language with my students but it is not enough to be exposed to new ideas. Teachers must have a clear idea where they fit and with considerable practice they will become skilled in developing good ideas into effective practice. Unfortunately it became all too clear that my “great ideas” weren’t as effective as I’d hoped and I doubted my teaching skills.

It wasn’t long until I found myself in muddy waters paddling for all I was worth. It seemed that for every concept or grammar rule I introduced, there were three points of
review that required addressing. There was so much that needed to be taught "first" that I hardly knew where to begin. I thought I subscribed to the belief that we do students a disservice when we dish out knowledge to them as though they have no voice in their own learning, but I lacked the expertise to help my students access language from other sources and so I became a walking dictionary. I planned simple mini grammar lessons to provide language structure and interspersed these with games and opportunities to communicate in small groups. The grammar lessons were planned to be five minutes of teaching and ten minutes of individual practice. As simple as I believed the lessons to be, they were still above my students' skill level, so the mini lessons frequently extended into marathons with me scrambling to circulate to all the students to check for understanding. Some students scoffed at the idea of playing the games or their behavior was so disrespectful or out of control during an activity that I found it necessary to stop several times to remind them of my expectations. I became increasingly apprehensive about planning anything that would have them moving about the room or becoming excited and in my attempts to control their behavior I lost sight of a basic tenant of my pedagogy: learning to learn takes time.

Teaching is often chaotic especially when a new concept is introduced and as many as five hands go up simultaneously to verify the instructions. Students suddenly need to move their desks, find a new partner, sharpen a pencil, talk about the lesson or reiterate the instructions sometimes three times. The "chaotic" was familiar ground but I was ill prepared for members of the class controlling or manipulating my teaching with their "unenthusiastic or inappropriate responses" to both my teaching and to the materials (Elbaz, 1983, p. 87). When homework from the previous class wasn't completed a lesson would be postponed. When students refused to stop yelling and cheering during a game we had to stop playing. But I felt personally responsible when a student would say, "French sucks!" or "this is boring!" At the end of many a day, I was filled with doubt and fear of having to face yet another tomorrow where students didn't appear to want to be in my class. I felt personally responsible for every student's attitude and progress. In my ideal classroom every student would be as excited about learning French as I was. I vacillated frantically between text, curriculum guide and my "bag of tricks" and somewhere in this teetering motion I lost my center as my belief in myself as a capable, competent teacher dissolved.
At this time I viewed my teaching as such a contradiction to my beliefs that I doubted whether I was ever truly centered on students and their needs. Was student-centered learning something I paid lip service to rather than lived? The dream of inspiring my students to learn was “crippled” like the bird with a broken wing. When I was feeling particularly critical of my pedagogy I would tell myself I had become the very sort of teacher whom I had regarded with despair at the onset of my teaching career. I wasn’t listening to the students’ voices. I heard what they were saying, but in truth, I wasn’t listening, I was busy scrambling to survive in this strange land. In this chapter of my life history I was the narrator of a story of confusion, doubt and struggle (Carter, 1993). I didn’t feel at all that I authored enough of my work in such a way that lives were being changed for the better. I was amazed when parents came to interview sessions and told me that they were so pleased with what was happening in my classroom because their child never liked French before coming to my class. I remained unconvinced of any degree of success as I focussed on the pits rather than the pinnacles of each day. The classroom climate just didn’t feel right and I felt distanced from my students and worried that they weren’t exercising their autonomy in the class for any good purpose. Wrapped up in navigating the curriculum, student evaluations, shuffling paper and struggling with the “right” way to deliver some facsimile of a curriculum, time swallowed me up, gave me a good chew and spit me out in pieces. Never mind the notion of “curriculum change,” I was struggling with the basic concept of what the French curriculum is and should be.

Content and method, time constraints and accountability chewed away the days and some mornings I found myself wanting to turn over and go back to sleep just to avoid the churning feeling that gnawed at my insides on the way to school. My French classes weren’t fluid and it seemed as though a stranger now stood at the front of the room. I was well aware that the context of school culture had altered dramatically. The focus of my teaching shifted to class management and getting through a day that blurred between classes of students sandwiched between bells. I wasn’t sure how to fit my principles and values into this new context of middle school French. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) caution that “teaching strategies cannot be standardized” (p. 32) and that teachers soon discover that strategies that were effective in one grade are not at all effective with another. “Sensitivity to context is vital when attempting to improve instruction” (p. 32).
Finding myself wandering in a foreign landscape that contradicted my values was frightening.

In both my personal and professional life I had experienced a colossal five years of being buffeted by change. I divorced my husband and moved to Quebec and later to France. A sweet granddaughter was born. I changed domicile from a spacious, bright home in a rural setting on 160 acres of wide open northern spaces to a dreary apartment next to a busy intersection in the middle of a small southern city and I enrolled in a masters program with UBC. In the spring of 1999 I found my birth father living in Mexico. My mother had told me he was dead. I was teaching in a Middle School where I would be responsible for 200 adolescents instead of the maximum of twenty-eight elementary students I was accustomed to working with. I faced curriculum planning for two new subjects, French and Home Economics. I would be teaching Foods and Clothing even though I wasn't a trained Home Economics teacher. Classes were double booked in the labs so I found myself doing Foods demonstrations in the clothing room. I taught French in the clothing lab too, as well as in another teacher's classroom—who was annoyed that he lost his room during his preparation block.

I bounded from room to room pushing a trolley laden with dictionaries and class assignments. I was often late to class because of the congestion in the hallways and discipline problems that sometimes detained me after a class. Getting to know the staff was not easy because of my workload and also because of my insecurities. In the midst of this quantum amount of confusion stirring up my life, a group of six girls in my French class initiated a campaign of “seeing how bad we could be but still get good marks” (personal communication, November, 1998). This attitude was completely contrary to the rapport I had developed with previous classes of students and I understood the girls' behavior in terms of a sign of my lack of classroom control and competence, which greatly unnerved me. I was so far from home I might never be able to find my way back.

Facing Contradictions and Constraints

My biggest struggle was over my responsibility concerning my students' lack of motivation to learn French. van Manen (1991) observed that “virtually all teachers (and parents too) experience in their lives constraints that frequently seem to make it difficult to be a significant influence in the lives of the children with whom they feel pedagogically responsible” (p. 99). This was rough terrain where I was no longer sure of
my footing. I began to research motivation and attitude in second language classes believing the problem to be “out there” somewhere. I just needed to identify it and then it could be remedied.

Did the constraints stem from not having had enough formal training in linguistics and language acquisition? Fullan (1993) argues that “many people did and still do take such minimal instruction and manage to have a career in teaching. It is true also that some people with a strong summer program would end up knowing as much or more as others who take a weak year long program” (p 19). But Brosh (1996) holds that “language teaching differs in essence from teaching other subject matters, especially in terms of the nature of the process, where the means of instruction is also the subject of instruction” (p. 125). My tendency is often to view others as the experts and authorities but there is merit in learning to value one’s own voice while weighing what others have to say. When the vice-principal suggested that I quit doing “nice” things in class and get down to some no nonsense, no talking worksheets and drills I felt defeated. I could do a few “nice” things, he said, when those girls settled down. So, in spite of my own practical personal knowledge based on my experiences as a language learner and my successful teaching background, I beat a hasty retreat to the photocopy room to copy a mountain of drill sheets.

Was the crux of the problem lodged in the prescribed syllabus? There was an expectation among the members of the French department that a prescribed amount of “material” would be covered before the end of the year. I was concerned that my students would enter the next grade without the same skill level as students in other classes. And more than that, I was concerned that I would be deemed a failure as a teacher if they hadn’t achieved a certain skill level. How I believed I could measure an acceptable amount of content into a vessel of acceptable skill level escapes me. But I can glean insight from Fullan and Hargreaves’ (1991) observation that “feelings of powerlessness which contribute to teachers’ lowered sense of efficacy, are often brought about in systems where they have little control over what is taught. For them detailed guidelines are not frameworks of opportunity but prisons of constraint” (p. 34). van Manen (1991) contends that “the teacher as professional has become increasingly deskilled as the curriculum has become more and more prescriptive and dictated by centralized control” (p. 99). Where were my skills? I was afraid they were gone for good.
Face to face with the dragons of accountability, diverse levels of ability, enormous amounts of paper work, fear of being incompetent, and the ever looming year end exams I found myself alone in a space where there only seemed to be one option. A good part of the time I fell back on what I could manage the most efficiently, which landed me in the kingdom where worksheets reign supreme, crowned with tests and quizzes. In a very short time I became queen of that land. Some students complained and clearly didn’t enjoy these lessons. I knew that the experience teachers provide in the classroom can influence not only the students’ levels of achievements, but also their feelings and their motivation concerning current and future language learning (Gardner & Maclntyre, 1994, p. 8) but the means to provide an enriching experience for all my students evaded me. The problem rests, as Young (1991) claimed, not so much in the student but in the language learning experience. Teachers must be aware that the social context they set up in the classroom has a profound effect on the learners and may be producing anxiety in the students but how can this be improved? How can a novice language teacher living in Western Canada where French is rarely heard and animosity is expressed over the bilingual status of our nation make French relevant for her students?

I viewed myself as a walking contradiction and, although this revelation wasn’t immediately transformatory, it did create a tension that compelled me to take action. “I could see that, while I held certain values, I could also be seen to be denying the values in my practice and living this contradiction created tension. The tension stimulated my imagination as I worked out ways of living my values more fully in my practice” (Whitehead, 2000, ¶ 6). In teaching there is always a need for a commitment to deliberation, to weigh alternatives, to choose the best course of action, and take action based on deliberation. But my commitment to my principles was sorely wounded, and the tension between what I professed to believe and my actions grew. Freire (1998) observed that what is important in teaching is a “comprehension of the value of sentiments, emotions, and desires. Of the insecurity that can only be overcome by inspiring confidence” (p. 48). But as I reflected on my pedagogy I focussed on my shortcomings and in doing so I misplaced the ability to view the entire field. I was struggling with my own “depersonalizaton” and as Ayers (2001) has observed in other classrooms, it was the syllabus and my focus on my teaching rather than the students and my vision to provide a meaningful classroom experience that had become the central thing. Both the students
and myself were losing, "the children through a narrowing of life chances and possibilities; the teacher through a degraded sense of her calling and her work" (p. 19).

The impetus to research my pedagogy was initiated by the incidents that unfolded during that first year of teaching French to adolescents. Armed with my bag of practical knowledge and a glimmering hope that I could be an effective French teacher I moved into the midst of a foreign land. Today I understand that it "wasn't a strange place; it was a new one" (Choeleo, 1988, p. 119). Researching my practice exposed the fear that had impacted my pedagogy. I knew there was a problem in student attitudes and motivation and I knew a tension existed between my beliefs and my actions but I needed to develop a correct way of thinking in order to develop critical practice. My knowledge was ingenuous in the respect that it was spontaneous, lacking the "methodological rigor" (Freire, 1998) that develops through reflection. Freire argues that it is essential to see oneself as having a disposition of change in order to be "not merely the victim but the subject" of change. Far removed from the farm, the familiar, and the mundane, I struggled to stay conscious and alive but it was very difficult to resist the urge to give in to pressures to conform to the system. Where had I misplaced my armor of hope and courage. In the words of Madeleine Grumet (1988):

women who would teach to provide a path to a richer, fuller sense of human possibility and agency must read the shadows of their stories to recover their intentionality. In order to understand our own experiences of teaching we must truly stand under them in those places where the bluebirds never fly. (p. 74)

The challenges I faced were formidable walls to scale and certainly cause for intense deliberation. My fears of being incompetent, caused me to lose sight of what I have known all along: learning takes time and students make the most progress when they know the teacher cares about them as individuals. We learn as we go and there is no end in sight to the road ahead. As I continue, one foot in front of the other, wherever the path may lead, whatever the challenges "the more I come to know the self I am shaping and that is being shaped as I travel the road of life" (Freire, 1998, p. 120). Pouring over the stirring words and thoughts of authors and change agents such as Ayers (2001), Dewey (1914), Freire (1998), Grumet (1991), Noddings (1987) and van Manen (1990), I am inspired by their passion, which exemplifies a bravery born of a steadfast commitment to
children and education that I want to believe never wavers. In their words I discover all
that I wish to embody in my own pedagogy.

In spite of the fear that I could no longer teach I somehow managed to keep a
grasp—was it ever so feeble—on my personal view of curriculum. One’s grasp of the
social-cultural situation of the school is always influenced by a narrative history stitched
with threads drawn from the pits and pinnacles of teaching and learning, making the best
of difficult situations, and embracing successes as we rise to greet another day. Curriculum, according to Grumet (1988) is the “presence of an absence . . . .Absent is the
laugh that rises from the belly, the whimper, and the song . . . Absent is the darkness and
the light” (p. xiii). I have experienced seeing the joy in the eyes of children who come to
believe in their own power to learn and grow. This is the yield after courage blossoms
and this is what enabled me to hold on to hope, no matter how dim the memory of the
dream. I knew that the world I was offering my students in my French class was far less
than what I had envisioned at the onset of my journey. In the process of conducting this
narrative inquiry, I have been able to determine those moments when I “gave in, let the
curtain fall back across the window, and settled for a little less light” (Grumet, p. xv). It is
in examining those somber moments of darkness and shadow that one recognizes and is
encouraged by an aspiration to draw back the blinds to admit the light. For in studying
“the forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external
forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities” (p. xv).

The Technical Aspects of Teaching

A life in teaching is a stitched-together affair…To make a life in teaching is largely
to find your own way, to follow this or that thread, to work until your fingers ache,
your mind feels as if it will unravel, and your eyes give out, and to make mistakes
and then rework . . . .(Ayers, 2001, p. 1)

I felt out of sorts and all alone in my new surroundings. Time took on a dimension
of hyper speed at the middle school level where I barely had time to close the door and
settle into the rhythms of my students before the bell would ring again and they would be
gone. Looking back to my first teaching experiences in middle school I can say that the
task of teaching felt hopeless. Our middle school is structured for efficiency rather than
what children really care about, and as Noddings (1992) argues, too little attention is paid
to the “need for continuity in place, people, and curriculum” (p. xii) while teachers scurry about the business of increasing academic rigor. Cuban (1999) believes:

“Structures” refer to the age-graded school, self-contained classrooms, a curriculum divided up into chunks for each level, and fifty-minute periods at the secondary level. The classroom organization nested within the larger school structure requires the teacher to manage 25 to 40 or more students of approximately the same age who involuntarily spend—depending upon their age—anywhere from one to five hours daily in one room. The teacher is expected to maintain control, teach certain subject matter, motivate students to learn, vary levels of instruction according to student differences, and display evidence that students have performed satisfactorily (¶ 46).

Ayers (2001) posits that the notion that teaching is essentially technical is a “major obstacle on the pathway to teaching” (p. 10). Attending to the voices of children, their parents and community should be major considerations in the act of effective teaching. One week into the beginning of the year I was dismayed to realize that I still didn’t know all of my students’ names. Interim reports crept up as I scrambled to find the time to learn to use the computerized grading program. There was a gulf between myself and the students, which widened due to my dearth of knowledge concerning second language instruction and acquisition but the school culture also contributed. Using a grading program felt absolutely foreign to my previous methods of assessing and recording student progress and as I matched names to numbers I realized I knew nothing about these children’s lives aside from the marks on the page and this seemed so wrong. I was using technology to keep track of the students’ grades, but integrating it into the curriculum never crossed my mind.

Cuban (1999) explains that because of the push for accountability and pressures to keep the class moving efficiently we tend to “polish up techniques and introduce mild variations of teaching” (¶ 41) rather than striking out to make sweeping changes such as integrating technology into our practice. As Hodas (1993) observes "the last technologies to have had a lasting impact on the organization and practice of schooling were the textbook and the blackboard" (¶ 2). Teaching, according to Cuban (1999), breeds a conservative practice where technology is viewed as an add-on rather than transformative. In the rush to cover the material during the week, the month, or a term,
the "technological" penetrates the center of our collective narratives taking the place of the children. The fear of making mistakes and agonizing over them as they occurred affirmed an incompetence that, to my mind, was felt beyond reparation. It is one thing to make mistakes, but it is quite another to lose site of the "constant striving that is animated by the pedagogical intent" (van Manen, 1991, p. 218).

In a way, I feel I've come full circle to discover that this whole internal battle isn't about grammar at all. Granted, researching the IRP and learning about second language acquisition has been a valuable learning experience because what and how I choose to teach will be grounded in a critical curiosity. When I doubt myself, I'm not effective and when I'm doing something because "that's what's done" instead of what I believe is important . . . doubts creep in and choke me. The students must be the center of my day at school. I need to be true to myself to reach my students and I need to be confident in my role as teacher. I aspire to the notions of Jack Gibb (1978) who believes the first consideration needs to be: "How can I make this an environment that turns me on, that I look forward to, in which I find daily love, and where I am doing what I want to do? When I can do this for myself, the environment cannot help but be a good one for students. There will be learning, growth, and community" (p. 270).

Unless I venture into uncertainty, no significant change will occur. I've been to the center of the black hole of uncertainty where my fears, doubts, and concerns very nearly consumed me. From this side of that gaping hole I see that problem wasn't whether to use the textbook and base my program on grammar, it was in how to deal with feelings of incompetence and to focus on being productive and effective in the face of uncertainty. How I have related to the changes I've experienced has made all the difference. It makes me shiver to think that it could be as Fullan (1993) says: things could
get worse even if I'm doing the right things and I had never considered that
things could get better in spite of my mistakes. He says change is a journey,
not a blueprint. I find I've been focussing on the nuts and bolts of how the
curriculum should be stitched together instead of enjoying the company of
those I'm travelling with. I'm looking forward to getting on with the journey
and, with a little of the "good luck" he refers to, the nuts and bolts will take
care of themselves and I will experience more successes than failures.
(December, 1998)

There are no shortcuts to effective language teaching and, "being an effective
language teacher is not, never was, and never will be easy" (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p.
196). It has never been my nature to choose the easy path. As educators, we need to
understand our own and our students' lives if we wish to provide an enriching learning
experience for students. "We have to work continually for increased understanding, and
to work simultaneously for enhanced effectiveness, in a constant cycle with no one
starting point and certainly no single and triumphant finishing point” (p. 196).

My feelings about my teaching were at the lowest ebb in 1998. I want to be able to
look beyond the given to find the possibilities, to come to a wall and see it as an
opportunity to reach new heights rather than as a reason to stop moving forward. In the
end, the problems I was facing were moral problems. Would I adhere to the dictates of
the language department's syllabus and continue to view my problems as technical or
material, or would I follow the dictates of my heart and take courage in what I knew
about children and teaching and learning. Part of teaching is facing failure every day and
learning from mistakes. At the heart of my teaching is a firm belief that there is

this reality, this thing of which I can never be free. Courage requires that I accept it,
I do not dwell on it so that it cripples me and provides an excuse (which I can never
have ) for my lapsed projects. I must have the courage to accept that which I have
had a hand in, and I must have the courage to go on caring. (Noddings, 1992, p.
170)

Tomorrow is fresh as new snow with no footprints, sparkly and blue with the
sunshine of a bright new day. In spite of all these feelings of hope for a brighter
tomorrow, I left the school the final day in June of 1999, with a sense of trepidation hanging over me. My teaching assignment to follow in September would be extremely challenging with six classes of English, French, Home Economics, and Art to prepare for and the prospect of teaching in five different classrooms around the school. With plans to attend classes at the university in July, the summer promised to be every bit as full of activity and as exciting as the upcoming school year. Still I was ready to rework the mistakes of the past year and I left for university that summer hoping that I would find some courses to show me a direction that might help me find my way.

The Promise of Technology in the French Classroom

Two French courses were offered on campus, one a methods course entitled “the Globalization of French” and the other “French as a Second Language in Canada.” The French courses included an inquiry into the impact of technology on second language acquisition and we spent much class time discussing the future and the implications of using technology in second language classrooms. Initially I was leery of the idea of using technology in the classroom. Cuban (1986) believes that to ask this question is to inquire into the purpose of education. The challenge, he argues, “is to acknowledge that both continuity and change are interwoven in the schooling process” (p. 109).

Restructuring and rethinking the way we go about teaching and learning is inevitable due to the association between computers and daily life in the twenty-first century (Colins, 1991). Today many teachers provide opportunities for students to interact and classrooms are often bustling with activity and the hum of voices. In society computers are used to go about the business that schools are associated with—communication. At the time of this study, the Core French IRP (1995) stated that “the information technology curriculum has been developed to be integrated into all new curricula to ensure that students know how to use computers and gain the technological literacy demanded in the workplace” (Ministry of Education, 1995, C-9). What were the implications for me?

My own knowledge base and experience with computers was limited to my ability to operate the little Macintosh LC that sat next to my desk at school, which I used to access the electronic bulletin board system in our school and to the LC I had at home, which I used to prepare handouts and type letters. For myself, as is the case with most teachers, I hadn’t considered how computers might enhance classroom learning.
(Marshall, 1995). The time and commitment required to learn to use them hardly seemed worth the effort.

