

QUESTIONS AND DOUBTS: TEACHING ON THE EDGE

by

Susan J. Settle

thesis

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INTRODUCTION

"Here I am in my thirteenth year teaching and I still can't get it right. Haven't I learned anything?" I wailed.

I couldn't understand it. It wasn't as if I wasn't trying. Wasn't teaching supposed to get easier with experience? Yet here I was still struggling with trying to make things work in my classroom. I felt the anxiety filling my chest again.

"Get a grip on yourself. Deep breath," I admonished myself.

For a few minutes I sat at my desk, chin in hand, letting my thoughts drift. Brows creased as I stared at the brightly colored bulletin boards that lay in the path of my gaze. Memories returned of a fall evening. A meeting of teacher writers.

At the front door I turned to say good-night. "You've stopped asking yourself questions," Judith said.

"Perhaps you're right," I sighed and I turned to go. But I was stopped by another suggestion.

"You might consider enrolling in a research program. There's one starting up in January."

As I drove home, I considered what had been said. Had I stopped asking questions? Was that why I couldn't seem to get anywhere with my writing? My teaching? Could that explain the unsettled feelings I was having?

A colleague startled me and the room came back into focus. After a brief conversation I returned to thinking about Judith's comments. I sighed deeply. Unfortunately, I could see that she had been right. I had stopped asking questions. My frustrations were putting blinders on what I was seeing or not seeing in the classroom. I could not articulate what was happening nor could I get past the intensity of emotions I was feeling. As a result, I had become less of a kidwatcher, thereby losing the opportunity to learn from the children. What was that saying about how I was fulfilling my role as a teacher?

My concern for what I was feeling brought me back to why I entered teaching in the first place. I knew by the end of primary that teaching was what I wanted to do. I had experienced my first job 'teaching' that year as I assisted a second language student to

read in English. The two of us would move to the back of the classroom and sitting beside each other, we would read through the books available, mostly the old Ginn Dick and Jane books. I felt important with such a responsible job and took it very seriously.

Through the following years, I encountered various teachers. Those who taught me to fear them, (the strap was still evident when I was just starting school) and those who inspired me to learn through field trips, drama, humor, whose easy going manner built trust and a joy for learning. By the time I finished high school, I knew which teachers I wanted to emulate. I enjoyed reading, I enjoyed learning. I was going to change the way learning had been approached. I was not going to teach through fear tactics. I wanted it to be an enjoyable experience for children. Teaching had struck me as a creative occupation with limitless possibilities and I was eager to set forth and see what I could offer. I began teaching at grade two. Puppets, music, art, were very much a part of daily routine. I believed very strongly that children's imaginations and creativity needed to be nurtured and encouraged. Learning centers became one strategy I used to develop independence in the children as learners. I tried to involve the children in as many life related experiences as I could but this probably resulted in one or two large projects a year. I was very much an idealist when I began. More experienced teachers would tell me, "You'll see. You won't think like that as you get older." I often wondered what they meant by that. But I, in my naive and stubbornness, paid little attention.

Now, however, I was afraid. I was afraid that I was losing what I had to offer the children. I was afraid that I was becoming an incompetent teacher. I was afraid that I would have to give up what I liked doing best- helping children get excited about learning- because I felt a tremendous discomfort about how I was working in the classroom. Were those more experienced teachers right after all? Had I begun to stagnate? Was it burnout? It couldn't be, not already. I wasn't going to let that happen...not to me. I loved what I did too much. But the doubts were surfacing and would not be laid to rest so easily.

My thoughts again reverted back to that fall conversation. I began to think about the "discomfort" and what I was trying to do in the classroom. I had taught grade two and three most of my teaching career. I had enjoyed those years a great deal. Each year I had tried to implement something new in the classroom. In 1981 I had enrolled in a Masters in Reading part-time. I was excited by all that I was learning about reading and writing. I set about creating centers but with different kinds of goals. Centers which encouraged more thinking and writing on the part of the children. I started writing workshops giving the children more choice and opportunity to explore their own topics. I was amazed at what I saw them do. I became more comfortable with creating hands-on experiences in science and math and tried to integrate the subjects as much as possible. Things seemed to be going well. I was ready for a new challenge. Four years ago, prior to this research program, there was an opportunity to move to upper elementary. I wanted to see what it was like. I wanted to see if I could do the same for the older children that I felt I had accomplished with younger ones. Presently, however, I was feeling far from successful. What was going wrong? There had to be some explanation. What wasn't I doing? What didn't I understand?

That evening at home, I decided to apply to the research program at Mount Saint Vincent University which was under the direction of Andy Manning. I was excited about the prospect, but I was also apprehensive. The word 'Research' still had a big R for me. Was this really something I could do? Sure, I had dabbled in enough courses that I was familiar with trying to examine and reflect on my own teaching. I was reasonably comfortable with writing in a journal style. I had completed an independent study with Judith Newman examining language use in my grade two/three class but was that really research? At the time, I didn't think about it. It was something I enjoyed doing, and I was discovering a lot about children through it. I was seeing them with 'new eyes' to coin a phrase of David Dillon's. Research always seemed something austere, something scholars did in classrooms other than their own. It was

something I read about, thought about in relation to my own teaching and accepted or rejected it in that light.

I knew that this program would help me think through what was happening. I hoped that it would give me some answers and put me out of my misery. I also knew, being the quiet person I am, that it would make demands on me that perhaps I didn't feel ready for but I needed some support. I needed some answers and I was determined to give it a try.

Once I was accepted into the research program, I grew to realize that my brief experience with the independent study had in fact been teacher research and that teacher research was not of the same category as the traditional educational research we have always known. I could relax a bit knowing that I had some experience in terms of collecting data in the classroom but then other anxieties began to creep forth.

How could I talk to these people about my classroom? What would they think? I was feeling very unhappy about my teaching, what I thought was going on and not going on in my classroom. I had already gone through one Masters program and I felt a bit of a failure for not being able to carry through with my beliefs about learning. So many feelings of embarrassment, insecurity came crashing in on me! I was surprised myself at the depth of these feelings. I was afraid to admit them to others. Then the question leapt out at me: "What kind of a learner are you anyway and how do you expect to help your students if you're reacting like this! "

My own years spent in school came to me as flashbacks. Images of my worst moments, my best moments, how I conformed, how I was influenced in terms of my own learning. I was struggling inside knowing how I had responded as a student, how I was still responding and what I was trying to encourage my students to do. I felt hypocritical. The words of Garth Boomer reverberated in my head, "We teach what we are." I cringed. What was really coming across in the classroom? Was I just a perfectionist, critical of my students? Why couldn't I make things work that I had read about in the literature? Was I just playing at 'whole language teacher' or did I really understand what I was trying to do? Was I trying to do too

much? Was I not really responding to students' needs? Was I providing them with enough support? Was I interfering in their learning? Did I even know what learning was really about?

I was reminded again of the tenuousness of the new learner and I did feel as though I was learning all over again. I had worked myself into a state of confusion. Question upon question echoed in my head. I was overwhelmed. I had considered turning tail to run but I couldn't. Teaching and learning were too important to me and I had to do my best to find out what was going wrong. And so began my journey... a journey which led me to reexamine my teaching practice and my personal theory through the questions and doubts I held.

I began by keeping a research journal. For me, it was a natural place to start. Journal writing had played, in the four years prior to this research, a significant role in my professional development through courses I had taken. It had been a means to reflect on our teaching practice and to make connections between that and our readings. I felt released. Here was a form of writing which felt comfortable, was informal and was accepted without judgement. Weekly we shared these pieces with the instructor and another person in the group. As conversation, it worked well for me. Here I would much more readily pour out questions as well as the excitement I felt in seeing what the children were doing in new ways than I seemed able to verbally. This time was no different.

February 23, 1991

As I continue to write in this journal I feel hooked. Here I can truly do my thinking. Here I can learn to admit my shortcomings and hopefully make it easier to share with others on paper. I can fumble my way through my thinking/learning/ reflecting about my teaching practice. Jot down questions I have.

I have thought about the many barriers we set up in ourselves preventing us from taking the risks we need to as teachers. I have felt all of these things over the past year and a

half. Before I could release myself to learn I had to face some serious issues. I had to look in depth at myself in terms of a holistic learner. I examined the articles on gender issues, political issues in education and I was stunned. It took me a couple months to come to terms with Woman's Ways of Knowing.

My question is how do we change ourselves from where we are to where we want to be? Is it the psychological barriers we have to work with or theoretical. Perhaps a combination of the two. So many factors effect us.

Research (Mayher, 1983; Fulwiler, 1987; Murray, 1987) has demonstrated that not only do we learn to write by writing but we also learn through writing. It is a thinking process. Fulwiler (1987) quotes Ann Berthoff and Janet Emig saying " ...that writing progresses as an act of discovery- and furthermore, that no other thinking process helps us develop a line of inquiry or a mode of thought as completely."

The benefit of writing, of course, is that it is thought captured and recorded at a particular time and place. It can be reread, pondered over, examined, interrogated, reflected upon and lead to new thoughts, new connections. It helps us to see where we are at a particular moment in time and where we have come. Mary Louise Holly (1989) states "[the journal]...helps the author to better understand him or herself, teaching and the nature of the profession itself."

I have found her words to confirm my experience. My journal recorded numerous aspects of teaching- what I hoped to accomplish that year with the children, how I set about doing it, what I observed in the children's reactions, conversations with the children, their parents, colleagues, and questions and doubts that evolved from these. Many of these recordings were critical incidents which Newman (1990) describes as "...occurrences that let us see with new

eyes some aspect of what we do." Reflections on these recordings were also included.

What I will attempt to do is demonstrate how I used certain significant journal entries as a way to research my own teaching practice and theory. I have organized the journal entries into three groups representing three key themes which constantly resurfaced through the school year: negotiation, relationship with parents and finally time and organization.

The first chapter 'Negotiation' reveals the discovery that I was not negotiating curriculum as much as I had thought. It reflects the struggle as I tried to move toward a more democratic classroom.

Chapter two 'Relationships with Parents' demonstrates how I had unconsciously excluded them from sharing in their children's school experiences through lack of communication between school and home.

The third chapter, 'Time/Organization', expresses the tensions and uncertainties I felt in relation to time and how it is organized in the classroom and school.

Within each of these chapters, the journal entries which have been boxed off, are in chronological order. Prior to each journal entry, I will set the context from which it arose and follow it with my analysis of the situation and what I learned from it. Italicized writing represents the reflections written at the time of the recorded entry, shortly after or during the typing of the journal in preparation for the categorization of the entries. Where conversations have been transcribed as taped, underlined words indicate words or phrases spoken simultaneously.

