CONNECTING FOR LEARNING:
FOUR PRESCHOOL TEACHERS ENGAGE IN SUSTAINED, STRUCTURED
CONVERSATION ABOUT GENUINE PRACTICE

by
KATHLEEN MARY McCABE
B.Ed., The University of British Columbia, 1994

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction
Early Childhood Education

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

The University of British Columbia
August 2000

© Kathleen Mary McCabe, 2000
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Faculty of Education, The University of British Columbia Vancouver, Canada

Date Sept. 23, '00
Abstract

This inquiry is about genuine practice in Early Childhood Education and the value of trusting relationships among child care practitioners as they converse about their practice. This participatory research project outlines the processes and describes the meaning that sustained, structured conversation about genuine practice had on four Vancouver area child care practitioners over a six month period.

Conversation was used as both a method of collecting data and a process to undertake to improve practice. Conversation provided us with a way to reconstruct and reinterpret our experiences, improve our understanding of ourselves as teachers and our understanding of children, and restructure our personal knowledge of teaching and children.

The participants understood being genuine as "being me" and "being connected" to children and themselves. They also spoke of it as acts of resistance against ways of being that can oppress children. I explain why genuine practice is an important concept for educators to discuss and should be used to supplement the current focus on curriculum planning in child care training.

Feminist epistemology, curriculum theory and autobiography have influenced this work. It is also informed by my 20 years of child care practice. This research stems from my desire to know my role as teacher better and to add to the growing knowledge about the value of conversation and genuine practice.

Sustained, structured conversation can be a valuable tool for professional development. It can help practitioners become more reflective by providing contexts where they are able to achieve a sense of trust, and listen well to one another. Sustained, structured conversation can also support the improvement of practice when participants refrain from giving advice but ask genuine questions and share stories of their practice.

The participants reported that they became more reflective in their work with children as they became reacquainted with their beliefs and values. They showed a greater propensity toward self-questioning as the conversations advanced. The participants also reported that the conversations provided emotional support needed during times of work-related stress and that building relationships outside of the work place was an important feature of the research.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ii  
Table of Contents iii  
List of Figures iv  
List of Appendices v  
Acknowledgments vi  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>The Participants</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>Review of the Literature</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retelling our Lives</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six:</td>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The Cloth Quilt</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>The Written Quilt</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Content of courses</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Sample letter of consent</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The Cloth Quilt</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>The Written Quilt</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Content of courses</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Sample letter of consent</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people who supported me throughout the process of this degree. My gratitude goes to the research participants. The three women gave their time at and between our meetings to talk, write and draw about their thinking. They also carefully and critically read drafts of the thesis which supported my understanding. We are fortunate to have such dedicated women working with children in our community.

I also acknowledge my research committee. I wish to thank Dr. Allison Tom for believing in my potential when I first began my study more than 5 years ago. She listened to my interests and provided valuable advice in planning and organizing the project. She also paid close attention to the details of the writing. I also thank Dr. Pamela Courtenay-Hall who was an infusion of hope for me throughout the research and writing process. Her spirit for learning in conversation will always be cherished. Thanks also to Dr. Karen Meyer, whose welcoming ways and belief in creative responses to research experiences acted as an inspiration to me.

I wish to thank the many coworkers who have shared themselves with me in conversation both before this research began and throughout its process. Brenda Carlton, Suzanne Fenwick, Wendy McPhail, Stacey Oness and Jacqueline Tepper have supported me as I challenged myself to think in creative ways. I will fondly remember our midnight conversations and walks while on retreats together and those moments when they caringly listened to my stories. I also thank Carla Randall for the time she gave me as I reflected on my understanding of the research.

I also wish to thank my husband, Bob Mackay, for his ability to play endless games of tennis or other sports outdoors with our young son, Liam Seamus, in order that I could have a quiet space to work and to have the meetings with the participants. I will also remember the freshly baked cookies he made that kept me fueled in the late hours of the night. His ability to listen quietly and to ask questions that prompted me to reflect on my work were a source of learning.

I also thank Liam who was patient when I said "just one more minute" as I often desperately tried to get one thing or another typed. He has reinforced my belief in sharing quiet moments of conversation with children in order to gain greater connection to them.

Finally, I wish to thank my mother and father who cared for Liam during meetings and when I was working. They made this work easier by being there for me.
Introduction

This thesis describes the challenges and benefits of sustained, structured conversation among a small group of child care practitioners as they engage in discussing genuine practice. This research provides insight into the potential benefits of support networks for teaching and ways to develop such communities of teacher/learners. While this research involved four supervisors of child care settings, the conclusions apply to child care practitioners generally. Many child care practitioners experience their work as multi-layered. Many supervisors have the added concern of dealing with administrative tasks not always shared by coworkers. Having said this, it is important to recognize the value that sustained, structured conversation and being genuine can have for all practitioners.

Traditionally, most child care practitioners are not encouraged to enter into sustained, structured conversation. The shortness of training time often lends itself to hurried and technocratic experiences of learning. In particular, the training programs focus attention on curriculum development which tends to limit explicit and extended discussions about being in relationships with children as a necessary part of the curriculum. By engaging in sustained, structured conversation about genuine practice child care practitioners can have the opportunity to critique their own knowledge and improve their practice. Sustained, structured conversation is offered as one framework for continuing professional development. In this research it helped the participants develop their knowledge of teaching and children and their philosophical understanding of themselves in relation to others.

As a child care practitioner of twenty years I have long been interested in developing my understanding of children, my teaching and of myself in relation to the people I meet through my work. I have felt particularly grateful to the women with whom I have taught over these years. Their wisdom, questions and openness to letting me hear their thinking about children led me to go beyond the walls of my workplace to share and listen to the stories of other practitioners. It was my experience with my coworkers that taught me that I work well with others in thinking about what it is to be a teacher. It was they who supported me, through their generous words and actions, to learn more about what it is to be genuine with children. The relationships I have with my coworkers have taken many years of care to develop. I knew that to begin to develop trusting relationships with the research participants, I would have to give them time and my self. It was for this reason that I set the research over a six month period, which I felt was the minimum amount of time I should give them to develop relationships where we felt we could trust one another. I also

1
chose the dinner table as the site of these conversations because I believed it has the potential to both inspire and reflect conversation. I was also a participant in this group.

I received names for potential participants from early childhood instructors. Letters outlining the project were distributed and those who responded became the participants. We began our investigation of genuine practice by exploring what we knew about it through our own experiences as children and young adult learners. Through this exploration we reaffirmed our beliefs and values about children and childhood and what it meant to be genuine with them. We applied this knowledge to our understanding of our present teaching.

This research is informed by multiple sources. I draw on my experiences as a founder of a child care program, a child care practitioner, a practicum supervisor, a mother and a friend. The literature from many disciplines has also been insightful. I used literature from teacher education (Bosworth & Hamilton, 1994; Goffin & Day, 1994; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Pugach, 1990), qualitative research design (Eisner, 1992; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Marshall & Rossman, 1989), autobiography (Miller, 1992; Pinar, 1994), curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cornbleth, 1990, Doxey, 1990; Miller & Seller, 1990) and ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986; Goldberger et al., 1996; Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Unfortunately, there is a lack of literature on how child care practitioners view and understand their work in comparison to teachers of school age children. Therefore I have relied heavily on literature about teacher education.

When I use the term child care practitioner I refer to people working with children from birth to school age. Child care practitioners who work with children of school age have not been included. Child care practitioners are named Early Childhood Educators by the British Columbia Ministry of Health. It is this provincial organization that issues licenses to practice when all training components have been completed. People who have not completed their training but who are in the process of completing it are permitted to work in licensed facilities.

I have mainly used the term child care practitioner but where necessary have substituted the term early childhood practitioner or early childhood educator in its place. Through the thesis I have used the pronoun 'her' when referring to child care practitioners. I have done this to reflect the fact that the majority of child care practitioners are female (Province of British Columbia, 1997). However, I do not wish to underestimate the contributions many men bring to the field.

I define sustained, structured conversation as the act of entering into conversation with others on a regular basis about a specific topic or topics mutually agreed upon by the members. In our conversation, the structure came from the participants as we developed ways to hear from everyone while not limiting the
full exploration of a topic by any one person. To explain, we
did not engage in multiple conversation topics that did not
connect with one another. We preferred to speak about one topic
with its related aspects in depth. We also structured the way
we worked together in conversation. Early in the process we
each spoke for approximately the same length of time. As the
process developed we found that we needed to change this turn-
taking method. We chose instead to focus on the stories of two
people per meeting in order to hear a more full account of their
thinking.

In general, the point of the conversation was to develop
relationships with one another where we could come to trust one
another and learn from one another. To develop relationships is
an important goal of these conversations. From and within these
relationships each person seeks to share, listen to, question,
explore and honor knowledge shared through stories of our
experiences as teachers and learners. Forming trusting
relationships is the starting point from which all my other
goals, such as learning about my practice and children, grow.
From good relationships I develop with others I find that I can
more openly share my understanding about my teaching. From good
relationships with others I am more open to their questions,
analysis and other commentary.

I would have liked to use the term collaborative
conversation because it is an important part of the process.
However, including this word within the name of this process
would have been too awkward. Collaboration suggests a combining
of efforts in partnership to share ideas or work through
concerns. It involves everyone bringing their understanding to
the conversation. It involves mutual respect. While sustained,
structured conversation includes all these attributes, I wanted
to stress the sustained and structured nature of the
conversation. This definition derives from my understanding
that as child care practitioners we use our experiences to
inform our practice (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). As we share
these experiences with one another in conversation we create
knowledge about our teaching which in turn can help us reflect
on and improve our practice. Therefore, sustained, structured
conversation is not used solely to help us learn about theories
so that we can integrate them into our work. Nor is
conversation only used to help us deliberate upon competing
views. Rather, sustained conversations offer a way to help us
reconstruct and reinterpret our experiences, improve our self-
image as teachers, and restructure our personal knowledge of
teaching to improve our practice.

I believe that many child care practitioners spend
insufficient time in their training learning about their
relationships with children. The time spent on curriculum
development outweighs any other component in child care
practitioner training (Province of British Columbia, Ministry of
Health, 1998. See Appendix A). I am also committed to becoming
more genuine in my teaching. This is part of quality child
care. Children deserve teachers who are genuine in their interactions. This does not mean that teachers have the right to display inappropriate feelings or ideas that would be harmful to children. It means that children deserve teachers who are completely present to them, who are reflective and who honor children as knowing beings. Being genuine with children requires that we know how we influence children and how they influence us. We need to respect children's ability to see us as thoughtful learners as well as caregivers. For example, I have improved my ability to teach children since I entered child care. In the beginning of my teaching I knew the words I was supposed to say to children to encourage them to form their own conclusions about their abilities. In response to a child who said "do you like my picture?" I might have said (with a large smile on my face), "Wow, look at the brilliant sun you made." But this is not always what the child wants to hear. I had been told to keep my opinions out in order to help the child develop her own. But sometimes the child wants to know what I think. To respond with any other kind of answer leaves the child feeling as though I didn't hear her. Now when I respond I think more carefully about my relationship with the child and how I can best help her grow.

It is my understanding that many child care practitioners have been well-versed in the topic of "quality" in child care programs (Moss & Pence, 1994), therefore I did not want to use this as a starting point of our conversation. I wanted to draw attention away from the possibility of rehearsed statements about what quality relationships might look like. As Moss (1994) writes, "in its mantra-like repetition, the word [quality] is in danger of being rendered meaningless" (p. 1). I did not want this research to promote such insensitivity. I thought the word genuine would encourage new ideas to be formed about children in relationship with others. I do not give a definitive list of attributes for genuine practice. To do so may limit us from seeing genuineness in the unique interactions amongst people. This research offers the beginning of an exploration into the nature and value of being genuine with children.

It is, however, important to begin defining the term in order to enter a conversation about it. At the beginning of the research I defined genuine practice as occurring when a practitioner acts deliberately to reflect and make wise choices that honor her personal knowledge of the world in relation to the child or children for whom she is caring. I believe that when genuine practice occurs, the teacher makes use of her reflected-upon personal history and scholarly knowledge, to make decisions with and for children. This was confirmed when the participants reinterpreted their personal histories, and discussed how these factors helped them reflect on and improve their relationships with children. My practice was improved when I reawakened a few events of my early elementary years. In my stories to the participants I was reminded of the importance
of asking children questions and giving them time to reflect on their thinking. I used this growing awareness to help teach myself about how I should behave with a particular child in the child care program. I combined this thinking with the reading I was doing on autobiography (Pinar, 1994; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). All these experiences helped support me to be more genuine in my relationship with the children in my care and with the participants in the research.

In the conversations that this research is based on, the participants explored their understanding of being genuine as well. Originally, the participants described genuine practice as the act of "being me" in concert with the perceived needs of the child. "Being me" meant acting with integrity. However, the participants did not often use the word genuine to describe their relationship with children. The most often used word to describe their relationships with children was "connected". Being "connected" meant that they experienced a sense of joy and the child expressed similar feelings. It meant that the child seemed to benefit from the relationship as did the adult in ways that were not selfish or harmful to either.

I, in my personal practice, have politicized the term. To me, genuine practices are acts of resistance and acts of love. They are motivated by the uneasiness I feel about certain social and political pressures that succeed in oppressing children. I also see it as a resistance to the replication of my personal history; one that is tinged with sadness about growing up too soon. Teaching in genuine ways is a chance to live my life as a whole person and to teach children they too can relate with others in genuine ways. I believe that to act in this way can lead to the improvement of the self and education in its wake. Even though our understanding and articulation of the concept of genuine practice was different, to practice in these ways meant we had to develop the ability to be wholly present to children. This meant more than our physical presence. It meant listening with our whole selves to others.

The two aspects of the research, that is, sustained, structured conversation and genuine practice, have been an interest of mine for the last few years. I wanted this research to make a difference to the ways I taught. I wanted to improve my practice by investigating my biases and exploring my assumptions. I also wanted to provide a framework for the participants to explore and improve their own practice. I hope readers will gain an awareness of the dedication these practitioners have to their work and the knowledge they use in their teaching. I hope that policy-makers and program developers at training institutions will use it to develop a broader range of teaching styles and professional development programs beyond the technocratic and curriculum based focus they, for the most part, have endorsed.

This thesis addresses three main factors that contribute to limited inquiry-based models for improving practice among child care practitioners. These are: an overemphasis on curriculum
development in practitioner training, a limited amount of time
to develop reflective and explorative practice, and a limited
awareness about how we can use our histories to inform our
practice. Each of these factors can keep child care
practitioners from teaching in ways that honor and respect their
personal knowledge and can limit them from developing their
ability to listen better to what children are asking and to see
what they need to teach children.

Engaging in conversation can help teachers build trusting
relationships with one another. These trusting relationships
can help practitioners to: 1) articulate their tacit knowledge
(Witherell & Noddings, 1991), 2) question their assumptions
about common practice (Elbaz, 1992), 3) reawaken and address
the values and beliefs that underpin their practice, and 4)
generate ideas that will help them improve their practice.

Theories that support my claim that sustained, structured
conversation can lead to better practice can be found in Chapter
Two where I have made a review of the literature. Vygotsky's
(1978) theory that knowing is socially constructed, that people
need to be actively engaged with one another and share what they
know in order to change themselves and their world, has had a
profound influence on my understanding. Feminist epistemology
which values experience and emotion as important sources of
knowledge (Belenky et. al., 1986; Goldberger et. al., 1996) has
also influenced my thinking. This literature has encouraged me
to ask how I know what I know. Theories in curriculum
development (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cornbleth, 1990) and
autobiography (Miller, 1992; Pinar, 1994) have helped me become
more aware of the teacher as a significant part of the
curriculum. Understanding the teacher as curriculum makes it
important to reflect on the kinds of interactions and
relationships that she develops with those in her care. These
readings have helped me pay more attention to how I function as
part of the curriculum. Theories that emphasize the
reconstruction of the way we see ourselves within the curriculum
as well as our role as agents in improving it (Greene, 1988,
1989, 1991; Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994) have also played a
significant role in my thinking about the benefits of sustained,
structured conversation.

I also address theories that have helped me understand
genuine practice in the review of the literature. Sarason,
Pierce and Sarason (1990) argue that children require our
unrestricted attention in order to support their social,
emotional, intellectual and physical development. Graue (1995)
has shown that this is not easily done in the hurried pace of
the curriculum. Miller (1986, 1990) suggests that unrestricted,
genuine, and child-focused attention cannot easily be achieved
when we are blinded by our unreflected-upon past. These
theories, along with the work of Tremmel (1993), van Manen
(1988) and Palmer (1998) provoke me to learn how I can be better
present to children. Finally, it is important to ask when it is
appropriate to be genuine and when it is not? Brophy & Statham
(1994) believe that it is important to investigate the assumptions of all our conceptualizations in teaching in light of the ways the community wants to be served. This research is needed to support teachers to improve their practice with children. It is also needed to inform policy-makers at the institutional level. The British Columbia Provincial Child Care Survey (1997) was undertaken to evaluate the "current initiatives and to assess the need for new policies and programs" (p. xi). This survey provided information about fee structures and enrollment trends but gave insufficient information about child care practitioners' training and skills. It does not provide rich data about child care practitioners' interpretations of their work with children or how they can be supported in their continuing professional development. For improved policies to be developed, it is important to ask more meaningful questions and provide more meaningful and rich data. I have developed the following research questions with this in mind. I have used the theories previously stated and the experiences I have had as a child care practitioner and mother to help me formulate these questions:

1. What is the potential role of sustained, structured conversation in child care practitioners' teaching?
   Specifically,
   a) How can sustained, structured conversation support communication among child care practitioners?
   b) How can sustained, structured conversation contribute to child care practitioners' knowledge about teaching, children and the self in relation to others?
   c) How can sustained, structured conversation improve relationships with children?
   d) What are some of the problems associated with sustained, structured conversation?

2. How is genuine practice characterized in child care?
   Specifically,
   a) How do participants characterize genuine practice?
   b) Which of these characterizations has the most to recommend it as an ethically appropriate ideal for guiding practitioner reflection?
   c) What hinders genuine practice?
   d) What problems might come with engaging in genuine practice?

In order to examine these questions a qualitative research design was established. Qualitative methods of study can offer a descriptive and informative analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) from which policies for child care training and professional development can be created. I used conversation as both method and process for learning about our teaching (Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994). I discuss the particulars of this design in Chapter Three. Specifically, I
describe how the participants were selected, how we developed
the process of our conversations and how I analyzed the data. I
use the literature on designing qualitative research (Marshall &
Rossman, 1989; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997), on issues of power
(Lather, 1991; Tom, 1997) and my experiences as a practicum
supervisor to inform the processes of conducting this research.

I used a combination of techniques to record the data and
my impressions of the data. I made changes to the design as the
research evolved. Throughout the whole process my ability to be
reflexive (Ristock & Pennell, 1996) supported my ability to
analyze the data. Further, my summaries to the participants and
including them in a review of the work helped support the
reliability, credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 145) and
validity of the research as I will explain in Chapter Three.

The thesis is organized in the following way. I begin by
describing the participants in Chapter Two. I use their
comments and stories to show some of the important topics they
spoke of and the value of the conversation to their practice. I
have placed the participants at the front of the thesis because
understanding who they are is important to understanding the
conversations we had. Further, without their dedication to this
research and to an exploration of their practice through
sustained, structured conversation, this research would not have
been possible.

After I describe the participants I follow with a review of
the literature in Chapter Three, then the methods in Chapter
Four. I include a discussion of my exploration into other forms
of representation of knowledge through an epilogue to this
chapter. As a child care practitioner I use, and encourage
children to use, multiple ways of representing what they know.
I had, throughout the research process, an uncomfortable feeling
about my ability to report what I learned solely through written
text. Eisner (1992) urges the use of multiple symbols to
represent knowledge saying that "any symbol both reveals and
conceals, its use provides, of necessity, a partial view of the
reality it is intended to depict" (p. 12). For this reason I
created a quilt that included the visual representations the
participants wished to share, and I have included a narrative
explanation of it in an epilogue to the methods chapter. I hope
that this narrative about the making of the quilt will inspire
others to broaden the ways knowledge is shared. Chapter Five
follows the chapter on methods and describes two of the themes
of our conversations, time and its relationship to genuine
practice and retelling our lives. Chapter Six contains my
conclusions and recommendations for further research and policy
reform. These recommendations centre on developing a
comprehensive plan to support sustained, structured conversation
amongst those who work with young children.

I hope the reader will enjoy learning about and from the
participants as I did. I hope the reading will encourage
further exploration into the challenges and benefits of
sustained, structured conversation and the ways we develop our

8
relationships with children.
Chapter Two

The participants

The participants are important to me. Without them this research could not have taken place. Introducing the participants by writing about them in the beginning of the thesis is responsible and reflects my thankfulness to all that they offered me during the research process. Not only is this a way of acknowledging the effort these women put into the conversations, it is also a way to understand the conversation we had over the six month period.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest using participant stories to draw people to becoming emotionally connected with the story-tellers. I chose comments and stories that reflect the commitment the participants had to the development of relationships with the children they teach. Building connected relationships with children and others is important to each participant and therefore it is right that I should include those comments and stories that reflect this idea. These comments and stories also demonstrate some of the other values each participant held and that are part of each participants' teaching experience. Some stories are left out because they are too personal to be included in this thesis and others are too fragmented to have them easily understood.

I begin by describing Joanne's and sharing her stories. I follow, in a similar way with Angela's, then Beth's and then myself. This presentation follows the order of their years of experience from most to least, except for myself who I leave to last because I feel I have more opportunity, through the whole thesis, to make my voice prominent. I give short reflective comments on the stories to help the reader know my understanding of the participants' intended purpose for telling the stories.

Joanne

Joanne is a veteran preschool teacher who has worked in child care and in the same facility for over 25 years. The facility is one of the oldest in the Lower Mainland. It is situated in an affluent area and serves children 2.5 years through school age. Like most child care facilities, the program is funded through parent-fees and administered by a parent-run Board. There have been recent reductions in the numbers of children attending the facility and therefore funds to support the program have been reduced. Reasons for reduced enrollment of the maximum 25 children per day have not been identified. During her time as a child care practitioner, Joanne has trained to be a high school teacher and has graduated from art school. She comes to child care and to these conversations with a wealth of experiences.

1 Joanne has chosen to use her real name.
2 Angela has chosen to use a pseudonym
3 Beth has chosen to use a pseudonym
Joanne’s mother was an inspiration to her as she was growing up. She guided her to develop her creative side. Her mother was always ready to get out the crayons, playdough and bubbles and invite the neighbourhood children over (A390 & C360, 99-01-04). She remarks “it was a good thing too or I would have been beaten down by some of my school experiences” (C365, 99-01-04). Joanne says there are fewer opportunities today for creative spontaneity of this sort in the preschool curriculum than when she first started teaching. She says, “I cannot leave the children the way I used to so I can read quietly with a child. I have to watch them all the time” (A300, 99-01-25). In this comment Joanne was sad about the need to be more of an overseer than a person who could actively engage with children. She says that the lack of direct support services for children who are not defined as “special needs” prevents much of this spontaneity because “I have to be a one-on-one worker” (A064, 99-02-22). Yet she wants to be “an advocate for children...they need time to daydream” (A147, 99-04-12).

Joanne believes in team work as a way to support children. She says,

a lack of hierarchy is something I strive for. I know the buck stops with me and that’s a little lonely. I don’t want to bother the staff with the administrative things although I sometimes need their help and their expertise. I like to be very egalitarian at staff meetings. We can all work to solve problems (C110, 98-12-07).

She adds, “I feel so lucky because the people I have worked with have always been compatible” (C150, 99-01-14). But it has been difficult for her to support her coworkers as a team because of the lack of funds to allow them time to take care of their health and time to share their experiences with one another.

Our team gets fragile sometimes, especially when we are all sick. One of the teachers burst into tears because she felt we were supposed to be four strong pillars and we were only two because we aren’t as well as we want to be. So I think I need to work more on team building and getting people to take mental health days to help themselves feel better (A164, 99-02-22).

Joanne expressed her understanding of, and desire for, better relationships with children in her visual journal. In her journal Joanne presented a drawing of a spark. Around it were dark shades which she said represented the things that prevent good connections with children. Around the drawing she wrote:

Teaching, even when you teach a whole roomful of people, is always a one to one experience somehow.
Learning, no matter how many students are around you depends on a spark or a connection between the teacher and the learner. It’s an instant of truth and recognition (B320, 99-01-04).

Joanne is concerned for many parents and children today who have to struggle through difficult economic times. She notes that the changes she has seen since entering child care 25 years ago are vast. She struggles with her feelings that parents should be spending more time with their children and less time structuring their children’s activities outside the family relationship. “It’s a challenge for the children to relax....They have day care and then they have all the community activities (A042, 99-02-22). She says, “some parents work 10 or 14 hours a day because they want money to have things. They have nannies pick up the children, cook the supper and get the children ready for bed. Then the parents come home just in time to say good night” (A070, 99-02-22). Joanne questions how she can be more supportive to parents while coming to terms with her belief that parents need to spend more time with their children. She says “how can I be genuine with them when I don’t agree with what they are doing?” (C280, 98-12-07).