Alagbe and Lenlech (1998) refer to the use of the Internet and on-line communication as having the power to revolutionize education. The very nature of computer use: to be able to find oneself in instant contact with the rest of the globe and to access information on any given topic imaginable has ramifications for the traditional nature of schooling. Much has been written about the need for change in our education system (Freire, 1971; Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, 1994; Sarason, 1982). We are poised on the pinnacle of what is yet to unfold but technology will not have a positive impact on the classroom unless teachers such as myself are willing, capable, and confident enough to incorporate it into their practices. I readily understood that the integration of technology meant much more than simply teaching a lesson with the computer. It requires me to rethink and in some cases, restructure my paradigms surrounding language learning and teaching. There are “implications for classroom power” involved in the language classroom when teacher appraisal isn’t as important to the students as learning to communicate in French (Kern, 1995 p. 459).

Ideally, in computer assisted language learning (CALL) the relationship between teacher and student changes dramatically from one of teacher as classroom manager to a model and facilitator. As students become autonomous learners technology serves as a powerful vehicle for “restructuring classroom dynamics” (Kern, 1995, p. 470). I envisioned a classroom where students are at the pinnacle of learning and testing their own theories and striking out on their own and being excited by the prospect of being able to do so. The more I learned about the potential for technology in the French Second Language classroom, the more I wanted to learn how to integrate it into my practice.

One of the difficulties I had encountered through the year was that the students were not comfortable interacting in French. Learning a language, according to Stern (1983), means much more than learning about the language. It is more than acquiring knowledge or learning skills. “The psychological concept of learning... refers also to learning to learn and learning to think; the modification of attitudes; the acquisition of interest, social values, or social roles; and even changes in personality” (p. 18). Developing proficiency in a language is “a relative process requiring time, interactional opportunities, and
collaboration among learners and the teacher" (Ramirez, 1995, p. 54). It seemed feasible that technology was a tool that might aid that process.

Anyone who has had any experience with computers knows that they are essentially interactive devices. This facet of computer technology makes it an appropriate tool for language learning, considering that the goal in teaching a second language is to provide opportunities for communication and interaction. Rivers (1997) contends that when learners have experiences in creating messages in real-life exchanges they learn, “to exploit the elasticity of language, to make the little they know go a long way” (p. 5). Interaction is central to language learning because it is a means to increase vocabulary. Using the computer to communicate has the potential to invite students to stretch their vocabulary as they attempt to engage in meaningful conversation with one another.

We learned of other benefits in using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the classroom and I continued to scour the literature to find out more. Text-based interaction can freeze discourse for analysis, correction, or reflection, which is useful to language learners because the text can be stored and reworked by the student. I thought immediately of those shy students who melt when they are asked to communicate orally. I saw this as an opportunity for my students to work in a safe environment, free from the pressure to perform in front of an audience. It is the computer-mediated feature of online writing which has “finally unleashed the power of text-based communication” (Warschauser, 1997, p. 4). Because of developments in CALL with the expansion of the World Wide Web and diverse versions of software, language teachers may broaden instruction from using technology for precisely structured grammar and phonetic lessons to focusing on the ability to communicate in the target language. Believing that teaching French with technology is about empowering students, I was willing to invest the time to implement technology in my classes to unearth its educational potential.

Developing new skills in technology will not, in itself, transform a teaching practice but conducting an inquiry of how to integrate technology in a meaningful and effective way will lead to improvement. I did not understand this concept when I stepped into the computer lab with my students. Listening to my cohort in my university class talk about their teaching experiences with technology and reading about successful strategies were gist for the mill, but as McNiff (1993) points out, trying to copy someone does not move forward my own understanding of why I do what I do. In the process of asking questions
and striving to find answers through action, the results of the study will be more deeply understood leading to a more profound professional and personal development than if the practitioner attempted to copy another teacher or was taught to implement technology. When teachers explore their own practice it is not only a case of transforming a practice but it is also a transformation of self (p. 101).

A technological revolution is going on all around us, computers are in our midst, we bank by computer, our cars run by computer yet computer technology is rarely introduced into classroom instruction. Why is that? Armstrong and Yetter-Vasset (1994) observed that when teachers meet to discuss “the integration of technology with colleagues it has become clear that while they feel that technology is going to be an important tool in foreign language instruction, there has been little discussion on how to integrate it into the curriculum once it is available” (p. 476). There are two computer labs in our school but they may as well be located on the moon for all that our teaching staff is using them. In setting out to implement technology in my class, I hoped that the insights gleaned from conducting this study would not only enrich my own pedagogy but that the study would also contribute to the dialogue concerning the integration of technology into classrooms in schools in British Columbia.
CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLEMENTING TECHNOLOGY

What must a regular classroom teacher know in order to use technology to change a practice? Becker (1998) acknowledges that in order to understand and implement change we need to rethink instructional goals, and there is a world of difference between being willing and being able to make changes when working with technology. It soon became apparent to me that “access is a necessary but not sufficient condition for increasing teacher and student use of new technologies” (Cuban 1999). I was willing to make changes but in doing so, I was to learn an important lesson about my personal limitations in situations where the “conditions of the professional life of teaching...are such that feelings of frustrations and failings are a constant concern” (van Manen, 1991, p. 82).

The Landscape of Middle School French

Our middle school offers a full range of programs and courses with French being mandatory for grades seven and eight and considered an elective course in grade nine. The school employs thirty-five staff members, five of whom are French teachers. Two of the teachers in our French department are veteran secondary French teachers, each with twenty-five years experience teaching French immersion, secondary and middle school core French. The two youngest teachers are in their first and third years of teaching with minors in French and a background in French immersion. My background is as an innovative elementary generalist who has been teaching French at the middle school level for three years. I hardly consider myself to be an expert in second language teaching and as such, my decision to implement technology was a leap of faith on my part based on my belief that technology might support a learner-centered curriculum.

In 1999 I found that the dynamics of my two French classes could hardly have been more polarized. One of the classes, which I taught in a regular classroom was comprised of students who were enrolled in a course called Recreational Leadership. In order to be selected for admission to the course the students were required to undergo an interview where they were expected to have demonstrated excellent citizenship in Grade 7, an above average work ethic, and good grades. The other class, which was scheduled in the computer lab, was comprised of students who faced considerable challenges. This class was comprised of students who were new to our school, many of whom experienced
learning difficulties and behavior problems. These students' misdemeanors included truancy, defiance, drug and alcohol abuse, and incidents of violence and vandalism of school property. I hoped technology would turn the key in the lock for these students who had firmly closed so many doors toward learning.

Scheduling one of my French classes in the computer lab promised online access to the Francophone world. As Rivers (1997) observed, "The more opportunities we have for human association with speakers of our new language, the more potential for growth in control of language for normal uses and spontaneous expression" (Principle 7, ¶ 5). I planned to begin with electronic messages on our networked bulletin board system (BBS) between classmates and we would then extend our communication to using the Internet to write to a Francophone community. I was nervous about the direction the lessons might take because of my inexperience working with computers and classes with electronic communication. I expected technology to improve my students' learning, but I lacked a working definition of the concept of implementation. The challenges of teaching are cognitively complex but even more complicated is understanding the noncognitive nature of our practice where we just "know" it is right. van Manen (1999) believes it may be this understanding which he calls "pathic" that continually challenges us in our efforts to develop a knowledge base for teaching.

Insights gleaned from course work, research and personal experiences convinced me that technology could exert a positive impact on student motivation and enhance their language learning. Kerr (1996) argues that the image of technology as being good or the notion that if technology makes it possible to do something, then that thing should be done is not necessarily the case in all situations. Just because physical access to technology is guaranteed does not guarantee successful teaching and learning. Furthermore, "much that is available ostensibly to "help us in our work" does not promote or encourage that interaction that leads to communication through language" (Rivers, 1997, Principle 7, ¶ 5). In spite of lack of support and a dearth of expertise concerning computer technology, I was prepared to act on my intuition which, according to Papert (1993) is the same kind of knowledge that teachers use far more than test scores or objective measurements in making daily decisions about students. Papert suggests that "the most important problem in education research is how to mobilize and strengthen such knowledge" (p. 27).
We are constantly bombarded with the notion that the world is "plugged in" and schools should be reflecting the "real world." Bush (1996) writes that "there should be a connection between the world and the classroom. Unless education reflects the world in which it exists, it has no relevance for the students" (p. 306). Many students use computers at home on a daily basis. Should learning at school reflect this reality? Countless dollars are being invested to bring schools online, so shouldn't we be keeping up with progress and taking advantage of innovations? But Berry (1996) suggests the implementation of technology is an issue that needs to be confronted and suggests that life is "better" without them.

We used to have free personal computers - minds, which are now being replaced by expensive computers - machines. To me, "mind" is a better noun than "machine," and "free" a better adjective than "expensive." (online)

Should schools be integrating technology in light of the incredible expense and questionable return for the investment of time, money and energy? Our staff has never discussed this question. Our school is typical of schools across North America who "answer 'yes' before we can fully comprehend the costs or time involved, much less the more fundamental issues of learning, development, or social organization where the impact of these decisions may be felt" (Kerr, 1996, ¶ 4). In our school, computers have been installed in two computer labs, the learning resource center and our library space. In September 1999 we purchased forty-five new iMacs, three PCs, and a myriad of other software and equipment including two digital cameras, three scanners, and a $5000 projector. Two computer labs and a number of classrooms were hard-wired for Internet access, an alarm system was installed throughout the school, software was purchased to protect against virus attacks on the machines and the technical support staff was assigned a preparation block to deal with occurring problems as they arose. In 2002 a completely updated lab of IBM computers will be installed. The administrative rationale for updating the new lab was not discussed with the regular classroom teachers who might be expected to integrate the technology.

There is substantial evidence, according to Albion (1999), to suggest that teachers' beliefs in their capacity to work effectively with technology are a significant factor in determining patterns of classroom computer use. For myself, in the computer lab, I experienced the oddest sensation of being paralyzed in action, knee deep in technology
and dying for lack of information and support. When I mustered the courage to ask for
information, the explanation swept over me like wind blowing sand over a dry barren
desert where I lacked reference points and found myself wandering in a foreign
landscape. Implementing technology was like plunging into the doing, and trying to
educate myself before knowing exactly what it was that I needed to learn (Schöns, 1987).
The world appeared obscure and out of context. It is "by plunging into the doing—the
designing, the teaching, the examination of their own learning—so as to have the kinds of
experience from which they may then be able to make some sense of what it is that’s
being said" (Schöns, ¶ 25).

Driven by my conviction that there had to be a better way to teach French, I
embarked on this project for which I had little personal practical knowledge and even less
support. It was my anxiety that prevented me from appropriating technology in spite of
my student-centered pedagogical beliefs. Once my classes were scheduled and I found
myself situated in the computer lab, a stream of information rushed by as I stood frozen,
alone, almost paralyzed. I was immobile in mid stream, unsure of how to take the first
step without falling and being washed away by the current. Nothing in the lab felt
familiar except my belief that “learning is tied to and must be relevant to, life” (Elbaz,
1982, p. 85) and that technology might provide the missing link.

Although my class was scheduled in the lab and the students were stationed in front
of a computer they were unable to log on to the server. They needed a user name to
access the BBS software and the technical support teacher was too busy to provide
assistance at that time. We spent weeks working around the machines. The students
completed exercises and assignments in the cramped spaces between the computers or
pushed the keyboards back to use the pull out drawers as a desk. We were in the
computer lab, the technology was right there, and the students wondered why we weren’t
using it. In truth, I was unsure of how to proceed. I asked our tech support teacher if I
could enter the students' names myself but was told that teachers were not allowed access
to this function for security reasons (personal communication, September, 1999).

September 20, Monday: We have been in the lab for a few weeks now
but we haven’t used the computers. I can’t load the students’ names into
folders so we can work online. Our computer teachers have set up a security
protocol that I need to work around. I wonder about implementing technology when there are roadblocks before I even begin. But the roadblocks are within, aren't they? I know myself well enough to understand that I just need to dive in. BUT... how do I put words to the “but?” I just know I have a rumbling feeling in my stomach. Is it just the planning that is making me nervous? I don't have the big picture yet and this world of technology is very different from anything else I've done, so that must be what is making me nervous.

September 21, Tuesday: They must have read my mind—today some of the students asked again when we could begin to use the computers and my response was, "When we have the lists together." So I need to ask about the lists again and then I must find time to sit down and learn how to set up a conference on the BBS. I'm not just sure what that might entail (September, 1999, rewritten July, 2001).

It was October before we could begin using the computers. Although we were physically in the lab with access to the machines, I was working in a context where I had "little access to technical experts for [my] own general education about computers or to solve immediate problems" (Becker, 1998, p. 27). Certainly there were things I could have been doing with my students online while we waited for the names to be entered into the system, but in spite of the books I had read, and the courses I had taken, I wasn't sure just what might be accomplished. My time and focus was divided between French and five other courses leaving me little time to consider how to "successfully integrate technology with teaching activities" (p. 27) aside from what I had already planned. Becker cites elements relating to training and support as being predictive of exemplary teaching practice and my practice was feeling far short of exemplary. I anticipated that once I was familiar with the technology, my lessons would enhance my students' learning.

The students' names were finally entered into the computer and I arrived at the school early the morning of my first online lesson to review the procedure once more. I
sat down at one of the stations in the lab to boot the computer, but nothing happened. I wanted to be sure I could access the students’ folders but the screen remained stubbornly mute. I tried three computers in all and then hurried down the hall to try the computers in the library. The librarian informed me the system was down and I found myself rushing back to my room to gather materials for a backup lesson. A serious impediment to implementation and change involves "the personal risk that teachers take in using a relatively unfamiliar technology with their students" (Strudler & Powell, 1999, p. 8) and without support, implementation is an uphill battle. In spite of my intention to use the lab, the technical support teacher decided to back up the system that day. In doing so he shut down the network without informing anyone. Once again I recognized the importance of having a school-wide vision that would include supporting individual teachers.

Having based my lesson on working in a lab that was up and running I neglected to consider that the computers might be down. Later that day, feeling inept and unnerved I explained to the class that we wouldn’t be able to begin until the next block. The announcement was greeted with groans and complaints. I didn’t consider myself “de-motivated” by the incident but, as Hodas (1993) observed there was certainly a level of anxiety generated because I was unfamiliar with the machines and I was embarrassed that I hadn’t anticipated the problem. Hodas claims that the fear of being embarrassed is a significant factor in the acquisition of the skills required to integrate computer technology in the classroom. As issues arose, my routines in the class were disrupted since I was involved in a new game with new rules, which take time to understand (Olson, 1992). By the end of the inquiry I came to understand that problems are simply reflections of questions. It is important to ask ourselves if we are asking the right questions.
I hoped using technology would give my students "more control over what and how they learn" (Patrikis, 1995, cited in Bush, 1996, p. 307). But I was surprised to observe that they were not nearly as comfortable with the technology and working in the computer lab as I was given to understand they would be (Bush, 1996; Heide & Stilborne, 1999; Papert, 1993).

Five minutes into the first lesson using the electronic bulletin board system, half the class raised their hands for help and I found myself scrambling from student to student trying to boot machines and answer questions and keep the students on task. Those who were already online were
reluctant to help those who were struggling. Some of the students weren't working on the assignment, but had wandered off to their favorite Internet sites and online chess games while waiting for their classmates to log. Inexperience in the domain of technology was the culprit, I told myself, as I tried to work with annoying machines that kept breaking down and students who were off task. They often wrote short messages with very simple vocabulary and the off task behavior was steadily escalating. It was impossible to make it around to everyone before their attention wandered.

It felt as though I was drowning in a torrent of pressing issues that required my immediate attention and at the same time I was flooded with feelings of ineptitude and isolation in that computer lab. Teaching in that room felt like diving deep, under ice-cold water and losing my snorkel on the way down. It was my intention to provide the students with an opportunity to take ownership in their learning but in reality, I was controlling their every move. Did I expect that because we were in a computer lab and stationed in front of machines that the computers would do the teaching?

Students who were able to follow the instructions for the assignment were frustrated with their limited vocabulary and asked me for phrases that required the use of verb tenses and phrases that far exceeded their comprehension levels. Hands were raised all over the room, and as students became bored with waiting they chatted with friends or moved about the room searching for mischief. Some of the students couldn't log on so I found myself racing around the room trying to help each individual. Either they weren't typing in the correct password, or they didn't understand how to key in their user name, or the technology teacher had missed their name on the list so their access was denied. (October, 2000)
This lesson didn't unfold at all as I had envisioned when I planned it. If anything, it was strewn in a crumpled heap on the floor and was trampled into the tiles by my scurrying feet. One of the boys suggested that the difficulty logging on might have to do with an overload on the server. I had no idea what that meant and I was extremely frustrated with not being able to provide access to the folder for all my students. Apparently the school server was only equipped to handle thirty users at a time. Since my class was comprised of thirty-three students, and there were likely other users on the network throughout the school, many of the computers stubbornly refused our requests to log on. My first response to this incident was that it is next to impossible to teach with technology when the teacher isn't aware of the limitations of the system rendering the software inaccessible to the class. But a "powerful reason to teach has always been to learn ourselves" (Ayers, 2001, p. 138) and working in the computer lab was opening up all kinds of mistakes, struggles and discoveries. It's not enough, according to Ayers "to put ourselves forward and assert our perspective; we must allow for the possibility of being ourselves transformed" (p. 138). To my mind, the transformation couldn't occur soon enough!

When the bell rang I was so drained and distracted by this miserable failure of a lesson that, before I thought to stop them, the students had bolted for the door without being dismissed. They disappeared out the door leaving papers strewn about on the floor and the counter tops, the chairs and keyboards in disarray, and dictionaries spread the length and breadth of the room. I looked about in dismay because the room was in an absolute uproar and I still needed to navigate the crowds in the hall to reach my next class, which was at the opposite end of the school. The technical support teacher, stepped through the door, looked around and immediately informed me that I needed to have them ready for dismissal sooner because he would like his room to be tidy upon his return. I was angry with myself for teaching the worst lesson of my life. I was uncomfortable with the mess the students left in another teacher's classroom and I was very nearly in tears as I
reached for pieces of litter on my way toward the door and past the jostling bodies now shoving their way into the room.

The thought whirled round and round in my mind as I hurried up the hall that my lesson had in no way made a connection with my students or furthered their progress. If anything, they had learned to be disrespectful when I hadn't held them responsible for the condition of the room and hadn't ensured that they were all on task during the lesson. I didn't stop the lesson to address the random and off-task behavior, which did nothing to promote their growth as "healthy, competent, moral people" (Noddings 1992, p. 10). Instead, I walked faster to try to cover more ground in my attempts to trouble shoot problems and be everywhere at once, but my quick steps soon carried me down a trail and out of sight of my students to where they had no inclination to follow. The next day the technical support teacher interrupted my English class, with a computer mouse in hand, and told me that I needed to keep a closer eye on my students because they were vandalizing the lab. Someone had removed the ball, rendering the mouse inoperative. I felt exposed as incompetent and frustrated with my lack of knowledge and wondered why I ever thought using technology to teach might enhance my pedagogy. (October 2000, rewritten, July 2001)

It would make for a wonderful thesis to be able to write that, after carefully recording my observations of the lesson and analyzing the data, I was immediately able to come up with some effective action strategies that transformed my pedagogy and bolstered my students enthusiasm for learning French. That would make for some excellent fiction and great material for a Hollywood screen-play! But learning any new language takes time, and this is equally true with the language of technology.

One of the issues that arose was that of being the sole teacher on staff working to implement technology. Is it fair to add an electronically illiterate teacher to the priority list for technology support teachers? I wonder how the landscape would have appeared
had there been ten teachers instead of just me working in our school to integrate technology? I found this a frustrating position to be in because as Dias (1999) confirms, the lack of support from "an on-site technology expert sends many integration efforts into a tailspin" (9). Initially it seemed to me a reasonable expectation that I would have support in the implementation process. Such was not the case and combined with the mechanical difficulties I encountered, I often felt discouraged and anxious over the problems of the day rather than excited about what might be possible tomorrow.

Not knowing the password to log on to the server created delays, and pulling up web sites and spending hours learning how to navigate them efficiently took an incredible amount of precious time that may have been better spent with input from an expert. Finally there was the issue of the mechanical difficulties that constantly reared its ugly head and breathed fire into all my best laid plans: frozen screens, or students not being able to log on, and sites that wouldn't come up. I hadn't bargained for the rough terrain that hindered my progress and jarred my steps. Technical issues held the reins with little time left for language development. Progress was likely much slower as I worked alone but, gradually, the details began to fall into place as documented in the following examples of one student's efforts:

Tuesday, October 12, 1999: Salut MME coburn. Mon fete d'action de grace etait bon. Salut!!! Marnie

Wednesday, November 10, 1999: Re: Shawna. Hehe Est-ce-que tu supposition quelle J'aime? Supposition!!! Tu aux pret ce tu reternes a des toiletes!!