The final chapter 'What is Real?: On the way to becoming' examines the underlying thread which binds these three themes together- the issue of gender and how it has impacted on my personal and professional life. It also reflects on the teacher research process.

NEGOTIATION: A way of being

Negotiating the curriculum in schools,... argues for classrooms in which teachers invite and allow students to help construct and enact the learning journey.

-Garth Boomer

I now see negotiation, ownership, conversation and curriculum as being intricately connected. At the beginning of this research journey, I was confused about all these aspects of teaching. I thought I had been trying to negotiate with the students, but since I moved to upper elementary there was a gut feeling within, that I really had not involved students very much in the curriculum planning with the exception of the reading/writing workshop. I didn't seem to be feeling the success like those I read about in the literature. In many of our early conversations, our small research group had discussed negotiating the curriculum with the students and we tried to clarify in our minds some of the issues involved. I remember commenting much later to another colleague that I felt I had needed to 'get to know grade five' before I could do that. Immediately it struck us both to question why I even felt that way. How did I view curriculum?

I can remember my early years, pouring over the guides provided by the department of education and the school, trying to decide what to prioritize with my students. My understanding of curriculum then was to take what I found in the guides, other resource books, my own imagination and create experiences and activities that would help my students grow as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and so on. What I knew about reading, writing, math and science was based upon my own experiences in school and what I had found out through teacher education courses, inservicing and conferences I may have attended. My curriculum drew upon what others expected me to teach, and what I thought would help make the learning more interesting. It was very much compartmentalized into subjects and I was the director in terms of what would happen with these subjects. My 'job' as I saw it then was to pass this knowledge on to my students in the most palatable way as possible.

To do this, I used puppets, song, art and learning centers. I believed very strongly in developing the creative side of the individual and I also thought that these creative activities would help to motivate the children into learning about the various content that was set for us by the guides. Our studies on nutrition led us to create our own restaurant. At special times in the year, we created our own class concerts for the parents to view.

In 1979, I had begun to attend conferences that talked about 'whole language'. I wasn't really clear on what that meant but I was excited about what I was hearing. Once I enrolled in the Masters of Reading program, some of the philosophy behind it was made clearer to me particularly in terms of reading and writing. My ideas of what the 'language arts curriculum' would look like began to change and I started to question the basal series from which we were teaching. I tended to use it less and offer other language experiences instead. If we were looking at fairy tales then I brought in library books of fairy tales. We read, shared and wrote fairy tales. We created our own castle with drawbridge which then was used as a stage to read our own fairy tales to parents. These kinds of experiences took more class time than just reading a story and answering comprehension questions on it. They appeared to 'slow down' the pace and so often in the eyes of administration curriculum wasn't being covered quickly enough. Now eight years later, how much had I really grown in terms of what I understood about curriculum?

Perhaps that was yet what I had to find out. Uncertainty abounded in many of the journal entries. What was curriculum really about if one was open to negotiation? I was wishing I had more time to work through this but the school year was drawing closer and time waited for no one. I had to begin the year somewhere. So early in September, I decided that my first priority was to set the stage for reading and writing experiences. I offered the idea of a magazine to the children. My reasoning was that this would allow for a great many different kinds of writing. I knew that they were not unfamiliar with various magazine genres as they had been involved in creating one at the end of their grade four year. The idea had taken hold well with the children choosing the themes for the

magazines. Later I felt that the students were not writing for real purposes but other questions concerning negotiation overrided that issue as this late September journal entry demonstrates:

...I find myself constantly struggling with whether or not what I am doing is invitational, negotiation. What opportunities do they have to opt out? I have discovered that my automatic response is that they have no option. Particularly in the subject of math/science. I suspect that is because I don't have enough activities available to provide options or invitations. When someone tires of working at an activity that we happen to be doing as a class ie. place value, there needs to be other options available. That means the potential for boredom, dissatisfaction etc can sink in. I used to do a lot of center activities in the lower grades. I need to set up some kind of system for the older students. The room I have is somewhat limited in space. It has to be practical too. I can see some options I have. I think I see now how I could have started the year off better. In previous years I had always begun with science, social studies or health related ideas. The activities then or invitations would have stemmed from those. A variety of activities were chosen with a minimum set and students chose which they worked on. I started more with the idea of a magazine rather than letting the form develop with other topics with which we were dealing. There'll be other opportunities to switch later on. I had thought alternating science and social studies topics as the year progressed. I have to sit down this weekend and really plan out the year to see how it will work. Also some of the topics can exist side by side. I also need to bring more current events into things. There is much to be done.

The line about "planning the whole year to see how it will work" belied any intention of negotiation on my part. I was all ready to plan the year without considering the children and their interests! In addition, I had been approached to work with two student teachers that year. I hadn't really had much experience in doing that. It had been enjoyable but I had to admit to being nervous about having people in my room again. It had been quite a while and I was feeling so tentative about what I doing. I felt as though I was learning all over again how to be a whole language teacher. I wasn't really sure how I could best help another teacher so in the end I fell back to what I knew based on prior experience and went to the curriculum guides and laid out what the year might look like. I negotiated with the student teachers what they would teach for 'units' after all that was what I had to do as a student teacher. But I had left out the most important people...the children with whom we were working. Yes, I had much to learn about negotiation and sharing control.

Boomer(1982) suggests that when teachers and students collaborate on curriculum that they have to think about four questions:

1. What do we know already?
2. What do we need/want to find out?
3. How will we go finding out?
4. How will we know and show that we've got there?

I knew in the past that prior to any theme work, I generally began with the first two questions in mind and sometimes the third, though I have a feeling I usually just set the children off to find information in books rather than dicussing other ways we could gather information. The last question I don't believe I raised with students very often. Frequently I set how the learning would be shown- through visual media, a poster or I might offer several choices. My reason for that was to expose the children to other genres of writing. But maybe there were other ways to do that. This was a limited form of negotiation, but a beginning. Throughout the year I struggled with this whole idea: how much more do I let go? I

had responsibility to my students. I was concerned about imposing too much but I was also concerned about being too laissez-faire in my approach. Paulo Freire and Ira Shor (1987) address this issue in *A Pedagogy for Liberation* emphasizing the need for democracy in education instead of authoritarianism. The key is to know when and how to pass authority over to the children; "freedom needs authority to become free." This seemed to me a difficult thing to learn to balance. I needed to let the students show me the way.

The other problem was the idea of invitations. How well did I really understand what they were and how to bring them about? It sounds almost ridiculous to ask that question. Certainly the very nature of the word suggested choice, options. Looking up the meaning in the dictionary, I saw the definition state 'to present opportunities or inducement for'. I liked the idea of looking at invitations in terms of opportunities. Again it does imply choice. I didn't feel I had been providing enough different opportunities. I wasn't very happy about the 'inducement' part. To me it sounded almost as though people would be persuaded against their will. In fact, I probably had been 'inducing' more than inviting children to participate. If I presented opportunities to children then I should expect that some will not be accepted. Most of the so-called 'invitations' I presented were indeed compulsory. I was still feeling very tied to what I perceived I was expected to 'cover'.

Harste/Short/Burke (1988) suggest that

Activities should be presented as invitations. Choice is central in curriculum because students test different hypotheses according to their different needs, interests and experiences. Children should be invited rather than forced to engage in specific literacy activities. When authors retain ownership of the process, they are more likely to focus their efforts on meaning generation rather than solely on meaning maintenance.

I knew ownership was important in the writing process. Did that not extend to learning in general? But although I believed this, I really had to struggle to put it into practice, to make it a real change. It was through the journal that I could hold the mirror up and examine what I was doing more closely.

In May, we became involved with a study on the environment. Prior to this next journal entry, we had just finished up a playground study which required the children to map out their school area. They had spent time surveying the grounds, measuring the perimeter, angles from various points and then using this information to draw a map to scale. I decided then, that this map could be used as a basis of further playground studies based on our environmental theme. I had come to our meeting prepared with ideas to put forth and again had forgotten all my good intentions to plan with the students what we would do. I was looking to them to fall in easily with my plans. But they were to teach me another valuable lesson in what negotiation was about.

May 7, 1991

Frustration arose as I tried to focus the group to plan our next section of study in science. I had thought we might do small group studies on the playground but as I tried to get feedback, I was frustrated by the seemingly unwillingness of students to listen to each other or to me. Everytime I tried to say something, twelve or more other voices drowned me out. What was happening here? Finally I gave up. I looked at one of the students who had been particularly outspoken.

"Fine Christopher, you go ahead and develop the topic." I then went and sat in the empty seat and waited.

Christopher looked for a moment then his eyes gleamed. He picked up the meter stick and stood in front of the class. He smiled, leaned on the stick and began to extoll his knowledge about the environment and his ideas on the various sections displayed on the board- the land, air and water.

Quickly, Roberto ran to the front of the room to join him. The other students in the room became quite excited. The voices began to rise again.

"Please raise your hands so all can be heard," I said firmly.

"Yeah," Roberto said. "We have to be serious."

"Maybe we will get somewhere," I thought to myself. I hadn't seen Roberto have such an interested look in his eyes for some time. Could I engage him somehow with this project? He was a very bright student, very knowledgeable about the environment.

Excited he said, "Can I answer the questions?"

"Be my guest," I replied.

Roberto responded to the question. It seemed as though only a few were actually listening or trying to. The others again were off into their own conversations about the environment. Things they'd read, news stories they'd heard, effects of pollution. I was having difficulty with the noise, the chaotic feel to the morning. Here I had been thinking of the "neat" weather studies we could do, the study of plantlife on the playground, the life cycles of plants and small animals, weather studies. All in keeping with the "curriculum" guide for grade five science. All along our topic was here. As it was getting close to recess, I stood up, thanked Roberto and Christopher for their assistance and said, "I take it then this is the topic we're going to study- pollution? Is that agreeable to all?"

Everyone raised their hand.

"We could write a newsletter!" Natalie suggested.

"Good idea! Jot your ideas down and we'll discuss them tomorrow."

