

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: ILLUSTRATED CONVERSATIONS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF
KINDERGARTNERS

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This study explores the voices of kindergartners engaged in illustrated conversations. Max van Manen's methodology for hermeneutic phenomenological research provides a framework for the study, and the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Noddings, Bakhtin, van Manen, and Palmer guide the interpretations of how we come to be with young children through dialogue.

Illustrated conversations, a process whereby the child writes his/her thoughts and drawings in a journal and then engages meaning-making with the teacher during a tape recorded dialogue, creates spaces for a teacher and student to have personal conversations about their lifeworlds. Using their own voices as the essential pathway winding through the experience, the study explores how the sixteen kindergarten children sense the spirit of home, explored the freedom to imagine their own ideas, acknowledged their identity, and developed relationships with others by engaging in

illustrated conversation. Their wondrous voices echo their sense of home and family as they defined, and redefined, their identity through friendships with the researcher and peers. The silent conversations bring forth further meaning, uncovering how space and time with young children help them better hear their own voices and the voices of others.

True listening becomes a part of pedagogy. Canvassed drawings and written thoughts, springboards for ideas, propel the conversations forward while also revealing how without voice, the meaning of the pictures and thoughts fell silent in the seeking of self. Children's voices—heard in dialogue, paused or silenced in between, and engraved on paper—connect pathways leading to self-identity. Truly listening to young children is a reflective experience that illuminates the voices and languages of young children.

This study uncovers how listening to and reflecting upon the stories young children choose to tell in tactful and reciprocal conversation is pedagogy worth exploring. The study suggests that illustrated conversations can support teachers in balancing the new curriculum mandates being required in kindergarten classrooms with engaging and meaningful interactions that uncover the cognitive, language, and social/emotional development of children. Through illustrated conversation, teachers are able to hear and support the hundred languages of children.

ILLUSTRATED CONVERSATIONS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF
KINDERGARTNERS

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2009

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DEDICATION

To my Honeybunch, who will always be the wind beneath my wings

and

To my mom, who gave me the wings to fly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Never stop loving, never stop believing, never stop dreaming your dreams.

These are my “words to live by” in my 1985 high school senior yearbook, source unknown. I am grateful for those who have walked with me along this part of my life’s journey who never stopped loving, never stopped believing, and never stopped encouraging me to make my dreams come true. I am truly grateful to Dr. Francine Hultgren, who inspired me to write from the heart from the moment I stepped into her phenomenology course so many years ago, providing me the space and time to uncover the meaning of the struggles and tensions I encountered along the way. She has guided me toward Max van Manen and Nel Noddings whose words I try to live each day with my class of kindergartners. To my committee members, Dr. Francine Hultgren, Dr. Steven Selden, Dr. Min Wang, Dr. Edyth Wheeler, and Dr. Patricia Scully, I express sincere gratitude for their time and insight into how I engage in educational settings and discourse.

To my children and their parents, for allowing me to journey with them to reveal their lifeworlds. I express my deepest love and appreciation for the presence of each of these wonderful beings who make each day of lifework, my lifeplay. Without their voices, mine could not be heard. They have given me the inspiration to find deep meaning in my lifeworld. Their joyous giggles, smiles, and hugs have given me the care I need to find balance in a world of tension. Their hundred, hundred, hundred voices have helped me listen and hold tight to my own.

For all those times you stood by me
For all the truth that you made me see
For all the joy you brought to my life
For all the wrong that you made right...
I'm everything I am because you loved me.
(Warren, D., Because You Loved Me, 1996)

Without the love and support of my family, this journey would not have begun. I thank my husband, Simon, for his unending patience, love, and support for so many years. To my children, my deep heartfelt thanks, for your understanding about how much time I needed to dream this dream. To my sisters and brother and related family members, for your thoughtful “How is it going?” questions that provided the quiet support I needed to keep writing my way through. To my father, who is with me always. And to my mother, especially, for without her initial “Just go, Michele, and see what it is like,” and her reading and rereadings, I would not have been blessed to uncover the meaning of my own identity and my students’.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE WAY OF LANGUAGE

No way. The
hundred *is* there.

The child
is made of one hundred.

The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.
A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.

The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)

but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.

They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and Christmas.

They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.

The child says:
No way. The hundred *is* there.

(Loris Malaguzzi, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, in Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1994, p. vi)

It was 1973. I walked into Cannon Road Elementary School toward the first classroom on the left into Mrs. Kellehar's class. I entered a world in which 35 years later I still dwell—the world of kindergarten. What I experienced there (friendships, outside play time, circle time, and hugs) is what I also experience every day in the kindergarten class I now teach. The wonder, excitement, and joy of young children have been and continue to be my life's journey. I have been blessed by hundreds of smiles, hugs, and voices all of which have led me to wonder about how children understand and create in their own hundred worlds. As a student and teacher, I journey to understand the languages my students speak, the languages that I speak, and how these find meaning together and for each other. How do I listen to and hear the experiences of the children who I talk with, write with, and care for each day ten months of the year? How have their hundred languages created my own hundred languages?

A Kindergartner's Hundred Languages

At the end of each school year, I take my children to visit the first grade classrooms. We enter the room, sit on the carpet, and gaze around the room. It is a time filled with anticipation for them. All the preconceived notions of first grade are just a summer away—their own desk, a new room, a hallway with “big” kids, real math and reading! Together we sit and wonder what it will be like. Questions race through my mind. I wonder how James (*all children's names are pseudonyms*) will do in this structure. How will Margaret adjust to the academics as the youngest one in the class? Will they forget me? Will they forget the Friday dance? Will they remember baking apple pie? Will they ever come to say “hi”? Their questions are

much different. They ask questions like, “Will we have snack? Will we do math? Will we have recess?” But the most frequently asked question, and usually the first, that arises from year to year is, “Will we have free choice?” Every year they worry about the loss of this time they treasure.

Free choice in my kindergarten room is when all the mandates of the system, all the reading group basic sight word instruction, all the “have-tos” of math skills, and all the worksheets disappear and they are free to choose whatever activity they want in the classroom. Their voices of who they are speak clearly and with great vigor during this time. Sarah paints everyday—a rainbow, a sun, flowers and a girl standing under the rainbow using the pinks, purples, and reds found on the easel. Jason and Damarqco head straight to the blocks where airplanes and cars begin their travels up the ramp blocks, airborne across the room and into a wall. Jennette makes cake and pie creations with the sand that inevitably winds up mostly on the floor. David places himself comfortably at the computer, logs in, opens up his favorite game and engages with computer language. Christian and Danielle pretend to be Dad and Mom in the miniaturized area we call dramatic play.

Kindergarten free choice gives them the time and space to practice their hundred ways of playing, their hundred thoughts, and their hundred joys. The artist’s voice projects itself with line and color for future displays in museums. The construction voices formulate aerodynamics for future airlines and car makers. The tactile and creative voices design sculptures for aesthetic environments. The computerized voice develops software for the 22nd Century. The imaginary voices challenge tradition by merging cultures and beliefs. And when I hear their question,

“Do you have free choice?” at the end of each year, I am warmed to know that their hundred *is* still there and that kindergarten did not steal it away.

Natural Languages

I am always amazed how my kindergartners are filled with thoughts. I listen to their voices as they play in free choice, as they are in line waiting to wash their hands, as they tell me about their pictures, and as they converse with one another as they complete their seatwork. Their “natural ‘languages,’ or modes of expression, including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music” (Edwards et al., 1994, p. 3) are heard each day, but how is it that we listen to these voices that illuminate who they are and how they make meaning of the world in which they dwell?

One morning during circle time at the beginning of the year, we were talking about our names. One child’s name was Jason. As I called his name aloud, another boy said, “Oh, like the movie!” The movie I wondered—the movie that **I** connect with Jason? Friday the 13th? I asked, “You mean Friday the 13th?” A confirmation of this was indicated with a head nod. Later, during our journal writing, I asked this young child about the movie and if he was afraid. He told me “No, because Jason only kills adults, not children.” I asked him if Jason was real and he said, “Yes.” Our conversation went on to talk about costumes and movies, fiction and non-fiction. It was on that day, that I caught a glimpse of this child’s world outside my door, and how his behaviors in class now made more sense. One of his hundred was not one of mine. Now it is.

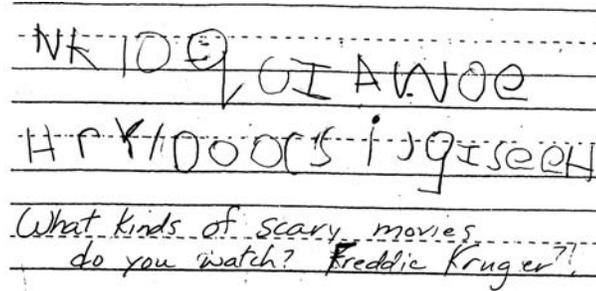


Figure 1. Is Jason real?

A few years ago, a student of mine spoke to me using his language of emotion. One day I was talking with a child who had expressed dissatisfaction with the noise level in the room. In the process of solving the problem, I had hugged the boy, gotten down on the floor to make eye contact with him, and spoke with him, personally, face to face. As I stood back up, I noticed another boy watching me from a distance. Immediately, this young boy stated that he, too, was having difficulty with the noise level. I looked at him and without saying anything knew that what he really wanted was just a hug and some attention. He got it. He continued to get it each day. And through just this one interaction, he and I began to have more conversations sharing our thoughts with one another. He often ran to me at lunch and gave me a hug goodbye if only for that hour we were apart. And at the end of each day, he would say goodbye to me before heading off to his bus. Perhaps that conversation, the replaying in my head of his face, his silence, and his body language, developed into a larger conversation that will allow us each to take “a position somewhere along the road...forever to formulate ideas and make talk about the way” we walked together on that day (Heidegger, 1968, p. 169).

On another day, a former student, now in third grade, walked into my room and handed me an envelope. She said, “Mrs. Dean, I just found this. I don’t know

when I wrote it but I wanted you to have it.” After a long hug and a thank you, I watched her leave my room now 4 inches taller, older looking and more mature. Her visit took me back to a time when she was a cow in our play “Click Clack Moo: Cows that Type” and how she knew all her lines and everyone else’s. I flashed back to times spent with her at the Daisy girl scout outings with my daughter selling cookies and learning to greet people politely, and not forgetting our manners whether they bought some or not. It reminded me of how fast they grow up but how connected we still are. And then I sat down and opened the card. It said, “Thank you for being a special teacher for me. As my kindergarten teacher you are in my heart always.” She wrote it in first grade. She gave it to me more than a year after it was written. How do I begin to describe the emotion that to this day fills my heart when I think about the care that she put into that card and the care she took to deliver it?

The note hangs behind my desk and each time I turn to get the stapler, tape, or pencil, I gaze at her hand-written note. I find myself reflecting upon who I am and how it is that I am blessed with such thoughtful pedagogical acts by children. “And thus the child becomes my teacher” (van Manen, 2002, p. 13). In the rush of mandates and questions of whether what I require of children is developmentally appropriate, she recognizes me as a teacher, as a caring soul who continues to live in her heart. She teaches me to continue to believe in myself and who I am. Her message is recognition of our relationship acknowledging my existence, my very being. Van Manen (2002) calls us to look at recognition as a teaching and learning experience that “is inextricably intertwined with selfhood and personal identity” (p. 38). I

recognize her and myself as connected beings, each guiding each other to who we are and who we wish to become.

“Mrs. Dean...Mrs. Dean...what is this word?” draws me back to the present. I stop and look around at the kindergartners sitting before me waiting for me to respond. I look at them and wonder whether they, too, will recognize me as they journey to becoming. I know that I must recognize them and who they are today to help them become tomorrow.

Capturing a Hundred Thoughts

Kindergarten is a place filled with stories. “Mrs. Dean, I went to the store last night and I got a new PSP game.” “Mrs. Dean, my mom bought me these new shoes and she said I couldn’t get them dirty.” “Mrs. Dean, I went to my mom’s sister’s birthday party and we had cake and ice cream!” I am told so many stories each day that it can sometimes be overwhelming. Capturing moments such as these on paper has found its way into my pedagogy, allowing me to pause and be “able to reflect on the meaning, purpose, and significance of the educational experiences of students” (van Manen, 1991, p. 100). What did it mean to Jason to hear about a movie where he was a “killer” of adults? What does my hugger take with him about the power of a hug? Will my little Katie continue to remember the meaning we made together during her kindergarten experience, or will it be covered over by the voices of others? Can we capture these moments on paper? How can we write our way into meaning together?

My meaningful way. When I began teaching kindergarten many years ago, I would often write in a journal at the end of a long day, trying to make sense of the

chaos that occurred over the six hours that I spent with my children. That first year I taught kindergarten with Frankie and his many block-throwing events. I recall Robert's long solitary walk from his home after ensuring his two year old sister was down for her nap and the responsibility he held as a five year old. I can still see Peter and his same dirty shirt Monday through Friday. I remember Kelli and her one hour bus ride from a white neighborhood into a black neighborhood in order to attend the academy program in public school. These are just a few of the experiences I explored alone in my journals. I was able to reflect upon the meaning *I* had made of their experience but was lacking the meaning *they* had made.

As years passed, I continued my journaling but added writing to my students' instruction. It began as the "Writer's Workshop" methodology in which I told the children what to write about and I corrected it for spelling and punctuation. But as in the past, only I made meaning from the writing entries. To the children, it was just another assignment. I didn't allow them to choose what they wanted to write about. I silenced their ideas and told them to speak my language.

Looking back upon this time of instruction, the interpretation of a Writer's Workshop was very similar to what Landry (2000) defines:

Writer's Workshop is a program that teaches children the conventions of writing. Students not only learn proper grammar and punctuation; they also come to learn and value the importance of drafting, revising, and editing their pieces of writing...Writer's Workshop is an excellent way to prepare students for state tests. (Landry, 2000, p. 2)

As a first year kindergarten teacher, I did what I was trained to do. I prepared my children for first grade, never stopping to interpret what their words were really saying to me. I followed the philosophy taught to me in teacher preparation courses.

Reflection upon my children's lives and my own were not a part of my pedagogy. I was not on the path yet. I stood outside of it and took "a position somewhere along the road...[never making] conversation about whether, and how, early and later stretches of the way may be different" (Heidegger, 1968, p. 169). I asked children to stand with me.

Their meaningful way. Experience and education have broadened my horizon about writing and meaning making with young children. Lucy Calkins (1994) introduces Writer's Workshop as rehearsals for writing. She encourages teachers to invent their own ways of inviting students to live like writers during their writing time. Children need to see the value in their ideas and the experiences that encompass their lives. Writing should demonstrate "the power and purposes...in our lives" and invite "students to discover ways writing can enrich their lives" (Calkins, 1994, p. 31). Lev Vygotsky, whose socio-cultural theory is based upon interactions among children and adults, believes

that writing should be meaningful for children, that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing should be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life. Only then can we be certain that it will develop not as a matter of hand and finger habits but as a really new and complex form of speech. (Vygotsky, as cited in Cole et al., 1978, p. 118)

The invitation to dialogue with children about their intrinsic lives began my pedagogical journey that I have named "illustrated conversations". These conversations are not assignments. I do not give them a topic. The purpose of illustrated conversations is to allow children to share what is most meaningful to them without the 'teaching of writing' requirements. There are no spelling errors. There are no punctuation errors. There are no 'top to bottom around and down' errors. It is all

‘write’. This time is *their* time to project their voice, to make a space for self-expression, and to be who they are however they are. What meaning we make of these stories is yet to be seen. What will our conversations reveal? How will we create a space for our relationship to grow and develop into a caring, respectful, and ongoing part of who are?

When my kindergartners stand before me and share their illustrations (Fr. *illustrare*) and written text from their journals, their eyes “light up” as they are “making clear in the mind” all the ideas that are held upon the page (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved June 25, 2007). Some will approach me and initiate the conversation. “This is me and Natalie and Jonathon all under the rainbow dancing. We are sliding down the rainbow after. We made flowers.” They embellish upon the details and make clear in my mind what they wish to express and share. Our informal and friendly “interchange” of “views, thoughts and opinions” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, p. 182) has come to be woven into the “ritual” writing process that we established together (Calkins, 1994, p. 33).

The conversational way. Our conversations—this “turn[ing] often”—from the French *conversare* occur not only during our journal time. We often share ideas and experiences in our daily routines—our circle time, our silly conversations on our way to lunch, and during our group snack time. Can these interactions also be our journals—a daily record of our thoughts (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved June 25, 2007)? Each day has become an invitation to talk with my students, to sit and listen and hear what impinges upon them. This dialogue allows me to find the meaning of their lives, to help me help them find the meaning in their lives. It is not a

“time filler” (Smith, 2000, p. 3), but rather a time to fill one’s Being with relation, care, and conversation. The time we set aside for illustrated conversations in our written journals has become a time to document our relationship. And, it is this phenomenon to which I am called in my study.

Just ‘write’. Listening to my own languages is what I have come to understand as an important part of my life with young children. It is through the “opening up, i.e., this revealing, i.e., the truth of beings” (Heidegger, 1956/1993, p. 165) that I was able to find meaning from the day’s activities with my children and allow them to speak their language. Amidst all of the activities, the mandates, and the routines, my father’s influence taught me that time must be made to just write with young children: No corrections of spellings or punctuation need be addressed, no “write-about,” no have-tos. Just write. Just think on paper. Share with me your thoughts. Share with me your dreams. Share with me how you look at the world and how it reflects who you are. Calkins (1994) in *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1994) states that “Writing does not begin with deskwork but with lifework” (p. 3). The following illustrations of my students’ writing and drawing, as well as my engagement with them display this sense of lifework. Marie’s lifework in September focused on the immediate events of her life with her family at her 6th birthday party.

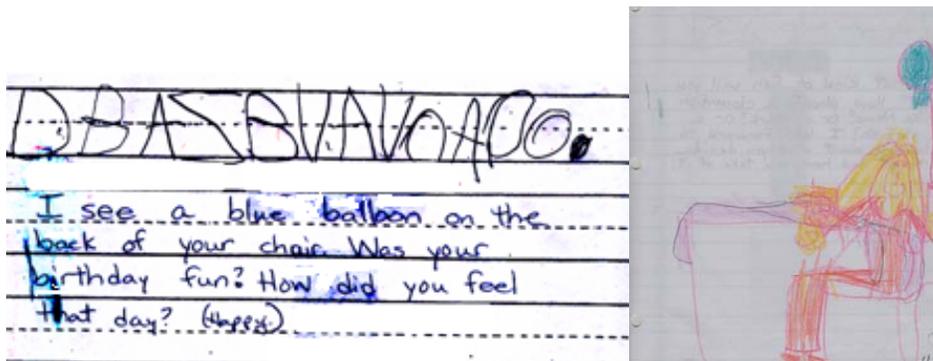


Figure 2: Marie’s birthday party joys.

This young girl's birthday was significant for her this day. How did getting a blue balloon make her feel? Were there people or events that can help her find meaning in why she wrote about her birthday? She shared with me the details of her party, the presents she received that day, the special people in attendance at her party, and how she felt as she sat there on her chair blowing out the candles on her cake during our illustrated conversation time.

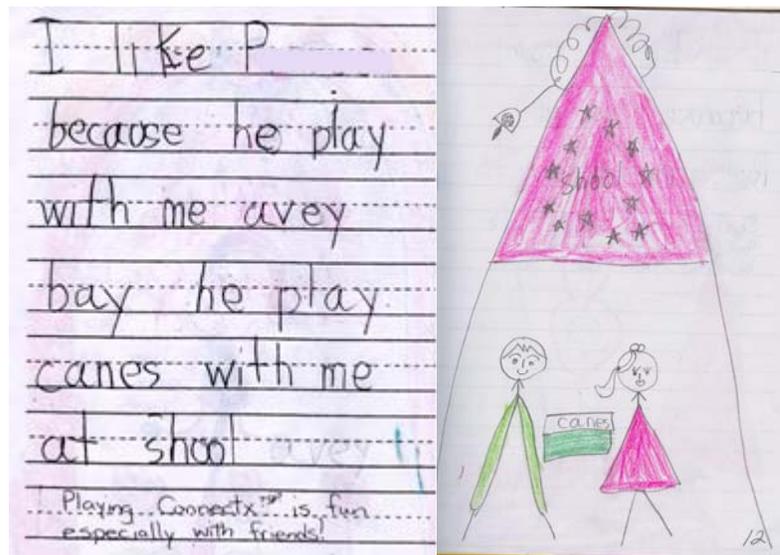


Figure 3. Jamie's friendships at school.

For Jamie, having friends to play K'nex with at school was very important, especially since Jamie only wrote about her family the first half of the year. For Jamie to illuminate her joy when her friend, "P", played with her was an "opening up" of her feelings.

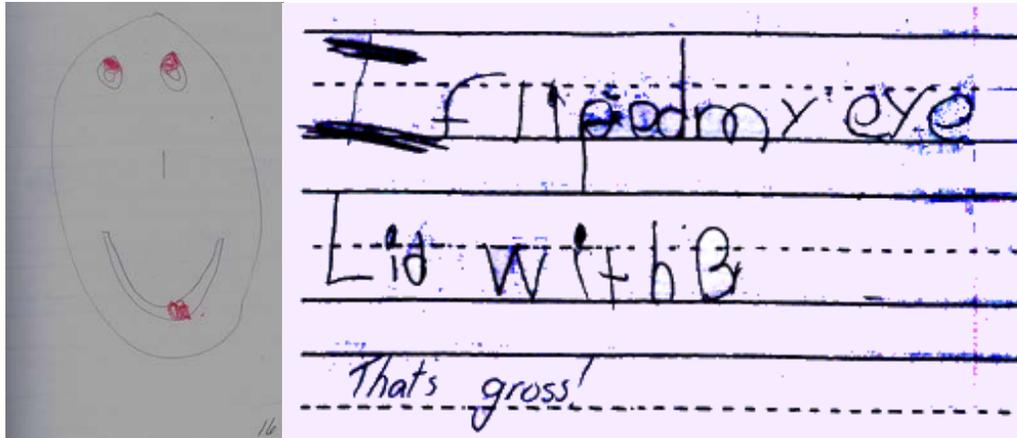


Figure 4. Henry's eye-flipping adventures

Henry was a twin who found his voice in the world by being artistic and funny. Through his entries he was able to spend hours detailing his thoughts in his illustrations (not to mention his ability to express his thoughts in text). Henry would share many of his jokes and silly interactions he shared with his brother and his grandfather during our time together. His illustrations were filled with details that he was not able to write on paper but was able to express in dialogue with me. I came to understand that while it took him a great deal of time to complete classwork, Henry was focused more on the details of his activity rather than just getting it all done. What was meaningful to Henry was enjoying his life with his family and doing the best work—not the most work but the best work he could while in school.

When engaging with my students, I must “*see* a situation calling for sensitivity to *understand* the meaning of what is seen, to *sense the significance* of this situation, to *know how and what to do*, and to actually *do* something right” (van Manen, 1991, p. 146). I must “[learn] to know only what [I love], and the deeper and fuller the knowledge is to be, the more powerful and vivid must be the love, indeed the passion” (Goethe, as cited in van Manen, 1997, p. 6). I must listen to their

languages, listen to my own languages, and merge the languages, for “*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 305). Together my students and I embark on a written and spoken journey that will lead us in a meaningful way to understanding how it is that we become who we are independently and together. Thus, we seek to uncover the lived experience of writing in kindergarten.

To understand more fully the meaning that lies in their stories, their ideas, and their thoughts, I must look to my own hundred languages. Without some rudimentary understanding of who I am, I cannot begin to help others understand themselves. And so it is that my children’s hundred languages bring me to reflect upon my own hundred languages.

My Hundred Languages

My languages are many, and yet, they are few. My teacher dialect came long before my “official” mother dialect, but both are deeply embedded in the language of early childhood education. My student language has changed over the course of my schooling from quantitative calculations to a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. I have hobby languages such as scrapbooking, sewing, decorating, and playing sports. Some languages have been able to voice themselves; others have been silenced; others purposely have been tucked deep down inside, and some have even been stolen away.

The written language is the mode that has brought me to an understanding of all the other languages that stir within me. The languages of data and research, early childhood philosophy, and phenomenology are a part of my way, tension-filled and

conflicting, but a part of who I am. I hear my languages because of the language of my written reflection. Join me briefly on a journey of my becoming a writer with young children uncovering the people and places that guide me on the *write* research path.

The AGE of Writing

My father, Alfred George Ennulat, or AGE as his license plate indicated, journaled daily. I would often find him tucked away in his “soul” room, pen and paper active. When I was growing up, my father would disappear to his room for hours, writing his thoughts. When his children moved away, he photocopied his thoughts and sent them to each of us so that one day we could document his life for him. It was those letters that kept me going when I was away at college, longing to get a letter to find out what was going on at home. For much of his journaling, my father wrote the facts. His deepest thoughts and emotions were hidden somewhere behind the weather and the daily schedules, waiting for me to uncover them. Looking back now that I have traveled along the path of reflection myself, his daily writing and sharing was his way of asking for recognition and receipt of his existence. His children laughed when we spoke of the daily letters he wrote indicating that “We know what the weather is, Dad!” I never thanked him for these letters. I didn’t acknowledge his existence for him. But they await my children in a binder in the attic in hopes that one day they will acknowledge his lifework.

Shortly before he died my father and I talked about the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology I found so captivating in my doctoral program. I explained how I could connect with the words and the emotions, and how writing my

way to understanding was finally a comforting assignment. The classes engaged in “ongoing cultural conversations” which addressed our present concerns coupled with tradition (Applebee, 1996, p. 39). This dialogue provided “a powerful starting point for reconciling issues of curriculum with recent approaches to instruction” (Applebee, 1996, p. 39). The tension that existed between theory and practice could finally be aired from the silence that lies within our school walls. I could find meaning in my pedagogy with young children through these conversations. And then I thought of his journals and how I wished he could find the meaning in his life through his words. How, perhaps, he could come to peace with his unattained goals. I explained how phenomenology allowed me to find my Being in the world and how different it is than just being in the world.

Because phenomenon in the phenomenological understanding is always just what constitutes Being, and furthermore because Being is always the Being of beings, we must first of all bring beings themselves forward in the right way if we are to have any prospect of exposing Being. These beings must likewise show themselves in the way of access that genuinely belongs to them. (Heidegger, 1962/1993, p. 84)

After my father died in 2005, my mother shared with me my father’s deepest thoughts—not between the weather and schedules but in his private journals penned in ink since the day he was married. One day when I find the strength to read his true feelings about his life, he and I will again be together turning each page and acknowledging his life. I wonder if he has written down somewhere the poem we wrote together when I was in the sixth grade. He was there on his bed in his tank undershirt and shorts watching the Dan Rather Evening News when I came in crying

because I couldn't think of anything to write. We crafted this poem illustrating our lives and how uncertain they really are.

To where I go,
I'll never know.
But where I land,
Could be water or sand.

My father is responsible for showing me that writing **was** to be a part of daily life; that writing brought forth those reflections that genuinely belonged to me and exposed who I was to myself. There are a few of his "Thought for the Day" letters I keep tucked inside my plan book to remind me of the Being that brought me to where I am today.

Early Writing

Yellowed papers of yesteryear fill the tub in the attic with my writing. I have always enjoyed writing, though I did not get very good grades in it. Looking through these papers returns me to a time of elementary school poetry writings, signed yearbook entries, and dittoed worksheets. There on the back of some scrap paper lies the numbers 1 to 1000, handwritten and handed in to Mrs. Rockwell in first grade for extra credit points. Middle school seems to have been lost or thrown away, perhaps an indication that I walked through those years with little recollection of anything positive.

As I sift through the memories, a plastic folder appears under the Mickey Mouse three-ring binder. Upon it is written Michele Ennulat Pd. 1 12-21-83. It begins with "To think of how I will feel, think, and act 30 years from now is mind boggling..." I was a sophomore in high school at the time, 16 years old, and had begun working as a summer counselor. I read on and smiled. It said:

Being out of college for about 20-25 years already, I will have started teaching young children. I hope that the kids I teach will teach me too; teach me what the real meaning of caring and loving is about, teach me about their life and what they want to do with it, like I have with mine. When considering my experience learning, I can not really say. I know I will grow with every new experience. Everyone's learning depends on their behavior and attitude towards wanting to learn.

I don't remember writing this piece, but I am glad I kept it. My path toward phenomenology began well before my doctoral work was ever thought about. Van Manen's (1991) notions of the child as teacher and care in experiences are exemplified in my 'pre-study' experiences. I have carried these thoughts with me all these years but never really heard them until rereading them and merging the past with my present. What would it have been like to read a journal of writings that I had done in kindergarten? Perhaps one day my students who receive their lifework each June bound in a folder will return to them in 30 years. Will their past also be their present?

Following the Write Direction

Fresh out of college and teaching fourth grade with dittos and textbooks at a public school academy far from my kindergarten comfort zone, I officially began my teaching career. I walked through the year in "place panic" (Casey, 1993, pp. ix-x) with my students always longing to be down the hall with the little ones. I was not comfortable in this place called 'fourth grade.' Where was the colorful carpet for circle time? Where were the cubbies? I dwelled in a portable classroom that lacked color, itty bitty chairs, and Lincoln Logs. I was lost. A year later, I walked into a room with big hollow blocks, housekeeping sinks and stoves, and paint easels. I knew where I was. I was home. I was free to let children construct their knowledge and I

would simply guide them to understanding. I learned new teaching strategies and began to realize how I needed to meet each child's individual needs. I also realized that kindergarten was a place where I would forever find comfort and security.

Reinvigorated with new knowledge about teaching, I returned to the University for more enlightenment and a Master's degree in Human Development. I left the classroom, and like Froebel (1889/2007), was guided by an internal force to being an official full-time student. After a year, I returned to the classroom but floundered, again, for several years in place panic. I tried out second grade and an office technology position until I realized that "the power of place such as a mere [kindergarten] room possesses [,] determines not only *where* I am in the limited sense of cartographic location but *how* I am together with others (i.e. how I commingle and communicate with them) and even *who* we shall become together" (Casey, 1993, p. 23). I returned to the world of miniature tables, silly read-aloud stories and songs, and finger paint.

After a three year stay-at-home-mom sabbatical, I returned to the public school system in an all-day kindergarten program in the same school I left prior to my daughter's birth. I knew that I would not leave kindergarten for a very long time. I came to understand that it is truly one of my hundred languages. Shortly thereafter, I was called again by knowledge to pursue a doctorate in Curriculum Theory and Development, this time remaining at home with my kindergartners while attending classes. I can replay the day of my first class as a doctoral student. I was driving to work that morning convinced that the road was too long at the cost to my family who needed me present. I weighed the "go—not go—go—not go" all day. At 3:45 pm I

got into the car and drove toward home. I called my mother. She told me to go. “Go and see what it is like, Michele. Just go.” I listened to her. I am grateful for her words for now I am awakened to new paradigms. My interests are captured by phenomenology and different ways of thinking about my being with young children. I started to write my way through my languages and theirs.

I began my coursework in 2003, just after the No Child Left Behind mandates and rigorous kindergarten curriculum became the required guidelines in the classroom. Up until that time, kindergarten was a place to believe in children. We were to help them socialize, teach some alphabet, and count objects to ten. We were trusted to care and use our knowledge of history to guide our developmentally appropriate practices. The past is perhaps what called me back home time and time again. The new rigorous mandates replaced our ways of being. I felt alone and frustrated with my profession—again in place panic. I longed to be with others who questioned the path we were being asked to walk. I needed to be with others who could dream the dreams and make them real. I began to wonder if place panic is an inherent part of life.

On September 8, 2003, in my first journal entry for *Principles of Curriculum Theory and Development*, I wrote:

My notion is that there needs to be a balance between free exploration and academic standards. Brain research tells us that young children need stimulating environments and that the synapses that occur because of these help to shape the brain both physically and in creating “maps” for thinking and processing. Therefore, children need the free exploration of a stimulating environment but in addition, research tells us that children are capable of learning far more than we have expected if given the appropriate stimulation. (Journal Entry, September 8, 2003)

Alone, I listened and searched for balance between the mandates and careful attention to children's needs. I read Max van Manen's *The Tone of Teaching* (2002) and *The Tact of Teaching* (1991). These texts, now filled with stickie notes, reflect the ah-ha moment that I wait for my kindergartners to have each year. To read someone else's ideas that are so much like my own, I begin to wonder if the paths we take are already planned for us. I found comfort in van Manen's words. I felt the strength to continue teaching my young children knowing that I was headed in the right direction, a path that would forever change our lives even while our voices were being silenced. I was now in place.

The Silenced Voices Within

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

Have you ever watched a kindergartner who has sat in circle time for more than 30 minutes on her carpet square with legs in "magic 5" and hands in laps, head cocked up looking at the teacher sitting in her comfortable rocker? One shifts his weight from one side to the other, trying to take the stiffness out without getting in trouble for not sitting still. Another puts his hands at his sides and tries to push up on his arms giving his legs the slightest bit of stretch. Another just flat out uncrosses her legs and puts them straight out in front of her like pretzel rods. The active one of the class has been spread eagle for 25 minutes now laying on his back and rolling around the carpet. He is lucky to be in circle still and not in the time out chair. Has the

teacher listened to the voices of her students? They long to stand up, dance, wiggle, and talk to a friend. They wish to reveal to others their thoughts and their desires.

What meaning do they make of the activity as they sit there and listen? What is it like for them to think about recess and free choice while sitting silenced on the carpet?

What is it like for teachers to understand how to come together tactfully with children and not be able to? What meaning do these teachers make from the engagements they *are* permitted? What meaning do the children make from these same experiences? In a nationally data-driven, quantitatively research-based educational system, teachers have been told what to say and how to say it. They have been given curriculum guides that explicate the language they are to use when engaging in instruction with children. Where are their hundred languages? Were they stolen? Packed away? Hushed?

As a teacher who has guided and has been guided by her students for many years, I sought to keep my voice alive. Going to graduate school exposed me to new voices, resurged old ones, and gave me the confidence to make heard those I felt needed to be heard. In school, I rediscovered my languages. I wrote my way through the silence. I understand being silenced, being in a place where you don't feel comfortable to be yourself, being in place panic. You don't care to hear. You don't care to listen. You don't care to express your thoughts. You would rather just silently be for as long as you need to be. Young children inherently want to be heard and not just seen. They freely open their hearts to those who will listen. What joy it is to hear children playing, laughing, and yes, even disagreeing. They are using their voices to be. Without their voices, there would be no "Mrs. Dean, look at my new shoes. I can

run faster now!” or “Mrs. Dean, you are the bestest teacher cause you let us go outside today!” There would be no interesting stories to uncover who we are. There would be no music, no uniqueness, no growing. It would be too quiet. It would be like walking into a kindergarten classroom where all are silently working at tables on meaningless dittos. They would be in place panic.

My voice and my students’ voices are the focus of this turning to the phenomenon of writing with young children. Because of their limited writing ability but strong verbal skills, illustrated conversations begin with self-determined drawings and initial attempts at formulating their thoughts and continue with a sharing and embellishing of their ideas with the teacher. How do I come to interpret the lives of my children through their illustrations and voiced stories? What meaning do we make together as we engage in our conversations and unsilence the world in which they dwell? What meaning do they make of their own lives as they live out kindergarten? How will the space we share create a caring place to acknowledge and listen to the voices of who we are?

Meaningful Language

Collecting text using the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology requires the researcher “to ask selected individuals to write their experiences down” (van Manen, 1997, p. 63). Since “most people find writing difficult...they will talk with much more ease and eloquence and with much less reserve than they will write their thoughts on paper....Writing forces the person into a reflective attitude—in contrast to face-to-face conversation in which people are much more immediately involved” (van Manen, 1997, p. 64). My interactions with my young kindergartners

have begun to open up the phenomenon of how children create meaning from their experiences with friends, family, and in school situations. Journaling with young children seems to have evolved as a way in which I can find out what is meaningful to them through interpersonal conversation. The more I explored phenomenology, dialogue and illustration seemed to be the ways that would capture best the essence of writing with young children.

Balancing Passionate Languages

Teaching kindergarten is my passion. This passion is filled with tensions between curriculum as plan and lived curriculum (Aoki, 2005a). Whether we follow Locke's (1692) theory in which children are a "tabula rosa" able to be "written" upon by others, or we adhere to Froebel's philosophy in which children are "in the center of all things, and all things are seen only in relation to himself, to his life" (Froebel, as cited in Palmer, 2001a, p. 94), educators of young children find themselves immersed in a world of play and laughter. Teachers of kindergartners find themselves dwelling in between these early childhood theories that support children's endeavors and discoveries and a national trend to create an academic world for five year olds. To dwell here means to balance both worlds, to combine horizons of opposing perspectives. Teachers must find their own balance, and only then can they tend to the balancing of their students' lives.

Balance is a question of centering. When we are properly centered, our experience of Being is in equilibrium. Being well-centered, we can encounter other beings in a more relaxed, open, receptive way. (Levin, 2003, p. 274)

I am well-centered on the lives of my students. I seek to understand their social-emotional development, physical motor development, language development, and cognitive development. Dewey (1938) explains:

Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them. (Dewey, 1938, p. 35)

While I was taught to instruct through a constructivist approach (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1915/2001; Piaget, 1959; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978), it is because of Maria Montessori (1961), Lev Vygotsky (1934/1986), Jean Piaget (1959), and many others that I am a combination of early childhood philosophies. With each lesson I teach to kindergartners, each course I instruct to community college child care professionals, and each conversation I have with colleagues, my horizon expands and I forever become someone different than I was before. It is through my written daily journaling that I reflect upon these interactions, choosing to make them part of my close horizon, or to keep them in the distance.

Who I am is reflected in my engagement with my kindergarten students. Through writing, together we merge horizons and see within each other a deeper understanding of who we are. Hermeneutic phenomenological research calls me to write and question the meaning of being in the world with my kindergartners. Through this conversing, I am brought to this question: “**What is the lived experience of kindergartners engaged in illustrated conversations?**” What meaning do these conversations uncover of the students’ experiences in relation to how they have come to Be in the world in which they dwell? What meaning do these conversations uncover of the students’ lives for the teacher? How do these

conversations come together to create a tactful relationship between student and teacher? How will my own journaling reveal the meaning of shared space between student and teacher?

Lived Paths of Meaningful Experiences

To do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching—questioning—theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world....Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. (van Manen, 1997, p. 5)

My passion for understanding my students' lives has opened up questions that I seek to answer through reflection about and with my students. I care about my students, not just about whether or not they will "meet the standards," but about who they are as people. How is it that my care will allow them to be confident with their own languages, to hold tight and not let others steal them away? In order to care, I must step out of my "own personal frame of reference into [my students]. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us" (Noddings, 2003, p. 24). Therefore, I must care enough about their meaning making of kindergarten to step outside of the mandates, those issues important to me and others, and step into their world. As an adult, I have, in a sense, outgrown the language of childhood, even as I dwell within it each day. This study will require that I relearn that language. I must uncover my own childhood language that has been stolen away by time in order to hear my students' voices clearly. I turn to van Manen's (1997) framework for researching lived experiences. These six activities provide insight into how illustrated conversations create meaning for children.

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

To understand the intention of phenomenological research, it is important I recognize that interpretation of my students' lives is "always *one* interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description" (van Manen, 1997, p. 31). The purpose of this study is not to generalize about how writing with young children should or should not be a part of all kindergarten curricula. It will not try to prove how journaling can solve the problem of how five-year-olds can learn to write better. It is my hope that what will evolve from our journey together is how teachers and kindergarten students can create a lived curriculum through dialogue. The analysis of the technical aspects of their writing can be observed and integrated into other times of instruction, but the meaning that children make of their lives in kindergarten could help to recenter and balance the mandated curriculum with the lives of young children in our classrooms. The voices of our children call to us to listen with open hearts and minds into how they perceive life. If we understand how children perceive themselves and their world, and structure schools around these ideas, would we not create a better education for our children? Would it not help to develop in children a lifelong love of learning? Who wouldn't benefit from children

looking to school as an enriching, engaging, thoughtful place to Be, instead of “a boring place where teachers tell you what to do all the time” (Conversation with Anthony, 2008).

Thus, the focus of my work with young children is uncovering what is meaningful to them enough that they wish to write about it and share it with me. “Lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them. Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life” (van Manen, 1997, p. 37). As they inscribe their memories on paper, our conversations will be forever etched onto their hearts and mine.

Turning the Page Toward a New Direction

As I begin the journey with my children, I have come to understand the importance of dialogue and developing relationships with my students. It is not only through conversation that these bonds will be formed, but the process of writing thoughts on paper gives us all the opportunity to uncover who they are, their purpose in life, and how they come to understand themselves in the larger world. Each year I am blessed with a group of children who come together as a family over the course of ten months. Year to year research will differ. What I uncover this year will be different than next year because of the nature of human uniqueness. Phenomenology, then, is my way of access to understanding these meaning making experiences with my kindergarten children.

This first chapter turns to the phenomenon of how I came to understand my position along the way. It examines how my life with kindergartners has evolved

from meaningless writing assignments to creating environments that examine the meaning of writing life experiences. Chapter Two deepens the examination of my work with young children using the foundations of early childhood education theory and current educational practices. Chapter Three presents the phenomenological grounding of my study, more closely uncovering the meaning that lies within the texts of philosophers such as van Manen, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Chapter Four reveals the wondrous voices of my children during illustrated conversations. Their voices emerge as pathways that explore the meaning of being at home and in imaginary worlds with others helping to define and redefine their identity. Chapter Five opens up the dialogue of what it means to listen—truly listen with young children. Finally, Chapter Six illustrates how children’s drawings and written text help to uncover the meaning they make of their compositions. Chapter Seven examines my personal journey of reflection and the meaning of shared space with kindergartners and how these insights may guide other teachers of young children who wish to better understand the tactful relationships that illustrated conversations can bring to the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO: WE LOOK TO THE PATHS OF OTHERS

Along my garden paths, perennials like Columbine, Hen and Chicks, Twirling Butterflies, and Hydrangeas guide my way. Each spring, I spend many hours caring for these precious gifts. I revitalize these gardens by trimming dead leaves, pruning twigs, and adding mulch. I plant new perennials to add more color and tend to the weeds that invade the soil. I give to them as much as they give to me. When I sit on my deck, I experience the fragrance of the lilac, the new blooms of the double rose, and the beauty of the day lilies. And so it is that my garden and I provide the joy, love, and care that each of us needs to survive each day.

I have another garden that is life-sustaining: my “kinder-garden.” It is a garden of children, each with their own unique blossoms, fragrances, and needs. These precious gifts also need tending and care each day. In order to survive, they must be planted in the right light, given ample water, and have access to nutrients. I find peace in this garden I tend for ten months of each year.

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life—learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon.

When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.

Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup—
they all die. So do we.

And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned—the
biggest word of all—LOOK.

(Fulghum, 1988, pp. 6-7)

Fulghum (1988) takes me back to *my* kindergarten experience. I planted seeds in a Styrofoam cup and watched them grow. I shared toys, talked out my problems, and said I was sorry. I washed my hands at the small sinks before snack. I painted and drew and sang some each day. I danced, read stories, and pretended to be things I wasn't. I was the cat who went to London to find the queen in the Nursery Rhyme play. I was the family dog when we played house in the play yard with the orange climber. I was the plant.

I am now the gardener. I am responsible for pulling the weeds, watering the plants, and providing the nutrients. Where once I experienced being cared for, I now find myself caring for. Life as a plant was simple. Go to school, listen to stories, play, and go home. Gardening is more complex. I must create opportunities for skill development, socialization, creative expression, and real life knowledge development. I squeeze in some dancing and singing and playing amongst the academic instruction. What I thought was a garden of social skill development and play, is now more like a garden of weeds—mandated curriculum, shorter play time, and national standards—that overshadow beautiful seedlings. It seems as if the natural nutrients that Fulghum writes of have been edged out by chemical fertilizers that we have been told to apply in order to make all the flowers grow similarly. What can my students tell me about these artificial nutrients so that I can prevent them from encroaching on their

uniqueness? How do the gardeners of the past provide the knowledge we need to create spaces ripe for growing?

Walk With Me

Since I can recall, I have always loved nature's beauty—plants, animals, and landscapes. I have always loved children—especially those who dwell in kindergarten. I have always loved writing—poems, stories, and thoughts. I was always content to walk alone enjoying these natural gifts. I could write poems and journal entries for hours only to tuck them into boxes for no one else but me. I could close my classroom door and believe that what I did was pedagogically right and didn't need others to agree with me. My path was my own.

I have only now come to a place in my journey where I ask others to join me on the path—to walk the way and make conversation about how kindergartners need to find their own way, not through mandates and standards, but through their own languages:

a position somewhere along the road, and there [making] conversation about whether, and how, earlier and later stretches of the way may be different, and in their difference might even be incompatible—incompatible, that is, for those who never walk the way, nor even set out on it, but merely take up a position outside it, there forever to formulate ideas and make talk about the way. (Heidegger, 1968, p. 169)

My engagement with children can serve not only my own pedagogy, but the pedagogy of others. We need to come together to change the direction of the mandated path that we have been told to take, and instead, to walk the path that we have watched unfold before us from the time of Comenius (1910/1967) to the current philosophy of Nel Noddings (1992). I ask that you walk with me as I uncover the

history of our footprints to understand better the imprints our children would like to make tomorrow.

Early Steps

Parents often remember their child's first steps. Both of my children spent only nine months crawling and exploring their environment before they stood up and began walking through experiences from a new perspective. From that magical moment when they took their first step to the inspiring tricks on bikes and skates of today, they have developed, imagined, and enlightened the world with their thoughts and ideas. They have created and recreated their world because of the experiences in their lives. So, too, I have come to understand my own path because of the footprints of early childhood philosophers that have walked before me.

I have often wondered where it all began. Who was it that started the path I follow? Was there one path that philosophers used as a grounding to create their own? Recently, I read *The Great Didactic* (1910/1967) by John Amos Comenius which focused primarily on the education of young children. Could this work have been a path upon which Locke (1692), Rousseau (1896/2003), Pestalozzi (1801/1894), Froebel (1905/2004), Dewey (1915/2001), Piaget (1959), Montessori (1961), Vygotsky (1934/1986), or Noddings (1992) traveled?

The Great Didactic (1910/1967) emphasizes “man [sic] is nothing but a harmony, both in respect of his body and of his mind” (p. 47) and to maintain harmony, man uses his senses to partake in the knowledge of all things. “Whatever makes an impression on my organ of sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch, stands to me in the relation of a seal by which the image of the object is impressed upon my

brain” (p. 45). Comenius encouraged parents and trained teachers to “plant in a man the seeds of all the knowledge with which we wish him to be equipped in his journey through life” (p. 259). As gardener, I seek to find what my kindergartners find of interest through our daily conversations, our illustrated conversations, and our presence with one another each day in order to plant the seeds and guide them toward understanding for their future.

While *The Great Didactic* (1910/1967) provides the basis for which I can come to an understanding of our evolution in early childhood, the more detailed theories of educational philosophers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Nel Noddings also have guided my path’s direction. Reflecting upon how pieces of each one of these theorists’ horizons have merged with my own to revitalize my hundred languages and keep my kindergartners alive, provides a foundation for understanding how our illustrated conversations can uncover the meaning being made by kindergartners of their schooling experience and their world.

Un “Locke”ing the Slate

Walking in the solitude of the crisp evening spring air, my thoughts are not on my dog, Mother’s Day, or the book I am to read for my neighborhood book club. The crescent moon illuminates my thoughts about John Locke (1692), the theorist who believed that children are a ‘tabula rosa’—a blank slate—upon whom we can write what we deem virtuous and moral. While Locke (1692) is often associated with the notion of “tabula rosa,” it was originally “Aristotle [who] compared the mind of man

to a blank tablet upon which nothing was written, but on which all things could be engraved” (Comenius, 1910/1967, p. 44).

When raising my children, do I not write upon *their* tablet when it comes to morals, values, and beliefs because I have deemed my thinking right? Do I do this with my kindergartners? Is it not a natural instinct to want what I consider the best for them? Perhaps it is human nature to want to expand and enlighten others’ horizons with the beauty of our own horizon. It is this same question that I must return to each time I sit down to plan lessons. What I write upon my planbook tablet will forever be a part of who my children are to become. What they write upon their journal pages will forever be etched into their being. What meaning is engraved upon their tablets when we engage in our illustrated conversations? Will they continue to “go on writing and engraving without finding any boundary, because, as has already been shown, the mind is without limit” (Comenius, 1910/1967, p. 44)? Our conversational tablet is an unending, evolving scroll that finds friendships, relationships, and reciprocity among peers and adults written upon its parchment.

Sharing cherished engravings.

And when they have so much true life put into them, they may freely be talk’d with about what most delights them, and be directed to let loose to it; so that they may perceive that they are below’d and cherish’d. (Locke, 1692, Sec. 108)

Children are born with so much life—so many languages—to explore their world. Letting loose their ideas in conversation and on paper creates immediate relations with whom they interact. Whether they choose to talk freely with their parents, their friends, their teddy bears, or a teacher, this freeing of the soul—this pouring out of emotion—creates unity between the child and the recipient. The cared

for and the carer (Noddings, 2003) become intertwined, if only for that brief moment. The relationship is forever altered and deepened. When my children engage with me about their fantasies, their emotions, or their families, I feel cherished to be invited into more than just their “school” life. I am asked to become a part of who they are. A twinkle in an eye or a smile and a giggle indicate that I have touched upon their souls.

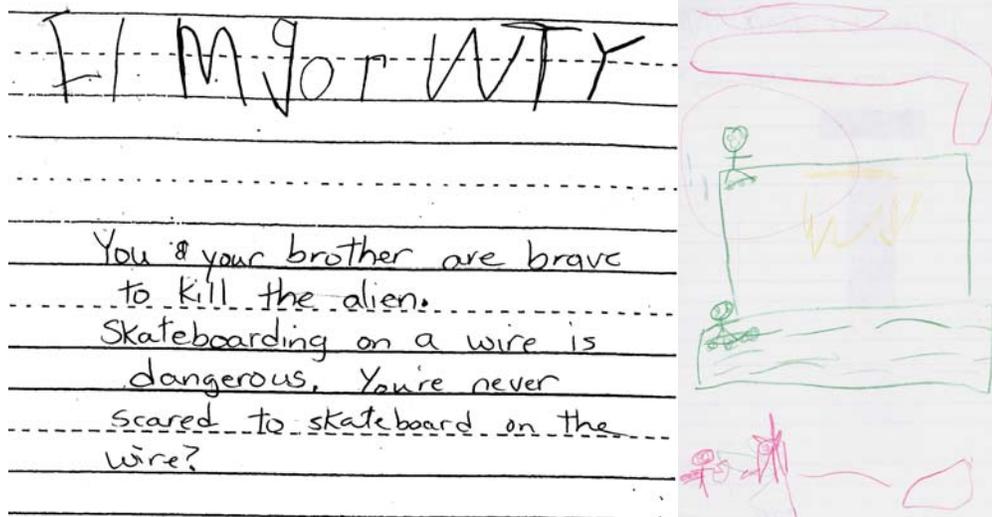


Figure 5. Jeremy's brave skateboarding tricks.

In this exchange, Jeremy speaks of his brother and him killing an alien while skateboarding on a wire. When I ask if he was scared, he indicates that he wasn't. It is okay to be on a wire above the ground chasing aliens. While I may find this scary, he does not. The encounter is a positive one for both of us. I find out what makes him brave and he finds out that I am afraid of riding skateboards on a wire.

Mother-child memory makings.



Figure 6. Christina's memory making family time.

A new baby sister has been welcomed into the world by Christina and her family. She finds comfort in carrying her new baby sister and taking care of her. Christina often shares in group time and during our conversations the joy she experiences in caring for her new sister and spending time with her mother and the baby. What is revealed is her devotion to her family as she permits me to be present along her journey. Her entries in which she and her mom and the new baby spend precious time together uncover the caring relation that naturally occurs between mother and child. Both exhibit cared-for and caring-for roles, acknowledging "what the cared-for gives to the relation either in direct response to the one-caring or in personal delight or in happy growth before her eyes," (Noddings, 2003, p. 74) simply by spending time together baking cookies or holding the new addition in the family. Christina is now both cared-for and caring-for in her relation with her mother as well as in her new relation with her younger sister.