December 15, 1999: Cher Pere Noel. Bonjour Pere Noel, ca va? Ce Noel

I considered Marnie to be self-motivated and a keenly enthusiastic student but I feared for her progress in what I perceived to be the noisy unproductive atmosphere of the computer laboratory. "Feelings of being overwhelmed by classroom restraints," argues Murphy (2000), "and issues related to classroom management [lead] to more teacher-centered instruction in spite of the desire to want to have more student-centered teaching" (chap. 3.6, ¶ 2). I expected students with Marnie's skill level to complete the assignments with the "right" answers, which to my mind meant grammatically correct. Even though I was well aware of the amount of time required to acquire a language I was stuck on the "perfect product" page. My expectations weren't in line with what the students were learning but another of the issues that arose was that my ability to articulate what I believed about their learning eluded me. I could only describe the world I could see, the world I could understand. Papert (1990) believes there are many factors that play a significant role in learning.

The context for human development is always a culture, never an isolated technology. In the presence of computers, cultures might change and with them people's ways of learning and thinking. But if you want to understand (or influence) the change, you have to center your attention on the culture—not on the computer. (¶ 7)

If my entire class had worked hard to complete efforts such as Marnie's my mind would have been at ease. But such was not the case. Much of the work other students was even less developed, consisting of simple phrases such as "ca va?" or "bonjour, comment ça va?" Their apparent lack of effort and progress plagued my waking hours and disturbed my sleep. Woods (1996) believes that "In teaching, the 'problem' and goal of having learners learn the language is dynamic. The teacher is making decisions and carrying out actions that involve decisions and actions by the other participants in the process—the learners" (¶ 24). Many of my students had a different agenda than I, so
although I planned lessons, the results were rarely predictable. There was a huge gulf widening in my interaction with my students. Would their writing improve over time? To our detriment, in the world of school we tend to begin with what students can't do or aren't doing and build our curriculum on repairing weaknesses (Ayers, 2001). Part of my job as a teacher is in struggling to understand the novel ways the students demonstrate their understanding. How can we describe something when we aren't certain of what we are observing?

I had opened Pandora's box and without knowing what was inside, I was unsure of how to proceed with the problems that escaped its confines. Fortunately, like Pandora, I managed to snap the lid shut once more before hope fled. Each little nasty that escaped from the box represented a deficit that I could identify in my lesson. After working in the lab for almost a month, it was clear that we had ventured into an environment that was far different from any other environment in the school and none of us had a map. For the students, the task of interaction on the BBS didn't appear to be translating into learning or furthering knowledge. Adolescents view talking and interacting as social activities involving lots of noise and movement. And those who fail, well, they failed in spite of being offered many opportunities to succeed. I was concerned over the quality and amount of writing that I should be expecting and in retrospect, my expectations may have been too high, but Ayers counsels educators to pay attention to what the environment is saying. In this case, although I was not sure where to find benchmarks for assessing writing, the environment was saying "Have them write more!" Charting my own course was a daunting task and it was Hope that carried me through.

Class time was more productive when the students worked in partners, providing peer support to those students who struggled with vocabulary and sentence structure in their messages. Pairing the students freed more server space so everyone could log onto the BBS. Partner work also diminished many of the "what do we do now?" questions, relieving my frustration of not being able to be in fifteen places at once. The opportunity to work together also inspired confidence in some of the students. For those students who were motivated to work through the process of learning to use the technology there was evidence of a kind of progress as they sent off more and more messages to their classmates. To my mind, they were becoming more comfortable working with the technology. Nonetheless, for all the progress they made, I will never forget that horrible
sinking feeling when the bell rang that day and time washed over me, sucked me out to an ocean of confusion and chaos and left me there to drown.

Lack of confidence posed a major obstacle to successful implementation of technology as I chose to view my mistakes and my bumping about in the dark as evidence of failure. Still, I consider myself to be a highly motivated teacher and, although I didn't have access to the Internet and online resources outside of school, I was eager to enhance my teaching skills by learning about this new technology that I saw as a potentially valuable learning medium (Honey & Moeller, 1990, p. 9). In a study, which examined how teachers' beliefs and values influence the successful integration of microcomputers in the classroom, Honey and Moeller found that a significant factor contributing to success was the teachers' involvement with computer work outside of school, "either to do additional school-based work or as part of their personal lives" (p. 9). Although I had little access to computers outside the school setting, my narrative history reveals character traits that I celebrate and work hard to develop such as perseverance and a caring commitment to education. It also highlights those pinnacles of personality that one would rather guard behind a closed door, such as low self-esteem and timidity. Selecting these particular story fragments to construct the narrative is certainly significant since through them I can understand how my attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and values are expressions of a narratively constructed identity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I can't say that I continually worked through the implementation of technology with the "view from the summit" in mind. Stepping into the lab, there was a whole mountain range of material to learn about technology and I was afraid of that ignorance. Rather than embracing it as an opportunity to grow, I had the tendency to hide it as being proof that I had no right to be in the lab. While conducting a narrative inquiry we find that as we "slide backward and forward temporally, it is clear that we stay rooted in a place called school" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60) and discover that we are not alone in this space. While working through an inquiry, however, we can allow the culture of school to isolate us to the point that doubts plague our practice. In our traditional system, teachers are expected to know everything and we "find ourselves struggling to survive in schools structured in ways that make our purposes seem hopeless and inaccessible" (Ayers, 2001, p. 8). Intuition told me that communicating over an electronic message
system was beneficial to language acquisition and I had faith in my ability to provide a similar language learning experience for my students. The difficulty was wedged into how to work in isolation to uncover possible solutions to elusive problems.

I followed an established pattern trod by most teachers during the process of technology integration as documented by Kent and McNerney (1999). Teachers go through phases as they learn to use technology to teach and in the entry phase I focussed on concerns with the technical aspects of integration and management issues. As I became accustomed to the computers and established routines in the lab I found I used "the technology to support the same instructional patterns that existed before the introduction of technology" (p. 12). I taught mini lessons on vocabulary and grammar and we used the BBS to practice sentence structure much as they would write out sentences in their exercise books. When I observed that not all students were receiving mail from their peers I decided to write letters as class assignments which each student was required to translate and respond to. Armed with dictionaries and vocabulary lists they worked with a partner to complete the assignments. The room took on a welcomed quiet hum and I began to feel as though we were making progress. But I question my motivation. Was I assuming responsibility for their learning?

A consequence of the assignment was that they were now writing to me and I felt that to maintain the integrity of the project, I needed to respond to each message. How does a teacher respond to messages that are riddled with spelling and syntax errors when language proficiency depends upon both comprehension and production (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 1)? The question of assessment and evaluation is bothersome. How does an educator decide on benchmarks for progress in a classroom of diverse skill levels not only in the French language but also in online communication? In the computer lab I was unclear of a proper focus. I struggled to produce simple phrases with familiar vocabulary that addressed their level of French but I often found it necessary to use tenses and vocabulary they weren't familiar with and I wondered about stretching them beyond their limit to where they didn't feel successful enough to continue. The demands of using the language to teach rather than teaching about the language brought my language skills into focus to a greater degree than if we were using a textbook and following a program and I was being tugged in many directions at once. Because I was the model for their developing language skills I felt tremendous pressure to maintain high
standards of writing which required endless hours of pouring over the dictionary to verify correct spelling and syntax. I wondered what it was I was looking for in their learning and my teaching. What does a classroom look like when it's been transformed by the use of technology? At this point in the journey the response to this question was uncertain.

As I established routines in the lab and became more comfortable with the computer software, I found time to create electronic worksheets where students could pull up the lesson on the BBS, copy the message to a file, complete the exercise and send their completed assignment to me over the BBS. The process was extremely confusing to some of the students and using technology in our class was often more about the “bells and whistles” than interacting in French. It didn't seem to matter what I tried, I find little evidence in my early field text entries to support the theory that technology encourages “exploration and the realization that there are multiple pathways to knowledge” (Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot, 1994, p. 483). Instead I was using technology to fit old routines and a curricular paradigm where I controlled the students' learning. Some students became more proficient at speed and efficiency and unfortunately I noticed that other students became even more proficient at copying and pasting their peers' work to answer assignment questions. I lectured the students on the moral responsibility to work to the best of their ability without plagiarizing another person’s work but I began to wonder if learning with technology might not be packaged differently than conventional classroom learning.

After working with the students in the lab for over a month, I was wondering exactly how technology was empowering the learners. In my elementary classrooms the students learned to take charge of their own learning over time. My goal was to help them become autonomous learners. But in my French classes some students remained almost entirely teacher dependent, preferring to raise their hands and wait for my help rather than to set out and find answers on their own. My goal was to fill them full of French. Their attitudes towards the class did not seem to be improving in that many of them spent their time chatting in English or playing desktop games rather than applying themselves to the task at hand. In response I used the online worksheets to replicate traditional learning practices (Murphy, 2000, p. 14) with the expectation that they would work in silence using the vocabulary provided on the screen, following the models, to learn to communicate in French. Discipline problems increased as the year progressed and those
students who were often in trouble in other classes misbehaved in our French class as well. Working in the lab didn't improve my rapport with these students. The conflict between what I envisioned in a student-centered classroom and what I observed in this curricular-centered classroom evoked changes but it "never transformed those beliefs outright; the process seemed more gradual: an erosion of the old, an accretion of the new" (Dwyer, 1994, cited in Murphy, 2000, p. 13). That I understood that there was a conflict was a first step toward a transformation of my practice.

In comparison to my leadership class, which was scheduled in a regular classroom, progress for the students scheduled in the lab was slower if there was progress noted at all and I was becoming concerned about assessment. Some of the students spent the class loading the program and when the machines froze or refused to boot up they sat and waited for me rather than asking for help from another student. The frozen screen translated into an immobile student with nothing being accomplished. My experiences with elementary school children had been that they were perfectly capable of taking charge of their learning leading me to believe there was something missing in my pedagogy with these adolescents. When the students did get busy with the task at hand they would write only three or four words and send off the message. When each message was received, the computers would ring off an electronic bell. The room was ringing like a wind chime in a hurricane with all the messages that were being sent off every few minutes. I had no idea that we could turn off the volume and the students were gleefully ringing those bells with gay abandon. We worked with the bells ringing for a week before I learned how to turn off the volume. I had not even considered that it might be possible to do so. (November 1999)

My fear that my intuition had led me astray and technology had no place in my practice was alleviated somewhat when I arranged to give my leadership class the option
of using the computers in the library to work through some of the same exercises. The
response was overwhelming. They used their time wisely in the library, spent ten to
twenty minutes typing as many messages as they could to each other, sent them off and
returned to the class. I was pleasantly surprised when I pulled up their assignment folder
because it was brimming with their efforts, each message demonstrating an example of a
good strong effort to communicate in French. I suspected class dynamic and location
played a part in their motivation to use the computers to correspond. These leadership
students demonstrated a strong work ethic and travelling to the library was a privilege
they wished to see extended. There was a payoff for producing good quality work. Still I
was finding “little evidence to show that learning a language through computerized
materials and exercises is superior to learning one through more traditional means”
(Richmond, 1999, p. 297). This class tended to produce superior work in the conventional
classroom setting, over the work that was being produced by the other class in the
computer lab.

Was the problem that the class was always held in the computer lab? Unfortunately,
space in the school was at a premium and I was reluctant to ask to move my students
since that would mean taking over some other teacher's class during their preparation
time. But was there more? Did I equate continuing working in the computer lab to
maintaining the stance that all was well. Moving out of the lab could mean that I was
admitting to the administration that my hunch about technology having potential to
enhance my students' learning was ill founded. In essence, I would be giving up.
Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that in composing a research text, one "looks for
the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across an individual's
experience and in the social setting" (p. 132). My narrative is a story of innovation and
rising to meet challenges, but it is also the story of the consequences of taking risks and
of the doubts that ensue with such action. Both my students, as well as myself, were
encountering problems with risk taking.

Class dynamic seemed to be a very real problem for the students in the lab as it is
the heart of most problems in teaching and learning. Stories about teaching and learning
are, after all, stories about relationships which are comprised of struggling to come to
know the stranger within ourselves, as well as creating a rapport with the strangers in our
classroom. Would the class scheduled in the lab be encouraged to leap their fear of risk
taking if they could experience a real reason to write and communicate? If class dynamic was a problem, it seemed a reasonable solution to invite them to step outside the boundaries of the school and its walls to participate in a different learning community.

I found a means to accomplish this in the core French IRP (Ministry of Education, 1995) in a unit where students participate in an email exchange to improve their French. Ohmaye (1998) found that "language acquisition depends heavily on interaction with native speakers and native speakers are hard to come by" (p. 2). This was certainly the case as it took months to find a teacher willing to correspond and I finally had to settle on a class of French second language (FSL) students in New Zealand. I found the class through a Web site called "epals." The online registration form was confusing and it took me several days to work through the registration process. Once inside the site, I found a puzzling array of requests for epals from countries around the world. It took days of searching the site to locate the requests for French correspondents. A week had gone by and I still hadn't made any connections. I was frustrated with the difficulty I experienced in trying to navigate the site and with the amount of time it was taking to find a class that was interested in corresponding with us. My frustration is supported by teachers in Murphy's study (2000) who also found that using the Internet was time consuming; required advance preparation that was not available during school hours; and that while a teacher may want to devote time to the Internet, demands already put on teachers make it very difficult to do everything one would like to do. The lack of training combined with little support and a blurred vision represent significant challenges to teachers interested in implementing technology. Implementation is further hindered when there is a lack of collaboration.

Ortega (1987) views networked classroom interaction and second language learning as a "collaborative act that happens in a social and political context, with learners and teacher working together in the new medium of networked interaction" (p. 82). But to the contrary, I experienced implementing technology as a solitary affair in the context of our school, requiring many extra hours with little satisfaction in return. There was an ever-growing list of skills, vocabulary and approaches to implementing technology to explore. Being no stranger to hard work and innovation I was certain that with the passage of time, I would slay this dragon of unfamiliarity and with this accomplishment all would be right with the world.
The end of the first term was approaching and my BBS mailbox was brimming over with messages. The sheer volume of messages was intimidating and well beyond a reasonable amount for assessment so I can concur with Kidd (1997) that a teacher's role is not diminished by implementation of technology. But I couldn't find evidence to support her finding that my place in the classroom was more vital, because I was not devoting my "entire energy to what humans do better" than machines by providing spontaneous interaction or an enhanced learning experience. In my estimation, my lessons were falling far short of the "expert" category. As I read the many messages filling my mailbox it was clear that my students were following my instructions to communicate with their classmates in French. But how could I measure what they were learning? What if there was no validation of a certain level of mastery? What if time was truly of the essence and if I trusted the process, they would eventually begin to learn in spite of testing or instruction? What then is the place of the teacher and instruction?

Conduction the inquiry brought to the forefront the question of the purpose of schooling and the place of technology in our present system, and more pointedly for me, why are we teaching French in middle school? The response to this question is fertile ground for debate but is beyond the scope of this inquiry. Still, I wondered if all the courses, the time, the travels and the effort to learn a language to improve my teaching of it amounted to a monumental waste of focus? Implementing technology was a catalyst to compel me to retrace my steps to the origin of my journey into education and the school landscape. My present task was to improve instruction rather than to justify teaching the course, but how does one separate the two. Implementing technology also forced me to examine the context in which I teach a disparate subject, isolated from my colleagues, without support in a strange landscape. Ohmaye (1998) explains that to design language learning environments we must combine content, theories of learning and issues of motivation and tutoring systems (p. 3). I was struggling with a justification for teaching French. I need to believe in the validity and the relevance of what I teach. In the end, technology provided such a justification. As I became more comfortable with the technology it began to have an impact on the nature of my instruction.

Justifying the use of technology turns in on itself to beliefs, values, assumptions and knowledge. In short, the argument is for a natural acquisition of language where the learner "does not try to learn, but instead engages in meaningful activities that require
language” (Ohmaye, 1998, p. 17). What does a language classroom look like based on Ohmaye’s design? I searched my field texts to ascertain what my students thought about our classroom. Some of their reflections reveal a tentative tone. Does that tone echo my own misgivings and uncertainties—not only about using technology but also about the difficulties inherent in learning a second language? Following are some of their thoughts about the BBS project. To introduce the survey I told them that I wanted to hear what they were thinking about using the computers to learn French and how they felt about working in the computer lab. The students hand wrote their responses on lined paper and they were asked not to include their names. Reading their responses I realized they weren’t as excited about working with technology as I had hoped.

Student: I like working in this room because there’s computers in this room and I like doing little assignments. I like working on the computers because it helps me with my typing skills. The [name of the school] BBS is good because it’s another way of communicating.

Student: I think that this room is good for class working but sometimes it is tempting to do something like doodle on the computers while a lesson is being taught. The BBS is helpful but I don’t like writing to you or one of my friends and having the message out in the open for the class to read. No, I don’t think the BBS is a waste of time. I would rather type then write it out by hand. Sometimes it is confusing but most of the time it’s not. It’s a more open are to do things. It’s not so closed in.

Student: At some times I enjoy working in here. The computers are a great way of helping with French spelling. I like using the BBS because typing and sending computer messages is much easier and keeps me organized better. If we do an assignment on the BBS that I don’t finish right away, I’ll never loose it like I do with a binder. I also look forward to communicating over the Internet. That sounds like fun. Sometimes the computers get in the way but most of the time they are nothing but a bonus.
I don't like doing research in the library and I don't like moving to different rooms like the library too much.

Student: I would like a different room. With all the computers it is really difficult to work I would like to just go to the library and use the computers there. The BBS is okay but a lot of times I get tired of using it. I do not think it is a waste of time though. Just a little boring. Without the computers we can also see the board without any trouble. (November, 2000)

Both students and I were adjusting to the place of the computers in our classroom and there were times when the computers were obstacles to learning. Initially they were the focus as they upset routines by stubbornly shutting down at the most inopportune moments. The Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow research project (Dwyer, Ringstaff, & Sandholtz, 1990) which ran from 1986-89 studied American classrooms integrating technology. The researchers found that an environment, such as one finds in a computer lab, where the students are seated as in an egg crate, tend to perpetuate a traditional approach to teaching and limits the number of possible options for change. Assigning partners was a first step away from that model where they would simply work quietly at their individual stations and go about the business of learning French under the guise of quiet concentration. If they are quiet they must be learning. Of course, teacher beliefs of this nature are contrary to a highly interactive and creative learning environment (Stuebing, Celsi, Cousineau, 1994). But I concur with Dwyer et al. (1992) that although my computer-based issues were far from over, my struggles to accommodate the new technology were abating during that first year as I adopted the technology to support familiar methods and materials. I followed the pattern observed by the researchers as I moved from the entry phase of confusion and struggle with management issues and trouble shooting to the adoption phase of using the computers within existing frameworks of instruction.

The Importance of Collaboration and Support

By November I was both mentally and physically exhausted. Afternoons spent at the school after hours were taking their toll. I sometimes found myself hunkered in front of the computer screen after 6:00 p.m. sorting BBS messages and preparing for the next day.
Lessons in the lab often seemed to drag on forever while I tried to attend to students' language development as well as help them navigate the screen while trouble shooting technical problems without the technical expertise to be able to fix the malfunction. The chaos of constant struggling to learn about technology along with discipline problems that simply would not abate were wearing on my health and happiness. My life revolved around school and my difficulties in the computer lab. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) refer to this sort of exhaustion as being where “One arises from lonely battles, unappreciated efforts, losing ground, and a growing and gnawing feeling of hopelessness that you cannot make a difference” (p. 107). School culture plays a role in what kind of tiredness we experience. As an elementary school teacher I often experienced an exhaustion that “accompanies hard work as part of a team, a growing recognition that you are engaged in a struggle that is worth the effort, and a recognition that what you are doing makes a critical difference for a reluctant child or a discouraged colleague” (p. 107). By no means did I feel part of a team at the middle school level. If anything, I felt censured.

I needed help to initiate the epal project. An outline for such a project is in the Core French curriculum document (1995) but I was unsure about school and district policies regarding student Internet use and correspondence via email. Everyone is always seems so busy and time is so precious that I was reluctant to ask for help. But I also wondered if there was a “best way” to organize my project and I believed that the experts in our school might have some ideas that could set me off in a worthwhile direction and save me some time in the process.

Pausing at the threshold of the computer room door, hesitant to enter and worried that I was imposing I felt as though I was about to leap off into a vast chasm. It was the same feeling I had when as a child I would pick up the telephone receiver to call my mother to ask her to come home. The two technical support teachers were seated at the iMac discussing something on the screen. Neither man looked up nor acknowledged me but remained deeply
engrossed in their conversation concerning whatever was on the screen. I approached the desk and stood, for a few minutes, waiting for them to finish their discussion. Finally one of them looked up. “Did you want something, Lynn?” The other support teacher continued focussing on the screen as I summoned the courage to find my voice. I hoped my questions wouldn’t appear too stupid to them. There was so much I didn’t know about technology and these two men were our “gurus” and here I was, at the foot of the mountain so to speak.