This entry was significant to me for two reasons. First of all, I thought when the children were not attending to me, that I had 'lost control' of them that day. I worried about whether I had 'given in' and let them take over. But I am now reminded of Donald Schon

(1987) who talks about "theories of action" or what we espouse to believe and "theories-in-use" which are the behaviors we actually exhibit when relating to others. He and his colleague Chris Argyris, came up with two models of theories-in-use. It was becoming more and more obvious as I examined these journal entries that my own theory-in-use tended to lean more toward conversation as a win/lose, defensive situation more than one which was open to negotiation of meaning. Perhaps I was not working so collaboratively with my students after all, if I looked at our conversations in a win/lose framework. Had I ever worked collaboratively with anyone to know how it really feels to have that shared sense of inquiry, of openness?

This entry taught me something else as well; that negotiation required careful listening as well as talk. I had almost neglected to do that. I had been trying, as Boomer (1992) says, to 'entice' students to follow my predesigned activities. He calls this a form of pseudo- negotiation. The teacher's concern is focused more on the organization of the classroom rather than student ownership of the learning. It was only in the throes of frustration that I sat back and what a different picture I could see when I was not concerned with directing the class. I did catch myself in the end when I realized that I had nearly underestimated the children's abilities to come up with their own inquiry questions.

Harste/Manning (1991) tell us that "[i]f interaction patterns have not changed, not much real change has occurred. Lots of things look like whole language, few things sound like whole language. Again talk is the key." I had to wonder how I was really interacting with the children. Was it in an open, conversational way or did I somehow close conversation and create tension through my own body language, tone and defensiveness when I felt their resistance? This was a tough one for me. I thought I was probably giving very mixed messages.

A week later, as part of the environmental study, I gathered a collection of books by Jean George to offer to the students to read. Again, here I was trying to be the organized, well-planned teacher and set about preparing the way. Choice and ownership would come

into question once more. The resistance of the children became stronger or was I just becoming more uncertain about what I had been doing and more willing to listen? The books I had chosen were not the kinds of books they were used to reading. I knew that but I felt that part of my role as teacher was to expose children to new genres. The question of ownership weighed upon my mind.

May 15

I was concerned that over this last term it seemed that some of the students reading had dropped off. Was it just the time of year? It was getting more difficult to keep them interested. They had been free to choose their own books most of the time. Was it the way I was going about things? Perhaps the 'environment' in the classroom was not stimulating enough? Perhaps it was too much of a routine. How could I get the revitalization to take place?

"Do I have to read one of Jean George's books?" groaned Frank. "I like Hardy Boys better."

"I know you do Frank. But I really feel it's important to take a look at other authors too."

"You've read several Hardy Boy books this year. It won't hurt to at least try."

Yet having said this, I felt as though I was infringing on their opportunity of choice. Maybe I was 'forcing my interests on them. I thought back to Chris who had spent quite a bit of time reading Hardy Boy books. I watched as he used the knowledge he gained as a reader in his own writing. In September, his stories all were about hockey, a play by play of every game. At that time he would only read sports books- Matt Christopher. He tried to develop a style but the stories were generally commentaries on the games. After reading many Hardy Boy books, he was now creating outlines for his stories, building up

the clues so as not to give too much away. His stories had taken on a new feel.

A similar thing had happened to Claudia. She had read a great many Sweet Valley High books. Her writing began to take on that style. Her characters became more developed. The conversations very natural. The other children loved her stories. The topics were ones they thought about at this age—struggles with friendships.

I used to feel guilty letting the students take school time to read these books. After all, these weren't on the book awards lists. These weren't 'quality' literature, I thought. But I realize now that they have helped students develop a sense of story and they are a type of genre in themselves. They can ease students into that transition of short chapter books to the more complex stories and novels. So why was I pressuring them to read an author they may not particularly like to explore? Perhaps there was a better way, but at the moment I just felt they needed a push to try other things. The other problem was material actually written about the topic in a fictional form. There was no problem obtaining factual material. Why did I feel the need to have books in fictional form on the environment anyway?

There had been no ownership involved in the gathering of those materials. No negotiation on my part, no invitations to bring in some books that they might find helpful to investigate their interests in the environment. I had set in my mind that I needed fiction to develop the idea of literature groups in the classroom. Yet again, I leaped ahead with an idea I had read without understanding what was behind the idea and how it evolved and fit within the context of that particular teacher's classroom (Harste/Short/Burke, 1988). My concern was with the organization of the classroom to help it run more smoothly but I was not hearing or seeing clearly what was

happening with the learning. Eventually this problem of the Jean George books came to a head.

May 23

"Okay, everyone. Get out your books for silent reading. Feel free to read with a partner if you're reading the same book."

"Miss S., do we really have to do this?"

Several more complaints arose about the J. George books. "Great," I thought to myself with a sigh. "We might as well talk this out again."

And so I had everyone go to our meeting area to discuss the problem.

The original transcript of the conversation ran about forty-five minutes. I have therefore only included the portion of the conversation which focused on their objections as to how I set up the reading. I found it difficult to go back and listen to this tape. I seemed to be very longwinded trying to make excuses to the children why I had such difficulty in getting materials. Perhaps that was a way of putting a guilt trip on them, that they should appreciate all this effort I had made to go out and find environmental materials just so they'd have something to read. Was this back to the idea of 'inducement?' The topic of the environment had been a mutual decision. The choice of the author, in my supposed wisdom of teacher, was mine. The choice of fiction again, was mine. I felt their lives would be enriched by having read George's books. I could hear the deadness in my voice or perhaps it was momentary frustration. Could it be a slight fear of losing control of the kids?

The first part of the conversation confirmed my belief that the problem for some was the descriptive nature of the books. It was not what they were used to. Many preferred a more fast paced story. The children went on to describe parts of their books that they didn't like. The boring parts as they put it. The taperecorder did distract

several of the students during the discussion time. Then came the question of ownership.

SUSAN: My question is..is it because ...so do we not read things because you're not used to reading them or is part of education learning to expand your horizons and seeing other things?

CHRIS: You're making us read them.

JIMMY: It's....

SUSAN: I'm asking you the question. What do you think, Trevor?
You were going to make a point?

TREVOR: It's so descriptive though... It's so descriptive.

CHRISTOPHER: It's boring.

SUSAN: It's boring...is it boring because it's something you're not used to?

CHRISTOPHER: No, I've read books like this before...

TREVOR: So have I.

CHRISTOPHER: ...because the teacher asked me to and I find them way too descriptive for my ...(thinks)

SUSAN: ...for your taste?

JIMMY: Your taste.

SUSAN: Trevor, you had something you wanted to say, I think. Did you?

TREVOR: It's like you're MAKING us read them.

SUSAN: I'm making you read them.

JIMMY: I know...I know you're making us.

SUSAN: How am I making you read them? Can you tell me more about that?
(indistinct)

TREVOR: I want everybody in the class to read a book...

CHRISTOPHER: ...by Jean Craighead George.

TREVOR: Yea.

(indistinct words as several students talk at once.)

SUSAN: So would you have preferred it if I'd said...what would you have preferred I said? Let me ask you that...(laughter)

At this point, the students made requests for other authors such as Robert Muncsh and Stephen King. I brought it back to books that related to the topic of the environment which was our focus of study. They argued that the others would teach them how to write as well. Be that as it may I was not prepared to veer from the topic of study we had already agreed upon.

SUSAN: So you're saying I'm imposing this on you.

TREVOR plus others: Yes! Yeah!

SUSAN (somewhat tense at this point): Alright, what would you have preferred?

JIMMY: Catapult.

CHRISTOPHER: (emphatically) That you let us pick our own book about the environment instead of just one, darn old stinkin' author.

JIMMY: Yeah, but..

CHRISTOPHER: I would have preferred like...we had a variety of authors.

MATTHEW: More, ...more.

CHRISTOPHER: More like sick...sick...SIX au...

SUSAN: Six different authors.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes, like with ...four books.

SUSAN: The only...So they wouldn't necessarily have to be novel books. It could be like...David Zuzuki books...

JIMMY: No, I don't like David Zuzuki.

CHRISTOPHER: ...about the environment... (indistinct)

At this point the noise level increased and several students were sighing or making noises around the taperecorder. The discussion continued for a long time and I was getting increasingly frustrated by the justified restlessness of some of the children. I was having difficulty listening to what they were saying though in hindsight it doesn't seem unreasonable. I did have mixed feelings about the whole discussion. Discipline had been a topic of conversation with the school and how students spoke to staff and other students. I struggled with the feelings I knew existed on staff, yet I also knew the only way I would understand was in hearing what the children had to say. This was a lesson for me. I needed this conversation probably more than they did. I was becoming increasingly more tense and exasperated as this pull between 'school' and student learning became stronger. All my good intentions for learning crumbled before my ears as students pointed out the limitations of what I had set up.

CHRISTOPHER: (sighing) The books you had gotten were just about animals...that's only ONE thing of the environment.

SUSAN: I know it is. Only one thing

CHRISTOPHER: You have others

SUSAN: I know it is only one thing. Have you heard what I said about the problem of finding books.

CHRISTOPHER: That was the least voted.

(some laughter from students who were having their own conversation)

SUSAN: The least voted one. We didn't take a vote.

CHRISTOPHER: No, remember when we went up on the board like..ah.. There were three or four different topics.

SUSAN: Because I couldn't... (then I remembered) No one has written fictional books on toxic wastes. No one has written any fictional books about water pollution.

JIMMY: Whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop...

SUSAN: (turning to Jimmy) You can go back to your seat. Now. No one has written books on...

CHRISTOPHER: It doesn't have to be fictional though. I said I wouldn't MIND fictional books.

In the end it was decided to take Roberto's suggestion that people choose their own book either fictional or factual that related to the environment to read. They read these with more enthusiasm. I can recall thinking... had I 'given in'? This feeling persisted throughout the year when I found myself in similar situations. What I hadn't been doing is questioning the real meaning of negotiation and how it changes the way we interact with others, what it means in terms of student control of learning. The reason literature circles never seemed to work was because there were few choices as to the kinds of books available. The reading wasn't answering the children's questions.

Talk had never played a large part in my own schooling. We were to sit quietly and attend to what the teacher told us to do. In fact, it was not until high school that discussion was actually encouraged and even then it tended to be in mostly a question/answer format. Sometimes questions were even discouraged. I can recall in one science class in high school, going to the teacher for some help. After

I asked my question, I was told," Your sister never used to ask me questions; she used to tell me things." Red-faced and embarrassed, I retorted, "I'm NOT my sister." and returned to my seat never to raise my hand again in that class or many others. Many years later as my sister and I reminisced about school, I told her about that incident. She explained that she had always put her questions in the form of statements to have confirmed or disconfirmed. She had caught on to the way of discourse in that classroom. I had not and sought help from family and peers. I became very used to not talking and was extremely uncomfortable when put in a position where I had to talk. I have to wonder how I ever made it through teacher training! Even at home when the debates occurred at the dinner table, I had a hard time getting a word in so eventually I sat back, listened and weighed what was said.