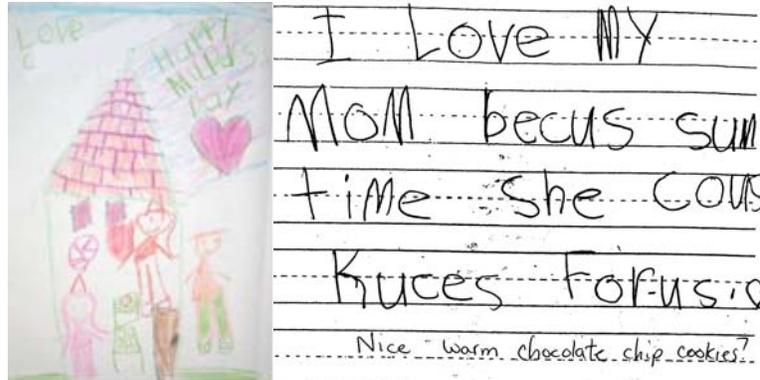


Figure 7. Christina's mom makes cookies.

Carving friendships. The space in which we find ourselves often provides opportunity to forge new friendships. On this particular day, Jeremy and Nemiah found a connection to one another on the page.

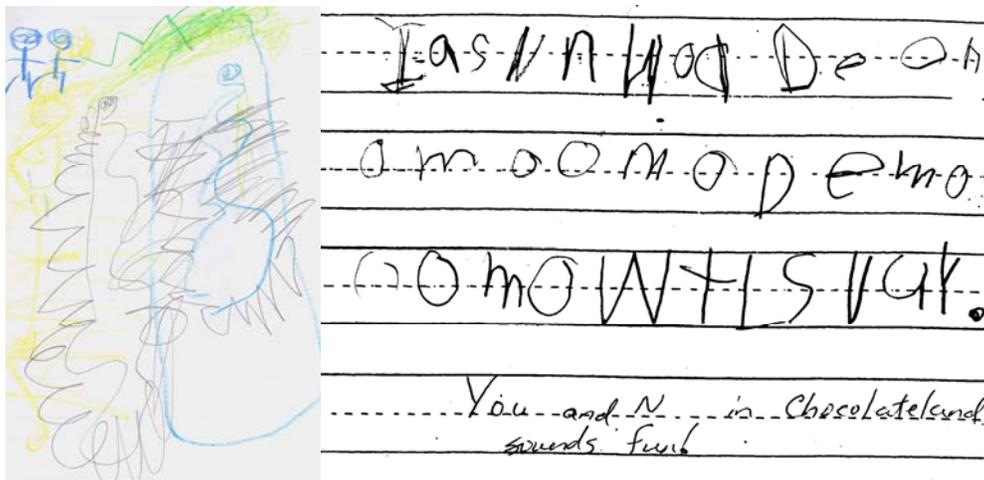


Figure 8. Jeremy and Nemiah find each other in Chocolateland.

The boys sat next to one another during journaling time, an occurrence that was not in the norm of daily routine. While they had been acquaintances in the class, no deep reciprocal friendship was observed. Sitting next to Nemiah, Jeremy decided to invite him into his imaginary world of chocolate. Was it because they were sitting with one another at the table, or did they have a brief engagement at recess, free choice or even during their walk down the hall that prompts Jeremy to include him in his Chocolateland fantasy? The companionship they developed on that day was “as

Shugar (1988) suggests, one of the functions of such group interaction...[in] learning what it means to be a peer” (Coates & Coates, 2006, pp. 229-230), a skill both needed to practice. While it is unknown whether the two children engaged in dialogue during the creation of this entry, they did invite me into the conversation when they both approached my table. Perhaps Jeremy wanted to acknowledge Nemiah’s presence. Perhaps Nemiah wanted to be there to be recognized positively by his peer. Perhaps they both longed for an acknowledgement of a friendship. Knowing and understanding each child’s need to be recognized positively (instead of the usual negative feedback often expressed by their peers) creates a space for the three of us to dialogue about what it means to be with others in a reciprocal relationship. I was able for a brief moment to etch upon their souls the meaning of friendship. The larger question that remains to be uncovered is whether our dialogue that day was carved in stone or written on a wipe on/wipe off board.

Named carvings. Social butterflies flit around my classroom constantly. Girls, especially, create spaces to transport themselves to lands where magic makes dreams reality. They join together in Fishland as Melody sits with her friends, Christina and Jennifer. Her thoughts, below, express her desire for friends to join her in a fantasy world in which the girls transform into fish and mermaids. I recall the day the girls sat together engaging in this conversation while writing. The girls engaged in social talk, “defined as talk which does not directly relate to the drawing activity or its subject matter but instead focuses on common issues...such as families, homes, class and friends” (Coates & Coates, 2006, p. 229). I would hear them giggle, talk about their sisters and brothers, and on occasion, about sealife and mermaidlife. When

Melody approached my table that day, Christina and Jennifer did not join her, but from the corner of my eye I could see them listening to our conversation. A whisper and a giggle captured my left ear while listening to Melody with my right ear. I wanted to be in both conversations about the same conversation. What would it be like to listen to a story about a world that you are in but not in? Young or old, what is it about hearing your name that prompts you to listen more closely to the details? Does your name simply capture your interest in the acknowledgement of your existence with someone, regardless of who it is?

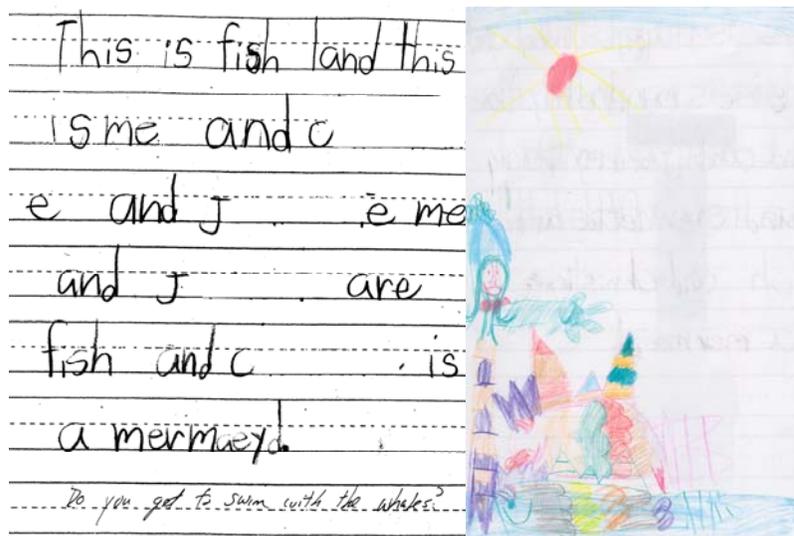


Figure 9. Friendships in Mermaidland.

Genuine reciprocity. Children write upon their own tablets while writing upon the souls of others during our journaling time. As they engage themselves on the page, spontaneous dialogue simultaneously engages with others. The interplay of care that finds its way between the lines of thoughts is what Noddings (2003) would call “genuine reciprocity” (p. 74). Each child is both a cared-for and a caring-for. There is a mutual equal caring in whom they “need not...try to distinguish the roles of the one-caring and cared-for” (Noddings, 2003, p. 70). Both are contributing and willing

to unselfconsciously reveal themselves in the relation, giving and receiving unconditional care when they meet one another.

Although my students have engaged with their friends during the writing process at their tables, they also want to hear the stories told aloud, especially if they know they are mentioned in the other journals. We come together as small groups, often those who have sat together during the writing time. They listen, laugh, and add to the conversation. What meaning is made of their friendship when they hear someone else refer to them in their journal? I wonder if they play more together on that day than usual. Does each child feel cherished when they are invited into a larger conversation?

A more difficult engraving. Children can relate to one another easily. They speak the same language. They think about the same activities. They laugh about the same events. The relation that is very quickly established as equal and reciprocal among children is not so easily defined between teacher and student. There exists an immediate sense of inequality in the relation. I am the one caring-for. I meet my children with openness, a clearing ready to include them on my journey. My “attitude that is perceived by the cared-for as caring is generated by efforts of the one-caring at inclusion and confirmation....It accepts, embraces, and leads upward. It questions, it responds, it sympathizes, it challenges, it delights” (Noddings, 2003, p. 67). My attempts at inclusion need to be acknowledged by my students, received and reciprocated regularly in dialogue in order to be genuine.

But there will always be a degree of inequality. While I attempt to contribute and include each and every child, the receipt of care by my students will in some

fashion affect how I meet each child. “A teacher is captivated by the student who thinks aloud and uses what his teacher has presented in his own way and for his own purposes” (Noddings, 2003, p. 73). How did I come to include only the voices thus far of Jeremy, Nemiah, Melody, and Christina? Where are the other voices? When pulling the journals that I felt illuminated our conversations, did I not instinctively turn to those children who genuinely reciprocated my care and thus, allowed their voice to cover over the voices of others? What meaning did I make of these children’s interpretations to choose them and not the others?

John Locke’s elaboration upon Aristotle’s notion of “*tabula rosa*” brings forth an understanding of what it means to interact with others, in particular, young children. They possess an innocence and purity that invites conversation which leads to the formation of their Being. I can only hope that what I have been asked to write and what I choose to write is what my children want me to write upon their tablets. It requires I enter into *their* world and understand the ways in which they experience and interpret it.

Childhood’s Ways of Being

Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it. Nothing is less sensible than to want to substitute ours for theirs. (Rousseau, as cited in Palmer, 2001a, p. 57)

As we are more and more inundated with mandates and outcomes (Bodrova et al., 2000; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum, 2008; Schickedanz, 1989), Jean Jacques Rousseau’s thinking has emerged for me as a premise for having the conversation with young children in order to keep their ways of seeing the world uniquely their own. I need to listen to their ways—their hundred

ways—of seeing, thinking, and feeling in order to keep their voices alive and not be substituted by mine or by others. How do they see themselves in imaginary lands or as superheros? Do they wish that it was a reality, or do they just wish to escape for a brief time?

What is it about the imaginary that captivates children’s minds? Could it be that the world of the imaginary is proper for young children? Perhaps it *is* their way of seeing, thinking, and feeling. The imagination can take us to fantasy worlds and lands of make believe that “forms an image [that is] not real” existing only within the soul of the imaginer. Could fantasy worlds make “visible...a whimsical notion... to light” up our minds while ‘imagi-nations’ are the possibilities that life holds for us (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, June 16, 2008)? What is it like to place yourself in a world that can only exist in your mind? What is it like to picture oneself in another world—another nation—believing that you possess the ability to make it reality?

Imagine the ways. Engaging with young children about their illustrations and thoughts, “releases the imagination” (Greene, 1995) of both children and teacher. “Attending concretely to these children in their difference and their connectedness, feeling called on truly to attend—to read the child’s word, to look at the child’s sketch—teachers may find themselves responding imaginatively and, at length, ethically to these children” (Greene, 1995, pp. 41-42). When I listen to their stories, I find myself entering an imaginative world that perhaps they have not yet dreamed of. Together we uncover the meaning of their illustration in conversation.

“Could the rocket ship have gone to Mars?”

“Yes.”

“Or could it have gone to Alaska?”

“(pause) Yes.”

“Perhaps it went into the ocean to explore?”
“Yes.”
“Where do you think the rocket ship went?”
“It went to Mars.”

Dialogues such as these often occur during our illustrated conversations. My desire is to “place children in speech and free writing situations in which they can find out what they think and why and what they see and how they talk about it, write about it, and bring meaning into their worlds” (Greene, 1995, p. 54). Would they have thought about taking a rocket ship anywhere else but space? Did my ideas spark any new ideas to later be revealed? While the aim is not to influence their stories with my own imaginative ideas, I walk with them along their releasing to illuminate the many paths that could be traveled. Together we “open clearings for communicating across the boundaries” and resist the tendencies that “enclose us in molds, define us in accord with extrinsic demands, discourage us from going beyond ourselves and from acting on possibility” (Greene, 1995, p. 135). It is this “participatory involvement with the many forms of art [that] can enable [the children] to *see* more in [their] experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, [and] to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured” (Greene, 1995, p. 123). Cheeseland, created by Kevin, exists in a world where you can jump on trampolines and eat your way through Swiss cheese clouds and drive in cheese block cars. Racecarland transports Ollie into worlds where his cars talk and race each other all day long. These fantasy worlds are unlike the realities of school, work, home, and play; they are opportunities to use their voice freely.

Fantastic imaginations. What is fantasy? Is it a place to go using the language of imagination? Is it a place young children fantasize using their hundred

languages by being “able to imagine” the unimaginable? (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved June 16, 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenology does not try to define fantasy; rather, it uncovers the meaning of fantasy as experienced. What meaning do my children make from escaping reality to worlds impossible to create? Do our conversations allow them to see more, think more, and feel more of their fantastic languages? We question, dialogue, seek answers to questions, and explore the world together imagining the fantastic.

Keeping languages alive throughout kindergarten creates a foundation for holding them close and not letting others steal them away. It is the hope they will become written upon the tablet of their hearts forever.

My son, do not forget my teaching,
But let your heart keep my commandments;
For length of days and years of life
And peace they will add to you.
Do not let kindness and truth leave you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart.
(Proverbs 3: 1-3)

Will my children continue to walk the way and seek the answers to their questions, or will their ideas be covered over by someone else’s questions when they move on to first grade? Will they continue to question the world in the same way I ask them to question and expand upon their ideas when we engage in word play? Perhaps one day they will return to find me and engage in conversation again. Then I will know that their hundred languages have not been stolen away, that our world of kindergarten remains written upon the tablet of their soul, that they have found life through school experiences, and that “all the ideas which [they] can conceive and which are useful to [them], all those which relate to [their] happiness, and are one day

to enlighten [them] as to this able character...may serve [them] for self-conduct during [their] whole life in a manner adapted to [their] being and to [their] faculties” (Rousseau, 1896/2003, p. 79).

Beyond the Schoolhouse Walls

We arrive therefore at the following conclusion: men [sic] must, as far as is possible, be taught to become wise by studying the heavens, the earth, oaks, and beeches, but not by studying books; that is to say, they must learn to know and investigate the things themselves, and not the observations that other people have made about the things. (Comenius, 1910/1967, p. 150)

Where does Life come into play when children think about school? Why is it that children, and subsequently adults, only see school as a building—a cinderblock structure where you walk in quiet lines, sit at your own desk, and follow the directions of the adults in the building? Is it that young children *would* believe that school is life if it weren't for influences that portray the school building as school itself? Where does Johann Pestalozzi's idea that “*Das Leben bildet*” or “It is Life that forms and educates” (as cited in Palmer, 2001a, p. 64) find its way into my pedagogy with children?

When I was young, I spent many of my free moments outside playing in the creek and in the woods near my home. Traveling with my family to the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, and Yellowstone National Park were experiences that developed my love of Nature. This engagement with the earth is an integral part of how my kindergartners experience their schooling. We go outside as often as we can to breathe, observe, and engage with the environment, escaping the concrete that cuts us off from life—from the plants, insects, air, clouds, and animals. We love to be

outside, free from the constraints of hard chairs, tables with work on them, and reading and math groups. I use my past to help create their present.

From the first day of school until the last, we engage in guided reading groups and math instruction in our classroom with little deviation from this routine. The “systematic method of modeling and teaching children the variety of reading strategies they need in order to become fluent, independent readers” (Wright Group, 1990, p. 5) begins each September with a set procedure, including an introduction and a predicting of the story elements, taking book walks to uncover the meaning of the pictures, activating their prior knowledge to assist with comprehension, several readings of the text, and follow-up activities (Owocki, 2001; Wright Group, 1990). These groups persist over the course of ten months, repeating the same routinized structure each day from 9:00-11:00 am.

If there is ever a time that I am most amused and dismayed simultaneously, it is when we have an assembly planned for the morning hours and I announce to my students that there will be no reading groups that day. In October, the response is mixed. Many children enjoy the time we spend together. I hear the “Awww!” and I get a warm fuzzy knowing that I have brought them to a place where they realize the growth they have made by being with me each day. By April, the response is far different. An overwhelming “YEAH!” fills the room. Have I stolen the desire to learn? Perhaps I have made reading groups so mundane that they no longer want to engage in them even though they are now reading independently. Have I not given them “active engagements with diverse works, active attempts to realize them as objects of experience...[that might]...counteract the *anaesthetic*, the humdrum, the

banal, the routine” (Greene, 1995, p. 76)? Or are they just tired of the constant work and no play environment? How sad that a motivated life deteriorates in the course of ten months! The “Awws” are gone and the “Yeahs” are substituted.

What part of their life *does* call to them to explore deeper, more than just learning to read? Would they rather talk about what they did over the weekend? Would they rather be taking a walk in the park nearby? Would they rather just play in free choice? Would they rather be home? Would they rather have school be something different than it is?

In *my* fantastic imaginary world there exists a school deep in a clearing in the woods. Beside the small pond there is a log cabin with a retractable glass ceiling allowing light to shine in all year long, illuminating all the thoughts that swirl around inside. The clearing is home to the souls of those who imagine—who can “form a mental picture of oneself”—here in this clearing (Rousseau, 1896/2003, p. 79). Nature will “strengthen and make clear the impressions...by bringing them nearer to you by the Art...[and thus,] converge toward the centre of our whole being, and we ourselves are this centre” (Rousseau, 1896/2003, p. 79). The possibilities of a centered, unified Life in the clearing, are endless. This is also the world Friedrich Froebel spent much of his life uncovering, searching for an educational system that was to be founded upon unity, care, and nature.

All is unity, all rests in unity, all springs from unity, strives for and leads up to unity, and returns to unity at last. (Froebel, 1889/2007, p. 77)

The German Path Prevails

Kommt, lasst uns unsern Kindern leben!
(Froebel, 1905/2004, p. 89)

“Come let us live with our children!” is the frequent translation for this Froebelian saying. When Froebel designed *his* kindergarten, the Germany he dwelled in was far different than the world I teach in today. His kindergarten was a place of childhood exploration. Childhood was to “give meaning to our speech and life to the things about us!” (Froebel, 1905/2004, p. 90) by living with Nature in caring, meaningful environments that supported dialogue and emotional growth. Children would find unity by progressing through childhood before entering formal schooling. Only then in *boyhood* were children to experience “*the conscious communication of knowledge, for a definite purpose and in definite inner connection* (see § 56)” (Froebel, 1905/2004, p. 94).

Boyhood, girlhood, or childhood? Froebel’s reference to boyhood was aimed at the time of life after the age of six—after the kindergarten years. Until the age of six when preparatory school began, children were engaged in sensory, playful activities carried out in Nature. In his autobiography (1889/2007), it appears that Froebel’s naming of “boyhood” perhaps arose when more deeply conscious reflection upon his own childhood gave him an understanding of how “other children might have the means to live the true child-life that was denied to himself” (p. 18). His experiences during childhood helped formulate many of “the sources of his whole educational system” (p. 18). Whether one was in childhood or boyhood, his educational ideas do not exclude girls—in fact he refers to all children and their need for unity with Nature in order to “benefit entire communities and the entire human

race” (Froebel, 1899/2003, p. 165). In *The Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (1899/2003), Froebel writes an entire chapter entitled “How Lina Learned to Write and Read,” displaying the process by which a six-year-old girl comes to use sticks to understand how her speech and the written word are connected. Lina, in her childhood stage, is encouraged to wait until her official schooling at preparatory school to “learn it better” (p. 337). I wonder how it is that children stop being children and start being boys or girls.

What is kindergarten? For many years, Friedrich Froebel’s kindergarten was imparted upon my soul as a schooling of children between five and six years old. Gifts and occupations were skills that focused the child on the unity of Nature and life “through free choice and free self-activity” (Froebel, 1899/2003, p. 198). These gifts, or manipulatives such as blocks and geometric figures, were used to engage children’s minds, preparing them for preparatory school. I wonder if preparing them for preparatory school is the same as “pre-school.” If one interprets these occupations and plays as such, then what Froebel founded was rather a “pre-school,” leaving kindergarten where?

But many years later, I had a conversation that revealed that Froebel’s kindergarten was for older children of eight and nine years of age. The source eludes me, but I did not question it based upon my knowledge of schooling in Europe which typically begins at a later age than in the United States. And so, with all this information, I defended kindergarten’s need for play and social development over the need for instruction and the imparting of skills.

It was not until I read *The Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (1899/2003) by Froebel, himself, that I uncovered the true formulation of kindergarten. His kindergarten was not designed for only five and six year olds as illustrated by Lina's story. Froebel's "first plaything of childhood" (Froebel, 1899/2003, p. 32) began with infants, balls, and specific activities using this gift, and continuing to add other gifts such as geometric blocks until school age.

Therefore, as soon as the life of the child, its power of spontaneous and voluntary action and its use of limbs and senses are aroused; when it can freely move its little arms and hands, when it can perceive and distinguish tones, and can turn its attention and its gaze in the direction from which these tones come; let us give to the child for its spontaneous and voluntary action an object which expresses stability and yet movability...the *ball*. (Froebel, 1899/2003, p. 31)

These activities, songs, and games were to be completed by "organizations for the associated (*gemeinsam*) guardianship and guidance of their younger children, brought together for the purpose at least for a few hours of the day" (Froebel, 1899/2003, pp. 163-164) and were to be guided by trained directors and teachers. With this knowledge, I began to question the meaning I had made of his theory.

Reflecting upon the many sources, I have come to acknowledge and support Froebel's notions of unity, life, and Nature as the essence of being in the world, but I do begin to question the structure employed with very young children in Froebel's methodology. While his philosophy encouraged expanding the horizons of parents and educators to benefit young children, does not a telling of how to interact with a young child create a sense of disconnect rather than a genuine reciprocal exchange? It is the conversation of directed materials, structured lessons, and specific mandates, rather than a careful interaction that divided educators employing Froebel's

philosophy in the twentieth century (Klugman & Smilansky, 1990). Both sides of the debate, though, continued to support Froebel's views on the value of play and how we approach children in caring ways, building the foundation upon which we "live with our children."

Ready to write. Lina, being only six, was not encouraged to write and read by her family because she was to "learn it better at the preparatory school" (Froebel, 1899/2003, p. 337). But Lina wanted to uncover her thoughts. She begged, "Give me a little piece of paper, dear mother, please, please; I want to write a letter too, like dear father" (Froebel, 1899/2003, p. 287). This motivation, this self-initiating activity, as Froebel encouraged, had been developed in Lina as it is with many of my kindergartners. They, too, want to write freely. They desire to emulate others and write and draw like "the big kids." Like Froebel's philosophy, *only* providing formal writing lessons including handwriting, recopying, and revising may be perhaps inappropriate for young children (Mayer, 2007; Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2002; Wright Group, 1990), but their desires should be captured and encouraged.

Open-ended opportunities to write and draw in relaxed contexts, without adults stating "the right way" to do either, enable children not only to sort pictures from print but also to gain expertise in each context. By achieving such expertise, children understand that the freedom they find in drawing provides a flexible bridge to the control they need to continue developing their writing abilities. (Baghban, 2007, p. 24)

Illustrated conversations allow for their thoughts to be expressed without the formal instruction on handwriting, grammar, or spelling—bridging the gap between formal school activities and Froebel's kindergarten playful ideas.

What would it be like to...? opens up a world in which we play together—in our words and in our minds. “Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man...It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world” (Froebel, 1905/2004, p. 55). Through play we experience the “all-quickenning, creative power of child-life” (Froebel, 1905/2004, p. 89). As a “kindergartner” myself, since “kindergartners” in *The Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (1899/2003) were trained teachers of young children, I also play in kindergarten. We *really* play *intrinsically* on paper *relatively free of rules*, focusing on the writing *process* and *dominated by we, the players*. These factors make up the disposition of play (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg in Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Playing on paper, the past becomes the present and together we meet on the pages of our journal entries filled with illustrations and discourse exploring our hearts and imaginations.

Froebel’s thinking took root in the United States with the help of Margarethe Schurz, Elizabeth Peabody, Susan Blow, and Patty Smith Hill. These women helped to establish kindergarten programs between 1856 and the early 1900’s in the United States, endorsing many of the same unifying principles Froebel did in Germany. Similarly, John Dewey (1976) argued that “Unity and wholeness of the child’s development can be realized only in a corresponding unity and continuity of school conditions” (p. 269).

Capturing Interest

The peculiar problem of the early grades is, of course, to get hold of the child’s natural impulses and instincts, and to utilize them so that the child is carried on to a higher plane of perception and judgment, and equipped with more efficient habits; so that he has an enlarged and deepened consciousness and increased control of powers of action. (Dewey, 1915/2001, p. 80)

How do illustrated conversations and my relations with my kindergartners capture their natural impulses? How does my engagement with young children carry them to a higher plane while we talk together on our journey? Does our participation in illustrated conversation deepen their sense of themselves? How do we encounter one another in the clearing while preserving the beauty of the space we enter and uncovering the beauty that lies within each of us?

This past April, I was waiting in my classroom when the most interesting people came to meet me at my snack table during Kindergarten Orientation. The spontaneity of their smile, the sound of their laughter, the creativity with which they informed me about all the things they knew and wanted to know about in life, and their hugs captured my soul immediately. Their interests became my interests. I spoke at length with Dilan and Sebastian whose love of sea animals was evident while we looked at books and ate animal crackers together. I thought about how they would flourish in my classroom when we authored books on the animal of their choice. Sophie, who expressed a wealth of background knowledge about her experience living in Italy, took me back to my own experiences living in Germany as a young girl. Maria's large twinkling eyes did all the talking for her yet to be voiced languages. I knew that these children would find their way to my roster for next year. And although Dewey (1915/2001) argues that teachers need to capture their students' interests, the reverse held true on this day. It is the dialogue initiated by these children that captured *my* interest and led me to choose to continue our journey in August. We have begun to merge horizons.

Will their journals reflect the play I envision occurring? I imagine Dilan at the water table with the ocean animals, creating coral reefs with blocks and getting grass for seaweed. His writing will travel to underwater caves seeking out these creatures. Maria is dressed up in the colorful fabric with her red sparkle shoes and her sequined purse holding a baby doll. She tells of the outings she takes with her mom in her journal. Sophie is packing the suitcase with dress-up clothes and heading off to some exotic island on the airplane they made out of chairs and boxes. She conjures up stories about far away lands with great detail. I observe the power they hold over their physical environment. They have the ability to immerse themselves into other worlds by the simple use of their imagination and knowledge.

Children's "free play" in the sociodramatic areas and their playing with words during illustrated conversation with me can be placed along a continuum (Bergen, as cited in Spodek & Saracho, 2003, p. 173). "On one end there is placed 'free play' while on the other end 'work' is placed. In between she places 'guided play,' 'directed play' and 'work disguised as play'" (p. 173). Therefore, our engagement together is neither completely child initiated nor is it completely teacher directed.

Playful interests. Our play "provides students with the challenge of talking about what they have seen, gives them the opportunities, permission, and encouragement to use language in a way [that]...liberate[s] their emotions and their imagination" (Eisner, 2002, p. 89). Free choice play, block play, dramatic play, and word play provide opportunities for them to escape from the pressures of academics. This ability to transform oneself from work to play "depends initially upon the ability to experience the qualities of the environment, qualities that feed our conceptual life

and that we then use to fuel our imaginative life” (Eisner, 20002, p. 4). Do we allow children enough time to play, or are we “rushing from place to place, . . . rarely linger[ing] long enough in one particular place to savor its unique qualities” (Casey, 1993, p. *xiii*)?

Education needs to slow down and allow children to travel slowly along this place we call the imagination. They need time to find the clearing, explore its intricacies, create spaces for themselves among its beauty, and wonder about its being. Perhaps my boys’ interests in superhero lands and the girls’ interests in Butterflylands are doing just that. Their “lifelikeness” in their stories contains “gaps in logic . . . but those very features . . . are designed to communicate the comical, playful, even sinister irrationalities of the human condition” (Singer & Singer, 2005, pp. 18-19). Our illustrated conversations encourage symbolic play (Piaget, 1962) on paper with thoughts of “*what might be*, when the child in play moves beyond the concrete shapes of blocks or toys—the *what is*—to *what was*, *what could have been*, *what can be tried*, *what might happen*. This path to realms of purest fantasy may be the route to that miracle of human experience, the creative imagination” (Singer & Singer, 2005, p. 167).

Writing playfully.

After detention, I went home and told my mom and I got grounded. I watched the other kids having as much fun as they could possibly have. I was having the most horrible day of my life. First I got punched in the eye, couldn’t really participate in P.E. because I hurt my ankle, got scolded at, and got detention for something I didn’t do. My face is so red. I’m going to explode of madness. I never should have called him a jerk. Next day I’m in Art and Matthew paints my face instead of his paper. Then, I wiped my face and he put paint on his face and told the teacher that I painted his face instead of my paper. I hate having to go to school. I wish I could just quit. But, no. I want

to be sick everyday. But then I couldn't play. I guess I'll have to live with it. I hate Matthew, don't tell, I do. I want to do very bad things to that kid. I want to be a good kid, but Matthew makes me be bad. I can't help it. I hate Matthew. (Samantha Dean, 2008)

My daughter, now eight, has begun to write stories on her laptop. This phenomenon did make me stop and think about what my children will find in their attic 30 years from now—a flashdrive? But like me, Samantha prefers to play with words on a computerized screen. My ideas, written, rewritten, and erased, are formulated to capture the reader's interests through the delicate interplay of words and emotions. There must be harmony in the powerful image evoked inviting you to read on—to freely engage with me in play. As a reader I ask you to engage with me about how I engage with my children. This uncovering of their meaning-making is a self-presentation of my engagement with my kindergartners (Gadamer, 1960/1989). My self-presentation of their voices plays as a “*presentation for an audience...*[filling me] with its spirit” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 109). My stories are their stories. My play is their play. Our play is “the interplay, of all the child's powers, thoughts, and physical movements, in embodying, in a satisfying form, his own images and interests” (Dewey, 1915/2001, p. 73). Their imaginative play with friends captured in drawings, and my careful engagement to uncover more of their ideas, empowers the child with his own thoughts and ability to expand his own horizon. My questioning prompts the children to think beyond their initial ideas and together we conjure up new play situations in which we both move to higher planes of thought—a more creative imagination which “is the medium in which the child lives” (Dewey, 1915/2001, p. 38). This brings about a greater understanding of the child who plays with me.

Child Centered Paths

“Would you please write down one thing you enjoyed about kindergarten?”

“I like wenu you let us play gamenes.”

“I like wen I play.”

“I like wene you lete us have free choice.”

“I like bolcs.” (blocks)

“I like resis.”

“I like win we wus playing mobotod.” (marble toss)

“I like the port wen we get to play in honecepeing.” (housekeeping)

“On the back of your paper, would you please write down one thing you would like me to change about kindergarten? What did you not like?”

“I do not like setbrs.” (centers)

“I do not like wene Paris scem at me.”

“I do not like bloks on my hade.”

“I do not like win we do cintrs.”

“I don’t like wen sumwout hets me.” (someone hits)

For two years, I have asked these same questions to my students in June. What do these children’s voices tell us about their curriculum? Blocks, housekeeping, and self-directed games are deeply embedded in their ways of Being in the world. This “unitary phenomenon” for young children is *their* being “absorbed in the world” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 78-80), of play “purely for functional pleasure” (Piaget, 1962, p. 89). Their need for care and attention is voiced in the need for physical and emotional safety. Also, deeply embedded are those stealing away their play—mandated literacy centers. As a teacher in a public school system, I do not have the control over whether literacy centers are an option; they are mandated. Literacy centers, often time-filling writing tasks, are stations designed by teachers to reinforce skills learned during guided reading groups, shared readings, and circle time discussions. When after seven months of school, children say “Yeah!” at the sound of “No centers today,” or indicate “I do not like win we do cintrs,” their voices mirror Jardine and Rinehart (2003) writing about children in school. They articulate that the

“relentless and ever-increasing consumptiveness and production” of children’s engagement with instruction, “explicitly articulated and rendered into writing in order to be pedagogically valuable,” creates too many “traces that threaten to ‘crowd out’ the very experiences that produced and sustained those traces in the first place” (p. 75). Instead of capturing and holding onto the language arts experience within their souls, they begin to define reading as small groups with the teacher and paper/pencil activities with specific directions to fill the time until lunch. Free choice, on the other hand, is a pleasurable time of play with no impositions upon their Beings. Sadly, it is on the list of items that might be removed from the curriculum. Why is someone not listening to the children we teach?

To whom will those who mandate listen? Will they listen to Maria Montessori? Jean Piaget? Lev Vygotsky? These theorists are cornerstones to how we engage with young children’s development.

Self-initiated paths.

The essential thing is for the task to arouse such an interest that it engages the child’s whole personality. (Montessori, 1961, p. 206)

When children sow seeds, water them, and care for them, the plants “give back far more than they receive...offer[ing] themselves as a *generous gift* of nature” (Montessori, 2004, p. 146). The nature of love is the foundation upon which Maria Montessori based her theory about the education of young children. Love is natural like “an eternal energy that nothing can destroy” (Montessori, 1961, p. 291). She calls upon educators to meet children in their world with care and love; and only then can we begin to understand their being in the world.

Maria Montessori used didactic teaching methods originally designed for “deficient” children in Italy, preparing them with specific activities to assist in the learning of reading and writing. Her methodology found its way into many of my literacy center activities for my kindergartners. I believed independence was valuable. So, I set the stage with my meaningful activities, and they completed the task with little or no assistance, empowering their learning to read and write. I created, in a sense, drill and practice types of activities for the children to use as self-correcting, independent learning centers. I asked them to speak my language, and the language of Maria Montessori, by giving them these tasks that covered over the voice of play and imagination. I did not listen as I should have.

Reading Montessori’s original pedagogical aspirations in search of insight into how to engage with kindergartners in meaningful conversation prompted reflection upon my own pedagogical tact. In creating activities for my students, I have not listened to their voices, even though they have expressed them in the “yeahs, aws, and do we have tos?” What I thought was a positive merging of horizons, is not. And yet, I would not have come to this understanding of voice and care without her voice. Her encouragement of independence, the creation of child spaces and her notion that “children possessed an interior spiritual force that stimulated their self-activity” (Montessori, 2004, p. 29) *are* themes that have positively merged with my horizon. Love *is* the foundation that “is permanent in mankind, and its consequences” will unite us with others along Life’s journey (Montessori, 1961, p. 295).

Similar paths that lead to one. Jean Piaget (1959) and Lev Vygotsky (1934/1986) are educational theorists concerned with understanding how children’s

language and thought are interrelated. The scientific experiments that both conducted led philosophers to define these arenas better and how they develop within the child. Piagetian theory calls us to understand how and when egocentric speech develops in young children. “This talk is ego-centric, partly because the child speaks only about himself, but chiefly because he does not attempt to place himself at the point of view of his hearer” (Piaget, 1959, p. 9). Piaget did not include the social and cultural backgrounds from which his subjects came as factors influencing the outcomes of his experiments. He outlined how children integrate new information into their schemas through assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium. These concepts can guide me to understand how my students approach new material, but how they find meaning in our conversations is not adequately addressed using this scientific method.

Vygotskian theory tells us that “Egocentric speech is actually an intermediate stage leading to inner speech” (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 32). Vygotsky credits Piaget for “[revolutionizing] the study of child’s speech and thought” (p. 32), but also argues that the speech and language of children are not limited to interactions among other children, and in fact, he calls forward the notion that interactions with adults and culture play an enormous role in the development of children’s speech. In working with my kindergartners, I capture the language they use to convey their message from their lifeworld—their culture, social background, and present horizons. Their language “has a spirit of its own, and...bears its own truth within it—i.e. that it allows something to ‘emerge’ which henceforth exists” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 385). The focus with my kindergartners is not on the *how* of their speech

development, but instead the *why*, the spirit, and the truth of their thoughts, of which Vygotsky attends to more so than Piaget.

An unfinished path. For many years, I walked along with Froebel creating gardens, taking nature walks, and playing with children's ideas. Later, I paralleled with Piaget and my pedagogy reflected children constructing their own knowledge paths. Pestalozzi's freedom and Montessori's independence began to emerge alongside these others in my curriculum with children. Then I began to instruct at the local community college and had to teach about Lev Vygotsky. I did not know much about his work. I explained how learning takes place when children engage with others and that the teacher's role in creating success in the zone of proximal development was critical. But I never truly understood his position until I read his own words. "A true and full understanding of another's thought is possible only when we understand its affective-volitional basis" (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 252).

Lev Vygotsky was silenced by tuberculosis at an early age, leaving behind only incomplete conversations. His life was unfinished, but in his short lifespan he successfully merged educational theories of the past with the care that van Manen (1991) and Noddings (2003) would come to promote in later years. What dialogues could he have had if he had continued his journey here on Earth? How is it that his ideas of play, imagination, writing, and uncovering meaning have found their way into my present?

Imagining the world.

One May afternoon, three children were pretending to be a dog, a mother, and a sister. The mother says to the others, "Gosh, I wish we had a tent. I went camping once." And so, the other two children tried

putting the fabric from the housekeeping area over top of the small hollow blocks. “Too small.” “Not high enough.”

I overheard this and asked them if they needed a bigger blanket. “Yeah! My mom makes tents with me at home over the chairs with our blankets.” I brought out two large blankets from the closet. Again the children begin designing the tents but the blankets keep falling down. I suggest clothespins. This seems to work. I begin to brainstorm and turn a table on its side to create a larger tent area. The children are excited and begin to design pet tents and human tents. All food is brought from the kitchen set area and play amongst the children unfolds. I retreat. (Classroom reflections, 2008)

Imagining blankets are tents and fabric swatches are dresses, building new worlds with blocks, and recreating new endings for class stories illustrate the creative talents children possess. They “enter an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 93). As children develop their imaginary worlds over time, their ability to imagine without movement is enhanced and play is redefined. For “school children [imagination] is play without action” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 93). Kindergartners have begun to redefine play holding fast to the active play of free choice and adding the non-movement play with me on paper. I return to Butterflyland and the world in which Spiderman and aliens join forces with my children to save or even destroy the world. We play without ever leaving our chairs. We go to places in our minds that we can’t in reality. We make up new worlds to perhaps escape the mandated world and enter places where new desires and ideas erupt.

Imagining on paper. Long before Calkins (1994) and the Wright Group (1990) encouraged teachers to teach children to write what interests them, Vygotsky explained that teaching writing needs to be “relevant to life,” “meaningful for children,” and is to be “*taught* naturally” (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 117-118). Journal

writing is a time for my children to write naturally about their life, and together we find the meaning of their ideas that they cannot express on paper. We teach each other through mutual engagement in conversation, writing upon each other's tablets. We devote thoughtful, caring time to one another about things that radiate within our souls.

To speak to one another means to say something to one another; it implies a mutual showing of something, each person in turn devoting himself or herself to what is shown. To speak with one another means that together we say something about something, showing one another the sorts of things that are suggested by what is addressed in our discussion, showing one another what the addressed allows to radiate of itself. (Heidegger, 1971/1993, pp. 408-409)

What radiates for them appears on paper and in their stories about their illustrations. What I have reciprocated is my experience—my horizon—to connect to their thoughts. Is what I offer to them meaningful?

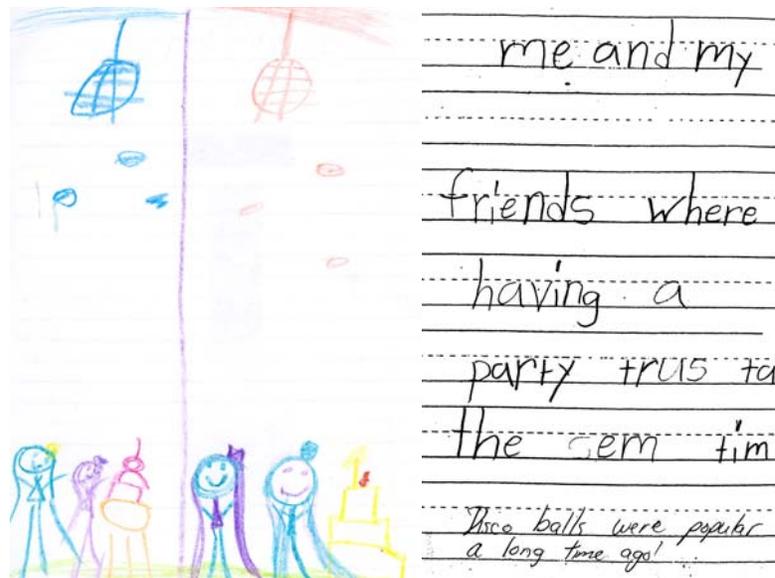


Figure 10. Dancing at a disco party with friends.

“I went to a party, Mrs. Dean!” And thus, the window opened. What was it like at the party? Who was there? I see you have these (*pointing to the disco balls*).

“Do you know that when I was growing up, we had these disco balls at my junior

high and high school dances. There was the time when I... and then my sister had a pair of homemade bell bottoms...Do you know what they are?...I can't believe I wore them!...What are you wearing at your party?...How does that make you feel to be all dressed up with the lights flashing and everyone dancing?" Jennifer smiled, laughed, and genuinely met me there that day. Whether or not she was enchanted by my words of yesteryear or wondering what I was really talking about, she listened. She reciprocated care just by listening.

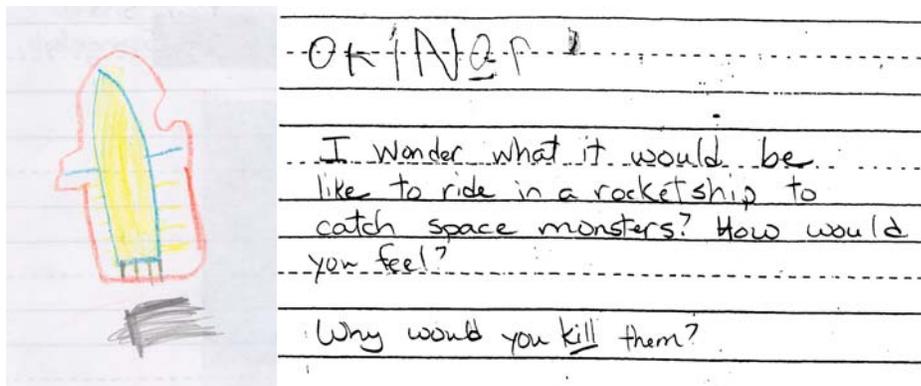


Figure 11. Finding aliens in space.

"This is my rocketship. It's goin' to space...Where are you going?...To catch space monsters!" The conversation expanded to talking about Apollo 13 spacecraft and its inspiring journey and how those astronauts had to reinvent the air filtration system with duct tape and a cardboard box. Darren's eyes opened wide. "Really?" Will he take the knowledge I have given him and share it with someone else to further the conversation he is having in his mind about rockets?



Figure 12. How do double rainbows get there?

“Have you ever seen a double rainbow? You know when you see one rainbow and then another is on top of it?...Yeah....How do they get there—both rainbows?...*pause*....There are 2 suns!....*I smile and laugh*... Good thinking! Really, I don’t know how a double rainbow is formed. We will have to ask Nemiah’s dad since he teaches science in fifth grade, okay?...Okay....I think your answer was a great one!—Two suns—I will have to write that one down for the future!” She and I laughed at our ideas, I more at myself for not knowing the answer to the question I posed.

My students and I have merged horizons on so many topics that it is hard to comprehend. I open my past to their present. I seek to enlighten their understanding of the world with my history. We find balance in understanding that each of us comes from a different past but both are accepted.

The educators of the past are those teachers who I am present with each time I enter my kindergarten classroom. Froebel created the room, Montessori’s child-sized furniture equipped it, Vygotsky’s language and socialization development envelops it, and Dewey’s child interest notions guide curriculum themes. And yet, my children

are my true teachers each and every day. Our smiles, laughs, and hugs create the safety of sharing with each other our imaginations in our illustrated conversations.

Writing Our Own Way

Journal writing supplied that private space where there are no mistakes...a safe haven that allowed children and adults time to dream wonderful thoughts, to explore new ideas, to disclose hidden tears and to express anger. (Wolinsky, 2004, p. 51)

What does it mean to journal? Should this “daily record of transactions” in the form of a “personal diary” have a specific method of implementation with ground rules to follow (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved June 16, 2008)? Research literature supports the use of journals, including dialogue journals with students (Cobine, 1995; Cress, 1998; Hannon, 1999; Peyton, 1993; Staton, 1987; Wanket, 2005). The procedure is for students to write about a topic, either predetermined or self-chosen, and hand it in to the teacher. Later in the day, the teacher reads the entry and responds in writing to the student’s entry. Much of the work outlines the benefits of journal writing. “Journal writing connects students with their emotional selves and core values” (Wanket, 2005, p. 74). “If a goal of writing in kindergarten is to promote a sense of story, as well as to encourage process writing, written dialogue with children about their writing will promote a development sense of story” (Cress, 1998, p. 15). “Knowing they would receive a response after reading their writing to me was impetus enough for some of the kindergartners competing for a moment of one-on-one teacher time with two dozen other children, the intercom, and myriad other distractions” (Hannon, 1999, pp. 202-203).

These examples of journal writing with young children support instructional decisions, but the focus of this study is not to justify my use of journal writing to

whomever may walk in the classroom door. Having implemented the Writer's Workshop (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983) and writing assignments with young children, I initially turned to dialogue journals as a way to connect with my children more personally. I began working on the idea of journal writing as the focus of my doctoral work. I named it *The Journey of the Journal*. One of the first writings about my dissertation idea indicated that dialogue journals would be the method by which I could uncover meaning with them. Reading more about the method, I knew there was something missing in the process. What was missing for young children was that "Someone must be there to listen, respond, and add a dab of glue to the important worlds that burst forth" (Paley, 2007, p. 5). In dialogue journals, there was no immediate, reciprocal interaction and care that develops when two persons communicate face to face.

I looked to my children for the meaning of journaling. Sharing in large group would often take so long to complete. Bodies would wiggle, whispers would begin, and a care-full engagement with each child would not occur in order to move along more quickly. And thus, we began sharing individually at my table. Illustrated conversations were born. I could pay attention, listen, and acknowledge each as a unique and special writing. I could hear their voices sing and dance with my own. I looked forward to entering into all these different worlds, perhaps to escape, like them, the mandated world in which we are told to dwell. The interplay of ideas and the spontaneous playing with words, especially with young children, is part of what calls me to explore this notion of illustrated conversations with kindergartners. There

is a sense when you walk into the room during this time that children want to be there. I want to be there.

I wonder what would happen if...? or Do you think...? or even How would you feel if...? These questions open up new questions and new ideas that may not have been thought about as they formulated their initial thoughts on paper. How do these engagements—these deeper meaning making conversations—bring them into a new plane of thought? Does our engagement provoke a thought that opens up to them who they are or what they can be?

Fantasylands. In past years, my girls and I have imagined new lands such as Butterflyland, Flowerland, and Candyland. In these magical worlds, my girls tell me of flowers that have secret petals that transform you into butterflies, or secret castle doors that transport you to a world of unicorns, princesses, and dragons. They transport me to their fantasy world allowing me to contribute to the magical images that are part of their “paper chain of magical imaginings” (Paley, 2007, p. 2). Sharing ideas as they illustrate their own magical worlds stimulates each child to add a new chain to their own paper story chain so by the time they come to share with me, their story is filled with vocabulary, details, and embellishments.

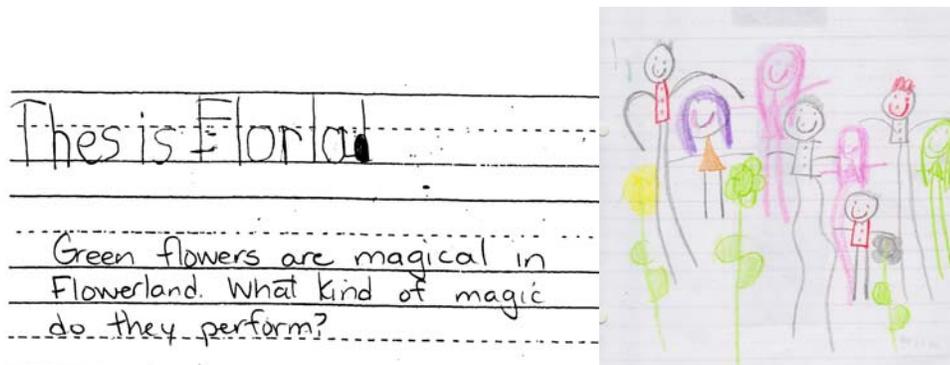


Figure 13. Magical Flowerland with friends.

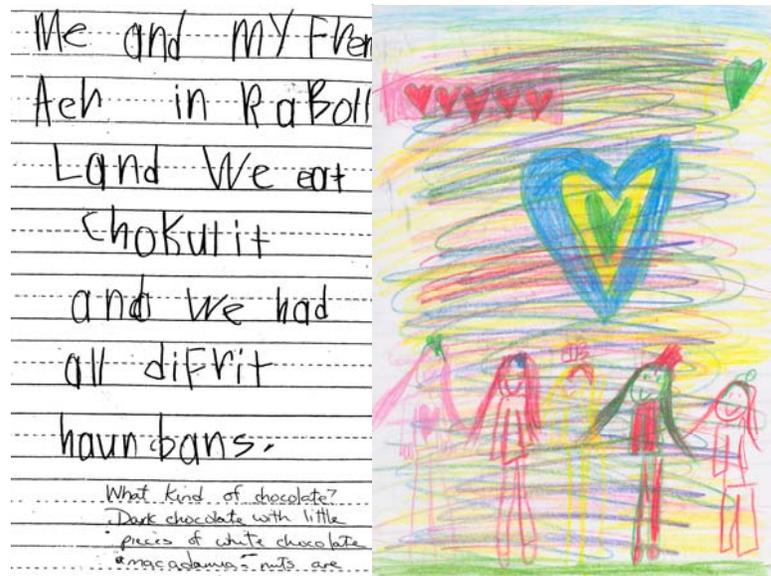


Figure 14. Rainbowland and chocolate treats.

Superhero worlds. The boys have taken me to worlds where Spiderman, Batman, and Ben Ten meet with secret buttons that mutate you into aliens with the power to destroy the world. Although I long to become a part of these imaginary worlds, engaging with the boys in more violent worlds is more difficult. Without trying to be a lecturer, I try to find out the whys of destroying people and often find myself asking questions to help them go to nicer places, engage in more peaceful actions, and veer away from the commercialized superheros and into more self-initiated fantasy worlds.



Figure 15. Green Spiderman is the newest superhero.

In her story-making with young children, Vivian Gussin Paley (1981) also finds that the world of superheroes “provide little opportunity to explore new ideas” (p. 129). Similar to her boys’ stories, my kindergartners continued to reiterate the same types of “bad guy versus good guy fight the world” scenarios. While Paley (1981) indicates that these superhero stories do not help to uncover her boys’ individuality, I begin to wonder if I could identify all of my students’ work without their actual paper and illustration in front of me. For example, while the boys continue to talk about superheroes, the girls also dwell in fantasylands with friends, captivating themes such as butterflies, rainbows, unicorns, or flowers. Do their stories themselves uncover meaning, or do *I* help *them* to uncover the meaning they have imparted upon their art? Perhaps it is not the words on the page that holds the meaning but it is the reciprocal, guiding, questioning relationship between us that allows for meaning to reveal itself.

Since the treatment of the “guiding question of the meaning of Being” (Heidegger, 1962/1993, p. 72) is phenomenological, my questioning with my students is a seeking. “Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought” (Heidegger, 1962/1993, p. 45). I seek to help them raise questions and find the answers they do not yet even know they have.