“I’m sorry to bother you but I have some questions that I’m hoping you can help me with,” I said. “I have a plan for a unit for my French class using the computers to write to students in a Francophone community, but I’m wondering about our school and district policy. How do I find out about that?” I asked.

“Well, at our school students are required to fill out an Internet application form and have it signed by their parents,” he offered. “But our policy is that students can’t access personal email accounts during school time. You’ll have to think of something else. The district has strict guidelines regarding communication over the Internet. There are safety issues involved that you will need to investigate, but you will need to contact the district office to find out that information.”

As he continued to cite the regulations and options available to me, I found myself swimming in technical jargon and dismayed by the obstacles that seemed to multiply with every word. Not the least of which was my perception that he really didn’t want to be bothered with my project. The second support teacher gazed up at me briefly to contribute that he had never tried such a project so couldn’t offer any suggestions and with that he
refocused his attention on the screen. I exited the room with the name of the district department head and the distinct feeling that I was stepping over a fence past a no trespassing sign. (November, 1999)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to tell educators how to change their situation to produce greater collaboration but without collaboration implementing computer technology is exceedingly more difficult. Working in isolation where there are so many unknowns poses an obstacle most teachers will not and have not been willing to confront. The majority of teachers will be denied access to a world of potential that is available to teachers and students through the Internet and computer technology if computer studies continue to be taught as a disparate subject under the domain of the technology teachers as is the case in our school. The path to implementing technology for the regular classroom teacher is exceedingly complex and changes as we "work with our organization's unique personalities and cultural conditions" (Fullan, 1997, ¶ 11) and many factors impact the decision, and the ability to carry through a plan of implementation. Teachers, require encouragement, support and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and technology experts to expedite learning. Very little discussion of this sort takes place in our school.

In his address to a group of administrators in New Zealand, Fullan (1997) reminds teachers that "student achievement increases substantially in schools with collaborative work cultures that foster a professional learning community" (¶ 11) but the reality of our system denies the development of such a community. From my own experiences the support teachers are already taxed for time to maintain the computer network in the school and teachers are reluctant to ask for help for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that we all have busy schedules and no one wants to impose on a colleague's time. To require technical support teachers to teach as well as to train, encourage and support colleagues who wish to implement technology places further demands on their time. I was keenly aware of this dilemma before entering the lab that day to ask my questions, and upon leaving the lab I was convinced there would be no future collaboration. I did not feel welcome to learn and grow at the expense of the support teacher's time and energy. Fullan believes there is no point asking "how" to change this
situation. In the end, change rests in the hands of individual teachers such as myself but we too are hampered by impediments outside of the system.

One of the impediments on this path rested in my belief in myself, which is tangled in my childhood and my experiences in my parents' home. Stories of becoming a surrogate mother for my siblings draw me back to a time when I felt alone, unsupported and responsible for the children in my care. I rose to that challenge much as I was prepared to rise to the challenge I set for myself in the computer lab. I had learned to continue to put one foot in front of the other and forge ahead even when travelling alone. It is our belief in our abilities that influence the way we behave and "what people do is often better predicted by their beliefs about their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing" (Bandura, 1986, cited in Pajeres, 1992, ¶1). The messages we receive from others and ourselves can powerfully influence beliefs. When I was a child I was ignored when I asked for help so I developed the tendency to take charge myself. Perhaps the goal of learning to implement technology was far beyond what could actually be accomplished, but it had potential to create an enriching language learning experience and I was convinced I could learn to use it by myself in spite of a lack of support.

I sent home the Internet permission forms and continued my quest for a French class to correspond with but by December I was losing hope. Hope isn't simply a positive attitude or a belief that—given enough time, everything will work out well. Vaclav Havel (1990), president of the Czech Republic, stated that Hope is "the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out" (¶7). Frustrated by my efforts to create an atmosphere where students were enthusiastically communicating in French it seemed to me that my efforts to improve my practice were amounting to a whole lot of nonsense.

In March I met a fellow French teacher who was working with technology at the high school. Thinking about my own work in terms of the path she had blazed gave me some insight into what might be accomplished. Our meeting offered me a glimpse of the possibilities that I had envisioned, but not yet realized. A teaching practice is not developed "through being directed by external agents" (McNiff, 1993, p. 105) but speaking with her opened up some possibilities for further development. Seeing what she has accomplished for her students helped me understand that building up my expertise a little more each year, as I was doing, would finally lead me to where I wanted to be. A
powerful influence on self-efficacy, "is vicarious experience in which other similar people are seen to perform a behavior successfully" (Albion, 1999, p. 20). The steps I had already taken made sense in light of her journey and I was once again hopeful that I could continue with like results. Seated beside her in front of her computer screen I learned more in two hours than I had learned in two months working in isolation at school. The opportunity to spend time speaking with a colleague who was travelling toward the same destination was a key to implementation for me. I saw evidence of technology transforming education over time in her work as she shared her web page, how it developed over the years and how she uses it with her classes as a reference and a teaching tool. I left her generous hospitality full of inspiration and thankful for the opportunity to share some of her time. “You’ll never know until you try, Lynn” she called after me as I left our meeting brimming with ideas and full of hope for what might be accomplished with technology.

Meeting this woman kindled a spirit of affirmation and encouragement. I felt that she recognized the best in me by confirming that what I was trying to do had merit. Noddings (1992) speaks of the importance of identifying “something admirable, or at least acceptable, struggling to emerge in each person we encounter” (p. 25). In doing so, we encourage the vision that leads to the development of a better self. How can teachers pass on a spirit of confirmation to students when they don’t feel affirmed or encouraged themselves? How can teachers feel free to take risks, ask questions and make changes in a culture where we work in isolation? Madeline Grumet (1988) believes that the ethic of caring must be considered in our profession. It is an ethic that “is rooted in space, requiring proximity and encounter, and time, requiring response and duration. It is part of history, and so are we” (p. 178). When the spirit of caring is absent I feel isolated and accused rather than included and affirmed. As she observes, our capacity to care is “entangled in our own reproductive projects, in the meaning of “school” in the histories of both mothers and teachers, and in our relationships to each other” (p. 178). It was a welcome relief to experience a spirit of collaboration and caring, which encouraged me to continue on my way.

Beliefs About Teaching in Cyberspace

Cyberspace, the virtual frontier where mastering the HTML language allows all who enter there the opportunity to navigate the kingdom freely and comfortably and
accomplish wondrous works. At least—that is what I believed. I heard the term Cyberspace mentioned when my students talked about some of the games they played online. When they enter Cyberspace, a world separate from the real world, they can assume virtual cyber-identities and engage in virtual reality (Warschauser, 2000) but I also thought of it as a place where we could go to engage in authentic communication with native speakers of French. Today's technology goes far beyond what is possible with video cassette and an overhead projector. Computer technology provides access to "the target culture that is not possible through conventional means—teachers speaking to classrooms" (Bush, 1998, p. 303). This sounds wonderful on paper but as previously mentioned, "native speakers are hard to come by" (Ohmaye, 1998, p. 2).

In February, I received an email message from a person in the United States. The correspondent identified herself as a grade 8 teacher who was interested in participating in a key pal project. I planned to introduce my students to an authentic French world by teaching "virtual" lessons where we brought French "people and their culture into the classroom regularly by means of electronic communication and resources" (LeLoup & Ponterio, 1995, p. 39), but not a single Francophone class had responded. Cyberspace represented a world I could enter to integrate authentic and creative communication into all aspects of my course (Kern & Warchauser, 2000). But first we needed someone to communicate with. So, even though the class that finally responded was American rather than French, I seized the opportunity to establish contacts for my students. I replied to the teacher with my ideas for the project and a suggestion that we work out some guidelines. The tone of her reply indicated that she was enthusiastic, so I was anticipating an enriching language learning experience for both our classes in this unfamiliar frontier that Warchauser (2000) refers to as "Cyberspace."

Lynn, Very excited to hear from you. My students will be excited as well. I have a year long class of 20. We are a technology magnet school - thus one of the reasons we are so interested in finding e pals. I agree that grouping the students at first would be a great idea. No, I have never done this before either, but I love trying new things and the students are very interested in this venture. Let's give it a shot and see what happens. (personal communication, February, 2000)
Initially I planned for the class to use one email account, which would allow me to monitor their correspondence, but since our correspondents were going to be using individual accounts I decided we would do the same. Establishing email addresses for the students turned into an exercise in frustration. In the planning stage, I felt confident that I had considered every aspect of the lesson but setting up the accounts opened a door on a new issue. Some students didn't want to share their passwords with me saying their email should be private. I wrote and asked my colleague how we would address this issue of privacy. Apparently she had already considered this and she wrote:

My students all have personal email addresses and I really don't want to be involved in their email other than the sharing what they feel comfortable with regarding their communications. (February, 2000)

The notion of the students not being "comfortable" sharing their communications with me had not entered my mind and I wondered how "teaching" fit into a project when the teacher didn't give feedback on the students' work. From my perspective this was not a "chat" project but an experience in communicating in French where my role was to monitor their progress and facilitate their communication efforts. The woman identified herself as a teacher in a technology magnet school but something didn't feel right. My hopes for this project were in line with what Lemke (1998) refers to as "the interactive learning paradigm" (¶ 46) which assumes that people know what they need to learn and do their best work when what they are learning is of interest to them and relevant to their own world. Lemke notes that "This is the learning paradigm of the people who created the Internet and cyberspace. It is the paradigm of "access to information, rather than imposition of learning." This was also the paradigm on which my beliefs about teaching and learning in elementary classes had been founded. But I wondered where we draw the line between access and imposition in an online landscape. Travelling through the uncharted land of Cyberspace evoked concerns for my children's safety.

The process of setting up the email accounts bore little resemblance to the lesson I had envisioned. I was nervous as once again I stepped into unknown territory. The students took a very long time to settle down and pay attention. I moved from station to station to ensure that everyone was
working with me, rather than surfing or playing a game. I tried to maintain a positive outlook, but inside I wished that I could just take complete control and shut down the computers until we were ready to begin. The machines were interfering with my lesson again! Unfortunately they were set up to run in such a way that once shut down many of them had to be rebooted with a command that only the technical support teacher knew and he preferred to keep the command to himself. The machines were to be left running at all times.

The room quieted as I explained the procedure of registering for an email address. Turning on the overhead projector to show them an example of how the page was organized was viewed as an invitation for groans about how they already knew about email and didn’t need to be taught about it by me. Doubt crept in and I wondered if I was wasting their time. I quickly skimmed over the pages gave a brief explanation of the procedure and allowed them to go ahead. I found myself avoiding their gaze for fear that they would see incompetence in my eyes. It felt like someone else had taken over my body and whisked my presence away. I didn’t feel connected to my students and throughout the lesson my gaze was drawn as surely as iron to a magnet to the clock on the wall. I used to love every minute of teaching and now I just hoped to maintain order between bells with this group of students.

The next hour felt like I had been dunked into the North Atlantic in November. Trusting that the students knew much more about email accounts than they actually did was definitely a mistake. I found myself awash in a sea of pandemonium as computer screens froze, hands waved wildly in the air,
and exasperated comments exploded around me about hating computers and how stupid this project was.

I hadn't anticipated one of the problems that emerged with selecting the usernames where the students discovered that the name they had chosen had already been selected and was therefore unavailable. "This is the third time I've had to redo this," complained one student. I felt my heart sinking as I hurried from student to student trying unsuccessfully to rectify problems and get on with my lesson. Frequently as many as four of the names they selected were unavailable and each time they were obliged to begin their application from the beginning. Some students gave up and wanted to use their own personal email accounts, while others who were adept at communicating over the Internet had signed up for their new accounts and were already rapidly typing letters in English. I explained that the purpose of the lesson was to communicate in French wondering at the same time how I had failed to communicate my expectations to them. Groans erupted again around the room amidst more disparaging remarks about being frustrated with the lesson. I was overwhelmed by the noise and confusion as chairs scraped across the floor and the rising volume of their voices reached a crescendo. Confusion and feelings of incompetence washed over me when once again, the bell interrupted my lesson. I called out to the students to come into the lab the next day to set up their accounts as their backs disappeared into the throng of bodies in the hallway. No one turned around to listen. (February, 2000)

Liberman (1982, cited in Kagan, 1992) contended that because so much of a teacher's professional life is beyond immediate control that the classroom seems to be the only environment over which they can exert a semblance of authority. The environment becomes one in which the teachers work in isolation, distrusting external advice and
becoming more uncertain about their practice. In this uncharted land, I wasn't at all confident in my ability to teach with authority. Research on teacher belief suggests that in the unpredictable environment of the classroom teachers need to know whether things are going well and they "must be able to identify, label, solve, and evaluate the solutions to problems" (Kagan, 1992, p. 79). We create our own guidelines that we can support without reservation. "In a landscape without bearings, teachers create and internalize their own maps" (p. 80). Hodas (1996) argues that a major requirement in order for technology to be widely dispersed through classrooms is "simplicity" based on general teacher aptitude, the amount of time available to learn to use technology and "the very real need for teachers to feel competent." Without a certain level of expertise in the field I felt I had little power or control in the classroom and furthermore I feared that the students scorned my efforts as I stumbled about trying to continue a project that seemed to be coming apart at the seams. Still, initial attempts to teach with the grammar translation method had seemed so wrong that I convinced myself that after leaping the hurdles of learning my way around in cyberspace, effective lessons would follow.

The next lesson was taken up with teaching the students to use the skeleton letter I devised to guide their writing. I reviewed the importance of not revealing personal information over the Internet, which was a condition of the agreement that the parents had signed regarding their child's use of the Internet at school. But how could they establish a friendship with a child in another culture without sending personal information? I gave them a list of criteria: not divulging last names, addresses or phone numbers and never agreeing to meet anyone through email correspondence. With every step I felt I was pushing further into a strange land and making up my own laws as I went but with my effort to create a "uniform content-centered" (Lemke, 1998) curriculum I was hampering our transition to using technology.

As the students struggled to write their letters following my model I was more aware than ever of the role I had assumed as a walking, talking dictionary insisting on correct spelling and sentence structure. I edited, trouble shot machines that went down, broke up arguments and group chat sessions, and taught mini lessons on navigating the Web and writing correct sentences as I circulated through the room. I was unintentionally perpetuating the notion that they were helpless empty vessels but rather than stop and address the issue I tried to move faster to cover both French and technology lessons as
required. As Dwyer, Ringstaff and Holtz (1996) observed, "even when innovative teachers alter their practices and beliefs, the cultural norms continue to support lecture-based instruction, subject centered curriculum, and measurement-driven accountability" (p. 2). It took much longer than anticipated before the students were prepared to send messages and another week went by before sending off our email addresses. We never received replies from the class. It was as though the messages were sent off to a ghost writer who had evaporated into space. It appeared that all my efforts tallied up to a monumental waste of time.

"Students tell us their experiences of the environments we create in provocative ways" (Ayers, 2001, p. 50). Their groans and the lack of concentration combined with the actions of this stranger who had stepped into my shoes in the classroom was compelling me to continue to question my pedagogy. As I listened to their complaints and observed their lack of application I began to experience the reality of implementing technology. "It took me awhile to discover that there were fundamental flaws in my journey—to realize that my baby steps forward kept occurring in the context of giant steps backward" (p. 86). Daunted and feeling as though I was the captain of a shuttle, adrift in space, I continued to try to set a course through Cyberspace without coordinates and an infinite galaxy stretching between myself and my students.

Slightly daunted but still persistent, I sent yet another message to a teacher in Corner Brook who had previously expressed interested in corresponding with us. She was delighted to hear from me. The students had already prepared letters so we could simply edit them to make them relevant to the students in Nova Scotia. This time the project promised to progress smoothly. But no sooner did we receive confirmation for the project from the class in Newfoundland, when our support staff went on strike and we were locked out of the school. By the time the strike ended and we returned to school, the teacher had moved on. Another attempt ended in failure.

Having established correspondence with a class in New Zealand, the project seemed to be on track again. When the students received replies to their first messages the room filled with excited chatter and laughter as they puzzled over them, asked each other for help translating and became engrossed in using French as I had hoped they would. Many of them eagerly typed a response and could hardly wait for me to check their replies so they could send back a message. But my heart sank as I noticed they hadn't taken time to
refer to their notes or their vocabulary lists and their messages were riddled with grammatical errors as they struggled to find words and phrases to express ideas that were beyond their level of French. If I expected to correct everyone's efforts the class would have to be extended by many hours. The thrill of their enthusiasm was overshadowed by my fear that in reality, this exercise might be doing more harm than good. Not only were they reading poor examples of French, but they were practicing writing poor French as well. The class ended with me questioning the effectiveness of keypal projects where the input is barely comprehensible and their efforts to reply were riddled with errors. The wave of relief that washed over me when it seemed the project was going to be successful now threatened to tow me under and drag me to the depths. How could I have been so wrong about something I had been sure would be so right? The students were enthusiastic about discovering more about their keypals but they didn't seem to care about using correct French to do so.

When the second set of replies to our messages arrived from New Zealand they were written entirely in English. I was exasperated! I questioned the teacher about the integrity of our project and she apologized explaining that she had had to leave the room and had asked her students to complete their letters and send them off themselves. They had embarked on their own communication project, writing letters full of questions for their keypals in Canada. Clearly they were enthusiastic about getting to know their new friends which was a positive aspect of the project, but I was insistent that communication continue in French during class time. Perhaps this upset our correspondents because they too stopped writing and didn't answer any more messages from our class.

I was further distressed when one of my students received communication via the Internet from someone claiming to be a student in Belgium, requesting personal email addresses from my students so they could correspond privately. I was seriously concerned for my students' safety. I responded to the address from Belgium requesting the name of the student's school and inquiring as to where the author found our address but I did not expect to receive a reply. With the added elements of uncertainty and possible threat of danger to my students' safety I felt the integrity of the project was in jeopardy. The year had been consumed by fluctuating states of confusion, frustration and unsuccessful attempts to create an environment where the curriculum came alive. I took stock, which didn't require rereading my field texts to come up with an action plan. I
decided to retreat from Cyberspace where the walls were obstacles, not challenges and where the path might very well pose a danger to my students. In essence, I was giving up. I was out of energy, disillusioned and feeling very uncomfortable.

I was giving up. That's about what it amounted to. Giving up or taking charge. I intended to move my block B French class from the computer lab into a regular classroom. I had had enough. More than that, I was discouraged and I didn't want any more to do with technology. As far as I was concerned, the whole project had been a complete failure, and I berated myself that the students had learned next to nothing through the course of the year. I was a failure, most of them were failures, the system failed me and I didn't even want to continue my research. How could I when the project had ground to a standstill? None of this seemed to be making sense and instead of motivating my students to learn French, the computers seemed to have loosened a myriad of nasty little beasts from Pandora's box who jeered and complained with nasty sneers and absolutely horrid attitudes. I was in the throes of convincing myself that implementing technology had been a complete waste of time and all I wanted was complete control and quiet and attention from my students.

At this point in time it felt as though the successes paled in comparison to my failed efforts. Each lesson I contended with some "unknown" that hadn't been considered or factored in and feeling off balance was exerting an enormous amount of pressure on my self-esteem. I felt as though I was about to come unglued. ATTENTION this human vessel is about to explode. SHUT DOWN ALL SYSTEMS - REPEAT - SHUT IT DOWN!

I decided to close the door and get out of the computer lab where I felt trapped in a struggle with no promise of relief. One thing is sure, just being
in a computer lab doesn't guarantee that technology is enhancing teaching and learning. I know that now but I'm not sure why I didn't listen sooner to my teacher voice saying: DO SOMETHING! It was as though I was frozen in motion. I began the year with such great hopes and expectations. What had happened to my vision? (May, 2000, rewritten, October 2001)

Were my expectations self-defeating? Cuban (1999) believes inflated expectations of what might be achieved with technology may lead to disappointment. He cautions that we need to accept that innovations are "worthy creations that take time" (Implications, 3). Considering my efforts to learn and grow and improve my practice that year in spite of an incredible workload I must remind myself that it is important to accept my efforts as credible. When I am unable to do that, I fall prey to a spirit of cynicism and disappointment.

In retrospect, one door closes to open another on new possibilities. Although the strike interfered with the key pal project with the students in Newfoundland, it was instrumental in my taking another step forward by compelling me to purchase a powerful new iMac computer of my own that I could use to access the Internet and design Power Point lessons. Strikes can go on for a very long time and I couldn't justify allowing my course work and my research to suffer for lack of a computer so I decided to purchase one of my own. Access to a computer at home impacted my view of Cyberspace and over time, helped improve my confidence in working with technology. Albion (1999) found that "the most significant predictor of self-efficacy for computer use among teacher education students was frequency of computer use". Before I had my own computer, I thought of building web pages and putting together Power Point presentations as things other people did out there. Cyberspace was where I would take my students to practice writing in French with the view that the writing would improve their language skills. Warchauser (2000) points out the folly in believing that a virtual online world exists distinct from our world. It is this notion of a fantasy world where we can take students to practice writing and then bring them back to the real world, that interferes with understanding the very real impact online communication can have in a language classroom. Belief in Cyberspace makes no more sense, he contends than belief in "writingspace or speakingspace or printspace" (2). How does one succeed in
transforming a curriculum, where instead of being "the prisoners of textbook authors and their priorities, scope, and sequence, we are free agents" (Lemke, 1998)? Can technology truly provide an avenue toward improving a practice for teachers such as myself?