I really didn't want to be talking at the children with whom I worked, though I suspect it was flattering having a captive audience. I learned that lesson many years ago when little freckle-faced, eight year old Vera rolled her eyes at me and said," Miss Settle if you don't stop talking we'll never learn anything!"

Well, I tried much harder after that not to talk so much and provide more opportunities for the children to be active learners and I still struggle with that today. Jones (1988) claims "...that many teachers may not know good talk when they hear it because they are unconvinced by the value of pupil talk in the first place." I believe that there is a point in what he says. What I've learned since examining my journals, reading and talking with other teacher researchers is that I didn't understand the value of talk and the part it plays in learning. Had I been so focused on the processes of reading and writing that I had neglected other ways of using language? It appeared I had. That's not to say there wasn't talk in the classroom but I have to wonder now what kinds of talk occurred? Was it primarily question/answer, explaining, directing, informing, organizing talk on my part? How much time was available for 'learning talk' (Jones, 1988); that is how much opportunity was there for the children to converse about what they were learning in a meaningful way to each other?

I turned to other readings to learn more about language and the role talk and conversations play. I now look at talk, negotiation and curriculum in a different way. Negotiation is a way of 'being' not something we 'do'. It begins with the give and take in conversation. With that conversation, the curriculum evolves. As the conversation continues, new meanings are constructed and learning happens. I am now less afraid of conversation in the classroom. For a time I thought excited conversation meant I was 'losing control' of the class. Now I can appreciate the new life and vigor it brings to our learning.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

...Whether we realize it or not, we teachers have a great deal of power over the lives not only of the children we teach but of their families as well. We have the power to make the best of parents doubt their own abilities. We have the power to create feelings of guilt or frustration, to confuse, anger or reduce to tears even the most stalwart. We have the power to impose- or simply allow- an unbalanced relationship that puts too much guilt on one party, too much authority and responsibility on the other, so that no real communication, no real sharing of ideas and information can occur. The problem is how to prevent that kind of imbalance, how to ensure shared understanding and joint goals.

-Jane Baskwill (1989)

I used to think that I had a good rapport with the majority of the children's parents. We would get together at reporting times or they would participate in trips and special events. But I now realize that our contact and communication was limited to those times with the occasional phone call. In fact the relationships were, as Baskwill describes, unbalanced. We were not working as partners.

During the year I focused my research in my grade five classroom, one issue that seemed to reassert itself through the parents was spelling and homework. Most questions were raised at or just prior to reporting periods.

Up to October, I had been dealing with spelling as part of the writing program. I no longer used the pre-test, post-test traditional spelling program. My own experience with lists seemed to suggest that although students did well on them week to week, the spelling did not transfer to the daily writing that was done. As a result, I had been trying to address it through the writing process during proofreading and editing sessions which took place with individuals or small groups. I did have a concern that it seemed to take some time to reach that stage at this intermediate level as their writing pieces tended to be much longer. Occasionally, I would draw attention to particular spellings of words, homonyms, contractions, endings, prefixes to the whole class when I noticed it would be of some help.

Nov. 13/90

It's been too long. Reporting time really is hectic. I found myself trying to gather information throughout these weeks- getting the magazine done was a major job. Finally it was completed on the 31st. I sometimes wonder if it was the best way to go at the beginning of the year. In many ways it went well. The students were excited about it. They made many of their own decisions about their writing. They worked hard on it as a whole. When I looked at the final magazine, I wondered if I had expected enough? The writing seemed to take a long time and yet it was not totally unexpected. They put it together rather well. I could see this being a good way to end a year. By that time, students would have encountered various genres, would have more experience with research and would also have had more background to the various subjects they wrote about.

The interesting thing was after the magazine was finished, the writing cycle did not continue as smoothly. It was as if the process had not been gone through at all. Students wrote something and it was finished- no attempt at reading it to others, editing if it was to go to a 'finished stage.'

I realized then that I should have taken a few more weeks at the beginning to really get the writing folders going. The first term is so short- really only four and a half weeks and I'm preparing for reports. It takes at least two weeks to write them for me and if I involve students in the process- this takes time as well. I didn't delve into the writing as deeply as I wanted to. We'll work at it.

When parent-teacher night finally arrived, I felt reasonably organized and ready. But I have to admit, I was surprised by two of the parents. Each had expressed in a very

emphatic way their concerns about spelling. Parent one understood what we were trying to do in elementary but felt it was not benefiting them in junior high. Students were being penalized during exams for spelling errors losing up to seventeen points for spelling errors. Although not stated directly, the feeling I was getting was that elementary schools were not doing their jobs. They were not preparing them for junior high. This parent was upset by this. He had a son who was still adjusting to his first year in junior high and a daughter who would be in the same position two years down the road. Both of these children have had some struggle with their reading in the past as with spelling.

The second parent was very verbal about spelling and "it's all because of whole language". She had seen her son in junior high cry all the way home because of losing marks for spelling. She felt her other son's spelling was atrocious and no one was doing anything to help him. What was going to happen to him in two years?

I could empathize with them and feel my own outrage for them. I also thought back on the last five or six years and how hard we worked as a staff to share with parents what we were doing and why. In spite of those presentations, the sharing of students' work over a year to show the changes which took place, those parents could not see the value in what we were trying to accomplish in the writing process. They felt the pressure of what was expected at the junior high.

I tried to explain what I was trying to do, when spelling became important in the process, why certain pieces of writing were not corrected; why the first draft is not perfect, why I don't ask them to erase and so on.

But I also realized that this was not necessarily going to help. They had already

made up their minds. Over the next few days, as opportunities arose I spoke to colleagues to see if they had any similar reactions. Most parents seemed fine once the program was explained. Neither of those teachers dealt with spelling in a traditional way.

So I asked myself- was I being unnecessarily concerned? Was it just these particular parents or is there some dissatisfaction, some rumblings about 'whole language' which was yet to rise. I tried to read more about spelling to refresh my own memory. (*Whole Language Evaluation Book*, articles, *Spel is a Four Letter Word*, Bouffler's book) I talked to other teachers.

What am I learning from all this? I'm started to see more the politics of education, the power of community and the effect on curriculum. I'm also seeing the importance of parent-school communication and knew I had to put more into this area.

I'm wondering about the kids. They have been asking me - when are we doing spelling as though it was never discussed as they're editing or writing. Is it their thoughts or their parents? Once I started their 'word study' scribblers, there were moans and groans.

One child said, "I'd rather have words on a list given to me than look for them in my writing."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because, I don't know...think I can find my misspellings on my own."

"I'll help you."

Spelling is a hot issue. Yes, I have begun a formal 'spelling program'. I'm not sure what value it will have. It will be interesting if it is perceived to have value.

I later abandoned this formal program after two or three months because I felt it was not really meaningful to the children and it became a matter of policing homework that tended to be rushed through or all done the night before. I also wasn't convinced that it was sending the appropriate messages about spelling. I replaced it with other strategies that again occurred mainly in the classroom. I had mixed feelings about the whole issue. How would parents react? Was I doing the right thing? Was I being fair to the children and the experience they may face when they got to junior high?

After our second set of parent-teacher conferences, I once again received feedback.

Feb.12/91

Some other concerns of parents have come to light. Another set of parents felt their child had regressed since coming to this school. They felt less involved in their child's education. Not as much work was coming home. When pushed to think further as to what that work was-

"He had reading to do."

"Is he reading now for homework?"

"Yes, a half hour every night."

"So that has remained the same. What else?"

"He brought spelling words home every night."

I explained my own feelings about spelling and what I was trying to do.

"What else was brought home?"

"Math homework."

Again I tried to explain the math program and how much could not be sent home due to the nature of the tasks. That they were not always typical as to the problems in the books, that I was trying to help them build an understanding of why they do what they do.

I felt a bit disheartened. What did parents see as the most value? And how was I going to help them see what I was trying to do? She did feel that the newsletter accompanying the report was helpful but felt it would be more valuable at the beginning of term instead of at the end. A fair comment I thought. Now I knew why I was reading about many teachers who sent newsletters home to inform parents. I could see that if I was a parent who was used to something coming home regularly, it would be difficult.

Could I possibly get going on that more regularly this term?

Another parent expressed concern over her child being bored in math. I knew this was also a concern of mine with several but for some reason, I was having difficulty making a change. Why? About half the group needed instruction, the other half seemed able to work with the algorithms but needed opportunities to try to articulate their understanding of them. I needed to build on that but did I have the understanding mathematically myself to do it? My thoughts had always been to develop a math workshop. Was it possible for them to have a math folder and files with some choice as to the activities in which they could become involved? How would it work? How much material would be necessary? Should there be a requirement in what they understand before sending them off? Could the process of authoring also work for math? Would peer tutoring work? What activities could I set up to allow for choice, challenge and yet still keep track of how their understanding is developing? Do I really understand enough about learning to set up appropriate activities? Why was I not doing this at grade five when I seemed to have less of a problem in two and three? Was it space? Knowledge

of concepts? Not knowing how to orchestrate it?

These parents were quite helpful in their feedback about how they were feeling. It became more and more obvious to me that the issue was not so much the spelling as it was communication or the lack thereof with parents. I had taken away the traditional ways parents got involved with school and replaced it with nothing tangible in their eyes. I was not helping them to feel a part of their children's education. I never really seemed to resolve the issue during this particular year with those parents whom continually expressed their concerns, but it laid the foundation for reexamining my relationships with parents.

In spite of the attempts I did try to make in the classroom regarding spelling, the issue was to raise its head again after the third reporting period. This time the anxiety of two parents was coming through their child.

April 10/91

As I walked around to see how students were getting along with their speeches, I saw that Elizabeth was working on the editing of her speech.

"How's it going, Elizabeth?" I asked.

"Okay, (then out of the blue) How come we don't do spelling tests?"

"Do you think that tests are necessary to learn how to spell words?"

"Yes."

"I see. Tell me, do you think we spell?"

"Well, we write."

"Are we spelling when we write?"

"Yes, but when I look at the sentences, there are three or four words in each spelled wrong."

"Can you recognize which ones?"

"Most times."

"That's great. What things are in the classroom that can help you fix those words?"

"Dictionaries."

"Yes, we have a dictionary of misspelled words as well as the regular ones. You also have your personal one. What else is available?.....(no response).....What about the charts?"

"I never look at them."