Joanne says that she could sort through this struggle better if she had more time to speak with parents about her understanding of the children. She says,

because of a lack of money we can’t do the kind of observations of children that we need to do. This makes us less prepared in meetings with parents. The lack of money also doesn’t allow for time to meet with parents because we have to be with the children....There’s very little time to develop mutual respect with parents (B220, 99-02-22).

Joanne is also a supervisor for practicum students who come to her centre to do their practica. Because of the large workload established by the college training program, and the often hectic pace of the child care facility, Joanne says she cannot always engage in conversation with the students as she would like. When practicum students appear unsure about how to be with the children, that is, not knowing what to say or how to respond to children, or how to develop the curriculum, Joanne encourages them to “…bring in the personal skills they have. When they realize they have more room in presenting who they are they are better able to be with children” (A325, 99-04-12). Joanne might encourage a student who enjoys cooking to bring her skills to the program by working on cooking projects with the children.

Joanne also encourages practicum students to ask questions about what is being taught. “There is little time for me to engage with the students in conversation so I encourage them to ask me and the other teachers questions” (B200, 99-04-12).
However, Joanne explains that sometimes explanation is insufficient in learning to work with children. She says, "the practicum students might have all the right words, so you can talk about it, but to understand children with your gut and your body is hard...That's why we need groups like these to give each other support to learn" (B600, 99-01-04).

Joanne is also an instructor in a local Early Childhood Training Program. She was given a text from which to teach a curriculum planning course. In order to understand and help explain the text to the students Joanne made a drawing. She said,

I felt I needed to make a drawing to help the students understand the foundations of this course. The course is a curriculum planning course and asks the students to think about why they should plan. The whole course is about planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum. I first used a spiral to talk to the students about what needs to happen. This represents what is to be taught, making observations, and then assessing and evaluating the process and then it happens all over again as you plan something else. I wanted the students to know that just putting out the blocks didn’t guarantee that they would learn about balance. I also did a drawing about the key concepts for developing the curriculum. In the text were: physical health and lifestyle, spiritual growth, artistic expression and appreciation of beauty. So I drew a picture with four pillars because I wanted to express that I saw these as the foundation of the curriculum (A197, 99-03-08).

There were many responses to Joanne’s ideas. I said, "I noticed that you used the pillars like Roman columns. It makes the curriculum seem immovable....Yet the words you were saying sound more sensual, not like cold granite. I wonder about things growing down as well as only seeing things as growing up" (A252, 99-03-08). Joanne responded, "I had not thought of that. It doesn’t really fit with my idea that learning is much more organic. It’s like a forest when all the roots intertwine....I need to pay more attention to my language. I think I’ll remake the image to be more rootlike" (A300, 99-03-08).

Joanne said she appreciated the conversations we had. "The word conversation was what was so important. It sounds friendly and reciprocal rather than a task force to come up with some solution to some problem. I’ve already been in those kinds of groups" (A308, 98-12-07). Joanne adds that she was reacquainted with her belief in developing strong bonds with children through sharing her stories and drawings with us (C259, 99-05-13). At the time of the research, Joanne was trying to determine what she could do about making her work life better. She was not enjoying teaching as much as she used to, mainly because she was
not getting as much chance to be with a variety of children as she would have liked. She notes “I have benefited a lot because of the support and trust in the group....I can tell my stories....It has helped me make the decision to leave my job” (C281, 99-05-13). Leaving her place of employment where she had been for 25 years was not an easy decision to make. Through our conversation she was given opportunities to rethink her reasons for teaching young children, and with this reawakening of her beliefs and values she realized she had to move to another place to work.

I have presented Joanne as an experienced practitioner who believes in children. She has hope for the future of child care and the conversation helped her feel better about being able to put into place the kinds of practices she thinks are important for childrens’ wellbeing. Near the end of our conversations Joanne reminded us of a song she had brought to the group earlier in the research. We sang it together “because it reminds us of the hope we have for children and our work with them” (A045, 99-04-12). The words are copied here with the kind permission of her sister who wrote the song:

We are here in this place and our roots are growing deeper
We are here in this place and our branches reach so high
We are here in this place and we intertwine our branches
We are here in this place, joined together earth and sky (A017, 99-04-12).

Angela

Angela has been a preschool teacher for 20 years. She is the supervisor in a facility for infants and toddlers which she helped to found more than 15 years ago. The facility is located in a large housing co-operative although the facility takes children from more distant areas rather than limiting enrollment to the immediate dwellers. The centre is administered by a parent-run Board of Directors. Angela is frustrated with the way her facility is administered. The By-laws and Constitution that frame the operation of the facility require an elected Board. However, rarely do parents come to meetings or want to take the positions. “The lack of people willing or able to take the roles and responsibilities makes the system inefficient and the jobs are left to me to handle” (A430, 98-12-07).

As a supervisor, it is Angela’s job to establish staff schedules and assist staff in creating plans for their professional development. In addition she keeps all necessary records relating to the children and their families. She makes sure the building and its contents meet all requirements set by the Licensing Department.

Despite the frustrations that Angela feels about the way child care programs are administered, she wants to continue
working in child care. She says she draws on her experiences as an immigrant to help her understand that some children and their families feel lonely and are suffering under hardship. She explains these hardships by saying,

I guess we were very poor. My parents came here with three little kids, no job, zero money, no English and no education. We were squatters in the mountains in the Valley. My father found a power building vacant and he put my family in the bottom part while he rented a room in Vancouver and worked day and night to get enough money....The powerhouse was about six stories high and because all the machinery was missing it had a big hole in the floor and I could see all the way down. The windows were all bashed out and the swallows came in and nested in the corners. My mother must have had difficulty here....When we got settled she had to keep the fire going to keep the kids warm. I remember a funny story about her....I remember the first time she saw a skunk and she didn't know it. She thought it was cute and tried to take it home to show the children....Now she thinks it's the most disgusting animal (B060, 99-01-04).

Angela also draws on her experiences as a mother to inform her teaching. She tells the story of the adoption of her daughter to help illustrate her love for children and her belief in touch and affection as their primary needs. She says,

In the year of 1979—that was the Year of the Child. I had worked in a day care for five or six years. I was learning what not to be because the supervisor was so bad to the children. I finally quit because I couldn't stand up to her. She was so much older than me and I was so young. I finally quit. I ran an ad in the paper saying that I would start a little home day care centre. Then my goal was to travel....I didn't want to look after anybody's baby. I wanted a baby from a needy family. Finally this woman called late one night. She saw the ad. in the Buy and Sell. She said that she couldn't tell me where she worked but that she worked late at night. She came over the next day with a beautiful baby....The mother left this little baby with me. Sometimes for days on end. Every once in a while she would phone when she couldn't come to get her. I started to get really connected to the little girl. I would stroke her and hug her and bath her and do all the things I wanted to have done to me when I was a little girl. She just blossomed. The woman always had an excuse not to pay me but I didn't mind because I just loved this little girl very much....This little girl was five months old
when I started but by the time she was one year old I decided that I needed to follow up on my other goal and move to Hawaii. I did but I was so sad because I couldn't stop thinking of the little girl. I came back about two months later and I found that the girl had been in a couple of foster homes (because her mother was unable to care for her). I got a job and the head supervisor let me bring the little baby with me whenever I had her. She didn't charge me because she knew I was not being paid either. When she got to the talking stage she said that she didn't want to go home and she wanted to stay with me. She would scream when her mother came to get her. Her mother looked so drugged whenever she came to get her. Even though I called the Ministry there was nothing that changed. I made a place for her in the house where I lived. For years this went on. Eventually, the little girl started kindergarten. I left a big basket of food for the mother at Thanksgiving because the mother had such hard times. It was midnight and I heard a knock at the door. It was the mother. She told me to get a lawyer and that she would let me adopt her. So I got a lawyer and now that little girl is my daughter....So you see, she is a great young adult now....That's because I loved and paid attention to her. I always touched her and stroked her. That proved to me how important it is for children to be touched and loved (A191, 99-03-29).

Angela brings a wealth of experiences that have helped shape her practice. She became reacquainted with the importance of appropriate touch and affection toward children as she shared and reflected upon memories of her childhood. She learned from generous teachers to be generous to the children in her care. She learned, through her experiences as a mother, to never give up hope.

**Beth**

Beth has been a preschool teacher for 12 years. Her facility is a preschool program for three and four year old children. As such it serves a larger population of families than the child care facilities where the other participants work. It is operated out of a community centre. Its administration is part of the community centre and as such Beth does not need to struggle to get parents to be on the Board. The source of funding is from parent fees. In addition to her work as a preschool teacher, Beth is an active volunteer at a local hospital and children's club.

Beth said that she entered child care after her children were in school. She had not thought of working with children in child care until she began volunteering in her daughter's girls' club. She said that there was no support for her while growing
up to learn about what she really wanted to do. She said

I found that I really enjoyed it. Then someone said
that they thought I would make a good preschool
teacher so that’s what I did. I was really nervous at
first. But I got straight A’s all the way through and
that made me feel good....I started working three days
a week in a preschool by being a support person to a
head teacher. I got involved with a church camp
project and doing all that helped me realize my
skills....This helped me understand my childhood more
as well as my own personal growth (C339, 99-01-04)

She added,

I want to make a difference in children’s lives by
doing this....It’s like the time I took a young girl
to Brownie camp. She had little money to go but I
found some for her....We were sitting around the camp
fire and the girl was wearing her napkin ring holders
we had made that day on her head. She looked like a
little cocker spaniel with them drooping over her
forehead....She was quiet for a while and then she
just blurted out “this is the most fun I have had in
my whole life.” It made me stop to think. It was
there---a connection with this child. I wondered how
something so simple could be so big to a
child....Experiences like this [camp] are good for the
kids but they are also good for me because I am making
a difference (C029, 99-05-13).

Beth shared her frustrations at making a difference in
children’s lives at present. She said, “I’m not feeling
connected to what’s going on and to the children” (D000, 99-04-
12). She wants to develop stronger teamwork between her
coworkers and sees conversation as an important factor in
building it. She tells the following story to illustrate the
necessity of more talk amongst child care practitioners:

I was at another centre doing a visit. I was sitting
on the floor reading to a child who had chosen a
Raggedy Anne book....I used to read the stories to my
daughter. I noticed reading it that there was so much
stereotyping in it. The child really wanted the story
so I finished reading it....But it bothered me. I
realized I would not have the book in my centre but I
was a guest and could not say anything about it.
There wasn’t much time to talk about it with the staff
at my centre either so stuff like that gets left
(B328, 98-12-07).

Beth says that it is important for her to develop teamwork
in her centre so that things move more smoothly in such a busy day and so that children’s needs get met. It’s hard sometimes to get the chance to develop teamwork when there is little time to work on planning how this can be achieved. It is further made difficult when she is the person with the most responsibility and more experience than the other staff. She says,

There is not so much distance between [staff name] and me. She is just learning and she’s learning very quickly. It’s part of my job to train her. I’m a firm believer in teamwork. I mean, I’m the supervisor which means to me that if there is a concern or a problem I am the one who is responsible. It comes down to me. But when parents come to the preschool I don’t want them to say “she’s the supervisor and she’s the assistant.” I want them to feel that they can come to any of the staff to make decisions without having to ask me. I still feel a little like I am the supervisor and I can set the guidelines, but I want us to be viewed as a team. I am working towards [teacher’s name] and I being on an even basis. I think it’s important especially when there's only the two of us (C085, 98-12-07).

Working toward teamwork is more difficult when there is staff conflict. Such was the case for Beth last year. Beth and a former employee had worked together for years until the employee began to feel some teacher burnout and was dealing with some difficult personal matters. Beth suggested that the teacher take a leave of absence which, instead of making the situation better, left the employee feeling unwanted. Beth says,

After that there was so much tension. I didn’t think the parents were picking it up but they were. Later on I found out that they felt they should take their children out if it didn’t get better. I was only trying to be supportive but it didn’t appear like that to [teacher’s name]...There were days when I didn’t feel like coming to work. I soon found that I was taking things too personally....I just couldn’t be myself....Things eventually got really bad and [the teacher] left the program (B452, 99-04-05)

Once the teacher left the centre Beth said that she needed to do something to make the parents feel better about the program. “The parents said that if it hadn’t been for my stability they would have taken their children out. But I still felt like I had to make things better” (B604, 99-04-05). It was at this point that Beth began to follow the lead of one of the other staff members who was interested in the Reggio Emilia
approach to early childhood education. In this approach, to be brief, a community of people in Italy (Reggio Emilia) came together to share their common philosophy for education. One of the major beliefs is that children and teachers can work together to create and learn. Beth said, "rather than me planning what the children will do I want them to have a say in what will happen" (C032, 99-04-05).

Beth had been feeling uncomfortable with the lack of structure in the day. She says, "taking the lead from the children is hard. Who do you listen to? You can’t just go with what a few say. You have to see how it fits in for the others" (D029, 99-04-12). Further, "I try to put out some art they will be interested in but they don’t seem to go to it. But when I put out an art project that has a final product they can recognize, they all do it. I need to know more about how this [Reggio Emilia] works" (D041, 99-04-12).

These thoughts of needing support in her thinking were the reasons that led Beth to be involved with the group. She said that she thought the idea of being genuine might help her deal with how she was feeling recently (C585, 99-04-12). She also wanted to meet other practitioners from outside her facility. Beth says

I am always interested in learning something new and that’s why I am here. I need to think about what I am doing and where I am going. I think it is really important that we meet with one another to talk about important issues. It’s also good to get out and meet other teachers. I want to be renewed and this sounds like something interesting (A275, 98-12-07).

It was through our conversation that Beth had time to rethink her role in children’s lives. She thought about how she would develop the curriculum, taking her lead as much as possible from the children but realizing she could still play a role in structuring some of the children’s day. She says,

I like to be flexible, but I like to have a plan for some of the activities. I think I have a natural tendency toward some structure. It must be the way I grew up. I have made a purposeful choice about going back to the other way [some of my old practices]. I am more relaxed each day and I’m no longer trying to be somebody I’m not....There will be some things in the stuff I have been learning that I will keep....Especially the ones when the children are made more aware of why we are doing things. Like the time we did those amazing things with the flashlights. That started with the kids and we just kept it going. They knew who got the idea and they all helped keep it going. I just needed to feel like I knew a little more about what was going to happen in a day (C106,
Beth adds at a later meeting that the topic of being genuine helped her rethink her planning. She says, "it [conversation about genuine practice] helped because I realized I had to come back to who I am and that means I need to feel a little control....I can't just change who I am because there's a new theory about how children should be taught....I need to think about it more and not make so many drastic changes" (B690, 99-04-12).

To summarize, Beth joined the research project because she wanted to rethink, in the company of other practitioners, her practice with children. She freely explored her need for control and how she could do this in ways that honoured children's interests. Beth appreciated entering into conversation. She says,

It is like a candle that you look at from the outside. When it is lit you can see the colours like stained glass. It is round. There are no sharp corners. It is very colourful and pleasing to the eye. There's light in there that really only shows its brightness when the candle is lit. There is a sort of inner glow that has been able to come out as we have been working together (A600, 99-05-13).

She adds,

Sometimes we can get lost with our understanding, and the conversations helps. The feelings and thoughts we have are the things we bring to our work and so it's important that we talk about them....The personalities and the discussion brings out the beauty in people for us to see and celebrate (B000, 99-5-13).

Me
I have been a child care practitioner for 20 years. Eighteen years ago I founded a child care facility in the lower mainland that serves children 2.5 through school age. The facility is located at a public elementary school because of my belief in having child care closely linked to other community services. Members of the community, with skills in teaching, social work and feminist studies hold positions on the Board of Directors. The parents in this child care facility say that they do not want to spend more time away from their children so they do not take on positions on the Board. Parents have been on the Board in the past but the responsibility rarely entices anyone to the positions. The centre is funded through parent-user fees. We serve more than 35 families per year.

I began my academic understanding about the ways knowing is socially constructed when I read Vygotsky (1978) many years ago. Specifically, I reflected on the nature of coming together to
talk with others as a way to bring about the improvements I felt I needed in my personal life as well as in my work as a teacher. At that time I did not foresee the ways I would put that developing understanding into practice. My feelings of isolation in training, in practica and in practice led me to search for other practitioners to engage with about teaching. It was in community that I began to improve the way I was teaching. The result was that the children received a more reflective and responsive teacher.

As I furthered my education through courses in women’s studies and teacher training I was introduced to authors who added to my awareness of the importance of working in community and conversation to improve teaching practice (Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994; Elbaz, 1983). I had implemented sustained, structured conversation within my work place. I supported my coworkers to take an active role in the operation and direction of the child care program where we work. This research comes out of these academic and practical experiences. I had a personal desire to see if sustained, structured conversations might be helpful to others to improve their practice. I did not test to see if the participants’ practice did improve as they said. However, that they said they were becoming more reflective about their work was important to me. I also wanted the research to inform my personal plans to continue conversation networks at my work site.

I entered this research study with enthusiasm to explore my ideas about genuine practice and to learn more about how conversation might work to help us improve our practice. I told the participants that I felt frustrated with my degree in education because it did not bring me closer to knowing about the worthiness of being genuine even though I learned a lot about the methods of teaching through my years at university (A132, 98-12-07).

I began by sharing my desire to be genuine with children. I felt I had lost connection to many important things in life. I wanted to explore how I could reclaim and share my sensitivity for the earth. I felt I had lost my connection to it because of the hustle and bustle of my life. I said,

I recall, probably through pictures of myself as a child, the pull of the earth. I remember the sand between my toes...and the water lapping at my knees. I want children to get the chance to run and play in the same way more often. I want to draw them into feeling more and showing them how much they can learn when they slow down. But I don’t know how I can do this and I wonder if it’s more about me doing it than it is about me doing it with children (B058, 98-12-07).

I also shared the following story to show how I wanted to understand more about being genuine with children in my
interactions with them:

I was reading Hansel and Gretal to a child one day because she had handed it to me to read. As I was reading I started to get terribly uncomfortable. I didn’t like the way the stepmother was being portrayed. I don’t know maybe it’s because I’m a stepmother. I know how hard it can be to change those perspectives. But anyway. I was reading and I just had to stop. I was getting too emotional about it and I told the child that I couldn’t finish the story and said that it was because I didn’t like the way people in the book were represented. I said that I could find her another reader if she wanted or we could read something else. Luckily, the child was pretty flexible and we started another book. But it has made me wonder. When is it right to be so genuine that you stop doing something that the child would like? Was it right to have my feelings come before the child’s? Should I have gone back to talk with the child more? There was so much that I wanted to think about and I need other people to help give me their ideas and I can think about my own....Maybe it’s because I use literature as a starting point in my work. I look at books like the Little Engine that Could and I just cringe.‘ I wonder if I’m being too crazy and I wonder if I can keep up such passionate responses without a steady group of people to talk them over with on a regular basis (B230, 98-12-07).

My coworkers have been very supportive of me. However, it seems as though there is less and less time to get together to talk. I said,

we go away for retreats together twice per year and the conversations we start there often last for many months. We developed our staff manual together and the staff-assessment tool we use. I really learn from their experiences and I learn from their questions but it seems that I need to do a more concentrated thing now. I need to think and hear some other ideas about what’s important to child care workers and how conversation might be organized to help us think about the issues (C244, 98-12-07).

In addition to learning from my coworkers, I also learn from my relationship with my child. As a mother I have become

4 This book has such an effect on me because of the uncritcized idea that all we have to do is work hard and we will get what we want or where we want to go. The little engine is usually represented as female which further entrenches the idea that the never-ending struggle to complete tasks alone is a female responsibility. it also diminishishes the responsibility and ability of the old and strong to take part in helping when help is needed.
more acutely aware of the passage of time. I wrote a poem in my visual journal about my understanding of this aspect of my relationship with my son Liam. I include it because it captures how much being with him has taught me about noticing my relationships with children in my work. Although I did not read this poem to the participants it represents the many small stories I shared with the participants about what mothering has taught me about being present to children.

**Moment of Ecstasy**

I think that what I shall remember and cherish most is the touch of your blueberry-stained hands in mine. As we stand at the basin side by side. You, arms outstretched, tippy-toed. Me, glimpsing into the mirror and through the veil of my hair at your look of concentration. As I bend to help you make the lather the stained fingers offer me extended minutes with you I caress the spaces between your fingers and notice the fold of skin still at your wrist My breath is held in this moment of ecstasy A moment, that envelops this mother-child relationship I am thankful

(99-03-08)

I brought myself to the group often through the things I placed in my visual journal. On one page I had made a doodle of curved lines crossing one another. I coloured in many of the enclosed spaces and talked to the participants about how I felt there was so much I needed to know....The empty spaces are the places I think are important. The spaces remind me to be quiet and listen. They also remind me to wonder about spaces I have in my thinking. I ask myself, where do I need to think through this idea or feeling more? I wonder what else it's connected to (B150, 98-12-07).

I also shared my beginning ideas of how I wanted to represent what it was I thought we were doing in the conversation. I said,

I want to represent it in some three dimensional form. Something like a ball with an intertwining framework....Probably out of a natural fiber. I went
to see one of the First Nations people in my centre and she said that she could take me to get the bark if I was available at the right time. I don't know, I'll give it more thought (C546, 99-04-12).

As I played with the idea I developed it into the making of a quilt. The participants agreed to give me some of the pictures from their visual journals. I was worried about taking anything that had come from magazines in case it was a violation of copyright so Joanne's artwork formed most of the pictures in the quilt. I then began thinking through my idea and realized that it was not the pictures that were most important. They represented some of the conversation but they could never represent all of it. I began to spend more time thinking about the spaces in between the pictures as spaces of exploration and conversation as well. I will write more about the process of making the quilt later.

I also shared my struggles to understand and support one of the children in the day care. I'll call him Rick. Rick had been with us for more than a year and his aggressive behaviour was a problem for the other children because someone would be hurt by him daily. I shared my deepening awareness and questions about what my role in his life was and how I could respond to him more genuinely. I felt fatigued from working with him and my coworkers said they felt the same. We successfully applied for a support worker for him. She came in once a week for four hours. Her job was to support Rick to become more controlled in his outbursts and to support the family in getting some assistance at home. Explaining my developing awareness I said,

I’m learning more about how I see this child. He’s become something to fix and straighten so that there isn’t as much trouble for the children or for us. When I was talking to him before it was like I wasn’t really listening to him and he wasn’t really listening to me....By watching [the support worker] I began to notice how I needed to be his advocate....I started to think about accepting his actions as something he needed to do in order to deal with the anger and fear he must be feeling...I also noticed how we were placing too much attention on him altogether. There was little else to look at other than the negative stuff....The children were watching us to see what we would do. That’s when I figured out something. I figured out that we needed to let the children take more of an active role in responding to him. We also needed to support them to feel that they were capable children when playing with him and that their ideas were important too. It sounds so simple—like we should have already known it. But sometimes when the schedule gets hectic and we’re doing a thousand things
at a time we forget to notice the little things....When I said we needed to accept him I sure didn’t mean celebrate hitting or anything. But I needed to be witness to it by being completely present to him....It’s about my relationship to him. I need to ask, “what would he have me do with him?” and I need to ask this in an unhurried way that acknowledges my feelings of being frustrated with him in relation to the things I really like about him and how I want to support him....When I was figuring this all out it was like a huge light had gone on....Questioning this relationship has helped me to start questioning the others I have with the children too (A172, 99-02-22).

I was able to share some of myself with the participants through my experiences as a student, a coworker and a mother. I shared my ideas about being genuine with children and others and I demonstrated an ability to question my practice in conversation as a way to improve it. Actively engaging in conversation about my relationships with children supported my thinking about how I was in relation to the participants. Being present to the participants’ stories about their histories and their practice helped make me more aware of the need to be more present with the children I taught. That is, thinking about my relationships in one setting helped me think about my relationships in the other. I enjoyed my time with the participants. I hope to continue seeing them in our work as child care practitioners.

Summary

Joanne actively engaged in personal reflection and shared her drawings and stories with us freely. She struggled to understand the social and political climate in relation to her teaching. In the end she decided to find alternate employment in a place she hoped would allow her to engage with children in more creative and spiritual ways. Like Beth, she wanted to return to her beliefs in order to be genuine with the children and with herself.

Angela discovered that she wanted to return to more connected relationships with the children. Administrative tasks had taken more time away from the children than she had realized. She reflected and talked about the way her thinking had improved because of working with us in conversation.

Beth rediscovered the value of celebrating her accomplishments and her skills. She gained an interest in exploring the reasons why she had changed her practice and asked herself how she could put her new learning in balance with what she could keep from the old. She wondered about how she could listen to herself more often in order to be more genuine with herself and with the children.

I wondered about how I could be more genuine with the children and others I served in my workplace. I used stories of
myself as a student, a coworker and a mother to share myself with the participants. This time to share my thoughts through stories helped me reaffirm my belief in the value of a community of learners who share what they know about their practice through conversation. I also discovered that I have a wish to reflect what I know about teaching in forms that can “speak” about the relationships we have with children and with one another as practitioners. I want to be able to tell about this in art forms such as quilt-making which can provide a medium for beginning conversations between people dedicated to learning about teaching and children. Poetry and sculpture might also help entice people to reflect on the meaning children bring to our lives. Whatever the way may be, I have discovered that it is important to explore this relationship between teaching and art in greater depth.