Walk With Care

It is here we must begin a new path. We have walked with those who came before us offering their thoughts on how to engage with young children. The journey began in Europe when Comenius (1910/1967) asked me to walk with children along a maternal path; school he believed should be like a mother’s lap. Locke (1692) joined my journey, imploring me to write upon children’s hearts, freely opening their souls

to be cherished. Reflecting upon how I should not determine everything to be written, I turned toward Rousseau (1896/2003) who told me that childhood has its own pathways, unique to childhood and that children should not be asked to walk in the ways of adults but remain true to their own paths. The freedom to walk in Life and learn from our experiences was further examined by Pestalozzi (1801/1894) and so, I kept pace with these philosophers. I followed alongside their footsteps until they met up with Froebel, whose philosophy was that we need to live with our children, in all their beauty and nature, and I was intrigued. I walked across the ocean to converse with John Dewey who extended Froebel's and Pestalozzi's views to believe that children should be the center of curriculum design.

Being a teacher, I heeded the advice of these theorists and took care to expand upon children's interests and desires. Sitting in my teacher preparation courses, the dialogue with Montessori's independent, self-correcting method; Piaget's constructivism and age-stage way of implementing academia; and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (which perhaps could now be interpreted as differentiation and acceleration) were languages I could understand and teach to my students. Reflection upon these paths has brought me to a higher plane of thought. It is no longer a question of *whose* philosophy—whose language—is 'better' than the other. It is not even a question of whether or not I deem the language as understandable. It is about the universal language of care. I found and entered a clearing and realized that no matter what clearing I enter, I must always take care to be in the clearing. Nel Noddings and Max van Manen are the rays of care illuminating the clearing.

Careful Ways

How do we care for one another in educational settings? Does it show itself when we greet each other cordially in the hallways? Do we care when we group children according to their scores on standardized tests? How do we express our care when given warnings about not hugging children because of liabilities? What ethical commitment do we have to our students? Questions like these draw me to texts and courses that expand upon this notion of care.

Reflection has become my entry into the clearing. I reflect upon how I am with others positively and negatively. In order that I understand my complete self, I need to “form a picture,” seeing not only myself as the one-caring, but also the one cared-for. There is a reciprocity that balances my “ethical self” (Noddings, 2003, p.49). I must envision my actual self and my ideal self as one-caring and cared-for, while also acknowledging its relatedness and relationship that define what it means to be ethical in my care with others. “Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you,” so frequently versed in my childhood, calls forth this same message. Care for my children as I would want others to care for me. My “natural impulse to care” arises around every corner, whether it is with “my” class students or students in the school (Noddings, 2003, p. 51). I walk down the hall and say “Good Morning” or give a hug and say “Have a great day!” with vigor and enthusiasm. I want all of us to care about each other as well as our own lifework.

Being the carer. “A *caring relation* is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). I *am* the carer. In order to be the carer, I must first share a

feeling. I must “receive,...communicate with, ...[and] work with” (Noddings, 2003, p. 31) the recipient of my care. How do I come to understand this reciprocal interchange Nel Noddings asks us to reflect upon? It is not only through illustrated conversations, listening to their voices, and helping them to uncover meanings in their lifeworld, that joining horizons occur. Other tactful, careful interactions contribute to our relationship. Because of these, we are able to meet each other more openly on the pages of our thoughts and imaginations.

I am sitting at my computer checking email as the last few minutes pass before the children will arrive. Hee-hee....shhhh...giggle giggle....tiptoe..tiptoe...shhhh. A shuffle of feet and the presence of a body tickles the back of my neck. “BOO!” I jump in surprise. “Good morning, Tessa! Good morning, Leon! How did you get in here? I didn’t hear anyone!” Laughter, smiles, and “We tricked you!” Every morning, these two early arrivers would repeat this ritual. Sometimes, I would hide in the coatroom ready for them when they came in. Other times, I would be in the closet so they would think I wasn’t in the room yet and then surprise them. But mostly, I let them surprise me. (Classroom reflections)

This engagement with my two students was our time together to greet each other to a new day. We could talk about anything they wanted. I would often hear stories about home, where they went the day before, or even whether or not they did their homework. We engaged freely. Even though this time was my planning time, I gave it up to talk with them. That *was* planning. I was able to plan for our day together simply by getting a sense of how they were feeling that morning. Others would join in the game if they got there early enough, opening up a world of curriculum opportunities. Did I care that I did not get quiet time to plan? I cared more about greeting them with a smile than with a prepared set of worksheets. More than that, it was perhaps a time to just engage with them on a non-academic teacher-

student level. I could take off my teacher hat and put on my friend hat. I was able to be silly like them. This is the type of care children seek when they ask their parents to play with them. They feel comfortable enough to cross that line of how to act with a teacher or an adult. It is not one of disrespect but of respect. They acknowledge that I can be as loving and caring as their parents who engage in silliness with them. Or, perhaps, unfortunately, it is the care they *wish* to engage in with their parents, but do not have the chance.

It is recess time and I am returning from the office headed to my classroom. As I enter, I see Robert standing there. Robert is a boy from another kindergarten class. He is standing there looking sad and very softly says, “Mrs. Dean, my classroom is locked and she’s on the phone and I...I...” and he looks down. My eyes follow his. He had had an accident. He turned to me for help. I told him not to worry. I went to my closet, took out a pair of new underwear from the bag I buy every year for just these occasions, and found a pair of pants that my son had outgrown years ago. I got a plastic bag and handed them to him. “Here, go put these on. Put your dirty clothes in the bag. And then go out and finish playing.” He did. With a thank you, he was gone with a smile back on his face. (Classroom reflections)

Why did Robert come to me? Did he simply know me from being next door? Or was it the care that I take everyday to put him carefully into his car at the parent pickup and say, “Good-bye, Robert. See you tomorrow! Don’t forget your seatbelt.”? Or is it the “Good Morning, Robert! How are you today?” each morning as I pass by his line in the hallway? My simple showing of motherly care has transferred from just being an adult who says hello and good-bye each day to someone he can trust to help him out in a time of need. “Children need continuity not only of place but also of people” (Noddings, 1992, p. 68). We met each other that day differently. He was being cared for and I was doing the caring on another plane. This time, it was not a casual exchange of care but a deeper, more personal sense. There was a reciprocal

being cared for. His trust in me to help him out, even though I was not his official teacher, was his caring for me, whether he was aware of it or not. I needed to thank him for believing in me to be more than just an adult doing a job.

Jessie is a confident girl who comes from a Montessori preschool. She is very independent in her actions and her thinking. She often will do as she pleases without regard to group rules or expectations. Throughout the year, we worked on continuing to be an independent thinker but to also follow rules and not do things 'slyly' so as to escape the requirements. For example, Jessie loves to engage others during free choice. She often directs many of the pretend play activities utilizing fabric, materials, and the room to best meet the direction the group should take. When it is clean up time, Jessie will wander around the room and not clean up the mess she has participated in making. Despite many efforts to participate in group clean up, she will do what she can to escape the task. Traditionally, we will all clean up the room regardless of who specifically made the mess. It is OUR room, and we will make sure it is ready for presentation to anyone who may enter. On this particular day in May, after many months of correspondences with Mom, after her repeated refusal to help clean up, I made her clean up what was left of the mess in housekeeping independently. The rest of the class, though trying to help her, was to prepare for snack. She would catch up with the group when her work was done. (Classroom reflections)

This type of care was not well received by Jessie. She wrote in her June correspondence of what she did not like about kindergarten that it was when she had to clean up by herself. She remembered the incident. I remembered the incident. I was not a caring person to her. I was mean. But I cared about her growth in this area so much that I wanted her to overcome this attitude of her being better than others that she didn't have to clean up the mess she had made. I wanted her to understand that when we play together as a family, we also clean together. Teachers "not only have to create caring relations in which they are the carers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care" (Noddings, 1992, p. 18). My encounter with Jessie at this time was difficult for me, because we meet each

other so differently in our typical journal conversations. During illustrated dialogues, we slid down rainbows with friends and dressed up like princesses with crowns in Flowerland. But on that day at that time, I held the responsibility to care enough to help her understand that her assistance in clean up was a way to show she cared about her friends and her school. Did I feel guilt that I had not approached the situation with more care? Yes. I found the courage to take a step toward tough love with Jessie, but “I must have the courage to accept that which I have had a hand in, and I must have the courage to go on caring” (Noddings, 2003, p. 39). This, honest and sometimes tough love, relationship is similar to the one her mother and she share, based upon many conversations with her and interactions witnessed between Jessie and her mother in class, after school, and on field trips. Perhaps this type of care was necessary for our relationship to deepen.

I am a carer, every day. As a teacher, a mother, and a student, I care about children. I am not always a nice carer. We all have our moments. But my life is dedicated to caring for others. It is my destiny. It is a dream that I have made a reality. My students wrote about their dreams last year and there were two young girls who wrote that they wanted to be teachers. Even now, as five-year-olds, they exhibit care for others. One of them is Christina who cares for her baby sister and engages in care-full activities with her mother. The other is a young girl who also wrote a great deal about her family and is often found in class taking care of others and helping to resolve conflicts. Both are my hope that a new way of thinking about education and school will become reality. I dream that our journey lives within them for all their days, guiding them to be the type of caring teachers who will change the world.

Being cared-for. The reciprocity of caring for others requires that “the cared-for shows either in direct response to the one-caring or in spontaneous delight and happy growth before her eyes that the caring has been received” (Noddings, 2003, p. 181). As the carer, my students receive my attention each day. It is the acknowledgement of this receiving that sustains me and lets me know that they have accepted my care. How do children acknowledge care from adults? How do adults understand their receipt?

I am in the checkout stand removing from my cart clothes, toys, food, and a bottle of water. The conveyor belt moves toward the scanner and I meet the cashier’s eyes. “Good Morning.” “Hello. Did you find everything you need today?” “Yes, thank you.” Silence. Beep. Beep. Beep. All the items are checked, bagged, and totaled. “Your total is \$79.52. Will there be anything else?” “No, thank you.” I insert my credit card, sign for my items, and wait. The cashier hands me a receipt. “Thank you.” “Here’s your receipt. Have a nice day!” I exit the store, bags in hand, receipt for my merchandise. Have a nice day. (Classroom reflections)

The receipt I hold in my hand acknowledges the last ten minutes of my existence. I encountered a person. She checked my items, charged me for them, bagged them, and sent me on my way. We cared enough to exchange cordial greetings. But I received a receipt as proof that we met. Her identification number is on my receipt. If anyone wonders who checked me out, it was cashier number 241455. I have a material object in my possession that acknowledges she cared for me at 10:55 am on June 26, 2008.

I also receive acknowledgement from those I care for each year. At holiday time and in June, I receive many material receipts—cards filled with hand written thank yous, body lotion, or gift cards to nearby restaurants. These receipts, though, are not “the natural reward of teaching” (Noddings, 2003, p. 182). The natural

rewards are when we laugh, giggle, joke, dialogue, and hug. They also acknowledge my care, or lack thereof, when they ignore, frown, and indicate that they don't like school. I have cared for them but we haven't defined care in the same way. I care to move them to a higher plane. Sometimes they care to stay grounded. Fortunately, these times are few and far between. It is the positive receiving and responding to my care that calls me to continue caring.

It is June 13th, the final day of school, and my class and I head toward the hallway to 'clap out' the fifth graders moving on to middle school. We wait for the line to process down the hall. I see them in the distance. Nathan whose start in kindergarten was a little shaky has come full circle and doing well passes first. Christopher high-fives me as he passes by and I tell him "Way to go, buddy! I knew you could do it." David, who was initially in a special education early childhood classroom but at my request spent the whole kindergarten day with me, passed by and I knew that I had done a good thing six years ago. And then I saw her. Thalia. She met me with her big blue eyes and her long brown hair. My nose started to tingle and my eyes welled up. She did the same. This beautifully talented young lady was off to middle school and she remembered me. Her emotions met mine and without any words I knew that someday we would meet again. I told her I wanted to see her become the first Hispanic female president and that she was capable of doing whatever she put her mind to. I told her to stay true to herself and don't cave into any peer pressure. I told her I would always be here if she needed me. We hugged. She continued with her classmates and exited the building. And within five minutes my students had gone. I was left with my 14 young minds that in 5 years would pass by me too. Will Christine or Jeremy remember? How will we meet in the hall on that day? I will have to stay around to find out. (Classroom reflections)

I am cared for. I know this because of the little moments like these. These are what bring me back to my classroom energized and refreshed after summer break. I reflect upon these moments while I sit at the pool or watch the sunset. They cause me to understand my purpose in life—to care for others and in turn, I will be cared for by

them. This caring relationship that I establish with students is the light that continues to guide the way toward each and every clearing.

A Phenomenal Journey

The good Lord gave us mountains, so we could learn how to climb.
(McDonald et al., 2006, track 1)

Thus far, I have acknowledged family members, teachers, and educational theorists who have contributed to how I make my way in this world. It is because of these interactions and experiences, that I am who I am. Together we have traveled to other countries, crossed some hilly terrain, and learned to be on the way. Now, in front of me stands a mountain possessing unimaginable beauty. I am not alone. Packed with reflections upon those with whom I have engaged in my pedagogy for years and new books holding the key to my phenomenological lifework, I will successfully write my way across the mountain. I must explore and uncover a careful way to reach the summit—perhaps a clearing to gather in all the surroundings from the many perspectives of the mountain top. My reflection upon my mountaineering will give me the knowledge I need to help others cross the mountain. Sharing my experiences with others will provide insight into the uncovering of themselves along their own journey as well as the meaning children make of the paths we choose for them. I guide myself “to a higher plane of perception and judgment, and [equip me] with more efficient habits; so that [I have] an enlarged and deepened consciousness” (Dewey, 1915/2001, p. 80) and self-understanding about how to uncover the lived experience of illustrated conversations with my kindergarten students. Packed and ready, I begin. The next chapter provides the guideposts for that journey.

**CHAPTER THREE:
BEING GUIDED TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PATH**

With beauty before me,
 May I walk
With beauty behind me,
 May I walk
With beauty above me,
 May I walk
With beauty below me,
 May I walk
With beauty all around me,
 May I walk
Wandering in a trail of beauty
 Lively, I walk.

-Navajo Indians
(As cited by Cornell, 1987, p. 22)

Lighted Paths

Life is not a race; it is a journey. Each moment of every day is a step along the way to understanding how I am to Be in the world. Each step is much like the first; moving forward into the unknown, an unknown filled with beauty, wonder, and enlightenment. I behold the beauty of my students each day within my soul. I walk with them along their journey as they walk along mine. Together our souls merge and light our way. *Lichten*, means “to make it light, free, and open” (Heidegger, 1972/1993, p. 441). Our walking together clears our way into free and open spaces. “It is only such openness that grants to giving and receiving and to any evidence at all the free space in which they can remain and must move” (Heidegger, 1972/1993, p. 443). We remain together on our illustrated paths, moving forward in beauty guided by those who have come before us, leaving our mark for those who choose to follow.

A Phenomenological Clearing

My journey of **uncovering meaning in the lived experience of writing with young children** has only just begun. *My way* is yet unknown. I return to my mountain, standing at the base in wonder of the forest before me of which I climb to find meaning in this journey. I have been on many walks through the woods of Yellowstone National Park, Sequoia National Forest, and my small childhood parkland of Pilgrim Hills, each standing in their own uniqueness, each holding a space of understanding who I am in relation to the world.

Somewhere between Rocky Gap State Park and Deep Creek Lake stands a pine forest my children and I stumbled upon during a day's excursion to explore and venture into the unknown of the area. We stepped onto a shaded pine needled trail that was to lead to a river overlook. Being five and seven-years-old, naturally the children ran ahead, leaving me to the peace of the woods. The signs say, "Please stay on trail" but I long to venture deeper into the woods off the beaten trail. What would I find back there?

I imagine the soft groundcover of pine needles cushioning each step as I wind my way among the trees. I listen for wildlife, smell the fresh sap, and feel the cool shade tingle on my skin. Far from the path of human existence, I see a ray of light and enter into a clearing. My own little sanctuary! Light beams filter through the small gaps left by the trees and illuminate the ground below. Small ferns fill the space and tiny trees start their journey toward the sun. I pause in awe of this place of beauty. No noise. No cell phones. No television. No fast food restaurants. No concrete houses. Just me and nature reuniting and listening to one another's silence.

Light pours in illuminating the stillness of the forest. It clears the darkness and makes way for appearances. “Every colour has in it the power to set in movement what is actually transparent; that power constitutes its very nature. That is why it is not visible except with the help of light; it is only in light that the colour of a thing is seen” (Aristotle, 350 BCE/2008, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.mb.txt>). The sun reflecting on the dew-filled fern leaves sets free the beauty of the darkened forest. I can see the greens and browns of the forest floor. I see small white flowers peeking through the pine needles. Small grey squirrels scamper from limb to limb. Without this clearing, without this light, the forest would remain dark.

What is it about these small clearings that captivate my imagination? I can stand in the middle of a wide open farm field or close my eyes at a busy city stoplight and *still* place myself in the clearing. “The quiet heart of the clearing is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being and thinking, that is presence and apprehending, can arise at all” (Heidegger, 1972/1993, p. 445). I am at home with my thoughts in this clearing. I am able to put all the have-tos aside and wonder about my place in the world. The beams of sunlight pierce my soul and enlighten my mind to all the possibilities of life. I can be anything. I can do anything. There is no darkness here. Are *my* forest clearings the clearings my children name “Butterflyland” or “Robotland”? Do they find peace and beauty in these places they can go to without ever leaving the room?

I blink and it’s gone. “Mom! Look!” There before me is the river overlook. Far below, the river’s path winds its way through the valleys with surrounding

mountains gazing down on its beauty. How many clearings in those mountain forests does Nature hold secret?

What Path to Take

Have you ever been on a manmade path in the woods and you notice another path beside it, less traveled, and rockier than the one you are on? Sometimes it runs along side the main path and then other times it veers into the woods never to be seen again. Where did it come from? Who made it? What was it about the main path they didn't like, or was IT the main path at one time and someone else created a new path? I have often ventured far enough away from the main one to catch a glimpse of what lies deeper among the trees, but I continued to return to the paths laid by others. Until now.

In the five years I have been a doctoral student, I have begun to walk an 'others' path, not too far from the main path, but far enough to wonder if it is the original path. Now the time has come to uncover its origins. I may need to stop and pause awhile. I may look back and wonder if I am on the right path. I may even turn around and take a few steps back. But a desire to explore fully the phenomenological way guides me toward new insights into how and why it was I traveled on the old path. I believe that there are clearings along the way—perhaps more beautiful than those I have ever encountered before. There in the clearings I can pause and reflect upon my trip thus far. Anxious, I am comforted to know that my students are with me on this venture, providing the support on which I need to continue. While they wait for me to guide them, I look to them to guide me.

Traveling along a humanistic path of discovery walking with my kindergartners' reflections, I have chosen phenomenology as my guiding methodology. "The method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) in the first place" (van Manen, 1997, p. 2). This fitting together, this "agreement of feeling", this harmony requires that I am joining something—someone (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved July 9, 2008). I seek harmony with my students, together creating a nurturing environment that allows them to explore and develop. I am always questioning how my students experience the classroom and how to bring the world into the classroom to "question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us" (van Manen, 1997, p. 5). I believe in the "power of [their] thinking, insight, and dialogue" (van Manen, 1997, p. 16) and capture these ideas in a research method that "is fundamentally a writing activity" for both my students and myself (van Manen, 1997, p. 7). Together we seek to find **the meaning of our lived experience when we dialogue and write together during illustrated conversations.**

Those Who Walked Before Me

I am standing in the clearing. I find a seat on a fallen tree and wonder. I question Life. Who has sat on this log before me? Who was the first to ever sit in this clearing and wonder? Did anyone ever sit here and wonder about the same things I do? How did this clearing get here? Why is it here? What purpose does it serve for the forest? Are the thoughts and souls of others before me still here? Is the path I took to get here the same as they used or do all the paths in the forest lead to here? Who am **I** in this forest? (Classroom reflections)

On the path trodden by early childhood philosophers, Comenius led the way for those who believed children were to be treated with care and love. Those of us,

who connected with these ideas, sought out his path and, since every seeking is a questioning, we interpreted his thoughts of care, deeper and more fully. We could never walk in his shoes but we could follow in his footsteps. In Chapter Two, I write about those whose paths I followed for many years.

Similarly, a philosophical trail was forged by the early Greeks: Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. The question that emerges as I look to this other trail is this: Are the paths really different paths or was there just one path from which everyone started and then eventually separated? I read Gadamer (1960/1989) who often refers to Jean Jacques Rousseau (1896/2003), Merleau-Ponty (1945/1958) who was influenced by Jean Piaget, and van Manen (1997) who speaks of Johann Pestalozzi (1801/1894). Were they on the same path, and then upon meaningful dialogue, decided to go their own way—one toward education and one toward philosophy? How will we ever understand the connections that were made in the past? Will we ever *know* what each philosopher or educator has read that has influenced their way? I have come to understand that many horizons have merged with mine, some expected and others not anticipated. The interplay of these horizons is what makes each individual unique. My way will never be the same as anyone else's way, even though it may appear to be such. I am forging through the forest with others' paths to guide me, but the path is my own. It will always be my own. What philosophical paths are close to mine that will guide me deeper to understanding?

Greek Paths

An answer to the question of being has been elusive for hundreds of years, for “it is said that ‘Being’ is the most universal and the emptiest concept” (Heidegger,

1962/1993, p. 42). Aristotle's (384-322 BCE) *Metaphysics* work addresses the very question of "existence in its most fundamental state (i.e. being *as* being), and the essential attributes of existence" (as cited by the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy website, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aristotl.htm>). In *On the Soul*, Aristotle states that a soul is "the cause or source of the living body...It is (a) the source or origin of movement, it is (b) the end, it is (c) the essence of the whole living body" (Aristotle, 350BCE/2008, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/sould.mb.txt>). I wonder how the soul of each of my students is illuminated through their senses? In what ways are their souls moved toward mine? Are their souls emotionally moved—drawn to mine like an "interior spiritual force that stimulated their self-activity" (Montessori, 2004, p. 29)? Even though we stand in one place together talking and writing, our souls move forward. Their soul moves my soul simply by being close and touching it with their words. Their forward motion engages in relation with me.

A Phenomenological Path

Almost 2000 years later, Franz Brentano (1838-1917) studied Aristotelian philosophy, arriving at an indepth expansion upon the works of Aristotle. He, too, "bracketed the question of the nature of the soul in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*" (Moran, 2000, p. 32), but his notion of descriptive psychology and intentionality influenced the minds of Freud, Twardowski, Meinong, and Husserl, projecting them forward toward new insights into the question of being and meaning—opening the door to phenomenology.

Edmund Husserl critiqued psychologism which "led to the founding of phenomenology as a science separate from both psychology and logic" (Moran, 2000,

p. 59). Husserl distinguished his investigations by going “back to the things themselves” (*Wir wollen auf die “Sachen selbst” zuruckgehen*, LI, Intro. § 2, p. 252; Hua XIX/1 10)” (Moran, 2000, p. 93). He believed that phenomenology was to be concerned with “concrete *acts of meaning*, meaning-intendings” (Moran, 2000, p. 93). But his *Logical Investigations* written from 1900-1901 (Husserl, 1970/2001) was only the beginning for the uncovering of phenomenology. His student, Martin Heidegger would reveal far more about the meaning of Being.

A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Path

Husserl’s work started Martin Heidegger down his phenomenological path and guided him toward a clearing of hermeneutic phenomenology, questioning the being of beings. Martin Heidegger spent ten years with guidance and support from Husserl, developing his own *Being and Time*, “which at once claimed phenomenology to be much older than Husserl, as an essentially Greek way of thinking, and also, at the same time, pushed phenomenology *beyond* Husserl, in that it replaced the study of intentional structures of consciousness with the more fundamental study of the relation between Dasein and Being itself” (Moran, 2000, p. 193). The existence of Being is to be uncovered through questioning and seeking. How one approaches this uncovering is via Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle of understanding in which is “hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 154). This possibility is understood only when one interprets the things themselves, never allowing the “*fore-structure...* to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 154). I must enter the circle and continue to trace back over the meanings we make to find

more meanings with them. The “constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 269), and thus, projects me along my path with my students. Heidegger’s philosophy is where I enter the circle, keeping those who came before him as the foundation upon which the circle was created.

A Hermeneutic Philosophical Path

The “love of knowledge, wisdom” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved July 9, 2008) guided Hans-Georg Gadamer toward a hermeneutic philosophy that has also influenced the steps I take with young children. Reading his thoughts and reflections in *Truth and Method* reveal how I am called to understand the interconnection of language, play, and experience when participating in young children’s lifeworlds. “Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 386). Conversations call forth language, spoken and written, between myself and my students during free choice play time, academic instruction, and meaningful dialogue.

“Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 103). How do you lose yourself in a place you have created? Do we really lose the way, or do we intentionally leave the other place for a world different than the one in which we dwell? As my children draw their thoughts, they immerse themselves in word play, an activity absent of strain but “experienced subjectively as relaxation” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 105). Their artwork is their “play—i.e., that its actual being cannot be detached from its presentation and that in this presentation the unity and identity of a structure emerge” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 120). Children

continue their play as they participate in a deeper sense of play as they present their game to me, holding us both “in its spell, [drawing] him into play, and [keeping] him there” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 106) presenting himself forward into a merging of horizons. Their play has fulfilled the purpose of immersing themselves in their lifeworlds and presenting themselves to others through language. I am invited to immerse myself in their worlds, to participate in their way by joining them in their thoughts.

In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a German theologian, inspired by the works of Plato, sought to uncover the intentions of the authors of the New Testament and “sought a way of getting behind these prejudices...by peeling away the layers of misunderstanding until we arrive at the living intuition which enlivens the text” (Moran, 2000, p. 274). Although Schleiermacher’s idea was that misunderstanding was universal, he did emphasize that the interpretation of a text needed “to take place along two different axes: *grammatical* and *psychological*” (Moran, 2000, p. 275). While the grammatical axes focused on knowing the language of the time in which it was used, the “putting oneself in the mind of the other” helps to come closer to understanding the texts of others, in particular, my kindergarten students. How can I enter their world without exiting mine?

Contrary to Gadamer’s belief, “Schleiermacher’s central assumption [was] that we can recover the past as it originally happened” thus making “hermeneutics...a kind of reproduction of the original production” (Moran, 2000, p. 275). Gadamer, on the other hand, recognizes that “as a historical being he experiences historical realities

which support the individual and in which he at once expresses and rediscovers himself” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 221). Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) would further examine Schleiermacher’s ideas, expanding on them to include the concept of lived experience or *Erlebnis*. “Man is a history-making creature who can neither repeat his past nor leave it behind” (Auden, W.H., *The Dyer’s Hand*, Retrieved July 13, 2008 from <http://www.quotegarden.com/history.html>). We can’t recover the past *exactly* as it happened, but the memory of it will remain at a distance beckoning us to uncover its meaning to guide us along our lifeworld. Martin Heidegger fused the past including Dilthey, Husserl, and Schleiermacher with his present to produce hermeneutical phenomenology, the methodological grounding upon which this particular study is focused.

The circle in understanding is not an orbit in which any ransom kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself...To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 154)

Walking Through Lived Experience

Aristotle often “had a habit of walking about as he discoursed” which would later be associated with the term “peripatetics,” meaning “to walk about” (as cited by the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/a/aristotl.htm>). Teachers of young children live in constant peripatetics. We walk about the room, we walk with our children, we walk with philosophers who guide our pedagogy, and we walk a line balancing practice and theory. While I look to the past to find meaning in how I have walked to understand the circle of hermeneutic phenomenology from

philosophers such as Aristotle, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer; Max van Manen is a prominent source of my present walking. His words resonate with my being. They call on me to understand not so much the history of phenomenology but how this methodology is my present. How can I be with my children and help them uncover their own being in the world?

Researching Lived Experience (van Manen, 1997) “offers a pedagogically grounded concept of research that takes its starting point in the empirical realm of everyday lived experience” (p. ix). What truly calls to me about his thinking—this calling that “means to set into motion, to get something underway—which may be done in a gentle and therefore unobtrusive manner” (Heidegger, 1968/1993, p. 386)—is the focus, like Heidegger, on care and tactfulness when engaging with others. Van Manen (1997) calls me to pursue human science research using an interplay of six activities while stimulating insight and using care to uncover the meaning of lived experiences.

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

I begin to examine my path using these activities as grounding for my engagement with my students. These six activities allow me to get underway into the hermeneutic circle.

Committed to the Path

To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being. Even minor phenomenological research projects require that we not simply raise a question and possibly soon drop it again, but rather that we “live” this question, that we “become” this question. Is this not the meaning of research: to question something by going back again and again to the things themselves until that which is put to question begins to reveal something of its essential nature? (van Manen, 1997, p. 43)

I engage myself emotionally and morally whether I write to clear my mind from a hard day at work, write plans for my classes, or write in journals with my students. Writing is at the core of my being. I write my grocery list as a mother who attends to her family’s needs. I commit my thoughts to paper as a student engaged in a phenomenological study in which writing is the most fundamental activity. I dialogue and dictate thoughts with my kindergartners each day that I am with them. However I am oriented, writing interests me (“to concern, to make a difference, be of importance” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved July 8, 2008). With young children, uncovering meaning from their writing is of importance to me so that together we make a difference by keeping their voices alive. In Chapter One, I revealed my understanding of my past of how I turned to this phenomenon of writing with young children, illustrating how care prevails over mandated writing assignments. I look to the future of how I will make meaning of the text we unveil tomorrow.

To find the essential nature of our togetherness, I embrace my students’ thoughts, ideas, and dreams. “To embrace a “thing” or a “person” in its essence means to love it, to favor it” (Heidegger, 1964/1993, p. 220). I love laughing, smiling, and talking with my students. It brings me joy, laughter, and peace. Together

we speak to one another; we say something that further opens up our being and how we approach the world. We devote ourselves and our ideas to one another. “To speak to one another means to say something to one another; it implies a mutual showing of something, each person in turn devoting himself or herself to what is shown” (Heidegger, 1971/1993, p. 409). As they reveal their thoughts to me, I return to my core—what meaning is made of our writing experience? What is it like to stand with me and engage in word play, creating imaginary worlds and inviting me to share in their lifeworlds?

Commitment to the path also means that the research question must always be in focus. It must be clear and understood. It must be lived (van Manen, 1997, p. 44). I live the question of how my engagement with kindergartners in illustrated conversations uncovers their voice and reveals to them the meaning they make of their world. The impromptu-ness of our meeting does not call for planning. We must live in the moment. The spontaneity brings forth the heart of what lies in each child. We embark on an adventure that “removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the unknown” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 60).

I interpret their tellings, embellishing upon them as we merge horizons. As Heidegger (1956/1993) says, “Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted” (p. 153). In essence, I interpret the interpretation of the interpretation. They must first interpret their own thoughts onto paper. Sharing this with me, we interpret their own interpretations of their text, their illustrations, and their imaginations. We expand our horizons, learning about each other through dialogue. The second part of this

phenomenological journey is my interpretation of our interpretative encounter. But understandably, my interpretation is only *one* interpretation, “and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description” (van Manen, 1997, p. 31). I must circle the circle that lies within the circle. The clearing is filled with complexities while the stillness beckons me forward.

Living on the Path

August 26: Day 1 of School

I greet my children for the first official time as their teacher. Their backpacks are bigger than they are filled with pencils, erasers, tissues, soap, and crayons. With each new child entering the room, more items are handed to me faster than I can sort and stack them. Finally, after 30 minutes of juggling, I am able to remove myself from the cubby area and find out what each has chosen to do while they waited for me. I observe. I make mental notes about what interests them. I find a seat next to a few gathered at a table and begin to interact. I float around the room for some time, just talking and watching. I collect data for my personal use.

August 27: Day 2 of School

I greet my children for the second morning. Collect any miscellaneous items that might trickle in but am able to talk more with my children about how they are feeling that day. After a quick circle time including a story, discussion, and directions for activities, the students are quickly engaged in art projects, alphabet games, and practice writing their names. I find my chair at my table, pick up my Palm Pilot, call over the first child on the list, and begin my required language arts assessments. I ask them to tell me what letters are on the page, what sound the picture begins with, and “repeat after me” sentences. I mark their responses on my computer. I collect data for my instructional use. (Classroom reflections)

I live in a world of data collection. This place we call school has become a building dedicated to “leaving no child behind in academics.” We record their progress three times a year with our technology. We analyze that data and create our

instructional groups based upon the results. This type of data is not what calls me to teach. It may give me the information I need to get my students on their way in learning the skills of reading and math computation, but it does not start us on the way of understanding and listening to our own voices. It does not provide the data we need to uncover the meaning we make of our kindergarten experience.

Our stories, hugs, conversations, and laughs *are* the data that uncover meaning. We talk and play and write together. I seek to find how this path can be uncovered. Young children do have difficulty writing the proper way with correct spellings and punctuation, but their thoughts are hidden amongst the illustrations and letterings on the page. What are these ideas that are concealed by the lack of writing skill? To find their thoughts, I must gain access while playing with them, in “free choice” and in word play.

I return to van Manen’s (1997) notion that lived experience is temporal: “it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past experience” (p. 36). This gaining access is temporal. Uncovering the lived experience of writing with my kindergartners does not happen during our first encounter. It doesn’t happen during our second. Although insights are made, there is an adjustment time. Together we learn how to engage with one another. We begin to gain access to each other’s ideas by building trust and creating caring environments.

In August, many written entries are brief. Illustrations are not filled with great detail. The conversations are short, filled with silent pauses and awkward looks. They do not really know this being in front of them. I am not their mother, nor have I known them longer than a month. I entered their life and am asking them to reveal

themselves to me in open, free dialogue. For many, this is uncomfortable. Trust has not been established. They do not know I care about them. They must perceive me as a carer; it is not a given when I become their teacher. This relationship will take time to grow. The interconnectedness that presents itself in conversation blossoms for some in just a month. For others, it may take until January, the timeframe kindergartners often have with the ah-ha moment when all reading and math concepts erupt, sending them to new places. And for a few, it never occurs. This path of investigating experience as we live it takes time, especially with young children new to the schooling experience and being away from the safety of their homes.

Reflective Paths

REFLECTION

Each time I see the Upside-Down Man
Standing in the water,
I look at him and start to laugh,
Although I shouldn't oughtter.
For maybe in another world
Another time
Another town,
Maybe HE is right side up
And I am upside down.
(Shel Silverstein, 1974, p. 29)

I look into the mirror and see a teacher, a mother, a learner, a daughter, a sister, a friend. Who are they? How does each voice contribute meaning to create the whole? To reflect upon something calls us to think about it with deep concern. It causes us to think about things of appeal; "to turn toward them in thought" (Heidegger, 1968/1993, p. 372). I turn toward my students' ideas for the meaning of how they experience their world. It is a seeking-questioning that spirals in a circle while lives move forward.

Spiraling reflections. This spiraling lives within our DNA inherently interwoven as a part of each human being. Language strands of motherhood, teacherhood, studenthood, sisterhood, daughterhood.... My “hundred hundred hundred more” language strands. The mystery of the language of DNA challenges scientists today. Just two years ago, they discovered the gene on the specific strand that held the key to Treacher Collins Syndrome, a craniofacial genetic condition gifted to my niece. Her DNA gave her a language that speaks the same language as only 1 in every 10,000 other people in this world. She shares with them a language that only they can truly understand amongst themselves. My son’s genes and my own hold a DNA gift of what others have labeled ADHD, with the emphasis on Hyperactivity. Scientists haven’t found any proof of a strand or gene associated with this ‘disorder’ that keeps order in my life. Does it exist, then, or have those who don’t possess the gift named it to give order to their world? I believe that this gift of thinking with speed and *being driven by a motor* allows me to hold onto my languages. I don’t relax. I don’t sit still very long. I can’t. It’s *not in the genes*. Perhaps no one can keep up with us ADHDers long enough to steal them away? Where did ADHD come from then? “Whoever gives a gift (and not just a mere present) gives himself” (Langeveld, 1984, p. 3). My father, though not diagnosed, gave this gift to me and my son. I must thank him when I see him next.

Reflective interpretations. Reflection upon interpretations of texts presents meaning making opportunities that provide for “more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic meaning” (van Manen, 1997, p. 79). Our engagement with the interpretations of

children's thoughts reveal meanings they make from their ideas. These discoveries are their own. Each one is individual, but together we focus on uncovering their own Being. Our conversations are a "sense-making and interpreting of the notion that drives or stimulates the conversation" (van Manen, 1997, p. 98). Langeveld's (1984) "personal sense-making...consists of the ways and means by which I constitute myself as a person;" coupled with his notion of "open sense-making...is the collection of interpretation[s] that we build through our communion and contact with our fellow human beings" (p. 2). This supports the notion that our "conversation has a hermeneutic thrust" (van Manen, 1997, p. 98).

My interpretations of their lifeworlds may reveal other themes, grounded in the existentials of spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), temporality (lived time), and (sociality) lived relation (van Manen, 1997). I must step out of our intimate conversations and look at our larger conversations. I return to the circle of circles. I have almost twenty-one small circles of children with whom I engage and journey through conversation. At some point in our conversational journey that seems right, I stop "gathering data" and analyze a group of circles to find themes that emerge from our being together. While the formal gathering is paused, our conversations do not. We continue on our journey, expanding upon the meanings being uncovered. Whatever themes emerge from our conversations, it is imperative that the themes are essential to the phenomenon itself. I continue to ask myself of the themes, Would the phenomenon of writing with young children during illustrated conversations be "*what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is*" (van Manen, 1997, p. 107)?

While reflecting during our dialogues and during the process of uncovering essential themes, I reflect using my hundred languages. I use the voice of teacher, of mother, and of student. They are not divisible, just as my pedagogy nor my students are not. We come together to create pedagogy. Without them, there would be none. There would be no experiences to share the meaning that lies within. The essence of any experience, therefore, involves beings being reflective of their own being in the world. Shared written reflection requires that my students and I are present to one another, each of us “*reflect[ing] phenomenologically on experiences of teaching and parenting [and studenting] as a teacher or as a parent [or as a student]. In other words, [we] attempt to grasp the pedagogical essence of a certain experience*” (van Manen, 1997, p. 78).

On the Write Path

The understanding of something written is not a repetition of something past but the sharing of a present meaning. (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 394)

Hermeneutical phenomenological research *is* writing. It requires that one uncover meanings of lifeworlds by writing and rewriting in order “to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld” (van Manen, 1997, p. 131). It encompasses my whole being in order to truly understand each of my children’s stories. Writing their voices to be seen by others reflectively “exercises us in the sense that it empowers us with embodied knowledge which now can be brought to play or realized into action in the performance of the drama of everyday life” (van Manen, 1997, p. 130). Writing returns us to the things themselves by reflecting upon interpretations of thoughts and ideas.

Children as phenomenologists. Writing *is* the focus of this study. It is the writing my students do that is their lived experience. They draw and write fixing their thoughts on paper. “It externalizes what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things in our world” (van Manen, 1997, p. 125). They express their internal thoughts for all to see and hear about. They expose themselves eagerly to share their lifeworld with others. They are “little phenomenologists” seeking meaning by acknowledging their life through the drawn and written word. My children use their languages to open up their being in the world, their ideas coming from deep within their souls. They “let be seen” those things that interest them through drawing and using their beginning knowledge of words and letters to write their thoughts (Krell, 1993, p. 33). There is no set of prescribed mechanistic procedures; rather, it is to “animate inventiveness and stimulate insight” (van Manen, 1997, p. 30). Young children’s writing opens up a stimulating world of animation and invented worlds.

Common languages. Due to their inexperience with the written word, my students and I engage in our saying to one another what speaks in our minds and souls. “Conversation is the process of coming to an understanding” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 287). When my children approach my table at the beginning of the year, we speak different languages. I speak the language of teacher, of adult. I find myself trying to learn their language during our first few encounters. What language speaks most clearly for them? Have I heard a language similar to this before? Is there anything that I know that will allow me to translate their language in order to come together in understanding? I can only use the knowledge from my past to guide me

toward their language and away from mine. The temporality of the activity returns and in time, through practice and daily immersion, I will “understand [their] language by living in it...[and learning it] so perfectly that using it no longer means translating from or into one’s native tongue...[since] mastering the language is a necessary precondition for coming to an understanding in a conversation” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, pp. 386-387). We seek a common language. Is it that I learn theirs? Do they learn mine? Do we find a common language that we both have mastered? Without a common language, understanding each other’s interpretations is perhaps not possible. Is it at the time we master a common language that we also enter into a trusting, caring relationship? Or perhaps, even, this common language we search for is named *care*?

The writing process does not end with our conversations. I look deeper into the meaning my students make from our gatherings together. No longer is the understanding between myself and one student. It opens itself up to the larger audience. The conversation between myself and my readers seeks understanding of how my students’ lifeworlds uncover the meaning of their experience of illustrated conversations. It is not to be a generalization that all children who engage in illustrated conversations will experience the same. The uncovering of themes inherent in the experience of illustrated conversations is a part of the larger circle. I write to show understanding. Perhaps writing is the dirt upon which our paths exist.

Oriented to the Path

Pedagogical thoughtfulness is sustained by a certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding to a particular child or children in this or that situation. Out of this basis of thoughtfulness, tact in our relationship with children may grow. (van Manen, 2002, p. 10)

Relationships that form between a parent and a child or a teacher and her student, while different in depth, are pedagogical in nature. How we meet the child in his/her world, how we attend to the needs of each individual, and how we reflect upon the interactions create a “*theory of the unique*...which starts with and from the single case, searches for universal qualities, and returns to the single case” (van Manen, 1997, p. 150). Each of my students is dynamic, mysterious, and inspiring. I am called as a teacher to see each child in his/her own uniqueness and use the tact necessary to nurture confidence, love, and care.

Blossoms along the path. To see a child pedagogically is to see each one from the view of whom I am in the world and who they are in the world. I meet each child differently in my classroom depending upon the relationship we have created. These relationships, positive or negative, are the ground of my pedagogy. I am lucky to have been blessed by the beauty of so many blossoms from my garden of children. I recall Anika, a fourth grader who so desperately wanted a friend. Anika came from a troubled home, would often stay after school to help me in the classroom, and enjoyed just being in the room with me at recess. Anika left fourth grade understanding that she had someone she could return to if ever she needed a shoulder. I still have a Christmas ornament with her picture on it that gets hung on my “teacher tree” each year. That same year, Ali, a young boy who was very knowledgeable but less confident in his abilities, walked on to fifth grade with a more positive self-confidence. They blossomed in my class. Whether it was just development, or it was the thoughtful engagements we shared during recess or after school, these children positively affected my pedagogy.

With constant guilt, there *are* those flowers that for me do not bloom. What could I have done differently to meet them along the way? How do they understand what teachers *are*? These are the pedagogical reflections that guide me to self-understanding. These questions guide me toward a clearer orientation to what it means to be tactful, thoughtful, and caring. For all children, my buds and my flowers, I must believe that their “gift of experiencing the possible” (van Manen, 2002, p. 11) will reveal itself in time, perhaps with a different gardener using her special blend of nutrients. Accepting that all seeds cannot grow in the same soil and reflecting upon how I must continue to learn how to alter the nutrient blend for different seeds, I must sustain my pedagogical thoughtfulness “by a certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding to a particular child or children in this or that situation. Out of this basis of thoughtfulness, tact in our relationship with children may grow” (van Manen, 2002, p. 10). Thoughts that constantly persist are whether I give my children a variety of nutrients to thrive, flourish, or die. Will they continue to grow, or have I set in place a journey of struggle just to stay alive? Reflections guide me to understand how I can change my engagement with young children to let each child be seen, acknowledged, and heard. It is my orientation. It is a commitment I have pursued since I was five years of age. It is my calling.

Deeply oriented conversations. When writing with my kindergartners, I am deeply oriented to their being, more so than during any other time during the school day. Being strongly oriented requires that “we do not separate theory from life, the public from the private” (van Manen, 1997, p. 151). Curricular mandates are ever-present in many classrooms requiring a specific amount of minutes dedicated to

reading and math according to a scripted guide. In order to remain a teacher, I must follow these guidelines or otherwise go through a “reteaching” of how to teach by an appointed mentor. While I orient myself to my students during these mandated lessons, I am not deeply engaged in the “letting be seen” Heidegger speaks of. “The [discourse] lets something be seen...namely, what the discourse is about; and it does so either *for* the one who is doing the talking (the *medium*) or for persons who are talking with one another, as the case may be” (Krell, 1993, p. 33). It is only during our illustrated conversations that I become deeply oriented to my students. I leave behind the mandates of curriculum and enter into a pedagogical union with my children. We both leave the classroom and transport ourselves into new and exciting worlds.

Just a Part of the Whole Path

At the far end of my property line, there was once a pine tree. Last winter, the ice and snow forced their elements upon the limbs and broke the tree in half. The tree slowly died that winter. When spring awakened, it was time to remove the dead tree. The plan was first to cut the branches in smaller pieces and remove all but the stump. Then, I would take my shovel, dig around the root and begin to axe the stump away, leaving a smooth area in which to plant grass. The idea was to make the area look as if no tree had ever stood there. The plan did not work. I was unable to unroot the tree. It was not ready to leave the sanctity of my yard. The “giving” tree wanted to give more—it wanted to remain a part of the soul of my homeland. And so, I left the stump with its ring of dead pine needles. I recreated the space, threw down some wildflower seeds, planted some gladiola bulbs, and was content with letting see what

happens. Now July, I gaze upon that same circle. The stump still stands surrounded by red, white, and coral gladiolas encircling sunflowers and daisies. I visit my flower garden every day to see the finches that feed on the seeds of the newly opened burgundy sunflower and to see how many leaves the deer have devoured overnight. Where once a tree stood home to birds, a flower garden now flourishes home to bees, butterflies, and deer. What I thought was a good plan, turned out even more rich and beautiful because of the stump.

My garden leads me to van Manen's (1997) final interwoven activity of research—"balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (p. 31). Like my garden, I have a "plan" to engage with my children in illustrated conversations. That is the whole. The parts that create the whole develop in engagement with each other. A theme is uncovered that centers the discourse. Historical figures organize the text exegetically. Through existentials of corporeality (lived body), temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), and sociality (lived relation) my children weave themselves through the text. Or perhaps, a combination of these offers new insights into writing phenomenologically.

What is most important on this journey, though, is taking the time truly to engage with my students, to come to understand and interpret their lifeworlds with them, and allow their voices to remain true to them. I keep oriented to my kindergartner's lifeworld timetables, not to my dissertation timeline. Only then, when I am ready to richly and deeply engage in conversation with myself about our engagements, it is that I begin to write the research that follows these three chapters.

Stepping into the Clearing with Kindergartners

A whole new world
A new fantastic point of view
No one to tell us no
Or where to go
Or say we're only dreaming

A whole new world
A dazzling place I never knew
But when I'm way up here
It's crystal clear
That now I'm in a whole new world with you

(Lyrics to *A Whole New World*, Retrieved 8 July 2008 from the National Institutes of Health, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/lyrics/aladdinworld.htm>)

Each September five-year-old children enter into a building they call school. What it holds for them is unknown. Will it be a place of care? Will it become a burden? What meaning will they make of this place of which they have been told they will learn how to read and “do numbers”? It is, for many, a whole new world to explore and discover its intricacies.

Each September, I too, enter a whole new world of kindergarten. I explore units focusing on animals, transportation, and nutrition with my group of children. I discover 21 new Beings that will enlighten my own sense of self. I look to them for the secrets of what makes kindergarten a special place in which to dwell. And this year especially, these new lifeworlds guide us toward understanding—understanding each other in deeper, more fuller ways as well as understanding the meanings young children make of illustrated conversations.

Many years ago, I sat at this same computer reflecting upon who I am and how I have come to be in the world. On November 11, 2003, I wrote:

My passion for the education of young children is so great that it encompasses my entire life. My life focuses on my students' lives, to do my job better each and every day, to evolve each day, to appreciate each and every moment I have with my students and particularly, my own children, to encourage others to see how their teaching can be so much better if only they try something new—to jump out of the box—so to speak, to become a better me. I must evolve within myself... (EDPL 635 Journal Reflections, 2003)

These questions of becoming have continued to emerge in my dialogues with myself and others. I reflect back upon many of the entries made over the course of these years and find that they return to children and the way education engages with them. Taking Phenomenology in 2006, I found my writing path of enlightenment, and thus, the question was born—*The Journey of the Journal*. I began not only to write my way toward the current question of **What is the lived experience of kindergartners engaged in illustrated conversations?** but also to learn how to question the world with them. For two years, I have practiced asking richer, more thought-provoking questions of my students. I have listened more deeply, being more tactful and thoughtful in our dialogue. Our conversations have illuminated their imaginary worlds and brought me closer to their lifeworld outside our school walls. Writing questions in their journals allowed me to reconnect later with the conversation we had.

This past year, we visited worlds like none before—imagined worlds with such depth and detail that looking back upon the comments I made, I cannot recreate the scenario that took place. Therefore, this year I made a change in the way in which I record our interpretations. I began to tape record each student interaction, hoping that this would not alter the quality of the engagement. To interpret the interpretations I need some type of written word. With 21 students, recalling details about 21

different conversations would be difficult to accomplish. In August when we began our conversations on the first day of school, we set into motion a journey that inevitably explored the 21 different paths all leading to one.

Walking the Path

“Good morning, Mrs. Dean!”

“Good morning, Maria! How are you today?”

“Good.”

“Great! Please sign up for lunch and then we have journals this morning.”

“Okay!”

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 8:40 am, my kindergartners dance, hop, stroll, wander, run, or simply walk into my room. A routine of emptying their backpacks, signing up for lunch, and getting started on their journal page has been established since September, and for many, reminders are unnecessary. By 8:50 am, all children have arrived, and the room bustles with activity, many already diligently discussing their illustrations and stories with friends. While they work, I get out the tape recorder, my pen, and the microphone. I position myself at my table and wait. By 9:00, the children have begun to finish their entries and approach my table. The process has evolved this year into sitting in one of the five chairs that surround my table, and if they are full, forming a line behind the last chair. Some rush through their pictures to get to be the first at my table, forgetting their thoughts. A gentle reminder, and they return to their space to record their ideas.

The conversations begin. I ask each child to tell me their thoughts or to describe the excitement going on in their illustration. They elaborate on the few letterlike markings on their page revealing fantasylands, superhero retellings, or events that happened to them with family and/or friends. As I listen to their tellings, I

ask questions about the details. What happened to...? Do you think...? What would happen if...? How do you feel about...? I write the questions on their thought page to help me connect their story to my recollections and recordings. The date is inscribed on the bottom, since often, many children fail to open to the very next page in their book, but more importantly, it helps me to return to the prior entries for reference. We close the conversation either by wondering about the next entry or by them telling me, "That's all."

Each conversation can be as brief as one minute or linger as long as five to ten minutes. I have no set time frame for them. They are free to embellish as long as they wish. Tuesday and Thursday mornings are dedicated to imaginary worlds and getting to know my children on a deeper level. The average time we spend as a whole class relating our stories is about thirty minutes. Each child is given the opportunity to share with me their thoughts, dreams, or desires. I have seen in their eyes the disappointment if I tell them to share their story with me *after* circle. Their shoulders drop and the sparkle in their eye fades. Reading groups need to wait on these days. Their hundred languages must be heard. We take all the time we need but, usually, by 9:30 am, our stories are placed upon the shelf, our imaginations engraved with another fantasy, and we return to circle time activities of weather, calendar, plans, and thematic development. Reading groups follow and our day progresses as usual.

My classroom demographics mirror many of the schools found in a public school system in a large metropolitan area. Although the school no longer qualifies as a Title I school, it is a Focus school in which 35% of our students receive Free and Reduced meals, 20% are identified to receive ESOL services, 54% are African

American, 17% are Hispanic, 20% are Asian, and 8% are Caucasian. The school serves middle income and low income homes in the community. My class of students is similar in composition with 25% receiving ESOL services, 40% African American, 25% Hispanic, 20% Asian, and 15% Caucasian. While these statistics may be useful for identifying needs for general populations, they have little to do with who each child *is* during our illustrated conversations. While cognizant of their cultural backgrounds, insights into their heritage are revealed through dialogue, and a fuller, more complete understanding of each child evolves. I do not understand them better *because* they are Caucasian; rather, I understand them better because of the relationship we have developed through our stories and interactions that uncover what it means to be five years old *and* Asian *and* experiencing illustrated conversations in kindergarten.