"Why?"

"I forget they're there."

"What else have we done? Why are these index cards on our desks?"

Elizabeth shrugs.

"Do you remember that we wrote these down because they were words in your writing that you wanted to know how to spell. Have you practiced them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"We weren't being tested on them."

"Do you need a test in order to learn something or can you just practice until you know it well enough to use it in your writing? (Hadn't I already asked that before? We seemed to come round full circle.)"

"I don't know." At this point Elizabeth was looking puzzled. I wanted to raise the questions for her but I didn't want her to feel insecure. In fact I was getting a little uncomfortable here myself! Here I had thought I had set in place all these things for spelling but they didn't seem to be getting used. What had I not done? Had I not provided the time to do these things? Was I being too unrealistic in terms of expectations? With all the other things that go on, was it just being forgotten and I had to revive their awareness? Had all these posters just become another decoration on the wall that served no useful purpose?

I looked at the index card. "Let's see if you can spell any of these words." As I called out the six or seven words, she spelled four of them correctly. The others she missed out by one or two letters.

"You said you hadn't practiced these, yet you know how to spell them now. How do you think you learned to spell these words?"

"Make. You used to ask me this all the time so I learned it." (I could recall on my stops at her desk asking her this word over a period of several days until it seemed she remembered it.)

"What about the others?"

"I probably knew them already and was just careless in my writing." (I wasn't so sure)

"Perhaps," I said. "Do you think having the words on your desk helped you to become familiar with them?"

Elizabeth thought for a while. "Maybe," she said uncertainly.

It was food for thought for us both. I left it there, then came the bombshell.

"Some parents think that we're not learning 'cause we don't have any homework or spelling words."

"Do you feel you're not learning?" (I was almost afraid to hear the answer to this one.)

"Well, when we get to junior high, spelling marks get taken off if we can't spell certain words right."

"I guess that is a concern. I really believe that by reading and writing a lot, we can become more familiar with these words. I thought the other things we were doing would also help. I'm hearing you say, I think, that you would like us to do something more."

"Not just me....everybody should have a test every week."

"I see. Would it be helpful if we set up some spelling study groups to help people with their spelling? Would you join a group like that?"

Elizabeth looked up to the ceiling, mouth pursed, "Yeah."

"I really want to thank you for telling me how you feel. That helps me a lot and I'll certainly think about what you said."

Although I was taken aback at first, I was really not surprised to hear these things come from her. Her father had said these same words or very similar to these earlier in the year. Later on in discussing the conversation with my student teacher, he suggested that it might be helpful to just heighten their awareness of what was available more. More doubts. If the students were showing this much concern then maybe I did need to address it more. But I really wanted it to be valuable, not just a mindless exercise as it became earlier in the year. Everybody just ended up trying to learn these words the night before the homework was due. What value was there in that? How could I set up these study groups? What time was I going to take away from other things? Harste/ Burke's class editors came to mind. They had three class editors who helped others with their work. I had tried something like that earlier in the year. It had worked for the time, but again when something happened to change our routine for a while, students working on different projects, it seemed to be forgotten and I never got it going again. Perhaps what I needed to do was set up mini- writing groups within the writing time. They have always been helpful to me in the past as well as now. Why wouldn't it be helpful to them? Why hadn't I been doing this before? Again previous thoughts had come back to me. Our discussion at Dora's a while back. It comes down to learning how to orchestrate what's happening; learning how to set up the experiences for the learning to happen, for engagement. Also it's about learning how to set up situations so

that the students can be supports for each other.

I really had much serious thinking to do.

When I first looked at this entry, I thought I still wasn't teaching spelling 'right'. In spite of the efforts I had made in the writing program to support spelling and to share strategies with the children, it still appeared to some parents and to this particular child as if the children weren't learning to spell. Doubts plagued me and I wondered if there was still something I was missing. John Mayher (1990) states that we need "to come clean on the processes involved in teaching and learning." What I realized was that I hadn't helped Elizabeth and others like her understand what spelling was in our classroom. I also had to reexamine if I was really demonstrating strategies for proofreading and editing in ways that were useful to the children. I realized again that I needed to communicate more frequently to parents what I was trying to do and why.

It wasn't until much later upon rereading my journals in juxtaposition with other texts that I realized there was more to this issue than spelling and communication. In fact, what was becoming clearer was the political and social context in which we teach. I had never paid much conscious attention to it before. I hadn't taken into account just how much it can effect what goes on inside a classroom. Parents here were feeling the pressures from junior high expectations in writing which contradicted what we were doing in the elementary school at least in terms of evaluating and grading. They had grave concerns about literacy and what they were hearing about it through the media. I was the one who was looking at education and literacy in a naive way.

Since then, I have tried to open communication with parents by student-created newsletters, meeting more frequently with individual parents and sending home video-tapes of children as they are involved in their work or presenting work to others. I am also more conscious of just coming out directly and asking parents how they're feeling about their children's education. I am less defensive

when I hear criticisms and try to look at things in a more realistic light. I try to ask for their input when we are about to explore something new or listen to their suggestions as to what they'd like to see.

No doubt reevaluating and renewing my relationships with parents is something I need to continue to pursue. For it's only in the working together that we can most support the child.

TIME AND ORGANIZATION

Invention is a form of organization.

-Graham Greene

Time has always been an issue in schools. I know I never seem to have enough of it. I'm sure I'm not alone in that. It's not just that we lead such busy lives, it seems that no matter how hard we work there never seems to be enough time to do all that is expected of us as teachers. Time, the organization of that time and trying to find a framework to work within was another key issue for me and frequently reappeared in the journal over the year. I felt that I needed to find a way to keep everything running smoothly whether it was between activities or between various study topics. This first journal entry was recorded after a month of school had gone by. We were well into the magazines the children were creating. They seemed to be progressing well but always was the doubt in my mind if I had started off 'right'.

Oct. 5/90

I find it interesting that since I've been trying harder to keep writing in a journal that several things have happened. First of all I find myself anxious to write but I sometimes fight with myself to do so. Schoolwork must come first and then the tiredness sets in. Unless it is written out, I find myself constantly turning the light on and off- ideas seem to come forth late at night. Thoughts piercing forth. Concerns leaping out.

I have felt my mind full with all I have read and things we have talked about. My mind does not seem to order these thoughts. It takes time for them to seep through and become more focused. I am anxious to put ideas into effect but I have a distinct habit sometimes of leaping forth before I have

thoroughly thought things through. Even when I do so, I find that reality tends to change things- one can never completely predict how students may change things. I have been concerned that I have moved forth too quickly this year. I have been wondering if the magazine was a good way to start and yet I can see they are handling it well. I can see that I need to provide challenges for them. This project has given me a feeling for what they can do in terms of research, finding information- their ability to make decisions, organize. I can see now certain goals for various students I need to consider. I will need to talk with them over the next few weeks. The library inservice on research was helpful. It gave me some more ideas as to how I can help the students as they research.

I know one of the key factors in a smoothly running classroom is a well-managed, well-organized one- the structure is crucial. I have not worked out a framework yet that I am entirely comfortable with. That is part of the support that may be missing. I need things moving along so I can keep the 'invitations' moving and the work in progress. The expectations set up. Perhaps after the magazine is out of the way- this will become easier to keep in place.

It seems to me here that I was concerned about keeping the authoring cycle going. I wonder if I'm valuing what's happening or if I'm still craving this 'perfect' classroom that must exist somewhere. My use of the term well-managed would make it appear that I keep complete control over everything. I'm trying to move to a more negotiable curriculum but realize that this year I did control most of the curriculum and what topics we would do and when. I gave the choices only within topics I chose.

Two things concern me now about this entry. The first is that I had the expectation that everything should go smoothly all the time. It was an unrealistic expectation. Classrooms and learning can be messy. Things don't always go smoothly or happen in a way we would predict. Sometimes the most unexpected things hold the most learning for us and sometimes what we think will hold a lot of learning falls flat.

I talked about 'leaping forth' before I had thoroughly 'thought things through'. Maybe this is the case but I usually give some thought to what I try in the classroom (though time restricts how much thought a person can give when involved with the day to day job of teaching). I may not however, have figured out all the angles surrounding a particular strategy or activity that I may be trying. I couldn't be certain of what might happen or how the children would respond. I think now, I'm more open to hearing their opinions and concerns about what we do. Could there have been the idea in my head that to be well-organized I had to be certain about what could occur, that I had to be able to predict exactly what might take place? Perhaps that's why it was so difficult to share the control with the children because the uncertainty factor would be greater. MacGinitie (1983) states that "to be certain is to deny that there is space beyond the circle of our own knowledge." Knowledge is not certain. It changes as our understandings grow and change; as our theories are tested, found wanting and are reconstructed. This sense of uncertainty, of 'not knowing' was something I had to become more comfortable with if I was to move in the direction of a more learner-centered curriculum.

The second thing that disturbed me about this entry again stemmed from the line "...one of the key factors in a smoothly running classroom is a well-managed, well-organized one- the structure is crucial." One of the elements I have come to value even more as I explored negotiation is the importance of ownership in the learning process. I believe that also needs to be extended to the organization of the classroom- whether it be the furniture, work areas, or how the time is used in the day. It makes for a different kind of organization, a more democratic one or as Freire and Shor

(1987) might call it, a more liberated one. The assumption I have carried with me from early years in teaching is the idea that 'well-organized' meant having order. Things would run smoothly and therefore there would be no discipline problems. Discipline is something I was told to watch for as I began teaching. It was only years later that I realized that the administration and I were on different wavelengths in terms of how we viewed discipline. My own feeling now is if children are really interested in what they're learning discipline is less of a problem. Dewey (1938) said "...it is not the will or desire of any one person which establishes order but the moving spirit of the whole group. The control is social but individuals are parts of a community not outside it." The teacher then becomes one who speaks for the interests of the group rather than as a power move to 'keep control'.

That spirit of which Dewey spoke comes through the building of a democratic community where all voices are encouraged to be heard, where all have a say in the workings of the classroom and what is to be learned. Building these relationships takes time, trust and patience. Sometimes I feel a year is very little time in which to accomplish that.

This next journal entry touches on some of the frustrations I had in finding myself moving back to a more 'transmission' (Barnes, 1975) style of teaching. At the time I felt that the problem was in my organization of the classroom and curriculum. In part it was. I still, at this point, had involved the students little in the actual creation of what went on in the classroom.