The participants all believed in the importance of making good connections with children. There is much to learn about being genuine in teaching. Also, there are many things that get in the way such as a lack of time to talk together about what we do. Green (1991) writes that it “may be that education can only take place when we can be friends of one another’s minds” (p. xi). This means to me that we need to think in community with other practitioners. It also means that we need to be present to children to hear what they are saying. There is also a lack of exploration into how our past influences our present teaching practice. Personal reflection and conversation can support us to learn more about these connections.

Finally, as a researcher I am reminded of Green’s (1991) words when she talks about the need for researchers to be present to their subjects as they talk about their concerns. She wrote,

as we do, however, we will find the old poses of detachment and distance no longer tempting or acceptable. The separation between subject and object will no longer exist, nor will the comforting assurances of cool and shining certainties. Finding our way in this new domain of possibilities, we will be engaged, and we will be in search (p. x).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) endorse the use of particular stories to draw people to becoming emotionally connected with the story-tellers. By engaging with the participants as I heard their stories and by rereading them in this chapter I am connected to the participants. I hope that these comments and stories help others become involved with the participants so that they may begin to call up and question their own beliefs and values and how these are played out in their teaching.
Chapter Three

Review of the Literature

This research began from my belief that child care practitioners need to be more genuine in their relationships with children. I began to think about this in earnest a few years after I completed my early childhood practitioner training. I felt I was not practicing in the best ways possible and I wanted to know how I could be more aware of my beliefs in relation to what I had been taught about children and my role with them. One step toward being genuine is to begin to explore child care practice through sustained, structured conversation with other child care practitioners. So far, many child care training programs have not taken steps to adequately address the training needs of prospective child care practitioners. Further, once child care practitioners have become licensed by the province, there is little professional development programing that addresses gaps in their training. This review of the literature addresses some of these gaps. In particular, it addresses 1) the training of child care practitioners, 2) genuine practice in the building of good relationships with children and others, and 3) the role sustained, structured conversation plays to helping build trusting relationships among practitioners who explore their practice together for the purpose of improving it.

I argue that training programs do not meet many child care practitioners’ needs to achieve the required competencies. This argument is based on the short time frame in which child care practitioners are expected to gain competence. In addition, there is an overemphasis on the curriculum planning aspects of child care practitioner training, at the cost of learning about the development of genuine relationships with children. This curriculum-based thinking constricts the understanding of what the role of the teacher is, limiting overall competence.

Many training courses in curriculum use developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) as their cornerstone. A focus on DAP within curriculum planning disproportionately draws attention to stages of development, rather than to relationships between people. I argue for a greater focus on the creation of a genuine relationship between practitioner and child. When the practitioner enters into a genuine relationship with the child she is better able to understand what the child knows and what the child wants to know. Therefore genuine relationships can lead toward better informed decisions with children. I demonstrate this need by highlighting how DAP needs to be reexamined in light of the diverse needs of the population child care practitioners serve.

Further to my argument that curriculum-based thinking is limiting children from experiencing genuine relationships with their caregivers is the way the curriculum is organized in the facilities. Of importance is the impact of time on
relationships and learning. When child care practitioners feel the pressure of time to complete many activities in a day with the children they are less able to observe children in their play. When there is a lack of time to adequately observe children in their play and to address complex issues, teachers lose opportunities to get to know the children's interests and abilities. This results in decreased opportunities to understand and subsequently meet children's needs. A lack of time also results in reduced opportunities to improve practitioner competence.

Building genuine relationships with children is an element of teacher training and professional development that has often been taken for granted. I address this in the second section. Further, generally speaking, we have inadequately explored and understood our practices in light of our own histories as children. Through an exploration of our histories as learners we can learn how we see children and how we see our role as teachers. This exploration can help us understand our beliefs and values and help refocus our attention on relationship.

Being present to children is one of the components necessary to developing genuine relationships with them. Another important component is the ability of the child care practitioners to act in the best interests of the child. This can be done when one takes the time necessary to reflect on one's thoughts and feelings about being in relationship with a child or children. Learning how to enter into genuine relationships with children and others may help us improve our practice. Sustained, structured conversation may provide the framework for developing these abilities.

Sustained, structured conversation offers practitioners a way to develop trusting relationships with other practitioners. I address this argument in section three. Sustained, structured conversation is also offered as a framework for learning about teaching. Through conversation the practitioner is often seen as a source of knowledge. When her knowledge is actively explored in the company of others, she may be more likely to develop more complex understandings of children and her role in their lives. In addition, as she speaks with others, the practitioner may develop a greater awareness of the political context in which she works and may discover, with others, how to challenge the status quo. Therefore, sustained, structured conversation has the potential to have both personal and political outcomes.

Section One: Early Childhood Training and Professional Development

It is important to recognize that the training programs, child care facilities and recommendations I make for the improvement of both are embedded within a political system that, generally speaking, does not value child care. By association, neither are child care practitioners valued as much as they
could be. There are exceptions to this rule. The inadequate funding that goes toward children and training for child care practitioners helps us become acquainted with some aspects of this complex problem.

Becoming and being a child care practitioner in B.C. requires not only a great deal of dedication to the work but the development of a complex set of competencies as well. Upon completion of an accredited training program, one can expect that the beginning child care practitioner is competent, has the means to continue developing her knowledge and performance abilities, and has a positive disposition toward children and learning (NAEYC, 1996).

Basic child care training is focused on the care and education of children 30 months through school age (Ministry of Health, 1998). Training in Infant and Toddler Development and Programming is available but not mandatory to maintain a license to work with children ages 30 months to school age. However, if one wishes to work in a program that serves children younger than 30 months, specific training is required. During the basic training time and after training is complete, child care practitioners are expected to know the standards from which they should work. The Child Care Sector Occupational Competencies (Chudnovsky et al., 1997) clarifies the roles and responsibilities, functions and activities, performance indicators and knowledge specifications that all B.C child care practitioners should develop through their training programs. To be specific, the functions of the child care practitioner are to:

- create and maintain a safe and healthy environment for children
- plan and implement developmentally appropriate programs that meet the observed needs of children
- nurture children to promote positive development
- support families
- share information appropriately, cooperate and coordinate efforts with other community services
- develop yourself and contribute to the development of others to meet current and future needs
- contribute to the effective management of administration of child care service
- advocate for a high quality, accessible and comprehensive child care system (p. 4-5).

Within each one of these functions is a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that must be present to show competency. Child care practitioners must have an awareness of children’s rights, child growth and development, professional
accountability and systems theory. They must further be able to communicate effectively; honor diversity; be able to observe, plan, document, assess, implement and evaluate; build relationships; and reflect on and improve personal and professional practice (pp. 6-7). In short, there is a tremendous amount of learning that needs to take place before a child care practitioner can be thought of as competent. Early Childhood Education programs are expected to fulfill this training capacity.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, based in the United States) asserts that professional education programs should ensure that candidates can integrate general, content, professional and pedagogical knowledge to create meaningful learning experiences for all children and to support families. It adds that the candidates should have an awareness of issues of diversity and an ability to work in collaboration with a wide variety of agencies (NAEYC, 1996, p.5). Further, the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC) Code of Ethics (no date) also endorses this range of abilities.

Early Childhood Education programs in B.C. are responsible for helping the child care practitioner to learn and continue learning to refine these competencies. The B.C. Ministry of Health, Community Care Facilities Branch, has developed minimum instructional requirements for the training of those who wish to hold a License to Practice as an Early Childhood Educator. Appendix A outlines the required course content and number of hours required for these areas of instruction. The associated number of hours of instruction "provides an approximate degree of importance for each instructional area; however, the emphasis of programs may vary" (B.C. Ministry of Health, 1998, p. 23). From this outline of program requirements the reader can see that training to become an early childhood practitioner involves learning a complex array of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Programs that seek to address these are often no more than 10 months in duration (B.C. Ministry of Health, 1998) with students attending on a full time basis. Specifically, to attain a License to Practice as an Early Childhood Educator in B.C. one needs to take 474 hours of course work, 428 hours of practicum experience and a further 500 hours after completing the education program, in volunteer or paid work experience. There is much to do in a short period of time. As this table also indicates, there is a disproportionate emphasis on curriculum development (312 hours) in comparison to the other areas of

---

The definition of systems theory is as follows: "It is critical that practitioners understand that children and families are part of systems, that services develop and operate within systems and that child care is part of the larger community social service system. The ability to understand systems and to think systematically is an essential part of best practice. The critical concepts are, basic systems theory; the key components of systems including structure, function, subsystems and boundaries; the nature of open and closed systems; effect of change within systems; and the impact of power and power imbalances within systems. It is also critical that practitioners understand: family systems; the child care system; the community social service system; the educational system" (p. 6 Chudnovsky, May, 1997).
competency, particularly the area of interpersonal skills and community relations (42 hours).

I assert that past and current training programs inadequately meet the training needs of early childhood practitioners in B.C. The time required to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to work with children is far below that which we should expect. To make the point clear, the current training requirement is the equivalent of just over 5 1/2 months of full time work, based on a 40 hour work week. Learning to be competent in this time frame cannot easily be achieved.

Continued professional development therefore is paramount to one continuing to improve one's practice. However, the expectation to do so is not rigorous. To maintain a License to Practice in B.C. one must have been working in the field for 500 hours over a period of five years and have at least 12 hours of accredited professional development (B.C. Ministry of Health). These are not adequate requirements.

As has been noted, program planning and curriculum content take up more than two thirds of the required course work at 312 hours. There are many ways to understand curriculum. It can be seen as content and subject matter, learning outcomes, discrete tasks, personal biography and an agenda for social reconstruction (Kessler & Swadener, 1992). However, curriculum is most often viewed as product (Cornbleth, 1988).

Generally, the child care community has endorsed developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) as the way to develop the early childhood curriculum. (Bredekamp, 1987; Wien, 1995). Assumed within the idea of DAP is the idea that children pass through a series of predictable and necessary stages as they develop. However, Graue (1992) suggests that there is no consistent evidence to show that this is true. She argues that development is not hierarchical and that a focus on an individual child's development alone does not recognize the social interactions that mediate the child's experience. Jipson (1991) contends that much early childhood programing focuses on developmental theory without recognizing the cultural biases that are embedded in such theories.

But many child care practitioners have not integrated these challenges to DAP into their thinking about curriculum planning and content. They become focused on their need to ready the child for school and other social systems (Kramer, 1994) without giving enough thought to the idea that readiness is a social construct. That is, "conceptions of readiness are constructed in social interactions as parents, teachers and others interested in the education of young children cope with the resources and constraints of their environment" (Graue, 1992, p. 66).

Adding strength to the argument that DAP should not be the only way child care practitioners should be encouraged to think about curriculum development is that DAP grew out of middle-income American beliefs (Bowman, 1994). As such, it does not
respond to the array of interests of many other groups in society. Racial and cultural considerations did not play as important a role in formulating these ideas as is needed. There is increasing recognition that the diverse and changing nature of young children and their families requires an examination of the training programs for early childhood practitioners. This has been particularly influenced by those in infant toddler care and special education (McCollum & Thorp, 1988; Stayton & Miller, 1993). A growing body of literature (McLean & Odom, 1993; Roberts, 1990) suggests that the voices of those who serve the interests of the child with special needs must be included in the creation and implementation of curriculum.

I have commented that curriculum is most often thought of as a product and that such thinking constricts the child care practitioner’s understanding of herself as part of the curriculum and her understanding of children’s needs. It is important for the practitioner to see herself as a curriculum planner (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). To do this she must examine the assumptions of the practices endorsed by the training programs. She must also examine the location of power within curriculum development (Wien, 1995). Further, she must examine herself as part of the curriculum (Pinar, 1994). However, I have noted that there is little time to think and talk about these necessary aspects either in training or after. Having time to develop one’s thinking is an important factor in developing competence to work with children.

As the competencies previously outlined suggest, meeting children’s interests is one of the tasks of the child care practitioner. To learn about children’s needs a practitioner must create space in her day to observe children (Bredekamp, 1987). However, as Wien (1995) demonstrates, the rigidity of programs, the high ratio of children to teachers and the multiple aspects of the job preclude observation of the children. Wien’s study shows that practitioners are often unaware that they take for granted the organization of time. They do not challenge it in their work because they have come to see the lack of time as normal (p. 137). Because of a lack of time to watch children as they play, practitioners are less able to know how and when to engage with them and subsequently make changes to the curriculum that might better meet their needs. Current child care practices in B.C. set as a minimum standard the approximate rate of one practitioner to eight children (serving children 2.5 through 6 years) and facilities can have no more than 25 children at any one time (B.C. Ministry of Health). Just given these factors one can see the difficulty in observing and recording observations, and developing genuine relationship with even a few of these children per day. As Wien’s study shows, observation of children and reflection on one’s planning and the building of relationships with children takes second place to managing the curriculum and other daily activities.

In conclusion, I have stated the competencies expected of
child care practitioners in the province of B.C. The list is broad and complex. I have described the Early Childhood Education Programs that are designed to impart the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes that are a standard in B.C. I have shown that training programs and professional development courses do not adequately support child care practitioners in developing such wide-ranging and complex competencies. Specifically, child care practitioners cannot develop these competencies in the short time frame they are given in training programs. Further, the overemphasis on DAP within curriculum-based thinking constrains the practitioner’s ability to see her role in more complex terms. DAP draws attention away from relationships between child and caregiver in favour of stages of development. When practitioners engage with children on more genuine levels they can be in a better place to learn what children know, want to know, and should learn. This will set the stage for better decisions about curriculum.

The child care facility is typically a busy one, full of children and adults in an array of activities. Much of the way the program is structured is due to the practitioner’s understanding of what the children need and how much time she has to support these needs being met. Practitioners need to challenge the way they think about curriculum, children’s needs (objective versus interpretive conceptions), and the way time is organized in these facilities in order to improve their competence. Practitioners need to take the time to observe and record children in their play so that they will know when and how to begin to develop a relationship with them. They also need to take the time to reflect on their role as curriculum planners. Through observation and reflection, and the development of genuine relationships practitioners can develop better ways to understand and meet the needs of children. I will now address how sustained, structured conversation can help practitioners develop another framework for understanding their role in children’s lives.

Section Two: Genuine practice

In the previous section I have argued that there has been a focus on curriculum development in early childhood training that has limited other explorations. In this section I discuss how the building of genuine relationships with children is an element of teacher training and professional development that has been limited by this overemphasis. This section demonstrates the importance of making genuine relationships an explicit part of training. In particular, it describes two important components of genuine practice: being present to others and acting in the best interests of others.

When a child care practitioner experiences an overemphasis on curriculum development in her training program it can limit her from thinking, in depth, about relationships with children. She may or may not bring this experience into her work site.
When this way of thinking is not examined, it can result in a hurried curriculum that limits the kind of contact needed to develop relationships with children (Graue, 1995). When we are so hurried we are not open to the presence and influence of the child (van Manen, 1988). We need to be encouraged and supported to be open to exploring how we influence children and how they influence us if we are to develop a curriculum that best serves their learning.

It is important to listen to children rather than uncritically diverting them into DAP curricula. Miller (1986, 1990) feels that when we deliberately ignore children’s voices or discourage them from discussing and acting on what they know about the world through their own understanding we effectively cut them off from themselves. Miller believes that all who enter into relationships with children need to investigate the cycle of violence that many childhood practices perpetuate such as silencing, ordering, scheduling, forced independence and discipline. While there are parents who have made a point of thinking and acting carefully in their relationships with their children, Miller says that “child rearing is basically directed not toward the child’s welfare, but toward satisfying the parents’ need for power and revenge” (1990, p. 243). Her suggestion is that we learn about our own history in order to understand it in relation to our practices as caregivers.

Sarason, Pierce and Sarason’s (1990) work demonstrates the need for positive and supportive relationships in children’s lives, especially for children who are most vulnerable. They and others (Doherty-Derowski, 1995; Shore, 1997) recommend warm, uncritical interactions, acceptance, and unrestricted attention as being primary to children’s needs. Becoming more aware of these needs in children’s lives is more important now than ever given the stresses that are on parents these days. Many parents have less time to spend with their children than only a few years before. Many are also often dealing with the additional burden of economic hardship which limits their ability to share joyfully in their children’s lives (Wolkow, 2000). The overall well-being of children is dependent on the quality of care they receive (Mustard, 1999). It is important that we look at the kinds of relationships children are developing with practitioners in the care facilities they attend.

Tremmel (1993) asserts that listening is really only possible when we are fully present to the child. van Manen (1988) echoes this idea in his call to teach with tact for which presence is a primary ingredient. Presence is the ability to suspend the noise within one to attend to the other (Tremmel, 1993). It is often equated with unrestricted attention (Sarason, Sarason & Pierce, 1990). Good teachers share one characteristic in common: They “are truly present in the classroom, deeply engaged with their students and their subject” (Palmer, 1998, p. 113). It would appear then that suspending the noise and giving unrestricted attention to another requires more than simply being in the same space with someone and
hearing what they say. It requires full body and mind consideration.

Mindfulness is another way of describing presence to another. “Mindfulness moves away from the mindless absorption in the endless parade of thoughts through the mind. When one is mindful, one lives in the present and pays attention—pure and simple....Practitioners need to become aware of the working of [their] minds, and simultaneously, to let go of the involvement in [their] thoughts and feelings while plunging, mind and body, into the centre of teaching and learning” (Tremmel, 1993, pp. 444, 456). Being present therefore is not an easy task. It requires not only a disposition toward wanting to be present but practice as well.

In addition to being present to the other, genuine practice must address how the child care practitioner can serve the best interests of the other while not losing sight of responsibilities. Tom (1997), in her work on deliberate relationships, draws attention to the need for faculty to be aware of their obligations in faculty-student relationships. While her work is not about child care practitioners and their relationship with children or their families, it is important because it features the importance of being genuine while being responsible. “Learning to be deliberate in relationships requires learning to pause, to ask and then to act responsibly” (1997, p. 7).

van Manen (1990) speaks about the importance of self-reflection as a way to address the needs of the other. Both Tom and van Manen’s descriptions require practitioners to be reflective. Tom looks at the ability to pause and think within the boundaries of the conversation with another and van Manen pauses to reflect after the event. Both draw attention to the need to think about how the relationship can be mutually rewarding. These thoughts draw attention to the importance of child care practitioners thinking about their actions, before, during, and after they engage with a child, in order to serve the best interests of the child.

The previous research provokes consideration about the need to be present to children so a mutually respectful exchange can develop. This is a matter of relationship. The relationships between children and their caregivers are thought to be part of what defines quality in the child care facility (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Evidence from research in biology, education and sociology shows the importance of high quality, universally accessible child care programs as one of the important steps toward creating a healthy population (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). But quality is not an objective and universal reality (Pence & Moss, 1994). Defining quality then requires an exploration of the underlying values of the term and an understanding that these values need to be made explicit (Brophy & Statham, 1994).
Section Three: Sustained, structured conversation.

In this section I describe how sustained, structured conversation can help build trusting relationships among practitioners. Trusting relationships can allow practitioners to share and explore their practice. Therefore, sustained, structured conversation is offered as an additional framework for developing the competencies necessary to be a child care practitioner. Sustained, structured conversation can be a rewarding way to learn about teaching and is a necessary addition to Early Childhood Education Training Programs.

To develop genuine relationships in children’s lives requires a full investigation of what that means to each practitioner. This can be done in the company of other child care practitioners. As practitioners engage in talk about what makes quality programming for children, they begin to explore the values and assumptions that underpin these statements. When values and assumptions are made explicit, practitioners are in a better place to judge the usefulness of these in relation to the communities they serve (Brophy & Statham, 1994).

Sustained, structured conversation is important to the development of trusting relationships amongst child care practitioners. I know this from experience. From these relationships we can learn about the relationships we have with children and how we want to deliver the curriculum. Green (1986) writes that it is through dialogue that we discover other visions of what constitutes a humane society. Green’s comment about dialogue should be considered within the context of the individual child care program as much as within Canadian or other social contexts. It is through such dialogue that we can best determine our role in children’s lives.

Sustained, structured conversation takes into account connected and separate knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). Connected and separate knowing are not mutually exclusive terms and capacities. The “two modes can and do coexist within the same individual” (Clinchy 1996, p. 207). Clinchy differentiates the two modes in saying that connected knowing involves the act of believing in order to understand. That is, communication is guided by embracing new ideas. In contrast, separate knowing requires that one “hold one’s views loosely, remaining open to competing positions” (Ibid, p. 211). Such was the case during the research when I listened to one of the participants talking about her views on mothering. In Angela’s view, she felt that mothers should spend time at home with their children. When they could not or did not want to do this she felt that she needed to act as a second mother to the child. I had a few ideas that differed from Angela’s. When I first heard her words I felt a tightening in me that was noticeable to me as I listened. I realized that to understand her ideas I needed to be open to her thoughts and to hear all her words. I let go of the tension that I was feeling realizing that her ideas were different but that I could learn from them. What I learned was
that she felt a pang of sorrow not having been able to stay at home with her own daughter as she would have liked. Her ideas have taught me to listen more carefully to parents who come into my Centre who might be feeling as though I am a second mother and to those who feel I am not.

For the purposes of this research it is important to take into account that the participants can use both modes of knowing, that is, connected and separate, when interacting with one another. Further understanding and improving the ability to become a connected knower becomes important within sustained, structured conversation because of its focus on believing in order to understand.

The literature on ways of knowing provides a framework for understanding how conversation can be used to help improve practice. Knowing-in-community is an important way to know about child care practices. Goldberger aptly demonstrates that knowing “is not insular....Meaning is not a solitary pursuit, but is interactional and negotiable; that is, knowledge is co-constructed” (1996, p.14-15). When a small group of people come together to act as a community of knowledgeable peers then the group can construct knowledge (Flannery, 1994). Ayers adds that finding “a space for imaginative thought and common purpose is in itself an act of affirmation and insurgency” (1992, p. 261). I do not intend to create a romantic view of the places practitioners can create to investigate their practice. However, there is personal and collective power that can be a product of sharing experiences, explorations, and aspirations within relationships to others.

Active exploration of one’s practice is dependent on dispositions toward knowing in relationship to others. Hollingsworth’s (1992, 1994) study shows that as teachers had time to share their frustrations, joys and experiences of everyday teaching, they were better able to understand their relatedness to one another and could provide more support through their understanding. In particular, it was the non-evaluating and trusting aspects of the conversation that helped the teachers understand their practice. Hollingsworth writes “we could take the risk of questioning whether our experiences were educative, expose our mistakes, and learn from the emotions and confusion of facing difficult issues” (1992, 1994, p. 45). Therefore, all who come together to work to improve their practice through sustained, structured conversation need to be open and honest about their practice, knowing that the space in which they talk is a safe one.

As Surrey (1991) argues, relationships in this sort of non-evaluative and trusting environment begin to have a unique existence beyond the individuals. A relationship is a unit that needs to be cared for in order for it to support the exploration of practice. Developing the ability to listen carefully therefore becomes critical to the maintenance of relationship.

Part of the care important to sustaining the conversation relies on the participants’ abilities to actively and
attentively listen to one another’s stories. It cannot be underestimated that when people share themselves through narrative, they are sharing many parts of themselves. Stories embrace the moral, emotional, political and aesthetic senses (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1990). Sensitivity to such sharing is important. Sometimes uncomfortable gaps in the conversation may provide for meaningful dialogue and wonder (Beyer, 1988) and at other times gaps may signal a need for quiet reflection.

Sustained, structured conversation can be socially and emotionally demanding work. Care of the group members requires good time management that allows people opportunity to speak (Gerlach, 1994). Giving people opportunity to speak in an unhurried way allows them the chance to direct the conversation in ways that meet their needs. As Stanger (1987) writes, listening, questioning and understanding can lead toward improved practice. This can only come about if people feel comfortable sharing their stories in unhurried ways and in a space that is focused on exploration rather than criticism. Helping participants to become actively responsible for the emerging structure of the conversation is also important to its maintenance. Hamilton (1994) urges that all those who become involved in collaborative work must understand the rules that frame such work. These might be developed by the leader in the beginning but be open to negotiation as participants take on more control.

In sustained, structured conversation, participants have the potential to teach one another about the purpose and meaning of classroom events within the sociopolitical context. Sustained, structured conversation can therefore become a catalyst for political action (Gillis, 1988). In this sense, sustained, structured conversation is a political act as well as a social one.

Through language (or other forms of representation), people can share what they know about themselves and the world (Vygotsky, 1978). Solomon (1987) writes that we all need to hold our ideas out to other people, and receive their responses, not just to hear their criticism and approval, but also to understand better our own views of the world. Lack of social conversation actually inhibits the healthy construction of personal beliefs because these only become real and clear to us when we can speak about them with others. Constructive reflection on classroom experience will require us to provide a social forum for discussion (p. 271).

In this excerpt, Solomon is speaking about the need for mentor teachers to make their tacit knowledge explicit. The suggestion holds true for child care practitioners as well. The comments suggest that improving practice is not a solitary endeavour.
Sustained, structured conversation therefore is grounded in ideas about the social construction of knowledge. As mentioned before, it can also be a political act. Practitioners who come together in community have a wealth of knowledge to share about teaching. The teacher is a holder of practical knowledge which can be used as a vehicle for change (Elbaz, 1983). The teacher can develop, through sustained conversation, her ability to become critically aware of her role in children's lives and of ways to improve her own and children's possibilities for learning (Elbaz, 1983, Wien, 1995). Elbaz notes that just speaking about thoughts helps teachers realize possibilities. She continues, "perhaps the best prospect for change in the work of teaching lies not in overturning existing practices but in acquiring the tools to become aware of, and to take responsibility for, changes that are already taking place" (ibid, p. 88).