In January, official permission was granted by the University and the school system to begin collecting the data that are used in the remaining chapters of this journey. All the parents were invited (see Appendix A for the Letter of Invitation) to an evening dinner meeting to review the process of research with their children. Parents were told that their children's work would be given pseudonyms and that there would be little risk involved for the children in the study. At such time, the Parent Consent Form (see Appendix B) was signed and the process began. Parents were assured that at any time, if a parent chooses not to participate, their child would continue to engage in illustrated conversations with me, but their stories would not be included in the dissertation research. The having of conversations is important to the relationship we have built thus far, and continuation is part of the oral language,

writing, and reading curriculum of the school system. Additionally, the “Data Acquisition Clearance Request” to the county school system for permission to conduct the research at the school was approved. (This permission letter is found in Appendix C.) Please note that all forms have been altered to eliminate the name of the school system in which this research was conducted at the request of the county.

From January 2009 to June 2009, I recorded and transcribed the children’s stories weekly. This activity consisted of several steps. First, the children began with their own ideas and wrote their thoughts and their illustrations in their journal book. Afterward, each child came to my table area where I was ready to listen to their stories while also tape recording the interaction. Children were told that their stories would be transcribed and later put into their journal, since not all the details of their story could be remembered. The tape recorder was very exciting for the children. Many watched the sound bars move as they told their stories, intrigued by how the bars would increase the louder their voices got. The child told his/her story while I listened, commented on the details, or asked questions to further draw out the details of the child’s imagination. I sometimes wrote one or two questions and/or a synopsis of the story on the child’s “written thoughts” page so that I could return to it and recall the interaction that occurred on that day. It was not a regular practice since I was able to transcribe and insert their stories by the very next conversation. The date was written at the bottom of the page. Each child came to share his/her ideas and stories during the 30-40 minutes time block that had been established. At the end of the year, the children were able to review all their stories. In September 2009, their journals will be returned to them after using them for this interpretive study.

I, too, journaled during this time. I reflected upon the interactions that I had with my children each session. I explored the deeper meanings behind their stories, how they connected to events in the class or of those events they've shared with me during other times of the day, and even how I had personally evolved through the process of illustrated conversations with my children. Understanding my relationship with each child helped me to strengthen my ability to question more fully the details of each child's story. These reflections provided the meaning I have made of our interactions. Their stories have provided the meaning they have made of their experiences. Together we found meaning about the relationship we shared and continue to share.

The data were collected and will be saved for a period of ten years, after which, they will be destroyed. It *is* hard to believe that the stories of my kindergartners will disappear when they are juniors in high school, but I am comforted to know that they are engraved forever on our souls. Once collected, I "*attempt to grasp the pedagogical essence of a certain experience*" (van Manen, 1997, p. 78) by reflecting upon the structure of the meaning of the texts "in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes" (van Manen, 1997, p. 78).

The themes uncover the meaning of their lived experience "capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand...[using] insightful invention, discovery, [or] disclosure...[to describe] the content of the notion" (van Manen, 1997, pp. 87-88). In order to reveal the meanings of my illustrated conversations with my kindergartners, I incorporated "(1) the wholistic or sententious approach...(2) the selective or highlighting approach,...[and/or] (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach" (van

Manen, 1997, pp. 92-93). Looking for commonalities among all the texts, supporting them with particular statements from individual stories, and finding similar statements among others' stories is the process by which themes took shape.

The nature of this engagement with my children allowed me to return to the conversations repeatedly. Our conversations were “oriented to sense-making and interpreting of the notion that drives or stimulates the conversation” (van Manen, 1997, p. 98). To find the essential quality of a theme, I sought to “discover aspects or qualities” that make illustrated conversations uniquely their own and “without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. 107). The children’s writing, our writing together, and consequently, my writing about their writing, has come together to uncover **the lived experience of illustrated conversations with kindergartners.**

CHAPTER FOUR: WONDERING VOICES

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in. (Carson, 1956, p. 55)

Tuesday morning...journal day. Taking down chairs, checking email, preparing centers for reading groups, and wondering...what will Peter tell me today? How much more *is* there to know about Sonic and Tails and Shadow? Will Samantha break through the stressful reality of life and find herself in an imaginary land where there are no worries for her? And Nicholas...oh, Nicholas...who will go to jail today and why and how can I help you find peace in the world in which you dwell? Could we for just today find a happy, silly place to escape to from behind the bars of your jail?

“Good Morning, James! Good morning, Evan!”

“Good Morning!”

Both sign in for lunch and then glance at the plans for the day. “Oh, it’s journals.”

Locating their journal on the shelf, they begin their artistic endeavors. Evan begins with drawing a detailed rendition of Sonic and writing his story using invented spelling. James ventures to Wrestlemania exploring the world of the ‘signature moves’ of Jeff Hardy and Bigshow. Others soon arrive and begin their journals independently. I wait with anticipation.

“So, Margery, what is going on in your story today?” “Well...” she begins.

Voices Emerge

I stand in wonder—in “awe” at my “marvel”ous children (*Wiktionary.org*, Retrieved June 21, 2009). It seems like only yesterday Jorge clung to me crying for his father, Kim spoke hardly any English, and James told me he didn’t know how to “read and write the way big kids do.” Now all are confident, independent individuals ready to continue their journey in first grade. My journey continues in the journal binders full of ‘data’ awaiting my interpretations of the stories. What will I find hidden between the lines of their words or squeezed among the colors? What did it mean to them—this writing activity? **What is the lived experience of illustrated conversations with my kindergartners?**

On June 8, 2009, I ask, “What was special about journals? What made journal time different than other writing time?”

Jennifer: You get to tell your imaginations.

James: My favorite was thinking about the story. Then I drew it. Then I told you about it. Then the recorder hear it too. When you put it on, everyone can hear it.

Peter: The cool words. That I write in the journal. In my journal I wrote some jokes. That’s what I like about writing.

Evan: You get to color everything and you get to tell your story.

Katie: Cause you can tell about your stories and all the stuff you draw and laughing about.

Margery: It’s like you can make any story you want and any writing and stuff.

William: I like it when I tell you journals because I am your friend.

Using their own voices as the essential pathway winding through the experience, this chapter explores how the children sense the spirit of home, explore the freedom to imagine their own ideas, acknowledge their identity, and develop relationships with others by engaging in illustrated conversations. The disclosure of their stories opens up the dialogue that illuminates how “philosophical enquiry with

children, with its emphasis on oral work, narrative voice and inclusive, democratic practice, provides a powerful means by which children can listen to their peers, share experience and explore meaning. They can learn to express their views with confidence, knowing that their voices are heard and they can raise questions of interest and concern to them” (Haynes, 2008, p. 57). In this chapter, their voices—their *hundred* languages—from the Latin root *vox*, meaning “language; speech, expression, signification of feeling or opinion” (*Wiktionary.org*, Retrieved June 21, 2009) illuminate how they have come to understand not just the words they write throughout the year but the feelings they developed in the process. “The infinite diversity of interpretations, images, figurative semantic combinations, materials and their interpretations” scribe themselves on the pages of our journey (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 140). Together my children and I (their voices represented now only by their entries, my recollections of the dialogue, and the recordings of our interaction) are involved in exploring the amazement of their wondrous voices. I “must be able to catch the ball that children throw to [me], and toss it back to them in a way that makes the children want to continue the game with [me], developing, perhaps, other games as we go along” (Edwards et al., 1993, p. 153).

Chapter Five focuses on listening, a reciprocal process that must be learned and practiced with young children, in order to more fully explore and understand the paths toward clearings. How does listening create spaces among us, “suggesting a reciprocal relationship between their social identities, voices, and the texts they create” (Cappello, 2006, p. 490)? Chapter Six explores how their illustrations and written text bring life and meaning to their stories. What do the colors, actions, and

characters uncover about themselves? How do they engage with these in the telling of their stories? In the final chapter, I reflect on how the process of illustrated conversations illuminate the possibilities of developing identity, understanding, and care when we engage with young children in classrooms filled with mandates and assessments.

Show and Tell Wonders

In our classroom, we do not have an appointed “Show and Tell Day” where children are given a predetermined time to share their favorite toy or special event that occurs in their lives outside of school, such as the one I recall from my own kindergarten experience. Instead, we have it everyday. We tell stories during opening. We interact with the toys brought from home during free choice. And we meet each other during illustrated conversations twice a week. Talking with one another is an essential part of being in our classroom. My children speak with their voices, their actions, and their expressions. Through the art of conversation, I get to know who and what is meaningful in their life. We embark together on journeys intertwining fantasy and reality, helping each other have “wonderful ideas and to feel good about [ourselves] for having them” (Duckworth, 1996, p. 14).

Sixteen of my twenty-one children are participants in this study, blessing me with their own unique ways of being in the world through their hugs, smiles, laughter, and conversations. Everyday I ask myself how I will help them discover and rediscover life and the wonders it holds. I listen to their artful stories told in casual conversation in the hallway or overheard during quiet center time. “We went to the carnival yesterday and I went on the roller coaster and it went fast and...” or “My dad

and I played football and I tackled him. Then my brother came and we played soccer and then...”

But those stories told during illustrated conversations are different “because when you write the words on your paper, it’s like you do the illustrations and it’s fun to create whatever you want” (Becky, June 9, 2009). Ashley, Katie, Margery, Kim, Samantha, Becky, and Jennifer are the young girls who often fill their journal pages with rainbows, adventures with friends, and stories of their families. Peter, James, Michael, Evan, Nicholas, William, Jorge, Brian, and Alex are the boys who teach me all about Sonic, Shadow, Jeff Hardy, aliens and spaceships, trips to Cheeseland, and adventures with friends and family members.

I wonder what meaning is made when they are given the freedom to explore their own topics during illustrated conversations. What do they teach me about themselves through their showing and telling of their artistic illustrations? It is important to acknowledge that the meaning I make from the experience is contextual. One utterance, able to be defined separately, lies within a greater context of more deeply meaningful utterances. To quote just one sentence does not fully grasp the meaning made about the experience between us. Therefore, in the examples that follow large portions of the dialogue are presented projecting their voices that lie within. To make meaning, “There can be neither a first nor a last meaning; it always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 146).

Colorful Truths

Teacher: What did you like about journaling, Samantha?
How the colors come on my paper. I like it when all the different colors mix together.



Figure 16. Samantha's colors come together (June 8, 2009).

What is it about Samantha's pictures that begin the thoughts that become our conversation? The colors? The ideas that swirl in her mind before her crayons even touch the paper? What does she consider her 'work of art'? Is it the finished product, or is it her interpretation and our conversation that brings meaning to make it art?

As my children scroll through stories in their journal binder, flipping from one page to the next, often I will hear them in hushed voices recalling their entries. "Oohh! I made a castle last time. I'm going to make a rainbow today." Or "I am going to make Sonic again only *this* time..." Finding the next blank page, some stop and look at the page before quickly grabbing a pencil and sketching out their illustration. Others begin by carefully pecking through the small crayon bin for just the right color, already mindfully working on their art-work. With each new crayon, the image reveals itself to the child and to those who sit close by. Yet, it is not this image that is wholly the true work of art. It is the totality of the cyclical process that begins from the moment they realize, "Oh, it's journals," to their reinterpretation each time they gaze upon the binder on the shelf. It is always with them. The ideas linger, perhaps, imagined long before they walk in the classroom. Perhaps, they collect and

are released only one at a time in a seamlessly flowing story. Or, perhaps all of their ideas have swirled in their minds for days creating the combinations, mixtures, and multiple images that emerge in their stories. “The artwork opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this revealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to work. Art is truth setting itself to work” (Heidegger, 1956/1993, p. 165).

Children are always setting themselves to work. Young children are in a constant state of play. Whether they are pretending in the dramatic play area, building with legos, drawing at a table, clicking the mouse on a computer, or playing with words. Play is the work of children if as Vygotsky (1978) states, “The child moves forward essentially through [the] play activity” (p.103). “Play creates the zone of proximal development of the child. In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above the daily behavior” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). Our illustrated conversations are the truth setting itself to their play—our engagement with one another as I guide them toward more independence, drawing out thought-provoking ideas and detail. The truth of the meanings of their ideas is concealed among the colors and lines. The words upon their papers contain messages for us to interpret. Together we verbalize the truths of their artwork.

During our dialogue animation, dramatics, and expression spill forth. During reading groups, the child is academically attuned to the task at hand, serious and focused on learning how to decode, comprehend, and write sentences using basic sight words. Perhaps that is why when asked what they like about journals, I hear, “They also are cool. They..you get to write and color and you don’t have to glue and

cut. And do hard work” (James, June 8, 2009). Journals are play for my children. Literacy centers are “hard work.” They are truthful in wanting to play.

And what is the truth? That is a phrase often heard between children and adults. “Tell me the truth.” Whose truth? Is not life truth for children? What is naturally being concealed by their youth? Or, should the question better read, What is naturally being concealed by adults to seek the untruth from children? Do we adults seek our truth or the definition of truth because we have lost our ability—our true ability—to play? Adults play differently than children. The imagination, the creativity, the entering new worlds fades and the harsh realities of the untruth emerge. And if adults retain the ability to imagine and ‘act silly,’ they are told they are acting ‘childish.’ What is wrong with being true to oneself in doing so? Thusly, perhaps the illustrated conversations with my children allow *me* to be childish while also allowing my children to practice their hundred, hundred, hundred more languages of play, imagination, creativity, and work and in the process act truthfully to themselves.

What meaning do they make from their lives as lived and lives as imagined? Their wondrous voices help “identify how children’s understanding and subjectivity are shaped through their interactions with us, as well as how these interactions shape our understandings of children” (Jipson & Jipson, 2005, p. 42). But as their voices come forth prepared to reveal their understanding of their ideas, they approach

the work with [their] own already formed world view, from [their] own viewpoint, from his own position....These positions...are influenced by the artwork, which always introduces something new....The person who understands must not reject the possibility of changing or even abandoning his already prepared viewpoints and positions. In the act of understanding, a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 142)

Our conversations are the ‘struggle’ in which we both change our positions. How will we meet each other today? Will we laugh? Will we learn something new about each other? What will we say that may further open the window of our beings to the other?

Wondrous Voices

Voice is a multiple, dynamic, and socially situated expression of oneself.
(Cappello, 2006, p. 483)

What meaning do I make of the words, utterances, stories, and conversations of my kindergarten students? When we come together how do our voices merge? They have interpreted their own artwork and are ready to voice it with others. What is in the silence of their minds becomes ours in the open, clearing meaningful paths for them, for me, and for us.

A Place Called Home

Teacher: You like it? Which do you like better...talking to me or talking to the class.

Talking to the class..no equal.

Teacher: Why?

Cause it feels the same.

Teacher: How does that feel?

It feels like I'm at home.

(Evan, June 8, 2009)

“Everyday is a journey, and the journey itself is home” (Matsuo Basho, 2009, <http://www.thinkexist.com>). What is a home and how do we create a sense of home in classrooms? The definition of home lies within each one of us as it is experienced by us. Carollyne Sinclair (1994) studies the phenomena of home in her book *Looking for Home: A Phenomenological Study of Home in the Classroom*. She, like Otto Bollnow (1961), believe that home is a “protected neighbourhood” dedicated to developing friendships and “trusted relationships” (Sinclair, 1994, p. 19). How does

a place become a home? I cannot purposely set up my classroom in a certain way to ensure a neighborhood atmosphere is present. I cannot script what to say and how to say it each day in order to guarantee trust exists from the first day onward. And, I cannot tell someone with whom to become friends. We grow together slowly as “each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace” with its “many *paths of learning*” (Miller, 2009, Retrieved April 9, 2009). The roots of this holistic approach return to many of the early childhood educators addressed in Chapter Two. Such “originating theorists include Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ralph Waldo Emerson,...Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel...Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori,...John Dewey, [and]...Howard Gardner” to name a few (Wikipedia, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holistic_education, Retrieved April 9, 2009).

The interconnected feeling of love, care, trust, and safety that I equate with home evolves naturally and without warning in my classroom as the children make choices and let their voices be heard. I acknowledge this emotion when I tell others the class has ‘gelled.’ They now stick with one another like trusted friends. They now respect each other and apologize with sincerity if needed. They now care for one another in a way different than when they entered the room in September. Nicholas gets up out of circle without warning to retrieve a tissue for a crying friend. Brian jumps at the opportunity to escort hurt classmates to the nurse for Band-Aids and TLC. Becky openly invites others into her play if she sees them sitting alone at free choice. They have become carers and care-forers (Noddings, 1992) amongst themselves. When this ‘gelling’—this genuine reciprocity—occurs, I believe they feel

they are in a homelike environment in which they are free to explore, free to express themselves, and free to Be without harsh judgments, penalties, and predetermined decisions. Their individual voices come together as a “protected neighbourhood” dedicated to developing friendships and “trusted relationships” (Sinclair, 1994, p. 19). And when I hear “Mom—I mean Mrs. Dean, Can I go to the bathroom?” or “I will miss you, Mrs. Dean” as they walk out the door Friday afternoon, I know I am a carer and a cared-for in that neighborhood space.

Dwelling within homeschool boundaries.

A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely, within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*. (Heidegger, 1971/1993, p. 356)

Illustrated conversations allow a space in which we dwell with one another. It is a time that our paths cross, stopping long enough at the crossroads to catch up on where they are, where they would like to go, and where they have been. Within this dwelling, we begin to unfold the essence of their Being. Language, an inextricable part of this dwelling, is evident in conversations that occur between us as well as amongst the children themselves. Our academic schedule, our length of time to engage with one another, and our required curriculum create our boundary, but while dwelling within, we have created the space to unfold our true selves. Within this boundary, we dwell within its walls having built the neighborhood. Illustrated conversations are our time to unveil ourselves *because* we are able to dwell there. “We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are *dwellers* (Heidegger, 1971/1993, p. 351). Our building

and dwelling together “become *worthy of questioning* and thus have remained *worthy of thought*” (Heidegger, 1971/1993, p.362). What meaning do my students make of this dwelling, this “*basic character of Being*” (Heidegger, 1971/1993, p. 362), in the space of illustrated conversation?

There are as many paths as there are children in my classroom, and each year I am blessed to travel alongside each one. ‘My children’ and ‘my students’ are one and the same. These children are entrusted to me to nurture, love, and care over the course of ten months, much like a parent cares for her precious gifts. My interactions come naturally, sometimes as if I were their mother. In our schoolhome, I can provide nutritious snacks, a change of clothes if they need one, and “help [them] search for their own potential” (Sinclair, 1994, p. 79). But the love I have for my 21 children is “both an emotional and an intellectual act, and as such forms a firm foundation on which to base an early childhood curriculum” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 28) where I “search and discover what is unique and different about each child and...attempt to enhance this uniqueness” (Sinclair, 1994, p.78). What meanings of their homelife are hidden in the stories of each child? As their teacher, what do I do with the meanings I have made? What truths are the narrations of the child’s past life events, and which are the imagined truths?

Home is where the heart is. What part of every ‘story’ is “an account of some incident” and what part is a “fictitious narrative less elaborate than a novel” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, p. 836)? How can I better understand my students’ lives when their stories intertwine reality and fantasy? Jorge, Kim, and Ashley have all shared with me “a report, a history, a connected narration of past

events” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, p. 836) about their families or events that have happened in their lives. Who determines whether the child’s report is the truthful account or an adult’s report is the truth? As a tactful listener, a carer, and careforer, I seek to find meaning within their story, gaining access to their innermost thoughts. Caring for my children, I wish to help them find happiness, security, and peace. To do this means to find what doesn’t bring them happiness and guide them toward understanding a world that for a six-year-old can sometimes be overwhelmingly worrisome, and yet also wondrous.

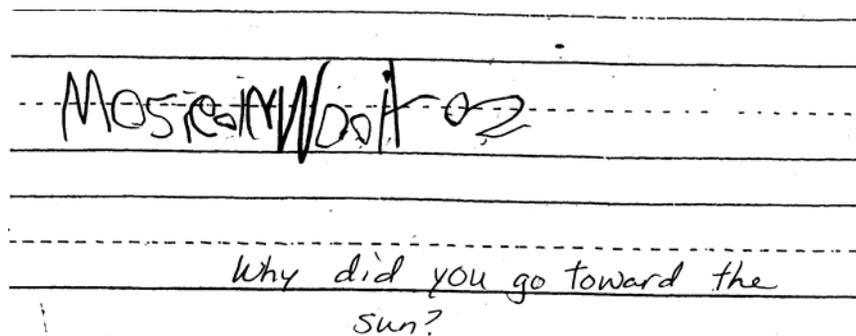


Figure 17. Jorge goes to the sun (March 10, 2009).

This is me and I was going right here. Then I got to the wrong way.
Then I went back and then I went right here and I crossed right here and there here and I cross here and then I go on the sun.

Teacher: Why would you go on the sun? Isn't it hot?

Because I want to be hot and then I went back to my house. Then I went to my room but my brother said I could not play in there so I get out and I went to my room.

Teacher: So you went to your brother's room and he told you to get out so you went to your room? What did you do in your room?

Nods yes. I play.

Teacher: You played?

And then my daddy came and he say we have to go to my grandma's house and my grandma she was sick. Then she came to my house but now she not sick.

Teacher: She's better? That is good. I am glad she is not sick.
(Jorge, March 10, 2009)

Jorge draws me into how his brother's words of being sent out were meaningful enough to bring it forth in our illustrated conversation. His going back and forth crossing the sun in order to be hot, being sent away by his brother, and attending to his ill grandmother are three very real issues for Jorge to work through during conversation. What will he do next year when his brother no longer rides the same bus each morning or passes him in the hall? Who will be there to talk to about his feelings?

The sense of family is deeply embedded in Jorge's being as illustrated by his entries often beginning with, "This is me and this is my brother," and "This is me and this is my dad." But Jorge's entries also capture a sense of fear with his family. "I was here. This is my brother. He can't get out from this thing. I can get out with this circle thing. It protect them. And I get out and I was going right here and I jumped to this and this and to the grass" (March 3, 2009). As he spoke, he moved his finger around his picture attaching "meaning to the different patterns of light, shape, and color" found in his story symbols (Shagoury, 2009, p. 28), tracing the "movement and action of the stories or information" he wanted to share (Shagoury, 2009, p. 22). Jorge, being a level one English Language Learner (ELL), struggled with expressing his thoughts in English. When asked a question, Jorge often chose to end the conversation rather than deepening the conversation. How do I, a non-ELL unable to place myself within his experience, find meaning between his lines and colors?

Listening to the voices of children of diverse race, ethnicity, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds continues to be studied in educational research (Copples, 2003; Ramsey, 2004; Soto & Swadener, 2005).

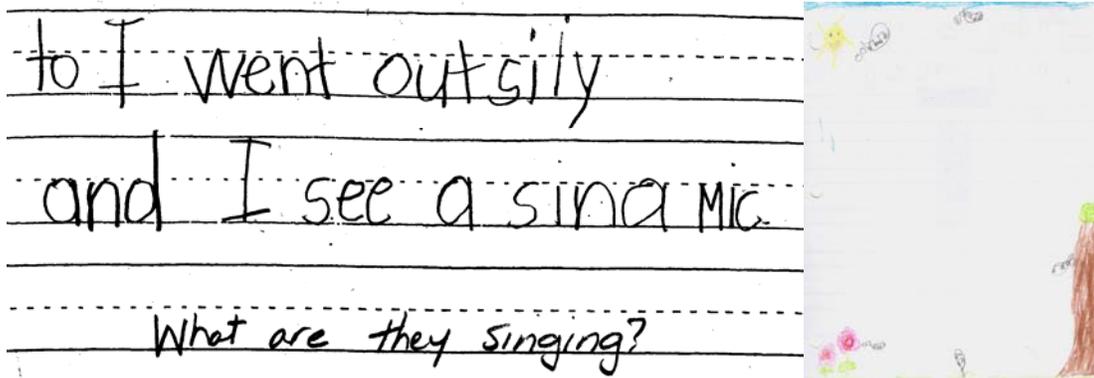


Figure 18. Kim talks with the sun (April 16, 2009).

Today I went outside. Then I saw the sun singing. Then the clouds singing and the trees singing. And the flowers singing. And the grass singing. Then everything singing.

Teacher: Everything is singing? What are they singing?

They singing la la la la.

Teacher: Wow!

And then they say "oh, busted! I'm telling mom." Then I say, "Mom, look come here." Then they say...then I say buh, buh, buh, buh,... Then my mom told me to help my mom cook.

Teacher: It's nice to help mom cook, isn't it?

Yeah. Then I went outside and I sing. I tell "Mom, mom!" Then she say, "Honey are you sure I sing?" My mom say that. Then my dad say "Hello, honey." The sun. The cloud. The tree. The grass. The flower. Singing. Do you [inaudible] and he said, "Yes." Then I talk with the sun. Can you say your friend to stop saying that? And then I said, "Okay, sing" Then they sing again. Hm... I hate that. Hello let me go to party singing. And then I make her sing two still singing and say Hmm...busted. Mom Dad. Then my daddy say I love your singing. That's it.

(Kim, April 16, 2009)

Kim, also an ELL student, reveals her reciprocal relationship with her mother on outdoor adventures enjoying the sun, flowers, trees, and clouds. Her stories are filled with replicated conversations between herself and others. Words burst forth in such rapid succession when Kim speaks that many of the details are missed during

our illustrated conversations and during transcriptions. As with Jorge, I am left with the feeling of just walking beside her on this journey, not really engaged with her ideas. Sadness lies within that I have not been as good a carer for her as, perhaps, I could have been.



Figure 19. Ashley plays with her brother (March 5, 2009).

I was in my room playing with dolls and my baby brother came. Then he got playing with me too and I said, “Are you playing dolls with me?” and he said, “Yes.”

Teacher: That’s okay for him to play dolls. It will teach him how to be a good daddy one day.

Yeah. And he was the daddy. Then my mommy came to my room and she said, “Good job, [Ashley]” cause I was playing with my baby brother.

Teacher: That is very nice to play with your baby brother.

Yeah and then my big brother came playing with me too. He was playing dollies too. And my mommy came again and said, “Good job, [Ashley]” and she gave me a kiss and a hug.

Teacher: I love kisses and hugs. I gave my mommy a kiss this morning.

Yeah. Every morning when I going to school I give my mommy a kiss.

Teacher: She loves it. It lasts the whole day. She has you with her the whole day now that you have given her a kiss.

(Ashley, March 5, 2009)

Ashley, an early entrance to kindergarten student, is a very young student and has struggled with separation anxiety all year. Mondays are difficult after spending so

much time with her family on weekends, and cries are frequent. Ashley and I have worked through her fears in both our illustrated conversations and our ‘sit on my lap and let’s talk’ time. I shared my experiences of my father’s death, emphasizing his being with me is always in my heart and mind forever. I shared with her my own journal entries of sadness and loss. Ashley’s journal entries open windows to her strong connection to family and how meaningful they are to her. She remains connected to her family, telling her stories despite the six hours apart and the three miles that separate her house from school.

How authentic are these stories? Do my children understand their participation in the story they present as real? “Authenticity and truth adhere not in existence itself, but only in an existence that is acknowledged and uttered” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.138). The stories about home and families spill forth each time we greet each other with words...utterances...conversation. But in as much as their realities spring forth, so too, the imagination and wonder of the unknown unveils itself in a flurry of excitement and silliness. In *Boys and Girls: Superheros in the Doll Corner*, Vivian Gussin Paley (1984) listens to the interactions of young children acting out media driven superhero characters. Similarly, my children reinvent the newest characters such as Sonic, Spongebob Squarepants, and Mario; morph their own good guys and bad guys; merge fantasylands; or escape to imaginary worlds experiencing fantastic adventures.

Use Your Imagination!

Every year a new army of adventurers enters the portals seeking promised treasures, bringing with them disguises and dialogues never before seen or heard or imagined. Welcomed or not, the children’s

thoughts run, flow, crawl, and fly into every corner of the classroom, marking out a pathway to learning. (Paley, 2004, p. 33)

My “army” of sixteen venture to some very unique worlds during our journal exchanges. There are haunted hotels with no adults (Ashley, March 19, 2009), jungles and deserts with talking monkeys and worms (Becky, April 16, 2009), and mice playing basketball in the park with a fox (Alex, April 14, 2009). Re-looking at the pictures, I transport myself back to that day when they first told me the story. Their twinkling eyes fill with excitement as we laugh together. The absurdity—the silliness—of the story intrigues me as a listener. Their ideas are “toward the ‘unreal’ end of the continuum” (Woolley, 1997, p. 992) extending ‘beyond’ and creating worlds that are uniquely their own. It evokes a sense of wonder that is “something [astonishingly] and seemingly inexplicable” (*Wiktionary.org*, Retrieved June 21, 2009). Together we travel over the rainbow.



Figure 20. Toward new worlds yet undiscovered.

Somewhere over the rainbow. “Creative and imaginative thinking are associated with an ability to think freely and without the constraints of given theory about explanations for events, as well as the ability to construct ‘other worlds’. These strengths of thinking, often linked to children’s forms of life and capacity for play, are

enormously valuable” (Haynes, 2008, pp. 58-59). What worlds do my children choose to enter with and without me? What do these hold in store for them? Safety? The wonder of the unknown? An escape from the commonness of reality?

In Purpleland, everything is purple. You can eat purple grapes and “all the grape popsicles you want.” You can see purple statues and “purple, purple, everything purple” Getting out of Purpleland requires “a secret door like in Redland. Like last time, otherwise...The door hears you opening it, then it’ll lock it. If you just open it quietly, you can just come back in the door because you can just open the door and come back into school” (Samantha, March 26, 2009). Samantha’s Purpleland, Redland (March 24, 2009), Invisibleland, Colorfulland (February 26, 2009), Sillyland (March 3, 2009), and Learning World (March 19, 2009) are places for her to escape the ‘have to finish my school work’ world and go where “I make everything however I want” (February 26, 2009). What evokes emotion is not her written text or her illustration, but her colorful modes of engaging in playfulness with me. “A crazy rainbow is a...a crazy rainbow is just like a wacky ride like bumpy bumpy bump and it was fast. That’s what like ahhhhh....” (March 17, 2009). Her “laughter lifts the barrier and clears the path” for genuine reciprocity (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 135).

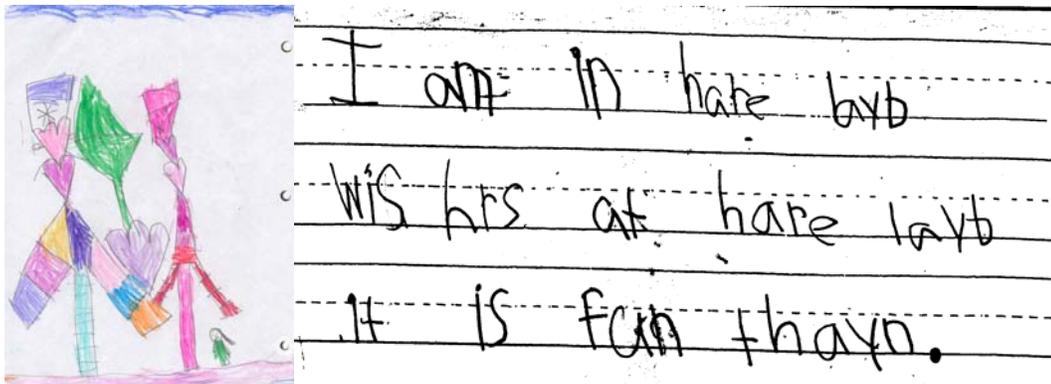


Figure 21. Becky’s hearts in Heartland (April 14, 2009).

The hearts in Heartland “came with me and they kissed me. And they played with me and they turned into something so they can make something cool so I can play on” (Becky, April 14, 2009). Becky’s places of wonder emerge from her reality. Becky, a ballerina, performs not only on stage but dances on paper. She twirls fairy plays with Samantha, has animals order pizza from her tent party, with the pizza man turning into a television, and sends herself to Hawaii to be taught how to hula dance and ride on humpback whales. Becky has a wealth of background knowledge that she incorporates into her stories. She’s “going to drive to Italy...take a boat through the water...[go] to an Italian school...with my friend Faith....to a pizza place...and get back in time for school” (May 19, 2009). She did live in Italy. She did go to an Italian school. She does have a friend named Faith. And she is always on time for school. The truths of her reality and her fantasy have intertwined in her dance on paper.

Cheeseworld emerges in September 2008 in Michael’s illustrated conversations. He explored what the place looked like, how the cheese originated, and what food tasted like in this new world. Five months later and one day after the parent information session, Cheeseworld reemerges in his stories. His mother, who browsed through his entries, commented to me that she was not happy with the attention he was giving to Shadow, Sonic, and other video game characters in his stories. She expressed concern to him about these entries and, as a result, the very next entry was about Cheeseworld. Sadly, this was the last entry about this imaginary world. Michael, like many of the boys in our class focused more on movie, television, and video game characters.

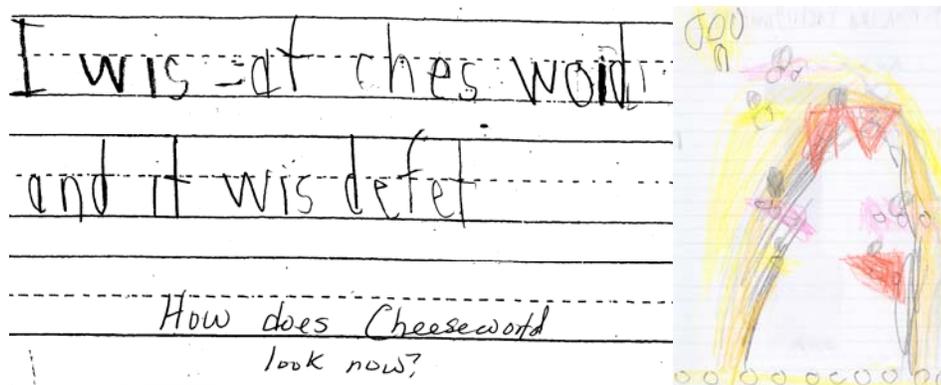


Figure 22. Cheesworld disappears (Michael, 2009).

It's not really real. "Perhaps more than any other medium, video games were singled out as the most important media connection to the Columbine killings" (Sternheimer, 2003, p. 109). This statement, this recollection of that horrific day I sat in front of the television mesmerized in astonishment—in wonder—about how this could happen at a school—challenges my ability to bracket my own prejudices from the stories that only my boys tell me about the characters in their video games. Their interpretations of the "spindashes", "destroying Eggman", and "hitting them with bombs" are far different than my own. I conjure up images of blood, death, and angry beings disconnected from reality. This type of play—this "very alluring...fantasy violence in video games ...[where] their play is mediated by the game, bounded by the logic of the game makers" (Sternheimer, 2003, p. 111) contradicts what I as an early childhood educator understand as play. The laughing voices...giggle, giggle, snicker, snicker...are silent. The pop, pop, bam, bam is heard. Where are the voices of innocent children imagining they are bunnies or robots? Why do I cringe when they tell me "When someone squish their heads, sometimes blood comes out"? But despite their insistence that "they are still friends," I wonder why they chose this scene from Wrestlemania to recall and not Spongebob skipping and singing joyfully

while jellyfish hunting. Sternheimer (2003) presents the debate over whether video games really do cause violence, citing studies in which “kids argue they know they are just playing games and that real violence is wrong” (p. 117). But my children are only five and six years old, not the “teens and young adults” studied. They are still working through the ability to discern fantasy from reality. What meaning do these young children make from the constant battle zones and action-packed good guy versus bad guy scenarios? Does it lie in the stories they currently tell in kindergarten?

Attempting to enter the *Sonic Unleashed* world one weekend, I placed myself and the controller in front of the television. I did not understand how this creature with spikes on his head was the focus of 29 of Evan’s journals. I listened to...no, heard...the introduction of how Sonic falls to Earth in search of something. Within 30 seconds, I was asking questions of my son who wanted to skip the intro and get to the game. Neither of us had ever experienced this game, and after I tried unsuccessfully at making Sonic run and jump, he took control of the device and began manipulating Sonic with ease. I was unable to immerse myself in this world to get “behind these prejudices...[and unable to peel] away the layers of misunderstanding until [I could arrive] at the living intuition which enlivens the text” (Moran, 2000, p. 274). And though I agree with Sternheimer (2003) that “We *should* ask questions about why violence pervades entertainment for both adults and children, ...we need to do so while looking at violence in its context, not just on the video screen” (p. 117). I, as a mother of a teenage son *and* a teacher of young children try to teach them to ‘use their words’ in times of conflict. As a researcher, I listen to the stories of young boys involved with Sonic and Mario video games, Wrestlemania, and superheroes, and

experience the very real and powerful tension of needing to bracket my personal views in order to better listen to their voices.

Reflection upon our engagement during illustrated conversations reveals that my boys embrace my voice of uncertainty, merge it with their own confidence, and express their understanding via comforting words of “it’s not real,” or “there’s no blood.” My questioning and my facial expressions voice my feelings about killing, hitting, and guns. Some acknowledge it and alter their story to accommodate my fears, while others continue on with their story.

There’s still more but it’s not about blood.

Teacher: Well, that’s good. Is it still about getting hurt?

Yes.

(Michael, February 12, 2009)

He wanted to wrestle. [Michael] said, No, no!

Teacher: Why doesn’t [Michael] want to wrestle?

Cause he doesn’t want to get hurt.

Teacher: That’s a good idea. That’s smart. But what does Shadow do?

(James, March 5, 2009)

Teacher: Eventually what happened?

They did never got him but then they killed him.

Teacher: They killed him?

Yeah.

Teacher: So the world was run by bad guys?

Yeah. Really bad guys.

Teacher: That’s not a very good thing.

Not a single person. Not a good single person.

Teacher: Not one of the bad guys even think about being good?

No.

Teacher: Are you sure? Do you think you could be all bad? Or do you think there is a part of you that is good all the time? Even bad guys.

You know. This is a joke. This is a joke. The bad guys just wanted to be a snowman and do nothing. They would just stand there and be frozen forever. That’s what they wanted to do.

(Peter, April 28, 2009)

You can't really see when you do it. But Jeff Hardy, he is the WWF champion. He didn't win any rumbles and stuff. He only won matches. Like there's this big pole. It's really big. Jeff Hardy climbed on top of it and then he jumped on two people and the ramp is really big and it didn't show when he hit the people. It didn't show when he hit the people cause blood pushed out. But wrestling is not really real.

Teacher: It's fake? They are all pretending? So there's no blood?
Nods no.

Teacher: That's a better thing. So why do they do it if it's not really real?

Cause they want to be strong.

Teacher: Well why do you have to do that to be strong?

I don't know why they wrestlers but the wrestlers...they're tall and there's this guy Batista. He fights good so they call him the Animal.

(Michael, April 16, 2009)

I specifically identify my boys since none of the girls wrote about violent acts using video game or television characters. Evan, in particular, wrote and rewrote adventures with Sonic for every entry except one. Like Michael, the entry following the parent information session focused on “[James] did the biggest fart. And he farted this much” (February 10, 2009). Interestingly, it was one of the shortest entries Evan had all year. What was meaningful to Evan was not valued by others, and as a result he was perhaps asked to deviate from Sonic in his journals. It lasted only one entry. By February 12, 2009, Sonic returned with Drago and Charzard eating William to death.

Evan, like James, Peter, and Michael, became my teachers during our illustrated conversations. Explanations of the minute details of what happens when you get hit by a bomb and turn invisible, or how to manipulate the buttons on the controller, or even how to do a “619” wrestling signature move reveal the truths of their artwork with detail. Did they continue to engage in these topics *because* they

knew I did not know? Did they want to be the teacher doing the telling and not always required to do the listening? Engagement in interpreting and expanding their explanations propels the conversation forward. For me, the extension of the conversation deepens the interaction. I begin to learn more about how they view the world.

For Brian, his desire to be connected to the other boys via the Sonic topic at school merged with the strong religious background and lack of Sonic he receives at home. “The God Sonic would say, ‘I will turn this turtle into a fast turtle. Go fast fast fast. Go all the way to space’” (Brian, March 23, 2009). For some children, like James, the lengthy stories created a space where someone was truly interested in what he had to share. It was he who in a hushed voice said in group, “I don’t really tell my mom stories” (Group Discussion, June 8, 2009). Illustrated conversations were for him a time “when the whole world hears me, everybody will know me” (James, June 4, 2009). James’ truth is that he is the middle child of five. The possibility of not being heard is very real for him sandwiched between a brother five years older than he, a sister three years older than he, and a set of twins two years younger. In class, he is not sandwiched. He has found a home here in class in which to make his voice heard.

Reflection upon the notion of superheros invading the space of young children’s imaginations as illustrated by Sternheimer (2003), Singer and Singer (2001), and Paley (1984), calls me to wonder whether we have looked deep enough into why young children, boys especially, focus their attention on video game and media characters. Looking to my children for clarity, I return to Evan’s stories of

Sonic versus Jenny, Peter's adventures with him and Indiana Jones, and Alex's stories of his father, himself, and Batman. The question was posed, "Did you see this on television or in a movie?" The answer was "No, I made it up." So, while I struggle with their unawareness of how violent their stories become when looking at a larger horizon than they can imagine, my thinking leads me back to early childhood theory. Child-centered curriculum calls for learning to be focused on the interests of the child. If I deem superheros not worthy of attention, am I being true to my children? What is called for is tactful teaching in which I cross boundaries sustaining "a certain kind of seeing, of listening, of responding to a particular child or children in this or that situation. Out of this basis of thoughtfulness, tact in our relationship with children may grow" (van Manen, 2002, p. 10).

Daddy's little princess. The fairy tale world of my girls presents itself in many ways, but most prominently through connections with princesses, castles, and rainbows. By virtue of their being called "Daddy's little princess," their voices reflect this self-fulfilling prophecy. What is it about being cared for by your dad? How do their stories reflect the relationship they have with their dad? What meaning is made when daddy comes to the rescue? There is a special feeling a little girl has about her daddy. I have it. My daughter has it. Perhaps the answer lies in 'daddy' instead of 'father.' The evolution of 'dada...daddy...dad...' from infancy to adulthood mirrors the deepening of the relation over time.



Figure 23. Becky watches a movie with her Dad (March 12, 2009).

There was this princess and a castle and she was tired of walking in to her store but then she got into her car and drove to the store and got Madagascar II and she was watching the part when the funny thing in the when the animals were in the airplane. She was laughing really hard.

Teacher: That was silly.

But my dad, on the weekends, my dad and me didn't finish the movie.

Teacher: No? Do you plan on finishing the movie?

No. We didn't finish the movie.

Teacher: Are you going to?

Yeah. But we are just...then we watched a different movie too. The Chihuahua movie.

Teacher: I haven't seen the Chihuahua movie.

But my dad fell asleep during the movie.

Teacher: He fell asleep?

I watched the whole movie. We were [inaudible] weren't at the movie theater when we were watching the movie. And then the princess was done with it, she wanted to watch another funny movie. And she bought another funny movie again and again when she was tired of walking.

Teacher: And what movie was that that she watched.

She watched Ariel and she thought it wasn't funny.

(Becky, March 12, 2009)

Becky imagines herself a princess while visiting her dad on weekends. Was she upset that they did not watch the whole movie or that on this special time she meets with him, he falls asleep? Was her unfulfilled desire to laugh with her dad

transferred to the movie instead of to her father? How will this princess confront her emotions?

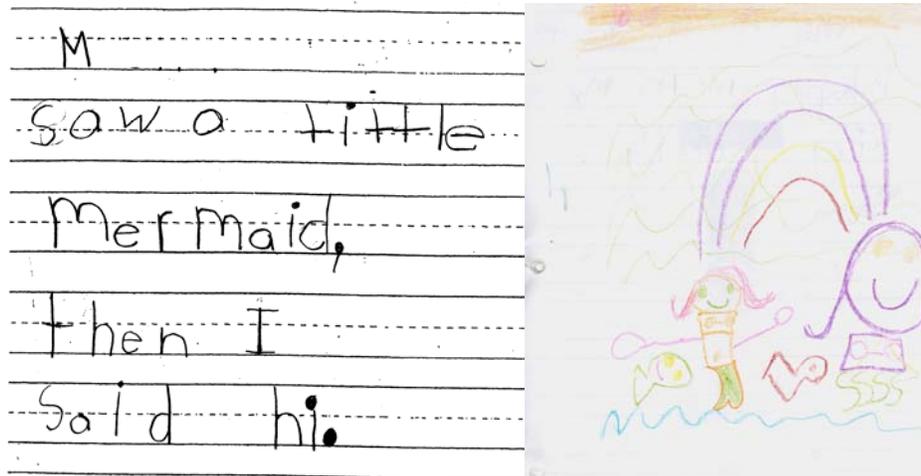


Figure 24. Dad rescues Ashley from Ursula (February 19, 2009).

Yeah. And then Ariel laughed and she said, "Why do we have a other problem?" Then she said...her daddy said that's not a other problem but that's okay we can go outside and buy some more food.

Teacher: That's a good solution.

Then Ariel said, "Thanks, Dad. I love to go eat some food."

Teacher: What's her favorite food?

Mine?

Teacher: No, Ariel's.

She likes Chinese.

Teacher: She likes Chinese food? Suppose it has fish in it, will she eat it?

Yeah. We eat fish too. And then Ursula went back to her house and then she changed back into a mean girl.

Teacher: Really?

Yeah cause in her house there's mean stuff and they are power to be mean and she changed back into a mean person and went back to night time, she was nice. When I went inside to her house, I asked her. Then Ariel turned into mean.

Teacher: Ariel turned mean?

Yeah. Then her Daddy came to rescue her she turned back both into a nice persons and that time she really got nice.

(Ashley, February 19, 2009)

King Triton is the heroic dad who saves his daughter from the mean Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*. Ashley's dad weaves his way through her playful words as King

Triton himself. Does Ariel like Chinese food, or does Ashley really want to spend time with her Dad getting “some more [Chinese] food?”

How do the relationships portrayed in fairy tales weave themselves into children’s imaginative stories? What meaning do children make when these relationships are not like those they see on screen? How do they develop their own identity as they merge the horizons between reality and fantasy? One interpretation may be to examine the role of female and male roles portrayed in the media. Is this identity as a female who needs someone to rescue her connected to their future as mothers who try to juggle work and home and find themselves unable to do it all? With females in more prominent societal roles, will children’s stories evolve with them reflecting more independent women? Glimpses of independence arose when Becky’s princess “was tired of walking in to her store but then she got into her car and drove to the store and got Madagascar II” by herself. Perhaps by mixing fantasy and reality at this young of an age, they are testing the waters of how to balance it all.

Princesses can come in all shapes and sizes. There’s the *Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980), Princess Cinderella, and there’s also Princess Supergirl. Katie’s abundant stories of Supergirl did not omit her from being a princess at least once. “There was a princess with a crown she loved it that was her favorite thing she really loved it so much and it gave her power to” (Katie, May 28, 2009). Supergirl’s crown, automatically categorizing her as a princess, gave her the power she needed to remain a superhero fighting crime while crossing into the princess world of dainty dresses and sparkling shoes. Like the superhero phenomenon, children entering imaginary worlds of interest to their identity are important to them. I need to acknowledge this

language and not steal it away. But perhaps, I need to help my young children merge the horizons of superheroes, princess castles, and reality.

Woven imaginations. Once upon a time...my mom went to the grocery store to get me a cake for my birthday but then a giant picked her up and took her to a boat and fell off into the water and I rescued her cause I turned into a mermaid and we swam back to shore with my dolphin friends and we lived happily ever after in a big castle and ate birthday cake for dinner. Hidden inside this story quilt are story pieces seamlessly woven together wrapping us up in fantasy, reality, and pleasure. They blend the sense of home with the fantasy of far away places in imaginative creations of truths revealing the separateness of both.



Figure 25. Patrick gets Spongebob from Oregon (William, April 21, 2009).

And there was a big street that Spongebob and Mr. Crabs wanted to walk down the street and see Patrick but he's not here. He's in Oregon.

Teacher: Patrick was in Oregon?

Yes.

Teacher: What was Patrick doing in Oregon?

Playing. He was in the water.

Teacher: Patrick was in Oregon and he lives in the water. So there is water in Oregon?

Yes. And Spongebob knew there was no water in Oregon so he came out and hold his breath for a long time and he come and get Patrick but he was already dead.

Teacher: They all dried up?

Yes. And then Spongebob picked him up and runned all the way to the Bikini Bottom and then he's alive.

Teacher: He got alive cause he got all wet again.

Yes. And then they came home and got some breakfast and came back and walked on the street again with Patrick.

(William, April 21, 2009)

William blends his mother's going to Oregon with his knowledge of Spongebob, Patrick, and Mr. Crabs to "express relationships among events and ideas" in his life (Shagoury, 2009, p. 11). The trip that William's mother took was real, but the impact of his mother's absence was felt deeper than he realizes. Several entries of his mother and Oregon arose in the same time frame. We talked about it at other times of our day and agreed that she would be back soon and that Dad was home if he needed someone. But he missed his mom dearly.

The mix of reality and fantasy weaves itself into many of Michael's stories as well. Michael has come to understand the difference between what really happens in life versus what happens on television and in video games, but he continues to explore the merging of these horizons in illustrated conversation. On another occasion Michael also stated that he didn't want to be a skateboarder because they get hurt. He understands the consequences of actions and makes choices based upon his interpretations of the situation. His voiced interest in wrestling matches is still strong knowing that "wrestling is not really real" (Michael, April 16, 2009).

And..but Jeff Hardy's kinda good cause he's the WWF Champion.

Teacher: Don't people get hurt in wrestling?

Yes.

Teacher: So they still do it even though they know they are gonna get hurt?

Yes.

Teacher: Now, let me ask you, in real life, would you wrestle?

No.

Teacher: Why not?

Cause I'm gonna get hurt.

Teacher: So why do you think John Hardy wrestles knowing he's going to get hurt?

Because sometimes there's partners with you.

Teacher: Oh, so sometimes there's a partner in the ring with you so you don't get **as** hurt?

Yes. Because Jeff Hardy and Matt Hardy are brothers.

(Michael, February 12, 2009)

And then....and then....and then....Peter captivates us with his action packed stories. He jumps out of his seat, eyes wide, serious intonation, and arms moving. The class stops with wonderment to listen to Peter tell his stories. We join in laughter. Peter's gift of storytelling is contagious. His mixture of Indiana Jones' daring moves, Star Wars villains, real life events, and silly jokes draws us into the conversation. We wait with anticipation. What will happen next? Who will giggle? Who will squeal out "Ew!?" What is it about Peter's telling that invites us into his world? Is it the pauses in his story as he looks at his peers waiting for an eyebrow to lift, or a giggle to squeak out. And then he begins again. Fast paced...animated...engaged with whomever's curiosity he can capture. What meaning do our responses have for him? Where did this reciprocal interaction begin? Did we build it because of our continual dwelling within illustrated conversations?

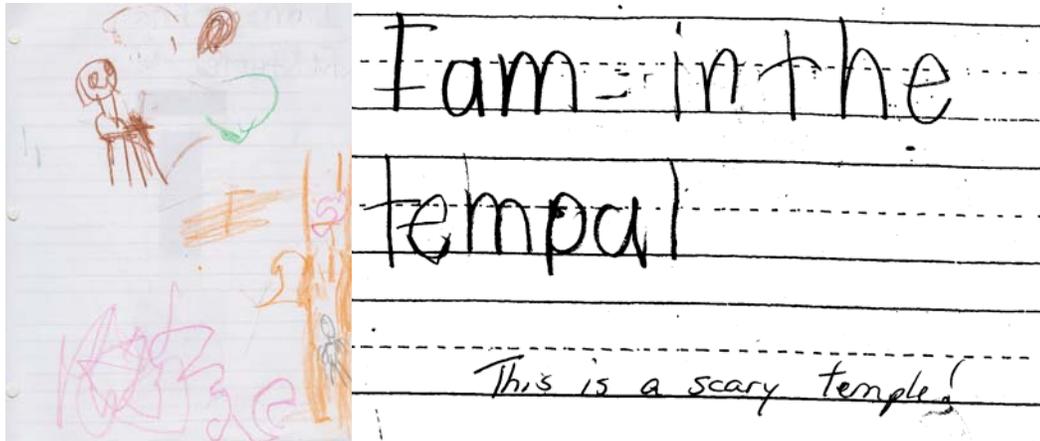


Figure 26. Peter goes to the mystery temple.