Nov. 15/90

This journal is useful to me. I have reread parts of it and have discovered similar questions keep turning up- primarily about the actual orchestration and planning aspect of teaching as well as the "being open" to how processes work- leaving room for discussion. I have recently noticed some patterns that have occurred in my classroom. When we are

involved in activities which are very 'hands-on' everything seems to run smoothly. The students are involved, they're discussing, I'm finding out more from them.

When I tackle a content area like space where the hands-on part is limited, then the noise is less productive, students more inattentive, I am more transmission mode. How can I combat that? These last two, three weeks since reports, I have become more demanding in my expectations of them in terms of listening to people, homework, time on task. I am ruling out discussion. Why? Is it a result of the reports? Is it so I feel I'm fulfilling my job? Is it the very nature of the curriculum? Poor planning?

I feel as though I am chained to that 'cover the curriculum'. Why can I not break that?

I changed the schedule around. I've moved science, social studies back to AM after reading; writing time after recess, after the read aloud time and math in the afternoon. It feels more comfortable that way. Now I have to rethink my topics and reprioritize what my purposes are. I have to try to be less content bound and more process oriented. It's odd to me that in spite of conscious thought to avoid that I almost can't help it.

Reality hits and it's the daily disagreements we all have to deal with. The stories they wish to share. I have frequently let my agenda come ahead of theirs. Time seems so precious to me. Is it because I feel I need to have covered a certain amount before the student teacher takes over?

Even having said that, I realize that means I have been more program directed than child-directed. Have I made the learning situation more artificial?

Am I just 'doing' whole language activities or is there a connection between them. Some

days it feels like its not- that I'm delivering a curriculum none the less.

A note on the research. I don't feel as though I'm doing enough. Am I gathering enough data? Am I gathering good data? Will it be usable when I'm finished?

I know there's this little voice niggling away at the back of my head- in fact I think it's the positivist rearing it's head. Those articles I read this week- hard to understand some of them.

Am I really researching about support or is it something else? I feel as though it's a self-journey - a learner learns.

I find my eye is pulled to the line " I feel as though I am chained to that 'cover the curriculum'. Why can I not break that?" To me, it indicates a dilemma I often felt that year. The pressure was probably more internal this particular year but was there nonetheless because prior experiences had emphasized the importance of that curriculum. Also in the journal, references had been made to report card time. Underlying that were the expectations of parents with regard to the curriculum and their children. My transmission mode (where I became more teacher-directed as opposed to learner- directed) tended to resurface when I felt the pressure of having to meet these demands. I fell into what Carr and Kemmis (1986) refer to as a technical view of education. I became a deliverer of curriculum rather than a co-creator with the children. I felt I needed to hurry the learning along not that I believed I would really succeed or that the quality of the learning would be greater.

What seemed to be valued more was the evidence in scribbles that students were working. The talk, the concrete experiences were not seen and therefore were invisible to the public. Paperwork done correctly was the measure stick of productive learning.

This last entry was recorded at the end of the day. Students had been involved in a study on clay boats which investigated weight, volume and density. Again, I expressed my uncertainty about time and the organization of the classroom.

Jan. 22/91

Students had taken home some questions for further thinking related to their clay boat activity (which was best design, what makes a good floater, what happened when tested designs?)

Questions helped provide a focus for thought at least that was intention. Could it have interfered with more spontaneous insights?

Held a class discussion on homework. Students really listened carefully to each other. Many insightful comments made about boat designs. Connections were made to real experiences. Question raised- so what about real ships? They're heavy but they float.

They'd had time to reflect on class?

"It's because they're spread out on top of the water."

What part did I play? I acted as a mediator. Students raised hands. I asked questions like 'Does anyone have anything to add to Mark's comments? Would anyone like to respond to Andrew's question?'

"Boats sometimes curve and have a piece of wood/steel that gets into the water to keep its balance."

I tried not to provide too many of the answers but wanted them to learn and think about each other's comments which I feel they did well.

Christine shared experience of watching boats be made near the cottage. Students discussed how wind might affect floating.

*Made connections to real experiences-
parents workplace, fishermen, effects of
weather.*

They agreed /disagreed with each others
comments.

"I don't agree with Amanda because if the
boat is too curved it would tip over cause it
rolls too much."

"I agree with Amanda because if a boat has
square corners and water gets in one end it
will tip. The curve helps it to stay afloat."

"If there's some weight in the bottom it
helps keep it steady."

"I would like to add to what ...said. My
father works on oil tankers and he goes out in
storms. His ship doesn't sink because of
wind."

*Real learning from each other. Whole class
sharing was more valuable in this case. By
coming to class prepared to discuss, more
depth in responses. How can I help this along
more often? Provide more time for
reflection on activities in class? It works
for me as I'm learning. The reflection is
important.*

*In the past I've always had concerns about
making sure the students are always
challenged so they're not 'bored' - but I may
have sacrificed the feeling of 'community' and
the benefit of this type of discussion in doing
so. Perhaps there was less time for
reflection, 'thinking with others' and
benefiting from insightful comments,
experiences within the whole group. I need to
find that comfortable balance again.*

*Problem arises. What do you do with those
who do not wish to engage with others? Do
you leave them room to do something else?
Another activity? Or just let them opt out in
their own mind as they sit with others? I
don't like the thought of that. I realize I have
not given many the chance of opting out of
activities.*

Am I overcompensating for having stepped back too far? Feeling I have to have that control again? Have I returned to the 'everyone has to do the same thing at the same time? Little choice in science, health, math. Less this year than before. Do I open it up? How?

They're not making as many of their own decisions or choices. Seems to me I'm back to structure, organization, meeting times. here I go again. I have to go back to ways the activities are planned, what needs I'm trying to provide for, how will they be accomplished?

Math- Had asked students as 'test' to respond to question.

Write how you would explain this to a second grader. 32

+ 79

Attempt to see if they really understood place value. It really caused them to think about why I asked them to do this. "If we have to do it this way, it means we really have to know what we're doing to explain it."

The responses have been interesting. Students asked about meeting with grade two' then taping the conversation so they wouldn't have to write but although the idea was an interesting one I had them write anyway.

"Can we have a conversation on paper? Make up a name for them?"

"By all means. If you'd like to try it that way."

I liked this entry because the children seemed so connected to each other in their conversation. I wondered if it was because of the opportunity they had to prepare and reflect on their learning before the discussion. I think so often we're in a hurry to push on with whatever else needs to be 'covered', we miss opportunities to pull the most from what we're already examining or we miss the gains children have made. I can recall telling one parent that some

children may need more time to make connections about spelling. Her response was, " I don't have time to wait for him." It was obvious then that children often have to hurry to meet the expectations of adults rather than be supported and encouraged in their growth.

Schools often constrain learning because of their very organization and scheduling practices. They can constrain the learning of teachers as well as children. Everything has its neat little box and the learning is supposed to conform to the schedule that adults create. But learning has no schedule and we can't really know what goes on inside children's heads without asking them, without conversation and so that takes time. My class 'schedule' now is only recorded on paper because I have to pass it in to administration and because the children need to know when they meet with other teachers for gym, french and music. Much of the rest of the time is called 'workshop' or 'investigations' and is left fairly flexible depending upon the direction we take. I still have a lot of work to do to make math more of a workshop feeling but it is moving there. Sometimes the math is an integrated part of something else we might be investigating; sometimes it is more separate.

What I've realized is that there is no 'perfect' schedule or framework that will satisfy every situation. We have to invent it as we go. As our focus of study changes, as our needs change, so does our room arrangement, and how we might spend our day. But we try to work it out together in a collaborative way according to our needs.

What is REAL?: On the way to becoming

Perhaps we write toward what we will become from where we are.

-Mary Sarton

Sarton's words are an expression of hope in what has been at times a difficult process. As I stated in the introduction, I began this research as the result of feeling incredibly frustrated with my teaching. My emotions blinded me to the tensions creating those frustrations and they were left unnamed. I really believed that I was missing something and I tried to search out what it could be through the research journal I kept. My focus began with trying to make sense of my practice through the theory and my theory through my practice. Journal writing allowed me to recapture those moments of surprise, frustration, concern, questioning, doubt and hold onto them for study and reflection at a later date rather than being lost and unexamined in the flurry of daily classroom activity.

Throughout this thesis I have tried to demonstrate how I used the journal as a way to critically examine my own teaching. The three themes of negotiation, relationships with parents and time/organization were major sources of tension that year. In analysing those themes, I have attempted to show where my thinking is presently with those particular aspects of my teaching life. There is still something missing in that analysis and it is that 'something' which I want to explore in this chapter.

Peter McLaren(1989) in his introduction to *Life in Schools*, describes how he had not placed his journal in context in its original publication. His book set about to correct this and he framed it within a critical pedagogy. I, too, in my own naivete did not understand the social and historical context of teachers' lives, particularly female teachers. As a result, I searched for answers that would ease the tensions I felt day to day in the classroom. If I could just find the right strategies, I thought, life in the classroom would run much more smoothly. There was an idealistic thread to my thoughts; a vision of education which I seemed unable to bring to fruition. But as Manning(1993) says, "[Teaching] ...is not a quest with

a pot of gold, a right way of doing things, at the end but a journey that never ends... We need to abandon perfection and substitute learning as the goal of teaching."

My own tendency toward perfection created a barrier to my own learning and my ability to further my own students learning. It affected the amount of risk I would take inside and outside the classroom. It affected my interactions with others whether they were parents, children or colleagues. Kathleen Weiler(1988) states that:

It is one thing to have goals and a vision of what education should be like; it is another thing to be able to accomplish that vision in the realities of the classroom in which the gender, race, and class subjectivities of teachers and students come directly into conflict.

I knew that each of us, students and teachers, come to the classroom with our own values, beliefs and experiences and that these would at times create conflict. I hadn't considered the depth from which these conflicts could arise or how ingrained these subjectivities could be.

Thinking back now, I can recall one particular day as I was reorganizing my files, overhearing the following conversation between John, a student teacher though I prefer to use collaborative partner, and Matthew. The children had been working away at a math problem. Matthew was having difficulty with one of them. Christine was trying to offer her help but Matthew continued to ignore her.

"Matthew, Christine has a suggestion for you. Why aren't you listening to her?" John queried.

"Because...she's a GIRL," Matthew responds with disgust.

"Your teacher is a girl and you listen to her."

"She's my TEACHER. I HAVE to listen to her."

So great was my surprise at his vehemence that I couldn't avoid a startled look in his direction, but not wanting to interfere, I returned to what I was doing. John eventually persuaded Matthew to listen to Christine's suggestion but Matthew was convinced she was wrong.