Such might be the case when we talked about supported child care. Supported child care is about including children who require extra support into the child care program of the family's choice. The way the system has been set up leaves many child care practitioners feeling overwhelmed by the real possibility that they will not receive adequate support for the child who requires extra help. For example, it took seven months from the time I applied, for me to receive extra support for a child with severe language and speech needs. In order to understand the system I first gathered as much information as I could about how supported child care was administered. Secondly, and most importantly, I began to see supported child care not as something being mandated from above, but something coming from me. I believed in inclusion so rather than seeing policies on inclusion as being forced on me I saw it as something I was asking for. By taking this position I am in a better place of helping to inform future considerations about how supported child care is administered.

If it had not been for the conversation I would not have been as prepared to articulate my understandings to those in positions of power within the supported child care organizations. I learned from the other participants about how they were working within the system. Gathering together in sustained, structured conversation can therefore be helpful from the personal perspective as individual practitioners think about improving their practice. Sustained, structured conversation can also provide the catalyst for political action, whether that action takes place within the walls of the child care facility or outside them.

In conclusion, I have argued that there is an overemphasis on curriculum development in Early Childhood Education training programs. This emphasis is often taken into child care facilities when the practitioners uncritically put into place that which they learned in their training. When this happens it occurs at the expense of learning to develop genuine relationships with children. I have argued that if
practitioners learn how to engage with children in genuine ways throughout their training and after it has been completed, they can be in a better position to learn what children know and what they want to learn and what they should be taught. Entering into genuine relationships with children requires the ability to be present to them and make decisions in their best interests. This can be done when practitioners take time to reflect on how they are part of the curriculum and how they organize the curriculum. As a support to their continuing competence child care practitioners should engage in sustained, structured conversation. This framework for learning is based on knowing being socially constructed. Through such conversation networks, practitioners can come to know themselves better in relation to the children they serve. They can also work with others to improve the ways early childhood practices are implemented.
Chapter Four

Methods

In the previous chapter I outlined the literature that shows the need for child care practitioners to engage in sustained, structured conversation in order to gain greater awareness of their teaching of young children. This chapter addresses the methods I used to complete the research. The British Columbia Provincial Child Care Survey (1997) was undertaken to evaluate the "current initiatives and to assess the need for new policies and programs" (p. xi). This survey, while providing ample information about fee structures and enrollment trends among other things, gives a cursory glance at the training and skills held by child care practitioners. It does not make clear the kinds of support needed for child care practitioners to continue their highly valuable, yet undervalued work. Nor does it give rich data about child care practitioners' interpretation of their work with children.

For improved policies to be developed, it is important to provide more meaningful and rich data. Qualitative methods of study can offer a descriptive and informative framework (Marshall & Grossman, 1989) from which policies for child care training can be reexamined. I used qualitative methods of study to describe the challenges and benefits of sustained structured conversation among a small group of child care practitioners as they engaged in the topic of genuine practice. Therefore, conversation served as both the method and the process in this research (Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994). The conversation served as a method to collect data about practitioner thinking about genuine practice and the conversation was a way of learning that I hoped to study.

Objectivity in research has more recently been thought of as an illusion (Eisner, 1992). This was not always the case. It was once believed, and is still believed by some to be possible, to investigate a phenomenon in an objective manner and then report the findings as "fact". As Eisner (1992) argues, objectivity is one of the "cherished ideals of the educational research community" (p. 9). This research lends itself to understanding subjectivity. It was my intention to base my understanding of this research on my reflected-upon, reasoned subjectivity. Throughout the thesis I have given details of my thoughts and actions to help the reader become aware of me as a researcher and a participant. This was not an easy process because my history as a student was so steeped in the belief in objectivity that I often had to struggle against feelings of being the objective 'researcher' in relation to how I wanted to be in conversation with the participants.

One way to deal with the tension that was within me was to be a participant and hold myself up to be viewed by the research participants and the larger audience. By becoming a participant I also draw attention to issues of connection with the
participants that go beyond issues of objectivity and subjectivity (Heshusius, 1994). When I looked at my subjectivity I wanted to look critically at what I was saying and doing and come to understand it within the context of my life (Clinchy, 1996; Ruddick, 1996). By sharing pieces of my life with the participants and the reading audience I hoped to make that subjectivity transparent.

Throughout the research process I paid attention to what was said and done and tried to pay attention to what was unsaid and/or repressed. Field’s (quoted in Clinchy, 1996, p. 230) reminder to “...learn to observe my thoughts and maintain a vigilance not against ‘wrong’ thoughts, but against refusal to recognize any thought” helped me to learn to be more open-minded about what the participants were about their work with children. Therefore, understanding my personal experiences had implications for this research. I became an instrument for understanding.

I did not know at the beginning of this research project who would be interested in being a participant. I trusted that the instructors who gave me names of possible participants, did not limit their selection to white women. However, all of us are white women. The field of child care is employing more women of colour. With the creation of more training programs in Vancouver, there are greater opportunities to hire women from other countries who bring an array of experiences which can only broaden our understanding of child care. Their conversations will need to be supported and they will need to be welcomed into ones already begun.

This chapter is divided into three sections; the first focuses on my planning, the second on the implementation and the third on analysis. In the section on planning I describe the selection of participants, my ethical obligations, and organizational strategies. I pay particular attention to how I planned to keep my power transparent and to ways that I would engage with the participants to support their exploration of their teaching. After discussing the planning of the research I describe its implementation. I describe the steps I took to gather the participants, how our meetings were structured and the management of the data. In the section on analysis I describe my data analysis strategies. Specifically I address how I used audio tapes as a primary source of understanding the data. In addition I used a series of note taking structures and quasi-transcripts to record the conversations, emerging themes and my responses to the conversations.

Planning

In the following section I describe the planning phase of this research. When I speak of my plans I emphasize the issues

*I acknowledge that the experiences expressed by me and the participants have are embedded within white middle-class backgrounds. Given this fact, it is as important for the reader as it was for me, to pay attention to issues of race, culture and difference and how these might have impacted the data.
that I believed were necessary to make clear before the research began. As the research was being implemented I took care to think about how meaningful these plans were or were not to learning about genuine practice and the value of conversation to improving teacher practice. Because I am speaking about the planning phase I do not make reference to the results of these plans. I have left my discussion of the outcomes of these plans to later sections.

I begin by talking about my reasons for choosing to work with women child care practitioners, the reason for the number of participants and the length of time for the research. I follow this by talking about issues of power which were important for me to know about before the research began. Finally, I talk about specific leadership skills I planned to use to support the participants in their exploration of their practice.

Choosing an all-women group was based on my understanding that, in our patriarchal culture, men are holders of power, in general, over women. Trying to come to an arrangement based on mutuality and equality may have been more difficult to achieve if men had been part of the group. Rich (1995) states that "[p]atriarchy is the power of the father: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men--by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male" (p. 57). As this statement indicates, male power over women is seen at practical, social and political levels. Therefore, it is important to create a place where women feel free of such male power over them. They need a place that is safe to take risks to discover their identities. As a researcher I needed to honor women's experiences and interests as well as finding ways to increase public recognition of their work (Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994).

Given this understanding and the length of time of this study it seemed reasonable to try to eliminate as many of these concerns as possible. Leaving men out of the conversation was one way to create a space for women to speak and challenge the status quo if they wished. Having said this I want to recognize that not all men are involved in masculinist behaviour and not all women refrain from acting in these ways. In my experience my women coworkers have taken a longer time to learn to trust men in conversation than they have women. I used this knowledge to help inform my decision to have only women be part of the group. I also asked the women part way through the conversations what their ideas were about this issue. They said that they too felt that they could more easily share their thinking in an all-women group than one that might have included men. While having men in the group might not have curbed the women's conversations (I know men who share in open and honest conversations with women) it is important to note that given the
shortness of time of the research to build trusting relationships, these beliefs about men must be taken into consideration.

Further, child care facilities have traditionally been the domain of women. Many men care about young children and need to be recognized for their willingness to set aside norms that often put a great deal of pressure on them to choose otherwise. However, recognizing the participation of men in traditionally female roles is not my intention in this research. Because many women have been silenced in a world often dominated by men it is inappropriate to ask them to share more of that time within this research.

After deciding to work with women I began to think about the group I would draw from. When I originally planned the research I intended to bring together child care practitioners and primary education teachers. I am a primary teacher and a child care practitioner and I felt there was much that the two groups could learn from one another. After receiving approval to do this I continued to think about the practicality of bringing the two groups together. I realized that the two groups may have had too many differences in their understanding about the purpose of early childhood education. I did not want to have the conversation revolve around searching for our similarities. My experience told me that we were less likely, given the too great differences of experiences, to focus our attention on genuine practice. I changed my population of participants to child care practitioners alone and reapplied for, and received, ethics approval.

I also saw the importance of restricting the research to child care practitioners to begin to include them in the debates about the importance of their practice. In comparison to the literature on teachers of school-age children (Goffman & Day, 1994; Greenberg, O'Donnell & Berquist, 1980; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Pugach; 1990) there is a limited amount of information that focuses attention on how child care practitioners work to improve their practice. I have enjoyed my time as a practicum supervisor for child care practitioners. I enjoy being able to engage and subsequently, become engaged by, the students. I felt that I could further this interest by engaging with child care practitioners who, like me, had been working in the field for many years.

Goffman and Day (1994) focused on elementary teacher education to document the importance of teacher responses and suggestions about how training and professional development should be organized. Their position is equally important for child care practitioners. Choosing experienced practitioners with diverse experiences can provide information-rich data (Patton, 1990). In this research, the participants come from diverse child care experiences that range from infant and toddler care, to preschool and group three to five year old child care. Drawing from a diverse group within child care adds rich data to the research. Speaking with other child care
practitioners with slightly different work experiences broadens our awareness of other aspects of the field. As such, the diversity of the group can lead to individual fulfillment as well as having practical research validity benefits.

The research group size is small to permit better management of data (Patton, 1990). Also, as a child care practitioner who has engaged with other child care practitioners in conversation, I have learned that talking with a small number of people at one time is advantageous. In my experience, when the group is small, each member has time to share their thoughts at each meeting if they wish. This would be more difficult if there were more than four people in conversation.

Further, I planned to provide dinner for the participants as one way to reciprocate for the time the participants were giving me (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As a child care practitioner I know about the rushed dinners we eat in order to get to meetings. Offering dinner provides a less hurried transition from work to the meeting.

A research design that employs a combination of strategies for data collection increases its validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 1979). In this study I planned to be a participant researcher, use a prolonged research time frame and careful descriptors in all my coding and note-taking procedures. I planned to use audio taped accounts of the conversations, record member responses to my summaries to check for reliability of my data, include participant reviews at the end of the writing process, and keep personal journals. I will also describe in the implementation section of this chapter that I added quasi-transcripts to this list of procedures to optimize my use of the data and I added an individual interview with each participant.

The length of time for this research allows for the sustained exploration of ideas. The time also lends itself to remaining flexible should the participants need to leave one issue in conversation in order to begin another one. Hollingsworth's (1992, 1994) study was twice as long but given that she was studying literacy with a larger group of women, my choice of a six month research period seemed reasonable.

I planned to audio-record the conversations to allow me full opportunity to engage with the participants. I planned to selectively video-record and photograph the meetings. I did this to allow me a greater variety of data. I also planned to video record because I thought the participants might like to view the tapes or have photographs in order to reflect on, either during or after the process, their contribution to the research. However, the video-recording seemed to be something the participants felt less comfortable with doing. They said they would do it but that they would feel a little less comfortable. Because I wanted to allow them the opportunity to become comfortable with one another it seemed reasonable to reverse this plan. I took photographs at the end of the process when we were making the quilt but there was no need to take other pictures throughout the process.
I did not plan to transcribe the tapes verbatim. Niks (1995) and Sanjek (1990) have shown that transcribing tapes verbatim increases the likelihood that rich details may be lost. I planned, as I listened to the tapes, to record my thoughts, descriptions and analysis within a note-taking system which used columns: the first for digits from the tape recorder, a second for a short description of the comment made by the participants, a third for my feelings associated with the comments on the tape recorder and a forth a successive columns for my analysis developed through repeated listening. As previously mentioned, I also added quasi-transcripts.

Having described the management aspects of the research I now comment on my planning for the relational aspects of the research. Child care practitioners come from a field that is generally, but not always, undervalued and devalued. This made it even more important for me to understand my role as researcher in relation to the participants. In particular, I had the responsibility to become aware of issues of power and how I could responsibly and appropriately hold that power (Davis, 1981; Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Tom, 1997). I had to learn how to support the participants in their exploration (Jordan et al., 1991). Further, I had the obligation to learn how to create a space where the participants would feel a sense of ownership and agency in the collaborative development of the conversation (Bosworth & Hamilton, 1994; Romer & Whipple, 1991).

I learned how to support the participants to take on more agency in the research process by drawing on and making explicit my experience as a child care practitioner. With reference to the research it is important that I planned and made explicit how I would support the participants to feel comfortable to direct the conversation and their learning. In my child care facility I have been responsible for creating a space where my coworkers can actively reflect on and talk about their practice. I have also monitored and supported practicum students. Ways that I support my coworkers and the students to take on more agency in creating the program they want are to create time for them to speak about their work and to do observations of one another. Most importantly, I make time to listen to what they would like to do in their teaching.

Just as I make time for my coworkers to have agency in our workplace, I also strived to have the participants feel some control in the research process. Lather (1991) states that when research is about a group collectively and individually, they should have a say in what is going on within it. Gitlin (1990) also asserts that participant voices need to be made prominent within the context of the research. Reliability and validity of the research are enhanced when participants take appropriate control of the research direction (Gibson, 1985; Johnston, 1990; Kyle & McCutcheon, 1984; Troya & Foster, 1988). To help the participants feel some control of the conversation I planned to state my readiness to shift my focus from genuine practice to one that would be more important for the participants.
(Hollingsworth, 1992, 1994).

Another way I planned to support the participants' involvement in the research was by working to make my motives, thinking and positions transparent (Tom, 1997). I was willing to state my motives, thoughts and positions as best I could and to help the participants feel in a position to ask me things they felt were not clear. I planned to, and did provide summaries immediately following each meeting. In these meetings I asked for the participants' evaluation of the previous meeting and their input for the next. They gave me verbal responses to these questions by saying that they thought I had reflected the basic ideas of the meetings and that it was unreasonable for me to think about putting in greater detail.

Integrating visual journals in the research process was a strategy that I developed to help the participants play a part in directing the conversations. Visual journals were large spiral-bound journals made of heavy paper. In these the participants could put pictures, drawings, doodles, newspaper clippings, summaries of meetings, and anything else they could glue, tape or draw or write into them.

The idea stems from my work with young children. As pre-writers, young children use pictures and other forms of representation to tell what they know. It is often a joyful experience and one that I love to watch. As I sit with children who add pictures to their journals I talk to them about the reason for putting them in, about the content of the pictures and about how they connect to other pictures they have put in their journals. I also use the visual journals to help a child become involved in a conversation if he or she is unsure of what to do with their time at the Centre. By asking a child to bring his or her book and talk about it with me we can usually work together to try and think of something the child likes to do. We also bring others into the conversation. I believed the visual journals had the potential of providing the same kind of reflective tool or starting point for conversation with the participants as it had with the children. I did not purchase the books in advance because I did not want to presume the participants would be interested in using them. I did not want them to feel pressured. I waited until the first meeting and then asked them for their feedback and their ideas about the journal's usefulness to their thinking. All participants agreed to use the journals.

Sharing my power meant developing good listening skills. As many authors assert (Greene, 1979, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), storytelling is a way people can discover their own voices as well as the voices of others. I wanted to listen in ways that honoured those stories. Listening is not an easy task. It is an intense form of communication where, while no speech is being uttered by the listener, her whole body is present to the speaker (Tremmel, 1993; van Manen, 1990). I intended to become "more curious and less directive, more interested in following [the participants']
lead" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 26).

I planned to make open-ended kinds of statements that supported continued reflection and conversation (Palmer, 1998). I planned to say things like, "I heard you say you were thinking about why you were changing your practice. Is there more you are ready to say about this to us?" In addition to making open-ended statements, there were three key ways that I had planned to enter into conversation with the participants. The first was to develop the ability to have empathy for the speaker, the second was avoid giving advice, and the third was to share my teaching experiences openly and honestly. I will now explain these ways of being.

Olesen (1994) argues that researchers who empathize with the participants are less likely to run the risk of speaking for them. Being less likely does not ensure that they will not. Alcoff (1991, p. 15) cautions that discussions happen within a political arena. Neither the speaker nor the listener can retreat from their locations. As such I planned to reflect on, and make explicit, my understanding of the social, political and historical currents which operate within the research project. I planned to do this during my listening to the taped conversations. Empathy meant identification with the speaker's feelings about the experience she had (Gilligan & Brown, 1992). I knew that I could not have the experience she did but I could imagine how she might be feeling and let her know that with my words and actions. It was important that I provide adequate pause before I spoke in order to allow the participants to complete their thoughts and words.

Refraining from giving advice prevented me from acting like an expert (Olesen, 1994). When I heard stories I planned to avoid responding quickly with advice. Such a statement to avoid might be, "here is what I would do or what I did in a similar situation." Giving advice is counterproductive to open exploration of ideas. I also planned to avoid responding with leading questions that really were ways of giving advice such as "did you think to read this article? or did you think to offer the child something else?"

When speaking about my understanding of teaching I planned to give examples of my experiences with children. I planned to answer the participants' questions about who I am as honestly as I could. Jordan's (1992) analysis of her relationship with clients says that when there is an "appreciation of the wholeness of the other person" (p.82) there can be more open and honest dialogue. In my experience as a child care practitioner I am continually developing my ability to respond to people in respectful ways.

I also created an outline of the first meeting. In it I specifically addressed issues of confidentiality, anonymity and the participants' power to leave the research at any time. These followed as a way to discuss the letters agreeing to the research that the participants signed.' I outlined my reasons

7 See appendix
for the research and my willingness to develop ways that might allow the participants opportunity to direct the conversation as they needed.

I have shown that I thought about issues of power within the research before I met with the participants. I planned to share power in appropriate ways. I planned to encourage the participants to take an active role in the process and content of the research through the use of visual journals, responses to summaries and in listening to their stories and comments about how they wanted to direct the conversation. I planned to avoid giving advice and to share myself openly and honestly. Confidentiality and anonymity would be assured throughout the process. In short, the research design allowed for a maximum amount of flexibility in order to allow it to evolve to meet the participants' needs as well as my own (Ristock & Pennell, 1996).

Implementation Phase

The following describes the steps I took immediately prior to, and during, the six months of conversations and interviews. In particular this section addresses three components of the implementation process: the way the participants were selected, a description of the conversation process, and the management of the data. In the first component I describe how names of possible participants were given to me and that members were chosen on a first come basis. In the second component I describe how the structure of the conversations changed as members took on more responsibility for its development. In the third and final component I describe how I collected and wrote about the data. All three components worked together purposefully to aid a thorough analysis that allowed me a clear understanding of the participants' conversation process.

1. The participants.

I selected group members approximately two months prior to the beginning of the research. I asked Early Childhood Education Program Instructors, who had experience with many child care practitioners, for names of practitioners they felt might be interested in thinking about joining the research. I sent letters describing the research to three individuals who told the instructors they would be interested in hearing about the research. All three responded to my letter by telephone. I explained a little more about the research to them at that time and they all agreed to join.

The three participants worked in various aspects of child care as I explained in Chapter Two. One worked in infant toddler care, one in preschool and one in a facility for children three through school age. All three facilities were operated by not-for-profit parent-run Boards. I had not deliberately set out to get such diversity of experience but was happy with the result. This variety of experience provided us
with a chance to learn more about each other’s facilities.

2. Structure of the Conversation

We began meeting at the University of British Columbia in one of the meeting rooms free of charge. Financial constraints made the rental of another facility unsuitable. I also believed that it would provide a more neutral space for the participants to enter into conversation as opposed to my home or work site or one of the participants’ homes or work sites. My thinking was based on my understanding of issues of power (Alcoff, 1991). However, the drive to, and parking at, the University proved to be troublesome for all the participants. They asked if the meetings could be set some place less awkward to get to. I suggested my home and they gladly agreed. Approval from the Ethics Committee was received and the third and subsequent gatherings were held at my home. I do not believe this change in setting resulted in negative consequences for the participants. Participants said they felt more relaxed in this place and that the travel and parking was less arduous (A000, 99-01-25). It was also much easier for me to prepare dinners.

In the beginning I provided the structure of the meetings. I believed that we needed some time to check in with the events of the previous weeks. I planned this in a formal way. I planned to give each person a chance to speak uninterrupted, for a few minutes. Such formal planning was soon put aside for more relaxed and group-directed interests. Instead, group members said they preferred to chat about our work week during dinner in a give-and-take manner. All group members were sensitive to each other’s need to speak. Everyone shared curiosity about each other’s lives in and out of work. We had usually finished dinner by the time we had shared this 20 to 30 minute talk together. I cleared the table and we began the topic which we had jointly planned at the previous meeting.

I audio-recorded the conversations. At the first meeting we talked about the use of video-equipment and photographs. I explained that this would offer me another form of data to work from in my analysis. I also explained that the participants might want these tapes to use at home to reflect on the meetings on or after the research process. The participants said that they did not think they would need the tapes and would be comfortable with seeing a copy of the thesis before it was complete. They were not that comfortable with the idea of video-recording. I also felt that the camera would be too cumbersome to try to position correctly in the small room we were using at the University. The participants agreed to using photographs at the end as a way to record our group membership.

I began our first meeting by talking with the participants about the consent they were giving by taking part in the research (Smith, 1990). I drew attention to the specifics of the consent forms they previously signed. I reminded them that the research was six months in duration and that they had the
right to leave the group at any time without giving a reason. I shared my interest in, and understanding of, genuine practice. I elicited the participants' comments about their intentions and their understanding of the purpose of the research (Lather, 1991). I shared my intention to allow the conversation to develop according to their interests. After everyone gave a number of suggestions for our next meeting the participants decided they wanted to speak about their experiences as learners. They each wanted to focus on a significant stage in their lives saying that it would help situate their thinking in the position of being a learner. They said that this focus might help them think about the importance of being genuine. We also set up a schedule for the remaining eight meetings.

At each meeting the participants said they were happy to be together and looked forward to coming. There was no predetermined speaking order. If someone had not already taken the lead I would ask them if they had a chance to think about the summary and if they had any comments to make about it and/or if they wanted to share an entry in their journals. Each person kept the summaries in the visual journals and anyone who had a comment to make usually kept a record of it there and shared it at the beginning of the meeting. Most often someone shared their entries in the journal as a way to begin the discussion.

Everybody had opportunity to speak at each meeting. The amount of time people spoke changed according to need. Each person was sensitive to the needs of the others and made comments such as "I have taken up enough time" and/or "I'd like to know about how you've been doing." Our meetings began going past 9:00 p.m. because we were in conversation and it would have been impolite to stop a person in mid-thought. Usually by 9:15 p.m. or 9:30 p.m. we realized the time and made plans for the subsequent meeting.

By the fourth meeting we said that we needed more time to explore each topic of conversation. At each meeting we brought significant thoughts and questions and this did not allow each person the time to develop the ideas. We decided that two people would bring their ideas to the group at each meeting so that the ideas could be developed. Each person planned the focus of her talk in advance so that the other members were aware of the topic. When we met we devoted more time to two people's issues.

There was only one meeting when a member could not attend. All members decided that the meeting should continue as planned because to have made other arrangements would have caused subsequent scheduling problems. We did make a schedule change once in the process of the meetings to accommodate another participant's work schedule conflict. The six months planned for the research allowed for this kind of flexibility.

After each meeting I wrote a summary of the conversation. I distributed these to each participant within two days of the meeting. In each summary I included a comment about the check-in talk, the content of the conversation and the plans for the
following meeting. I included some verbatim statements wherever appropriate. I always asked the participants to speak with me by phone or at the next meeting if there was a mistake or something I had not understood. The participants said I summarized the meetings well.

I kept a personal journal to reflect on the research process. I documented my feelings of the participants, my interactions with them and the general research process. This journal provided an additional source of data. In it I documented that the participants did not use the word 'genuine' often in our conversations. I used it more often than they did as I spoke about my relationship with one of the children in my facility. I wondered if the topic of genuine practice was worthwhile to the participants. Upon further listening and reflecting I saw that the words 'connected' and 'relationship' were being used where I would use the word 'genuine'. From listening to the stories and then writing my feelings about them in my journal I believed that each one of us was reaffirming the importance of being genuine with children and others but that we used different words to describe these relationships.

Also, at the beginning stages of the research I was troubled by a feeling that I had not set up enough time for the research. By the third meeting I was fretful that the conversation was not moving quickly enough. Upon examination I saw that I was working under an incorrect idea that more data would be better data. I thought that if we talked more about genuine practice or other issues I would have more data from which to work, thereby making the research better. I began to understand that more data does not make better research. One of the first things I did to understand these feelings was to reacquaint myself with my research proposal. I asked myself if genuine practice was something I wanted to study and describe. After reflecting on this question I believed that while it was important to me in my practice, I did not feel that the other participants needed to make it their focus as well. I could be flexible in this regard. Once I understood that the process and value of the conversation was more important to me I began to focus more on its development and I became less fretful of the time I had to understand it.