Becky mixes reality with fantasy when she is a dolphin, a princess who owns a castle, the owner of a monkey in the jungle, and climber of a beanstalk to a castle in the sky. Becky balances the back and forth between parents in her reality by having them in the story simultaneously. She is able to ‘fix’ her world to what she wants through her illustrated conversations. When Becky is a dolphin on April 28, 2009, her lengthy story evolves from being a dolphin, to dad’s eyeballs falling out, to mom breaking her arm and going in a wheelchair, to her birthday party, but with a bear wearing a witch hat and a necklace. Sporadic and jumpy...reflections of her immediate family life. She identifies with this inconsistency and thus has created a narrative life that mirrors the one she dwells in.

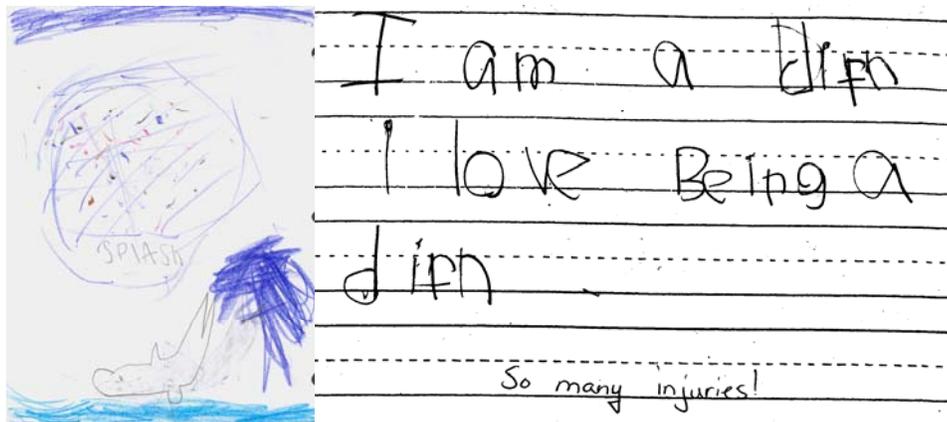


Figure 27. Becky loves being a dolphin (April 28, 2009).

I am a dolphin. I love being a dolphin.

Teacher: Why do you love being a dolphin?

Because...

Teacher: When did you turn into a dolphin by the way?

Because last time when I was a grownup, dad he was the tail of me and my mom was the middle part of me and I was the front part.

And my dad's and my mom hurt herself again. And my dad said, "Oh, my foot" Because the tail he couldn't reach and he broke my tail.

Teacher: Your dad broke your tail?

And he was fine and he pretended he was Superman. And then he went after...and then he did funny stuff. And then he juggled and tried to find me. And he said, "I'm sixteen" and then he tried to pull up and then he broke his head.

Teacher: Your dad broke his head?

Yeah. Then he went to the hospital and they cut his head open.

Teacher: Wasn't it already open if he broke his head?

No.

Teacher: No?

He broke his eyeball and his eyeball fell out. And he..and then his eyeball fell in the toilet. And

Teacher: The toilet.

And they put another eyeball in his eye and they makes.. and he got a cast on his eyeball.

Teacher: Now how can he have a cast on his eyeball?

You put it through your eye. And he putted a cast on his head. Laughs.

Teacher: I wouldn't want to be your dad. I wouldn't be able to move. And he was all better and he putted his ??? on his foot. And he took a shower. And he putted soap on his head. And he ate the soap.

Teacher: Okay.

And my mom she broke her arm again and her nose. And she went to the hospital and she sitted in a wheelchair. And then she quitted being inside and then me I broked my foot and then I went to the hospital and sat in a boat.

Teacher: So many injuries. Are you all going to get better eventually?

Yeah. But we stayed in the hospital. And then we were out and then I played with a Barbie. On my birthday I hurt my head. And then my head was bleeding. Laughs. And then my dad broke his foot on my birthday.

Teacher: After he broke his head?

And my mom said it was birthday time and I danced on my head.

Teacher: I thought you broke your head. How can you dance on your head if you broke your head?

Umm...cause you put ears on your head and you can go upside down and then I was dancing on my feet and then I danced on my arms. Then I hurt my head again and then my tooth fell out.

And the tooth fairy came. I saw the tooth fairy what she looked like. She looked like a bear.

Teacher: A bear.

Yeah. And she said, “Argh!” And then she didn’t move. Her claws she hurt my head cause she scratched it a lot. And she was wearing a witch hat and she was wearing a necklace.

(Becky, April 28, 2009)

Working through events in their life via imaginative role playing, they merge the truths of their stories. Because of this, they are able to form and redefine their identity which “is not a static unit, but is something dynamic, multi-faceted and active. It is never completed and is a personal mixture of past and future, of fact and fiction, creatively rewritten into an (ever-changing) story” (Vandenbroeck, 2000, pp. 4-5). Their stories are who they are. Their voices prevail.

Who Am I?

Everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others (my mother, and so forth), with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality. I realize myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms, and tonalities for the formation of my initial idea of myself. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 138)

Who am I? How do I construct this definition in relation to my children, and in what contexts do I define and redefine myself? Which voices prevail as I redefine myself? Through conversation and interaction, “the dialogic nature of language helps us to continually reconstruct ourselves” (Cappello, 2006, p. 483). How do my children redefine themselves during illustrated conversations? What is brought out in their stories that gives them the freedom to creatively rewrite their own narrative?

The imaginative stories of home, friends, Sonic adventures, castles, and aliens, open windows to interaction. In our reciprocal exchange, we listen and respond to one another’s interests. We are able to show ourselves mutually because of

the relationship we have developed. In September, the stories told are short and concise. Laughter and giggles are omitted, not because they can't laugh but because they do not know what my reaction will bear. My boys quickly make meaning of the "What is that?" and "You're joking, right?" questions and exclamations are interpreted by them as, "She doesn't have any idea what goes on in my video game." They interpret my response and throw the ball back to me with more information knowing I will catch it. They beg the questions further. They want to teach me how "Shadow went from regular Shadow to Supershadow, [and] Supersonic to Darksonic to Weresonic" (Evan, April 23, 2009). The game of Yu-Gi-Oh is a focus of a lesson from Peter.

You have to have that alien person and then you put down a Yu-gi-oh card and then you put the alien person on and then another Yu-gi-oh card on. Someone puts another Yu-gi-oh card on your card. And then there's a battle. It's a different kind of alien toy. Then you have to battle and whoever has more..whoever can raise it to more lives, they win. Whoever has more, more, more lives. And then they have a little fight. Both of the cards. And then who wins the card, fights. They get 300 'g' s. 300 g's usually that's like second, ten, twenty. (April 23, 2009)

The girls take a different path to understanding how I might respond to their entries. Perhaps by the mere fact that I share gender with them, they engage in dialogue about rainbows and princesses. What is this connection toward which same genders gravitate? Is it the fear of being ostracized by their own gender if they play with topics not in line with their own? Why don't any girls talk about Sonic? Why don't any boys become a prince? Even in an open discussion, these boundaries are not crossed.

In dialogue, my children and I “experience messages from others and through their own perceptions...[constructing] an understanding of race, ethnicity, gender, and ability...[shaping our] self-image and, by extension, [our] relationships to others” (Gordon & Browne, 2004, p. 526). During illustrated conversations, we can ‘be’ whoever we want; go wherever we want, and say whatever we want. We practice writing ourselves into being. And yet, it seems, there are still boundaries we dwell within—borders not crossed—topics not discussed. Our being is written within the dwelling place of these boundaries.

I am me. Each of the sixteen participants use ‘I’ in their entries regularly. In using ‘I’, they begin to uncover themselves, their talents, and their desires without interference or influence from an adult guiding their entry. “This is **your** story, not mine” would often be my response if they asked me how to write something. Purposely not scheduling adult assistance during this time, I want the children to understand that it is truly **their** work, left to their own imaginations. My children’s voices identify their feelings of pleasure, disappointment, heroism. “I like pink” (Kim, April 23, 2009). “I like to play NBA” (Nicholas, May 21, 2009). Their voices identify themselves in the past and the future, “This is me and I was driving the roller coaster” (Jorge, April 3, 2009). “I was Superman” (Brian, April 14, 2009). “I want to be a soccer player” (Michael, February 19, 2009). Mostly, they identify themselves as objects or beings other than themselves.

Looking deeply into these conversations, I question my interpretation and meaning of why they try to be something other than themselves. Perhaps, they seek to uncover the meaning of what it is like “on the other side of the fence”? Why would a

child want to be Sonic, the hedgehog? Are they trying to find balance between what others and they have defined as their ability, and what is possible? This notion of possibility...why do we seek to know what we don't? What drives us? What drives children to want to live in castles and drive fast race cars? Because someone has said they can't? In essence, they toss the ball back saying "Yes, I can. Yes, it is one of my hundred, hundred, hundred languages and yes, I will keep it close to my heart in my own imaginative world of creativity and no, you won't steal it away."

Morphing oneself into something else was not as common as I had predicted it would be. While many children go to different worlds and engage in adventures with other characters, their identity as a child remains intact. Only a few transform into another object or person.

After the birth of her baby brother, Margery turns into a tree, and on two separate occasions, a flower and a cat. Her reasoning for being a tree is logical—in fact—if I could turn into a tree, I would do so for the same reasons. It *would* tickle when woodpeckers peck on you and you could grow tall so you *could* see everything. So while she may want to be something else to escape her "baby brother crying" (Margery, May 5, 2009), she is rationalizing the whys of her dreams. As a cat, she is able to "sneak out" (May 21, 2009), and as a flower, she stands all by herself under the night sky. Again, indications that, perhaps, Margery is not receiving the only-child attention she once was but searches for it as something other than herself.

I love the tree.



Figure 28. Margery turns into a tree for safety (April 23, 2009).

I turn into a tree.

Teacher: You turned into a tree? How do you turn into a tree? I love your eyelashes on your tree! How does it feel to be a tree?

It feels funny.

Teacher: Really?

Uh-huh.

Teacher: What do you do as a tree?

Well, a lot of animals live in me.

Teacher: Really?

And some of them put holes on me and it tickles.

Teacher: I would think that would tickle. A little woodpecker going peck peck peck on you!

Uh-huh. And I love the leaves in my branches.

Teacher: That would be cool. It would give you shade. It's like a hat.

Uh-huh. And I don't get wet.

Teacher: That's right. You wouldn't get wet with all those leaves.

And I like it cause I am very tall.

Teacher: You would grow very tall so you could see everything.

Keep reaching for the sky.

And I just like every cloud just like my branches.

(Margery, April 23, 2009)

William is a young boy who did quite a bit of “turning into” things. He became a fish, a lion, a flower, and aliens with special lungs. On February 10, 2009, William became a dirtbike and then a sled. His ‘need for speed’ is captured in many of his entries about dirt bikes, racing, and rocket ships. On this particular day,

William was the medium, the dirt bike, which would take his brother for rides if it weren't for his slipping on the "magic dust." This magic dust could be mud or dry dirt which causes a motorcycle to slip out from under the rider on sharp turns. Morphing into a sled either takes away the problem of his brother falling off a medium dirtbike while still feeling the adrenalin rush of speed or, depending upon the weather at the time, it is the most recent vehicle he used in the snow that winter. William is comfortable riding his dirtbike on the weekends and is familiar with 'throttle' and 'racing' in the motocross arena as acknowledged by previous conversations with William and his father. Further discussion in this story and on other occasions about my own son's dirtbike riding, acknowledges his interest and my acceptance of dirtbike riding. Writing about his passion in his journals in February replaces the real thing until the weather is perhaps more conducive to outdoor riding.

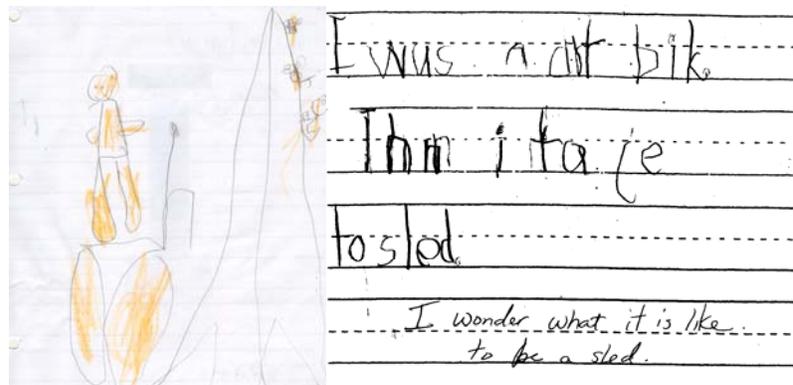


Figure 29. William changes into a dirtbike and a sled (February 10, 2009).

Then I started...I was a dirtbike first and then I turned into a sled.

Teacher: You were a dirtbike and then you turned into a sled?

Yes.

Teacher: You were the actual bike?

Yes.

Teacher: You went RmmRmm? And somebody rode on your back?

Yes. And it was my little brother Chandler and he made me get little because he had magic dust with him and I didn't know that he had magic dust so it was up here and he put the magic dust over here. But he was just up here and I couldn't see him and

then I slipped on the magic dust and then I turned tiny like a dirtbike medium like a dirtbike but the middle part the wheels are turning to a sled and then it's sticking and then it's coming all the way up and down the jump and then it's going to slide down the snow and it'll break the ice.

Teacher: How does it feel being a sled?

Pause. When you just use your imagination.

Teacher: So it's cool being a sled? What would you do if there was no snow?

We still can go down.

Teacher: You can still go down?

Yes. It's the same thing because the period went into the dirtbike shop to get a new dirtbike. And he's gonna come right here. This is the period.

Teacher: That's the period?

My throttles.

Teacher: Your throttle is the period?

Yes.

(William, February 10, 2009)

Both Margery and William pretend to be something other than them “providing the opportunity to escape the limitations of established rituals” (Paley, 2004, p. 92). They were able to enter a world of the “What if?” “I am a dirtbike” and “I am a cat” transports them from school to play, from reality to fantasy, or from an assignment to an engagement. Pretending on paper gives them the freedom to examine more closely their anxieties and feelings. As Margery and William enter new worlds their “varied and elaborate scenes...[allow them] to gain more sophisticated communication skills” (Klein et al., 2003, pp. 43-44). Our conversations are the springboard for Margery and William to bounce into these fantasy worlds through which their inner speech emerges. Background knowledge and personal interests keep them in midair as they look down upon their reality from a fantastic perspective. These fantasy worlds are “the glue that binds together all other pursuits, including the early teaching of reading and writing skills” (Paley, 2004, p. 8). Sticking the landing

as we complete our conversation, they re-enter illustrated conversation with a new, broader perspective of who they are.

“What will you be when you grow up?” is a common question asked of young children. Firefighter, teacher, astronaut, and police officer are typical responses that point them toward a desired life’s path. This future identity-defining is determined by the child based upon the experiences they have had early in life. Different than William and Margery in which they “turn into” something, Samantha “is” the other. But what is it like for the child to become the future today?

Through our dialogue Samantha brings herself closer to what it is really like being someone other than kindergartner Samantha. She identifies herself as a “fairy with curly hair,” the ruler Samantha of Samanthaland where “it’s very cold because the wind is blowing a lot,” and a piece of gum “that was swallowed by a dog.” By placing herself in the world of another, Samantha is able to work out some of the anxiety about the stresses of kindergarten. Her fears of not finishing her work, going to first grade without Mrs. Dean, taking tests, and not knowing what is coming next are some of her most frequent topics of conversation. Samantha takes herself out of these situations and places herself in a world where she is a “clown forever....and do tricks like PPSPPSSSTTTTT!!!!...and eat clown food” like cotton candy. Her descriptions, enthusiasm, and laughter place you at the circus with her at that very moment. You can hear the ringmaster calling out the elephant names, you gasp at the death-defying acts of the acrobats, and you can smell the roasting of peanuts and the sugar of the cotton candy. “Getcha popcorn! Getcha peanuts!” A circus is a place

where smiles and laughter abound—especially when you get to create your life as the circus!

I am a clown
for ever.



Figure 30. Samantha is forever a clown (February 12, 2009).

I am a clown forever.

Teacher: You are a clown forever? So you are going to grow up to be a clown?

Yes.

Teacher: Are you going to make money being a clown?

Uh-huh.

Teacher: How?

I'm just going to take the money and pay for the money.

Teacher: What?

No I take all the money and snatch all the money.

Teacher: From where?

From everywhere.

Teacher: So there is money floating around the world and you are just going to snatch it up?

Yeah.

Teacher: Is that how clowns really get money? If your job was to be a clown, what would you have to do?

No. I would have to do tricks like PPPPTTTT!

Teacher: So people will pay you to be funny?

Uh-huh. And then people will say, "[inaudible]"

Teacher: Are you sure that is what you want to be forever and ever and ever?

Nods.

Teacher: Is that it?

No. I'm gonna have to eat clown food.

Teacher: What is clown food? Cotton candy?
Yeah.
(Samanatha, February 12, 2009)

By expressing their hidden emotions through the stories they tell, children are beginning to acknowledge their feelings, but they are not yet able to label them as jealousy, anger, confusion, or anxiety. It is easier for them to “express emotions indirectly...than it is to state their feelings directly” (Epstein, 2009, p. 60). They “send and receive emotional messages, use emotional knowledge and self-regulation to negotiate exchanges and form relationships...that make them open to learning about their world” (Epstein, 2009, p. 57). These exchanges do not occur solely with me during illustrated conversations; in fact, many children dialogue with peers to express their emotions.

I belong. Becoming an official member of a kindergarten class is simply a matter of having your name placed on a roster. Regardless of our abilities, our cultural heritage, our religious beliefs, our physical appearances, we have come together to learn. A list of names determines the group membership, but what characterizes the group? How do they come to belong to this group? Smiles and warm embraces at 8:50 am on the first day of school begin the journey of creating a classroom identity. The first week is spent sharing stories of birthdays, family activities, and favorite things revealing the outer layer of who we are. It takes many more conversations to create a caring relationship that opens up their innermost feelings and emotions. More quickly than the adult-child relationship forms, a bond among the children emerges. On that first day, children gravitate toward one another developing friendships and connections that deepen for ten months. If I ask, “Who is

absent today?” someone realizes that their friend isn’t there and answers me instantaneously.

Friendships are support systems. The children sit with one another in circle, collaborate on projects, and ‘butt’ each other in line just to be in close proximity. Security and a sense of commonality bond friends together. The similarities in stories and pictures indicate that they share ideas with friends. They dialogue, laugh, and share pieces of themselves with one another during our writing. As Becky explains, she is “happy” when she can “copy off of your friends and you get to write whatever you want” (June 8, 2009).

Teacher: Yeah? What does that feel like...happy?

It feels like good to write whatever you want cause when you do it you can write rainbows.

Teacher: Things you like?

Yeah. And you get to talk to your friends at your table.

These “encounters with the arts and activities in the domains of art can nurture the growth of persons who will reach out to one another as they seek clearings in their experience and try to be more ardently in the world” (Greene, 1995, p. 132). Becky and her friends share an idea which “is, in short, art and a work of art. As a work of art, it directly liberates subsequent action and makes it more fruitful in a creation of more meanings and more perceptions” (Dewey, 1929, p. 371). Their “art is knowledge and experiencing an artwork means sharing in that knowledge” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 84). Together they come to my table having magically finished at exactly the same time. Katie and Ashley and James and Evan included one another in their entries, revealing voices of mutual reciprocity.

While Katie and Ashley frequently would have conflicts, indicating that they aren't friends anymore, do they reveal here in these stories the hidden truths that Ashley and she are friends, having fun behind the rainbow and making pictures together? On April 14, 2009, both of their entries reflected a friendship.

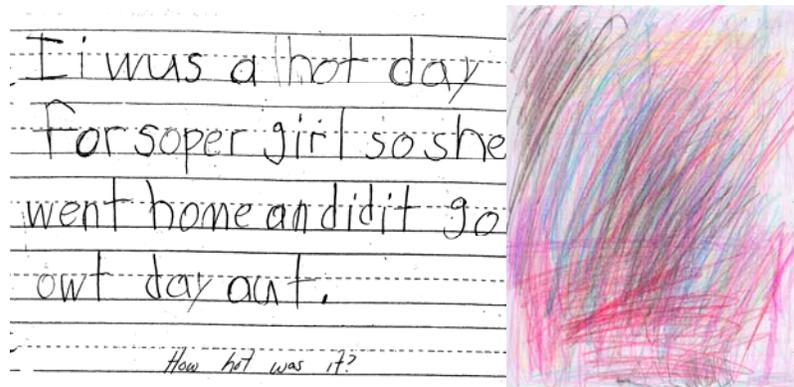


Figure 31. Supergirl's adventures in the heat (April 14, 2009).

And there was a rainbow and me and [Ashley] were behind here.

Teacher: Behind the rainbow.

Yes. And you couldn't see us. [Ashley's] right here. I'm right here.

But it covered us.

Teacher: So she couldn't see you.

And then the hot monster came so Supergirl saved the town.

(Katie, April 14, 2009)

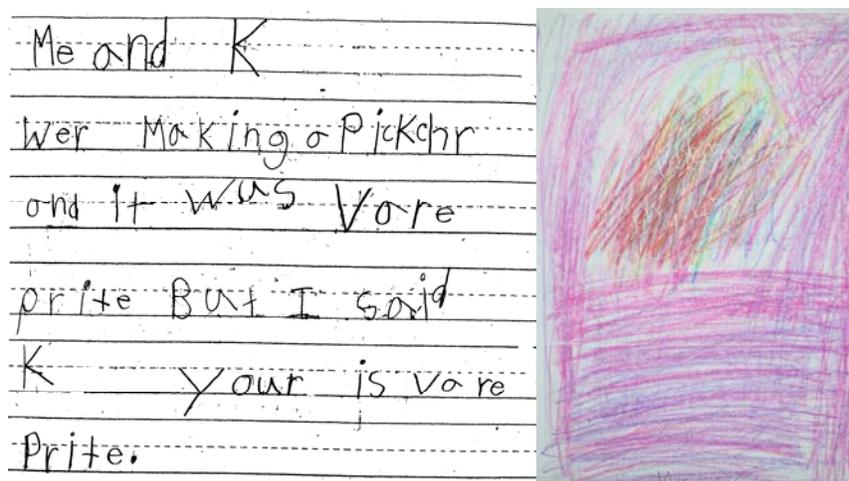


Figure 32. Ashley draws with Katie (April 14, 2009).

Me and [Katie] were making a picture. Very pretty but I said [Katie] yours is very pretty. Me and [Katie] made a picture. Then

[Katie] gave me a pretty color. It was pink. And it was dark pink. And it was very pretty. She did it so pretty.

Teacher: It is a pretty color.

Yeah. And then [Katie] giving me some colors.

Teacher: That's a very nice friend.

Yeah. And then [Tanya] came and she said, "Can I play with you?" And she said, then [Katie] said, "Yeah, sure." Then we were playing all day color and yesterday we made a castle.

(Ashley, April 14, 2009)

So, too, boys experience this sharing knowledge with friends by including each other in their drawings and text. In these adventures, James and Evan, close friends, create stories about one another while adding humor to our engagement. The topic of flatulence sailed "in and out of weeks and almost over a year" among both the boys and girls even with open conversation (Sendak, 1963, p. 15). They are five and six-year-olds experiencing the natural, but approaching it as children (and sometimes adults) do.

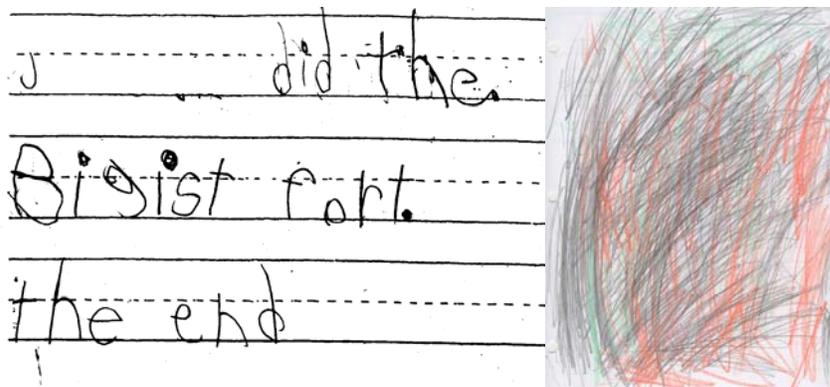


Figure 33. Flatulation all around (Evan, February 10, 2009).

[James] did the biggest fart. And he farted this much.

Teacher: You know, I have to tell you. It's kind of gross but this morning I was sitting there making my children's lunch. And do you know my daughter did? I heard this PPPPPFFFFTTTTTT. I said, "Sal, what was that?" And she said, "I had some gas!" She rocked the whole kitchen. It sort of looked like that!

Like this!

Teacher: How come you didn't fart?

Because [James] ate two buildings.

Teacher: Did he fart them out?

Yes.

Teacher: Wow! Any more to this interesting story?

Yes. I mean No. The end.

(Evan, February 10, 2009)

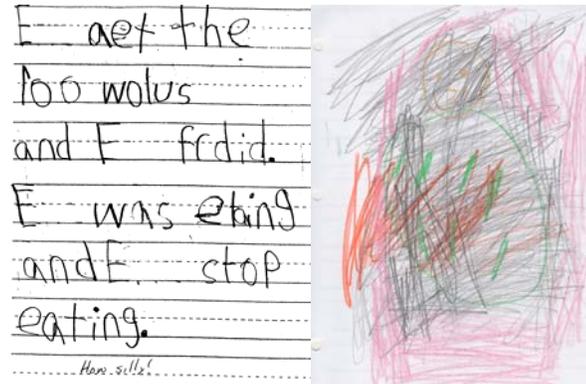


Figure 34. Evan eats 100 words (James, February 10, 2009).

[Evan] ate the 100 words and [Evan] farted. [Evan] was eating and [Evan] stopped eating.

Teacher: Why did he stop eating?

Because he was too fat. He doesn't want to get anymore fat.

Teacher: He doesn't want to get any fatter?

Yes.

Teacher: Well when he farted did that release some of his gas?

Yeah.

Teacher: Did it make him thinner?

Yeah.

Teacher: What are you and Eric doing writing about farts?

I don't know.

(James, February 10, 2009)

The art of our conversation uncovers their thoughts during our illustrated 'show and tell' time. Together we stand in the clearing and "we believe we are at home in the immediate circle of beings" even though this "clearing is pervaded by a constant concealment" (Heidegger, 1956/1993, p. 179). As young children, how does truth show itself in the themes of their stories? What other deeper truths are hidden in the imaginative, pretend fantasy worlds they take me to that I have not uncovered?

What meaning is made when the truth remains hidden in their retellings of real lifeworld events and activities?

I can do anything. Grandiosity from the French root *grandiose* meaning “impressive” and from the Latin derivation, “big” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved June 24, 2009), characterizes many of the journal entries with ‘I can’ or just plain ‘I’. What is it about being a dragon and flying and then getting “blowed up,” but then turning back to oneself and playing with Jorge and going to Target cause “then we buyed more toys. Then we went home with them. And then we opened our toys and played. And that’s it” (Alex, May 5, 2009)? What meaning will Jorge make when he rereads his story in years to come of his own drowning, “then I just get up. Then the water was in my stomach. Then somebody got it out. Then I went home” (April 16, 2009)?

Katie was Supergirl all year. Each entry was a different adventure, sometimes fighting a hippo (March 10, 2009), or taking a bite of a magic ball that would make her sleep forever (February 19, 2009), or even saving the whole city from the hot lava “with her water power” (April 28, 2009). What meaning does it have for Katie to save the world using her powerful hair, water power, arm power, and fireball power? Katie is an only child who travels between her mother’s home and her father’s home; but she primarily resides with her mother, her grandmother, and her great grandmother. Yes, four generations in one household! Katie is also a young girl who has been struggling with cooperative play this year. Although she reads and completes higher order math problems well above grade level, Katie is not viewed as one who can reciprocate and play with others equally. She is a strong leader who, in the words of

some of her girlfriends, “is bossy.” This need to control the situation in social engagements at school and in her Supergirl adventures could very well be her escape from the lack of control she has over her family situation. She can and does do grandiose acts of heroism in her quest to save the town from evil. Supergirl has sisters and friends who help her fight the monsters. She “bangs her beads into the tent so it can break down and save all the people” (March 19, 2009), carries missiles “to space so they can put it on a planet and then the missiles will blow up and make the planet blow up” (February 6, 2008), and can “glue the sky back together with her super fast speed” (May 19, 2009). Her methods of saving the town were impressively grandiose. She identifies and finds strength in Supergirl. What meaning is made as she becomes this heroine? Perhaps it is when “Supergirl tried to save the world again. So she did again. And her mom was proud at me. She was happy again” (May 19, 2009). She seeks happiness for and the attention of her mom. How wise Katie is in her youth.

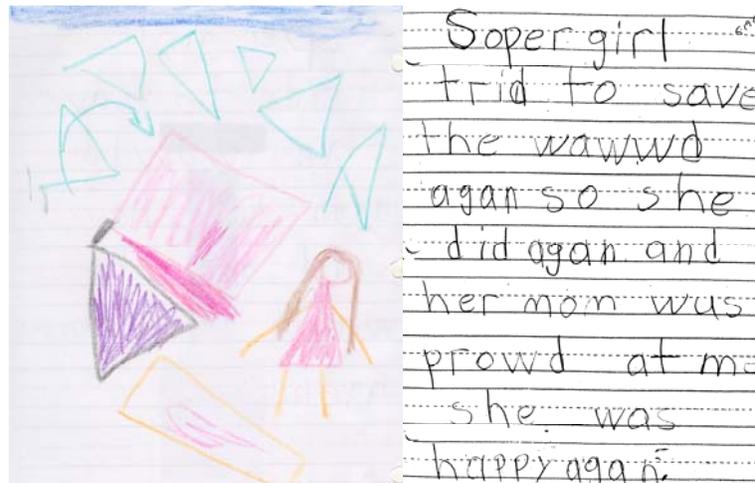


Figure 35. Supergirl saves the world again (Katie, May 19, 2009).

Identity formation for young children is an ever-changing dynamic. As these stories illustrate, my children seek to learn more about themselves by becoming someone else, expressing their likes and dislikes, transforming into other things, and

engaging in cooperative relations with others. Do they possess the ability to venture into the unknown *without* others' paths nearby for comfort and safety? How will they acknowledge this safety net and use it *to* venture out?

Relationships with Others

“It takes a village to raise a child” (Old African proverb). My classroom is a part of this village—this “network of values and relationships...[which requires] the presence of caring adults who are dedicated to children’s growth, nurturing, and well-being” (Clinton, 1996, pp. 13-15). All twenty-one of my children need my caring, nurturing attention whether it is a smile, a hug, or a few extra minutes spent with just them as recognition of their being a part of our small classroom community. Peer relationships develop as they share ideas, help draw a character or object, spell a word for another, or find a specific color crayon they need. Their relationship occurs in the moment. As a teacher, I not only attend to momentary needs but in listening to their conversations, reading their emotions, and observing their actions, I continue to ask myself how to help the child for tomorrow. In doing so, am I not identifying their identity and influencing who they are to become? Therein lies a tension between being with them in the present and fulfilling my role as teacher to guide them into tomorrow. How do I guide them without imposing my identity onto them in such a manner that they do not listen to their own voices but instead take on mine? I often catch myself at assemblies looking at a former student on stage wondering how our time together influenced who they are today. Do they feel confident on stage because we opened that door in kindergarten? Did they receive the writing award because of our illustrated conversations and other writing engagements? These questions will

forever remain unanswered. I would like to believe that they have in some small way become who they are because of the interactions we shared. How much is the true question.

How can I help? When children ask me for help writing a word or tying a shoe, Lev Vygotsky's philosophy of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) immediately rings in my mind, and I ask the child to try first and then if they still need assistance I will guide them toward the task at hand. As a teacher of young children for more than twenty years, I have come to understand what requires immediate assistance and what concerns will evolve and resolve over time. I must first learn who my children are—superficially at first and then deeper as the year progresses. I move them along the learning continuum, providing less and less assistance encouraging independence.

Emotional concerns are far more difficult in employing the ZPD. It is not simply a matter of learning to spell one's name which most do independently by the end of kindergarten. It is deeper than that. It is more complex. I must look long term. What does this mean to the child's future if it is not addressed tactfully now? How do I provide the care necessary for the child to acknowledge their fears without becoming their 'parent'? How do I exist *in loco parentis* from Latin meaning "in place of the parent" (*Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org>, Retrieved June 26, 2009) without taking the place of the parent yet still wanting to assist the child? How do I approach these concerns? Legally, sometimes. In all cases, it requires a tactful engagement with the child freeing the child to express him or herself simply by lending an ear or a hug. What meaning do the children make when I dialogue with

them about issues they would like to discuss with their parents but don't? Perhaps it is just like those moments that I, a grown adult, call my mom for the gentle way she listens without judgment or knowing that even if I don't ask, she'll give me a hug and tell me she loves me. Her love is always there. For my children, perhaps just always being there is enough. Perhaps that is why I don't get substitutes unless it is absolutely necessary. Even on the day my father died, I felt drawn to be with them, knowing that I needed them as much as they needed me that day. My father would have thought the same if he were in my position, too. Thankfully, I stayed with my family but the thoughts *were* there. My presence means as much to me as it does to my children.

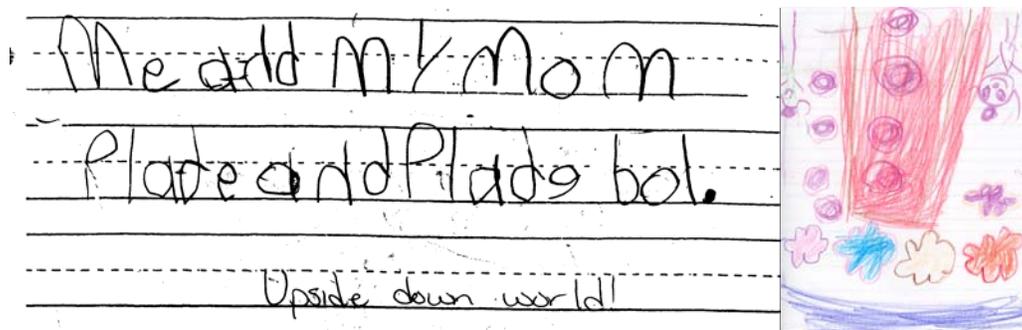


Figure 36. Jennifer's mom gets hurt again (April 28, 2009).

Me and my mom played and played ball.

Teacher: What did you play?

We played ball and the ball flew in the volcano and then it turned into upside world.

Teacher: Now what is upside world? I've never heard of upside world.

And then the volcano was lower a little bit higher. And then the clouds came out and then...

Teacher: So you're upside down?

Yes.

Later in the story..

And then my mommy felled into the volcano.

Teacher: Is she still okay?

Yes.

Teacher: How can you fall into a volcano that is still upside down?

I don't know.

Teacher: Well, I don't know either.

She went in the bottom of the volcano.

Teacher: She went into the bottom?

Yes. It had a elevator in the volcano and then it started to rain clouds and then the gumballs fell on people's head. And then the sky turned purple.

Teacher: Hm...

That's it.

(Jennifer, April 28, 2009)

Does Jennifer need help sorting out how her family structure is different than Ashley's or Peter's? For many of Jennifer's entries, her mom and dad are separated. She refers to "her mom's house" and "her dad's house" often in classroom conversations but has never said that they don't live together. I don't know the reality of this situation. I can only try to understand how her volcano in an upside down world may be analogous to how she feels when she goes from one house to another. As her friend, I give her the space to talk out her emotions in a neutral zone. Looking beyond the immediate with her upside down volcano fresh in my mind, I observe Jennifer in free choice and during snack. Does she approach situations with peers in an upside down manner? What can I do to help turn the world right side up?

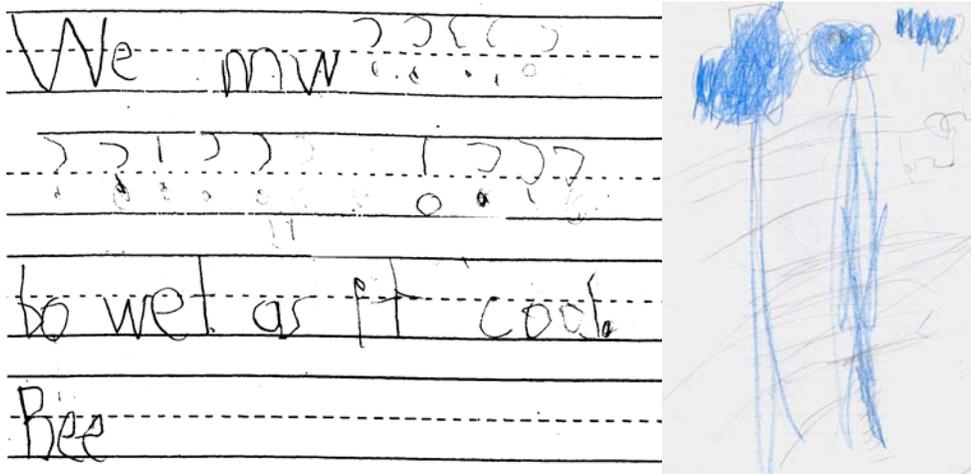


Figure 37. Upside down worlds (William, February 22, 2009).

... and this was my little brother named [Mark] and [Mark] fell down but.. **Teacher:** Who's [Mark]?

My little brother. And [Mark] fell down and he fell down and he was crying and I just helped him up and my family was laughing so loud but everybody started laughing and I just picked him up and I just stared at him and then I just take him to the doctor and he was in there 1 second and then I get him back and he was okay.

Teacher: [Mark] is okay. How did he fall in the first place?

Cause he tripped over a rock and then his face was jammed up like a bloody face and I just put all over bandaids.

Teacher: How old is [Mark]?

One. For real. He's a tot now.

Teacher: Do you take good care of [Mark]?

Yes. My mom said I can pick him up a little bit or touch him.

(William, February 22, 2009)

For William, his call to me for recognition of his actions perhaps gave him the encouragement he needed to know that despite everyone's laughing at his brother; he did the right thing by taking care of him when he fell. I acknowledged him on that day as a good big brother. What meaning did he make of my approval? Perhaps my answer lies in his answer to my question "What did you enjoy about journals?"—"I like it when I tell you journals because I am your friend" (June 8, 2009).

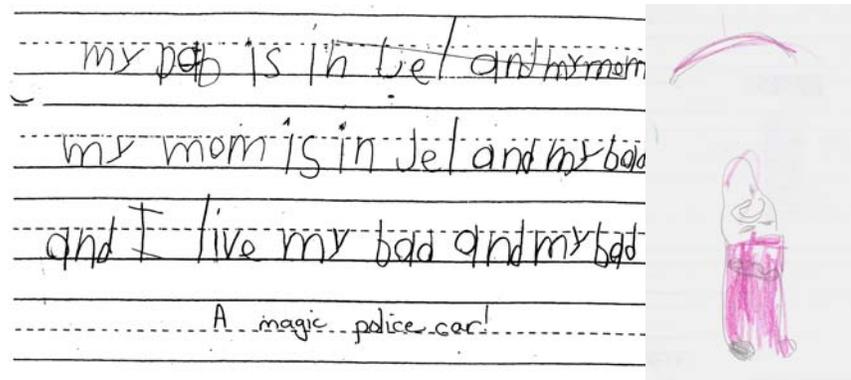


Figure 38. Life is not so easy in jail (Nicholas, April 14, 2009).

This is when my dad is in jail and my mom...my dad is in jail and my mom is in jail and my dad and I love my dad and my dad. Then this imagination person, when the other police person was sleep, they snuck out and then the magical thing, a magical robot put them back in jail. Then they ? Then he was sleeping and then they got out. Then they got in a police car and then

they went to get a new car. Then my mom grabbed the police. My dad drive the police car and then my dad drive the new car and then they got back. Then my dad got back in jail and my mom didn't. Because he had the police car.

Teacher: A magic police car?

Yeah. Then and this imagination came and they was like "Hey, I didn't do that! Hey, this dude did that. That has the gun!" Then he got in jail and my dad came back out of jail and then they saw me and my grandma. And so they took me back home and then we all played Wii.

Teacher: You all played Wii?

Yeah, on 3 players. And then I play my ?? speed and take a nap. That's all.

(Nicholas, April 14, 2009)

Nicholas holds a special place in my heart as his stories reveal and conceal ideas of jails, police arrests, and shootings. Does he understand or even begin to understand the truth of his own art? Where do his stories come from? Are fantasy and reality intertwined as he tries to find his path of truth? Does our engagement guide his journey toward a clearing? I don't know how to help Nicholas anymore than talking to his parents about the sadness and events that take place for him and his family. After discussing this with them, there was a short time when jail and death were not the focus of the story, but they continued to weave their way through. Talking with counselors is also a possible method of helping Nicholas further open up and confront the violence he lives in his stories.

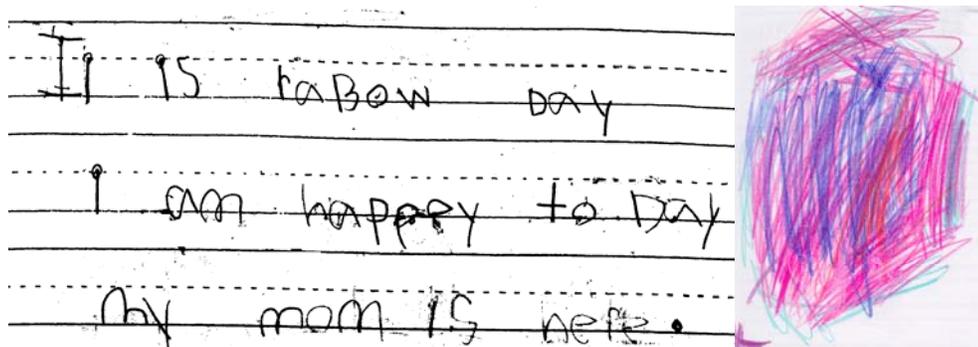


Figure 39. Happy rainbow days (Becky, May 5, 2009).

This is Rainbow Day. I am happy today. My mom is here.

Teacher: What makes it happy about rainbow day?

Because you go outside and we see fireworks at night at school and

Teacher: At school?

And then there was rainbows cause there was all rainbow colors coming and they give us power in our hearts.

Teacher: The fireworks?

Yeah. And then it makes us remember the people that died in our family.

Teacher: That what?

That died in our family.

Teacher: Who died in your family?

My great grandma and I never seen her before.

Teacher: Not too many people have seen their great grandmothers or great grandfathers. That is rare that you get the chance to do that.

Only three people died in my family.

Teacher: Yeah? I'm glad there is not more.

Some people...one person in my family has cancer and she is staying at her house and another person that is Madeline's mom, she had...I forgot...but she ?? itches on her. And where the fireworks were, we had...everybody got to pick a card and we had a big party at school and then we had cupcakes and then a cake. Then we got some crystals and then we had cupcakes and my mom made granola and then we made more and then my dad had a really big party. And then I left and my mom gave me a really big kiss and a hug.

Teacher: That does feel like a rainbow day!

And then we had rainbow cake and rainbow cupcakes.

(Becky, May 5, 2009)

Becky worries about the death of her great grandmother, a woman whom she's never met. How does this happy, rainbow day turn into a moment of sadness and then back to a joyous party occasion? What was said or seen to cause her to bring up the death of a family member? And to what extent do I discuss this concern with her? How do I not cross the boundaries of teacher and parent? What have her parents explained to her about death before this conversation?

I love my hus
and i love my
mom and dad.



Figure 40. Margery finds love at home (March 17, 2009).

I love my house because it's very cute.

Teacher: It is a cute house.

Uh-huh. And I like who's with me and who's with me is my mom and my dad. And I just like when I..my baby brother is gonna come.

Teacher: Is he almost here yet?

It's almost April, right?

Teacher: Almost April.

He's gonna be born in April.

Teacher: He's due to be born in April? It's getting close. You'll be a big sister soon!

Last...he's gonna be born on last day of April.

Teacher: April 30. That's not that far away..only about a month and a half.

And I can't wait to play with him sometimes.

Teacher: It is fun to play with them. But when they first come out...when they are first born, they are itty bitty. Is there more?

Yeah. And my mom and dad is always busy with my baby brother.

Teacher: That's what happens. That's when you have to start growing up and saying "I am a big girl now."

So sometimes I spend time with my mom and dad. When my baby brother comes I could not spend time with my mom and dad, right?

Teacher: Well, they will still be around. It's important for them to say, mommy needs to spend time with the baby so daddy gets to spend time with [Margery]. Kind of take turns. But usually when the baby comes, Mommy is going to be really busy with the baby and she'll be really tired cause the baby gets up in the middle of the night.

Actually, no. Cause my mommy has to go to work sometimes.

Teacher: You're right. She has to go to work. But sometimes mommies get off alittle right after they have a baby when he's just born. Then someone will have to take care of baby. Who is going to take care of the baby?

My dad. Then when my dad has to go to work, he's going to drop my baby brother and me into my cousin's house cause my cousin's mom doesn't have any work she couldn't drive. And when we went to my cousin's house, me and my baby brother and my cousin were playing.
(Margery, March 17, 2009)

Margery was blessed with a baby brother late this year. The parents prepared her for the changes as heard in her conversations with others and throughout her journals. In this particular conversation, her intonation of "right?" indicates that Margery needed some confirmation that babies are joyous and complex and that changes in the house would certainly happen. As her friend, I listened and shared my own experience, hoping that would help her with the coming transition.

How has the attention I have tried to provide my children given voice to their dwelling in illustrated conversations? The sentimental stories of home, the playful imaginations, the building upon and redesign of identities, and seeking out of support are the ideas they acknowledge as being important to our illustrated conversations. How have I heard their voice, listening to them again after the initial face to face, after the transcription, after the browsing through each one's entries, and after my meaning making reflections? Was I present enough to them to make it meaningful? Reflection upon this notion and the realm of true listening to children is the focus of the next chapter.

Are They the Same Voices?

Twice a year, my kindergartners write and stage two plays. I assist with costumes and guide them toward backdrop and scenery development. Time to practice becomes part of our day, and a flurry of excitement fills the air as "Play Day" approaches. I teach them to "project your voice" on stage so you are heard by all.

Samantha confirms my ‘teaching’ of this when recently the second grade gave a play performance, and on her thank you letter to them she wrote, “I like the way they projekt there voce.”

Illustrated conversations are biweekly projections of voice for my children. Their voices are heard as they engage with one another at tables carefully creating their artwork. A new voice is heard as they tell me their story—in a manner different than the one that casually described their picture to a friend. This voice tells a story with excitement, intonation, pauses, and giggles. Our voices meet on the paper and on the tape recorder. Others overhear the conversation and join in or mimic our conversation when it is their turn. I return home with tape in hand and listen to yet another voice. This voice is a confirmation voice. Did I hear what I thought I heard? How do I transcribe *that* laugh? How many *pauses* do I type in if she doesn’t say anything for 20 seconds? Did I really say that?!?! Why would I ask a question like that? Inscribing their voice to paper, I print out the copy, place it in their binder, and wait for the next story to be told. Now, five months later, I sit and listen to the creative, imaginative, enlightening, wondrously connected voices of each child’s journal. I hear more clearly as I peruse each book, rereading each entry day after day. How does hearing their voices and listening to their voices differ? Chapter Five explores how the art of listening requires far more concentration than I once thought. “They have many lessons to share with us—lessons about what they need, what makes them happy, how they view the world. If we listen, we’ll be able to hear them” (Clinton, 1996, p. 19).

CHAPTER FIVE: PLAYFUL LISTENING

The city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, renowned for the network of centers it provides for young children, “is a body of pedagogical thought and practice, permeated by cultural values, making the early childhood centres into social and political spaces” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 17). These spaces that support meaning-making experiences “are extremely important and powerful in revealing the ways in which children think, question and interpret reality and their own relationships with reality and with us” utilizing the “pedagogy of listening” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 19).

In listening to the voices of my children, in listening to the busyness of classroom movement, in listening to the recordings of my children’s stories, I learn how they grow, how they help others, and how they interact with others. In the process of our conversation, I realize that “hearing is a gift to be valued and enjoyed” (Levin, 1989, p. 89). I “relate to, or be with” my children in various ways (Levin, 1989, p.18). I may perceive their voices auditorily, their pictures visually, their ‘boos’ emotionally or their ideas intellectually. We may enter our illustrated conversations in a relaxed manner or a hurried manner. We may be curious about a topic. We may be indifferent to the activity, gazing only on the paper before us. Our body language may position us far away or close together as we meet each other along the way. We may be focused and listening intensely, or we may be distracted and staring off in other directions. How does our way of listening and understanding how we are ‘with’ one another clear the way for finding meaning in illustrated conversation?

Playing with Idea-filled Hearts

The ancient Greeks formed the word for *listen* by placing *hyper* in front of their word for *hear* (*akouein*); so in Greek, *listening* is literally translated as “hearing in great amount” or “intense hearing”.

Interestingly, the Chinese character for *listen* includes the notions not merely of hearing but also of nonverbal behavior and of connecting with the speaker in cognitive as well as affective ways. Listening is also connected with ideas. For example, the Sino-Japanese character for the word *idea* is the combination of two other characters: “sound” and “heart”. (Jalongo, 2008, p. 11)

How do I listen intensely to the inner life of my children’s idea-filled hearts?

How do I listen to—“Dasein’s existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others” (Heidegger, 1962/1993, p. 206)—my children in a “primary and authentic way” so that I am “already with [them], in advance, alongside the entity which the discourse is about” (Heidegger, 1962/1993, pp. 207)? Questioning my own listening amidst the voices of my kindergartners, I examine how learning to listen changes the meaning of the interactions between my children and me. Thinking about the meanings and making interpretations through thought keeps me “underway [for] if [I am] to remain underway [I] must first of all and constantly give attention to the way” (Heidegger, 1962/1993, p. 170). I question my curiosity about how what I hear in-between the words is an essential part of the meaning of illustrated conversations.

How Do I Play?

It was the process of journaling with young children begun more than five years ago that prompted this journey of illustrated conversations with my children. Part of my initiative was to let my children know that I wanted to spend time with them listening to their stories and engaging in open dialogue. Since personal journals were *my* way of expressing my thoughts, I provided the opportunity for them to

explore this venue for self-expression. It was to be a personal narrative of their ideas, thoughts, and creative imaginations. After listening to their stories, I wrote a question or a comment in response to our interaction on the bottom that would jog my memory of the conversation if I needed to refer to it later. It was not a corrected rewriting of their words; rather, it was an acknowledging of the child as a true writer, leaving their text true to their being. As the years evolved, my comments were not enough for me to recall the interaction with detail. How were they feeling that day? What was going on in the classroom to prompt this conversation? How did the conversation flow? So this year I added tape recording to the interaction to capture our interaction better. What has resulted from my engagement with them this year, different than in previous years, is a recognition that just sitting with them and thinking about one question or comment to write while they talk is *not* intense listening at all.

The tape recorded accounts of our dialogues this year have uncovered the need to address what it means to listen to my children, “not just with [my] ears, but with all [my] senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation)” (Clark, et al., 2005, p. 20). What do the pauses, intonations, and large silences mean? What is it about this “time of listening, a time that is outside the chronological time” (Clark, et al., 2005, p. 20). Our laughs, our facial expressions, how close we sit to one another, how long they linger acknowledges the emotions they feel during this time. Our engagement “is generated by emotions and stimulates emotions” (Clark, et al., 2005, p. 20). Did I welcome and be open to differences by “recognizing the value of the other’s point of view and interpretation” (Clark, et al., 2005, p. 20)? My children would tell me about exciting new worlds, events in their lives, and cartoon characters that intrigued them.