Here was an example of how gender subjectivities clashed in the classroom. John continued to demonstrate that he valued the girls' comments and suggestions and their confidence grew. I was left wondering how I could have been so unaware of this before. Had I just cast a blind eye to it? Had I become so accustomed to these kinds of comments 'made in fun' because they were so much a part of my own growing up? Was this part of the reason for my sense of helplessness and frustration when trying to build collaborative relationships with children, with adults? Were the girls often being silenced because of their sex? Were they not valued? What was I really doing to support the girls and what was I doing to help the boys understand? Was I responding more to the boys in class? Was I showing the girls I valued their opinions and stories? Was I just being tolerated because I was in a position of authority? Was I so much a part of that culture that I couldn't recognize it myself?

Weiler (1988) explains the depth of these conflicts:

Students, like teachers, are historically situated beings, whose complex subjectivities are socially defined and at the same time are internalized and lived. Both students and teachers have experienced and participated in relationships of domination, submission, oppression, and privilege which have helped to shape who they are and how they interpret the world. This recognition of students and teachers as historically situated subjects with conflicting gender, race, and class interests is vital to understanding the possibilities and limits of the classroom.

I have tried to think back to my own years in school as a student. I can recall incidents of domination, submission, oppression and privilege. I didn't know those experiences in Weiler's terms of course. I submitted as a young child to the bullying that occurred toward me by one boy in particular because I didn't think I was allowed to fight back. It wasn't done. Day after day, I would cry all the way home as this boy threw rocks or grabbed me by the coat collar and pulled hard until I choked from the strain of pulling against him. I remember the anger in his eyes. I continued in the direction of home with his taunting and meanness following me. When we reached the part of the road where we headed in different

directions, I could only feel relief. My parents never knew of these incidents. I'm not sure why I never told them.

I can also remember incidents as a teacher where I have felt the frustrations of not being heard as I struggled to live what I learned. My mistake was in believing that it would be easy to create collaborative relationships in the classroom or the school. I hadn't realized how complex it really is.

Our research group's conversation and readings centered on these political, social and cultural issues in education. I made brief references to this in some journal entries, but I never carried the writing beyond that. Most of the incidents I collected were focused on the teaching experience itself. I wasn't able at that time to situate myself within that context. I wasn't able to build the connection between what I was reading and my own experiences. In hindsight, I suspect it was because I was uncomfortable talking about the issues. I was afraid to raise questions, losing the opportunity to make meaning through conversation. I could only feel this sense of what did it all mean? Everything seemed enormously complicated and overwhelming. I felt incredibly shaky inside, uncertain and afraid...of what I didn't know. How did it all connect with what I needed to do in the classroom? Unable to make sense of it all, and hesitant to show my lack of understanding to others, I put it to the side in avoidance and tried to seek the answer in the journals. They seemed more concrete. I continued to collect critical incidents for a year. Then came the process of trying to type up the journals and to categorize the incidents.

It wasn't until a couple of other events occurred that examples of incidents such as the one with Matthew and Christine began to resurface for me. I could no longer avoid the issues. During the time we were examining our data, I was invited to join another research group which was investigating the dilemmas of teaching. These teachers, too, felt similar tensions in their teaching lives. The conversations I had with Andy raised questions which provoked and challenged what I'd always believed. These questions gathered in my mind and were mulled over time and again. Part of our group conversations also touched on those significant educational moments

in our lives which shaped our thinking. When I had written these out, I noticed that many of these moments focused on when I felt valued or not valued, when I felt helpless, or powerless. I began to see how many of our experiences did center around power, gender, cultural differences and institutional barriers.

Meanwhile other connections were being nurtured in the original research group as we made plans to go to a conference in Exeter, England. The conversations we had also related to these issues. As I listened to the concerns of these teachers, I realized that I wasn't the only one who had these feelings of frustration. In fact, they helped put to words what I still could only feel. The question began to grow in my mind...could gender have such a huge effect on what goes on in classrooms and schools? I started to rethink other experiences in my life, both personal and professional from a different perspective.

I wonder now why the incident of Matthew and Christine and others like it did not appear in my journal. Perhaps I saw it as an issue we deal with as 'adults' forgetting that attitudes and values are formed in the earliest years. Perhaps these issues had been rendered invisible because they are such a part of our daily lives. Perhaps they reminded me of too many other experiences in my own child and adult life where the message that came across was the inferiority of women. It hurt. I realized that I had learned the lessons of being female only too well.

What I'd like to do now, is revisit the three themes which I pulled from the journals and reexamine them from the standpoint of gender. Michael Apple (1986) creates the case that in both England and the United States, teaching became a women's occupation as men left for jobs with higher status or pay. Teaching came to be associated with nurturing children and as a preparation for motherhood from the male perspective. Not all women who entered teaching considered they were preparing for motherhood. For them the job was seen as an opportunity to enter the work force on another level. As more women entered, the nature of the job changed. More controls were placed on teaching and the curricula. Primarily men filled the administrative positions, set the rules, the curricula and looked after the discipline. The system became very

patriarchal and suggested the inferiority of women. Although gains have been made through women's movements and resistance, this belief is still very prevalent today. It was there when I went to buy plumbing parts. It was there when I went to rent a miter saw. It was there during the twelve years I was a member of a pipeband. It's present in the classroom. It's all around us; sometimes very subtle, sometimes more overt.

I discuss this here because this history of patriarchy and gender are inseparable. I can't discuss gender without talking about relationships and power. I knew I wanted a different kind of relationship with my students than what teacher/student has been in a traditional sense.

In reviewing the entries on negotiation, it was evident at the beginning that I had made little headway in changing the power relationship between student and teacher. Although I wanted to build a more collaborative relationship with students I found myself working in ways that prevented it.

...I have to sit down this weekend and really plan out the year to see how it will work. Also some of the topics can exist side by side. I also need to bring more current events into things. There is much to be done.

I had commented earlier in Chapter one, that I hadn't even attempted to sit down with the students and plan. Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that one of the weaknesses of "the 'interpretive' approach...is the failure to recognize that many of the aims and purposes that teachers pursue are not the result of conscious choice so much as the constraints contained in a social structure over which they have little, if any, direct control."

My reasons for planning a year in advance without the input of students was a result of administrative requirements and expectations. It was what helped to make us accountable as teachers to administrators and the administrators to their supervisors. It was part of the institutional constraints which deal in hierarchy and

control. So deeply is it embedded that even when I am consciously trying to alter those relationships, I find myself still falling into those molds. Part of the reason I had such difficulty negotiating with the children was because I had internalized the notion of 'teacher having to be in control'. That was the history of schooling. I wanted to shift that to a shared power though I recognized my responsibility to all the children. The pull I felt between that traditional notion and what I now believe about learning and how it should operate in the classroom, created those tensions which kept me on the edge. An excerpt from the May 7th entry reflects this continued struggle.

May 7, 1991

Frustration arose as I tried to focus the group to plan our next section of study in science. I had thought we might do small group studies on the playground but as I tried to get feedback, I was frustrated by the seemingly unwillingness of students to listen to each other or to me. Everytime I tried to say something, twelve or more other voices drowned me out. What was happening here? Finally I gave up. I looked at one of the students who had been particularly outspoken.

"Fine Christopher, you go ahead and develop the topic." I then went and sat in the empty seat and waited. Christopher looked for a moment then his eyes gleamed. He picked up the meter stick and stood in front of the class. He smiled, leaned on the stick and began to extoll his knowledge about the environment and his ideas on the various sections displayed on the board- the land, air and water.

Here again, I was feeling curriculum bound and feeling guilty that I had been trying to lead the children in my direction. It was through their teaching that I learned what negotiation was about. It

was after the May 23rd entry that students really let their resistance be known in the conversation we had about the Jean George books.

SUSAN: Trevor, you had something you wanted to say, I think. Did you?

TREVOR: It's like you're MAKING us read them.

SUSAN: I'm making you read them.

JIMMY: I know...I know you're making us.

SUSAN: How am I making you read them? Can you tell me more about that?

(indistinct)

TREVOR: I want everybody in the class to read a book...

CHRISTOPHER: ...by Jean Craighead George.

TREVOR: Yea.

Once more it was evident that ownership became an important issue. The choice of the author had been mine as well as the genre of the texts. There was little input from the children as to how we set this up and they were letting me know this up front. Boomer (1992) draws our attention to what he calls the 'uses and abuses of power in education.' In the past, I had never really viewed myself as having 'power'. I always saw it as standing outside myself. Dale Spender (1982) describes how women have often felt they have less authority to act on the world. For a long time I believed this. I felt I had to defer to the 'real authority', whether it was to parents as a child, to parents in combination with other adult authority figures in the schools and community as I was growing up and to employers or other authority figures as an adult. They were the ones who had the power to make the important decisions. It is only now that I am coming to understand the position of privilege and power I do have. Being 'teacher' does put us in a position of power with the children. Boomer(1992) suggests that

...the classroom regimes which teachers establish (at whatever level of education) represent microcosms of the kind of community/society which they value. The analysis would have to be made at the deep level, not just on the basis of such things as desks in rows and formal features. One would want to know whether the teacher

power is being used to emancipate or subject; whether individuals feel confident to question or feel cowed; whether rules are imposed or collectively built; whether ethnic minorities are included or marginalized and so on. The teacher's presentation of self (e.g. as fount of received wisdom as opposed to intrepid seeker) and orientation to others is possibly more profound in its teaching than the formal curriculum. ...In order to promote student emancipation, of course, they need themselves to be emancipated or at least fighting for their own emancipation.

I envisioned a classroom where decisions are shared, where all voices have a part in the conversation and where all feel valued as people. What we do with the power and privilege we have is an important statement of how we view the world and the kind of place we want it to be.

The chapter on the relationships with parents deals with the underlying political climate of education. The November 13th entry reflects on parents' concerns with the curriculum, particularly in the area of spelling.

...When parent-teacher night finally arrived, I felt reasonably organized and ready. But I have to admit, I was surprised by two of the parents. Each had expressed in a very emphatic way their concerns about spelling. Parent one understood what we were trying to do in elementary but felt it was not benefiting them in junior high. Students were being penalized during exams for spelling errors losing up to seventeen points for spelling errors. Although not stated directly, the feeling I was getting was that elementary schools were not doing their jobs. They were not preparing them for junior high. This parent was upset by this. He had a son who was still adjusting to his first year in junior high and a daughter who would be in the same position two years down the road. Both of these children have had some struggle with their reading in the past as with spelling.