Having a computer in my home opened the door to new possibilities and understandings. It was rather like knotting up some bed sheets, tossing them out the tower window and beginning a slow descent. I learned to use Power Point software and discovered that the "interactive learning environments add visual images and sound and video and animation" (Lemke, 1998) which hitherto seemed mysterious and inaccessible. They weren't inaccessible at all. I built my own web page, which is certainly a formidable task without the help of others, but not impossible. I was able to use the Internet to conduct research online and became adept at navigating sites.

With a computer at home I was liberated from the hours I spent at the school recording marks, preparing assignments and catching up on BBS news. Signing up for on-line banking changed the way I did business in the world. Finding a key pal in France opened a door for me to learn still more about the French culture. As I spent more time using the computer I began to feel more confident and the computer began to change the way I went about the business of daily living. Having my own computer I was able to participate in a Power Point workshop for educators with other teachers who were interested in implementing technology in their classes. The excited buzz of conversation "Hey, come look at this!" or "Have you tried this yet? Look what you can do with it!" resonated around the room as we shared our discoveries and offered encouragement. Armed with a spirit of collegiality and a willingness to take risks and to play with technology, I explored that "frontier" with enthusiasm. The notion of Cyberspace as an inaccessible domain began to dissolve as the landscape became more familiar.

The opportunity to explore technology with a group of colleagues evoked a spirit of excitement about teaching and learning online as we discussed ways of extending our practice. Ayers (2001) reminds us that "there will always be more to know, always more to become, and that in our quest we must reach out for allies and friends to give us strength and power and courage to move on" (p. 135). One of the women at the workshop was a teacher librarian who suggested she and I get together and do some planning. I mentioned that I would like to develop a student research project on French culture and she was interested in the idea of working together with another teacher who was willing
to invest some time to plan a unit. I felt validated and encouraged by her offer. In a world
where I previously felt lost and alone I now felt part of a group of learners and as a result
navigating in Cyberspace seemed far less threatening. Nel Noddings (1992) discusses the
important role caring plays not only for the students in our care, but for teachers as well.

When we are struggling to understand, when we are committed to connection but
are unsure how to achieve it, we need genuine dialogue with concrete others. Then
we may come to a satisfactory resolution governing this time, these people, this
place. (p. 120)

The importance of nurturing and developing this pedagogical spirit within schools
cannot be understated. Working in isolation, without support, was the most difficult
obstacle to overcome. There is a need for schools to develop their vision for technology
in their school if classroom teachers are to invest time and energy into integrating
technology into their classes. I spent several weeks creating my Power Point presentation
but when it was done I was disappointed to discover I couldn't use it. Access to the power
point projector was limited to the availability of the administrators' laptops because these
were the only machines in the school that had the appropriate word processing program
to run the software. When I approached our principal to ask to use his computer He was
reluctant to lend it, saying he needed it during the day and didn't want to set a precedent
of lending it out to teachers. Cuban (1999) believes:

a school's acquisition of . . . broad access . . . seldom leads directly to most teachers
becoming serious users of new technologies. We require so much technical support,
pro-d opportunities, release time. Somehow we need to develop a spirit of team
effort—a school vision if you will. Access is a necessary but not sufficient condition
for increasing teacher and student use of new technologies. (Implications, ¶ 8)

My principal suggested I ask our computer specialist to load the program onto one
of the iMacs, which I could then move to my classroom for the presentation. Schools
frame the "uses of technology in classrooms that have affected classroom use" (Cuban,
Conclusion). Approaching our technology specialist with my request I found he was very
busy and loading the software was a low priority. It was doubtful that he would have time
to install the program for a number of weeks.
At the time, he had one preparation block for technical support and during that block he was expected to attend to the maintenance of the system. The request of one teacher to load software onto a stand-alone machine was at the bottom of a very long list and there it remained two years later. The notion of Cyberspace as land bordered with no trespassing signs was a long way from being vanquished within the boundaries of our school walls. Perhaps this will occur when, as Warchauser (2000) envisions, "computers and other online devices will be found in every classroom in developed countries, not just in computer laboratories" (¶ 16).

The opportunity to use my Power Point lesson slipped by and I admit to feeling reluctant to resurrect it, and along with it, all the ensuing problems inherent in access to the technology. Newman (1998) discusses the issue of administrative support for teachers trying to implement change and states that "even incremental reform requires some administrative support. While it's essential for teachers to take some initiative for curriculum change, without administrative support such change is doomed from the outset" (¶ 18). Implementing technology is like learning a second language in that what you don't use, you lose. By the time an opportunity arises to use my presentation, I may well need to relearn a whole host of material or the software may have dated so that the program will not operate on our system. Without administrative support, projects are often doomed to failure and the technology remains locked away in some distant bastion. As Freire (1998) explains, "my role in the world, is not restricted to a process of only observing what happens but it also involves my intervention as a subject of what happens in the world" (p. 72). I can resign myself to the fact that today just isn't the right time, but had I never worked through some of the issues of implementing technology I would simply "reinforce the power of this system" (Freire, 1998, p. 78). Change requires patience and hope that the little ripples I create on the surface will radiate and eventually touch a distant shore. "Swimming against the tide is risky" (Newman, 1998) and on occasion it is met by the disapproval of colleagues and administrators. Real access to technology may be in the hands of the administrators and the technical support teachers but the determination to implement technology is only exceeded by my grasp and my willingness to keep reaching.

Examining my personal life history has helped me to understand how learning to use technology has been about renewing my practice. As observed by Sirotnik (1999), it is
about "capturing the wonderful tangle of purpose, activity and unexpected twists and turns, and beliefs and motives that must be interpreted if one is truly bent upon understanding human endeavor" (¶ 27). The power of computers is not to improve school but to replace it with a different kind of structure (Papert, 1996). The final bastion of Cyberspace crumbled when I pummeled it with my determination to storm its walls by posting a web page. This marked the dawning of my understanding of the term electronic literacy. Shetzer and Warschauer (2000) draw a distinction between focussing on the technology to focussing on pedagogy:

While previously educators considered how to use information technology in order to teach language, it is now incumbent to also consider how to teach language so that learners can make effective use of information technology. Working toward both these objectives, rather than just the first one, is what distinguishes an electronic literacy approach to network-based language teaching. (¶ 3)

Focussing on the development of "electronic literacy" differs markedly from developing computer literacy. An electronic literacy framework considers not only "how people use computers to interpret and express meaning . . . the ability to find, organize, and make use of information" but "it also encompasses how to read and write in a new medium" (Shetzer & Warschauer,¶ 8). My struggles while building a web page and successfully posting it shattered that final wall and as I stepped over the rubble I realized I hadn't conquered "Cyberspace" at all because it didn't exist. What I had conquered was my fear of scaling the wall around it. In doing so, I was back where I began, with a vision to create a space where students are enthused about learning.

July 6, 2000

Using PageMill to construct my web site is like putting a puzzle together. I decided to use this software because it is what we have available at school. Now I'm not so sure that that was such a good reason! It is taking me forever to learn each step in the process and I find my other commitments at school are suffering. Learning to use this software represents the steepest learning curve in my adventure so far. No one else in the workshop had used Pagemill so it took the entire three days of the workshop just to
determine how to load the color onto the background. Even though the instructor spent over an hour trying to help, he finally had to give up and leave me to puzzle it through on my own. It seemed that I reached a certain point where it clicked and I became "PageMill literate" and the software made sense. Now I can say that I can indeed use this new medium to author my work.

July 20, 2000

"Sorry," says the male voice on the receiver. "I'm not really familiar with Page Mill. I don't think you can upload that software. You probably have to start again from scratch using Fireworks." I silently groan with exasperation as he continues to explain processes I have no patience to try to understand. I have been working at uploading my site all day and how difficult can it be? I can't use Fireworks anyway, because I have an iMac and as I listen I'm thinking, "What do you mean it won't upload? I know NOTHING or next to nothing about this server space but even I know that can't be true. My professor used Page Mill software for his web page and he posted his without any problems! I feel such frustration welling up inside over all this. My web page is tucked away in its folder on my desktop while I am glued to the screen and the homepage I have access to with the cable company. It's been many long days and late nights and today marks the deadline for completing and submitting the web site, which is the culminating activity for the online course with UBC. My instructor is leaving for Spain tomorrow with his daughter's dance troupe so there is no respite for being tardy.

I call the Apple Information help line but they "don't deal with software problems." They suggest I download a program called "Stuffit" and upload
some other program. My mind is spinning with all the ups and downs. There isn't any help line for Pagemill, only text and email contacts. Our technical support teacher doesn't have any suggestions but assures me that there shouldn't be any real difficulties. I'm annoyed because after all this work I am still bumping into closed doors. Doubt is beginning to chew at my resolve to master this project but determination wins out.

Finally, I succumb to the frustration and call my professor. I hate to do this because I know he is busy trying to finish up his marking, but he has been so helpful online. I am relieved to find he is equally helpful over the phone. He attempts to walk me through the procedure, relaying instructions as we go, but it just won't upload. We work for about two hours and finally he advises me to forget it. Just send the file, he tells me, and he will take a look at it.

"Get some sleep," he advises, "Things will look differently in the morning." I hang up, disappointed and feeling defeated. Truly, the world of technology is beyond my grasp. Or is it? I just can't let it go. If I can't do this it will mean that all my hard work has been for naught and I just refuse to accept that! Finally, at 3:00 in the morning I watch hopefully as the computer whirrs through the steps I selected on the screen and "ABRACADABRA" the site is posted. In reality, it wasn't loaded by magic, I posted it. I did it! I feel elated and very, very tired. (June, 2001, rewritten October, 2001)

It was well into summer holidays when that final bastion in Cyberspace crumbled around me and the illusion of a fantasy kingdom where I would take my class to learn French dissolved before my eyes. I had approached implementing technology as a means to an end—with my goal being to learn to use it as a teaching tool. I viewed technology as carrot to motivate my students, believing that once I became computer literate, my
pedagogy would be transformed. In reality, I was anxious and frustrated over the steep learning curve that seemed to mount forever before me as I realized that having gained one summit, there would be many more up ahead. From my vantage point, my struggles with technology hadn't improved my practice. In spite of the countless hours I spent learning to use the BBS, finding key pals, and searching for online activities and puzzling over how to fit them into grammar lessons, the majority of my students remained unmoved by opportunities to communicate in French or use the computers as learning tools. In spite of all my hard work to develop and post my web page I never had occasion to use it as a teaching tool. I was back where I began, wondering where I was going. The answer was not to be found in the computer lab, but tightly wrapped up in my beliefs, knowledge and assumptions. In light of that insight, I needed to develop a course of action.

**Invention: The Final Phase of Implementation**

> In order to arrive at what you are not
> You must go through what you are not.

T. S. Elliot

I awoke the first morning of teaching at a middle school to put on someone else's shoes and set out on a stranger's path weaving through a bleak and foreign land. The challenge of teaching as Ayers (2001) points out, is not essentially technical or material but it is, at heart, a moral problem. As the process of implementing technology unfolded in my classroom, worry and doubt filtered through the atmosphere. Atmosphere is defined by van Manen (1996) as "the way in which space is lived and experienced, and also the way a teacher is present to children, and the way children are present to themselves and to the teacher" (p. 36). I lost my belief in my ability to teach when I let go of my focus on my students. As a result, my vision was often blurred as I stumbled about in uncharted lands. Emphasis should be focussed on the students' language acquisition but I had yet to discover the conditions that would unlock the mystery of language learning for them. Where was the woman who was overflowing with a passion for teaching? Where were my innovative ideas and my connection with my students? The landscape of my personal and professional identity had shifted and agitated my perspective of where I thought I stood in my pedagogy. I scarcely admitted it then, and I am loathe to articulate my concerns now, but the teacher I had become "was unable to
make the connections that would complete caring relations" (Noddings, 1992, p. 2) with my students.

The year I left the north I received a parting gift from one of my elementary students. She knew I was passionate about writing and so she gave me a little lined notebook with a flowered cloth cover. Inside the front cover she wrote:

Dear Ms. C.

Thank you so much for being there when I needed someone. You are the best teacher ever. You are one in a million. See ya. Thank you so much! I love you. (June, 1996)

I cared deeply for all my students but I became a stranger to myself, and my students at the middle school when I let go of that ethic. Noddings (1984) argues that when we opt not to care (and caring is optional) we not only separate ourselves from others, but from our ideal selves. Feeling related, or the desire to feel related to others is at the core of being. Separating ourselves from caring causes anguish because it simply isn’t natural. Through the years, I have been filling the little book she gave me with quotes and one of the entries was written by Antonio Machado (1993) who wrote, “Life is a path you beat while you walk it. It is the walking that beats the path. It is not the path that makes the walk.” I look back over the steps this stranger chose to take and I ponder the steps she will choose to tread tomorrow and I am surprised to find my steps are no longer tentative. Rather than try to tread the path beaten by others before me, I am once more slashing at the undergrowth and blazing my own trail and loving every minute.

To succeed in any endeavor requires coordination, concentration and sound vision. Teaching in a middle school I needed to find my way through the technical aspect of teaching, to examine my beliefs, and to develop an understanding of language learning in order to face my students with confidence. It is quite easy to attribute successes or failures to experiences that cling to us like ghostly traces from the past affecting our personality and perspective, or to anticipate the future based on current circumstances. But living in the present is very much like threading a needle in that it requires a concentrated effort in order to be successful. The phases I went through to learn to use technology to teach French reminds me of trying to thread a needle without my glasses. I
know the eye is there and the thread is close but without the proper lens through which to see, my vision is blurred and it is difficult to accomplish the task.

The beginning of the 2001 school year found me in my own classroom teaching grade 8 and 9 French and one class of gifted students. A brand new iMac computer lab was across the hall and was available for four of my French blocks. After two years of teaching five different courses in classrooms all around the school, I now felt as though I had finally landed in my own space. As Becker (1998) observed, my “points of intellectual references” (p, 29) had also improved and I had developed new goals although there was much to learn about how to accomplish them. I had made considerable progress learning about technology and I had more experience teaching French to adolescents. Grace of the stories told, and the lessons learned along the way, my steps were firm and confident. I had scaled a huge wall and the view from the top was exhilarating.

Transforming Practice Through Experience

To teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge (Freire, 1998, p. 30).

Like Freire, Shulman (1986) believes "the ultimate test of understanding rests on the ability to transform one's knowledge into teaching" (p. 14). Implementing technology was much easier the second year because I was travelling a familiar path. My Internet research project was running smoothly as evidenced by the quiet hum, sprinkled with soft laughter and chatter that reverberated throughout the room as the students focussed on their projects. I was pleased to act as a resource for ideas and references for my students instead of assuming the role of a walking dictionary with all the answers. Pulling up a chair to talk with the students about their projects I found our conversations occasionally drifted from far away countries and cultures to what was going on in their lives after school. As I learned more about these young people with whom I shared my day and my experiences, a little bit of the stuff of life, the things that happen all day long outside the boundaries of the school yard and the bells, was breathed back into my French class. Educators may be able to learn about the subjects they teach and they may develop fine tools and methods to incorporate into their practice. They may know what constitutes good teaching "but this may not change the way they "know" their classrooms, their schools, their children, their colleagues, and their professional lives. . . . What is missing
is an understanding of knowledge, not so much as something given to people, but as
something narratively embodied in how a person stands in the world" (Clandinin and

Using technology as a teaching tool can be very effective but in the end, it is the
teacher and students who create an atmosphere not the machine. The events that unfolded
in my French class in the year 2001 were the fruition of two years of asking questions as I
struggled to free myself from the technical aspects of schooling that led me to believe
that there was so much I didn't know and needed to justify. I was unsure of where I fit
into our school's culture with my beliefs that were different than my colleagues about
how language is learned. I had questions about the curriculum and I struggled with what
and how to teach in my French class. I found myself stirred by the words Friere (1998)
and Grumet (1988) who challenge teachers to struggle for freedom to teach according to
a moral conscience in a system that is geared toward efficiency and production. Clandinin
and Connelly (1998) argue that what teachers know depends on the shifting landscape of
school stories, as the landscape shifts so does what is known as well as the value attached
to that knowledge. Freedom, begins with taking initiative and in doing so we discover
how to open spaces where people "can become different, where they can grow" (Greene,
1988).

Creating Workable Spaces in the French Classroom

Beginning the 2000 school year I resolved there would be no wasted time during
class and that my students, not the syllabus or the text book, would remain central to my
teaching! I realized, as observed by Nunan (1988), that "given the constraints that exist in
most learning contexts, it is impossible to teach learners everything they need to know in
class" (p. 3). This was a liberating notion that I had misplaced along the way. To begin
with, my students needed input into their learning and their voices had been sadly
silenced. I decided to invite the students to take part in planning the unit. I scheduled a
class meeting with each of the classes that could have access to the lab. "Proponents of
learner-centered curricula are less interested in learners acquiring the totality of the
language than in assisting them to gain the communicative and linguistic skills they need
to carry out real-world tasks" (Nunan, 1988, p. 22).

Everyone pulled a chair into the middle of the room and a different tone swept over
us as we talked. When the discussion drew to a close one of the girls put up her hand and
commented, "You know, we should do this all the time. We never talk like this in any of our classes." I thought she might be exaggerating the "never" but her classmates vehemently backed her statement. When I asked for a show of hands to indicate their willingness to participate in the project almost every child raised a hand, verifying Krashen and Terrell's belief (1983) that "What really counts, therefore, in the development of second-language skills is the process of engaging learners in interesting and meaningful classroom experiences" (cited in Nunan, 1988).

I located some online vocabulary game sites to help them build their vocabulary before we began exchanging actual messages. The previous year many of the students hadn't progressed beyond simple *bonjour* and *salut* phrases but I now had a clearer picture of our final destination the impediments to our progress as well as a few short cuts. I had also changed my view of my role as a teacher as a facilitator in the computer lab which enabled me to plan a more effective program of studies. We began with some vocabulary building exercises in the classroom and then progressed to the exercises in the lab, after which the students would send messages to each other, sharing a little information about themselves by using simple salutations and phrases. Before scheduling the lab I sought out the technical support teacher to explain my plans, and verify that the machines were indeed operating. I hoped to avoid any surprises. The next block amidst much excited chatter we proceeded across the hall into the lab. The students enthusiastically stationed themselves at the computers to log on but their enthusiasm soon dissolved into confusion and frustration when they discovered that they couldn't access the Internet because they couldn't log on.

October 27

*Calm, absolute calm. I can't believe I was calm! The students were bubbling over the activity and chattering excitedly as they took their places at the iMac stations. As we entered the lab, I caught a glimpse of the technical support teacher as he slipped past the last student and out the door. I explained before proceeding to the lab, that they would need to help each other and we paired students who were confident and comfortable working online with those who indicated that they needed help navigating.*
The students were excited about the prospect of having some "fun" but when we sat down to work, they couldn't log on to the activity and even those who could log on couldn't access the activity because the message came up that the machine "won't read java." This was bizarre because that morning I verified that the site would come up. However, I never thought to try ALL the computers. I moved from station to station checking that students were entering the correct URL. Hands are waving in the air, "Mme. Coburn, Mme. Coburn, Mme. Coburn."

After checking three machines it became apparent that the lesson was doomed. I stopped the class and explained the situation.

"Listen, you will need to be patient. For some reason we can't all log on and I'm trying to fix that but I can't be everywhere at once." To the class I added, "Was anyone able to log onto the activity?" One hand went up, "Great, Matt, how did you go about doing that?"

And on it goes.

I researched the sites and taught the introduction to the lesson, and I thought I had everything covered but the dreaded login had escaped me. I was about to give up trying to find a solution, when Jamie, a quiet, shy student raised her hand and told us how she managed to access the site.

"Just hit m and then again and it should load. That's what I did and I got on."

Well, her success gave me hope, but unfortunately her technique didn't work on all the machines. The thought skittered through my mind that she was certainly adept at messing about until it works. I could smile to myself in
light of the confusion during the lesson because I've made some progress there myself. Hence the calm demeanor in spite of impending chaos.

I was convinced there must be a simple explanation for why we couldn't get started so I told the students I was going to find the technical support teacher to ask why they need a profile to enter the program. He was not in the prep room, the library, nor the office. I toured the school at high speed convinced there must be something simple he had neglected to tell me. I finally found him coming across the courtyard from the Tech Ed room, a pound of coffee in his hand. When I explained that we couldn't access the system and asked him what to do he responded that, working with technology requires extensive planning and teachers need to prepare well in advance before going into the lab to work. No, he couldn't help me at this moment, he added, as he was busy. The students would need to report to him to acquire a password.