How do I give “meaning to the message and value to those who offer it” (Clark, et al., 2005, p. 20)? Do I try to always input new information into their minds, or do I “formulate questions” for them and for me that guide and encourage more discussion (Clark, et al., 2005, p. 20)? If I truly were to listen to my children, I would use the “discipline of bracketing, the temporary giving up or setting aside of one’s own prejudices, frames of reference and desires so as to experience as far as possible the speaker’s world from the inside... [so that] the speaker [would] feel less and less vulnerable and more and more inclined to open up the inner recesses of his or her mind to the listener” (Peck, 1978, p. 128). This very question of not bracketing my own images of violence leads me to wonder about how I enter the listening relationship with my children. It is the “premise for any learning relationship” that will legitimize each of us “both those who listen and those who produce the message” (Clark, et al., 2005, pp. 20-21). With these ideas in mind, I return to van Manen’s (1997) notion that “To do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). I must “stand close enough to the child to want what is best for the child, and...stand far enough away from the child to know what is best for the child” (van Manen, 1991, p. 87) by listening tactfully and carefully to their voices.

Just Playfully Listening

Sitting in the quiet of my home, computer before me, I pause and listen. But I am not dedicated to just listening. The sound of the show on television takes part of my listening. How heavy my dog is breathing requires I hear and listen for changes in case she has an asthma attack. The hum and occasional clunk of the refrigerator cues

me into its working properly. The crickets outside the window remind me that it is late but peaceful. For every listening I am engaged in, I am not just listening.

“*Gelassenheit*, ‘just listening’, is often a *playful* listening, a listening which enjoys itself, a listening whose ultimate purpose is to be *without* a purpose: *ohne Zweck*, cut loose from the incessant reproduction of *zweckrational* life” (Levin, 1989, p. 233). To ‘just listen’ during illustrated conversations would mean I delight “in releasing soundful beings from the representations” on their page as we “wander and drift” through dialogue reciprocally (Levin, 1989, p. 233). When I ‘just listen’ to them, it “lets them be and lets them go and lets them sound forth within dimensionality they themselves open up, we receive, in return, a gift of sound: resonances that sound and measure the dimensionality, the ontological difference, of Being itself and let us hear deeply into the vibrations of its immeasurable openness” (Levin, 1989, pp. 233-234). What joy is experienced and opened in listening playfully to the sounds of children’s voices? How does our playful listening alter our relationship? As we listen to one another’s ideas, look at one another’s expressions, wait with anticipation for the next opening, we find ourselves “inseparably *intertwined*...related by spontaneous, changing, moment-to-moment correspondences” (Levin, 1989, p. 234). We just listen...or do we? Can we truly release all of ourselves to the opening of space? Do we not always hold a piece of ourselves in fear of losing ourselves? Our illustrated conversations open the door to cultivate and develop our hearing—our gatherings of sound that occur when we suspend our “normal and habitual judgements”—always on the way to becoming “more responsive, more caring, more compassionate” (Levin, 1989, pp. 255-256). We are always practicing and refining the art of listening.

Tossing the Ball

In our classroom, my children and I engage reciprocally. They share with me ideas, and I embellish upon them with my own experiences. So, too, I share ideas and they reciprocate with comments and questions. Our classroom incorporates the context of “multiple listening” in which teachers, groups of children, and each child redefines and “overturns the teaching-learning relationship [shifting] the focus to learning; that is, to children’s self-learning and the learning achieved by the group of children and adults together” (Clark et al., 2005, p. 22). If we put learning about ourselves in the forefront of our pedagogy, we open up spaces of dwelling and building together in care and respect. We begin to understand each other’s ways of being. We acknowledge each other through our illustrated conversations, tossing the ball back and forth to one another carefully.

Being friends. Here, William acknowledges me as a ‘girlfriend’ but I reciprocate with deepening the conversation about our adventure together.

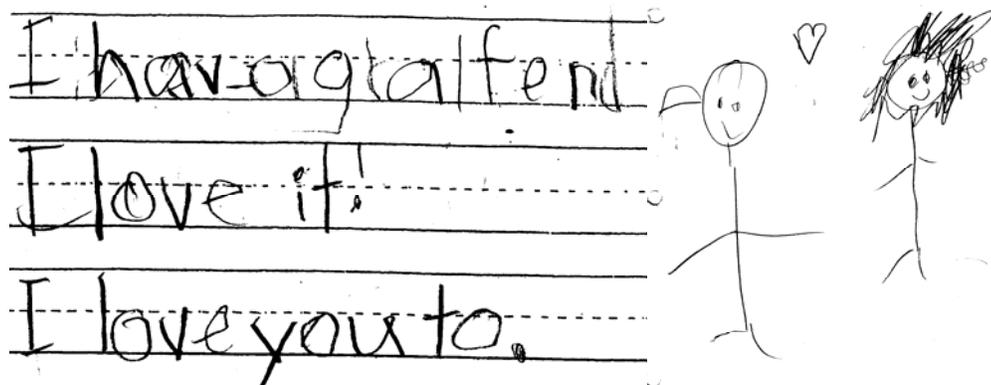


Figure 41. I have a girlfriend (William, April 16, 2009).

I love my girlfriend. I really love it.

Teacher: What do you love about her?

Her hair.

Teacher: Her hair.

And her dress.

Teacher: Her dress. What is special about her dress?

Um...nothing.

Teacher: Nothing. You just love it.

Yes.

Teacher: Who is your girlfriend?

Ms. Dean.

Teacher: Really? I'm not wearing a dress.

Yes.

Teacher: I am? What about my hair?

Yes.

Teacher: My hair is doing some strange things today.

And when I start going around up to the moon and space...

Teacher: You're going to leave me?

No. You're coming with me.

Teacher: I'm going with you? Oh, are we going to see Saturn?

Saturn and the sun.

Teacher: The sun? Are we going to burn up if we get too close to the sun?

A little bit.

Teacher: Just a little. We'll get a suntan?

No. You're going to start to have red marks and then it's going to start to go fire.

Teacher: Oh.

Before we have red marks.

Teacher: Will we get away before we burn up?

Pause. And then we came back down to the earth and we went on the plane to Oregon to see my granddaddy. *Conversation continues about grandfather...*

(William, April 16, 2009)

The start of our dialogue begins as usual... So, William, what do you have today? William states he loves his girlfriend...I respond with a question. Our conversation continues as it always does. There is no indication of who his girlfriend is in his text or his illustration. The bodies in his drawing have no clothes, no dress, and no color. And very simply I ask, Who is your girlfriend? expecting a classmate's name in response. And then it hits. "Mrs. Dean" reverberates...*I'm* his girlfriend. I am in disbelief but at the same time I smile with joy knowing I am cared for. Subconsciously, though, I wonder, where will this go? How does he associate with the term 'girlfriend'? Will this proceed into a discussion that teachers should not

address? My response to his statement about his loving me would set into motion the interplay of the conversation. How will my throwing the ball back define the boundaries of our interaction? My response may alter his preconceived, preplanned story. How do I respond staying oriented to William while still being “accountable with regard to the reasonableness or goodness of our influencing of children” (van Manen, 1991, p. 60)?

“Really?” My voice rises with excitement, speeding up the pace of my speech. Choosing the safe route, I turn attention to his illustration of me. “I’m not wearing a dress!” I divert the dialogue to the similarities and differences between the being that sits before him and the one in his picture. For the remainder of the conversation, we jump to Oregon, space, and back to Earth but end with “**Teacher:** Do we live happily ever after? **William:** No. We’re still walking to um...the end” (April 16, 2009). Interruptions from other children pause our interaction but we continue journeying together. Someone sitting beside him trying to take his pencil immediately precedes our seeing a “big, fat pencil” that is a “learning rocket” and the eraser that someone asks for is brought into the conversation as the “eraser goes to heaven.” These interruptions seem to add to his embellishments, driving his story forward, not wanting our journey together to end. I acknowledge our ‘togetherness’ clearing a path on which he feels comfortable sharing with me, an adult teacher, his imaginative stories with friends of all ages. He finds security in our dialogue. William redefines the teacher-child relationship when he indicates “I like it when I tell you journals because I am your friend” (June 8, 2009) at the end of the year. I am not only a teacher, but a friend.

Fairies and giants. So, too, Samantha alters the teacher-child relationship inviting me into her stories. She and I go to New York, dress up as princesses, live in a palace, and go fishing. At one point, she “turned into a fairy and Mrs. Dean turned into a giant” (February 10, 2009). Of course, I am the giant in the story because I am ‘older’ than she, the small, fragile fairy. My suggestion that my mom be the giant because she is older than me is not a viable option since she wants the story to be just about us. She, like William, trusts the relationship we explore and deepen together, both in class and in fantasy stories.



Figure 42. I am a giant and you are the fairy (Samantha, February 10, 2009).

I turned into a fairy and Ms. Dean turned into a giant.

Teacher: A giant!?! How come you get to be the fairy and I have to be a giant? Can I be a giant fairy? Look at my teeth!

Laughs.

Teacher: Ew! How come I have to be the giant?

Because you’re older and so I get to be the fairy.

Teacher: Well, then maybe my mom can be the giant and I can be a fairy? She’s older.

No. You be the giant cause I don’t know your mom.

Teacher: Oh. Am I a good giant or a bad giant?

A bad giant.

Teacher: A bad giant!?! What makes me a bad giant?

Umm..

Teacher: Cause I talk LIKE THIS!!!!

Eeeee....

Teacher: You know what? If I am a bad giant, I get to eat fairies for snack!

But the fairy, me, the fairy with curly hair. I gave you the heart and you can turn into a fairy.

Teacher: Oh, good! A magic heart! I get to be a fairy!

A good fairy!

Teacher: I thought I would be a giant forever! I didn't want to be a giant forever!

You don't want **me** to be a giant forever and eat YOU!

Teacher: No, I don't!

(Samantha, February 10, 2009)

High-pitched squeals of delight pervade the story. Knowing how Samantha giggles, I laugh out loud when I replay her giggle. I imagine it again. It encompasses her whole body. Her shoulders rise, her eyes twinkle, and her teeth peek through her smiling lips. She becomes the light-hearted fairy. I immerse myself in the role of a mean giant with a strong, deep voice. After my role is established as mean giant, she quickly decides to give me a good heart and turns me into a good fairy. Samantha then switches roles turning herself into a giant so she could now eat me who was now a good fairy. Through the giggles and smiles, she attempts to lower her voice to become the role of the giant to eat me. It sounds more like a giggling giant than one who will eat me. But I respond with surprise. I acknowledge her attempt.

We meet each other that day in a playful interchange of power, overturning the teacher-child relationship to one of reciprocal interaction. "The important point here is that when children, to a greater extent today, are recognized as participants and qualified informants in their 'being', they also become more empowered in the process of defining their own future identities—their 'becoming' (Clark et al., 2005, p. 76). As she practices role taking, she is comfortable with her search to uncover her identity.

You just never know. Young children express their emotions freely and without reservation. When a child tells me they love me, I interpret that love as caring. By April, I begin to look more closely at how each child has suddenly and without warning, emerged as an independent, caring being. Peter's emotions jump out on the page on April 3, 2009. Initially, Peter writes "I love Mis Dean". Within two minutes his entry is done and I am not yet ready for stories. I ask him if he could go back and add more while I get the recorder set up. He agrees. He comes back with "I love Mis Dean and I love mom." By this time, I am ready with tape recorder in hand.

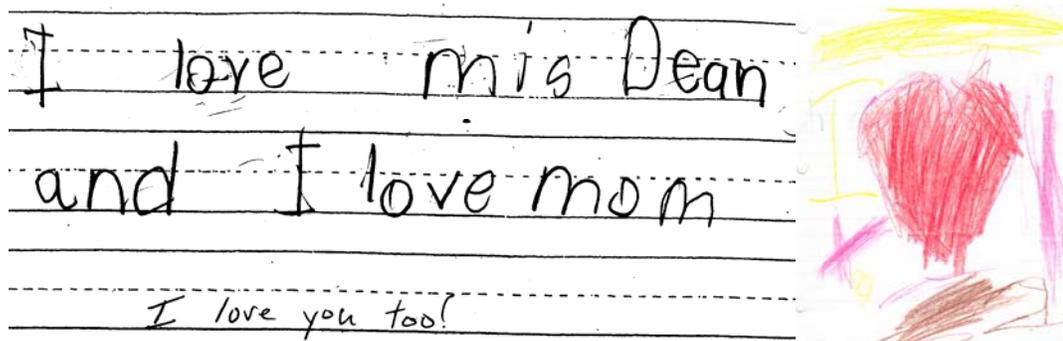


Figure 43. You are gray, Mrs. Dean! (Peter, April 3, 2009).

I love Mrs. Dean.

Teacher: I love you too!

And I love my mom.

Pause.

Teacher: What is the same about her and me? Is there anything the same?

No. You have a lot of gray hair and my mom has..my mom colors her gray hair with brown.

Teacher: Oh, I have gray hair? Really?

Nods.

Teacher: Where? Point to one. Do you see one?

Yeah. Right there.

Teacher: Oh! Really! I have to get rid of that. That's my goal to get rid of that gray hair. So what else?

This is a dot and this is a "T". This means a heart—love. And this means..this means..this is a playground over here. I jump on this and then I jump down. This is a thing you jump on it and then you fall down. And then you fall down here and you are standing. And this is a trick. This is a trick. You have to jump

on this and then it will hit you up. This is a trick if you go here you will go like this.

Teacher: Like a springboard?

Yeah. Like this...whooooooo. And then you go and do a backflip.

Boom! Boom! Then again. This is a trick. This is holding this up. This is like a diving board. This is cool. And I went off the diving board. The first time I was a little bit scared. Like this high. And then the pool was like this deep. I went off the diving board and I almost did a flip.

(Peter, April 3, 2009)

How innocent and trusting he and I meet each other on this day. His expression of care for me is heart-warming. After a few difficult months of ‘cramming’ to get the children to benchmark in both reading and math, his care is a welcome voice. I pause, wondering how he defines the love for his mom and the vastly different love he feels for me. Wham! Gotcha! As if by magic, out of nowhere I am now a gray-haired teacher who doesn’t dye her hair. All I can do is laugh in surprise. Unbelieving that my gray hairs are actually visible, he and several other children are willing to point them out. But as quickly as his expression of care comes, it is replaced with doing tricks and backflips. In that momentary pause after my gray-elimination goal setting, do I admit to myself that I am, in fact, gray and say “What else?” as a distraction to get the boys from fussing over my head? That moment with Peter is one that will forever modify my life. He ‘let be seen’ what I didn’t want to be uncovered. His innocence and honesty brings care, laughter, and identity awareness in my moment of need.

Engrossment and mutual reciprocity (Noddings, 2003) are characterized by an open, receptive caring to one another. Engaging with my children during the initial dialogue, we meet each other as carers and careforers (Noddings, 2003). In Chapter Four, the typed transcriptions uncovered meaning of our dialogue. But to continue on

the way, circling deeper into the phenomenological circle, re-listening to our dialogue uncovers deeper meaning. “The experience of the conversation can only be revisited and contemplated through memory, recall, or documentation of conversation through transcription (written, audio, or video). Even then, the emotional state, context, and relationship between participants may not be accurately captured” (Iorio, 2008, p. 301). In **seeking the lived experience of illustrated conversations with kindergartners**, I must interpret the recordings to find the emotional state, context, and relationship between us that lead us toward meaning.

Teacher: Would it be just as fun if you didn't tell me your story?

No.

Teacher: Why?

Cause I have no one to tell the story and its boring.

(Peter, June 8, 2009)

I like when I was talking on tape.

Teacher: What is it about talking on tape that is special about journaling?

Cause when I get to write a cool story, I like talking to the tape.

Teacher: Why?

Because the tape records everything I say and the whole world can hear me.

Teacher: So the whole world can hear you?

(James, June 8, 2009)

When I tell you the stories.

Teacher: Why do you like telling me the stories?

Cause you can tell about your stories and all the stuff you draw and laughing about.

(Katie, June 8, 2009)

Teacher: So you get to talk with your friends while you are doing your journal. What about when you are telling me your story?

Um...its fun too.

Teacher: Why?

Cause when you tell the stories you get to share stories even if you are in line, you get to hear the fun stories you tell.

(Becky, June 8, 2009)

When you get to tell your imagination, you get to tell anything you want. And you get to tell anything in your life that you like.

Teacher: And is that a good thing to be able to tell someone?

Yes.

(Jennifer, June 8, 2009)

Well, I could tell you the story and everything goes to somewhere when you record it and I like when everyone hears it.

Teacher: It is special to have everyone hear you, right?

Uh-huh.

(Margery, June 8, 2009)

I like telling stories because I like to talk a lot.

(Evan, June 8, 2009)

Playing Catch

On Play Day this year, the kindergartners engaged in a water balloon tossing game. Each child found a partner and stood across from one another. The parallel lines were about two feet apart. Handing them a balloon, they very gently and carefully tossed the balloon to their partner. If it was caught, they threw it back and waited for the next step. Two other scenarios also occurred. Some balloons, though dropped, remained intact. Thankfully, the partner could pick it up and toss it back. Whew! Saved. Some were not so lucky. Splat! Aaahhh!! Game over. For those who remained in the game, one player took a step backward and play began again.

In September when illustrated conversations begin, we play the game in reverse. I am everyone's partner. We physically sit about two feet from one another, but the space between us is far more distant. They wonder who this person is asking me to tell them a story. What do they want me to say? How should I act when I tell the story? They are reserved in their interaction. Similarly, I have questions about the being in front of me. What do they enjoy doing? How will I approach them? How will they react when I ask them questions and make comments? As the game is

played over the course of ten months, we continue the back and forth throwing to one another, with the change being after each toss, we take one step closer. Closer to what? To genuine reciprocity? Mutual engagement?

Can we ever be so close that we are unable to pass the ball? Our identity, our voices, our beings create the spaces that will always be between us. We stand within the boundaries of our dwelling. The meanings and the understandings we make of one another during the game become a part of who we are, but I am never close enough to completely know all the languages they possess. Why?

Every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them. (Dewey, 1938, p. 35)

No matter how close I think I get to understanding, they are constantly becoming a different person. Every step I take toward them, they take a step toward themselves, distancing themselves from me while together we try to close the space between us. What lies in the *participation* of the illustrated conversation? Elements such as how long we play, the pace of our game, what happens if we drop the ball, or if something happens to the ball in midair, are parts of the game that need understanding to get to the meaning we make of our dialogue together.

How Long Do We Play?

When my children arrive on Tuesday morning, some skip over to the shelf, grab their journal and get right to work. Other children walk over to the shelf, slowly figure out where to sit, talk with their friends and flip through their book before finally reaching the page for the day. They begin without further delay. Then there are others who arrive late, take their time unpacking and signing in for lunch, and even

pick a puzzle off the shelf while everyone else is busily working at the tables. They are not aware that today is journal day.

Initially, the children would wait in line to tell their story. Sometimes the line would be seven children deep. Those telling their story were engaged, but those waiting began to whisper to one another, fidget in line, or interrupt the story being told. The process evolved to having children place their binder in a pile on my table while someone told their story. They were then free to do something quiet while they waited their turn. This came with advantages and disadvantages. It was quieter without the others standing at the table opening the space for more focused engagement. But having to call them away from another activity they chose to do in order to share illustrated conversations often altered the interaction. Again, some ran over when I called their name. Others strolled. And still others took the long way around the room. The length of their engagement perhaps revealed their desire to be with me or their longing to be somewhere else.

How long do we dwell in this place we call illustrated conversations? Each of us dwells in places, boundaries colliding and merging. Our classroom space, our 'table area for recording' place, and our own personal spaces unite, constantly reshaping boundaries. "We partake of places in common—and reshape them in common. The culture that characterizes and shapes a given place is a shared culture" (Casey, 1993, p. 31). What calls us to partake in this shared culture? Do the children consider it a place they were placed in without choosing to partake, or do they choose this place knowing a place of sharing exists? Perhaps "what matters most is the experience of *being* in that place and, more particularly, *becoming part of the place*

(Casey, 1993, p. 33). This becoming develops one's sense of self which "grows out of and reflects the places from which we come and where we have been" (Casey, 1993, p. 38). Each child's identity is redefined in our space through our timeless shared place, how ever long they choose to reshape the boundaries in which we dwell.

Quick and to the point. Time constraints in our classroom press in on our illustrated conversations regularly. Journals, encompassing a good forty minutes of the morning, are followed by a 20-30 minute circle time that involves reviewing our daily plans, sharing a read aloud, and a discussion centered on the theme for the month. Reading groups are scheduled next for about 60 minutes until 11:00 at which point the children head off to lunch. On journal days, Jorge comes in, completes his entry, and has quiet time. During this quiet time, he is also pulled by a parent volunteer to work on alphabet recognition, sight word identification, or handwriting practice due to his lower scores on his assessments. On Tuesdays at 10:00, regardless of where we are in the schedule, Jorge and the other ELL students leave the room to attend specialized English language instruction. If for any reason, Jorge and I do not share during the morning session, we dialogue during free choice time. When this happens, Jorge's stories are significantly shorter, little interaction occurs, short answers to questions emerge, and glances to the other side of the room frequent the interaction. "In a glance we see and are seen....We need to know the importance of small things in our dealings with children" (van Manen, 2002, p. 46). I make meaning of the glances. He is not engaged. He doesn't want to be. I hold the ball. He looks at me and says, "That's all" before I can even toss the ball again. For many, including Jorge, this is an infringement upon their time and space to engage with toys from

home, computer games, and close friends. It is an imposition to exit their afternoon play time to enter back into morning journal time. Likewise, on Thursdays, if journals are not completed during the morning time block, we share during their computer lab time. This is yet another infringement on a “once a week time” to explore new online games. “Once again we couldn’t finish stories prior to circle and reading groups and resorted to computer time. The stories are not as creatively expressed nor are they lengthy and filled with detail. The boys especially watch their computer while telling me their story as if it will magically go away” (Personal journal, April 16, 2009).

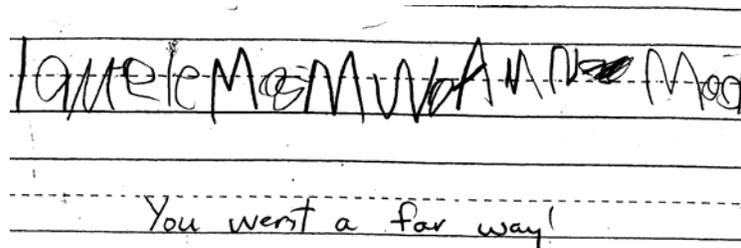


Figure 44. Jorge moves around the world (February 26, 2009).

This is me and when I was trying to get out this balloon. And I popped it. Then I get out and I running and running right here and right there and I fell and I was still okay and then I get up and I went right here.

Teacher: You were busy. Why did you go all those places?

I don't know.

Teacher: Is there more?

No.

(Jorge, February 26, 2009)

What did it mean to Jorge to pull him from activities that he enjoys in order to tell me a story? What meaning of our time together is made with this infringement as part of the process?

This is gonna be a long one! Regardless of what Ashley is doing, she opens herself to illustrated conversations. Many of her entries are five to ten minutes long and are filled with detail, facial expression, and intonation. As she flows from one topic to another, her big brown eyes open wide, she smiles, and her hands begin the expression of action in her story. I don't often have to ask what her story is about. She initiates the conversation. Ashley's intonations call the listener to move through the plot with curiosity. What will happen next? And then? And then? I wait for the ball with anticipation, wondering what will happen next. What will I discover now?

Ashley, a young kindergartner, is a leader with compassion. Her communication skills with peers has a magnetic force all its own. Girls surround her waiting for what she will imagine and engage them in today. Cooperative peer skills abound, and she can talk her way through the whole morning and afternoon. She freely shares her thoughts and ideas with anyone who will listen. This is not a result of not being able to talk at home. She is just as imaginative there, according to her mother, father, and older brother. She is a confident child aware of the voices she possesses. Her hundred hundred hundred languages are still there. Illustrated conversation is another path for identity defining, confidence building, and conflict resolving. The length of time she tosses the ball back and forth uncovers the longevity that our relationship holds for the future. I know that Ashley is one child that I will

connect with each day as she journeys through her elementary years. Listening to Ashley is a gift she gives me everyday.



I was on the
cow and playing
with the cow.

Figure 45. Ashley cares for her cow (March 3, 2009).

This is me and this is my sister. She came out of house and she was inside and she went to the barn and my cow was there and she took down our cow from the barn and she was playing. She was sitting on it. When I came out of house, she was already sitting on it and I petted her.

Teacher: You have a cow?

Yeah.

Teacher: What is your cow's name?

I was gonna name her Marley.

Teacher: That's an interesting name, Marley.

Yeah. The cow was coming and I just went back home to watch tv and Spongebob was already on and I went inside and watched Spongebob.

Teacher: What was going on on Spongebob?

It was the Happy Valentine's one.

Teacher: The Valentine's one?

Yeah. Then my cow went back inside her barn because she likes Spongebob too so I put on Spongebob. My sister was inside the barn and she was playing with her still. He was sitting and she was jumping on him. When she stopped, she want to stop the

jump and she was like standing to watch Spongebob and she fell down. Then rain came on my cow's barn and she went outside and they were playing more and the rain came. My cow got all sick and I had to take her to the vet. Then when she sleep and then he sat on top of the vet.

Teacher: He sat on top of the vet?

Yeah

Teacher: Did the vet get hurt?

Yeah. The vet went to the hospital. She went to the hospital. My big fat cow just sit on it more.

Teacher: He just sat on it more?

Yeah they sitted on the doctor and the vets too. Then the vet had to go to the other hospital. Then he said all of the hospital's house. Then the cow was sleeping in the vet's house and then the vet came home. And she said "Evan is getting a lot of sicking today and the cow was sleeping at the hospital. Then she said, "Okay, I'll sleep on the cow's head."

Teacher: How does the cow feel about that?

Mad. Cause he mad her very sad a lot. So she made him sad. The other day she went to the hospital to a check up and then her tooth got loose. Then she gave that tooth to my cow. Then my mom came to the hospital. She was at the same hospital. And the cow was. And she got hurt on the cow because then the cow got..she didn't have hair..so when my mom slepted on him, her head got hurt and her head was hurting and she went to the hospital then when she came back it was still hurting cause my cousin, his name is Adam. His head hurts cause he fell down one day on a brick and it hurts. Now it still hurts. Now if someone hits him on the head, it will hurt. And he will tell his dad.

Teacher: I would say it would hurt.

And then the cloud, and the rain went all over my cow and he got sick and had to go to the vet again. The other vet was in the hospital and he went to the other vet and then at the other vet he didn't sat on it. Yeah. Because she fixed him. Because that vet was mean to him.

Teacher: More?

No.

(Ashley, March 3, 2009)

While we enjoy early morning stories, opening the day to choice, silliness, and an expression of "I am here today!" this is not always possible. After a hurried reading and math-filled day, taking them away from a valued place of free choice

creates place panic for them and me. What is interesting is when they were called to tell their story during literacy centers or math groups, all gladly agreed and came willingly. Stories were lengthy and full of detail, sometimes even more so than during the morning sharing time. What might this say about how children value these spaces of academics?

Silent Speed Ball

When playing silent speed ball, the object of the game is to pass the ball as quickly as possible around the circle without talking. If you drop the ball or talk, you are out of the game. There is only one winner. Time is the deciding factor in this game. How quickly can you pass it? How long can you stay quiet? Illustrated conversations with particular children can sometimes reflect the game of silent speed ball.

“Silence is our listening openness: in order to hear something, we must first *give* it our silence...It is a gift to which we must respond by giving it, in return, the gift of our own silence” (Levin, 1989, p. 232). The silences that occur between us need the same genuine reciprocity cultivated in our relationship of care. Not infringing upon the child’s silence is just as meaningful as the voiced conversational back and forth. Kindergarten is for many the first introduction to formal schooling. Many classrooms hold within their boundaries a set of rules that includes raising your hand before you speak and only speaking when called upon. How do young children learn the art of conversation, learn how to manipulate the silences between the words if they do not hear fluidity of genuine discussion? My classroom does not contain these rules. I want children to understand the interplay of speech and silence. They

need to appreciate the silences, understand the meanings, and act upon them accordingly.

I can stay quiet a llllloooooonnnnnnggggg time! As I replay his stories of superheros, God, friends, and Racecarland, I try to connect the meanings I have made of the passes Brian throws to me. I relisten to his stories, intensely hearing more than just the string of words uttered. What lies between the words? Long pauses, questions to me, and interruptions from others fill the spaces.

Brian, a quadruplet, has shared time and space for six years. He has shared clothes, toys, rooms, and adult attention. This year, the first year of being separated from his siblings by classroom walls, he is able to be recognized and use his voice without the immediate presence of his two brothers and one sister. I do not know about the other three children, but Brian struggles to find his unique voice. Pouting when he doesn't get his way, crying because he can't imagine what to make with a ball of clay, and hiding in the bathroom during public performances, his hundred, hundred, hundred languages seem muffled. Is the shared voice with his siblings hiding the innermost thoughts that belong only to him? How does his trying to find voice reveal itself in illustrated conversation?

“You have to guess.” “It's a secret.” Are these questions, which result in a lengthy pause, providing Brian the untimed time and space he needs to find his place in the conversation? He wants to continue the conversation but can not find the voice he needs to express his innermost thoughts. The slow paced conversation gives him room to breathe, to think, to hear his inner voice, and express it with thoughtfulness. He asks questions to me in hopes that I will take some extra time to respond. If I

respond too quickly, another is tossed to me. This gives him the time he needs to explore the meaning behind his story and the words he desires to use to uncover it.

SUP
day and bobby was
Fit



Figure 46. Guess what is happening! (Brian, February 24, 2009).

Teacher: Okay, what is your story?

You have to guess.

Teacher: I have to guess? Let me see, what was last time's? (Looks through past entries) Oh, this was about crashing a motorcycle.

Nods no.

Teacher: How about Sonic?

No.

Teacher: It's about Racecarland?

No.

Teacher: I have no idea. Tell me.

No.

Teacher: I don't know. It looks like a mean person. Like wow—that's a face. And invisible people here. What's happening with the invisible people and the mean face? (Interrupted by students)

It's like Supergirl..

Teacher: Like Supergirl?

Only it starts with a 'b'.

Teacher: So it starts with a 'b'. So it's Bupergirl.

No.

Teacher: Buperbirl? Super boy?

Yes.

Teacher: What happens with Superboy?

(Returns to his seat to write his words)

The bad guy and Superboy were fighting.

Teacher: The bad guy and Superboy were fighting? And then what?

Uh-huh. He almost shoot something from these things that make him fly (Interrupted)..but there was a problem with this.

Teacher: There was a problem with that? What was the problem?

Story continues...

(Brian, February 24, 2009)

These quiet moments spacing out his ideas are “the tact of the ‘silent conversation’ where chatter would be misplaced, or where intrusive questions may only disturb or hurt...The noise of words can make it difficult to ‘hear’ the things that the mere conversation of companionship can bring out. In good conversation the silences are as important as the words spoken. Tact knows the power of stillness, how to remain silent” (van Manen, 1991, p. 177). Is he able to hear his individual voice in our silent conversation? In the above example, his own interruption of returning to his workspace to add his text provides more time for Brian to gather his ideas. Upon his return, the conversation is faster paced and fewer pauses are present.

Journeying together through discussions of God, Racecarland, and Sonic, vibrant details and laughing are often missing. I have hope—the “patience and tolerance, belief and trust in the possibilities of [my] children” (van Manen, 1991, p. 68)—that the year we spent making meaning of his first-time independence from his siblings will carry with him through life. As his independent voice explores his own languages that dwell within, he uses the comforting voices of others to speak with him. In time, I believe Brian will find the clearing. In the June 2009 example below, Brian still searches for how to express how he feels about illustrated conversation. I know it is there, hidden, just not yet acknowledged by him as his own. What is

meaningful here for Brian is the opportunity to explore with someone fully engaged in a reciprocal encounter that walks beside him as he uncovers his identifying voice.



Figure 47. I like to read my journal on tape. (Brian, June 8, 2009).

I like to read my journal on tape.

Teacher: Why?

Because....(long pause)

Teacher: What is it about the tape you like?

I like the tape because....(long pause)

Teacher: Suppose the tape wasn't there, would you still like doing journals?

Yes. (long pause)

Teacher: Why?

I could....(long pause)

Teacher: What do you like about journals if you didn't have the tape?

I like writing in my journals about....(long pause)...trees.

Teacher: Why would you choose to write about trees?

Cause they're big. And I like to write Sonic and Tails.

(Brian, June 8, 2009)

I can pass it the fastest! Kim is not like Brian. She prefers a fast-paced, action packed, dialogue-filled conversation. As illustrated in this eight minute engagement, Kim does not leave room for pauses. She holds conversations within our conversation. Details for her are numerous. Understood details for me are difficult. The speed, accompanied by quick, high-pitched giggles, are difficult to translate at any point during interpretation. When sitting across from her, her pace is so fast I find that all I can do is sit and attempt to take in what she is saying. I pick up on pieces of

the conversation...Mrs. Dean...take hands...joking...blah, blah, blah... I wish there were pauses for then I could make meaning of smaller segments as well as have the opportunity to confirm what I think I heard. These “silent conversations”—these pauses—allow the listener to engage more deeply with the speaker. Why doesn’t she stop and invite me in? As an ELL, does she not understand my questions and, therefore, prefers just to talk without me? Or, is this a special time when she is allowed to talk freely without being interrupted by an adult? Perhaps her family culture believes that a child should be seen and not heard. Or perhaps, her motivation and energy to project her voice for others to hear takes complete control and she herself can’t stop it. She doesn’t pass the ball to others—she throws it in the air and catches it herself.



The day was saturday
Will you ever get your
hands back?

Figure 48. Kim loses a hand (March 5, 2009).

(This is the last part of the conversation with Kim.)

Teacher: I need to give you your hands back.

Yeah. Because you like my hands. It's beautiful. And they got tattoos and really pretty nails. And then I say, "Ms. Dean, you took my hands." And then you say, "No!" Are you? Then I say, "Are you joking?" and you say, "No." Let me ask my friend. And then I come back and I tell everyone look I come back. I say, "Ms. Dean, you are joking." The friend said, "No. And then you said, "Let's ask a second grader, or a third grader, or a fourth grader" And then I go and say, "All the people a big class they say no...they say "are you joking, Mrs. Dean" They say "What is in there?" I look and say, "It's my hands!"

Teacher: You found them!

Then I say, "Oh, no! Oh, man! They took again." And there's some more....Then the rainbow hand is missing too. Then I said, "I need to talk something." And then the rainbow come to me and say, "Did you took my hand?" And I say, "No." And then he say, "Have you can tell everybody?" and then the rainbow tell everybody and they come back to me and say, "You are joking, Jenny!" And then I say "How do you know my name?" Because Sunday you're mom stay home and I saw you talking "blah blah blah blah" Then I said, "What?" I hate you a lot, Rainbow." I was see what in the bag. "It's my hands! You joking, Jenny!" Then the sky...this is a long of story...then the cloud say, "Who took the hand again?" Then my mom always scream, "I need to go find first" Rainbow, rainbow, do you see my hand? "No. Go ask the people to go...people..every people...then the cloud go, "Do you see my hand?" Hey, what are you doing? I can go to my friend. And then the cloud jump in and locked the door. "I got idea!" I open the window. I sneak in. The cloud close it back. Then they go upstairs. And say, "Friend, friend." Then mom said, "Who is up there, honey?" "Um, nothing, mommy." This said the cloud, daughter, friend, then okay. Maybe I can go talk my cousin friend. Cousin, can I see....Are you joking, rainbow. Ah-hah! You took it."

(Kim, March 5, 2009)

Within the midst of our dialogue, a burst of energy pushes Kim on, powered with action, thrills, and silliness. The multiplicity of person in her stories, mom said, I said, she said, are all conveyed with varying intonations, shifting positions rapidly back and forth, back and forth. "This shifting between being depicted (embodying or

enacting the character) and being the depicter (impartially drawing-telling the event) is revealed” (Wright, 2007, p. 10). What propels her to speak with such speed and excitement? When this happens to children like Kim, have they suddenly come to understand that more lies among the pictures and text than they themselves first understood and they want to capture it before it disappears? Is there a glowing light in the distance as they talk themselves toward but never quite reach? But then as if somebody flipped the switch, I hear, “That’s all,” and *I* am left with an uncomfortable feeling of never reaching the light. Why did we stop our journey? Was there something there that you did not want to unconceal? They are “done” and off to another playful engagement with meaning-making. I, though, am left to interpret for myself such as in this conversation with Brian.

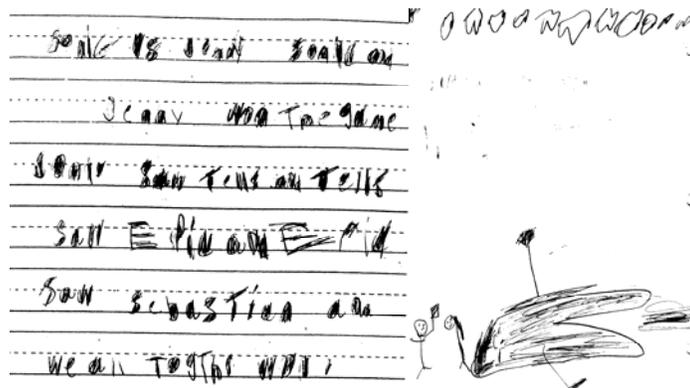


Figure 49. Invisibility among friends (Brian, May 21, 2009).

Teacher: Where is [Sammy]?
 [Sammy]? [Evan] and [Sammy] and me are invisible.
Teacher: Oh. So where’s [Kim]?
 Here.
Teacher: So who is talking to [Kim]?
 Him.
Teacher: Who is him?
 Tails.
Teacher: And then what?
 That’s all.
 (Brian, May 21, 2009)

The pace of a conversation is a part of the dialogue that helps to uncover the meaning made for each child. Whether there are brief pauses or lengthy pauses, these momentary gaps are also dwelling places for meaning-making. They are a part of who their voice, their identity, is at that moment in time. What defines their being is how they approach the experience. Brian uses these pauses for reflection, an inner thought provoking time to gather ideas, and the search for his hidden voice. Kim uses few pauses during conversation with me uncovering her deep engagement with our devoted time together. Her expressions and emotion jump out, pausing only a moment to take an occasional breath. The speed at which we pass the ball (or juggle the ball) reveals more about the experience than just the text does. But what happens when the ball is dropped? What meaning lies between us?

Oh, no! I Dropped the Ball!

Our dictionaries tell us that ‘care’ is a state of mental suffering or of engrossment: to care is to be in a burdened mental state, one of anxiety, fear, or solicitude about something or someone. Alternatively, one cares for something or someone if one has a regard for or inclination toward that something or someone. (Noddings, 2003, p. 9)

I have been inviting my children into illustrated conversations for several years. This passion for writing with young children drives me toward self-understanding and pedagogical insight. I endure the “suffering..of inflicted pain” because it is also the “object of love, deep interest” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, p. 614). Written on these pages of heart-filled stories, I confront the pain and joy that accompanies my care.

Dr. Seuss meets Sonic. What happens when two imaginary characters come together in a “farting” festival of giggles? Dr. Seuss meets Sonic in an explosion of

gases that takes him far into space. I can't stop laughing. It propels the interaction into silliness and imagination. The laughter fills in the silent gaps that may have occurred but didn't. Wherever this idea found its roots, Evan creates an environment in which he becomes the leader. His embellishments continue to engage my curiosity.

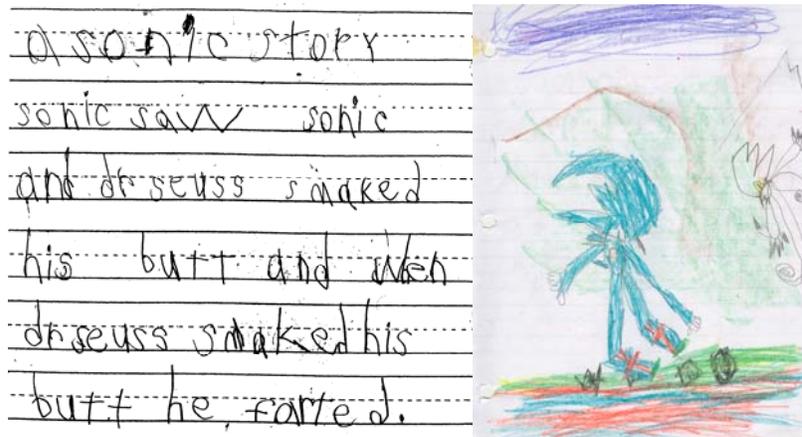


Figure 50. Sonic meets Dr. Seuss (Evan, May 28, 2009).

The Sonic story. Sonic saw Sonic and Dr. Seuss smacked his butt and when Dr. Seuss smacked his butt, he farted.

Teacher: EW!!!! Disgusting! Giggle Giggle. Pause with giggles continuing. So, what happened now?

When Dr. Seuss farted, he flew up to heaven.

Teacher: Ah! That was really big fart! WHOOOO—it's like rocket boosters.

Giggles. And this is his fart. (Points to picture)

Teacher: Did it smell?

Nods yes.

Teacher: It did? Did it knock Sonic over?

Yeah. He fainted.

Teacher: I'd say.

And he was grinding well when he was fainted.

Teacher: I can't imagine the stink!

And he just fell and he didn't fall off the grind but it did hurt.

Teacher: Laughs. Now is Dr. Seuss and Sonic in a game together?

Hm...no. I just made it up.

Teacher: That's a good imagination. (Still laughing) Did it knock his hat off?

Yeah.

Teacher: Did his hat go POOF!?

Yeah.

Teacher: What about Thing 1 and Thing 2? What would happen if they farted?

Then...Sonic and Werersonic farted, they ????(inaudible)

Teacher: Laughs. Pause. Is there more?

No.

(Evan, May 28, 2009)

Relistening to many of Evan's Sonic stories, the amount of laughing that occurs was pale in comparison to this one. In almost all of our conversations he teaches me about Sonic. They are more informative than humorous. But on this day, his serious Sonic adventures turn into comic relief. Making an adult laugh was perhaps, one of the more meaningful experiences that Evan has during our five months of conversation. This is the joy.

Sadly, there is also pain. I long to continue. I want to hear more...laugh more...listen to his voice more. But when the dialogue becomes inaudible as Evan tells me what happens when Sonic and Werersonic fart, I drop the ball. I don't hear his words. Is the noise in the room too loud? Is he looking in another direction? Am I still imagining Dr. Seuss in his striped hat flying up to the sky with a cloud of green gas under him? Instead of a response that could have elongated the blending of Dr. Seuss' book world and the video game world, I laugh perhaps because that was the only response I can give. I now know that I had dropped the ball. The dialogue comes to a screeching halt. It is not the tape. It is not the noise. It is a circumstance of miscommunication. I miss the communication.

Smooshed blueberry pie. Recalled as one of her favorite journal entries, Jennifer's blueberry pie excursion opens the space for her to "get to tell [her] imagination" (June 8, 2009). She and her friends seesaw their way to fun before jumping in a blueberry pie. What is it about *this* journal that emerged as a valued

example of her lifestory? Is it that her friends, the same children she struggles to get along with in class, play with her unconditionally? Or was it that she was able to control the outcome of her adventure? What is it in the exchange that brought deeper meaning to her story? Her favorite joy is telling this story.

Reinterpreting the story, I feel guilt. Do I unintentionally guide her toward my interests through my questioning by giving her three different pies to choose from? Do I change the course of the conversation simply by asking her to elaborate on her image and the word ‘pie’? Is her path different than the one I choose to take? Is that slight pause after my question where her thoughts are deciding whether to take her path or answer the teacher’s question? In this same dialogue, the middle of the conversation is not captured due to technological difficulties. The reader is left to make his/her own judgment about how the children get out of the blueberry pie. I drop the ball again.

“In caring we risk guilt, either through accidents while caring is sustained or through the lapse of caring. In the former case, nothing can undo what has been done. Atonement is not required, because forgiveness was freely given at the outset” (Noddings, 2003, p. 39). And while *she* may not interpret our conversation as having had the ball drop, I do. Fortunately, her indication that it is her favorite is perhaps her forgiveness for my error. Jennifer is left with a story that is “smooshed” into her heart as an exemplary story using her imagination.

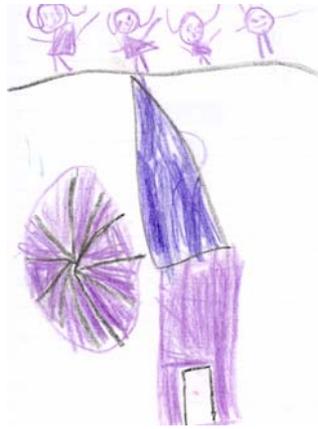


Figure 51. Smooshed blueberry pie (Jennifer, May 19, 2009).

Me and [Katie] and [Kim] and [Nicholas]...

Teacher: What were you doing?

We were playing on the heesaw and then it turned into a house. And the heesaw broke.

Teacher: The heesaw or the seesaw?

The seesaw and then the people fell off and then the pie came.

Teacher: What did the pie do?

We ordered pie.

Teacher: A pizza pie or a blueberry pie or a grape pie?

A blueberry pie.

Teacher: A blueberry pie. Did you fall in the blueberry pie?

Yes. And we ate it.

Teacher: You ate your way out?

We licked our faces when...

Teacher: I see you turned purple after eating the purple pie.

Tape cut off. Got new tape.

And then we smooshed the cake after we went into the house. Then the shark turned black. It was blue that time. That's it.

(Jennifer, May 19, 2009)

As a teacher, self-reflection during this study is kept in my personal journal.

There are several more instances in which I drop the ball with my children. Nicholas' entries, especially, uncover how I may not have listened well enough, even though he opens his heart and lets his being be seen. What else could I have done for him to find a happy voice during our time together? But van Manen (2003) reminds me that "Obviously it is not possible to act always and consistently in a pedagogical manner with children and there is no point paining oneself with blame" (p. 68). I enter the

clearing, merge horizons, but must continue to move along the path to uncover and learn more about myself, knowing that I “can neither repeat [my] past nor leave it behind (Auden, W.H., *The Dyer’s Hand*, Retrieved July 13, 2008 from <http://www.quotegarden.com/history.html>)?

Where Did the Ball Go?

Their stories re-call me to listen. This calling, this “bringing into action or discussion...[to] consider as being” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, p. 118), summons me to re-turn to their stories for further understanding of what happens in the space between us. Months after they have been uttered, I turn back because they call again. Whose stories will call “in a loud or distinct voice” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1961, p. 118)? And whose won’t?

What happens in that space while the words go from the speaker to the listener? The dialogue must be heard, must be kept in play, so that I (or they) can receive the message. What happens when the message is altered somewhere in the space that lies between us? What meaning is made by the speaker? What meaning is made by the listener?

Batman is still alive. Ball dropping and pauses abound in Alex’s stories of Batman, dinosaurs, and spacemen. His soft spoken voice requires extra effort to immerse oneself in the dialogue. The noise in the room is sometimes too loud to hear him clearly. Attempts to intensely listen are ongoing. But when the noise is too loud, I must stop the interaction, and put the conversation on hold. A loud knock on the table or “Excuse me, I can’t hear Alex” challenges the talking. Now a silent room, I can better hear Alex. But to have kindergartners silent, unvoiced, during a time when they

are to voice themselves creates a tension for me. Yet, this is Alex's time. He deserves my undivided attention—full immersion in the conversation.

Stopping the conversation in an effort to attend to Alex better interrupts his thoughts. What does it take for Alex to regain his momentum? Where is the ball during this unexpected stop? His ideas twirl in the air waiting for one of us to catch them. Does he recognize that his idea is not being heard and so retells it, or does he wait for me to respond? Sometimes I reiterate in question format what I thought I heard to acknowledge his ideas, asking perhaps for forgiveness for our interruption.

There were a few occasions in which Alex shared his innermost thoughts with me, despite the interruptions. In my interpretation of these occasions, what is meaningful here for Alex is his ability to express his desire to intermingle fantasy with reality—Batman with Dad. He has a deep connection with his father, experiencing tearful separation anxiety whenever he needs to leave him. He and his father spend many hours roughhousing, reading, and going places. He values this time. In class, Alex struggles with academics and has begun to verbalize how he can't do the activity. He realizes that he does not read and complete math problems like the other children. So, perhaps by pretending to be a superhero with powers that can bring people back to life if needed, Alex is substituting high self-esteem and confidence for those that he lacks in completing classroom activities, while also remaining close to his father's supportive embrace.



I M A B I O M

Figure 52. Batman and Dad keep me safe (Alex, February 24, 2009).

Batman. [Interrupted] This is Batman. That was my Dad.

Teacher: Your dad?

Yeah. And then my dad said. [Paused for noise. Teacher stated that it was too loud in classroom to be able to hear Alex.]. And then I was trying to shoot my dad but he said no.

Teacher: You were what your dad?

I was trying to shoot my dad.

Teacher: You were trying to shoot your dad?

Yeah. But he said no.

Teacher: Well, that's a good idea.

And then I dropped the gun and then and then my dad got powers. The sun stung me. And then I was still alive.

Teacher: The sun stung you and you were still alive?

Nods.

Teacher: Whatever happened to Dad?

Um. I shoot all the powers.

Teacher: You shot Dad's powers?

Uh-huh and then he shot me and then I shot him and then he was [inaudible].

Teacher: He was dead? That is a sad thing. Are you Batman?

Nods yes. Pause.

Teacher: So Dad must have been a bad guy?

Nods yes. Pause.

Teacher: Well that's not fun. Pause. Anything else to your story?

Nods no.

(Alex, February 24, 2009)

What is unfortunate in relooking through his binder is that I find several stories left untold. Whether he didn't want his voice heard, or he himself understood that *his* self-expression of stories were not as clear and audible as the other children he listened to, Alex did not come to record and share illustrated conversations with me each time. These interactions, while necessary for this study, are not to be forced upon the child. If a child chooses not to tell his/her story, it is accepted. What was it about the experience that Alex did not wish to pursue? Why am I left with a feeling that I did not help keep his voice alive? How did he come to feel not a part of the experience?

What did you say? James was another child who had great ideas, but I remain unsure if I passed the ball as well as I should have due to the misunderstanding of his speech production. At the start of the year, I listened carefully to the sounds James uttered. What was that word? How does my not understanding a word alter the meaning of our interaction?

In many conversations, I had to stop James' story and reiterate what I thought he had said. What meaning did he make of this? Did he think I was not listening close enough? There were times he would sigh or glance at me with frustration. The conversation was left hanging until I could understand what was being said. I needed confirmation of what I heard so that I could make meaning of the story. What does this do to a child's imagination? For me, it's like a commercial interruption during my soap opera. Why must the media insert a dialogue that doesn't merge with the dialogue I am currently having? It *is* frustrating. I acknowledge James' reaction.

In order to listen, I had to perceive the words and respond to them after meaning had been made. There was a breakdown in the communication linkages. Had I not tried to make meaning by interrupting, would I be not listening again? With or without the break, would he associate illustrated conversations with a time where he is not valued for who he is? That struggle pervaded the interaction many times. I would catch myself prefacing the conversation with “Talk slow because I am old and I don’t hear as well as I used to” or “Slow down because last time the tape didn’t pick up your voice very well.” Without correctly hearing the words, meaning was difficult to make in the context of the story. I would be busy decoding the words instead of making meaning. “You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time” (Peck, 1978, p. 125). I learned to listen more carefully and by May 2009, conversations with James were better understood and less broken up. The ball stayed in motion.



S was
sonic and the
would upsid down.

Figure 53. James enters the world of wrestling (February 24, 2009).

(This is picked up in the middle of the conversation)

He didn't know but there was a evil guy on top of the world who's spinning it.