The second parent was very verbal about spelling and "it's all because of whole language". She had seen her son in junior high cry all the way home because of losing marks for spelling. She felt her other son's spelling was atrocious and no one was doing anything to help him. What was going to happen to him in two years?

I could empathize with them and feel my own outrage for them. I also thought back on the last five or six years and how hard we worked as a staff to share with parents what we were doing and why. In spite of those presentations, the sharing of students' work over a year to show the changes which took place, those parents could not see the value in what we were trying to accomplish in the writing process. They felt the pressure of what was expected at the junior high...

Parents were feeling the pressure from two directions. They were aware of what the government and media were saying about illiteracy in Canada. Much of the debate was leading to 'back to the basics' versus 'whole language'. They were also seeing the results of junior high expectations in terms of how literacy was being evaluated and the effects on their older children. They saw 'whole language' as failing their children. I felt some responsibility for that. I questioned whether I had failed these older children whom I had also taught in elementary school. Had I perpetuated the myths of whole language which Newman and Church (1990) describe? Though I cannot speak for these parents, I would guess that I lost credibility in their eyes as a teacher and they viewed my teaching ways with suspicion. My attempts to explain the philosophy behind what I was doing came too late. My careful gathering and analyzing of their son's work and the growth in the writing I saw was thrown back to me unexamined with the distaining comment, "That's garbage!"

I felt guilt and sadness after that meeting. Guilt that she felt the school was still failing her children; sadness that we could not bridge our differences for the sake of the child and uncertain of where all

this was going to lead. My uncertainty increased even more when the parents' concerns and attitudes reappeared in their children as it did for Elizabeth in this excerpt from the April 10th entry.

"Some parents think that we're not learning 'cause we don't have any homework or spelling words."
"Do you feel you're not learning?" (I was almost afraid to hear the answer to this one.)
"Well, when we get to junior high, spelling marks get taken off if we can't spell certain words right."
"I guess that is a concern. I really believe that by reading and writing a lot, we can become more familiar with these words. I thought the other things we were doing would also help. I'm hearing you say, I think, that you would like us to do something more."
"Not just me...everybody should have a test every week."

Elizabeth was feeling the tensions too, caught between her parents' beliefs and what I was promoting at school. I could empathize strongly with her. Her tensions were mine. I remember how inadequate I felt and helpless in the face of public perception of education and literacy. Weiler (1988) again helps to clarify some of these tensions:

Feminist teachers and administrators face difficulties as they try to put their ideals into practice, but these difficulties are the result of structural and institutional forces beyond the scope of their individual lives. Rather than focus on the supposed failings of *individuals* working in the schools, it is much more useful to consider the institutional structure of the schools as the cause of dissatisfaction or perceived "failure." Working from this perspective, critics have pointed to the increasing bureaucratic control in teaching; the demand for results expressed in increased testing and demand for quantifiable results; and the "deskilling" of teachers through the use of packaged curricula.

I was feeling this 'demand for results' by parents. They were used to testing in their school days and felt that not testing, was

being too laid back. The other schools did it. Although Canada is not as test oriented as some countries, it seems to also be moving in the direction of standardized testing in a variety of subject areas. I know what 'deskilled' feels like. I know what the demands packaged curricula can do. I have experienced it certainly not to the degree teachers in England have with the National Curriculum, but I believe a real loss in learning and creativity can happen for both students and teachers when those kinds of controls occur.

The chapter on 'time/organization' again reconfirms what institutional structures can do to create tensions for teachers and children. Throughout that period I seemed to be searching for some framework, schedule or structure that could ease the frustrations I was feeling when trying to work toward a more learner-centered classroom. On October 5, I wrote:

...I know one of the key factors in a smoothly running classroom is a well-managed, well-organized one- the structure is crucial. I have not worked out a framework yet that I am entirely comfortable with. That is part of the support that may be missing...

I struggled with trying to work with students to plan, yet try to integrate all disciplines to create a context for the learning, a purpose for what we were doing. Yet I had to pass in a schedule to the office. What did I call what we were doing? Was it science? math? art? or all three? I felt myself hemmed in by the expectations of the system as I described on November 15:

...When I tackle a content area like space where the hands-on part is limited, then the noise is less productive, students more inattentive, I am more transmission mode. How can I combat that? These last two, three weeks since reports, I have become more demanding in my expectations of them

in terms of listening to people, homework, time on task. I am ruling out discussion. Why? Is it a result of the reports? Is it so I feel I'm fulfilling my job? Is it the very nature of the curriculum? Poor planning? I feel as though I am chained to that 'cover the curriculum'. Why can I not break that? I changed the schedule around. I've moved science, social studies back to AM after reading; writing time after recess, after the read aloud time and math in the afternoon. It feels more comfortable that way. Now I have to rethink my topics and reprioritize what my purposes are. I have to try to be less content bound and more process oriented. It's odd to me that in spite of conscious thought to avoid that I almost can't help it...

It is difficult to move beyond the structural constraints of the institution and close to impossible to do it alone. Here again, I felt the inadequacy of being unable to do all that I wanted to do. I couldn't seem to find that 'right' framework that made the classroom feel as if it was run smoothly. I felt the pressure of time or the lack thereof for all we were to accomplish. I feared I didn't have what it takes to be a teacher anymore. I feared that 'b' word... burnout. Weiler (1988) challenges this use of the word 'burnout' as it still focuses on the individual as being at fault. Dale Spender(1982) describes in detail how historically women have been excluded, made invisible and often grow up believing we are 'wrong' because we live in a world which has been defined in patriarchal terms.

Every aspect of *their* male language serves to reinforce *their* male belief that women are in the wrong, and because *we* have to use their language *we* begin to acquire their beliefs. From birth we are bombarded with the belief that men are more important and that we have less authority to think and act in the world, that we only exist in relation to them. When we look for contrary evidence not much is to be found- not because it has not been there, but because it has been removed. So we doubt. We doubt our own feelings and our ideas. We search for words which encode our meanings, which describe how we feel and think,

but the words are not there. So we doubt more. Each day of our lives we are informed that women do not count, that we are wrong, that our different descriptions and explanations are ridiculous or unreal. If we try to insist on their validity, we can be discounted again, as aggressive or emotional (unfeminine *or* feminine, but either way *wrong*). With nothing to confirm our explanations of our own lives, we begin to deny our existence, to repudiate our explanations and our lives. We learn that we are wrong: we become educated.

Through all of my journal entries, it was clear that my initial reaction was to blame myself for 'not getting the teaching right'. I hadn't understood the complexities of how institutions work and historically have been created or how those deep-seated beliefs may impinge on the collaborative relationships we try to build in the classroom or in the school. Nor had I understood how language can help define who we are. The difficulty I had in trying to build this 'ideal' classroom I had in mind, was not so much that I didn't know the direction I wanted to head, but that there were many historical and cultural factors which intervened.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?"

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.:"

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and you get

loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

"I suppose you are Real?" said the Rabbit. And then he wished he had not said it, for he thought the Skin Horse might be sensitive. But the Skin Horse only smiled.

"The Boy's Uncle made me Real," he said. "That was a great many years ago; but once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

The Rabbit sighed. He thought it would be a long time before this magic called Real happened to him. He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished that he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

March 28

I had picked up *The Velveteen Rabbit* today. The line that stands out to me in that story is What is real?

What is real teaching? Being a learner too? Coming to know? When you really come to know something, it is like you live and breathe something new. It's not so easy to say to a child "you have fifteen minutes." You struggle with them and can understand that it takes time for the thinking to develop around a subject/topic.

What is learning to me now?

This excerpt from *The Velveteen Rabbit* has always been a favorite of mine. It has expressed my feelings for so many situations- this teacher researcher journey being one of them. I have felt the hurt that sometimes comes with turning the mirror inward. I have felt the discomfort with the vulnerability involved in

examining one's own practice and assumptions. Like Rabbit, I have felt 'the uncomfortable things' happening to me. And I have wondered, what is real teaching? What is REAL?

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Real isn't how you are made," I thought. "It's a thing that happens to you. When you are supported in a genuine way through reading, conversation, collaboration, not just in friendship but professionally too, for a long, long time then you become Real."

I started thinking about what being a 'Real' teacher means to me now. My idea of it has grown. It's learning with the children. It's helping each other 'put the edge on our learning' as I think Harste described it. It's taking the responsibility for our own learning and creating something together; no hidden agendas, an openness, respect and acceptance for who we are as people, as learners. It's hard to do but when it happens...what a powerful learning experience it can be!

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit. "Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"He's right," I thought. "It does hurt sometimes. I had to learn to be more vulnerable through conversation. I had to rethink what 'real' conversation was (Manning, 1993). I'm still learning. I've had to let down my guard and really look at who I am. It wasn't easy to share that picture with others. But the rewards in terms of learning have outweighed the pain."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. ..."

"How insightful," I cried. I remembered back to the beginnings of this journey and Andy's comment to me as I prepared to leave class to go home: "You're not seeing it in context."

I didn't know what he meant then. It took me a long time to work through that understanding and I'm still trying to make sense of it; I'm still on the way to 'becoming.'

"...once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always."

" Ooooh, Rabbit. This Skin Horse knows his stuff!" Once things change, you can't go back. That's why my frustrations were so evident. My thoughts about learning were changing and they didn't always fit the institutional expectations ...yes, frustrations abounded.....at least now I realize where the tensions lie.

The Rabbit sighed. ...He longed to become Real, to know what it felt like; and yet the idea of growing shabby and losing his eyes and whiskers was rather sad. He wished he could become it without these uncomfortable things happening to him.

The discomfort is always there at one time or another but perhaps that's when the most learning takes place. It's the discomfort that keeps us on the edge. It's what pushes us to move on.

This question of reality still lingers in my mind. I used to think there was a certain 'reality', a certain truth out there. I now believe that each of us creates our own reality in relation to our social and cultural ways of knowing. Reality changes as we use different lenses to examine our world. How I looked at my journal entries at the beginning of this research, what I thought was 'real' in them then is different from how I look at them now as I write this. There have been many conversations, rereading of texts, reading of new texts, courses and conferences which have led me to other conversations in Britain and Australia. With each new experience, each new reading of a text, comes a rethinking of what I have known before, a reconstruction of personal knowing. I had no idea at the beginning of this journey that I would find gender being raised as an issue underlying and linking these journal entries together. But it's my present reality. Who knows about tomorrow?

"Hmmmmm ... HEY, RABBIT! WAIT FOR ME ... I'LL beCOME WITH YOU!"

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