Paralleling my struggle with my concept of time in the research was my deepening understanding of my relationship with one of the children in my child care facility. I described some of this struggle in the participant chapter. In my work with the boy I came to terms with his behaviour believing that it was an expression of his fear and anger. Once I learned to accept him as someone struggling to live with and describe his feelings I became more relaxed. Thus my learning at my work and in the research process had an important parallel: with acceptance comes a greater ability to be fully present to others. Learning acceptance with the child taught me to be more accepting of the process of the research.

It was during this time of reflection on how I would use my
time with the participants wisely that I sought and received approval to do an individual interview with each participant. These took place near the end of the research. I chose informal conversational interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) to provide each person an opportunity to say things they might not have otherwise said in the group meetings. I wanted to allow them to have opportunity to speak freely on any topic of their choice and for as long as they liked. The participants decided the pace of these interviews. I went to Angela’s house for dinner. Joanne took me out for breakfast and Beth came to my child care centre one evening.

These interviews were also audio-taped. I think that this was an important addition to the process because it allowed each person a chance to articulate some summative statements about her role in the research and the ways she felt it worked for her. While I had developed some guiding questions which I provided the participants with before the meeting these were omitted if the participant said that they had other things they wanted to speak about. I followed their lead in these interviews for the most part.

As I mentioned in the planning phase, I wanted to show the participants that they had power within the research and that my power as a researcher and a participant was not more important than theirs. I had not thought carefully enough about how the participants wanted to name themselves in relation to the work they do. By the second meeting I heard the participants talking about being bothered by the term child care worker and its associated meanings to them. Listening carefully to this I told them that I was thankful for their conversation because I had been calling them child care workers in my writing and in my speaking. I apologized for my insensitivity. I shared with them my understanding of why I think I had not made a distinction between child care worker and child care practitioner. Upon reflection I believed that my degree in education has afforded me more legitimacy as a child care practitioner than I would have had without it. The participants talked about being called preschool teachers but this was also problematic for them because of its association with a type of program rather than referring to those who work with children prior to their entry into formal schooling. We settled on child care practitioners to reduce the possible confusion other terms might cause. This conversation helped me became more sensitive to the needs of the participants to name and describe the work they do. I began to pay more attention to other things that I may have taken for granted.

Midway through the research the participants asked if they could get a letter saying that they were part of the research group. They said that this research was better than any of the smaller courses they took to maintain their child care license. In Chapter Two where I present a review of the literature I drew attention to the number of hours of course work and workshops that licensed child care practitioners must complete in order to
maintain their license to practice. I felt this was a perfect opportunity to provide some reciprocity (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) to the participants. I obtained letters from the Centre for the Study of Curriculum Instruction and I distributed them to the participants on the last evening. I also offered to help any of them with setting up a computer system that would help reduce some of the stress they were feeling having to do so much by pen and paper. They were pleased with this suggestion although somewhat timid about using a computer to keep track of their records. I left it with them to consider.

In the planning section of this chapter I wrote about how I planned to use my leadership skills to support the participants in their exploration of their practice. Joanne was going through a particularly stressful time in her life. As shown in the chapter on the participants, she said that the conversation had offered her not only a time to talk about her teaching but offered her some emotional support as well. By being empathetic when I heard Joanne share her stories I provided her with a safe space to articulate her ideas and feelings. Beth said that I was “right there” (C470, 99-05-13) when I listened to them tell about their experiences.

There were times that I shared some of my books with the participants. I did this when they asked about some of the reading I was doing that was influencing my thoughts about my work with Rick. I refrained from offering suggestions about how to solve problems. At one meeting Joanne asked me why I did not often share the particulars of my facility. She wondered if I had done so deliberately to not appear as an expert (99-04-12, untaped). I said that I had not deliberately left out stories about the operation of my centre but that what was important to me was working through my thoughts about my relationship with Rick.

Angela said she was affected by hearing my stories. At our interview she said, “I’ve been told that I see things in black and white. Because you see things in colour and in different dimensions I began to think about things differently” (011, 99-05-10). She supported this comment by telling me that,

Remember the time I said that a child in the centre was a real boy? Your stories about Liam made me look at what I meant....You see, I was raised with my sisters....My experience with boys had shown me more of the stereotypes....I also have only had a girl....Your stories helped me confront my fears about foster parenting a boy. I think that I will change my mind about only fostering a girl (058, 99-05-10).

Angela has been foster-parenting a young boy for almost a year now and she remarked at our March meeting that she loved it. While these stories reflect that I used my work experience as a supervisor well in the research, I often had feelings of insecurity. My journal entries suggest that I was developing a
growing awareness of the difference between feelings of inadequacy and feelings of humility in the research. I wrote,

Why do I have doubts about my capability?...Why do I feel like this when I also feel as though I am eating and breathing the participants and their stories? I’m trying to figure out what’s going on here and my role in the conversation’s making....I’m starting to feel humbled by the participants’ experiences and knowledge. I feel like I can learn a lot from them by listening to their triumphs and their struggles. I’m beginning to be more patient with myself....Knowing that I have lots to learn is not bugging me so much. Reading and reflecting on Le Guin’s version of the Tao has been important in this process of understanding my leadership and my participation in general. In it she writes, “when the work’s done right,/with no fuss or boasting,/ ordinary people say,/Oh, we did it.” My understanding of this is that I need to be less fretful about the process. I have to be trusting of my skills while not being self-assured....Coming to greater awareness of myself has been a real plus from the research. I hope I can integrate this sense of peacefulness and mindfulness more often into my life....Being quiet and acting simply are probably the skills I need to practice most. They are hard skills to learn sometimes (Personal Journal, 99-02-13).

This research had an impact on many aspects of my life because it was drawing me into self reflection on issues of being genuine and the value of good relationships to learning. McMillan & Schumacher (1997) have argued that reflection, self-questioning and self-monitoring are important practices in qualitative research designs. Reflections such as the one above served as important sources of data during the data analysis phase of the research.

The ninth and final meeting was a celebration of what we individually and collectively achieved. We talked about how the conversation brought us back to reflect and talk about our beliefs and values and that this talk had inspired us to share our thinking with our coworkers. We talked about the conversation helping us reprioritize the things we had to do with and for children in our care. We talked about how happy we were to have been able to get to know other practitioners.

At the last meeting I also asked the participants what they wanted to do about their anonymity in the research. They had told me earlier that they were comfortable with their real names being used. They said that they were still comfortable with this decision. However, I said that they should each think about it again after they read the completed thesis so that they were making the best decision for themselves. By checking and rechecking with the participants I hoped to protect them from
harm (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). After reading a final draft of the thesis, one participant said she wanted to have her real name recorded and the other two said they wanted theirs changed to protect people they spoke of from potential harm.

The last meeting was also tinged with a little sadness. I spoke about how I would not be able to continue the meetings if they wanted to because I had work and home obligations. I talked about writing in the summer and meeting with them once I had a draft of the thesis developed. The other participants said that they too were sad that it was ending but that they hoped we might either get together informally or see one another more often through child care events. Between the end of the meetings and the writing of the thesis I ordered cakes through Angela’s home-based business and visited a bookstore in our neighbourhood with Joanne. Beth asked me if there was substitute teacher work at my centre for the summer. She was interested in seeing what she felt like working in an all-day child care program. I gave Beth’s name to my Board of Directors for substitution work during my summer holidays. She was accepted. We spoke briefly on the phone about it in November when she said that the accelerated day of the preschool program suited her better.

3. Writing the thesis

The writing of the thesis did not get started until February 2000. Home, health and work events took precedence between the end of the research and the writing. This break in the time between doing the research and writing about it was problematic for me. I had immersed myself in the research while it was going on even though I kept working and caring for my family. But events became more complicated as the summer drew near. My mother-in-law was dying and I helped to care for her in these last months. It was an important time for my whole family and I became even more aware of the lack of conversation that had taken place with her about her life and now about her dying and death. I wrote several pages about this in my journal because I thought not only was my awareness about the need for conversation amongst practitioners growing but it was extending to family as well. Following my mother-in-law’s death I was needed to work extra hours at the child care centre because my coworker was taking an extended medical leave. I had not anticipated the extra work load being as arduous as it became. Further to this I was being treated for tendinitis in both biceps. Injury to these muscles had made typing a difficult activity. I began to see these events as an incubation time for my thinking. In some ways I believe it provided me with the distance I needed to think about ways I wanted to make the learning I had experienced make sense to a wider audience. The result was a more well-planned understanding of the making of the quilt and the need for it both for myself and for others who are interested in talking
about child care and ways of representing what we learn.

When I had a draft of the chapter on the participants ready in March 2000, I invited Beth, Joanne and Angela to dinner. We had a wonderful time talking. Each person gave me some feedback on the chapter. There were some minor changes but generally they considered my comments and reflections appropriate. We also planned how some of the entries from the visual journals would be used in the quilt I planned to make as a representation of the research. Beth and Joanne offered to come and help with some of the stitching but Angela was too busy with the child she is presently foster-parenting. I was unable to take Beth and Joanne up on their offer to help with the quilt because I found that I sewed most often in the late evening. I also found the sewing a very personal and reflective time but I will talk more about this at the end of this chapter. Before the end of the meeting I reminded them that they would have an opportunity to see the completed work before I submitted it for approval. I wanted their feedback, reflections and clarifications before a final copy was made.

As indicated in the planning section of this chapter, seeking the reflections and clarifications of the participants throughout the research process increases the research reliability (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). I add that this practice must be managed with care and attention to insightful analysis. I recognize the potential problems that might surface if the participants do not like the analysis made by the researcher. This occurred for me when Angela did her first reading of the participant chapter section of the thesis. In it I had made comments about her focus on the administrative issues of child care. Angela clarified for me her dislike for the practice of having parent-run programs and not the administrative functions she completed. I thanked her for clarifying my misunderstanding about her thinking on parent-run Boards. I also told her that upon my analysis of the data there was a high number of comments made by her about how her administrative concerns were taking her away from the children. I felt she realized the impact of these issues when she spoke about how much she cared about children and how she wanted to be available to them more in relation to the multiple tasks she had to complete. She agreed with this analysis but wanted me to clarify that it was her concern about the utility of parent-run Boards that was causing her to feel the tension she felt.

In summary, my work and my research intertwined during the six months of meetings and the pre and post meeting times. I used my experience as a child care practitioner to inform the kinds of care and attention I thought necessary to developing a learning community within the research. I used my experience as a researcher to make me more aware of the kinds of power I am entrusted with when I act as a supervisor in my facility. Sustained, structured conversations based on mutual respect, humility and honesty have afforded many learning opportunities in both my research and my work. This summative comment leads
me to talk about the analysis phase of the research.

The Analysis Phase

My analysis of the data was supported by my experience as a child care practitioner and as a coworker who has entered into conversation with child care practitioners for almost twenty years. This analysis was also supported by my preparation through course work (Marshal & Rossman, 1989; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) and the literature related to qualitative research (Olesen, 1994; Patton, 1990). I used a number of techniques for recording data and my impressions of the data in systematic ways (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The techniques I used were: the use of a high quality tape recorder to audio-tape the meetings and the creation of quasi-transcripts of the audio-tapes, a strong note taking system, and a personal journal that supported my thinking. I also developed a conversational relationship with another student who, having experiences in graduate work and as a teacher of adults, talked with me and asked questions about my developing analysis. I describe each in sequence.

I did not transcribe the entire tape-recorded meetings for many reasons, including the enormity of the task. Accurately transcribing each word of the conversation among a group of people is very difficult because of the complex nature of group discussions (Niks, 1995). Support for this argument is found in the work of Sanjek (1990) who believes that not only is transcribing a labour intensive activity but rich details of the context may be left out in the process. Niks (1995) argues the under recognized value of the spoken text. She writes, "the form of representation the researcher chooses affects the image of the event that is presented, and each form of representation affects the image differently. Written transcripts are no closer to reality than taped conversations" (p. 50). I chose to allow the spoken recorded text to be the primary source of data. From these I recorded emerging themes and my reflections of the conversations and documented the development of our group awareness and support.

Some form of transcript of the meetings was necessary for me, however. I felt I could more quickly refer to a transcript for reference points in my thinking and writing than I could search through the taped meetings. After the first meeting I began to develop quasi-transcripts to supplement my listening to the tapes. Immediately following each meeting I listened to the tapes and created a transcript which briefly outlined the format of the meeting and also recorded specific comments which pertained to genuine practice, conversation and other issues that were important to the participants. The quasi-transcripts supported my understanding of the spoken word and allowed me to clarify the themes that were emerging.

Following the completion of the quasi-transcript after each meeting, I listened to the tapes multiple times and made a list.
of topics raised and how these topics were emerging as themes. I also used a journal to record my reflections and possible questions or directions to include in future meetings. I used the counter on a tape recorder to index my notes for easy referral. As I listened to the tapes on multiple occasions I paid close attention to the context, the content and the silent aspects of the conversations.

My personal journal supported the audio-tapes, quasi-transcripts, and note taking procedures. In this I continued to develop my ability to be reflexive. Reflexivity became key to the research process.

Reflexivity refers to self-consciousness with the goal of establishing non-exploitive relations between the researcher and the communities researched. Reflexivity is closely tied to flexibility: being prepared to reshape the research design and adjust the research methods to reflect what we learn in the course of doing the research, both for the community and from the community and from our own reflections (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 48).

Reflexivity is the ability to reflect and critique what I do, how I feel about what I do and why I make the decisions I make. It helps me understand my relationship to what I know and to the participants in the research. It is about becoming self-aware.

Understanding my personal experiences had implications for this research as well. I became an instrument for understanding. While I met with the participants I was reminded to rummage through my experiences in search of a match (Clinchy, 1996). By searching for these parallels I was more able to understand what the participants were speaking about.

Searching for a match was not always easy. There were times when I did not understand a comment or line of reasoning. When I heard a comment or a line of reasoning that was unfamiliar to me or different from my own I responded by pausing, allowing the participant to continue or others to ask questions for clarification. By encouraging the person by listening or asking questions I had more opportunity to gain understanding. Therefore, even in our differences we could still converse with one another to develop understanding.

I did not think it was my purpose to question all that was being said. Sometimes I let aspects of the conversation develop on their own without my interference, believing that the meaning and importance of the stories might be for the speaker to question and further explore at her own pace. My task as a researcher and a participant in sustained, structured conversation was to be present to the participants, to be engaged with their experiences and to speak about my experiences with honesty and humility. I also had the responsibility of keeping the conversation focused on teaching-related issues. In the analysis my task was to regard the stories and comments with
respect, discipline and responsibility and to treat the participants with care in my rewriting and interpreting of their stories.

It is important for researchers to address how the participants will be treated in the written text of the research. Sandelowski (1993) asks researchers to try and achieve a balance between fulfilling the obligations to tell what was heard and knowing that the participants should not feel alienated or hurt by the text. In this research I was not drawn to writing about the participants in ways that would have been hurtful to them. When I heard their stories and when I interpreted their words and placed them in the thesis, I tried to do so with care.

As I mentioned in the introduction, there is a limited amount of research being done about practitioners’ interpretation of their work. As such, child care practitioners are not as practiced as those who have been researched in this way, in articulating what they do. This research adds to the data available. Generally, if, as researchers, we gain practitioner trust and then share their stories in ways that present them as being naive we stand to lose their trust. We must take their experience at being able to articulate their thinking and the context in which they work into consideration in our analysis. When we carefully and judiciously present child care practitioners as thoughtful and articulate beings we stand to learn about their practice and they stand to gain because they have been given an opportunity to speak and be heard.

Sandelowski’s (1993) work is connected to the statement I made previously about my analysis being premised on a desire to be respectful, disciplined and responsible. This stems from my belief that the research project was not solely for my gain. While it is part of my desire to inquire into my own practice and I had an obligation to fulfill a research component for the degree, I also wanted to provide avenues for the participants to gain something from participating. By this I mean that I respectfully listened to their stories about their teaching and their lives and I hoped that by listening they would be provided with a space in which to explore their thinking. I also wanted to ensure that their stories could be trusted in my hands. This means that I had to know the context in which the stories were given and make this knowledge part of my understanding. Further I had the responsibility of sharing their thinking through accurate representation of their ideas and words and making reasoned judgments about these in my analysis.

I also said I had to be disciplined. The manner in which I recorded and analyzed the data had to be systematic (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997) and done with care. “The analytical process demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, pp. 115-116). When I speak in Chapter Four, about the lack of time
the participants had to engage with children in genuine ways or to investigate their practice, I did not count the number of times various topics were addressed. I tried to understand the significance of time and the way it was organized in their lives. I tried to understand how they felt pressured by the tasks they had to fulfill in a day. Given the number of times they talked about their administrative tasks I might have assumed that this was a more important topic to them. But what they were saying was that their desire to be connected to children was connected by the administrative demands. It was not that they were particularly bothered by the administrative tasks so much as they were trying to explore how they could be with children and do these tasks equally well.

A way that I supported my growing understanding of the data was by developing a conversational relationship (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 147) with Carla Randall, a student also studying at the graduate level. Carla and I are both dedicated to teaching. We enjoy thinking about our work and wondering how we can be supportive to preservice practitioners. Carla and I met on a regular basis to talk about our work. During the conversations she asked me critical questions about my developing analysis. This relationship was very important to me and to the analysis because it helped me bring more attention to the idea of space as an important concept in sustained, structured conversation. Space can be seen as silence and this raises questions of when to comment and when to leave these silences alone. It can also mean the creation of spaces in which to explore our practice. The conversation also helped me think about how I wanted to present these ideas in other forms beside the use of written text.

I also said previously that I had an obligation to be responsible in the analysis. My intention was to present the participants with care without forgoing my responsibility to uncover and comment on issues that were important to address. I illustrate my point with a fictitious example. If I reported that one of the participants said that parents are uneducated about the needs of children, one could assume that this participant unjustly characterizes parents as unknowing and characterizes herself as an expert. If I do not either present this comment in context, such as clarifying that the participant has just had a very difficult week and some parents have been questioning her choice of activities for the children, then I do a disservice to the readers and to the participant. By presenting the participant in such small, uncontextualized scenarios or comments, I reflect only part of her, and she has difficulty in recognizing herself. I wanted to be careful not to force her to retreat into herself rather than moving to improve her practice. Therefore, I have tried to strike a balance between my obligations as a person and as a scholar while maintaining the trust that I was given by the participants.

To summarize, the planning, implementation and analysis phases of the research were rewarding, thought-provoking and
mutually supportive. The plans I made required me to pay attention to issues of power. I used my experience as a child care practitioner of many years to serve as an instrument of care. I developed and practiced empathy and questioning without criticism. I shared who I was openly and honestly. I continually checked with the participants to make sure the conversations were also meeting their needs. I trusted that they would tell me if they needed to do things differently. There were times of insecurity for me. I used my reflective journal to discover the reason for my feelings and shared these with the participants when it was appropriate. Entering into sustained, structured conversation was a valuable tool to research practice but it was also a productive way for us to talk about the meaning of our practice in our lives.

The following section describes my understanding of the research process, my impressions of the participants and their influence on my thinking. I talk about the making of a quilt to help me understand my roles as researcher and participant in the research. I also talk about making the quilt to provide another way to represent what I learned in the process of the research.
Methods Epilogue: The Quilt

If I could tell you what I mean, there would be no point in dancing

Isadora Duncan

Joanne shared the above quotation with me the night I met with the participants to talk about the chapter I had written about them. It was just the comment I needed. It was what I had been thinking all along, expect that instead of a dance, I wanted to make a quilt. It's another way to share knowledge and sometimes comes in particularly helpful when text seems to limit the sharing of the experience. As Eisner (1992) writes, "any symbol both reveals and conceals, its use provides, of necessity, a partial view of the reality it is intended to describe or depict" (p. 12). I offer this section about writing and my quilt as another viewpoint, from another part of me, of the research process. Making the quilt and writing this section has helped me to address the limits I felt in writing the rest of the thesis.

My thoughts about representing what I know in visual art form started a few years ago when I was in teacher training. I had the good fortune to take a mathematics course from Rena Upitis, a professor who was on sabbatical from Queen's University. I remember feeling that my knowledge of mathematics was insufficient. I questioned how I was going to learn to be a good primary school teacher if I felt so lacking in this area. What Rena taught me has been invaluable. She taught me to look for math in everything I see. I started to see mathematics in the ways people planted their flower gardens or how they placed rocks to accent or replace where plants might have been. I saw it in the waves on the beach. I started to see it in the bus schedules, the ways the many downtown buildings were designed and the sweaters my mum so carefully knit. I saw it in dances I went to and the music the children listened to. Once I had connected with these things I began to see how beautiful mathematics was and that it was indeed everywhere! Not only did I get over my fear of mathematics but I also learned the importance of seeing things in other ways. I also learned to share what I was seeing with the children. They were being pulled into my passion for mathematics as a very real and purposeful thing. I shared it with the children by pointing out the patterns in the buildings, the clothes they were wearing and the songs I taught them. They looked for patterns in all sorts of places. Further, they started to demonstrate to me what they knew, not just by telling me, and I valued these stories very much, but they started to show me in the paintings they made and the constructions they created. So both Rena and the children have been my teachers.

It was with this in mind that I began my quest to represent what I learned in the research in another way besides the text that I wrote. Presenting the quilt was about making sense of
the research for myself, to add beauty to the world and to invite people into conversation about what it is we do as teachers and how we envision what we do with children. I also offer it as a way to invite people into my thinking. There is much that is left unsaid in the research. I was unable to find the right words for everything I learned, and as Joanne told me once, "sometimes pictures are better than words because there are some things that just shouldn't be said." I invite all who see the quilt to think about how their lives have been influenced by others as mine was by the participants and by my relationships through conversation with so many people. I also invite others to see how conversation plays a part in their learning.

Midway through my meetings with the participants I wondered how to represent some of the conversation in a way that would reflect what I thought was happening. Joanne was an inspiration in her ability to share her thinking in art form. I played with ideas and always found myself using my hands to try to explain my thinking about what I wanted to do. I wanted something to hold that would represent what it was I thought we were doing together in conversation. The group members and their stories inspired me to think of the web of experiences we all bring to children, some of which we shared with one another in conversation. There was trust and openness early in the conversation and I wanted some way of telling and cherishing the feelings I had about that.

I thought some sort of ball might represent what I wanted to say. I thought of it as about the size of a child's small bowling ball—just enough to hold in both hands when looking at it. I didn't want it to be closed. I needed to see through it. I wanted to notice the weave that supported its shape. I wanted it to be brown, the colour of the earth and I wanted it to have a smell. My next step was to see what I could do about it. I met with a parent in the day care who goes to the mountains annually to strip bark from the trees for her weaving. There's a very narrow window of opportunity to do this and she said she would take me with her if she could. However, I soon realized that I had very little skill to weave the kind of ball I wanted. It gave me a new appreciation for the work she and others do in weaving. I began thinking of something different.

I pondered what it was that I liked about the weaving idea. It was the mixing together of various pieces to form a whole that appealed to me. I thought about how my life is somehow pieced together from my many experiences to form a whole. I can separate various events from within my life and look at them but somehow I can never really understand them until I see them tied to other events. I also noticed that as we met in conversation, the participants and I shared various pieces of our lives together through stories of our work. I noticed how the group was forming a whole on its own. I wanted to reflect this in the art because it was through this wholeness that we built the kind of place where we could explore our practice.
Thinking about piecing things together reminded me of quilting, which I admired from afar in the local quilter's store and at various galleries or shops that used this art form to beautify spaces. I thought about the lovingly made quilt my son was given on the day of his birth, every stitch done by hand, that continues to keep him warm at night even today. I had very little experience with quilting except in Rena's mathematics class when a group of us got together to make a math quilt that children could play with. I had also made a memory pillow for my son's second birthday. However, I had never dreamt of trying to do anything so large. As I played with the idea and shared it with the participants I started to see that this would be a good way to celebrate and show their art work from their visual journals. Once I was settled on the idea I was determined that even though it might not turn out the way a seasoned quilter would do it that I would make an effort.

The participants shared their drawings and pictures with me. I did not use their magazine cut outs or newspaper clippings because of the possibility of an infringement to copyright rules. I think I would do this differently next time because I was not as able to include as many pieces of work from Beth and Angela as I would have liked. I took these drawings to a local quilter's store and had them transferred onto cloth. The transfers are not as rich in colour as the originals but that was to be expected.

The next thing I did was think about the size of the piece and the colours that might work well with the many pictures I had. This process was difficult. Size was important because if it was too large it wouldn't fit on many walls and I had promised the participants that, if they wanted, they could take turns having it. Colour was also difficult because we had used so many colours in our art work. Quilters often use a colour wheel to match colours so that they will be pleasing to the eye. With so many colours in the many drawings I had to think about another way of looking at how I would choose the fabric. In our conversations, Angela often used the word "passion" about her work with children. I think passion is often represented by purple. She also liked the colour purple. Since I had only a few of Angela's pictures to add to the quilt I felt I could use things that reminded me of her. Therefore, I chose various colours of purple to tie the pictures together.

The writing of the thesis did not get started until nine months after the end of the conversations and interviews. I began by spending a focused amount of time thinking and writing about the research in a journal-like style. When I finished the participant section of the thesis I gave a copy to the participants to read. I figured that if they didn't recognize themselves in the writing then there was no reason to continue until I had been able to write about them in a way that they could recognize themselves. They met with me for dinner shortly after I gave it to them and we had a wonderful time talking about their perceptions of the writing and how they felt about
being written about. I included their contributions in subsequent writings of the chapter.