Teacher: There's an evil guy on top of the world who was spinning the world?

Yeah.

Teacher: Who would that be?

Uh...[Michael].

Teacher: [Michael] was the evil guy on top of the world. And then what happened?

And then [Michael] jumped over. [Michael] jumped down.

Teacher: [Michael] jumped down?

And [Michael] almost died.

Teacher: [Michael] almost died but he didn't? He jumped off the top of the earth.

And then Wario caught him

Noise interruption...

and then Wario said come to meet him in the video game.

Teacher: He what?

Wario said come here with the video game.

Teacher: Who said come here with the video game?

Wario.

Teacher: Who?

Wario.

Teacher: Who's wawio?

I don't know.

Teacher: Warrior?

No, wawio.

Teacher: Wawio?

(Discussion about the name "wawio" ensues with other children as teacher tries to get the correct pronunciation for this name)

Teacher: Does it have a 'b' in it?

No.

Teacher: Wawio? W..w...w..w

Another child tries to tell me wario with an /r/.

Teacher: So Wario does what?

(James, February 24, 2009)

Another Round

Silence is not a space which has been cleanly emptied of language, but is one that is rich and fertile in its openness to the possibilities of language—possibilities which may be unheard of, which may be unknown until they germinate in the space a listening silence creates. (Mosher, 2001, p. 366)

Minimizing the interruptions, making meaning of the silences—the pauses and inflections, and exploring the context in which illustrated conversations occur has revealed interpretations of the meaning of illustrated conversations for my kindergartners. Truly listening to young children is a reflective experience that illuminates the voices and languages of young children. Had I relied solely on my comments on the journal entries as I have done in years past, I would not be able to come to a deeper, more meaningful understanding of each child’s experience. I would not have been able to recall the details of each engagement. For this study, incorporating a multisensory approach, I capture their voices in my mind, on a tape recorder, and on paper. Relistening to their voices, I circle closer to *Erlebnis*, the concept of lived experience. Listening is a “complex web of interactions, continually moving from the micro to the macro level (Clark et al., 2005, p. 38), calling me to question the meaning of my interpretations of illustrated conversations. What do the voices captured on tape, the transcribed text, and the initial personal dialogue mean to uncover the lived experience of illustrated conversations? How do the tape recordings and the transcribed stories come together to uncover the lived experience of illustrated conversations with kindergartners?

Chapter Six examines how the illustrations and written text provide another avenue for meaning making during the journey of illustrated conversations. How do their drawings come to life illuminating action, thought, and how they view the world? What does the text that they have written create for them to understand their own story?

CHAPTER SIX: CANVASSING THE WORLD

The world is but a canvas to our imaginations. –Henry David Thoreau

Scrolling From Here to Here

Children live and relive the world on paper through their writing and their illustrations. The canvas on which they express themselves is the “basis for creative work” (*Wiktionary.org*, Retrieved July 3, 2009). These canvases immerse children in the possibility of experiences. They illustrate their engagement with others in their environment. They illuminate the colors of wonder. The canvas can be action packed with excitement or calming with serious emotion. Canvasses can reveal how they dwell and become in the world. In this chapter, I explore how my kindergartners’ drawings and written thoughts help uncover the lived experience of illustrated conversations. What do their illustrations and writing, what Calkins (1994) refers to as “rehearsals” (p. 23), mean as they engage in illustrated conversations?

Calkins (1994) explains that rehearsals are “a way of living...[in which] writers see potential stories and poems and essays everywhere and gather them in entries and dotted notes” (p. 23). My kindergartners gather glimpses of their lives beginning with an idea, a tiny seed, they plant on paper. The seed grows and meaning erupts. Children experience life and gather ideas to share every moment of every day. But what are they *rehearsing* for? Life is not a rehearsal. There is no final product—no big performance after a lifetime of practice. Life is the easel with the roll of paper, a continuous illustration of experience. Their scrolling work is their life. My children’s engagement on paper is a canvassing of life’s being in place a moment at a time. They are not trying to *get* to a special place; they are truthfully already there,

journeying within from place to place in the images they portray with color, lines, and definition. They define it and paint it today, and tomorrow they paint yet another definition. The work on their paper is their life on paper, their truth on paper.

There are no right or wrong answers in the arts when we reflect upon “the artistic product through which an artist has made some sense of the world and through which an audience makes its own new sense” (Davis, 2008, p. 52). My children flatten their vivid three-dimensional world onto the two dimensional page, trying to organize and redefine their images. “Of the things he knows, he draws only those that have impressed him not only mentally but also emotionally” (Di Leo, 1970, p. 102). How do I show how I killed the aliens? Should I draw me running lots of times? Should I just draw one scene or put them all on the page? To illustrate their own wonderings, they will “use ideas in creative ways when they are in environments that are nurturing and when all ideas are respected” (Althouse, et al., 2003. p. 46). I am the audience interpreting their images as I view my children’s sense of the world engraved on their tangible journal ‘product.’

Illustrated conversations are themselves a journey; these written pieces are the ground we walk on. Their voices are the air they breathe, smell, and hear along the way. The pauses and interruptions are the roots and rocks that block the path, causing us to go around, step over, but nevertheless an essential part of our path. The illustrations of their lives are the images that we use to document our journey of the past, the present, and the future. Our journey “is not simply from here to there but from here to here to here, or more precisely from the here-in-view-of-there to the there-reached-from-here” (Casey, 1993, pp. 278-279). We have journeyed with their

transcribed stories. We have journeyed with the pauses and interruptions. We continue on the path uncovering meaning within their illustrations and text while remaining in place on the journey of illustrated conversation itself, wondering about the interplay of the voices, the pauses, the interruptions, the pictures, and the written text. .

A Picture Paints a Thousand Words

My kindergartners love to draw pictures of friends, family members, favorite places, imaginary worlds, and silly characters on their canvas. They are filled with color, line, thoughts, actions, emotions, and experiences. Their drawings describe what words, both spoken and written, can't. The canvas connects the artist to their world, capturing "their feelings and experiences in extremely interesting and authentic ways" (Calkins, 1994, p. 22). The authenticity of the experience is to look inward at each entry to see the outward meaning made of the experience. What does the illustration tell me about the text? What does the text tell me about the illustration? How do the colors, lines, and order convey meaning about the artist and their story?

Motivated to Draw

Dressed in my grandmother's housedress, big elephant slippers, shower cap, and apron, I enter the classroom of child care professionals. They stare. They wonder. They laugh. They question. What *is* she doing now? "I am Mrs. Wishy-washy and I have a farm...." I tell the story of how my pig, my duck, and my cow play in the mud and I have to give them baths all the time (Wright Group, 1990). My appearance grabs their attention. They are focused. In my dressing up, I am focused. Could they

have understood the lesson on motivators just as well if I had walked in wearing my skirt, blouse, dress shoes, and hair in a bun? What is it about my appearance that draws them to listen more intensely?

My children create warm-up motivators every time they step into their writing. A dash of red here...a house there...a yellow sun in the sky...an alien with a big eyeball. Their drawings and text are their springboards for ideas, “affording them space to work out their ideas and stories through illustration...as [they] add more details and gain confidence in their work” (Thompson, 2005, p. 24). “Okay, what is your story about today?” Eyes return to their papers. A gaze to their text...over to their illustration...and back to their text...now they are ready. Our eyes meet; they are ready to journey with me. Reading their words, they enter slowly. These words, these conversation starters, create the opening for our dialogue. Then, as if the flood gate is released, their ideas flow. And then...and then... and then... Returning to their dashes of red, houses, suns, and aliens, they complete their stories. Like graphic organizers, drawing sets the stage for the story. A brief pause, a glance to another part of the picture, and off again...and then...and then...and then.

Their drawings, unlike their text, are frames of reference. Zeroing in on a part of the picture, they can pick up where they left off if their telling is interrupted. They see a small dash, recall why it’s there, and embellish their story with the dash. If I inquire about an item that is not discussed in the story, they pause, gather their ideas, and continue, “Oh, yeah! That’s” What is it about that item they forgot? Is it a background object there for aesthetic purposes? Could it be that it was the first idea, but as the drawing unfolded, more thoughts spilled out and covered over the original

story? The drawings could be scenes of stories layered on top of one another thrusting ideas forward, like the “multiple motivations [that] move people into lifelong learning” (Greene, 1995, p. 64).

“Young children’s drawings offer a freshness, boldness, and sense of purpose which we as adults might struggle to emulate” (Coates & Coates, 2006, p. 221). Like Harold and his purple crayon (Johnson, 1955), children draw their worlds on paper. With each new line, curve, swirl, splash of color, their life springs forth. The richness of these drawings has “much to teach us if we care to learn” (Walker, 2007, p. 3). What will Peter’s one color drawing reveal about how he engages with the world? What do all the people with no faces in Nicholas’ illustration mean?

Symbolic Writings

While their illustrations are filled with images of themselves, their friends, imaginary spaces, and recollections of places they have been before, the text that accompanies the drawing follows what many researchers have identified as stages or continuums (Baghban, 2007; Calkins, 1994; Shagoury, 2009; Thompson, 2005). Analysis of my kindergartners’ writing skills is not the focus of this study, yet, the ‘data’ contained within their journals would be ample. Many begin with strings of letters and progress to a mix of conventional and invented spellings with punctuation. Some progress slower than others, and I make mental notes: *I need to work with Brian on spacing. I need to have Becky practice writing her b’s and d’s. Don’t forget to work on letter-sound correspondence with Jorge.* These mental notes work their way into my reading instruction plan book. But for illustrated conversations, what is more important is how the words that are on the page help to reveal the meaning of

the dialogue we share. Some children recognize their growth from one to two word entries, disconnected from our dialogued stories into full page stories that correspond to their voices. “I filled the whole page, Mrs. Dean!” Others concentrate more on putting their thoughts on paper. “I put my whole story on the page!” Does their progression alter the images they construct in their drawings? Do the pictures and text work in harmony to uncover the meaning of the story being told? How does our interaction change when they become confident, proficient writers?

The symbol-filled pages of my kindergartners’ journals follow Vygotsky’s (1978) conclusion that “The difference in play activity between three-year-olds and six-year-olds is not in the perception of symbols but in the mode in which various forms of representation are used...it indicates that symbolic representation in play is essentially a particular form of speech at an earlier stage, one which leads directly to written language” (p. 111). For Alex and Jorge, their rudimentary strings of letters with more detailed drawings represent an earlier form of symbolic play on paper. They rely more on speech and illustration rather than text to convey meaning during conversation. Peter and Katie, whose written texts are accompanied by minimally detailed pictures, have come to use the written language more comfortably as the springboard for conversation. Reliance on illustrations fades as their confidence as writers increases.



Figure 54. Alex, February 24, 2009.

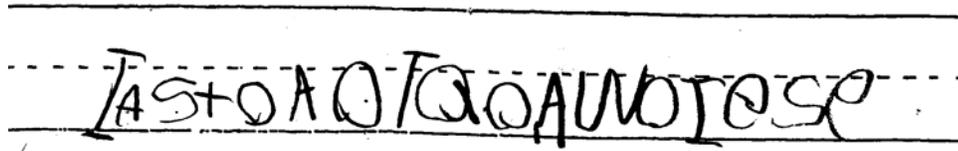


Figure 55. Jorge, May 5, 2009.

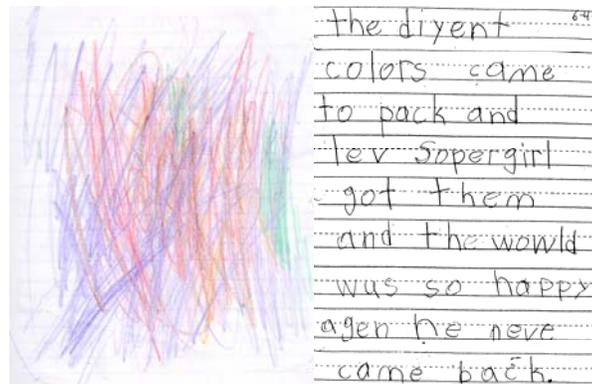


Figure 56. Katie, June 4, 2009.

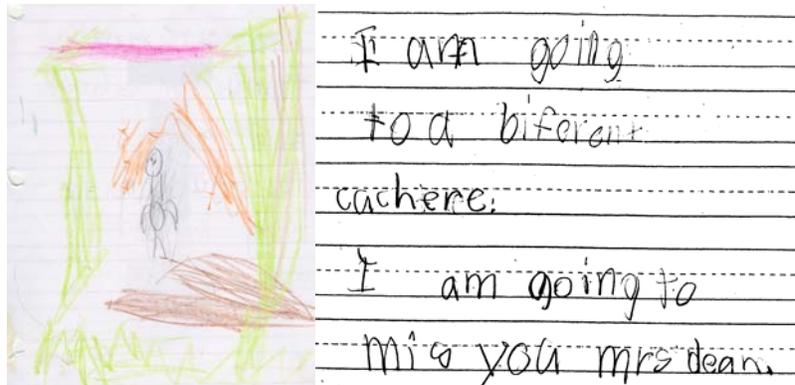


Figure 57. Peter, May 19, 2009.

Canvassing the Emotional Self

Working their way through separation anxiety, not having any friends, and being worried about learning how to read and do math during the first half of the year, students reveal far more about their personal emotions the second half of the year after having developed a sense of trust and safety. No longer are they worried about how I will react; rather, they long for someone to talk to about their emotions. Their illustrations and text capture their feelings of joy, happiness, anger, and fear. Understanding the perspective of the situations in which they dwell, I become a carer able to meet their needs in emotional times.

Smile and the world smiles with you. Have you ever known someone who no matter how bad your day gets, can cheer you up simply with their being there? Is it their smile? The spark that is ever present? They engage with you in a way that takes your mind off everything negative. They hold the keys to the black hole of sadness. They're the vacuum that sucks out all your negative vibes, opens the black hole, and swoosh...gone...forever (well at least as long as they are near). Ashley is like that. Her smile is contagious. She bubbles over with excitement in everything she does. Carpe Diem Ashley! Ashley's stories emulate her aura of joy. Her pictures erupt like

Old Faithful. Reds, oranges, purples, and greens dance in a joyous outing to Montgomery Mall to buy dolls. Bright and cheery buildings, rainbows fill the skies, happiness abounds with family. Her love for her family is so engrained in her soul that the emotion that radiates when she experiences a momentary separation anxiety attack from family, a momentary place panic, is not sadness but love. She wants so much to remain in place with them. “My big bruthr,’ ‘baybey bruther,’ and Dad go to “Mugrure Molls’ to buy a pink dolls together. Rays of comfort shine when she reads her text and connects with her trip with her family. The engagement is “a means to express the experience of being alive,” re-enriching the family outing as she relives it within our conversation (Iorio, 2008, p. 299). Does she re-place herself in the van as she drove there? Does she find herself in that momentary place when she picked out her pink doll? How are the emotions she experiences in the telling like those she experienced as lived?

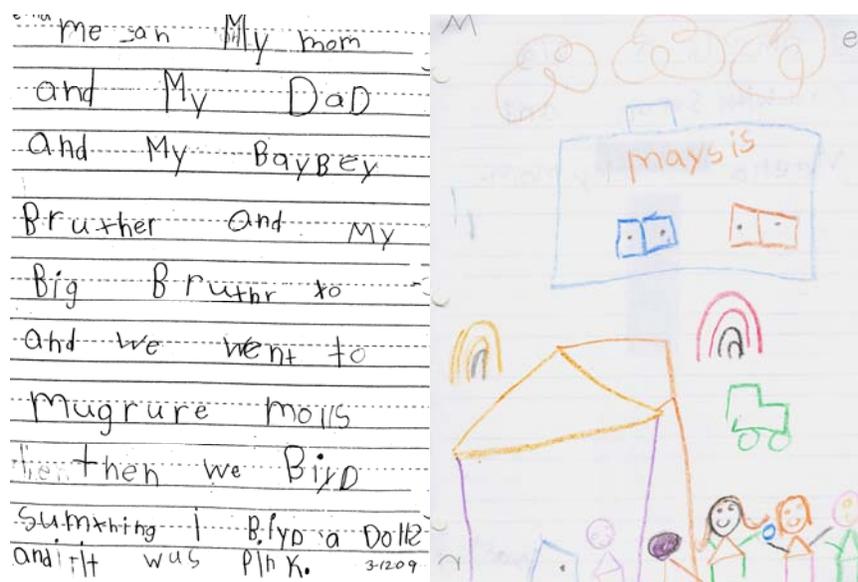


Figure 58. Day trips with the family (Ashley, March 12, 2009).

I like it here. “I like ballet so much!” says Becky. Seven small children on a big stage as the curtains open, revealing the performers, polished brown flooring just right for tiptoes and twirls, girls costumed in orange wearing matching ribbons in their hair, two boys in black strategically placed between the girls creating a pattern of pirouetting splashes of color, stars twinkling above casting rays of happiness to all in attendance, and Becky is dancing with delight as mom and dad are at her ballet recital. Gazing at her picture, I feel the pride her parents do watching their little girl performing, remembering her steps after many long rehearsals, and her feeling confident enough to do it. You can almost see the smiles on mom and dad’s faces gazing up at their daughter twirling and sashaying under the lighted stars.

Becky captures her thoughts so appropriately on the page engaging the reader in her ‘ballae’ with mom and dad in the audience. “My mom is here” is a constant in her life; mom is acknowledged first. She is the one who took her to ballet each week. She is the one who made sure she had all she needed. She is ever present. “My dad is here to,” not only reveals that he is at the performance but also that he is here—here in Maryland, not Canada, ready and able to attend more of her performances and participate in more daddy-daughter outings.

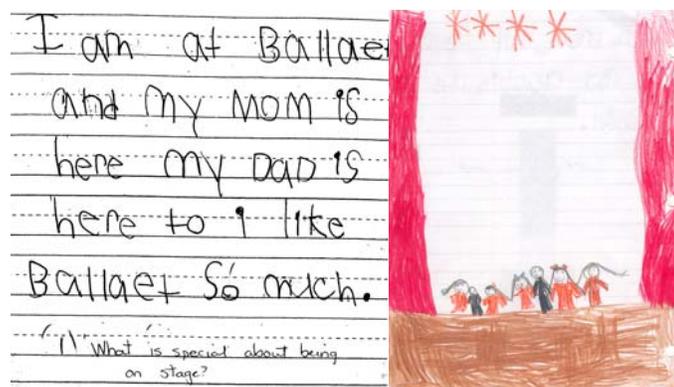


Figure 59. Becky’s dancing loves (March 19, 2009).

Don't worry, be happy. Children experience anxiety and stress just like adults. They come to my classroom crying because they didn't have breakfast. Or they tell me about how they had to have broccoli for dinner and they didn't like it but they had to eat it. Or a friend told them they weren't their friend anymore. These little blips in the radar of life are, for young children, big blips. The stresses in children's lives affect how they interact with the world. Similar to Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the relationships that a child forms to help support and resolve conflicts are critical in how the child dwells in the world (Morrison, 2007, pp. 128-130). If this "mesosystem" does not create stable relationships for children to rely on, the child's meaning of their being would be ultimately affected. Illustrated conversations are part of this system that opens the space that gives children the support and comfort they need to grow and reflect upon their emotions.

Samantha doesn't "like tornadoe's." The sun is scattered. The clouds are gray. Color jumps all around on the page. Something is in disarray in her mind. What swirls within the pinks, oranges, blues, and purples in the center? "This is A storm. It is a bad storm. It is calld a tornadoe. I don't like tornadoe's." This is anxiety producing for her. She punctuates her distaste for these storm events with darkened periods confirming her feelings. Her illustration and text open the door in her mesosystem, inviting discussion about her worries. Her voice reiterates her emotion as we talk through the tornado, emerging safely on the other side. It does not sweep her away. It passes with little damage, this time. We huddled together riding out the storm connected by our words of comfort.



Figure 60. Samantha and the tornado come face to face (May 21, 2009).

We all have our moments. The counselor at our school makes regular visits to kindergarten. The class meetings, broken into two groups of boys and girls, address issues that have encroached upon our dwelling together in harmony. Forgetting to use the magic formula to resolve conflicts, bullying, teasing, difficulties interacting with friends, and worries are explored to help guide the children toward healthy social-emotional development. How do children manipulate their feelings within the space we call school? Does this space support open spaces for listening and respect? In the fast paced, don't stop instruction world of education, we must ask ourselves if we teach young children to manage their emotions well. Do we teach them how to handle the pressures of life? I've heard the phrase "Let it go" used as a strategy for organizing emotions. How does a six year old organize feelings like a light switch, able to be turned off and on with the flick of a wrist? The idea of managing one's emotions needs to be established through trust, dialogue, and modeling. I teach my children that talking about their concerns helps them uncover why they feel that way in the first place. It gives them the platform they need to explore solutions and strategies to organize their emotions. Illustrated conversations provide yet another

place for children to confront their emotions, talk about them, and reflect upon solutions in case they arise again.

Someone is very angry in William's illustration on April 14, 2009. The "v" eyebrows, the teeth and frown, the arms in the air waving, and the lack of color portray an unhappy being. This character stands as tall as the house. Behind the first person, stands another neutral being, no real smile but no frown either. The house is partly colored, the clouds and sky are scribbled purple, and the moon a bright yellow but hidden behind the purple markings. Brown dirt creates the foundation for this event. Whatever the problem, it is big. Immediately, I know someone needs time and space to talk about his lifework.

"My bad. And mom my mom was lafinoatme." Connecting the picture and the words, meaning was made without any dialogue. I put the pieces together. William is the angry being. Mom stands behind watching. They are at home on this dark day William vividly recalls. I created the foundation for the story in my mind using his springboard to help me. Confirmation of this was voiced in conversation. According to William, this happened when he was little. He was wearing an outfit that was too small for him, but mom thought it looked cute. He didn't want to be 'cute'; he wanted to be big. His anger took over, taking awhile to calm down. For William, his emotions within extended outward into his writing. What would it have been like for William if these emotions were not aired? Would they remain bottled up, eating away at his being, forever tainting his view of being 'cute' versus being a 'big boy'? Was this really what was bothering him—this cuteness?

Finding meaning in just the text and drawing does not get behind the experience. His perception of his mother's laughing *at* him was hurtful as he has begun to emerge as a confident individual, no longer in preschool but a reading kindergartner preparing for first grade. She on the other hand, laughed not at him but perhaps as a sign of days gone by. I know as a mother of two, I long to be back in the moment with my son in his little vest and tie posing for his picture, and my daughter bundled in her warm pink winter sack with only her one finger sticking out. They *were* cute, as William I'm sure was in his little outfit. William's definition of cute is associated with being little—immature and babyish. Adult mother's definitions return us to their littleness with fond memories of innocence and safety—where we could protect them and cuddle them.

William's illustration and story do not reveal that his mom was out of town in Oregon at the time of this entry and during the next three conversations. Mom was a target of anger. In the next journal entry I was loved as his girlfriend, and then following that, Spongebob went to Oregon to get Patrick and take him back to Bikini Bottom. He transferred his emotions of missing his mom into anger for her, displaced his love to me perhaps because I didn't leave for Oregon, and then finally he takes matters into his own hands and gets mom back from Oregon to the comfort of her Bikini Bottom. William's memory of the event resulted in "*a new method of uniting elements of past experience with the present*" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 36). Could he be combining his mother's presence in the past with her present absence? Perhaps he recalled a memory with his mother that was as hurtful then as her leaving for Oregon is today.



my bet. and mom
my mom was
lafinoat me

Figure 61. William's sadness spills forth (April 14, 2009).

Canvassing Friends

Friends, friends, 1, 2, 3
All my friends are here with me.
(Children's song lyrics, author unknown)

“Children want to be acknowledged by their friends. They strive for social connections and validation of their places in the school neighborhood” (Thompson, 2005, p. 30). Evan, Michael, Jeffrey, and James; Samantha and Becky; Ashley, Katie, and Terry; Peter, Jorge, Alex, and Charles; Margery and Kim; Jennifer and Carrie; Sammy and Nicholas, Brian and William. These partners and small groups find comfort and safety in one another's presence. Friends, from the Old English *freo*, meaning “free, to love” show affection freely through care and joy, laughter, and smiles. They are not weighed down with the adult meanings of ‘love’—their love is a

caring “free of cost” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved July 6, 2009). Gentle breezes of sharing voices, light laughter, and whispering care fill our room. “If that world is lived by those who experience friendship with one another, whose mode of relationship is out in the open and grounded in mutual regard, more and more people will find pleasure in looking differently at the shared world, varying perspectives while feeling their own ultimate understanding enlarged” (Greene, 1995, p. 69).

When sitting next to friends, often they include one another in their stories. They learn to write their name and create close representations. What is it like to see and hear your name in someone else’s story? You are acknowledged. You are cared for. You must have been a carer to reciprocally be cared for by others. How do kindergartners express their relationships with friends during illustrated conversations? What is revealed about the nature of the interaction?

‘Boy’friends and ‘girl’friends. My girls are often social butterflies. They flit around the room engaging in dialogue, sharing secrets, and playing in housekeeping together. They make known their connectedness, and they also let it be seen and heard when one isn’t another’s friend anymore (temporarily, of course). My boys are less apparent. They hang out together at the computer, build airplanes with legos, and race cars across the floor. When one is absent, another takes his place—or so it seems.

Gender differences have been researched from various positions along the nurture/nature continuum. Gender has been defined by biological influences which define ‘male’ and ‘female’ because of the physical attributes one possesses. Through a psychoanalytic lens, “Freud maintained that children learn to become male or

female by identifying with, imitating and internalizing the values of the parent of the same sex” (Maynard, 2002, p. 26). And via a social learning theory, gender “differences are learned through the individual’s interaction with his or her ‘environment’” (Maynard, 2002, p. 27). How young children construct their gender identity remains beyond the scope of this study. What does present itself as meaningful during illustrated conversations is how my children’s voices mirror what research illustrates about how boys approach writing and how girls connect more with expressive arts.

Popular culture including Barbie dolls, action figures, video games, and television, all have a profound effect on how children dwell in the world. Commercialism reigns in our young children’s minds as a part of their “inherent and structural properties of society...[about which] children learn to position themselves correctly as male or female: what are deemed to be appropriate, normal, and possible ways of thinking, feeling, behaving” (Maynard, 2002, p. 31). Through illustrated conversations, my children explore the language that is associated with ‘women’s language’ and ‘men’s language’. My girls talk about going shopping, picking flowers, and dressing up like princesses. For Margery, Becky, Samantha, and Kim, “friendship has a lot to do with telling who they are in a *real*, *truthful*, or *faithful* manner rather than what they are capable of doing” (Maynard, 2002, p. 130). But they also cross into ‘boy worlds’ without the stigma of ‘being a boy’ or ‘that’s not allowed’. These lines have been blurred for my girls. Katie is Supergirl all year remaining connected to her sisters and princesses while saving the world. Ashley visits haunted houses alone and finds her way out without being saved by a male figure. “This exemplifies

how girls...sometimes try to join the male discourse or break through the male enclosure” (Chen, 2009, p. 171). Could this boundary crossing exist because of my own crossing boundaries in the stories I tell? Do the girls come to realize that they can do and become anything when I tell them about gutting my bathroom and retiling it independently, or when I explain how I used a chainsaw to cut down a tree that was dying in my yard? Do they feel secure in crossing gender boundaries because their school environment supports it?

My boys, though, do not cross into ‘girl’ worlds. They don’t become princesses, go shopping with family, or pick flowers from a garden. Their conversations about superheros and battles remain in the “arena for negotiating and maintaining status” that “include an assertive, central character and, compared with girls’ stories, a stronger sense of place and spatial awareness” (Maynard, 2002, pp. 33-39). James, Peter, and William build up friendships as they engage in active scenarios in which they “do something together or ‘share’ what they can ‘do’ with their friends” on paper” (Chen, 2009, p. 130). Their stories illustrate constant action where “fantasy and flight are synonymous. Running and leaping are what they like best, and nothing else makes them feel more distinctly the opposite of the girls” (Paley, 1984, p. 21).

Other than their mothers, the boys wrote few entries that included ‘girl’ friends. The few entries in which Kim became a character in a Sonic story evolved from her engagement with these same boys during recess and free choice. She was the one girl who played with the boys and engaged in cars and block building activities on a regular basis. I wonder why it is acceptable for her to cross into the boy

world taking on a 'boy role' while the reverse would not be acceptable? While Nicholas engaged in dramatic play with the girls, his role was tied to 'being the dad.' He did not cross the gender boundary. Even with stories of my husband who cleans the house and makes dinner, the boys did not venture to explore the reverse gender roles. "In a way, the boys are caught up in their own hegemonic male discourses while the girls seem to be flexible and have more choices to explore different ways of doing gender" (Chen, 2009, p. 172).

Exploring gender identity is an area of reflection that will propel me into further reorganizing and adjusting my being with my children. Illustrated conversations will provide the stage for examining how children define themselves and how I can better invite border crossing for boys and girls, while simultaneously accepting that "There are tensions between disrupting children's interests in the name of equity practices and recognizing the nature of role-play in children's early development" (Rogers & Evans, 2008, p. 109). Providing space for them as authors telling their own stories and voicing all the possibilities and languages of life, illustrated conversation contains "some sort of a magical power that seems to make the creative part of the self actualize in reality" (Maynard, 2002, p. 114). Our dialogue releases the meaningful power of identity and gender definition and redefinition for my children. It is important to "encourage boys to experiment with different versions of masculinity...[while] equally...offering girls alternative femininity scripts...[after I] identify the dominant modes of masculinity and femininity operating within [my] environment" (Rogers & Evans, 2008, p. 109). Meanwhile, I continue to ask myself "how this meaning is made possible because of

gender, race, class, and the position of the children and teacher within these structures...[that] fundamentally structures what knowledges we access, what experiences we have and, therefore, what meanings we give to our life” (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 87).

We end up okay, James, a boy who helps define the interactions of many of the boys in the class, is the glue that holds the boys together. James understands the meaning of the word ‘friend,’ how to treat others, how to share, how to talk to one another in conversation, and how to form a deep and lasting relationship with each. While he doesn’t cross gender boundaries, he does not dismiss the possibilities. “Possibility thinking, then, involves a shift from recognition (i.e. ‘what is this?’) to exploration (i.e. ‘what can I/we do with this?’)” (Craft, 2008, p. 95). He explores more than just superheros and fighting. He speaks of friends engaged in activity but always with a ‘happily ever after’ ending, not found in many of the other boys’ entries.

He and Evan share many of the same interests. They both write about Sonic. They both enjoy a challenge in math. They both love to read about science and nature. They both include one another in their stories. While Evan sticks to Sonic stories, James ventures to other experiences. He explores wrestling, rocketships to outerspace, and transporting into movies and video games, all with his friends. Whether they fight evil bad guys or race against Sonic, everyone wins. Everyone comes out okay. No one dies forever and no one is left out.

On March 26, 2009, Evan and Jeffrey join another character, perhaps Sonic because of the spikes coming out of his head, next to a triangular object with yellow lines coming from the bottom. My interpretation would be that the three are traveling

to space in this rocketship. All are smiling. His written text tells me that “Jeffrey M vs Evan and Sonic Came on and they went to spas and They all won.” James includes his two friends in an adventure to space with Sonic. They survive the trip and tie at the finish line. “They just hurt their hand and then they’re okay” (James, March 26, 2009). The detail in his text is developing as he manipulates drawing with detail and writing his thoughts. The “freedom they find in drawing [and writing during illustrated conversations] provides a flexible bridge to the control they need to continue developing their writing abilities” (Baghban, 2007, p. 24).

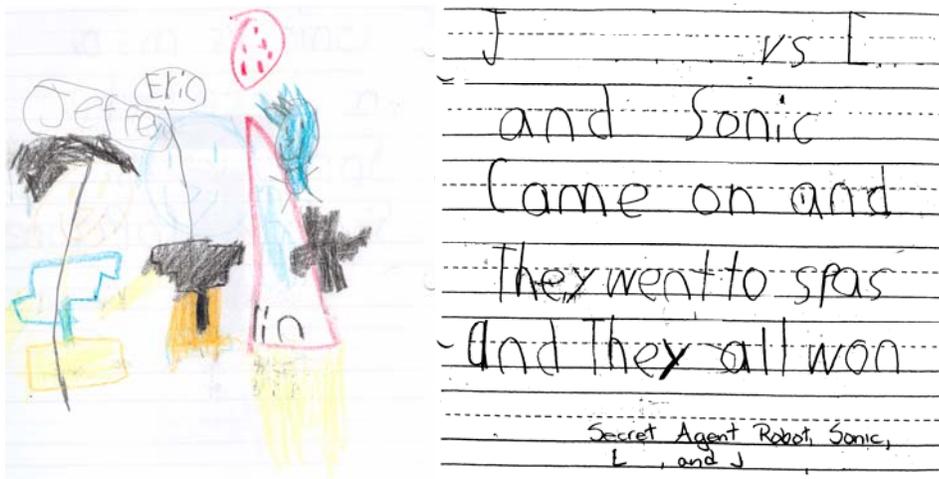


Figure 62. James and his friends go to space (March 26, 2009).

Is my friend here today? Is she here with me physically? Is he here in my thoughts? Is she here in my heart? Where is here? Where are my friends? James begins his day with friends surrounding him. In the hall, on the bus, in the cafeteria at breakfast, in the coatroom. All the children do—or so I thought. In looking at the stories of my children, I came across one journal—just one—that does not have any friends mentioned anywhere. It is not until this very moment, when organizing my thoughts and making meaning of all my children’s lives, that I come to realize how

lonely this one child must be. She comes to me each week to tell her stories. Her appreciation of the earth, the sky, the sun, the butterflies, and her family emerge as central themes. But not friends. Could it be that I didn't pick up on it since she and I are much the same in the topics we choose to write about in our place of thought and reflection? I flip through my own journals and no where is there a mention of a friend. My family is there. My garden blooms are there. My students are there. But no friends. A friend not in the sense of the Old English *freo* which associated friend with "beloved" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved July 6, 2009) but a friend in the sense of someone to spend "joyful" times with that is "free from" the "beloved." Her family is her 'beloved' where she is 'free' to be 'joyous', but is there another, another person that is not related by bloodlines that she connects with and calls her friend?

Still in disbelief, I return to her entries again in search of one—just one—entry focused on a friend from class. One lone girl in green pants with black hair stands under gray clouds (February 12, 2009). Just a smiling sun (March 26, 2009). A young girl standing in the grass (April 16, 2009). A house with one smiling face in the window (May 5, 2009). These illustrations barren of connection with other beings is also apparent in her texts. "I loi at the big hans" (February 9, 2009). "I like me plase" (March 10, 2009). "I love my hos" (April 14, 2009). I am disappointed in myself for not seeing this emptiness earlier. What meaning did she find in kindergarten? Does she walk away from our experience with any memories of friendships?

Are Margery's entries written-as-lived or lived-as-written? Does she write as if the experience has been lived, or does she live out what she has written? Going to

the playground with her cousin that cries a lot is written-as-lived. She relives the experience through dialogue. Her experiences outside of school come to life on paper in school. I consider them written-as-lived. But illustrated conversations can also be accounts of what children would like to be. “I am a clown forever” is a telling of a life of possibility. What could happen if I explore this world on paper? Imagine the possibilities to live out our written dreams! Returning to Margery’s entries and the events I recall her living out in class, I come to the enlightening, and somewhat saddening, conclusion that Margery makes meaning of her life in journals written-as-lived. The meaning is made in her reflections upon her life. Even when she wanted to be a cat, Margery observed the solitary nature of a cat, reflected upon the quietude that accompanies this independence, and compared it to the new noise that persisted to emerge from her new baby brother. The meaning behind her turning into a cat is perhaps her need to find a quiet place to dwell. But what of the lived-as-written for Margery? Does she dream to be something else? Does she dream to write friends into her stories? Where is *this* voice?

Canvassing Family

In our diverse and changing environments, the definition of family is also ever-evolving. What is a family? What do the members bring to one’s understanding of care, safety, and love? Each September, in our Myself and Others social studies unit, we talk about families. Who is in your family? Mom and dad are frequent members, but not always living together. Sometimes brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents arise as members as well. Discussion about how the child fits into the family structure also emerges. I’m the youngest. I’m an only child. I have

an older brother but he lives with my dad. My sister goes to college. The definition of their position in the family relies on another's position. They perceive themselves as being within a group that cares, loves, and provides the necessities in life.

When this revelation occurs, the conversation turns to how other groups can share the same qualities that families share. I tell them that we are a family. They question how our class can be a family—especially when we just met each other. But still I tell them we are a family. We spend time together. We care for each other. We support each other. Is that not what families do?

The time spent with their families outside of school is often an idea that filters through their writing—especially in the first half of the school year. They rely heavily on what they know to be real, what they trust, and what they have experienced the most for five years. Their entries are usually a telling of past events, written-as-lived, as is with Kim. For some, the possibility of living out dreams with family members is lived-as-written. Jennifer often explores the lived-as-written with her mom.

My mom and me. Jennifer's mom is a triangle with a head, two sticks for arms, two sticks for legs, a smiley face, and hair like big 'W's. Sometimes mom is on top of a rainbow. Sometimes mom is standing next to a smaller version of her under a rainbow. Other times the two are near a house. And sometimes they are together in the snow. But always they are full of color. Red hair, pink clouds, purple dresses tantalize the imagination. Where are they today? What will happen with her and mom? On colorful days that precipitate pink, brown, and orange specks, Jennifer and her mom are happy because "Mymom and me and we staye home."

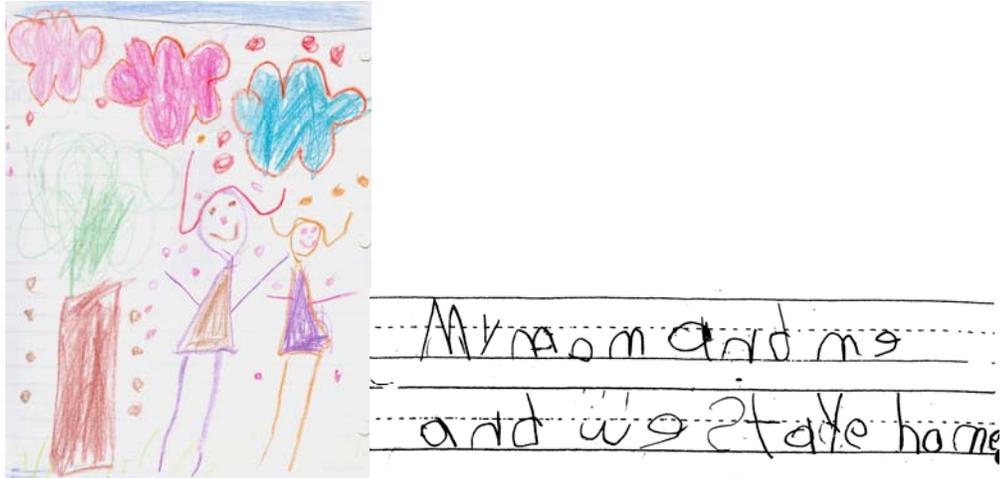


Figure 63. Jennifer spends time with her mom (April 23, 2009).

Captured in a moment in time, the drawings urge you to find out what is next. What will happen to the two girls as they stand on the purple base? “My mom and my dad wet to the pool”—Oh, yes—the pool with your mother. Where is dad in your picture? I wonder...and look...dad has never been committed to paper—just mom. Questions about the story call to me. If I could ask them, whose story would it be then? Hers or mine? I let her tell me.



Figure 64. Family times at the pool. (Jennifer, May 5, 2009)

Meaningfully united. Long pretty dresses, colorful makeup, curly hair, and shoes focus the audience on the image. On a clear blue, sunny day with a possible

pink horizon, three larger females and a smaller less colorful girl use every bit of open space. There is happiness here. The colors brighten the already sunny day. These women are outside enjoying the air. What Kim writes is much like I imagine “today I was wet uat say weth my mom and my entee and and and my lettu sist” *Gardens are pretty!* (Teacher comment). Deciphering young children’s invented spelling and considering that English is Kim’s second language, I come to understand that “today she went outside with my mom and my aunt and my little sister” and from my comment, they must have been enjoying a garden. What is revealed in previous stories with Kim is her mother’s attraction to flowers. With this background knowledge, I understand a great deal of what was voiced. She did go to a garden with her mom, her aunt, and her little sister on a beautiful day to look at the flowers. She loves her family members.

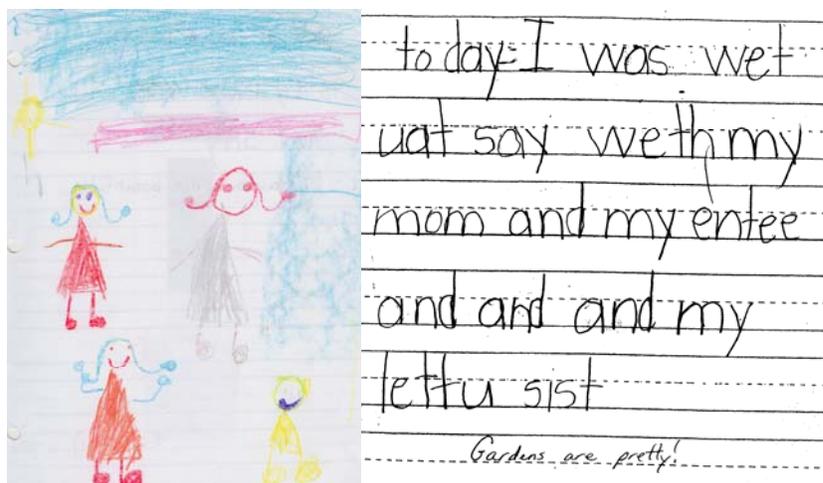


Figure 65. Kim and her mom in the garden (March 24, 2009).

Kim, like Jennifer, has a close attachment to her mother, including her in many conversations. Fast forward on our journey to April 30, 2009, to find a house with two girls standing to the right of it. The roof is red, the clouds are blue, the sun is

yellow, and the people are dressed in coordinated colors with shoes, hair, and facial features. I imagine this is Kim and Mom. She writes, “Today my mom was see a casoaw and my mom yell four me and I say wire and I say it was bifoo.” Her yelling “Wow!” at the sight of the castle to her mom united her text to her illustration. Kim continues to amaze me with her linking drawing to text and to voice. It is not the dirt or the air, but the natural impediments that often block the meaning to come forth. The speed at which she talks and her challenges with the English language slow the meaning making relationship being made.

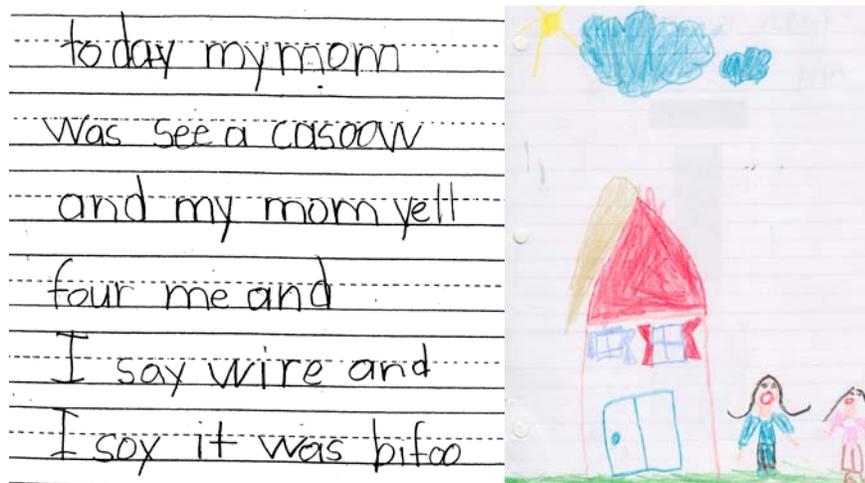


Figure 66. Beautiful castles seen with mom (Kim, April 30, 2009).

Canvassing Action

The visual effects of a movie can make or break the essence of the movie. I recently attended the opening day premier of *Transformers 2* (Bay, 2009) with my family. Parts of the movie made me dizzy as the camera spun around and around. The speed and preciseness of a car that transforms into an alien right before your very eyes kept me guessing as to what would change next.

Running, spinning, breathing, talking. How are these physical movements like those shown in a movie captured on paper? How do you show that someone is running fast? An open mouth in a 2-dimensional picture could mean yelling, talking, yawning, or a hungry person waiting for food. How do children show the meaning they wish to portray? Children “shift fluidly between texts and simultaneously use many systems of signs, such as words, images, sounds, and gestures” in their illustrations (Wright, 2007, p. 4). Wright (2007) refers to these as “intratextuality” (p. 4). They create a relationship between the text and the graphic representations through “whoosh” lines, speech bubbles, and labels.

Dashing down court. What is going on in your story? Well, “They got on fiur they got wotr they go ot ov the home” and this is how I show it.

Dash...dash...dash...whoosh....whoosh...whoosh. Nicholas takes his pencil lightly making more lines on his picture telling me that the lines represent the flowing water. As he reads, he embellishes his drawing, creating more meaning for him as he journeys. These dashes “become mnemotechnic symbols...to associate a certain phrase with each mark” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 115). Were each of these marks his remembering of an actual experience he had with dribbling down court?

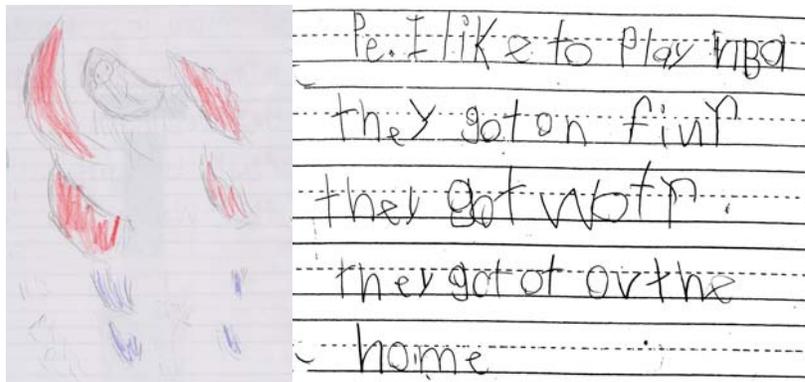


Figure 67. Nicholas dreams of the NBA (May 21, 2009).

So, too, on May 26, 2009, Nicholas dashes his way across the court and up for a lay up with Kobe Bryant. “I am take me to nBa...I am at NBA...I am go to the nBa” Nicholas is clear in his message...he will be a basketball player making shots like those he showed me on paper. Color was not necessary for him on this day. He clearly knew what he wanted to say. He saw it in black and white.

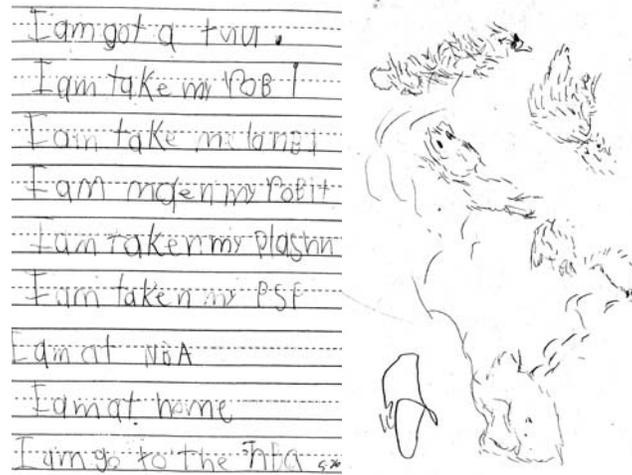


Figure 68. Nicholas continues to dream about the NBA (May 26, 2009).

Walking through pictures. Six faceless beings stand in reds, blues, and greens. Who are all these people I wonder. Why don't they have faces? Why does one have a darkened in head only and another is completed darkened in? Will the text help me decide? “MotcBsistoBJoNMtMWOTiS. *Why were you following him?(teacher comment)* Meaning of the story is not made. Without Jorge's voice and without knowing about Jorge's interests, the meaning that would be made of this entry would be that six guys are floating around in the grass, sky, and fire. But what I do know through Jorge's voiced story is that these six men are really just one or two. Jorge shows action in his illustrations. They are not captured moments in time. The picture shows the many sequence plots that he tells. His voice speaks of himself

falling in fire and his father saving him. He gets out of the fire and into the water. He gets out of the water and back over here where another man was following him because he wants him to slide. But Jorge goes under the grass and sees a worm only to get out of the grass and take a bath to get clean. Now return to the picture...Begin at the brown man in the fire—that's Jorge. Dad is the blue colored man standing on the fire. Together they travel in the picture to the right hand side where Jorge is in the space near the blue water. The darkened in man above follows Jorge, but Jorge escapes to be the blue colored man in the green area. There he is under the grass finding worms. The bath part of the story is not visually represented as that came out of my own questioning about his being dirty under the grass. He agreed he would be and nodded that he would take a bath, but both ideas were mine, not his and, therefore, not in his picture.

“Because more information is embedded in the pictures than in the print, drawing provides a horizon and leads the child deeper into the writing” (Calkins, 1994, p. 88). Jorge's drawings provide a scaffold for his writing, allowing an organization for his story to be told. He is able to “capture [his] ideas, [his] understanding of others and the world around [him], and [his] feelings and experiences in extremely interesting and authentic ways” (Thompson, 2005, p. 22). He continues to practice writing his way deeper into his texts supported by the people and the color in his illustration, but meaning lies hidden until we come together in voice to uncover the details and experiences he has presented on paper. I can not access meaning using just his text and illustration; his voice is necessary to toss the ball. “Ideas that cannot be embodied through a medium are destined to remain in the

cortex, a locale that is inaccessible to others and evanescent for oneself” (Eisner, 2002, p. 99). Without his voice, without our sharing and merging horizons, and without the conversation, the meaning would remain locked on the page and in Jorge’s unexpressed thoughts. Thankfully, our “oral compositions...are more sophisticated than [he] can convey in writing” (Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004, p. 50) providing the entry into the circle of understanding. For Jorge and me, the path toward meaning lies solely in our voices merging in conversation. I must pay close attention, listen, and honor the “ways [he] is using the symbols [he] create[s] to make meaning....[to open]...a window into [his mind], discovering what is happening in [his world] and what is significant to [him]” (Shagoury, 2009, p. 30).

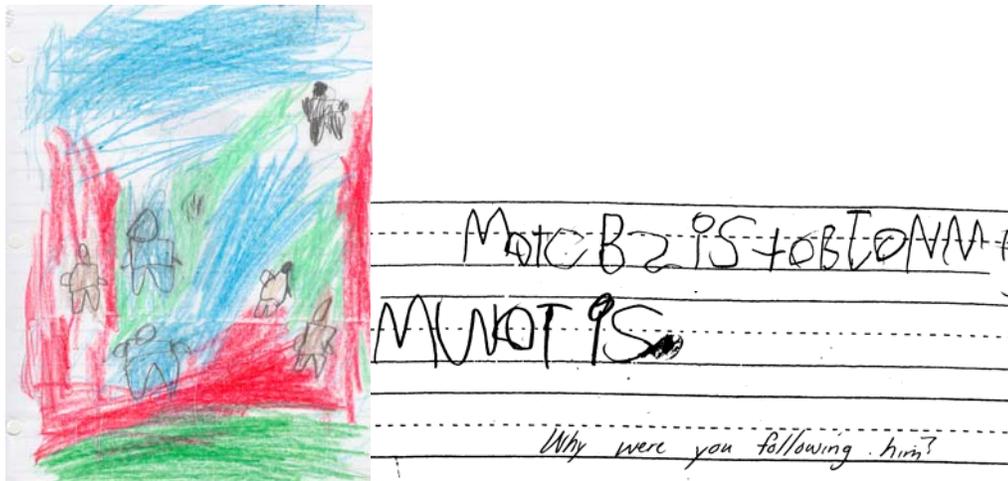


Figure 69. Jorge jumps from place to place (April 14, 2009).