I remained calm. I had worked entirely in isolation last year so I was prepared to do the same this year. I hurried back to the lab and got there just in time to go back to our classroom. It didn't seem appropriate to articulate the problems I was having with access to information to administration or to the support teachers. (October 27, 2000, rewritten, November 2001)

The goal of organizations such as schools "is not to solve a defined problem but to relieve the stress on the organization caused by pressure operating outside of or overwhelming the capacity of normal channels" (Hodas, 1993, ¶ 4). A single teacher attempting to storm the bastion of cyberspace might be considered very low on a priority scale for a number of reasons. Truly, teachers ask a lot of questions of the technical support teachers. We define organizations such as schools, "by their lines of flow of power, information, and authority. Schools as workplaces are hierarchical in the extreme, with a pyramidal structure of power, privilege, and access to information" (Hodas, ¶ 5).
These issues of the flow of power, information and authority are raised when regular classroom teachers attempt to implement technology in schools. A case in point: when the screen flashed up "access denied" as I attempted to organize students' names in files, access or rename some of my own files, or save work from specific computers to my server space. The justification that was provided by the technical support teachers for regular classroom teachers being denied access to functions such as entering students' names into the system, or being able to access student passwords or user names was that if teachers have access to the hard drive they will cause problems with the system (personal communication, 2000).

Does denying access to some functions that would make teachers' work in the lab so much easier perpetuate the notion that computers are simply add-ons to subjects? We are teetering on the brink of transformation, renewal and a new vision. But the other side of the vision is the space where brand new computers fill laboratories in the personal domain of the information technology teachers or rest on counter tops in individual classrooms to be relegated as tools for keeping records or typing worksheets. If every teacher in the school were interested in implementing technology more support would be provided out of necessity. Without ample support there is little hope that teachers such as myself will continue swimming against the current. The impact on my students' learning is hardly worth the effort when it isn't tipped to their favor and I find myself losing patience with a system where I want to teach but am "denied access."

The Click: Shifting Paradigms to Move Beyond the Technical

Certain aspects of learning a foreign language are very much like learning to implement technology. I learned French by immersing myself in the culture, enrolling in language classes, challenging my ear, and listening continually to the local radio station. In spite of such considerable motivation to learn, comprehension eluded my grasp. After four months of struggling with the language, the radio announcer's voice still crackled through my walkman.

January, 1997. Foul, winter winds blast directly from the north in Chicoutimi and drive the cold right to your bones. On this particular day the wind was exceedingly bitter so I had been forced to don toque, fleece liner, mitts, scarf, ski pants, heavy wool socks and hiking boots before setting off
to the university. It was either insulate against the cold or risk severe frostbite. The morning ritual was to put in my earplugs then wrap my scarf and finally pull on my toque before hoisting on my back pack and turning on my walkman on the way out the door. My footsteps made a hollow crunching sound in the cold crisp snow and my eyelashes became heavy as fronds of ice coated them, freezing top lash to bottom in two annoying little lumps.

Trudging through drifts to find the path through the field, I suddenly became conscious of the radio announcer's voice and was amazed to realize that I could understand what he was saying! For months, the radio had garbled at me as I hiked to and from the university but today, for no apparent reason, I could comprehend the voice speaking to me. Of course, not every word was intelligible, but I could follow the idea of the broadcast. I smile inside once more as I reminisce over the enormous amount of anxiety that faded into bliss as I continued on my way. (November 1997, rewritten, November, 2001)

In the fall of 2000 I found that electronic literacy clicked in much the same manner as my aural comprehension of French had clicked. Over the course of the previous year, each new application of technology had contributed to "insights into what works and what does not" (Ohmaye, 1998, p. 21) until the language was no longer gibberish. Through my experiences of working with students in the computer laboratory with the BBS and the Internet, in developing my web page and working with Power Point software, and in interacting with other teachers who were interested in implementing technology, I acquired a sufficient level of computer literacy to know that mechanical obstacles, while often unavoidable, were beyond my responsibility. A preoccupation with developing my computer literacy was not going to improve the atmosphere in my classroom. In fact, concerning myself with the workings of the machinery interfered with my teaching as it set a self-imposed and unrealistic expectation on my performance. The stress exerted on my teaching as I tried to teach around mechanical difficulties was clearly revealed the fall of 2000, when I was assigned a classroom across the hall from
the brand new iMac lab. As Warchauser (2000) remarked, it is without the hindrance of faulty machinery to contend with, that teachers are able to focus on developing electronic literacy framework for implementing technology in the language classroom. It was at this time that the realization dawned that I will likely never be a computer expert nor would I want to become one. This was a major epiphany on the road to integration of technology. Being a technological wizard is not my passion. My passion is in opening the door to lifelong learning for my students and helping them feel at home in their French class.


Today the students' voices burble like stones washed up on the beach by a turning tide. Marianne leans way back, golden hair spilling over her chair, as her head lolls to one side, she opens her mouth and lets out a belly laugh that would rival Santa's as she wins the online vocab game much to the exasperation of her partner. At the station next to her is Bruce, who has yet to complete a single written assignment for me but he is completely engrossed in a vocabulary game of Concentration with his partner. Previously he spent his classes engaged in activities such as working on refurbishing his spit ball stores, constructing paper airplanes or participating in other questionable endeavors, such as concocting secret potions of pencil lead and ink leaked out of the pens he has dismantled. But in the lab he doesn't have time for any of that. "Hey, that's not the right one. Remember it's copine that's a match and it's this card right here!" His index finger taps the card on the screen emphatically and, sure enough, he is right. With an affirmative nod of his tousled head of hair, he crosses his arms over his chest, leans back comfortably with eyes shining, and waits and watches for the next opportunity to test his memory. It feels like home here, this place where we've landed.
The bell rings to groans of, "Hey, I'm not done!" from some of the students and I smile to myself.

"Remember to push your chairs into the stations before you leave and take your textbooks along with you. Next class we meet in our own room."

"See ya Madame."

"Au revoir Madame."

"Salut Madame."

"Hey, can we come back in here next time, this was fun!" (rewritten, November 2001)

Access to machines that function without breaking down was a contributing factor in the success of the activities I implemented in the 2000/2001 school year. I had also developed a solid understanding of "how people acquire languages, the conditions that are necessary for learning, what motivates people to learn, and the resources and experience they need to develop communication skills" (Ohmaye, 1998) which had a positive impact on my practice. Furthermore, I was finally at home in my own classroom and I was familiar with the middle school culture and able to organize my routines in my own space in the school which alleviated the pressure of marching to the ringing of bells and moving resources up and down crowded hallways on a trolley. Relieved of so many distractions and having lived to tell the tale, my focus shifted from surviving in a foreign land to my students. "The most powerful influence on self-efficacy is, "enactive experience" in which self-efficacy for a behavior is increased by successfully performing the behavior" (Albion, 1999, ¶ 20).

It was during the second year of implementation that the notion of electronic literacy clicked. Warchauser (2000) views the place of technology in the language classroom as "a tool that our students can use to read the world, to write it, and to rewrite it" (¶ 31). He (2000) explains that it is agency that really "makes students so excited about using computers in the classroom: the computer provides them a powerful means to make their stamp on the world" (¶ 32). He encourages teachers to think of ways to explore forms of online communication and in light of his suggestion I began to consider how I might extend my email project so that my students' work actually fulfilled a meaningful purpose
for a real audience beyond simply saying "Bonjour." I decided that we would not only focus on letter writing to a Francophone community, but also would extend our efforts to building a class web page that we could share with our key pal class to teach them about our city. My "enactive experience and resultant increases in self-efficacy" were achieved through my experiences of the previous year. Not all of those experiences had been positive but I knew the route I wanted to travel for I had charted the course and I had a clear destination in mind.

Dias (1999) records that during the initial phase of implementing technology teachers typically encounter problems with discipline and resource management as well as technical issues that arise to plague the process. She observes that teachers need support during this phase but even though I worked in isolation, the experience, however exasperating at times, served to strengthen my belief in my self-efficacy. Children love to play, no matter their ages, and since games are appealing to most children's curious nature I could see that vocabulary practice lent itself well to technological format of an online game. In the initial stages of second language acquisition, learners must acquire a few thousand high frequency vocabulary words (Groot, 2000) I needed to select a "relevant vocabulary (which and how many words) and create optimal conditions for the acquisition process" (¶ 1).

The vocabulary games provided a good base for the letter writing and they were a huge success in terms of students becoming engaged and striving to master vocabulary. Surveying the students as they worked, I reveled in the joy that comes from working with students who are enthusiastic about their learning. "Joy does not come to us only at the moment of finding what we sought. It comes also in the search itself" (Freire, 1998, p. 125). Gentle laughter and excited cries sprinkled the air as they worked through the exercises and when some of the students, who already had a good grasp of the vocabulary, asked me if there was something else they could do I directed them to the next set of exercises. To their delight, they found those games more challenging and therefore more enticing. I was satisfied that my effort to make technology an integral part of my pedagogy had opened up the possibilities of redefining how I went about providing opportunities for students to learn.

Finally, in this place, at this time, I had created the atmosphere I was looking for. I take solace in the words of Allwright and Bailey (1991) who believe that, "we cannot
expect to reach understanding one day, and then simply be more effective the next" (p. 196). It had taken time and the willingness to trace an ambiguous path to reach this destination. It is part of my character to refuse to avoid the urge that Sumara (1998) speaks of, to settle myself in easy locations. I prefer instead to "deliberately seek the difficult, the unknown, the ambiguous, the unpredictable. . . . there is, in fact, something to be learned by dwelling in difficulty for some time" (p. 42).

Rereading my field texts evokes memories of times when I felt frozen in action and I recorded possibilities for action that I didn't always embark on. This bothered me and I wondered if I had been struck with an acute case of procrastination. But I found myself implementing those ideas and strategies with positive results the second year in the computer lab. What had clicked? Carter (1990) examines the question of how teachers learn to teach, observing that knowledge of teaching "is shaped by a professional's personal history" (p. 130). The characteristics of my instruction had shifted from being teacher centered to project-based and individually paced (Dwyer, 1999). As I continued to ask questions and work through different strategies my preoccupation with what I didn't know about language teaching and technology gradually shifted to a focus on how to help my students interact in French. Confident that everything would come together given enough time, I settled on an eclectic approach to language instruction. This is supported by Rivers (1997) who contends that the language teacher should avoid restricting teaching and learning to one modality which does not "prepare the learner for the full array of contexts in which items may recur" (Principle 3, ¶ 1). By the time the students' names were entered into the system and we could return to the lab, they had been exposed to the vocabulary for describing themselves and asking questions in many different contexts.

Using an overhead projector to introduce the assignment wasn't ideal but such were the limitations within which we worked. It would have been preferable to use Network Assistant, a software program that allows the instructor to link all the computers in the lab to teacher's computer so that each student can remain at his or her station while viewing the instructor's screen. Unfortunately, access to this program was denied to me at this time. Means, Blando, Olson, and Middleton (1993) found that one of the factors influencing successful implementation is easy access to the technology. Having the lab right across the hall was wonderful. But having to use the overhead in my classroom to
introduce my lessons was less than satisfactory because the students forgot the instructions as we moved from room to room. A wild rumpus ensued for a few moments as the students found their seats only to realize they weren't sure how to proceed.

As the hubbub quelled and students began typing their messages a hush settled over the room and all was quiet except for the clicking of keys. A few little heads popped up simultaneously, a curious look in their eyes, and one student commented, "This is weird, how come no one's talking?" Her question was greeted with a loud "SHHH!" from her classmates. Her head snapped back down again, and her question dissolved into the air of concentration that permeated the room. van Manen (1996) contends that "every home, every classroom, every school contains a certain atmosphere. The question is not whether there should be a pervasive atmosphere in the school, but rather what kind is proper for it" (p. 31). Scanning the room it appeared the atmosphere in our classroom was affecting the students in a positive way. This is confirmed in a selection of responses I chose from a survey of their thoughts about working in the computer lab. We discussed the assignments before they completed the survey and I explained that I wanted to know what they were thinking. Their responses, which they sent to me via electronic mail, were overwhelmingly positive.

Student 1: I think that when we use technology in the classroom it kind of helps us learn better because it has more information and it doesn't take that long to find it all. One thing that I don't like about finding information on the computer about French is that no one will know how neat your writing would be and everyone would have the same typing. Plus it would be kind of boring. I think that kids today spend too much time on the computer playing games and not looking up information. The computer is for learning and other things besides computer games. It would be totally freaky if we all had to use computers and nothing else!!!!!!

Student 2: Technology is a fun way to learn. It allows us to be creative and put our two cents into learning. I think we learn more and it really goes into our heads when we are interactive. We need to feel and touch and really
be able to look at our work straight down. With computers you have to scroll down with the mouse and keep searching and after staring at a computer screen all day I think my eyes would hurt. au revoir madame. have a good day.

Student 3: I think technology is useful though and I can learn a great deal off of the computers. . . . I think technology in a classroom is a good idea and yes I would like to type things up all the time rather [than] writing them up. I would like to get a lap top actually and then I could use it in class. . . . I think today a lot of kids are on the computer almost all the time and well I don’t know about all the other kids but I do learn when I’m on the computers and I’m not always just talking and doodling around. (December, 2000)

Although they reported enjoying working with technology I wondered whether technology was truly enhancing their learning and if so, in what ways? Bob Godwin-Jones (1995) contends that such questions are pointless. Eventually, he argues, students will be using computers to the extent they are using pen and paper today. As observed by Kent and McNergney (1999) teachers need to acquire a certain level of necessary expertise "before successful technology integration can take place" (p. 13) and as they began to show personal mastery of the technology they begin to question previously held conceptions regarding learning. The focus then turns from the machines to the students. I could see how my own concerns had shifted from the technical to the practical as I introduced strategies to use technology as effectively as possible.

Although their French was far from perfect and few of them were "on the same page" they were all busy interacting, asking questions and finding answers. Schön (1987) observed that what teachers want to do is to teach in the form of reflection-in-action and introduce an element of surprise. In our classroom, students were surprised as they were plunged into the experience of working to communicate in the target language for which they had a rudimentary vocabulary, a short amount of time to produce their correspondence and the inevitable grade looming at the end of the exercise. Allowing
them to swim, in this crazy sea of expectations as Schön suggests employs the element of surprise. Learning became a sort of game.

Surprise finally gave way to familiarity as students drafted their own maps of the computer lab landscape and our lessons unfolded to the rhythms of individual learners. Having demonstrated the utility of the online translator, and provided examples of skeleton letters on the BBS as well as some relevant game sites for building vocabulary, I was able to direct my students to a wealth of knowledge that was at their fingertips. In the classroom they played games to enrich their vocabulary and oral language skills and they listened to prerecorded tape selections while completing workbook activities. Some techniques were more suitable for teaching particular aspects of the language such as speaking and listening than is technology (Ramírez, 1995, p. 121) and being more familiar with effective teaching strategies for second language acquisition allowed me to plan an interactive program.

On one occasion, when the computers went down and we were waiting for the technical support teacher to get us back on line, I took advantage of the moment to gather feedback from the students by asking for their opinion regarding working in the computer lab.

Jesse is often at the center of a discussion on any given topic during class time. He is on an individual education plan for his core subjects and he is making a good effort to participate in French. Blond haired, blue-eyed and a smile as big as the world he maintains a sunny disposition in spite of struggles with academics. He thrives on opportunities to contribute to oral discussions and his hand shot up right away when I asked for some feedback. "The best thing about working in here with computers is we don't have to listen to you. No offense, but teachers talk too much! I know I'm the kind of kid who learns stuff just by doin' it. I get bored when teachers go on and on and it's just better when we can just do our own thing. Like those games, you know. I learned a lot from those games. I even think I learned a word and I haven't learned any other words so far."
Matty sat quietly with his hand up. A serious student, Matty pays close attention during class and scores excellent marks in all areas of the course. He spoke with brevity and confidence, as is his style. "The best thing about working in the lab is we have all the control. You tell us what you want us to do but we can work at our own speed and if we want to do more, we can. But we don't have to. We have more choices in the computer lab and I think that is good for us." (December, 2000, rewritten, November, 2001)

Technology Evokes A Particular Way of Thinking

In 1988, Apple observed that computers had been lauded as the solution to the crises in education, in response to the age-old argument that if we solve the problems of education, we will solve the problems of a nation. The impetus behind equipping our schools with computers is that computer technology will give our students new skills that are necessary to compete in a world job market and contribute to society. It will also "necessitate and create a more technically knowledgeable teaching force thereby eliminating the drudgery of teaching and make the tasks of teaching more interesting and creative. Will it?" (p. 289). Apple cautions us to think carefully before leaping on the technological bandwagon. At the core of our thinking should be "the ideological and ethical issues concerning what schools should be about and whose interests they should serve" (p. 292).

The new technology "embodies a form of thinking that orients a person to approach the world in a particular way" (p. 305). One of my students hints at this form of thinking in her survey response quoted earlier:

The thing that's difficult about learning French from technology is that the technology can't explain it to you, and for instance, if you needed to learn how to say the French words or accents, how would they do that on the computer? They wouldn't, or they would have to have a special voice thingy for everyone. I don't think any kids go on the computer just to learn, in a way you kind of learn if you explore Internet sites. (November 2000, edited, November 2001)
Apple (1988) argues that as technology takes over the transformation of the classroom into its own image the discourse of the classroom will change to center on technique, and less on substance. What should be at the center of classroom discourse in a French class scheduled in a computer lab? I wonder if *technique* will remain a central issue as teachers and students become more comfortable using technology. There is no doubt that my classroom was being transformed as my teaching changed and my teaching was certainly changing. But the implications of the changes and transformation were beyond my understanding and sometimes seemed to pull in opposite directions (Elbaz, 1983, p. 65).

My teaching behavior followed to the letter the five phases of technology acquisition experienced by the teachers implementing technology as identified in a study by Dwyer, Ringstaff and Sandholtz (1990, p. 12, cited in Kent & McNerney, 1999). At the *entry* level I was initially concerned with managerial and technical issues where my classroom instruction was predominantly the same. In the second phase of *adoption*, I became concerned with how to adapt the technology to my instruction and focused less on technical issues. I began to use technology more but the technology still supported the same instructional patterns that existed before I introduced technology. Entering the third phase of *adaptation* I found the students were more adept at typing hence, I expected many of their assignments to be completed efficiently over the BBS. Exercises were completed online and sent to their class folders where I would verify completion and assess their progress. The fourth phase, referred to by Dwyer et. al as *appropriation* occurred during my second year of working with technology. During this phase I showed personal mastery of the technology and I began to introduce new instructional strategies. The librarian and I presented some evening workshops for parents interested in helping their children use the Internet for homework and I found ways to individualize instruction for my students by finding alternate websites for online games. In the final phase, *invention*, I began to create new learning environments such as the webpage construction, which differed radically from my previous teaching experiences at the middle school level in that they were authentic and relevant to my students' lives. The students were using the language for a purpose, not simply learning about the language. The atmosphere in the classroom felt welcoming and productive. In this phase, I saw the learning that was taking place as an active, creative, and socially interactive process.

There was a seamless transition from writing BBS messages to writing to a class on the other side of the globe on the island of Réunion. As the students were finishing the writing assignment on the BBS I was busy registering with "ePals", an online community and provider of classroom email. Within a week I received four responses from Francophone classrooms interested in corresponding with us. I found a wealth of online information about Réunion that could be used to extend the project beyond letter writing so I decided we would write to them. Having developed new teaching strategies with which I was comfortable (Carter, 1990, p. 301) it was a simple matter to compile the information on the island, create lessons complete with sentences in simple French, post them on the BBS, and have my students submit their assignments to folders that had been set up for each class. The assignment required them to access different sites much like the process of working through a scavenger hunt. The text on the French sites was far above the reading level of my students, so the lessons focussed on finding specific phrases, and describing the island and the culture by referring to the images which they could refer to online. Rivers (1996) cautions that "Material that is not integrated in some way into the student's progressive learning experience (material that is inaccessible, for instance, because of level of difficulty) can be suffocating and discouraging" (Principle 7, ¶ 5). With careful planning, I could circumvent such discouragement. The assignment also opened up possibilities for those students who were more advanced in their language skills as they had the option of trying to read more of the text if they so chose.