After dinner I showed them the photo transfers of their art work. I think they were really amazed at seeing what they had done and how this represented some of what we talked about. It brought back memories of specific conversations and we talked about the value of the conversations and the visual journals. We stood around the table to determine where the pictures might look best. It was great using the table as the framework for the size of the quilt because of the hours we had spent at the table talking about our practice. Once we had worked out the placement I took photographs so I wouldn’t forget where the pictures were to go.

One night one of my friends came over to sit and stitch a bit of it with me. As we sat on the couch, side by side, I felt an intimacy that I had not experienced before. As we sat quietly stitching, and talking about our work, I realized we were sharing ourselves in ways we had not done before. There was an easiness to our conversation—a settled way of being together. It made me think about how I could put more of these kinds of relationships into my life and how important the making of these must be to those who still gather to make them.

The trials of working with the pieces of art were many. I wanted to place the pictures randomly on the quilt and since the pictures didn’t line up well together because of their size and the placement, I could not easily create large squares. Working with squares and rectangles makes piecing and quilting much easier. I could have made it easier on myself by lining up the art work in more even lines but this wasn’t the way the group worked together. Our thoughts weren’t always in line and neither should the art work be if I wanted it to represent our thinking and our process. And I did.

I continued to struggle with the piecing together of the art and the purple strips I made. Sometimes I had to take the stitching out and start again. I had to make careful choices about when I wanted to do this. This was the same as the writing of the thesis. Sometimes I could have begun a page or a sentence or a thought over again because my words were not able to represent exactly what I thought. However, if I had continued doing this I would never have finished the thesis. I felt that I could never really tell exactly what we did because each new telling is a recreation. Each badly sewn piece served to remind me that it isn’t as important to get it right because there are many rights. What was important was that my process was thoughtful and that I was taking into account all the best sources of information I could to help me make my choices.

Taking the best advice I could get from a number of sources wasn’t always easy. As the quilt was nearly finished—I had only the binding left to do—Joanne came over to see it and give me a paper she had written on children and art. As she looked at the work and I showed her some of the words I had stitched into the border she said that I could have only
stitched through one layer of fabric and then I would have not had the puckering and the many pieces of thread would not have shown on the other side. As I slumped down to the floor, realizing my error I felt like taking out all the stitching and starting again on the border. But Joanne looked at me as though I was crazy. She said, “that’s what happens sometimes. Things happen in art that you don’t plan for.” My friend who was there asked me to think about all the things I was doing lately and if it was really worth starting again. She said, “besides, it gives it a quilted look.” I think they both knew I would have taken the stitching out and started again if they had felt it was best. This project has taught me more about letting things be as they are even though I still have feelings that I could have done it better.

The same feelings came up for me during the research process. I stayed up at night wondering how I might have said some things better and how I would try to learn from these errors for the next time. Sometimes I felt as though I asked too many questions. It made me check to see if I was the same at work. I asked my coworkers what they thought and they said I always asked questions when they were working but that the questions served to give them a chance to reflect. I hoped I was doing the same for the participants, giving them time to reflect but asking no more questions than I would have in any other circumstance. I didn’t want to seem expert-like or that I thought I had the right answer. I asked the participants for their feedback about this and I trust that when they said my questions served them well that they felt that they could be forthright with me.

I worked hard piecing the quilt together because I became immersed in it. I thought over the conversations as I worked and I became reimmersed with the participants and their stories. I knew that I was not able to be back in the conversations completely, once the moment is gone it cannot be recreated as it was. But the pictures brought back memories and helped me raise new questions about my role in the research and the way I thought the conversations worked for us individually and collectively. The quilt-making was becoming part of the writing and the writing, part of the quilt.

This latter thought parallels my belief that the topic of genuine practice supported the conversation and the conversation supported our understanding of genuine practice. Talking about being genuine with children brought being genuine with the participants to the forefront of my mind. I don’t know if this happened for the participants but I felt they were being genuine early on in the conversation. The conversation supported genuine practice because in our growing relationship with one another we became more trusting with one another, more present to each other’s stories and more genuine in our own reflection and in our sharing. These had an impact on our desire to be more genuine with children. We were learning about the benefits of being genuine by experiencing it amongst ourselves.
I remember a conversation I had with Joanne when I was conducting her interview. We talked about the concept of space. Joanne and I said that it was the spaces that were important in conversations. I started to think about this more. I thought about spaces to talk, spaces of silence within conversations and the necessity of being alone in spaces that support our reflection. These moments of solitude making the quilt supported my understanding of the conversations we had and the conversations I continue to have with my coworkers. Even though I have been feeling a little ambivalent about not including the participants more in the stitching of the quilt, I have also recognized the benefits of working quietly by myself creating a quiet space of contemplation and connection with myself.

As I looked at the art work I shifted my attention from the pictures to the spaces between the pictures. The patterns and the colours became more apparent and intriguing. As I looked at them I began to wander into untold stories about my teaching and about my desire for connection with other teachers as a way to improve my practice. It was more an emotional wandering than anything else. I was getting the idea of it in my fingers as I touched the stitching and the patterns. I started to understand that the multiple pieces of purple fabric represented so much more than I could say about the conversation. I wished I could write more eloquently about what I was feeling. But I could not.

I have written the words “in between” along the outer edge of the quilt. This phrase expresses my place in the research where I sometimes felt tensions between being a researcher and a participant. I was growing in connection to these women. I knew it was my responsibility to analyze the data and it was even hard for me to think of the conversation as data. I felt unsure about using their words to complete the thesis. This thinking led me to be ever more vigilant about describing the participants and their process honourably and respectfully.

It was also hard for me in between the data collection period and the writing. I had to put the research aside to be present to these other people in my life. I wanted to get back to writing the thesis but there was no way I could do it all at once. I thought about how life is part of the research, and about my life as a teacher. Sometimes I felt in between. Other times I felt completely connected to what I was doing as each day unfolded. To stay present to what I am doing is a lesson I will need to continually study.

I mentioned that space became a concept I started to explore; space with others, spaces in conversation and spaces to be alone in reflection. I need spaces to talk about what I do with other teachers. I need to try to articulate my knowledge to them so that I can hold it up not only to them but to myself. This research created that space for me and I think it did for the others as well. As I note in the thesis, these women all led very full lives. They said that they were often too busy to do many of the things they wanted with the children or for
themselves. This research helped us create such space away from the immediate obligations of our work and home lives. Beth used to say how much she looked forward to coming to the meeting because it was a different pace from her life. She said she felt as though she was carving out some time for herself. I too felt the benefits of this time away from my other obligations even though by doing the research I was partially fulfilling those obligations.

The concept of space was also seen in the conversation. Sometimes there were spaces of quiet when we gave one another a chance to finish a thought or press on to articulate our knowledge. Other times there were uncomfortable spaces when we didn’t see things in similar ways. At times like these I was challenged to think openly about issues and to wait for more to be said before I questioned the speaker. These spaces also challenged me to recognize my own judgments in similar or different places in the conversations and to become more aware of these judgments and possibly even the assumptions behind them. So spaces of silence are as important as spaces of sound. It makes me think that I don’t take silence as seriously as I should. I can only imagine what music would be like without any spaces. Just think of one continuous sound. I like the spaces and will pay more attention to them now.

The concept of space is also celebrated in my alone time in making the quilt. I enjoyed the quiet stitching of the words around the edge of the quilt in the evening with my young child snugly tucked under his covers. As I sat with thread in hand, the constant rhythm of the needle, interspersed by the sharp jab in the wrong place, kept me aware of the necessity to stop long enough to sense some of the slower rhythms of my life. I started to think about how the spaces of the quilt were holding the pictures in place much like my time alone was holding me and supporting me to continue the work I was doing.

One day I decided to sit in a local coffee shop and stitch because it had a large sunny window and I needed a change of scenery. I hadn’t been sitting long when two older women came in for a drink and chat. One of the women saw what I was doing and took a few steps back to my work. She asked if she could see it. I showed it to her, a little nervous that she was a quilter and might see all my errors. She didn’t point out a mistake. She looked at the quilt and then looked at me and said “You’re a teacher aren’t you?” Without giving me time to answer, she said she knew it “because of the colours, children love these colours. I think you also teach very young children, look at the pictures here, there’s so much you could talk to a child about in these.” I was overcome by this woman’s ability to feel so sure about what she knew. I hadn’t even thought about using the quilt with children. I marveled at her “guess”. Could there be something to the idea that there are people who just have an ability to know things in other ways I hadn’t thought about or given credence to? The woman continued to talk while I listened. I remember feeling overwhelmed by her
enthusiasm and her joy for life. And I thought--this is what the quilt can do--it can draw people into conversation.

It won't draw everyone. It might only draw a few. But quantity isn't what I am looking for. The research only had four of us working together in conversation. Increased quantity would not have made the research more valid or reliable. I think that we can each take from it something valuable. We can learn about the importance of trusting relationships in our lives. We can also learn that through these relationships we can share our understanding of our practice and our desire to improve our practice with children.

By creating the quilt I hope that other conversations will begin. I also hope that each participant who takes the quilt will see it as a small reminder of their dedication and insight into the research. I hope it will invite others to ask about the research and about their knowledge of children and teaching. I'd be happy if the quilt could become well worn. I hope it gets touched as much as making it touched me. I also hope that by adding this section to my thesis, others may be encouraged to create multiple representations of their research findings so that we can support shared understanding through a diverse range of methods.
Two Themes In Our Conversations

In this section of the thesis I invite the reader to become involved with two themes that presented themselves during our series of conversations. The first theme I will describe is the way a lack of time impinged on the participants' ability to practice in genuine ways. When the participants felt pressured by a lack of time, they felt less able to put into practice the kind of attention to relationships that they felt was necessary for themselves and for the children and families they served. I begin by giving an overview of some of the systemic constraints in which child care practitioners work. Following this, I will describe, through a rendering of some of the participants' stories, how a lack of time reduced opportunities for the participants to engage with children and their parents in genuine ways.

The second theme I will discuss is how an exploration of our histories was an important step in learning about and improving our present practices. Through reacquainting ourselves with, and retelling, our histories, we articulated and reaffirmed our beliefs in our visions of child care. Doing this supported an investigation of our present practices and led toward making changes to improve our practice. For the three participants this was a first opportunity to think, in sustained conversation, about how their individual histories were connected to their present day beliefs and practices. Through the exploration in conversation we began to see how we are shaped by our history as well as how we can shape it by retelling it. Further, we began to see ourselves as active agents who could take steps to improve our practice. I will use the participants' stories to help show that, on a practical level, we began to see ourselves as active agents in a system that presents us with many challenges.

Time and its relationship to genuine practice.

It is worth describing a little about the nature of the preschool environment in order to illustrate the immediate, systemic constraints felt by many early childhood practitioners. I will not be providing a full description or analysis of the wider social constraints within which child care rests. I will however be describing some of the immediate systemic constraints such as minimum requirements set to establish child care facilities within British Columbia.

These minimum requirements reflect and are embedded within a limited understanding about the needs of children and their caregivers in our society. Child care practitioners are often undervalued and underpaid which, in part, reveals a lack of understanding about the importance of the relationships and experiences young children develop in high quality child care.
facilities. It is within this complex context that I describe the basic parameters that direct the establishment of child care facilities.

Requirements established through local community health Boards regulate the space and teacher to child ratios that must be present in a child care facility. These are considered minimum requirements and should be taken as the starting point when creating child care facilities. However, the financial constraints of childcare, a user funded system for the most part, often work against the creation of higher standards. Funds are allotted to staff wages, benefits and general rent and utilities of buildings. Little funding is left to support the creation of larger, more fully-equipped spaces for children or to fund administrators to oversee the smooth functioning of the program. The lack of funding leaves much of the daily administration up to the child care practitioner in addition to her work with children. Yet child care practitioners are not being adequately recognized for the skills and knowledge they have developed.

Joanne's story depicts how her knowledge was not being adequately recognized. Like most not-for-profit child care facilities in the Lower Mainland, Joanne's facility was run by a parent Board which changed from year to year. Joanne had been at her facility for almost 25 years. She had come to know more about the operation of her facility than the parents and yet she and her coworkers were not involved in many of the decision-making processes even though they tried to share their ideas. The Board was struggling with how to maintain the program which was beginning to suffer from reduced enrollment. Board members no longer wanted so much responsibility. When it was decided by the Board that a new model for administering the Centre was needed Joanne's advice was ignored. She was told: "We are the Board. You are the employee. We are thinking about the good of the Centre" (C077, 98-12-07). This comment does not reflect the real role child care practitioners play in the lives of children or their role in the ongoing creation of facilities that are operated efficiently and with high standards.

Angela also shared her frustration with parent-run Boards. Angela noted that she was often put in the place of training the parents, many of whom reluctantly took on positions on the Board. Angela also had to deal with many of the administrative roles that went undone because of vacant positions on the Board. Angela said she felt lost in a system that neither supported nor recognized her ability to carry out the multiple roles she handles.

The role of the child care practitioner is considerable. Angela and other child care practitioners respond to the immediate needs of many children at once. Angela plans her program of activities to respond to the skills she feels the children need to learn. She keeps track of medical needs. She speaks with parents, bringing them into the daily activities of the program wherever possible. She keeps track of the
attendance and the related administrative tasks. This is a brief account of the multi-layered and time consuming nature of the child care practitioner's work. Developing strong relationships with children and their parents or with other early childhood practitioners when one must fulfill so many roles in so little time can be difficult.

Yet this struggle within their practice was an area where the participants chose not to focus their attention in the conversations. At our initial meetings they decided that the exercise of restating the confines of the administrative roles would be counterproductive to the development of ways of looking at how they could improve their practice. Joanne felt that the administrative function of her job takes her away from children "and that's not why [she] went into the field" (A320. 98-12-07). Rather than reworking her thoughts about administration, Joanne wished instead to focus her attention on reclaiming her connection to the children.

As the conversations developed I began to see how their administrative tasks were not in themselves difficult things for the participants. All the participants noted that they were good at being organized and successfully worked to develop team building strategies, just two of their functions as administrators. However, managing the daily tasks as administrators took them away from developing the kind of relationships they wanted to have with children and their families. Wien (1995) adds that often childcare and preschool programs have scheduled days that limit the children and teachers from becoming involved with one another. There is a rush to get to various aspects of the day such as teacher-directed circle times, play time inside and out and the routines of lunch, toileting and rest. Angela told the following story to illustrate her awareness of how these multiple tasks were taking her away from children. She said,

I have been paying attention to the business end of child care too much. I like that side of it but I now know more about the individual uniqueness of children. I have tried to concentrate on that. I have been short-staffed. Yesterday, as I was walking quickly to another part of the room a girl said that she missed me while I was away. I answered her but I didn't stop to talk. I wished I had stopped what I was doing to pick her up. It was a little voice in me that kept me up all night. I stopped to ask myself "was it so important to keep doing the beds or making lunch rather than picking her up and stroking her." I feel I have got into a rut. From now on what does one minute make in a busy day? (C331, 99-05-13).

Angela had developed a pattern for getting things done. It was through our conversation that Angela began to reacquaint herself with the needs of the child. She began to loosen her grip on
the need to have the maintenance tasks be so organized. Instead, she began to reflect on her desire to deepen her relationships with the children.

Joanne’s stories also show a desire to put into place ways that she could manage the administrative tasks without exchanging them for good relationships with children. Joanne felt that connection to children was the most important part of her practice and yet she did not have the time or the resources to help support this goal. She wished she had more time to spend with the quieter children. She also wished to become more connected to the children who required extra support. She explained one of the drawings in her visual journal that speaks to these gaps in her connection to the children.

I tried to do the drawing abstractly. With a spark. The dark shapes here are all the things that come between us and the children. It’s a miracle even that we get through to the child because there’s so many things in the way. What they bring to that day and what we bring to the day, and when it works it’s a rare occasion. That will last awhile. The actual times that it works real connection, doesn’t really happen that often. It’s a magical thing. That’s what I like about being a teacher and a learner....Teaching even when you teach a whole roomful of people, is always a one to one experience somehow. Learning, no matter how many students are around you depends on a spark or a connection between the teacher and the learner. It’s an instant of truth and recognition (B350, 99-01-04).

Joanne shared her desire to reconnect with children. She felt a great deal of loss because she was not able to make as many connections with children as she used to. She wanted more time and some organizational changes to help create these opportunities.

In the beginning of our conversations Joanne felt at a loss as to how to achieve her goal. She wanted to approach the parent Board but she felt there was limited time to share her concerns with them and she doubted the efficacy of such an action given a growing uneasiness in the relationship she and her coworkers were having with the Board. She began to question how she could be genuine with children when she felt so unsupported and at odds with herself and her employers who were also the children’s parents.

Joanne did not feel she could spend the time or energy in trying to reorganize the Centre to meet these goals. Instead she chose to find other employment. This was a difficult decision for her to make because she had had so many fond memories of the Centre. In the end, though, it was her desire to be true to herself and to children in general that prompted such a decision.
I also shared my thoughts about my struggle to be genuine in light of my ever-increasing responsibilities as an administrator. Most of my conversations revolved around my effort to work genuinely with the child called Rick in the Centre. I spoke of Rick in Chapter Two where I mentioned the pressure my coworkers and I were under to give him the kind of care he needed. I was resolved to spend more time with Rick to support him in learning to be more respectful in his play. However, because of the lack of time and my growing dislike for the added pressure I felt his behaviour was putting me under I began to seriously doubt my ability to work in his best interests. In a ten hour day he would need almost constant supervision in order to prevent injury to the other children. Further, I felt he was deepening his dislike for himself.

Months after my request for a support worker we received one who stayed with Rick for a four hour day once per week. During the six months she was with us the worker played with Rick to help him learn to control his angry outbursts and helped him learn other ways of playing with the children. She also spoke to us about how we could help him, and gave some support to the family as well. This was quite a task given the narrow time frame.

At first it was nice to be able to watch someone else work with Rick and it gave us a chance to relax a little. We studied how she responded to him and watched his reaction to her. The children also watched how she worked with him. Even though the support worker tried not to show her focus on Rick it seemed that everyone knew who she was there for and why.

As the weeks went by we began to see changes in some of Rick's behaviour. He began to look to the worker for support which showed he was starting to recognize when he was going to need help. However, the support worker's contract was almost ended and Rick was still showing signs of needing extra support. The time we had to watch and listen gave us the chance to see how we wanted to develop plans that would resonate with our desire to build the kind of community we thought best for the children; one that involved everyone in the decisions and plans. We began, most importantly, to involve the children in helping to make this a reality. Today Rick still has some problems working with others but we no longer see him as the centre of the problem. We now, more often than before, look to the children to help us solve the problems that arise.

As coworkers we were able to put these plans and our subsequent improved practices into place because of the increased time we had to engage in sustained, structured conversation with one another. To add to this I was also being influenced by my conversations with the research group. Bringing my thoughts about my practice to the group helped me think about how I wanted to be with the children. Having the time to discover and reflect on my practice with my coworkers and other child care practitioners in conversation continues to be important to how I think about my teaching.
Part of the development of the idea to incorporate the children in more of the decisions of the Centre revolved around the idea of respecting them as important members of the community of learners. Beth’s stories caused us to reflect upon how we were respecting others in our practice. In her stories, Beth wondered about the idea of respect. She felt that learning to respect others was not as simple as it first appeared, especially when there were differences of opinion. To Beth, it was not just a matter of agreeing to disagree. She wanted to learn how to really hear what others were saying and engage with them in conversation.

Beth presented us with one of the issues she was trying to understand. She was often asked what readiness activities she was developing to help the children prepare for school. Most of the parents narrowly defined readiness activities as formal instruction in reading and mathematics. However, because Beth had little time to talk with parents in order to understand parents’ perspectives, her ability to work toward shared understanding was limited. In speaking about her ability to engage in conversation openly with parents she said:

I can only do it [tell people what I think] with some people. Is that where respect is?...Where you know the boundaries?...I think people use the word without understanding the depth of the word. There’s so many different ways of respecting people’s feelings (B338, 99-02-12).

Beth knew that it was important to speak honestly with all parents but she was trying to learn how to engage with them in this way when there was so little time to hear their perspectives and share her own. She also felt there was so much she did not know about their thinking about their children and about child care in general. She found that she was more able to come to terms with the frustration she was feeling when she began to talk about and accept her feelings and the parents’ perspectives.

I was trying to understand their position because deep down their interests were for their children and they feel they are doing their best. We may not always like what they are doing. That’s sort of the respect thing. We need to try and look at what these parents are trying to do. We need to take ethnicity into account. There is a lot we don’t know (B160, 99-02-22).

In the beginning I noted that poor funding and administrative frameworks put a great deal of pressure on child care practitioners to fulfill a large array of functions. I have previously shared comments Angela made about the multi-layered nature of child care. I also shared Joanne’s stories.
about the difficulty in not being respected for her experience when she was interacting with the parent Board. Pressures such as these limit the kind of relationships we wish we are able to develop with the children and parents we serve. Working within such systemic constraints often placed us at odds with ourselves. The pressures and responsibilities often limited our ability to actively engage with others about how to remedy some of the problems we were facing.

Taking time for sustained, structured conversation added a new way for us to think about our work with children. One aspect of coming together was our ability to lay out our concerns to one another. We did this through a reconstruction of the events of our work in story form. As we told these stories of our lives we began to free ourselves from our desire to find immediate solutions. We were building an understanding of acceptance in order to learn where we should place our energies.

Joanne set herself free of the entanglements that were developing with her employers by talking about her frustrations. As she did this she began to accept the administrative situation as one that she could not change. Freeing herself from a focus on fixing the administrative problems helped her address her desire to be more connected with the children. Angela, through sharing stories of her administrative responsibilities, began to see that she was spending more time than she wanted on them. Angela began to set aside the pressure she was feeling about the multiple tasks of her day in favour of her relationships with children. Accepting that she did not have to do everything at once made her more aware of the childrens’ needs to be with her. I began to learn to accept Rick’s behaviour as an expression of his hurt by talking with the group members about my desire to fix him. As I learned to accept Rick I began to see that I could ask the children to play a larger role in learning ways to respond to his anger. As Beth shared her stories about her program she began to develop a greater awareness of the tension she was feeling about not having the time to engage with parents. As she spoke she began to accept the limited time she had with them. This led her to feel less stressed. She felt that this resulted in her developing greater capacity to enter into conversation with parents about their children. Thus, through our conversation, each of us began to realize that to set the pressures aside for a while in conversation, allowed us to see the pressures from other perspectives. When we accept our dilemmas or frustrations as things we cannot always fix right away as we’d like, we began to reacquaint ourselves with our desire to be more genuine with children, their parents and colleagues.

Acceptance means openness and an ability to consider alternative views and try to focus on the whole picture before setting a judgment to it. It does not mean resignation. In my case, acceptance meant that I gathered more information from the participants or the children in my care rather than thinking
that my views were enough to help me make decisions. I was aware of my beliefs but I tried to act on them only after having taken all ideas into my reasoned consideration.

Through our conversations, all of us believed we could be active agents in bringing about improvement in our practices in the political system within which we worked. While we at times felt limited in our actions, we were committed to developing a system that was more responsive to our own goals and the interests of children and families. Part of learning to accept means that we take the time to reflect on how we have been thinking about our role in particular problems. Just because we accept something does not mean the problems dissolve. It is important that we take the time to determine where we might best spend our energy and where we have to stop feeling that we have to be the solution to the problems.

Telling our stories in conversation helped us develop a greater awareness of the effects of the systemic constraints on our ability to practice in genuine ways. Before engaging with one another we felt the pressures of the ever-increasing demands of the administrative tasks we must complete. We also believed there was an increasing number of children who require more support than the current teacher-child ratios allow. But we had not fully articulated how these pressures were taking us away from being genuine with the children and their families. By engaging with one another we became reacquainted with our values and beliefs, the core of ourselves that led us into child care. Articulating these renewed our interests in becoming more genuine with ourselves and in our relationships with children and their families. The conversation prompted us to see ourselves as active agents in developing improvements in our own practice and in the system as a whole.

The next section will illustrate the need for child care practitioners to develop ways to engage with one another in sustained ways. In particular, it focuses on the need to reacquaint and retell our history. Through such a practice an articulation and reaffirmation of the values and beliefs that grew from our experiences can be explored and used to guide future practice.

Retelling our lives

Returning to the past is an important step for child care practitioners to take when looking at the present and planning for the future. Miller (1986, 1990) urges us to commit ourselves to an investigation of our personal histories. As we explored aspects of our histories in conversation, we began to hear one another reexamine and reaffirm the beliefs and values that brought us into child care. When these were articulated we were prompted to develop plans that further reflected those examined beliefs and values.

What follows is a description of some aspects of our histories in light of our present practices. I will share
Beth’s, Joanne’s, Angela’s and my own stories consecutively. Beth struggled with her desire to develop a child-centred program in light of personnel problems at her work site, feelings of teacher burn-out and a childhood history of feeling a lack of control and support. I then describe Joanne’s belief that children’s lives are being over-scheduled. Joanne wanted to bring back some of the spontaneity and creativity that she had experienced as a child and that she had known as a beginning teacher. Angela’s childhood had direct links to her current practices. By engaging with us in conversation Angela began to see where she could make changes in her thinking and in her practice while reaffirming her belief in her ability to make children feel special. My history as a coworker and a mother has also shaped how I practice today. My examination of the importance of my history, my coworkers, and my child reminded me of the need to be genuine in my practice. The stories show the importance of engaging with our personal history in light of our teaching beliefs. These stories also demonstrate a need for child care practitioners to engage with one another in sustained conversation about what they believe they are doing in order to improve their practice.

It is important for the child care practitioner to be connected to her beliefs and values. I made a claim in the previous section that there is little time to reflect on our practice given the multi-tasked nature of the work. I will now demonstrate that the sustained conversation we engaged in, helped us become reacquainted with our beliefs and values and that this was important in the improvement of our practice.

Beth.

As a teacher in a preschool setting, Beth works closely with one coworker. When the relationships between teachers are good it can make the program seem full of vitality but when those relationships break down it can make working together much more difficult. Subsequently, the teachers’ abilities to be genuine become strained. Over the last year Beth’s coworker of many years left the facility on poor terms. A replacement was found but this person has had a tremendous number of obligations in her life and this has often left Beth carrying much most of the responsibility and because of this Beth has begun to feel some teacher-burn-out.

To relieve these uncomfortable feelings she felt she needed to revitalize herself and her program and in doing so began to implement, directed by the enthusiasm of another preschool teacher, a child-centred program based on the methods begun in Reggio Emilia, Italy. This program relies on the teacher’s ability to observe children in their play and develop a curriculum that emerges out of the themes they raise. In this program, teachers and children construct knowledge together. Crucial to this program are the collaborative efforts of teachers and parents and time for teachers to converse with one
another.

There is difficulty in putting into place a Reggio Emilia-like program given the systemic constraints I have already discussed. There is often not enough time for teachers to engage with one another. Parents are often too busy to spend time in conversation with the teachers. Further, given the number of tasks a teacher must complete in a day, there is less time to do the kinds of observations necessary to discover the children’s interests. Developing a program that is intended to meet children’s interests remains important. In order for a program to be successful a complex set of plans need to be implemented. Two of these are a full examination of current practices and intended outcomes as well as plans for monitoring the program’s development.

Beth began to feel that she was not successfully meeting the needs of many of the children. She was feeling disconnected from them and she was not clear on her role within this new framework. Through our conversation she began to investigate her feelings about this in relation to her beliefs.

One of Beth’s beliefs is that children need to develop a balanced self-concept in order to feel successful and happy in life. She wanted them to involve themselves in play that would promote their self-esteem and that gave them a place where they could feel they had some control in the outcomes. She explored this belief through sharing some of her childhood history with us. She said

I remember the bomb site near my home in England with the bushes of lilacs or rhododendrons with all the junk in them. We used to build houses. Remember the biscuit tins? We made things with them. I remember watching out my window one night because I had to go to bed before the other kids. There was another girl stealing my stuff from my house to bring to her house. But there was nothing I could do about it....I also remember when I was four and I went to school....The first day we were shown where to hang up our coats. There were stickers above them and I picked one with the rose. The next day another boy came and took the hook with the rose. I remember trying to tell him. I didn’t succeed though. I have no idea where I put my coat after that. It was stuff like that that made me feel like I couldn’t do anything and my mother didn’t help either....She still says things like. “Why bother? You can’t do it.”....So I know what it feels like to feel inadequate (B175, 99-01-04).

Beth says, “that is why I feel so strongly about helping children to develop strong self-esteem. I want them to know they are loved and that they can do things” (B200, 99-01-04). Beth also wanted them to feel a sense of control in their lives,
something she did not often feel as a young child. As she told
the stories of the lack of control she felt in her life she
began to question where she was helping children to feel agency
in the preschool program. Beth felt that she had put the
present practices into place without completely exploring how
and why she wanted to do them. The intent to create a child-
centred program was guided by her training and her history.
However, she had not taken the time to engage with others about
how she would put it into place and why she was so willing to
give up her previous practices. She commented that “to buy into
a whole new way and make such drastic changes wasn’t going to
work” (C690, 99-04-12).

Through our conversation Beth began to examine her need for
control within the program. She began to wonder how she could
meet the needs of the quieter children whom she felt were being
neglected. She wanted to acknowledge her own style of teaching
(D029, 99-04-12). She decided to return to some of her previous
practices of planning so that she could feel a better sense of
connection to herself and the children saying, “now that I have
made a more purposeful choice about going back to the other way
I feel I can be more relaxed each day rather than trying to be
somebody I am not” (C135, 99-04-05). She felt this return to
herself helped her become more genuine in her relationships with
children, parents, and teachers alike.

In the stories Beth shared she told of becoming overwhelmed
by some personnel events that had taken place at her facility.
She was beginning to feel burnt-out as a teacher. She was also
carrying strong memories of a childhood that left her feeling a
lack of self-esteem. All these feelings and events prompted her
to put into place some current practices that she, through our
conversation, began to see as a little misguided. Through our
conversation she began to reexamine her strengths and her
beliefs which supported her to regain control of the kind of
program she felt would be best for the children and for herself.
In doing this she began to feel more able to be genuine in her
relationships with the children and with the parents.

Joanne.

Early in the research Joanne mentioned that she felt good
teachers often teach in ways they do because they want to undo
some of the past wrongs against children. She also said that
good teachers want to be like one of their favourite teachers to
reflect what they think good teachers do. Joanne told the
following story to help us understand that she thought good
teachers care for children and help children develop awareness
of multiple points of view. The story depicts a teacher who did
not have such skills. Joanne said that the impact of the event
made her feel how important it is not to treat children in such
disrespectful ways. She also said these memories help her focus
on developing relationships with children. The story also shows
Joanne’s belief in herself at an early age in such an unfair
situation:

I wrote down a memory of an event in grade four or five. We had to use our compasses and protractors and make a design and then colour it. I remember blending all the colours on top of the design. I remember mashing all the colours and blending them in over top of this very structured design. I thought it was beautiful. We came back after recess. My picture was put on the black Board with another child’s. I remember thinking, she recognizes how good it is. Then she started talking about it and I was just shocked because she was comparing my picture with the other child’s saying how correct his was. I remember feeling confused and physically sick. But I also remember thinking: she’s just wrong (A370, 99-01-04).

Joanne wished to develop a program where the children would play a part in the decisions about the content and execution of the curriculum. She wanted to help children recapture and explore the spontaneous and creative aspects of their characters. Joanne was feeling a great deal of loss for the past when she entered into conversation with us about children. She felt that there is tremendous pressure on children due to their lives being more scheduled and organized than they should be. She recalls her childhood with fondness when she speaks about the role her mother played in her development. Her present perspective on how children are being cared for is in sharp contrast to the visions she holds of the more spontaneous and creative childhood of her past.

In the beginning of Joanne’s conversations with us she spoke about her memories and beliefs with a sense of loss. As she engaged with us in conversation she was able to mourn and subsequently let go of the negative feelings she was experiencing. Through our conversation Joanne began to understand how a number of factors, such as her childhood experiences, her employment situation and her desire to recapture some of the experiences from the past with children, brought her to the point where she was reassessing her desire to continue teaching. In my journal I wrote about how the conversation was working to help Joanne think about what she wanted to do in her career. I wrote:

When Joanne first met with us she stated clearly that she wanted to talk about being genuine with children....As Angela talked about her relationship with her Board and as I did as well, Joanne began to open up more about her problems and feelings of not being listened to. I see Joanne as being a person who listens well to others and shares her ideas and opinions in open and non-threatening ways. She has acted this way with all of us....I think that hearing
some of the stories has given Joanne some sort of
permission to share her frustrations as well....The
subtle questions that are asked about her feelings and
about the events she is dealing with don’t seem to be
intrusive but stem from a real interest to care about
her. Beth shared some thoughts about the changes she
has experienced over the years as have Angela and I.
I think that by sharing our personal stories of what
we want for children and what we have been able to do
in the past has helped her think that it is not just
she who is feeling a sense of loss for the past but
that there is something more to it than that. I
wonder if my stories and those stories from the other
members about helping children to be more in touch
with their environment...has had an impact on
reaffirming what she wants to do in teaching....It
seems as though, as we progress through our
conversation she is less hesitant about articulating
what she wants to do. Maybe it’s because we all seem
to be less hesitant and more articulate as we talk
about what is important to us and reaffirm our
commitment to children (00-04-17).

Through our conversation Joanne was given the opportunity
to become reacquainted with her beliefs about children needing
more time in concentrated exploration of the world. She also
wanted more time in quiet talk with individual children. The
conversation provided her the opportunity to reexamine her
values within her present understanding of children and her
place in their lives. It also aided her in her decision to find
employment that might better allow for those beliefs to be
practiced. By the end of our conversations Joanne was preparing
to teach preservice child care practitioners at a local college.
She was looking forward to this experience and to working in a
preschool in September. It was a preschool that focused on the
arts so it was something that seemed to really respond to the
needs she talked about in the conversations.

Angela

When our conversation began Angela shared her personal
early childhood history openly. She said,

When I was really young I didn’t get that much love
and affection. I really wanted it but my mum couldn’t
give it to me. I guess it’s because she wasn’t
educated about how important it is....I don’t think my
mum liked being a mum....She had five kids....There
was never any touching in my family. I can never
remember my parents telling me that they loved me or
cared for me....My father’s job was to beat us when we
were bad. I remember the last time my dad was coming
after me to beat me. I had told my mum to be quiet because she was bugging me when I was trying to do my homework. She wanted me to clean the house. I locked myself in the bathroom. My sister came by and she said she would call the police if he hurt me. She got it instead. When we went to school the next day we did not say anything but the counselor saw and the Ministry for Children and Families came to our house. That night my mum took the newspaper and we found a clippings for domestic help by our beds. At 16 I would go to school during the day and then look after other people's children and clean their houses at night. So now you know why I want to be a good teacher and a good parent--because it was so terrible for me (A097, 99-03-29).

Later in series of conversations Angela said that revisiting her history helped her reflect on the impact it has had on her present teaching practices. She remarked, "it is clear to me now that how I teach is because of how I grew up" (D315, 99-01-25). She said she always knew how important touch was in her practice; that to cradle children when they needed her was one of the most important and best things she could offer them. Retelling these stories helped her rethink how much importance she had been placing on the administrative tasks of her work. Once she had been reminded about the importance of giving her time to the children she began to rethink the way she spent her time in the facility.

Further to the thoughts about how she was spending her time in her work, Angela began to explore how she was supporting the children to feel a sense of agency which she also felt was important for them to learn. She said,

I have been noticing my practice more. I seem to interrupt [the children] when they are in conflict. I started to ask myself and the staff questions that would help us explore why this was happening. I said let's think about it and decide what we want to do about it. Let’s look at what the children might be thinking or feeling. Let’s do this for the next few days and then let’s look at what we want to do....I don’t want to look at what’s right or wrong, but I want to look at what’s working for the children (A121, 99-05-13).

Angela was beginning to reconsider what she was doing with children in light of her growing understanding of her beliefs which were articulated through her exploration of her history in our conversation. She had begin to think less in term of what she thought was "black and white" and "right and wrong" as the previous quote implies. She was beginning to think more about alternative viewpoints and being more open to other ideas that
might differ from her own and to use these views to inform her practice. She still felt that some ways were right and other wrong when working with children. For example, she said it was right to help children develop a sense of independence in the facility and that it was wrong to let a child cry when a parent left in the morning. However, she was more open to exploring these ideas by sharing why she felt these things and asked what others thought in order to reflect more broadly about her beliefs. She said her practice was improving because of her reflection into, and reexamination of, her personal history and present practices throughout our conversations. The following are excerpts from my journal,

Angela has changed considerably in the way she enters into conversation with us....She seems to be questioning her thinking more than when we started the group....She also started to talk about places she could rethink her actions at work where she was not as proactive as she wanted to be in helping children understand issues of stereotyping....It seems as though in our busy lives of teaching there is not enough time to sit and be heard. It reminds me of the importance of providing space for people, as well as myself, to share our thinking about our practice (99-03-17).

Angela had some good experiences in school that she currently draws on to help her be a good teacher and that add another dimension to her experiences as a young child. She says,

My sisters were all making fun of me and chasing me around a tree. I was supposed to start grade one and was scared I might get the horrible teacher I had heard about. I wanted my friend and I to get a nice teacher. I was lucky. I got [teacher's name] and she was very nice to me. My friend got the mean teacher. I remember on the last day all the report cards were being given out and I was asked to stay behind. I wondered what I had done and why I might be in trouble. Then [the teacher] gave me a doll. She smiled at me. Still to this day I don’t know why I got it but it made me feel special. That’s why I give the kids a special cake on their last day. I want them to feel special (A120, 99-01-04).

Angela’s stories help us understand that one uses stories of sadness and stories of joy to inform teaching practice. Our memories impact us as teachers. When special people in our lives made us feel special we carry those feelings with us. In Angela’s case, she shared these special memories and experiences with children by trying to do the same for them.

85
I have learned much about my practice by engaging in conversation with other child care practitioners. My coworkers and I have shared many stories of our histories with one another. Often after we have shared memories of our childhood we wonder what memories we are helping to create for the children in our care. One of my coworkers, after attending a conference with me, wrote a poem about her growing awareness of the impact she was having on many children as she worked with them over the years. She noted the small moments that we sometimes overlook in our rush to do so many things in a day. When I read her poem I had the chance to think about and once again celebrate the experiences I have gained from working with such conscientious women who care about their work and about the children. I was reminded of the gift of themselves that they give me as they share there joys, worries and goals with me as we talk in conversation. I am honoured to have been able to share with them part of myself too. I enjoy sharing with them my personal history as well as my current dreams for myself and the children in the Centre.

As I engaged with the participants I drew on these experiences to inform how to enter into conversation as a researcher, participant and, in some cases, leader. I spent time before and during the research, thinking about what stories I wanted to share about what it meant to respond genuinely to my need to be the best teacher I could be. I shared the sensual remnants of my childhood, my memories of moments I have made an impact on a child, and my experiences of motherhood to inform the kind of relationships I want to build with children and their families. I recalled, in story form, my childhood memories of walking on the beach feeling the sand between my toes and the cold, hard floor of my first kindergarten room. I remember the time I made eye contact with a child who had just witnessed the beauty and fragility of a dandelion in seed when we were out on a field trip. I remembered, and wrote in my journal, about the time I washed my son Liam’s blueberry-stained hands and breathed in the scent of the precious moment in time. All these memories moved within me and reminded me of the need to be genuine in all my relationships and in responding to my call to be a teacher. At one meeting I told the participants a story which I had illustrated and written about in my visual journal. I told it as a way to express my desire to continue to be curious and thoughtful in my teaching. I paraphrase my speaking and my journal entry here:

I remember a particular lesson by a teacher when I was about 11 years old. Without much introduction, the teacher asked the class what things controlled their lives. I remember a lot of giggling but not many answers. I thought of many events in my life which I felt were problematic and which unnecessarily
controlled me but I could not think of something that would affect all the kids in the class. Later, he quietly responded “traffic lights.” I remember many of the kids in the class laughing but I sat there, struck by the simplicity of the answer. His question had raised many more questions for me. I began to feel as though I had been sleep-walking up until he had asked me that question. To this day I remember the feeling I had at that moment of having my eyes opened.

When I told the story I wondered what the others thought about it. It seemed as though they did not know what to make of me or my story. They did not really respond and they didn't seem to add their own similar stories to the telling. I think that this is what happens in conversations sometimes. People give us the chance to speak and we share some things that serve mainly to help us rethink, reaffirm or re-witness our memories. This is a gift that we give when we enter into conversation with others and a gift that we take as well. I told the participants that this is one of the guiding stories I use in my life when I teach and when I enter into conversation with others. I remember to try to ask the questions that might help me learn about things I have taken for granted. I also remember to give others as much time as possible to think about the answers, and in some cases, to be patient when there are no answers to give. I also remember it as a way to learn that sometimes we do not know the impact we are having on others and to treat others well in any case. I wonder if the teacher knew what kind of connection he made with at least one of his students that day. His question continues to be reflected in my thinking even today as I wonder what I am taking for granted.

Summary

In the first section of this chapter I claimed that there are systemic constraints on the child care practitioner that limit her from practicing in genuine ways. The multidimensional nature of the work and the lack of time to complete all there is to be done presents the practitioner with many dilemmas. The child care practitioner has little time to reflect on the kinds of relationships she is developing with the children and their families. However, time to engage in reflection with others is essential to good practice.

Through our conversation we learned that it did us little good to worry about or become exasperated by the poor conditions under which we often worked or the problems that were bothering us. When we practiced a reasoned acceptance of these events in our lives we created room for the strength of our commitment to become more evident. Once we recognized the strength and commitment we shared we were buoyed by the agency we each, and collectively, represented. We could then spend our energy
fixing things that we had a chance of repairing.

Our agency was further recognized when we shared our histories with one another. When we retold the events of our lives we began to see how we shape our history as well learn how it has shaped us. Beth made a reasoned choice to return to her previous practices when the newer practices she was trying were not helping her to be genuine. Joanne left her present employment in search of a place where she could make her beliefs a reality. Angela both reaffirmed and reconsidered her practices in light of an exploration of her beliefs through a recounting of her history. I was reminded to celebrate the lessons I have learned from my childhood memories, my coworkers and my child.

These stories prompt me to critique our training as early childhood educators. We were given little preparation on how to deal with the multi-task nature of our work. A focus on what activities to plan and how to discipline children is not enough to prepare us for the work. We were not taught how to keep the children’s interests and needs at the centre of our thought amid often chaotic days and competing interests. We spent less time than we would have liked reflecting in community about our beliefs and values that guide what we do with children. Much of early childhood practitioner training does not promote discovering the knowledge we have within ourselves. Entering into sustained, structured conversation can be one step toward helping us overcome these limited training experiences.
Chapter Six

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter describes the benefits and challenges of sustained, structured conversation as the four of us engaged in the topic of genuine practice. In particular, this chapter focuses on the potential benefits of such support networks for teaching and ways to develop such conversations. There is an overemphasis on curriculum development within child care practitioners' training in comparison to training on how to develop supportive relationships with children and others. Practitioners face many obstacles once they complete their training and begin work in child care facilities. One of these is a lack of time to reflect on their role as educators of young children.

My interest and understanding of genuine practice in my work as a child care practitioner led me to think that it could provide the beginnings of a discussion into ways of being with children. I thought that this topic might add balance to the overemphasis on curriculum that I had been familiar with in and after my training. The participants said they wanted to pursue the topic because it was new to them and worth exploring.

The topic of genuine practice drew the participants' attention to thinking about what they knew about relationships in their teaching and what they thought was important in teaching. They drew on their personal histories to help inform their thinking.

As I outlined in previous chapters, I have used my 20 years of practice to inform the research process. I have also used a wealth of literature to help me understand the data. What follows is a description of the findings from this research into sustained, structured conversation. I will begin by addressing my questions about sustained, structured conversation, and follow this by addressing my questions about genuine practice. I will end this chapter by providing recommendations for further research.

Before I address my guiding research questions on the benefits and challenges of sustained, structured conversation it is important to reiterate the definition. Sustained, structured conversation is the act of entering into conversation with others on a regular basis about a specific topic or topics mutually agreed upon by the members of the group. The point of the conversation is to develop relationships with one another. Through these relationships each person seeks to listen to, share, honor, explore and question knowledge through stories of our experiences as teachers and learners. Sustained, structured conversation is not limited to learning about theories that others have developed so that we can integrate them into our work (although this might happen at times). It is not limited to deliberating upon competing views. Sustained, structured conversation, offers a way to reconstruct and reinterpret our
experiences, improve our self-image as teachers, and reconstruct our personal knowledge of teaching to improve our practice. In order to understand the particulars of these benefits of sustained, structured conversation I return to the research questions.

1. **What is the potential role of sustained, structured conversation in child care practitioners’ teaching?**

   Specifically,
   
   a) How can sustained, structured conversation support communication among child care practitioners?
   
   b) How can sustained, structured conversation contribute to child care practitioners’ knowledge about teaching, children and the self in relation to others?
   
   c) How can sustained, structured conversation improve relationships with children?
   
   d) What are some of the problems associated with sustained, structured conversation?

In the following paragraphs I address the five separate sub questions although not in order of their appearance because of the overlap of responses and my desire for a more fluid description.

Sustained, structured conversation contributes to child care practitioners’ knowledge about the importance of good relationships with others. The relational aspects of teaching were very important to all the participants. As I have already mentioned in previous chapters Beth, Joanne and Angela drew attention to the isolation and loneliness they experienced as supervisors within their child care facilities saying that although they tried to work as a team in their work sites there was always the added pressure that they were the ones finally responsible for the program. They all stated how important the conversation was to them because it helped them feel less lonely and isolated.

The participants involved themselves in the research because they said they wanted to have a chance to rethink their practice with others. I have a good relationship with my coworkers and we talk with one another about our work on a regular basis. However, I also needed to broaden my relationships with other practitioners from outside my work place. I wanted to share my thinking, listen to others share theirs and talk about specific concerns I was having difficulty understanding. My coworkers were readily available and helpful but I felt I needed to move outside this circle to gather more perspectives. As I shared my experiences with the participants about one of the children I was having difficulty supporting, they helped me learn how I wanted to be with the child and how I thought I might better meet his needs. They gave me their attention and their time by listening to me with care. They also gave me their questions and shared their stories of similar experiences which helped me think about things in different
Beth spoke about the need to meet with others from outside her workplace in addition to being able to talk with her coworkers. She said that she could speak with her coworkers about things but there was not the time to talk with them at length. She also said that it was nice to get to know people with varied perspectives. Angela also said that it was important to meet people from outside her work site because "it's easier to talk with people from outside of work. That way you don't have all the history with the people you work with" (A515, 99-05-10, interview). The group, being a new group of acquaintances for Angela, provided her with the space to think and talk about her practice in new ways. However, her comment that the group did not have all the history was striking because soon our group too had a history and one that we needed to acknowledge as time went on.

Sharing ideas with other practitioners from outside work was important to developing our ideas about our teaching. Angela spoke of the importance of play in children's lives. In one conversation as she was leaving to go home she said "play is a child's work." I told her I wondered how it came to be that play was not thought of as important in itself in order to be thought of as important. Later, in our interview, Angela spoke to me about this idea. She said she had not thought about some of the things she said as carefully as she wanted to. The statements have become commonplace just as ideas of what makes quality child care have become standard and uncriticized (Moss & Pence, 1994). Angela said that it was important that she shared her ideas with us because she had taken some things for granted. She said, "I felt supported because of the questions that you asked...the stories also helped me think about things differently" (A011, 99-05-10, interview). She added, "I was more aware in my practice. I was always sensitive to the children but I was even more aware because of the conversation" (A192, 99-05-10, interview).

Angela experienced a change in her ideas about boys' and girls' characteristics. The conversation raised her awareness about stereotypes and this thought led her to be more open-minded about foster-parenting a boy where she had only asked for a girl. She now foster-parents a boy and she is thankful that the conversation opened her awareness to the possibility when she had overlooked it before.

The conversation also helped her assess how she was supporting the girls and boys in various play spaces in the facility. She started to think about how she could encourage the parents to understand that boys need to play more dress up games "because that is how they understand their world" (A610, 99-04-12) and how she could get the girls more involved in the block corner. Angela has reflected upon her ideas and broadened her understanding about stereotyping children. She attributes some of her growth to the conversation she had with the group members.
Joanne’s connection with the group members helped her think about her work situation and how it was hindering her from teaching in the ways she wanted to teach. She often spoke about her desire to bring some spontaneity back into her practice. She spoke of her inability to do this because of the amount of one-to-one work she was doing with a child who required extra support. As the meetings progressed Joanne had an opportunity to reflect on her values and beliefs about children and her relationship to them. She spoke of wanting to build greater connections with children but how it was difficult with so many things in the way. Through our conversation she explored what the past meant to her and what the future held for her in teaching. She said

I went through a kind of grieving of the way parents and kids used to be. Now I’ve let go of these ideas because things are the way they are and I have to accommodate them because things aren’t going to go back to the way they were....I’m not having as much fun as I used to....I think teaching [adults] will give me a new thing to do (B344, 99-04-05).

Earlier I wrote about Beth’s expressed wish to meet with practitioners from outside her work site. The conversation supported Beth as she spoke about and came to terms with her teaching. As I have talked about in Chapter Two, Beth tried to follow the lead of one of her coworkers who was attempting to implement a type of Reggio-Emilia program. But she had not adequately thought about her reasons for wishing to do this. As Beth spoke with us she said that she realized how much she needed some structure in the day. She said that sometimes change does not always mean improvement. Before we had met in conversation Beth had not shared her discomfort about her teaching and the delivery of her program with many people, particularly not in a sustained way. There had not been the time or the people at work to develop such conversation. Beth was shouldering much of the responsibility for the administration of the program even though her ideal was to have all of the staff work together more effectively and equally. Because of the conversation Beth was able to achieve a greater sense of purpose in her teaching and she said she became better connected to the children she taught.

The stories I have shared throughout this thesis demonstrate that sustained, structured conversation contributes to child care practitioners’ knowledge about teaching, children and the self in relation to others. Beth learned that teaching was not a matter of putting new program ideas into place. Angela learned about the importance of articulating and reflecting upon her ideas about children and childhood. Joanne reaffirmed the importance of good relationships in her life. I learned about my need to articulate my thoughts to others especially when I am feeling as though I am failing to support a
child or the children in the centre. In so doing I was able to increase my understanding and my ability to be more genuine in my responses to the children.