They were now using the language to discover information about an island in the Indian Ocean and they were also learning to work with a new medium. The shock over bringing up a French Web page full of text was often met with exclamations of dismay over the impossibility of reading all that text. Once it was clear that the expectation was not to read the entire text, but to use what they already knew to push their understanding to extract bits of information by referring to the images or identifying specific bits of text, they were willing to forge ahead. As they became familiar with the online landscape and in particular the process of accessing files over the BBS the technology began to take a less obtrusive position in the lesson and they settled into working through the assignments at their own pace.
In retrospect designing a course of study would have been so much easier if I had access to prepared resources that were subject specific, but at what price? If such software packages existed, would the Internet then become nothing more than an online textbook with teachers at the mercy of what is delivered "down the pipe?" The time spent creating lessons ensured my own active engagement in learning along with my students, but as Clandinin and Connelly (1992, p. 377) observe, caution is advised or teachers will end up carrying out other's ideas in the struggle to attain a dream of what one wishes to be rather than working within and pushing to extend the boundaries of who one actually is. This notion of dreaming of change rather than actually living that dream to fruition is at the heart of every successful quest as exemplified by the question the protagonist asks the shopkeeper in Choelho's novel (1988), The Alchemist:

Well, why don't you go to Mecca now? asked the boy.

Because it's the thought of Mecca that keeps me alive. That's what helps me face these days that are all the same, these mute crystals on the shelves, and lunch and dinner at that same horrible café. I'm afraid that if my dream is realized, I'll have no reason to go on living. (p. 57)

For the most part, the notion of teachers implementing technology remains a dream for the future rather than the reality in classrooms today. Is it the fear of what might happen if the power of autonomous learning were in the students' hands that leaves us sleeping or does it have more to do with the difficulty inherent in coming to understand curriculum "as a course of life and develop[ing] a language of practice in which we think, talk, theorize, and act differently in relation to practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 293)? Schön (1987) contends that the way we categorize knowledge in school is "one of the key features that separates schools from life. The ways in which things are grouped together, the way things are treated as similar and different, are not the way in which they are grouped and treated as similar and different in our ordinary life experiences" (¶ 5).

There is a myriad of literature speculating on the future of technology in schools and language classes and its potential to transform schools and education but in reality, little has changed in classrooms. To implement technology into the school culture requires waking from the dream of a distant future and beating a new path in the present reality. Implementation of any sort of reform requires an active involvement in teaching and learning because in working to construct a practice, we erase the "distinction between
curriculum and instruction, between ends and means" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392). Schools must serve to further education, the purpose of which, according to Plato is "to make the individual want to do what he has to do."

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1998) what one must do is join the parade. They admonish us to view schools as a landscape of a living place of relationships between people where we cannot easily anticipate how our presence, our innovations, our stories will influence other stories. The parade proceeds whether we wish it to or not . ..As we dance along in the parade, we begin to understand how to be part of the parade and to be more awake to it. (p. 161)

We were marching forward in our French class. Having established communication with students in Réunion, I extended the project to have the students work in partners to create a page for a web site about our town. One of the students was learning HTML and asked if he could be in charge of creating the web site. Some of the students were concerned that they had never worked with web pages and they were reluctant to contribute to what "sounds like a whole lot of work" (personal communication) but we walked slowly through the process and it wasn't long before everyone was willing to march along together. Technology and French were weaving together "in a seamless manner to support and extend curriculum objectives and to engage students in meaningful learning . . . [as] part of the daily activities taking place in the classroom" (Dias, 1999, ¶ 6).

I glimpsed, in the distance and in fleeting moments during class, a glimmer of excellence that drew me hopefully forward. A feeling of what it looked like to be "doing it right" became comprehensible although difficult to articulate (Buchman, 1992). Carter (1990) explained that "teachers may not always be able to express their views analytically" as there are many variables affecting action in practice. It is truly difficult to articulate why or how the changes occurred or clicked but there was indeed a change. I felt it in the relationships with my students. I saw it in their eyes when they came into the classroom and joked and smiled and chatted about their day and I heard it in the questions they were asking about using French to communicate. It was in my ability to plan assignments that pushed them forward while fostering a feeling of success and
confidence in knowing the path behind and anticipating the road ahead. Their work took on an air of purposeful activity and I was looking at their work in process rather than as a completed product that served as evidence for what they had learned.

As I moved about the room I noticed that Mark was busy typing HTML codes onto his screen. "Don't forget that you need to put together a page too, okay?" I reminded him. He nodded, but didn't take his eyes from the screen as he continued working. And as I walked away I wondered if it was fair to ask him to make a page as well as construct the site. Beside him on the counter top was an incredibly thick book about learning HTML. He had read it from cover to cover he informed me and he believed it was getting easier to remember all the codes. As I continued my tour of the room I pondered my role as a teacher in this room where one student was organizing other students' work and his classmates were reporting to him rather than the teacher. In our room, for this project, he was the expert—or at least he was on the road to becoming our expert.

He was a good French student and he demonstrated a solid grasp of basic communication skills. He earned many of his marks by working on projects with two of my strongest students. This was his first year at our school and the transition from his home on the coast to our middle school hadn't been easy. His mom had informed his teachers that he was having some problems with a group of kids who were name calling and making his life pretty miserable. It occurred to me that his role in this project was an opportunity for him to shine.

Circulating from student to student I was amazed at how engrossed they were in their work. Some students were finishing up a previous assignment of exploring web sites to discover more about Réunion. Others were busy completing exercises on specific grammar points that I had
posted in their folders on the BBS. Upon my return to his station I noticed that Mark was still engrossed in his book. "What's up?" I asked.

"I'm just setting up the welcome page," he replied, "I have most of it together but I'm having a hard time figuring out how to enter the accents. I can't seem to find anything about that in the book. What do you think I should do?"

I thought for a moment. "Well, Mr. Thiesen might know," I offered. "You could ask him during lunch time. But Mark, you need to be sure to put your own page together. Do you think you might leave the problem for awhile and work on that for a bit."

"Well, I would really like to figure this out," he muttered. He was still buried in his book searching for the answer to the question that continued to elude him.

"Just take a few more minutes and then you really need to get busy with your own page, okay?" No answer. "Mark, did you hear me?" I asked.

"Yeah, I heard you already. Sheesh!" As I walked away, his head was still turned to his book and he was completely absorbed in the task he had set himself. (March, 2001)

My interaction with Mark raised an important issue concerning students' roles in such projects. Was it a capricious act to allow him to design the web site? Had I reflected very carefully "on how to use, or help students to use, this almost mesmerizing variety of materials, so as to insure that it increases opportunities for learning and improves quality of learning?" (Rivers, 1997, Principle 7, ¶ 5). Mark was indeed learning, but developing his French language skills was not his focus. What was most important? Being unskilled in HTML I was delighted that he had a fire of enthusiasm raging for his contribution to this project but I hadn't anticipated the amount of time he would need to invest in it. I find myself frustrated time and again by the technical aspect of schooling where students are moved from class to class and subjects are disparate and taught in isolation. Far better if Mark could focus on completing his own page during French class and use other classes
to post the pages onto the Web site under the tutelage of a technology expert. Mark was indeed completely engaged in learning but in this case his learning had nothing to do with learning French.

Continuing the project would not have been possible without his expertise because I lacked the skills or the resources to implement the web site project on my own. Lemke (1998) argues that it is time to examine the purpose of schooling, which should focus on our interactions and interdependencies on one another, world wide, not just in our classroom or our country. As a teacher I must work within the boundaries imposed from without and the moral obligations I impose on myself from within. My mandate is to teach French but in this case, I find myself at odds over what is best for students such as Mark, the class as a learning community and myself. In this project, I began to question whose interests are being served and to what end.

Surveying the classroom I noticed that the students were on task and enjoying their work. It was not uncommon to hear my students asking, "So, do you think they will understand this?" or "Could you just help me with this sentence. I don't want to post it on the web site if it's not right" (journal, March 2001). I am reminded once more that "students learn the functions of language by using a language" (Rivers, 1985, p. 41). Without exception, each one of the students was on task for the duration of that first class. A few weeks later, it was not uncommon for one or two students to be so busy at what they were working on, that they began to pack up after the bell rang to groans of how just a few more minutes to finish up would have been perfect. Watching them working I could see evidence for Warchauser's (2000) argument that:

we will fulfill the best use of computers in the classroom when we allow and encourage students to perform the most real tasks possible, to take advantage of the power of modern information and communication technologies to help try to change the world in ways that suit students’ own critical values and the interests of humankind. (p 35)

The online assignments lent an air of purposeful intent to the class. It is common knowledge that for many adolescents the most important aspect of each day is having the opportunity to share ideas with friends. The success of this web page project complimented this adolescent mind set. The purpose of learning French was "not just to
'know it' as an internal system but to be able to use it to have a real impact on the world" (Warchauser, 2000, ¶ 32). Discovering that there were students on a tropical island far away who listened to the same music they did but could barely speak English, opened a door to want to learn more about them.

I decided to extend the project even further by having students write one half of each letter in French and the other half in English. In this way, both classes were able to serve as models of their native tongue for their key pals while practicing using the target language. By injecting this aspect of teaching the authenticity of their communication was intensified. I viewed their learning as Murphy (2000) did, as an active process of making sense of one's environment through knowledge construction, interpretation, negotiation and sharing. In schools where education is based on an interactive rather than a curricular paradigm students would pursue topics and interests and problems and agendas of their own and of the groups they participate in. For myself, this is a preferable landscape in which to teach and learn and I believe that this is possible today if teachers have access to technology. Unfortunately, access to that place in space and time is still denied.

As the technology becomes available in every classroom and more and more teachers venture to the computer lab with their students, we may begin to see a particular way of thinking about computer technology and education emerge in schools. I have seen evidence of good things but I would not advise others to follow my path. As it stands today, the way is strewn with obstacles that serve to block rather than support implementation. In 1988 the solution to improving teaching and education for many of the western industrialized nations was the rapid introduction of computers into schools (Apple, 1988). Thirteen years later, an incredible amount of money is being invested to bring schools online as computer labs across our province are updated and renovated but, for the most part, technology remains the domain of the computer support teachers.

The implementation of technology in my classroom is based on a progressive view, that "is capable of awakening, stimulating and developing in us a taste for caring and for joy, without which educative practice has no meaning at all" (Freire, 1998, p. 126). I intend to work through issues that will continue to arise in my teaching but as I conducted my inquiry, the answers to any questions about implementing technology in the French class were dictated from top down. In the fall of September 2001 classes in the two
computer labs were rescheduled so that the labs were only available for classroom use for
two blocks, one of which was my preparation block. The technology to open the door to
the world and a rich Francophone environment is physically accessible but it is
constrained by top down decisions.

A Consideration of Method

There could be no creativity without the curiosity that moves us and sets us
patiently impatient before a world that we did not make, to add to it something of
our own making. (Paulo Freire, 1998, p. 38)

Teaching French at a middle school after a two year sabbatical in France and
Quebec guaranteed that I would find myself in the midst of an unfamiliar world that
wasn't of my creation. Curious about my place in this landscape, I hoped to make
something worthwhile of my teaching assignment. My thesis and my present pedagogy
are the result of three years of striving to satisfy my curiosity. I began by constructing
field texts in the form of an annotated bibliography on the literature regarding motivation,
and the place of grammar instruction in second language classrooms and I then combed
the field texts for themes that would suggest stories that could be transferred to the
research text. I was continually writing, researching, reflecting on my teaching and
striving to create a place for myself that felt like my own. This thesis then, is a retelling
of how I came to be in this place at this time telling this story.

Characteristic of this method of qualitative research, a narrative inquiry takes on a
life of its own as it was written although there is always an underlying sense of plot. The
inquirer in such a research project must trust in the process of constructing the research
text while telling and retelling stories, all the while remaining continually watchful for
narrative threads that might be revealed until the final stories are selected and converge.
It is at this point that the inquiry draws to a close. A narrative inquiry is not begun "at the
final stages of an inquiry as if we can convert any kind of study into a narrative
inquiry....questions of form for a narrative inquirer are with us from the outset of an
inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 165). Nor can a narrative inquiry be skimmed
for meaning because "narrative explication derives from the whole" (1990, p. 7) What we
are presented with, in the end, is a story that will "help us imagine the possibilities as well
as disclose the constraints of the institutional world of teaching where we make our
living, suffer, succeed, and fail" (Graham, 1993, p. 191).
Like Greene (1987) I wanted to break out of a mold where I felt subordinated to the beaten path. I feel blessed and so much more sure of my steps in having encountered a community of writers and researchers who inspire me to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Through the works of writers such as Nel Noddings (1984); Maxine Greene, (1988); Madeline Grumet, (1991) and Paulo Freire (1998), I was reminded of the importance of using my own voice to tell my story, to pose questions, to begin my own inquiry and to "go in quest of the kinds of meanings that would pattern [my] experiences and help [me] make sense of the actualities of [my] own [life]" (Greene, 1987, p. 10). Choosing and employing this research method is a reflection of what I have added to the world of middle school French. In a space where I felt walled in I wanted to find the open spaces of speaking and writing that van Manen (cited in Greene, 1988) refers to as text that is pedagogically contagious "filled with an awareness of the obstacles in the way of finding meanings—the very ones to which we are condemned" (p. 14).

Narrative inquiry is a form of living and allows the understanding that it is the inquirer's voice and experience that renders the writing process valid. The narrative is constructed with a tentative sense of plot where it is understood that "the writing itself makes a difference to the final text" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 153). The form shifts and changes as the writing progresses, with the inquirer ever contemplating what the final text may present to the audience, all the while struggling with issues of meaning and significance (p. 146). To move the field text to a research text I related stories, anecdotes, and samples of my students' voices followed with interpretation or analysis to relate the narrative to research on narrative, technology, second language teaching and learning, and the development of pedagogical and practical knowledge. The process of selecting the stories that comprise the narrative took place over a span of three years during which time I researched narrative inquiry and the development of teacher knowledge and discussed my writing and received feedback from critical friends. Taking time to discuss the writing helped me focus on the central issues that articulated the essence of my reflections and what it meant to be writing in the midst of my experiences. I experimented with form, sometimes selecting a story fragment and writing it as a poem or anecdote or in the third person and through the writing, "eruptions in the text" would surface that were not always selected to be included in the research text.
The narrative inquiry method formed the framework for my thesis as I questioned the writing process and the relevance or significance of selected story fragments. I began to recognize the central issues of the development of personal practical knowledge and the importance of caring and developing and maintaining a pedagogical spirit in my personal and professional experiences. These same themes recur time and again in the work of Freire, Greene, Noddings, van Manen, Clandinin and Connelly, Bateson, and Rivers.

Having completed the writing I have reconstructed the narrative that shaped the teacher I am today. Out of ethical considerations, some of the stories were set aside while others were selected to be included as they emerged from the text. I wonder about the limitations of writing a narrative where my voice resonates throughout. But if we are to make changes in schools so that teachers leap into the fray we need to hear about teachers' lives. We need to know who they are and where they stand in order to understand their needs. One of the strengths of this study is that it represents a teacher's voice from inside the classroom. There is a need to understand where teachers have come from in order to imagine where they might wander next. The writing was sometimes surprising as I wondered what some of the story fragments had to do with implementing technology. Reading the text, from beginning to end I see the journey in a different light. Where I was impatient with my progress or my seeming incompetence, I now understand how every attempt to learn more contributed to my personal knowledge about myself, my teaching style, my limitations and the possibilities for new avenues to explore. The restless curiosity that plunged me into implementing technology in my French class has become critical, which is "a type of curiosity that can defend us from the excess of a rationality that now inundates our highly technologized world" (Freire, 1998, p. 38). Grace of my experiences, my examinations of my beliefs, and a clear understanding of what it means to be electronically literate, I am convinced that technology has much to offer my students. Determining the validity of my journey is now the work of my reader.

The last weeks of the middle school year unfold in a flurry of activity as students write final exams and teachers are busy entering final marks into the computer grading program. This year the routine was slightly more stressful because the two computer labs, where teachers usually worked on
marks, were closed because the machines were being moved. The iMacs filtered out of the classroom across the hall like water spiraling down a drain to be replaced by the old machines that had caused me so much distress the year before. I regarded the transformation of the lab with consternation as my plans for the following year dribbled away before my eyes. Easy access to the iMac lab across the hall was a major factor in the success of the integration of technology into my lessons this year. I wondered why I had not been informed of the move as I had been using the lab regularly. Upon questioning the reason for the shuffle I was informed that the old Macintosh machines were to be replaced with new IBMs in the fall and apparently the lab across the hall from my classroom was better designed to support an IBM lab.

In March of the following year the lab had not yet been refurbished and I had abandoned using technology to teach French. The two support teachers had been time-tabled to share a common prep and more computer classes were scheduled in the labs despite a Ministry of Education mandate (November, 1999) to integrate information technology into all subjects areas rather than delegating the lab space to teach "computer studies" courses. Our staff wasn't notified or asked for input concerning these changes. In effect, my access to technology and the computer lab has once more been denied. In light of considerable effort and the time I invested in learning to use technology to teach and learn about French I am left with the question, "So what?" Can I justify the journey in light of the journey's end? (February, 2002)
CHAPTER FIVE: RETELLING THE STORY

Notes From the Field

The move from field texts to research texts is layered in complexity . . . There is no smooth transition, no one gathering of the field texts, sorting them through, and analyzing them. . . We return to them again and again, bringing our own restored lives as inquirers, bringing new research puzzles, and re-searching the texts. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2001, p. 132)

Throughout a narrative, the inquirer strives to ask "questions of meaning and social significance" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 130). The issues of memory and meaning, can be a repressive dead hand weighting the inquirer to a heavy past or an uplifting "luminous thread of life and meaning" (Buchmann, 1992, ¶ 6). The task of drawing story fragments from field texts, memories, and my autobiography remind me of the many nights I spent watching my grandmother working her embroidery. In all the time I spent watching her working, I can't remember considering her method. To a little girl of ten years old her technique was insignificant and my recollection is only that of the threads melding into a beautiful image that she later framed with pride. The method she employed was left to me to work out in my own needlework many years later. There was a "right way" to go about working a cross-stitch just as there is a way to construct a narrative inquiry. I do know that my initial efforts were frustrated by inexperience. The threads on the back of my work often became tangled and sometimes I lost count and was obliged to rip back my stitches and begin again. In the end, I was able to teach myself an appropriate method. We are all self-taught to some degree, some more than others. Our education is dependent on life's lessons we have chosen to attend to.

Berk (1980) contends we recognize what is educative in life by "rendering the quality of the learner's experience" (p. 87) through autobiography which discloses the educational significance of events in a life. There are teachers who are content to work within the same boundaries year after year, using the same handouts, strategies and activities as they travel along a path that is tried and true and familiar. They have what I consider an uncanny sense of being able to teach quite comfortably within our education system with all its constraint. I, on the other hand, am inclined to take risks and bump
1564-1616
about and I can't observe the apathy in my students without feeling personally responsible for it. Education is not between the pages of the textbook, it is in learning how to learn, or finding ways to use the course content to ask difficult questions, and it is in striving to embrace our students in all their potential and teach them to exceed that potential. Education must teach us to step off the beaten path much as I set off up a steep learning incline to puzzle through the veritable maze surrounding the kingdom of Cyberspace. Gunn (1982) contends that the self I seek has its life in “groundedness” and she believes the question that begs response is *where do I belong?* rather than “who am I?” The question of the self’s identity becomes a question of the self’s location in the world” (p. 23). Like Thoreau, (cited in Gunn, p. 42) I have gone fishing in the deep pool of time, using myself as bait to catch the prize of understanding what it means to implement technology and why I want to ask this question in the first place. At the crux is the realization that using technology allows me to present lessons that are authentic. Authenticity is as important to me as it is to my students and the problem of how to teach French authentically is a huge issue for me. Education must be authentic.

From childhood I have pushed against boundaries that have been imposed by outside forces to hold me in place in a particular landscape. My experiences of being cared for by my grandparents served as a model for me to care for my siblings and later on, to care for my own children, which contrasted to the distance I felt from my own parents. In choosing the good and the moral ground, the seeds of caring and intimate concern for children were sown to blossom into a pedagogical spirit. A pioneer lifestyle fostered the development of an autonomous nature and an appreciation for innovation. My life on the farm, as a young wife and mother, was regulated by a practical education and the passing seasons, and was far removed from the technical aspects of the school system and technology. A certain strength was cultivated during my experiences abroad where I discovered a new dimension of “self” by leaving behind my northern identity of teacher, mother, and wife to don the hat of a traveler, and explorer and situate myself in the midst of another language and culture. As a narrative inquirer I have searched for the epiphanies that shaped the character of a woman who is willing to push aside boundaries and risk embracing change, to dance through the chaos that frames creative endeavors so as to develop a certain pedagogical wisdom in the computer lab. As Fullan (2000) argues:
the more powerful technology becomes, the more indispensable good teachers are. Technology generates a glut of information, but it has no particular pedagogical wisdom—especially regarding new breakthroughs in cognitive science about how learners must construct their own meaning for deep understanding to occur. This means that teachers must become experts in pedagogical design. It also means that teachers must use the power of technology, both in the classroom and in sharing with other teachers what they are learning. (¶ 15)

In telling my story I have come to understand how lived experiences led me along the path to the place where I felt that technology might serve a purpose in making a difference in my life and in the lives of my students. The story fragments selected from my notes from the field are cairns along the journey that mark the path I tread. Gunn (1982) contends that viewing “autobiography as simply a report on past events is to overlook the fact that autobiography takes place in the present” (p. 43). Narrative inquirers write research texts “in the midst of uncertainty” where they are less sure of the landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 144). Part of the difficulty lies in knowing that we write about a narrative history that is “becoming rather than being . . . . The writer must find ways to write a text that is “in place” not abstracted but placed” (p. 146) and pointing toward an anticipated future. We are, all of us, homeward bound and though the moment we shall arrive is never certain, it is anticipated with hope and longing. In considering where we have traveled, and where we stand today, we can prepare for a brighter tomorrow.