Such improvement in our ways of thinking about practice was possible because of the dedication that each person brought in conversation. Each of us was dedicated to the time frame of the research and to giving one another our attention in each conversation. Each person asked me questions with care. They also asked one another questions in the same way. As such, I did not feel attacked. The other participants said the questions stimulated their thinking so that they "questioned the whole thing [what child care is]" (C300, 99-05-13). To have felt attacked would have shut our thinking and the conversation down. Our stories of our experiences lent themselves to being borrowed as knowledge of other ways of doing things and as such they proved helpful.

These stories also demonstrate that the sustained, structured conversation supported us in building networks that were not in place before we met. Joanne said "the isolation in our work, the many roles we play and the lack of time means we cannot give support to one another....We lack this kind of group in our field....I have enjoyed the other round table discussion groups but this group has given me more time to connect with others....I feel more connected" (C281, 99-05-13). Joanne's comment signals the uneasiness I feel about ending the research even though I know that this is what I need to have happen. The problem with ending the conversation at the end of the research is that each person felt a sense of loss and wondered where they would get future support. There is still a lingering feeling of loss for me at this time and recently Joanne and I have spoken about starting a conversation group that would gather together to talk and make a quilt about our practice. After the thesis is ended we will begin to develop this idea further.

Even with such plans the idea of ending the research in the midst of such feelings of loss makes me wonder about the trust that we gain as researchers when we enter these relationships through our research. Joanne said, "I felt so vulnerable in my work and I benefited from the support and the trust in the room" (C320, 99-05-13). How, as a researcher, do I honourably respond to such sentiment in words and practice? One way I have attempted to respond is by taking into account the participants' sense of trust they have in me to present them as people who are doing their best to learn about their teaching and the children with whom they work. Specifically, I recognized my weaknesses in my practice and wrote about them. I also wrote about how the participants struggled with issues within their own practice. I wrote about their strengths and their learning. I hoped to present them in their best interests while being true to my scholarly obligations. I wanted to respond respectfully and thankfully for the time and commitment the participants gave to the research and to me personally.

I have mentioned that dedication to the conversation and
ability to respect the developing level of trust amongst the members was very important to the outcome of the conversation. If we had not given each other our attention and care we would not have been able to share our thinking as easily. Because each member appreciated the need for confidentiality and respect we were able to talk openly. The most important aspect of our conversation was the practice of empathy with one another. When we were empathetic with one another we were each able to talk about our concerns and our failures. Sharing our problems could have posed a large problem had the members not been sensitive and caring. Therefore, as a researcher and as a participant, each person must be confident that they have the trust and confidentiality of the group when they enter into sustained, structured conversation. They must be committed to valuing the developing relationship and supporting the development of trust.

There are some problems associated with sustained, structured conversation. Generally speaking, there is a lack of time for practitioners to engage with one another on a sustained basis. Over the course of less than one year early childhood practitioners complete an intensive training program where they must have a firm grasp of the skills necessary for the work they will do with young children. The shortness of time leaves limited opportunities for sustained conversations about important topics such as relationships with children. There is also a limited amount of time for practitioners to get together at their work sites to engage in sustained conversation. To ask practitioners to gather together after work hours is also difficult because most are women who have many other responsibilities.

Another barrier to developing sustained conversations is related to economic reasons. There are limited financial resources for governing bodies of individual facilities to pay for practitioners to engage with one another on a regular basis. Most child care facilities are primarily supported through user fees. While these fees are still too high for many parents to afford and are causing other families financial hardship, they are still too low to pay for costs other than practitioner basic wages.

A further barrier to sustained, structured conversation can be a social and emotional one. Learning to engage with one another in open and trusting ways is not something that everyone is able to do. Some people need to learn skills such as refraining from giving advice and listening in order to engage with others and be supportive in conversation. If sustained conversation is forced on anyone it will not have the same kind of benefits. It is difficult to imagine that most preservice or practicing practitioners would be against such a method for learning but there are always a few people in every group who have a different way of learning. These different ways should be recognized for their own benefits as well. However, we should not limit our willingness to try new ways of teaching and learning.
These problems or barriers to sustained, structured conversation are within a political framework that does not value conversational styles of learning as highly as is necessary to help people become a community of learners. However, if small groups begin such processes than they are likely to begin to show how productive they can be.

Having described the benefits and challenges to sustained, structured conversation it is important to turn to the other part of my research which is to address the topic of genuine practice. I remind the reader of the research questions for this topic. They are,

2. How is genuine practice characterized in child care?
Specifically,
   a) How do participants characterize genuine practice?
   b) Which of these characterizations has the most to recommend it as an ethically appropriate ideal for guiding practitioner reflection?
   c) What hinders genuine practice?
   d) What problems might come with engaging in genuine practice?

As I said at the outset, my goal was not to give a definitive description of genuine practice. It is something I continue to learn about in my work with children and think is important but it is not where I wanted to concentrate my energies in the research. We could not fully investigate this topic over the course of the nine conversations. However, we began to learn about its meaning and it is this meaning that I will share.

In my introduction I said that child care practitioners are well versed in talking about quality within child care. I restate that Moss (1994) writes, "in its mantra-like repetition, the word [quality] is in danger of being rendered meaningless" (p.1). I wanted to draw awareness to an aspect of quality child care without focusing on the concept of quality. Good relationships with children are an important element in developing quality programs for children (Langsted, 1994). I did not want the word 'genuine' to replace the word 'quality'. The word 'genuine' drew our attention to our relationships with others. Through our conversation with one another we increased our awareness of being genuine with others. The genuineness we experienced from one another in the group prompted us to think about the kinds of genuine relationships we said we wanted to build with children.

In my introduction I wrote that genuine practice occurs when a practitioner is present to the child and acts deliberately to reflect and make wise choices that honor her personal knowledge of the world in relation to the the child or children she is trying to support. I said that when genuine practice occurs in teaching, the teacher integrates her personal history, the knowledge she gains from it, and the scholarly
knowledge she has experienced with the child she is teaching. I also said that the participants described genuine practice as the act of "being me" as they learned about and met the needs of children.

The participants also said they knew when they were not being genuine. Beth spoke of it when she said she was feeling out of place with the way she was organizing the program. She said was trying to be someone she was not (C106). Joanne also said she did not like the way she was handling the problems she was having with one of the children in her care. She knew she was not being true to herself but she did not have the time or the support network at work to help her think about how to come to terms with the problems she was facing. She said she was feeling disconnected from herself and from the children. Joanne said

"teaching children takes more than just skills to develop their cognitive abilities. There is a whole social and emotional area that needs attention. Some people are more able to meet these needs than others...that is why it is so important to be a team when working with children (A525, 99-04-12)."

I agreed with Joanne to some extent when I said that there might be a disposition to being genuine and caring in teaching. But I also think that learning to be genuine is possible with support. I think that with discussion, practitioners can learn where they are being overly technocratic in their relationships with children. They might also explore their relationships with children and ponder how children want to be cared for.

When we began our conversation about genuine practice we all agreed that it was about "being me". It was our lack of a more developed understanding that led us to thinking about how we could increase our knowledge of it. I said that thinking about my history as a learner provided me with insight about my current practice. I said that my personal exploration had helped me develop my understanding of genuine practice as a political act. I described my childhood as silencing and at times hurtful and said I did not want to repeat these ways with the children in my care. Through my reading (e.g. Miller, 1990, 1986) and my reflection I investigated where I was perpetuating ways of teaching and learning that were not helpful to children in my care. I developed my understanding of genuine practices as acts of resistance and acts of love. My genuine practices are motivated by the uneasiness I feel about certain social and political pressures that succeed in oppressing many children. One of these is how we under support children to become thoughtful, feeling and expressive individuals. Another is that children are often taught that individualism is more important than interdependence. Thus, I see genuine practices as a resistance to the replication of my personal history of silencing and hurt, a chance to live my life as a whole person.
and to teach children they too can relate with others in genuine ways. I believe that to act in this way is to improve the self and education in its wake.

We did not all describe genuine practice in the same way but I believe we began to understand its importance more as we talked about our history. Talking about our history was purposeful. It was not about reopening old wounds strictly to seek one another’s care although this is an important aspect of letting those wounds heal. Talking about our history helped us explore our beliefs about childhood and caring for children. Joanne said that the conversation helped her realize this and she has talked about it with her adult students. She said “we come to teaching with so much prior knowledge. It’s a challenge to get students to talk about their knowledge, but we need to do it because it helps them learn about what kind of centre they would want their children to be in” (B645, 99-05-13). When we made our prior knowledge, beliefs and values explicit we looked at how we wanted to respond to these in our practice.

Angela’s stories about her awareness that children need love and affection were important for her to share because in doing so she began to rethink the time she was having to spend on administrative tasks and which, while she enjoyed them, they took her away from the children. When she talked about returning to the children by spending more time with them she was critically analyzing her own practice. Her stories of her history also helped me reflect on ways I had been taught and significant events that have shaped who I am. By sharing some of these stories in return I showed how much I respected her trust in me and how important it was for me to also learn from my experiences.

Joanne also characterized genuine practice as the act of “being me.” She understood it in terms of being “connected.” Through her stories, Joanne was reconnecting to herself. It is easy to see why Joanne was doubting herself. She was facing a great deal of turmoil at her centre; that is, low enrollment, staff who were feeling ill, a system that is not fully developed to meet the needs of children who require extra support, and a lack of understanding by the parent Board about her knowledge of the child care facility. There appeared to be a large gap between how Joanne viewed the role of the parent Board and the role they were taking. There was little time for them to develop a more mutually supportive relationship given how these administrative roles are structured. These factors contributed to Joanne’s uneasiness about her present teaching, saying that she was not having as much fun any more. Working with the children in spontaneous ways was something she wanted to do and the reason she chose to continue with child care rather than teaching high school, for which she is also trained.

Joanne said that it was not appropriate for the children to see her sad all the time but neither did she want to dismiss or hide her feelings. It may have been helpful if Joanne had been able to work things out more collaboratively with her parent
Board and if she had been able to get the support she needed for the children who required extra support. In this way she would not have left things so unsaid and she and the parent Board could have learned from the conversation. However, because of the structure of the administration/staff roles this did not happen. I think this is why Joanne feels so strongly about the helpfulness of the conversations we had as a group. She wrote,

I was afraid that I came across as a bit of a 'whiner' as I first read this [chapter on participants], but of course I realize now that our meetings took place during the most difficult time of my teaching career to date. So if I sound negative I guess it’s with good reason. I also realize how valuable these conversations were to me, not just to analyze and construct meaning about the work we do, but in my case, as an emotional and professional support during a stressful time. I am much happier now. Thank you again for creating such an opportunity (2000-03).

It was important for Joanne to develop trusting relationships. When she trusted us she felt comfortable sharing her feelings and her dreams about working with children. She was also given a chance to articulate her skills and celebrate them with us. This helped support her morale and assisted her in finding the courage to leave her job and find others that were more suitable to allow her to be the kind of teacher she wanted to be.

Angela also had concerns about the management of her facility. It too was operated by a parent Board, but rather than having parents who wanted to take control of the facility, she found it difficult to find parents who wanted the positions. Those who did take the positions were often not qualified to fulfill the obligations and she was left either training the parents or doing the jobs in addition to her work at the centre. She was comfortable doing the work but, like Joanne, was not being recognized for her commitment and knowledge. Angela’s stories showed the importance of respecting people’s contributions and according appropriate recognition. Angela continues to give of herself to the facility. There were times when she felt frustrated and angry with the way the parents treated her. She said that the parent Board system is inefficient because parents can often not afford the time and often do not have the skills to operate a facility effectively. Even though she often completed many of the functions that would otherwise have been a Board responsibility she was not recognized for her efforts. The multi task nature of her work coupled with a lack of acknowledgement for her roles and responsibilities led her to feel as though there was not enough time to be with the children.

I have previously quoted Angela as saying that she needed to slow down and take more time with the children. The conversation supported Angela’s awareness of her belief in being
connected physically and emotionally to children. She noted that the conversation helped support her thinking and prompted her to connect more often to other child care practitioners with whom she can share her ideas.

Because of a lack of time in our conversations we did not discuss the potential problems of engaging in genuine practices with children. We focused on the benefits for children and for ourselves. However, I can make some comments from my own experiences. At the outset I said that genuine practices are acts of resistance. Whenever I encourage and support children to be connected to their feelings and to say what they think should happen in their day I set in motion a challenge to the order that has been established, particularly by adults. To look at something simple, if I respond to a child who says that she doesn’t want to eat her lunch, I might wonder if I have made the lunch period a pleasant time for her. I might ask myself what else is going on in the room that is distracting her from eating and wonder how I can create a way for her to see that all that she wants to do can be done if we set up a different schedule for it. At the same time I might recognize that she might not be hungry and I tell her that she knows how to listen to her body and she should eat when she is ready to eat. I watch throughout the rest of the day and sometimes ask her if she has had anything to eat yet and if she is hungry. Then her parents come to get her at the end of the day they are very disappointed in the child for not eating and are even more disappointed in me not getting her to eat her lunch. I share my reasons with the parents but they do not see the situation the same way. I share some of their concerns as I have often had them with my own son who at times has gone without food for longer than I think is healthy. I might try to understand if there are other social or cultural issues that I might not be recognizing or know about. But since the parents and I cannot agree about letting her eat when she is hungry I tell them that I will watch to see what is going on each day and send a record home of my observations. I agree to sit with her at lunch and see if this helps her eat more. It is in these small dilemmas that we realize the potential problems of bigger genuine acts such as allowing a child to express her anger or sadness rather than hiding it or encouraging children to speak out about the policies that affect their lives. Each situation has to be thought out carefully with attention to the ramifications for the child and the teacher and the family. Most importantly, it points to the need to develop conversational relationships with all people—children, coworkers, parents, administrative bodies and policy-makers.

What I have shown is that sustained, structured conversation has the potential to help practitioners build relationships that can influence and support them in their lives. A lack of trusting relationships with other practitioners limits the kind of conversation that can support improved practice. Without trusting relationships it is
difficult to imagine becoming aware of our tacit knowledge, questioning our assumptions about common practice, reawakening and addressing the values and beliefs that underpin our practice, and generating ideas that will help us improve our practice. Conversation about genuine practice asks us to address ways we teach and how we are encouraging children to become thoughtful, caring members of society.

It is important that we personally and collectively negotiate for time to put sustained, structured conversation into our practice. Through such efforts we can learn how to articulate our thinking about childhood and children. We can use our alliances with one another and our collective wisdom to inform upcoming programs and policies. Governments are spending more time talking about the need for all children to experience quality child care. We need to be able to articulate what we know so that we can make our voices heard.

It is also important for us to develop ways to put sustained, structured conversation into our plans for professional development. The current strategies for professional development are lacking in scope. Twelve hours of course work and 500 hours of practical experience over a five year period are not adequate to maintain a license to practice. Course offerings through local colleges can be helpful but they often do not meet the needs of many people and often do not go beyond classes on curriculum planning. We need to begin to take control of our own professional development by building relationships with one another. Through these relationships we can learn about other ways of teaching and we can investigate our own thinking. One step in supporting us to do this is by granting such collective groups credit toward their license for their time spent in conversation.

This research has been a rewarding experience for me. Through it I had the opportunity to meet with three other dedicated practitioners. I also had opportunity to think through, in a disciplined way, my thinking about sustained, structured conversation, genuine practice and the role I think conversation can play in my professional development. My work on the quilt has given me the opportunity explore other ways of knowing and representing knowledge. However, there is much yet to be done, as I will now note in the following recommendations.

**Recommendations**

This research points to the need for child care facilities to provide the financial means for child care practitioners to begin sustained, structured conversation. It would be beneficial to begin these conversations within work sites in order to help practitioners build the conversational relationships needed to improve the ways services are provided for children and their families. Further, practitioners should be given paid release time to begin to develop conversational relationships with other practitioners from outside their
facilities to help remedy the loneliness and isolation felt by practitioners. While funding may be a large barrier to sustained, structured conversation within a facility, it should be recognized as an opportunity for professional development and become part of the list of priorities for fiscal spending.

This research also points to the need for sustained, structured conversation to be used more often in the training of child care practitioners and to have this training be more broad in perspective. The focus on curriculum, especially when it is mainly offered in technocratic ways, allows the misconception that learning is mainly a process of transmission to persist. Rather, when preservice child care practitioners and instructors are encouraged to listen to one another and share what they know, they can begin to challenge existing modes of learning while also constructing knowledge.

There are many barriers to these recommendations. The work of the child care practitioner is often undervalued both politically and socially. There is little political will to place child care issues at the top of spending agendas. Many people do not fully understand the role of the child care practitioner or the importance of quality programs in children’s lives. It will be important for all those who care about children to make their voices heard in order to improve this current understanding.

A lack of time is also a barrier to the development of sustained, structured conversations. Basic training courses are generally little more than ten months long. During this time, as I have previously mentioned, child care practitioners are expected to learn a multitude of skills. Once again this comes back to a lack of funding necessary to make these courses longer in duration.

A lack of time is also experienced by those in child care facilities. There are many tasks that need to be completed each day and given the lack of adequate release time for professional development there is little one can do to upgrade one’s knowledge about children and teaching.

Also, learning to engage in conversation is not as easy as sitting together to talk. Participants in conversations must learn, over time, some basic skills such as the ability to listen attentively, refrain from giving advice, and learn how to express one’s position. Entering into conversation therefore takes skills and a disposition toward it. Conversation cannot be forced on anyone. However, preservice child care practitioners as well as those already practicing should become familiar by association with such groups so as to learn the benefits of conversing together.

I hope that those wishing to try to implement sustained, structured conversation will not be overwhelmed by the potential barriers. As can be seen in this research, there are those who wish to develop their understanding of children and teaching through this method. We each come with a wealth of experiences to share. We need to begin conversations to see where we can
support others to begin to construct additional understandings of the vital work child care practitioners do with children and their families.

I close this thesis with a story. My purpose is twofold. One, I have taken up a great deal of space in this thesis describing my research and interpreting others’ stories. As I conclude I want to make a symbolic gesture as a movement toward giving up some of that space. That is, I want to welcome, practically and symbolically, the conversations already begun and yet to come. This gesture is symbolized by the open boxes. They correspond to the pictures in the quilt which themselves echo stories untold.

Two, I have previously mentioned an interest in discovering the “spaces in between”. There are many stories that did not get told in the thesis. These stories could be the spark to ignite many other conversations about practice. The story I tell between the boxes is just one of these. Therefore, my purpose is to invite the reader to take on a position of wonder and to see sustained conversations as an adventure into understanding our practice. I wonder what you might place in the empty boxes and I wonder what stories you might begin to share that come from your experiences “in between”.

102
Figure 1
The Cloth Quilt  Actual size: 54 x 44 inches
Note: Read this as face to face with Figure 2, The Written Quilt
I had just held the plastic model of the heart in my hands. Now I imagined I was floating in a crimson tunnel in a curragh, a net at my feet. It was strange that I was in the lead, and in such a wide boat, behind me trailing the long scope that was to find the almost blockage, closed made The narrow, passage larger when
my own net at my feet. I imagined flying in a tunnel in a cumagh, a net at my feet. It was strange that I was in the lead, and in such a wide boat, behind me trailing the long scope that was to find the almost blockage, closed made The narrow, passage larger when
“everything will be fine”? These words told him just before they wheeled him into the operating room echoed in my mind.---It was also strange that I should be thinking of this as a metaphor for my research about conversation. The concepts of power, and the research role in helping me understand what was being my dad’s heart. Likewise, my understanding of my dad’s surgery had implications for how I understood my research and my life in general. Those spaces my research, seemed ---I have thought I recall my dad
and conversation that filled the room. I remember space at our initial meetings in the research. conversations provide small connections that may permission nothing is as adventure to
also remember the silence. The hugeness of space when slips and waivers had been signed. The knowledge that certain as you want it to be sometimes. Yet, there’s a certain unknown. The wonder. I remember these feelings as I engaged research---As I near the pay attention to giving up Bearing witness to space Scary, humorous, powerful pace. As I think these thoughts to the left to let the scope pass. It can do the work it was meant to do and I will assist by throwing down the net.

Figure 2  The Written Quilt
Bibliography


Brown, J. (no date). *Art and young children*. Unpublished essay for parents whose children are in day care.


Chudnovsky, R. (1997 May). *Child Care Sector Occupational Competencies*. Vancouver, Canada: Child Care Sector


Appendix A

Content of Courses

A summary of the areas of study for early childhood training programs and the minimum number of hours required in each area.

Child growth and Development. Approximately 96 to 100 hours of instruction time. The content of this area of study will include:

- Study of genetic and environmental factors which influence development of the child's personality, physical growth and development (from birth) and acquisition of language skills.
- The theories of child development and their practical application
- Observing and recording children's growth, development and experiences.

Early childhood Education Program Development: Part 1. Program Planning. Approximately 96 hours of instruction time. The content of this area will include:

- The history and philosophy of early childhood education together with the principles and practices related to developmentally appropriate program planning, implementing and evaluation in relation to:
- The importance of learning through play.
- The guiding, caring and education of young children.
- Planning the indoor and outdoor play environment to promote all aspects of a child's development.

Early Childhood Education Program Development: Part 2. Curriculum Content. Approximately 216 hours of instruction time. The curriculum component must be integrated into the planning of programs for young children which include:

- Creative art experiences
- Music, movement and drama.
- Children’s language and literature.
- Science, social studies and pre-math skills.

Interpersonal skills/Community relations/Interacting with Families. Approximately 42 hours of instruction time. The content of this area of study will emphasize the student's acquisition of skills that promote the following:

- Establish and maintaining effective working relationships, between staff and the community.
- An awareness of available community support services for children and families.

Health Nutrition and First Aid. Approximately 24 hours of instruction time. The content of this area of study will include:
• Role modeling and management of healthy practices
• Caring for the health and nutritional needs of young children.
• Promoting an awareness of the importance of providing personal care, food preparation, activities and menu planning.
• Planning procedures to assess and manage illness and accidents, focusing on preventative health/hygiene practices and how to handle a child who becomes ill.
• Recognizing and assisting a child to cope with stress
• First aid requirement is 8 hours of child's focused (0-12 years) instruction time. A current Fist Aid certificate is required prior to certification.

Practicum. Approximately; 36 hours of practicum seminar; 280 hours of block practicum and; 112 hours of observation practicum. The content of this are of study will include:
• Supervised observation in a variety of early childhood daycare centres.
• Seminar-discussion sessions between centre staff and ECE students.
• The opportunity for students to experience different philosophies[ of Early Childhood Education.
• The opportunity to apply Early Childhood Education Theory to practice through supervised practicum experiences (p 23-24).
Appendix B
Sample Letter of Consent

November 9, 1998

Engaging in sustained structured conversation about genuine practice in early childhood education: Challenges and benefits.

Dear

As you know, I would be very pleased if you were to consent to be part of my study investigating the challenges and benefits of group support networks for early childhood educators. I am particularly interested in supporting conversation about genuine practice. The project is part of the requirements for a Master of Arts Degree from the University of British Columbia. Dr. Allison Tom of the Department of Educational Studies is my research supervisor.

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to attend nine, two to three hour dinner meetings over a period of six months. We will hold meetings every three weeks but the dates and times of the meetings will be organized to fit the schedules of the participants.

All meetings will be audio recorded. Those who attended the meeting will have the opportunity to read a summary of the tape and/or listen to excerpts. I will also be video recording and photographing during some of the meetings and would appreciate your review of these tapes or pictures. This review process should take approximately ten hours of your time and will be done to seek your clarification and comments.

Unless you indicate otherwise, I will not use your name, names of the people close to you, or the name of your place of employment in any written materials and oral presentations in which I might use materials from our meetings. Transcripts will be typed with initials for names, and in final form the material will use pseudonyms. If, on the other hand, you would like to be identified as the source of these insights, I will use your name and acknowledge you as the source whenever I use the information as long as I can do so without violating the confidentiality of those who do not wish to be identified.

All material collected for this project will be kept secure and codes for the tapes will be kept in a separate place. I will contact you once I have a complete draft of my thesis and ask you if you are comfortable with the way you are identified.
in the work.

You may withdraw from the group at any time. You may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts used within or at the end of the meeting process. If I were to want to use any materials in any way not consistent with what is stated above, I will ask for your additional consent.

In signing this form you are agreeing to take part in the research. If you have any questions please call me at 731-3242 or Dr. Allison Tom at 822-8598. If you have questions concerning the rights and treatment of research subjects you may contact Dr. Richard Spratley, Director of the UBC Office of Research Services and Administration at 822-8598.

I,------------------------------- have read and received a copy of the above statement and agree to participate in the meetings under the conditions stated above in the research project titled: “Engaging in sustained structured conversation about genuine practice in early childhood education: Challenges and benefits”.

-------------------------------
Signature of Participant

-------------------------------
Date

Further, (please sign all sections to which you agree):

I agree that Kate McCabe may use audio tapes in recording my participation during these meetings.

Signature of consent
I agree that Kate McCabe may use video tapes in recording my participation during these meetings.

Signature of consent

I agree that Kate McCabe may use photographs in recording my participation during these meetings.

Signature of consent