Retelling the Story

Home—the cloth on which a tapestry is stitched together with the thread of a lifetime of experiences. Retracing one's footprints by following that thread determines why it was important to set out on the journey in the first place. In this story, the process of writing about the journey engenders the hope and confidence to continue on. Narrative inquiry allows me to weave connections between the past, present and future as I describe the interactions, intentions and relations that are inherent in my teaching and learning. Computer technology can be acknowledged as having made inroads into schools and striking out on one of those roads has been the story I have shared. The story telling has been a creative act, the purpose of which Goodson and Sikes (2001) acknowledge as an interpretation through writing that spells out the influences that may have colored both
the story and my interpretation of it (p. 48). This is not a definitive tale expounding the way things ought to be, or the way things are today. The story draws to a close with the understanding that though the way ahead is anticipated, it is never certain and there is always more than one path and a myriad of destinations to draw our wandering footsteps homeward bound.

It was Gandalf, in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* who said, "All who wander are not lost." Throughout my wandering, my curiosity has been raveled and restitched as I inquired into my own personal and professional narrative by charting the path leading to and through the computer lab. I attempted to be as explicit as possible in the selection of stories chosen to articulate the journey in order to understand and improve my pedagogy but there are limitations involved in determining which stories to include since one can only describe the world one can see. There is always a question of whether we tell stories about the world as we wish it to be rather than the way it really is. Or do we tell the stories of a world that we wish others to see, leaving the tales of the pitfalls by the wayside? Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that a narrative never concludes. In the end, we retell the story to help us "move on in ways different from, yet connected to, where we began—retelling connected to telling, reliving connected to living" (p. 187). The stories comprising this research text highlight those forks in the road that impacted my decision to stay the course, or to set out on a path of my own. Writing the research text enabled me to chart a course full of possibility for my students and myself in my French class.

Working in the computer lab to teach French was like taking a huge gulp of air and diving deep beneath the surface of what I purport to believe. It has been an enormous struggle to learn to use technology effectively but having worked through the basics I believe there is potential for it in my French class that I will not find elsewhere. Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) wrote that we are forever uncertain of our actions, but we recognize the destination when we arrive and in that recognition, we know that we are home. Freire (1998) believes it is "only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" that knowledge emerges (Freire, p. 53). It was an affirmation of what I know about teaching and learning, to find myself at home with my students in the computer lab. I concur with Bateson (1984) who writes:
Learning turns a strange context into a familiar one, and finally into a habitation of mind and heart. The world we live in is the one we are about to perceive, as it becomes gradually more intelligible and more accessible with the building up of coherent mental models. Learning to know a community or a landscape is homecoming. Creating a vision of that community or landscape is homemaking. (Bateson, p. 213)

We will continue to grow and change and improve education by striving to understand why we do the things we do in the classroom. What is missing in the literature on school change, according to Clandinin and Connelly (1998) is an understanding of knowledge "as something narratively embodied in how a person stands in the world" (p. 157). Through narrative inquiry, one gleans an understanding of one's place as an educator and a person. Telling and retelling the stories drive one back upon oneself as story fragments are selected from the field texts or erupt unconsciously from the narrative. Sifting through stories is like raveling threads of tangled floss to untie the knots that cause us to wince. The final work is comprised of tiny stitches blended together to create a beautiful tapestry. The stitches and the knots are worked into the warp and the weft of the lives of practicing teachers, the stuff of why we teach the way we do. Richardson (1994) understands writing to be "a way of "knowing"—a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 516). This notion of discovery through writing is supported in Ayer's observation (2001) that "If we are to discover and develop our own relationship to the good and the just, we must understand our lives and our work as a journey or a quest" (p. 138). How useful is discovering a raison d'être for the path I trod? In the end, I abandoned using the lab to teach with technology in spite of having found my way home there, so what purpose did documenting this journey fulfill? Unless we can understand the factors that influence teachers' decisions to use or avoid using technology it will be difficult to provide effective resources which enable teachers to integrate it into the curriculum (Lam, 2000, p. 412).

Computer technology represents a new landscape "ready to be explored and exploited by teachers" (Murphy, 2000, p. 5). Having ventured into the daunting online learning environment with my classes I understand why few teachers are willing to venture forth. There are considerable impediments to the implementation of technology not the least of which, is an education system that encourages apathy in students by focussing on the
technical aspect of schooling rather than generating enthusiasm and a necessity to challenge belief systems and dive into chaos for an undetermined period of time. Students learn to be bored, we teach them how to do that at school. Writing my story enabled me to peel back the layers of the woman and educator I am becoming, to reveal the lens of beliefs, knowledge and assumptions through which I view the world. To ask why I feel personally responsible for their boredom.

My life history is composed of stories of change, challenge and innovation. Puzzled over the apathy I perceived in my students I needed to trace back to the knots threaded through my beliefs. The story I told then was one of a teacher feeling far from home, who didn't feel at home with her students, and who couldn't seem to find her groove. As Bateson (1994) remarked, most learning that is threaded through experience occurs outside of educational settings and beliefs are well established long before teachers ever attend university. Through the writing, I acknowledge my identity in my classroom as being anchored in both my personal and professional life, not as something static, and fixed imposed but as a complex creative interaction between myself, my students and the curriculum that allows me to know the situation in my classroom.

Confusion and chaos sometimes engulfed me in my middle school French class but it was tempered with a belief in the potential for technology to improve the learning climate in my French class. Without that belief, such an endeavor is doomed from the onset. As so many writers before me have said, we can't go around, to arrive we must pass through and there are no short cuts, or if there are, no one was there to point them out for me. In the end, it wasn't so much the physical access to computers in the lab, the courses I took or the support of colleagues or administration that motivated me to learn to use technology. As Albion (1999, ¶ 12) observed, it is a teacher's belief in his or her "capacity to work effectively with technology" that is the most significant factor in determining the use of computer technology in the classroom. My beliefs about teaching and learning were formed well before I became a teacher and were centered on practical experience and the importance of the central position of the learner in developing curriculum. To transform a practice requires a shift in the way we go about our business at school. The business of schooling at the middle school level was unnerving because I could no longer close my door and allow time to unfold for the year. I found myself exposed and vulnerable to self-doubt and pressure to conform to the way it's done here.
This tension directed my quest for "increased professional knowledge and skills and led to a reconstructed personal practical knowledge and to the enhancement of [my] practice" (Beattie, 1995, p. 64). Beattie argues that re-form can not be imagined individually but requires a linking of our collective images and imaginations so that "we come to know ourselves and our changing environments, and to transform both self and environment" (p. 67). I only had to look around the room to see that my students weren't happy and I knew I needed to do something about that. In telling my story I was compelled to listen to the children and I was reminded of my place and theirs in the curriculum.

**French Class**

**What is the point**

I mean how many of us will actually go to France

**Some day**

(Grade 8 student, February, 2000)

Hearing this student's voice and other student voices echoing this sentiment cut to the quick of my pedagogy. My background as an elementary teacher was full of stories of students who were enthusiastic about learning, but at the middle school level I found myself in the midst of a contradiction between what students want to learn, and what they were expected to learn. I thought I held a progressive view of education that celebrated students taking charge of their own learning. But my reflection in the eyes of my students was not of someone I recognized nor wanted to acknowledge. I struggled with the grammar translation method and I followed a text book and prepared lessons to teach the students about the language as I tried to bend learning to fit into a box where I could control, direct and evaluate it. I tried to bend my lessons in the lab to fit routines that ensured quiet, organized instruction cloaked in the guise of classroom control. The issue of struggling with my teaching methods are supported in what Murphy (2001) observed in her study where teachers beliefs about second language education are largely based on images from personal formal language learning experiences and that these beliefs may be responsible for ineffectual teaching practices (chap. 3.6). Struggle is vital to change and perhaps the biggest struggle is in understanding self.
Bateson (1994) believes that "self is learned but it is also a barrier to learning" (p. 66). Self is the thread by which time is bound into a single narrative as we struggle to meld the unusual, the chaotic into something familiar. The thread was pulled taut and ready to snap as I struggled to make myself at home inside the mold of a middle school French teacher. Believing that experience makes the best teacher I focussed on what I didn't know about teaching French and the middle school system. My autobiography reveals the character of an idealist who dreams of creating an atmosphere of caring and enthusiasm for learning for her students. Writing my narrative history into my inquiry has allowed me to revise my sense of self as an individual that is keenly interested in impacting the education system to understanding that the world I describe is only that which I can see. There is much more that is hidden from view and that will become clear as I become familiar with the landmarks in this middle school landscape, a notion which is supported by stories of celebration and struggle in my classroom. In my reluctance to ask for help from the technology support teachers springs to mind I can see how I never did learn to march in their parade and I must learn to do so to receive support and encouragement. In the midst of implementing technology I believed they were too busy to help and I sensed their concern about my intrusion into their domain so I worked alone in spite of a feeling that there should be more support provided. One of my strengths is in my ability to strike out into uncharted territory—a trait that is crucial to implementation.

It feels comfortable and safe to hold tightly to what we know but if we never step off the beaten path, will we ever be confident to find our own way? Retelling my story I am amazed at how very different the computer lab looks now than it did three years ago. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* I continue to teach French, in a middle school, the same grades, much of the same content, but there were enormous changes when I worked in the computer lab. Someone said, "One can never step in the same stream twice." Each time we return to the water's edge, we find an altered landscape and a current drawing the stream to its source. In composing this narrative I struggled with issues over my lack of knowledge about technology and teaching French to adolescents and how to meld the two into a constructive atmosphere for teaching and learning. One must look beyond the problem to see the solution that is inherent in the journey. Developing a constructive learning atmosphere in a computer lab with thirty students and one curious teacher does not occur overnight. A mindset that infers that teachers must be technology wizards to
use technology set us up for disappointment and frustration in the lab. My passion is not centered on technology but on my students' attitudes towards learning for which I feel responsible. Realizing this, my focus shifted to my students and the computers became almost invisible as the atmosphere I had been striving for clicked into place. The students were indeed in charge of their learning and I felt at home. It is in finding ways to ignite my students' curiosity by providing authentic learning experiences that my own curiosity is ignited. Creating a constructive learning atmosphere is my passion.

Writing a narrative requires retelling both the pits and pinnacles of experience. If we are to strive to find ways for school districts to provide support and professional opportunities for teachers we must not deny the person the teacher is (Goodson & Sikes, p. 70). Once we can locate a "professional practice within a whole-life perspective, it has the capacity to transform our accounts and our understandings" (p. 71). Certainly teachers need to stimulate their thinking by trying new techniques, but as Rivers (1996) points out, they need to do so "without losing their grip on enduring truths of learning and teaching that have proved to be basic to effective language experiences" (¶ 1). Part of my struggle had to do with tensions that developed around my inadequate understanding of language acquisition, and how to incorporate a communicative approach into teaching grade 8 students. The manner in which I learned to speak French in the real world by immersing myself in Francophone culture, contrasted sharply to the constraints of teaching adolescents who failed to see the relevance of learning French as a second language. I tried organizing the students into groups to practice speaking, but they spoke in English, I planned games but they refused to play, and I developed hands-on assignments, which they participated in half-heartedly. Even though I "understood the need for genuine and spontaneous interaction to promote second language acquisition, in classes of 20-30 adolescents, spontaneous interaction resulted in discipline problems and required [me] to provide more control" (Freeman, 1991, cited in Murphy, 2000, p. 17). In spite of all I thought I knew about teaching and where I thought I stood as teacher, I found myself conforming to a system that was geared towards efficiency and controlling the classroom. A language isn't acquired through studying grammar but it was so much easier to teach as though that might be true—to hand out worksheets, and record the marks as evidence of learning, to insist on silence, to control the learning. In retelling the story I see how I was trying to escape from my own self-perpetuated prison. Like Greene (1987), the only way
I can make sense of that story is to say that I don't know why I don't just conform to the mold I set for myself but my story is one of wanting to break out of it.

In effect, in my middle school classroom I closed the door on my vision for building a curriculum that was centered on my students and a communicative approach to language learning. The chasm between my students seemed so vast. How could I justify teaching in a manner I didn't believe to be effective? I couldn't, but it offered an illusion of control. I found myself at a loss as to how to teach students whose motivation to learn was so very different from my own. As van Manen (1996) observed, "There is a certain feeling of security in a world where, at least in principle, every question has an answer—in a world where we experience things as being solidly grounded, where every question finds its place in some rock-bottom sense of natural order and certainty. And yet this security is a false one" (p. 40). The French language is riddled with rules and exceptions to rules, which the students found unnerving and confusing. I dug deeply into my bag of strategies to find some tool that might shift my focus and I drew upon the notion of implementing technology.

Instruction should be directed to finding ways to help students discover an acceptable and appealing reason, within the context of their own narratives, for learning (Noddings, 1994). Computer technology can provide that context. In surveys and conversations many students identified working with technology in French class as engaging, fun, puzzling, challenging and worthwhile (journal entries, 1999, 2000, 2001). Each step in the journey into teaching and learning should be taken with the student's perspective in mind (Noddings, 1994) but in order for this to happen there must be a shift in the teacher's perspective. A teaching style is not only the product of a teacher's own schooling, teacher training and practical experience in the classroom. Teaching style is also influenced by a teacher's personality and belief system and "by regularities in the social structure in which most of them work" (Becker, 1990, p. 12). Computer technology offers a practical, authentic approach to learning that satisfies a natural curiosity. The challenge is to work within the school culture with all its constraints to "adapt schooling to the opportunities presented by technology in ways that are effective" (Becker, 1990, p. 15). Implementing technology was an attempt on my part to address this issue of authenticity by providing a specific type of learning environment.
In the computer lab the students came alive and looked forward to "French" class. They groaned when the bell rang before they were able to finish a project. From my perspective it wasn't learning to use the French language that enthralled them—it was the excitement of finding out about the world and learning to use the Internet as a tool to teach others that engaged their curiosity and gave meaning to their learning. With my focus off of teaching them about the language we could go ahead and learn the language to learn about the world. In the end, I discovered that it is what Warschauser (2000, ¶ 32) refers to as agency that is at the center of "what makes students so excited about using computers in the classroom: the computer provides them a powerful means to make their stamp on the world." The new landscape of the computer lab with a real purpose for communication is very different than traditional instruction, where the focus is on memorizing vocabulary and writing a quiz to prove mastery of the content.

Papert (1987) believes that cultures might change with the presence of computers but to influence the change, one must focus on the culture, not the computer. The virtual French class has "the capacity to generate reality and thus to provide access to the real world to an extent that would not be possible otherwise" (Murphy, 2000, p. 24). I am not convinced that schools have reached the place where a level of collaboration has been established to support the classroom teacher as a learner. Teachers require as many opportunities as students to learn to use technology but I concur with Kirpatrick and Cuban (2002) who observed that "schools offer only a stopgap support approach, which, in the end, erodes confidence in the technology's value and helps to sustain largely technology-free teaching practices" (Why So Little Impact, ¶ 7). In light of my experience with my classes in the computer lab, I'm not convinced that our school has a vision for teachers to implement technology. Too many times I was left stranded in the middle of a lesson without technical support when computer screens froze or we were denied access to the server. It is unrealistic for individual teachers to expect or even to attempt to become computer experts and to trouble shoot machines while teaching. There simply isn't enough time to learn. Computers are in the domain of technical support teachers who have the opportunity to work with the technology and learn alongside their students every day of the week. We need to take heed. Collegial technical support must be provided to classroom teachers in the computer labs to facilitate integration. I would welcome the opportunity to work with an experienced support teacher or colleague as I
feel that it is in open discussion about teaching and learning that we make real progress. Such support has yet to be extended. Perhaps I need to learn different methods of reaching out and requesting such support.

Honey and Moeller (1990) observed that teachers who are involved in computer technology were, for the most part, highly motivated and self-taught. The teachers in their study reported the importance of having technical support at their disposal which varied "from having a supportive mentor in the school who was available to trouble shoot and answer questions, to having a supportive administration" (p. 10). I was disappointed to find that such support was not available in my school for a number of reasons. Integrating technology requires a change in thinking about the way we work in schools. It requires teachers to become risk-takers in computer labs and it requires schools to provide the support for individual teachers to do so. Without collaboration and support the learning curve is substantially steeper for individual teachers such as myself who start out as electronically illiterate and this serves as a barrier to successful implementation. Through conducting the inquiry I recognized that it was on account of sheer determination that I continued on in spite of the impediments to my progress. What is required is more feet marching in the parade so we have more support from administration and the support teachers.

I began with a belief that technology would transform my practice. But the transformation must come from within and cannot be imposed from the system to the learner, or transmitted from teacher to student or teacher or administrator to teacher. It can't be learned from a book or from watching other teachers because implementing technology is a process and there is no short cut to the destination one has in mind but the excitement and enthusiasm to take risks can be sustained with encouragement and support. It is crucial to maintain a curious mindset in spite of working in a system that is driven by the content of a curriculum, the demands for efficiency accountability and a tendency for teachers to work in isolation. Technology evokes a particular way of thinking about teaching and learning but without the contribution of individual teachers there will not be a transformation of our system.

Technology is raining change upon the way we live and work in society but if teachers aren't encouraged to explore the possibilities that are only a computer lab away, it will continue to run down the roof and be swept into the gutter. Teachers need to step
out of their classrooms, sheltered by the umbrella of efficiency and the way we have always done things and get good and wet if we are ever to soak up all the possibilities offered to us by technology. The courage to step forward into each new day to not only embrace but also to seek change, is tantamount to implementation. It rests with individual teachers to keep moving forward and beating their own paths.

To pay attention to children and to see teaching as a deeply humanizing enterprise requires an interest in human freedom and rests “in the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 1988, p. 3). It requires bravery and respect and the intention to draw the best from our students and from ourselves. When we settle for less, when curriculum comes prepackaged from the Ministry or a publishing house rather than being composed from the lives of teachers and students there is a danger that our students may become little more than numbers on a grid. Freire (1998) reminds us that no matter what we do or think we do and no matter where we are located in space and time, we are foremost people. True freedom is rooted in respect for personhood and it is a constant challenge to maintain that respect. “True discipline does not exist in the muteness of those who have been silenced but in the stirrings of those who have been challenged, in the doubt of those who have been prodded, and in the hopes of those who have been awakened.” (p. 86). My calling as a French teacher is not to fill my students with sentence structures but to provide them with a means to extend their own reach, to grab hold of their education and rise above their dreams. It is frustrating to know that a means to do so exists, but access to it is denied.

In pursuing the answer to my many questions over the course of my graduate work it has been my good fortune to be exposed to the powerful works of many writers who have provoked my thoughts and inspired my teaching. Paulo Freire (1998) counsels teachers to rigorously struggle against anything that prevents us from being something more than we are at any given moment (p. 128). Nel Noddings (1984) admonishes teachers to have the courage to go on caring for students even when that caring isn't reciprocated. William Ayers (2001) believes that teachers must link conduct with consciousness in striving for excellence. Maxine Greene (1988) argues for surmounting obstacles so that the children in our care will have models to follow and can learn to take initiative themselves from our example. And finally, the famous words of Antoine de Saint-Exupery from his *Little Prince* draw back the curtain on this narrative inquiry, and lets the light filter through
with his words: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye." Guided by the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2001) I have learned to inquire into my personal narrative and to trust that the process will bring forward a sense of how experience, the growth and transformation in the life story we author, is the driving impulse for narrative inquiry.

There is a world full of virtual possibilities beckoning to French students and teachers from beyond the door to the computer lab. Having stepped through that door and into Cyberspace I found that there is indeed a place for technology in my teaching in spite of the constraints imposed on me by working in a school where teachers, technical support staff and administration do not yet share a common vision. The computer lab can become a familiar landscape where children take charge of their learning. That I have been able to chart my own map of the technological landscape through writing this narrative serves only as a record that another has traveled through the land and found her way. Teachers must be willing to examine their own beliefs about teaching and learning in order to make advances with technology. Conducting a narrative inquiry is one way to further understanding for it has confirmed for me the importance of understanding beliefs in order to transform them. By telling our stories of experience we begin to peel back the layers that shroud our core values and beliefs and in doing so, we begin to understand our practice and to see the possibilities in exploring new landscapes. In sharing my story, I hope to offer insight into those possibilities that may be helpful to other teachers interested in implementing technology in their own classrooms.
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