Racing thoughts. Randomly placed purple and pink dots adorn the page surrounding blue ghostlike shapes and a square that resembles a house. Large filled-in red rectangular shapes draw your attention to the center of the page. Brown x’s sit quietly on the left. What is happening here? The lines, the markings, indicate movement of some sort but what? I turn to the words...“Shaddow was trying to kill

King because 2 2 Sonci was killed” (May 28, 2009). Having not recorded this story of Peter’s, I am left with partial meaning. It has been too long to recall the details, perhaps due to the sheer number of Shadow and Sonic and King Rattlesnake stories that were told this year. I do know that King refers to King Rattlesnake, a bad guy in the Sonic series. Otherwise, the only interpretation I can make is that the blue ghostlike shape is King Rattlesnake. Sonic is perhaps the dots that race around the drawings showing the speed at which he moves to try to confuse and trap King Rattlesnake. Shaddow? I don’t know where he is. As the audience, I could see the story unfold only in his words, not so much in his pictures.

Peter has followed the path of what many researchers indicate as a progression from drawing to writing (Baghban, 2007; Calkins, 1984; Schickendanz & Casbergue, 2004; Thompson, 2005). Now reading on a first grade level, his writing has surpassed his drawing. “Although [he] may still find it easier to draw than to write, [he] find[s] it easier to embed meaning into a written text than into a drawing” (Calkins, 1994, p. 88). Peter has so many ideas in his drawings that his writing will need to catch up to his drawing. Eventually, his “writing [will] catch up to [his] talking” (Calkins, 1994, p. 88).

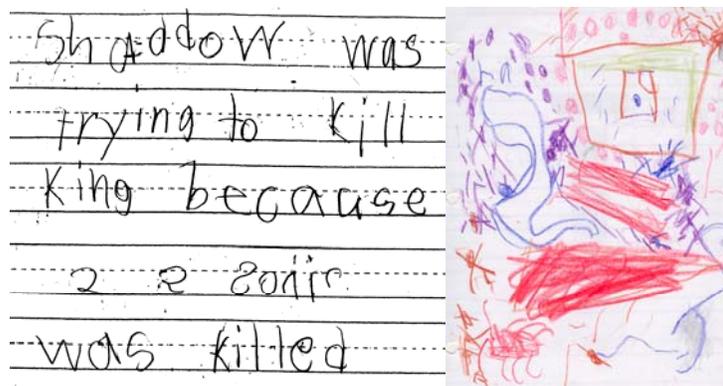


Figure 70. Sonic enters Peter’s world (May 28, 2009).

Similarly, on March 10, 2009, there are three gray shapes surrounded by a sea of red. Three blue dots sit in the corner. I try to conjure up my own meaning of this image in fear that I will not get it right. I don't understand what is going on in the picture and I am so far out of his imaginative world and my own, that I pause. I ask my biological children, what do you think this represents? One says "The head of a horse...see...there's the snout. There's the stables. And that's water." Okay, but that is not what Peter would write about I say to myself. Samantha, what do you think? Pause...pause...pause. "I don't know...Mickey Mouse going through a maze?" I instinctively turn to his text for help. Oh, yeah, now I recall the story! "The Ripublic this planets name is hot lava planet it is danyjirris. I can herea the sound of cerashing sords I can felu the thing floting." Missing from the pictures are the mountains, the polar bears, and the monsters. The story completes itself as he tells each detail. The pictures, the written text, and the voiced story create the experience.

Meaning from the illustrated conversation can only be made with the presence of all three elements. While his drawing is more "about self-expression and communication rather than precise representation" (Thompson, 2005, p. 22), his written words fill the space with what detail he can fit in. What would happen if Peter had more lines on which to write? How could I restructure the journal for children like Peter whose text and voice are catching up to one another? I look forward to the day when Peter's voice, illustrations, and text merge together to create a novel on the New York Best Seller's list. The meanings of all three will blend seamlessly in a story of intrigue, action, detail, and humor.

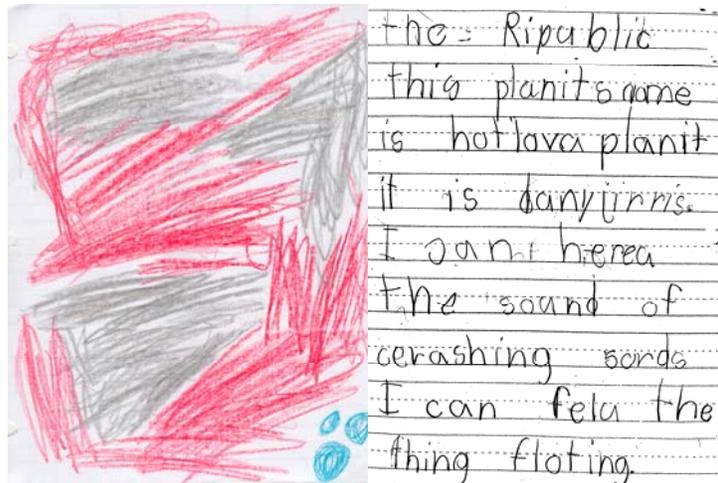


Figure 71. The Republic is dangerous. (March 10, 2009).

Talk to me. “The last story of sonic King boo tid to bol Mario but he was to sloy Mario tid to get to the mario sicit but the Mario pepl wr ting to find Mario king boo said I will” (Michael, May 14, 2009). King Boo is a new character in the Sonic adventures in our room. Michael embellished his picture with a speech bubble from King Boo, helping the reader to identify who King Boo was. “You are not ulowd to do tist” came from the character with a necklace hanging on his neck and spikes like Sonic. Four other characters, all with minimal detail and no color adorn the page sporadically. The reader is left to make connections between the speech bubble creature and King Boo who tried to do something to Mario but was too slow so Mario tried to get to the Mario something but the Mario people were trying to find Mario when King Boo said “I will...” Michael is much more comfortable with the telling of his stories. His drawings and text are just springboards. While he is capable of adding detail and color to his pictures, he chooses not to. He is more focused now on the writing (which for this entry was far and above the norm) and the telling of details.

saying “I will kill you.” What is it about “You are not allowed to do this” that finds its way to his illustration?

Who did that? Brian questions the world with intrigue and imagination. “Mrs. Dean, why did we forget to have snack?” “What will happen to him?” “Where did the seed go?” “Why do the leaves get brown?” “How do I do this?” Similarly, Brian uses questioning in his illustrated conversations. As noted in Chapter Five, Brian seeks answers to questions, but relies on others to tell him the answer without first exploring the possibilities on his own. In this story, Brian writes, “Look it Evan tem we have to stop His tem.” What jumps out is that we have a team situation and Evan is the leader of it. Turning attention to the opposite page, pencil sketches indicate “Me” above a child with an open mouth and a ball of flame, possibly zooming over his head. Whoosh lines follow the ball toward the ground. Beside him, another label name “Evan,” with Evan smiling. Above these two boys (and a mystery third) is a large traced handprint with a circle surrounding it. On the palm it reads “ti that bib ho.” No meaning can be made if read this way. Because of Brian’s telling, one must read it in reverse “ho bib that ti” But what he said was “Who did that?” All the reader knows without Brian there to help interpret is that Evan has a team and a hand is saying something to “Me” and “Evan” and someone else nearby. The speech bubbles and labels assist both Brian and the reader in gaining more meaning for his story. They, like the drawings, can be used as conversation starters.

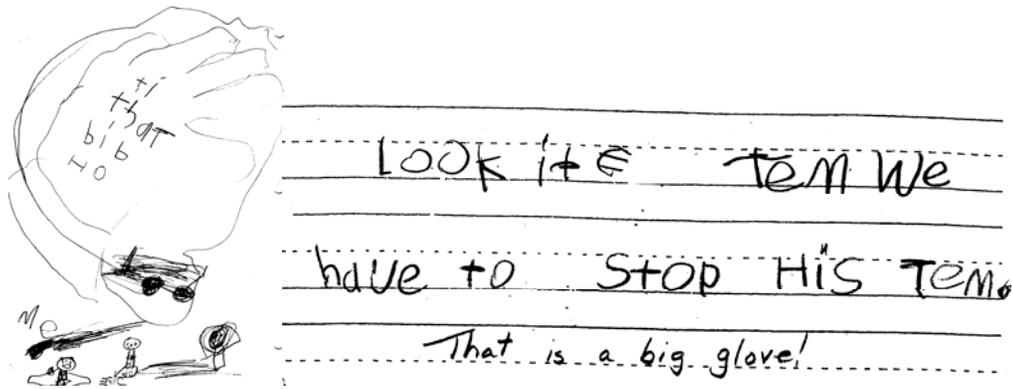


Figure 73. Who did that? (Brian, March 26, 2009).

The conversation unfolds....Two big gloves belonging to the devil are getting poked by Evan. Blood comes out of the devil's stomach and that's the end. "What do you mean that's all? How can you end the story there? I don't know what happens at the end. Does Evan live?" is my response to Brian. After a brief pause, Brian states that "The end is there is something over here that blasts the whole world. This whole world (pointing to his binder) not this world where we are here...inside my book...in there...Every story I made up is gonna be dead....until Christmas" (Brian, March 26, 2009). He knows that the world outside of our conversation will continue to exist. His imaginary stories will blow up and die but only until Christmas. Christmas comes up quite often for Brian. He attends Sunday school and Bible study on weekends. For Brian, Christmas represents the celebration of the birth of life. His stories will rebirth on that day. Blending his religious identity with action adventures with friends, the devil is injured by Evan. Evan's team comprised of Evan, himself, and some other character not described go up against the devil who says, "Who did that?" Brian knows. He merges his religious horizon with his fantasy in a magical, but short, story of friends. The incorporation of one's religious background into storytelling is found among prominent authors, in particular Elie Wiesel, a "self-proclaimed storyteller"

who believes the “Hasidic style [and value] of storytelling...draws on [the] oral traditions...and messages...[of] the lives of the Hasidic masters [which] contain lessons about hope, despair, joy, madness, friendship, and other human feelings and actions” (Horowitz, 2006, pp. 7-8). This blending of many horizons within one’s lifeworld opens the imagination and possibility of uncovering the meaning of being.

Canvassing Possibility

“Children are liberated through art to invent worlds in other-worldly ways” (Wright, 2007, p. 2). Where did Cheeseland come from? Why not have Spongebob meet Sonic? The worlds they know about and understand—like Sonicworld, the wrestling world, princess world, and mermaid world—are conversation starters as well. Their engagement with these worlds through movies, television, friends, and older siblings, begins the thought provoking process to create other worlds.

In Tom Hanks’ *Big* (Marshall, et al., 1988), Josh Baskin becomes an adult-sized kid, who lands a job as a toy tester in New York City. In a presentation meeting, the adults in the room discuss a new toy building that transforms into a robot. Josh very innocently expresses his views that children wouldn’t find it fun. He explains that you can’t play with a building. From his perspective, the building cannot be used as a story starter. He suggests merging a robot with a car or a spaceship. The two worlds of robots and transportation come together in his imagination. Each with their own horizon, he now merges horizons into a new ‘fun’ toy.

My kindergartners imagine the possibilities when two of their worlds collide. What lies beyond the immediate? What can you invent all on your own? Using the knowledge within their immediate horizons, how my children engage in the

imaginative story-making reveals how their “*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 305).

Playing with ideas, questioning the whys, organizing thoughts, all come together in worldly ways uncovering the way of their world.

Stories not told, text not finished, pictures half colored...what do these still hold? Are the ideas still there, just not documented for others to see and hear? In the recesses of their lives, they imagine playfully with worlds adults can only hope to be invited to attend. Margery’s unfinished text “The prnss” and detailed drawing of a person on a horse in front of a castle smiling as the sad person in the tower looks downward are horizons that are yet to merge in voice. Where was this story to go? What places could we have explored? The possibilities are endless in this unended story. I can only imagine and interpret for myself. Here’s what I think...

It is Princess Margery, who just happens to be the daughter of King Anthony. She is riding her horse coming to visit her friend who sadly dropped the keys to her castle door out her window and can’t reach them. She has been stuck in the tower all day and thankful Princess Margery has arrived to help her. Finding the keys, she lets her friend join her on her ride, and together they travel the world laughing and singing taking care not to drop the keys that they will remember as the start of their adventures. That’s all.

I wonder if this is what she had in mind.



Figure 74. Margery’s unfinished entry

Pencil or crayon? Looking at a tall, half-purple structure with arm-like projections on the sides while two creatures float above can motivate one to listen to what Alex has to say. I wonder what will happen here. He writes: “wmITP6iAzE. O wmbPb.azAo tkr Yocket.” His written text does not reveal meaning about the picture. Can you tell me about this blue, angry looking creature over here? Zigzag mouth, dark dots for eyes, and hair that stands taller than the creature itself protrudes from the bottom left hand corner of the page. Why is he so much bigger than the other bodies? What does that structure in the middle of the page—the bright purple one—have to do with the four characters? Imagination lies between the letters and images of Alex’s entry. What happens in his story? The meaning that is made from Alex’s entry today must be gathered from his voice. I am thankful for the tape recording.

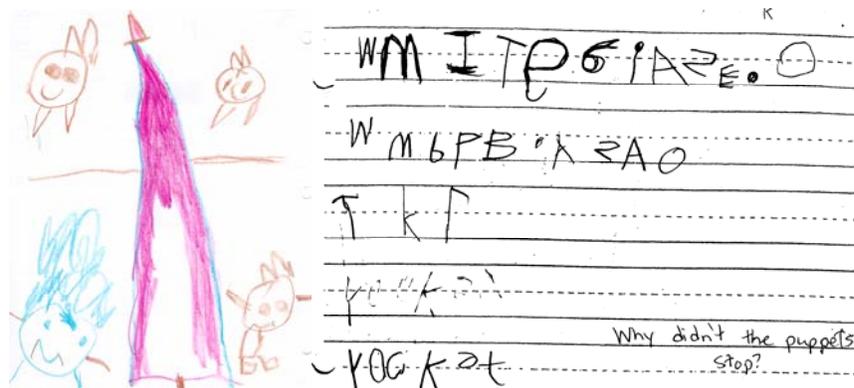


Figure 75. Alex’s puppets ride in a rocket (March 19, 2009).

The transcription of his soft voice tells me about the purple rocket and the two puppets beside it. And the purple stuff is the exploding rocket ship with arms and a head. And the brown guy’s head falls off and the puppets laugh and that blue guy—that was really a spider who makes all the bugs eat the guy’s head. His voice could not be separated from the pages of his life. All the elements of our journey, the air,

the ground, and the obstacles, had to come together to create a meaningful interplay of conversation.

What is interesting about Alex's entries is his exploration of color. For much of the year, Alex draws in crayon. His entire drawing is permanently etched as he reforms his creatures, his movement, and his structures from memory to paper. Part of my pedagogy is to not only provide children opportunities to appreciate their own art, but to also encourage children to think about the art they create. When I draw in front of the children during games, discussion time, and free choice, I think aloud. I purposely say, "Wow! I think I will use a pencil to sketch my work just in case I want to change something later because I know I can't erase my marker or crayon." I talk my way through my drawing. Similarly, Alex begins to draw his pictures in pencil before adding color. Does he expend so much energy on drawing in pencil that he leaves none for adding color? In this example, Alex sketches a detailed image of many characters, some happy, some with zigzag mouths. But purple and green find their way covering over the details of his drawing. His text does not indicate the action, and now, his picture displays confusion, disorder, and/or exhaustion. I wonder why he chooses to color at all. Is it because I usually add color? Or is it something else? It is not revealed anywhere on our journey that day. Happily, by May 5, 2009, Alex sketches his drawing and carefully adds color. A smiling character walking on grass next to a taller and thinner character under gray clouds emerges. What adventures do we travel through here?



Figure 76. Alex, April 28, 2009.



Figure 77. Alex, May 5, 2009.

What if...? What if I could go into a video game and stay there forever?

Evan's imagination and ability to recreate the Sonic video world in his journals keeps him focused on a topic for uncovering. Looking at Evan's text on March 17, 2009, I immediately think—Wow! Have we moved on from Sonic? "by E... I like Karis. I like my mom. I like toys. I like sonic. I like fish. I like gams. I like school. I like math." Evan expresses what he enjoys using the basic word 'like'—a basic sight word used in instruction and writing literacy activities. Familiar with the spelling, Evan incorporates his reading instruction with his free writing during journals. Without gazing at the picture, I imagine fishbowls, a school, numbers, mom, toys, and perhaps a small Sonic. Attention transfers to the illustration. Sonic. Sonic moving fast in all directions. Blue Sonic and Dark Sonic are present since these images have been part of Evan's entries since September. I have come to know his reproduction of this video game character. Where is mom? Where are the carrots (karis)? Where are the toys? This entry was not typical of Evan's entries. Usually, Evan writes Sonic vs someone over and over with different characters fighting against Sonic. What happened on March 17, 2009, that Evan writes the text of what he likes but returns to Sonic in his drawing? In subsequent entries, Evan continues to write minimally but

the questions of “what if” persist. What if Sonic interacted with his friends? What if there were a Vinesonic? What if Sonic went to the Olympics? His illustrations reveal the text he writes. Sonic immerses us deeper into his video game. Trapped, we dwell there waiting for the next what if...

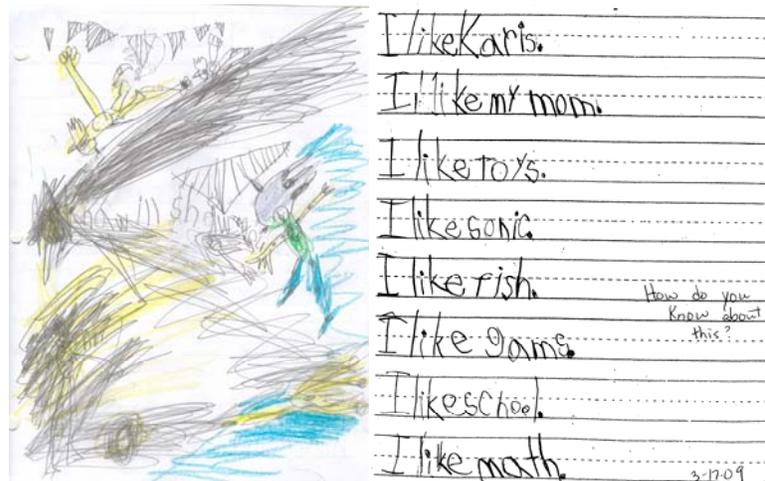


Figure 78. Evan likes everything AND Sonic. (March 17, 2009).

Stepping Forward to Admire the Work

If places introduce permanency into journeys—since they are where we can *remain* as we move about—journeys bring out what is impermanent and continuously changing when we are in place itself. (Casey, 1993, p. 289)

Illustrated conversations place us on a journey in which we move, change, and grow while being implaced in a kindergarten classroom. The experience of kindergarten is multifaceted, all working toward a harmony of merging horizons. Within our classroom walls we paint our dreams, build our friendships, and draw our meanings of life. We are not simply moving through time day to day in order to complete the requirements of kindergarten. We immerse ourselves in the day to day meaning making finger painting messes, imaginative play productions, and reenactments of fairy tales and fantasies. Our journey during illustrated conversations

transports us in place from “here [our voices] to here [the silence, interruptions, and pace] to here [the illustrations and written text], or more precisely from the here-in-view-of-there [from the first entry to the last] to the there-reached-from-here [look at what I did this year]” (Casey, 1993, pp. 278-279). Knowing the essence of illustrated conversations *is* the journey itself—the interplay of the voices, the pauses, the interruptions, the pictures, and the written text, we continue our journey of understanding how this interplay creates meaning for each who walk the way. In Chapter Seven, we move forward toward understanding how the small parts of our art create the bigger picture, and the pedagogical insights from this work and play together.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIVE SPACES GUIDE THE WAY

Kindergarten is filled with ‘kinder’ voices—the gentle and unique voices of young children. We dwell together in harmony and genuine reciprocity, journeying together as we discover who we are in this place of learning, growing, and care. Balancing the tensions of academics and meaning-making experiences, we walk beside one another, “attending to the life thread of spirit pervading and connecting all things” (Glazer, 1999, p. 250). The spirit within radiates outward, filling our spaces with ‘care’ful kindness. Within this space, twenty-one five-year-olds and I race through reading and mathematics standards, mingle in social gatherings, and make meanings of our lives in dialogue. Illustrated conversations place us in place. We continue on the path of understanding through reflection, searching deeper to uncover **the lived experience of illustrated conversations with kindergartners.**

The wondrous voices of my children echo their sense of home and family as they defined, and redefined, their identity through friendships with myself and peers. The silent conversations brought forth further meaning uncovering how space and time for young children help them better hear their own voices and the voices of others. Drawings and written thoughts, springboards for ideas, propel the conversations forward while also revealing how without voice, the meaning of these two ‘pieces of paper’ fell into more of a data collection than a seeking of self. Children’s voices—heard in dialogue, paused or silenced in between, and engraved on paper—connect pathways leading to self-identity. Illustrated conversations become a “leading out into a world of possibilities, while at the same time being mindful of the students’ finiteness as mortal beings” (Aoki, 2005c, p. 362). Through

reflection upon the reciprocal ‘care’ful relationships that developed, I continue to question the lived experience of illustrated conversations and how hearing their wondrous voices has opened up the conversation of how it is I listen, truly listen, to my children and myself. How are the spaces needed to practice, uncover, and develop children’s voices created in public schools?

In this final Chapter, I reflect upon the spaces my kindergartners and I dwell in during illustrated conversation as it has redefined my own pedagogy. Through these insights, it is my hope that others who read my words will come to dwell in reflection upon their own pedagogy of creating tactful and careful spaces to dwell with their children.

Wide Open Spaces

Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. Human beings require both space and place. (Tuan, 1977, p. 54)

In the midst of activity and noise, the calming reassurance that kindergarten possesses creates a caring place for young children. So too, our place of illustrated conversations provides us another space to come together along the path on which meaning has begun its unfolding. The spaces become places as we journey together making meaningful connections valued by all. How do my students and I dwell in the physical place, social/emotional space, and curriculum environment that illustrated conversations help define? How do these insights alter my pedagogical place?

Walled Space

Cinderblock buildings are cut into classroom spaces, desk space and circle time space position for power, and personal cubbies define ‘my space’ and ‘your space’ while we exist in our classroom space. “Find your paper in the folder bin. Only four people at a time in housekeeping. Put your work in your cubby. Go to your seat. Wait your turn at the easel. These puzzles only go on this shelf not on the art cart.” Boundaries are established everywhere. The walls that separate classrooms create the boundaries that enclose us in worlds of academics. Windows, positioned too high for children to see the world at their level, only open 4-6 inches for air to wiggle in. And even then, in efforts to maintain equal temperatures in classrooms, windows are not to be opened, teasing us to what lies on the other side. The view of trees limits our connection to the outside world. Hard chairs and dull colored furniture create a school space rather than a comfortable dwelling place.

As time passes, we redefine the space within these boundaries to create a place “from which something *begins its essential unfolding*” (Heidegger, 1971/1993, p. 356). “In open space one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence” (Tuan, 1977, p. 54). Within my bounded classroom, I become aware of the missing open space but also very grateful for the comforting place it provides. I find peace sharing space with young children putting me in place. We journey together through space and time, building and dwelling in reciprocal relation. And while I would rather redesign and reconstruct the space I have been given to dwell in with my

kindergartners, without these physical limitations, we might not have built the place of illustrated conversations.

I Love this Place!

In September, twenty-one children entered Room C102 at 8:30 am to begin a journey that would take them into worlds of animals, plants, dinosaurs, insects, and folktales. Parents entered with their children on that first day of school and lingered to see how their children would react to this new environment. By 9:00, I had two children propped in my arms crying while simultaneously trying to start a circle time with 19 others sitting before me with anticipation of our first big activity in kindergarten. I continued to hold both children close as another child helped me turn the pages of Mrs. Bindergarten's adventure into kindergarten (Slate, 1996). Luckily, by 9:30, the parents had drifted toward their homes and work and my two criers were calmer, no longer needing my holding but still positioned close by. The space had become a place. In the course of one hour we had already forged a path through a difficult time together and found care and compassion along the way. These types of social and emotional milestones occurred over the next ten months, redefining and solidifying our commitment to find meaning with one another.

Identifying with one other. Our identities "can be established...either from the outside in or from inside out" (Glazer, 1999, p. 79). As we interact with one another daily, the reflection upon who they are and who I am begins to reshape our identities. Ashley initially came to school lacking the self-confidence that she could make it through six hours without her mom. After months of my encouragement and her own reflection upon others in the class, she is now one of the most confident girls

in the class. She has come to view herself from the inside out. Likewise, Brian grew in confidence from within as he stood outside of his connections within a quad group.

Each child, individually, grows emotionally and socially as their experiences provide more and more opportunities to reflect upon their position among peers, how we meet each other, and how we learn to dwell in careful, reciprocal, respectful harmony. Giving children spaces to understand their being in the world as they establish and recognize their heart-filled voices amongst all others is a critical aspect of respecting others. We teach children to respect others. We have school rules that state, “Respect yourself and others,” but do we provide the open space to do so? Do we spend enough time to dwell in this place of respect and reflection to deepen its meaning for identity development?

In my classroom, voiced identities are heard in illustrated conversations. The children explore ways of being themselves and being themselves as others. “I am a tree. I am a clown forever. I am Supergirl. I am a dirtbike.” It is a time, aside from the mandates of reading groups and structured writing lessons, that children are free to discover how to become. Time is devoted to uncovering the “many, many layers of wholeness, layers of meaning” made by their participation in dialogue (Miller, 1999, p. 195). Their expressions of joy, happiness, sadness, and fear are valued understandings of their becoming from the inside out. Voicing their stories to themselves, they hear their own voices, delight in the pauses, revise the details and express their innermost ideas in the safety of their own place—a space carved out just for them during illustrated conversation. It is “Only by knowing and expressing what is going on inside ourselves can we authentically communicate who we are and what

we experience to those with whom we share a world” (King, 1996, p. 49). We must redefine our own identity to help others discover all theirs. Providing opportunities for children to become becomes our mandate. We must redesign the spaces we have been given to create places of care for an individual’s social/emotional growth.

As one of the architects in my classroom, I am handed ideas—intentions and purposes of those who want something built. Namely, successful completion of grade level objectives. I plan out the physical spaces each August by sitting in the middle of my empty classroom, imagining children engaging in pretend play in one corner while building with blocks in another. How will the traffic flow be if I put the computers over here? Will those wanting to read quietly be able to do so if I put the library next to the blocks? How will the social interactions flourish if I put the easel in a tiny corner and leave the sand table near the doorway? How will I position the tables so that the children can complete literacy centers without too many distractions, but still have the tables close enough for our family style snack AND not have too many tables on the rugs in case of spills? Questions like these race through my mind. Eventually, the plan is made and building begins. I complete the physical labor with ease.

There are no prefabricated plans for how to create social and emotional environments with children until I enter the space with those who will dwell in the space with me. Together the children and I cultivate twenty-one separate plans, matching personal interests to a sense of each one’s being “settled-in living” (Casey, 1993, p. 174). This cultivation and dwelling within our space requires “patience-in-place; it requires willingness to cultivate, often seemingly endlessly, the

inhabitational possibilities of a particular residence” (Casey, 1993, p. 174). We must rearrange until our space is uniquely our space, since “To cultivate *its* interior we must cultivate *our* interior,” making it “a matter of letting one interior speak to another” (Casey, 1993, p. 174).

In the teacher-student relationship, there is a need to create openings that allow easy access to self and others. “Somehow, within our institutions, the doorway[s] for genuine learning became narrower and narrower” (Glazer, 1999, p. 135). But our relationship in illustrated conversations widens the space, blurring the boundaries between teacher and student, merging toward joined horizons of beings. I don’t hold the power, as in typical teacher-student relations. We are not oriented to a specific learning outcome. I can not remove myself completely from my teacher role. It is part of my identity. I must, instead, cover over the teacher hat and put on the hat my children ask me to wear. It could be a learner hat, as with Evan and Michael who become the teachers and I the student. I could be asked to put on fairy wings or giant teeth to become something other than instructor. I may need to put on two big ears just to listen to their concerns—no judgment, no questions, just listen. When I am able to put aside the mandates of the other spaces in which we dwell in order to dwell in illustrated conversation, I am able to listen to my inner self becoming more childlike. We engage in silliness and reciprocity like peas in a pod.

A place called home. There is a comfort I find in family that no other group can sustain. We can be ourselves at home without pressure to be someone we’re not. My children are my family, so illustrated conversations naturally feel like we are sitting around the kitchen table catching up on events in our lives. I engage in the

relaxing storytelling that erupts during this time. The laughter and wonder that awaken my inner child spring to the forefront of my being. This feels good and yet, sadly, this feeling does not always exist in the classroom.

During assessment windows, the aura is very different. It is during this time that I reflect in my journal about how I can transfer those same emotions we encounter in conversation to all of our classroom engagements. “How can we create a constant feeling of home in which children feel secure and develop relationships they value with those with whom they dwell? Or should we begin to model for them a home that perhaps they don’t have? But then we return to the notion of who defines what that home relationship should be?” (Personal reflection, February 15, 2009). What alters the environment are the fast paced have-tos that were in the plans I was handed. These tension-filled moments shake my inner being, causing me place panic.

Do my children feel this sense of panic? Perhaps I need to center myself better while balancing the mandates in order to trust the lasting relationships we build in our home and community. Community “helps [us] develop a sense of true self, for only in community can the self exercise and fulfill its nature: giving and taking, listening and speaking, being and doing” (Palmer, 2004, p. 39). This sense of community, of home, is “not necessarily...living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other. It is not about the presence of other people—it is about being fully open to the reality of relationship, whether or not we are alone” (Palmer, 2004, p. 55). How is it that my awareness of family fades during the juggling of events that I did not request to be in my home? Even though I am still at home with my children, I do not feel our presence of being together. How does the

administration of these mandates provoke us to lose our connection to one another and view each other as something other than carer and “care-forer”? In these times, I turn to my young children for guidance to bring me home again.

Just when it feels like it’s hopeless
And I’ll never make it alone
I hear the voices of angels
Tenderly calling me home
(J. Garrett, *Tenderly Calling*, 1998)

Circle of trust.

“trust...help...confidence...comfort...alliance...hope...believe...faith”
(*Wikipedia & Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved July 5,2009)

At the age of four, I walked with my grandfather in Brooklyn, NY every day around what we called “The Horseshoe.” Remembering this event takes me back to a time when trust was reciprocal without my even understanding what trust was. I walked with him because, as most five-year-olds would say, “It was fun.” I knew that he would protect me from the dogs that growled behind fences with signs that read “BEWARE OF DOG.” He knew I knew the way home. He believed that if he collapsed due to his heart condition, I could run and get help. He trusted in our companionship. His trust taught me to trust, to believe, to help. This “*re-membering* involves putting [myself] back together, recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of [my life]” (Palmer, 1998, p. 20). I re-member moments like these when I am lost on my journey, when I need someone to help guide me, or when I need to put myself back together and get back on the way.

When I find myself disconnected from my children because of external pressures and I begin to lose my early childhood way and follow the mandated path, I

re-turn to these memories. I learn from those who have come before me. I re-look at my engagement with my children and know that they trust me to guide them if they lose their way. I trust them to help me find my way back. We establish the “circle of trust...to make it safe for [our] soul[s] to show up and offer us its guidance” on this journey (Palmer, 2004, p. 22).

Illustrated conversations mirror circles of trust as we “sit quietly ‘in the woods’ with each other and wait for the shy soul to show up. [Our] relationships...are not pushy but patient; they are not confrontational but compassionate; they are not filled with expectations and demands but with abiding faith in the reality of the inner teacher and in each person’s capacity to learn from it” (Palmer, 2004, p. 59). As our dialogue carries us through the year, “We learn that this space is focused, meaningful, revealing, and yet profoundly safe—we develop the trust to speak more directly about ourselves” (Palmer, 2004, p. 91).

How do we establish trust in the classroom? In schools? We must begin by allowing children to trust in themselves. We must give them room to understand who they are as individuals. Only then when they believe in themselves, can they help and trust others in the same way. I believe that to love them—to care for them—means also letting them find their way without me. I return to our illustrated conversations at the beginning of the year. I trust that they will all find within themselves a story to tell without my spelling the words or giving them ideas. By not offering them help, I am helping them believe in themselves. They will become confident in a comfortable environment where they are free to make mistakes and learn from them. They will become strong writers who understand more about what it means to dialogue with

teachers because “I like talking to grownups” and “I like it when I tell you journals because I am your friend” (Jennifer & William, June 8, 2009). They are able to create a trusting relationship with an adult, a friend, who will listen and laugh with them. They are motivated to become lifelong learners. Isn’t that what school is to be about—journeying through life’s learning experiences?

Understanding myself. This study is a conversational “process of coming to an understanding” about the lived experience of illustrated conversations (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 387). The conversation held within my journals “doubles the hermeneutical process, namely the conversation: there is one conversation between the interpreter and the other, and a second between the interpreter and oneself” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 387). Perhaps this study is not only a doubling but a quadrupling conversation. The first is the children’s conversation with self—how they approach their ideas, interpret them, and inscribe them to paper. Second, the face to face conversation they share with me at our table also requires an interpretation. We interpret the rhythm, the pauses, the facial expressions, and the meaning of their stories together spontaneously. Then as I reinterpret their stories during transcriptions, I stop the tape, think about what was said, and type it. If a word is not audible, do I try to understand what I think the child might have said and listen again? Does this decision to write what I think I heard alter my understanding of the text when I reinterpret to find meaning? Finally, as I reflect upon myself as interpreter in my personal journal, I question myself as researcher, as teacher, as listener. This process of self-reflection has emerged as an impetus for change. Without my ‘having’ to reflect this year, my engagement with my kindergartners would not have revealed the

beauty of the environment. Without this portion of illustrated conversation, it would have been a way for children to express themselves, but I, as listener, would not have listened as well.

The conversations I held with myself on the pages of my journal had “a spirit of [their] own, and...the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it—i.e., that it allows something to ‘emerge’ which henceforth exists” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 385). What emerged from my journals was a springboard to this dissertation. Chapter 5: Playful Listening attends to the meaning that is made from the pauses, the interruptions, and the breaks in conversation. “I think, too, what is missing from the ‘stories’ I transcribe are the facial expressions that either engage us or not. I wonder what my own facial reaction is to the boys telling me about violence” (Personal journal, March 12, 2009). Did I begin to dwell in this question? Did I try to remove my biases when responding to the boys during their stories? This weighed heavy on my mind throughout as evidenced in my entries. Six weeks later, I write, “Maybe it’s not about violence—personally—at all. Maybe the media plays into it and pushes boys to these interests. What else are they to do? Their minds are molds. How many young children will stand up and say, “No, that’s wrong what you do to me... We have brought them to where they are” (Personal journal, April 30, 2009). This reflective journey, within the illustrated conversation journey, within our kindergarten journey, brings forth an altered sense of how boys approach violence in their stories. Next year I will continue on the path to understanding, but since Evan, Michael, James, and Brian will not be with me, I must retrace my steps with others, but this time with a different set of shoes.

Through reflection, I ask myself open questions which “[expand] rather than [restrict my] arena of exploration, one[s] that [do] not push or even nudge [me] toward a particular way of framing a situation” (Palmer, 2004, p. 132). These very questions open the space for curriculum environments to find space in our place.

Curriculum Worlds Collide

Clearly, curricular acknowledgement and professional awareness of children’s languages—including developmental, situational, and cultural variations—matter. They allow us to better attune pedagogically to children’s authorial intentions and challenges and thus to help them make voices visible on paper. (Dyson, 2008, pp. 18-19)

What should kindergarten children be expected to learn in their first ten months of formal schooling? Should it focus on their social and emotional development? Should they learn to read and calculate numerical problems? The tension for kindergarten teachers lies within the historical context of kindergarten. Kindergarten dwells in between early childhood realms and philosophies and formal schooling. The National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) addresses the needs of the child while remaining neutral in regard to curriculum and assessment. The NAEYC supports “curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children” (NAEYC, 2004, p. 40). Yet, the NAEYC position statement encourages the use of ongoing observation and developmentally appropriate assessments in order to

assess young children’s strengths, progress, and needs that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children’s daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and

learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions. (NAEYC, 2004, pp. 40-41)

How do I navigate these relational spaces keeping the focus on my children's voices?

Tension-filled spaces. I have come to believe that life is a tension-filled dwelling in place. In the field of education, there have always been differing theories about how to educate the young. There are those who have compromised in the nature versus nurture debate, agreeing that both have some say in the matter but disagreeing on how much each plays a role. There are those who continue believe that the only way children learn is by adults deciding what to put into the empty vessel, and through drill and practice types of techniques, fill the vessel with what they deem worthy. There are those who believe that children should be constructing their own knowledge with no input from adults. Adults are there only as quiet guides. And then there are those who believe that children need guidance and instruction with a balance of direct teaching and exploration. Just as there are as many paths as there are kindergartners, there are as many ideas about how to educate young children. What to teach young children comes under scrutiny as well in the language of curriculum. This, too, presents tension for teachers.

Curriculum-as-plan is the work of

curriculum planners, usually selected teachers from the field...[that]...frame a set of curriculum statements: statements of *intent* and *interest* (given in the language of “goals,” “aims,” and “objectives”), statements of what teachers and students should do (usually given in the language of *activities*), statements of official and recommended *resources* for teachers and students, and usually, implicitly statements of *evaluation* (given, if at all, in the language of ends and means). (Aoki, 2005a, p. 160)

Kindergarten teachers are required to engage in this type of curriculum, especially due to the 2001 No Child Left Behind reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and “compliance with the new policies and procedures associated with standards-based accountability systems” (Goldstein, 2008, p. 223).

The other type of curriculum discussed by Aoki (2005a) is curriculum-as-lived and experienced by teachers and students in collaboration with the interests of those individuals. There are no standards by which this is defined or assessed. Teachers understand and situate themselves within the “face-to-face living” learning environment (Aoki, 2005a, p. 160). I understand my children’s “uniqueness from having lived daily with them” (Aoki, 2005a, p. 160). But curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived is not an either/or option for teachers.

“Dwelling in the zone of between” I have come to understand that “This tensionality in [my] pedagogical situation is a mode of being a teacher, a mode that could be oppressive and depressive, marked by despair and hopelessness, and at other times, challenging and stimulating, evoking hopefulness for venturing forth” (Aoki, 2005a, p. 162). In this tension, I found illustrated conversations. These times of hope and stimulating conversation carry me forth, balancing both ends of the spectrum. These conversations are curriculum “*constructed* by [the] participants. The knowledge that evolves is knowledge that is socially negotiated through the process of conversation itself; it is knowledge-in-action” (Applebee, 1996, pp. 39- 40).

There is no escaping the tension. When one adds weight to one side, it calls for a re-turn to pedagogy to even out the scale. It requires thought-provoking and challenging conversations amongst professionals about what is right for young

children. Voices of teachers of young children need to project their children's voices of identity, family, choice, and sense of home to those who say school is a just place for filling the vessel with their information. Do we not want our children to become wise in the use of their knowledge? For knowledge "is our understanding, which is conceptual, which is intellectual, which is philosophical. It is insight which is very much connected to our brains. Wisdom, however, is the insight and understanding that comes from our hearts. Wisdom is compassion; it is genuine love, genuine caring" (Rinpoche, 1999, p. 55).

How do illustrated conversations create balance in my children's "zone of between" curriculum? I turn again to my reflection upon my pedagogy during these dialogues. Listening, questioning strategies, slowing the pace of instruction, and writing insights sit with me in the middle of the scale.

Listening to the landscape.

The more I relisten to their stories, the more I realize that I am not a very good listener. Some of the questions I ask, they just answered. (Journal reflection, February 8, 2009)

Rereading my journal for insights for my own understanding of identity and self, I find concerns about my own frequent listening entries. "Do the children know when I am not listening? Can they tell by my questions? Can they tell by my body language how well I'm listening?" (Personal reflection, February 24, 2009). Engaging in dialogue in Chapter 5 about how one needs to wander and drift while they "just listen" with no purpose, I question whether I remained "open to the meaning of the other person or text" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 271). Yet, this questioning I had in my journals, was a "*hermeneutical task [that became] itself a questioning of things*"

(Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 271). Within my journals, I questioned deeper. During illustrated conversations, I was attuned to the questioning of my pedagogy, altering the interaction with my children. Aware of my biases, of my thoughts, I was able to let the children's selves be seen more clearly, bracketing my own prejudices from entering the dialogue. Over time, the questions in my journals uncovered themselves in theirs.

Engagement in and interpretation of illustrated conversations requires I become both speaker and listener. "An actively responsive understanding of what is heard...can be directly realized in action...or it can remain, for the time being, a silent responsive understanding...but...with a delayed reaction" (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 68-69). During our story telling, I become the speaker actively responding to my understanding of the story told. In active responses, the child and I meet reciprocally, alternating between speaker and listener, trying to make meaning of our interaction as the story unfolds. The meaning of their voiced stories and intonations is made with them during face to face dialogues. I again become the speaker when I reinterpret the stories; a silent responsive understanding takes place in the solitary moments of transcription. My silent responses are more meaning making for me as teacher. What did that mean to me when I interrupted them? How do they respond to what I said? This reflection upon the interaction occurs during my journaling and the transcription process. "The reflection upon their stories gives me insight to my own self—my own being as a being who is supposed to be caring for this person in front of me and it takes a return to the conversation to make the connection real. Why?" (Personal journal, February 12, 2009). Why does it take a return to the interaction to deepen the

meaning made? We return to Heidegger's encircling of meaning making in phenomenological inquiry. Multiple interpretations are possible—even with one interpreter.

How do these insights inform my pedagogy about the nature of listening to the voices of children? “Since the ‘truth’ of Being is a ‘voice’ that can speak only through *human* voices, to be gathered into its history means that we participate in the ongoing cultural conversation, keeping it attuned to Being. It means speaking out...making a space of good listening for all the voices of history” (Levin, 1989, p. 273). The landscape of wide open spaces needs the attentiveness of good, true listening during the ongoing conversation with young children. We need to be open to changing parts of the landscape that were put there by those who didn't listen to the children. We must return to the organic landscape of childhood.

Questioning myself. How does my questioning influence the meaning made between us? “Every questioning is a seeking...Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness” (Heidegger, 1962/1993, p. 45). Seeking to find the right words in each question I formulate is an ongoing struggle. Remaining true to the phenomenological method, my questioning needs to welcome and invite further opening to their own questions and thoughts without my prejudices and biases interfering. It takes practice and concentration to ask questions that invite rather than ask.

Rather than seeing a child's question as something that needs a quick and simple answer, the adult may try to help the child in his or her natural inclination to *live* the question...True wonderment does not ask a thousand questions. I truly wonder, when the question I ask is returned to me somehow, or when it lingers and envelops itself with a stillness, the stillness of wonder. (van Manen, 2002, p.19)

What is required of listening and questioning resides in the child. I must know my children's interests and be able to "get to know the horizon of the other person" (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 302), "[keeping] alive the interest that produced the child's question" (van Manen, 2002, p. 22). My questions should not be ones that induce a quick answer. They should be ones that ask the child to question their own thoughts. What would happen if...? How do you feel about....? What happens next? What would happen if teachers were able to slow the pace of instruction allowing children to question the world in which they dwell? What education needs are "thoughtful educators who can catch a question and deepen it with a quiet gesture" (van Manen, 2002, p. 21) of care and respect.

The hurried child and teacher.

The concept of childhood, so vital to the traditional American way of life, is threatened with extinction in the society we have created. Today's child has become the unwilling, unintended victim of overwhelming stress—the stress borne of rapid, bewildering social change and constantly rising expectations. (Elkind, 1981, p. 3)

Many schools today reflect the contemporary bias toward having children grow up fast. In a way this has happened because our schools have become increasingly industrialized and product-oriented. (Elkind, 1981, p. 47)

In the zone of between, I must learn to slow the pace of instruction, cognizant to acknowledge and value each of my children daily. Illustrated conversations, while providing opportunities to escape from the academic mania of completing all the reading groups, circle time discussions, math instruction, and literacy center hustle and bustle, also becomes a time that elicits more imbalance. Initially, children's stories would last no longer than 40 minutes, ending around 9:30, keeping 'on

schedule' for the required curriculum elements. As the year progressed, so did their stories. They became full of rich detail, exciting plots, and humorous conversation. They crossed into the official reading block time. I could feel myself begin to tense, wondering which way I should tip the scale.

As a teacher trying hard to balance it all, I find myself glancing at the clock after 10 children, wondering how many more I can get in before we really needed to stop and continue the conversations later in the day. This option, as discussed earlier, causes problems as well. The decision had to be made each day based upon the children. Their engagement with their meaningful activities became the determining clock. I don't believe that the "banquet of experiences that feeds all their senses, touches their hearts, and moves their souls...[should shrink] to an anorexic diet of activities, drills, and worksheets" (Jardine et al., 2003, p. 95) in order to accommodate our tight time schedule. So, illustrated conversations continued to lengthen as the year progressed, supported by the basics of early childhood education curriculum of "participation,...belonging,... conversation,...devotion,...listening openly and generously to each other...[and] students and the living questions they bring from their lives to the life of the classroom" (Jardine et al., 2003, p. xiii). I could not deny them or myself the pleasure of hearing their voices come alive with spirit and excitement.

Choosing the 'write' space. "In teaching children to write, one way of doing this is to look and listen beyond the words on the page and thereby allow more of children's language, cultural, and textual knowledge and know-how to enter into and inform official efforts to help them compose" (Dyson, 2008, p. 14). My children

engaged in exploring imaginary worlds, media worlds, and real worlds during illustrated conversations this year. Unexpected topics like farting, girlfriends, cuteness, Sonic adventures, and Cheeseland caught me off guard, and I had to wonder about my reactions to these. Do I accept them? Do I try to steer them toward a more ‘likeable’ subject that Others would approve of if they read them? I chose to trust my children and myself that they would work their way through this topic and we would come away with more of an understanding about what it means to be in that topic.

This freedom to choose repeatedly comes up as to why they enjoy our time together “better than reading centers,” because in “center time you have to choose the sentence that we have to write but at journal time you get to make your own sentence” (Samantha, June 8, 2009). “And you don’t have to glue and cut. And do hard work. All you have to do is make your own story” (James, June 8, 2009). And because “You get to tell your imagination, you get to tell anything you want. And you get to tell anything in your life that you like” (Jennifer, June 8, 2009). Their words are truly their own—no warm up read aloud to get them thinking about a topic. No writing lesson to model my idea. Just write whatever you want. After Samantha states that she enjoys her freedom, I ask her what school would be like if she got to make up her own sentences all the time. Her response, “Great!” Wouldn’t it be great if children had a say in what they were to write? How much more meaningful and engaging school would become. Children might actually want to learn and write about topics they are genuinely interested in, as opposed to something someone tells them to be excited about. Illustrated conversations are a part of my curriculum as lived, evolving

each year. They will compliment, not replace, nor be replaced by, a writer's workshop methodology. My children's voices are strong and worthy of attention.

The reflections about my own listening, questioning, balancing, and writing program have uncovered insights that could be acknowledged by others in other educational settings. What would it mean for more young children to engage in careful reciprocity with teachers? What meaning would they connect with school? Further research ideas have been brought to light as a result of this study, ones that I hope to pursue in the future, again with my kindergartners. Additionally, teacher preparation programs and administrators could benefit by attending to some of the insights that have revealed themselves during illustrated conversations. These unexplored spaces are waiting for meaningful place-making to occur.

Unexplored Spaces

Space: the final frontier
These are the voyages of the
[Illustrated Conversations]
Its [10 month] mission
To explore strange new worlds
To seek out new life and new civilizations
To boldly go where [my students and I have not] gone before
(<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/385400.html>, Retrieved August 4, 2009)

Each episode of illustrated conversations is a new adventure reaching into the unknown. We do not know what we were going to find in Cheeseland, Purpleland, or in a spindash with Sonic the Hedgehog. We use our communicators to transmit messages. We transport ourselves with beams of imagination pulsating through our bodies. The space we encounter becomes a place of intrigue and wonder as we

encounter new adventures. How do our journeys into the unknown call us to explore further? What can others learn about our voyage?

Our playful dialogue is one of volition. What the children choose to write about, tell stories about, and think about remains a power they possess. Illustrated conversations place the children in a privileged position. Their unexplored spaces are spaces that they control. What they choose to bring forth and what meaning I make from their voices is a choice they have privileged to me. The play we engage in is a choice they prefer over the “hard work” of “coloring and cutting.” What would happen if children’s play, either in dramatic play or in written self-expression, became as important a privilege as being given the rights granted them to engage in advanced reading and math instruction? What space could these playful engagements have in curriculum development?

Space to Find My Own Discoveries

I am called to teach by teachers—my mentors, Mrs. Kellehar, Mrs. Tillary, Mr. Frace—who also shed light on the field of study of tactful interaction in schools. I am “drawn to [this] body of knowledge because it shed[s] light on [my] identity as well as on the world. [I do] not merely find a subject to teach—the subject also [finds me]” (Palmer, 1998, p. 25). Vocation, from the Latin *vocatio*, refers to a call, a voice (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, Retrieved August 4, 2009). When I was five, I heard the voice of Mrs. Kellehar call me into kindergarten. I responded. I sought summer camp counseling jobs, after school child care employment, and read the literature on prominent teacher’s colleges. I began to live teaching “prepared to accept newness and surprise, pain and happiness; for these are the dimensions of the world that make

us rethink, almost daily, who and what we are” (Huebner, 1987/1999, p. 381). I now “answer the call of children and young people” daily (Huebner, 1987/1999, p. 380). Even when I am not in the classroom, I am drawn to young children. Do I seek out the children for comfort or escape, or do we find one another by chance? Inescapably, I am a teacher wherever I go.

My journey in illustrated conversations will continue as long as I am a classroom kindergarten teacher, evolving as the years uncover new insights. This 10-month voyage with these 16 crew members has revealed new worlds worthy of further inquiry. There are discoveries to be made for my ever changing role as teacher and carer. I will continue to re-search illustrated conversations for more meanings for different children and for myself.

Transcribing time. In the years to come, I will continue to use the tape recorder, which “capture[s] the unheard or unfinished murmur, the misunderstood and mystifying context, the disembodied voices asking for clarification and comfort,...[and] the impatience in *my* voice as children struggled for attention, approval, and justice” (Paley, 2007, p. 153). But in the future, instead of recording all their voices on one tape, each child will have their own story tape to accompany their journal. It will be their voiced stories for them to hold onto and relisten to as I did this year. Then, parents can also hear their children’s voice of imagination and excitement during the short-lived moments of early childhood wonder.

Due to the increasing mandates and time constraints, transcribing their stories biweekly is not a feasible option for the future. It is very time consuming and as I engaged in this transcription process, other aspects of my teaching and family life

took alternate undesirable paths. These need to return to the stable path that existed prior to this study. Without dismissing the capturing of their voices on paper, a critical element in making meaning, the process of transcription needs adjustment. Perhaps if I were provided more time to transcribe during the school day or have access to more accurate speech-to-text transcribing software, this part of illustrated conversations would remain in tact. Perhaps transcribing one every week or every other week is also a viable alternative. Each year is different, so it is a wait and see situation. These tensions, while they give “life its dynamic impulse, its normative structure and moral nature” must “also require of us a reflective response” (van Manen, 1991, p. 64).

Parents join in. Another aspect of illustrated conversations that was prompted by our initial approval meeting with parents is how to include families in the process. Could having parent sharing nights be an illumination and a time for parent reflection on their child’s voice? How would children react to this invitation? Often, I find myself wondering if parents should have the opportunity to explore their children’s entries. What would that bring to the experience? Would it alter the children’s entries like it did for Evan and Michael after their mothers had seen what they wrote about? Tension arises here. I begin the conversation with myself. Why shouldn’t I be able to send their journals home and expect them to return in the same condition? Why do I assume that parents may have the children alter them? Could it be that in conversations with parents in the past, comments arose such as, “They need to change that. It isn’t written very neatly. Is it okay if they write about that? Is that normal? Should they be writing about something else?” I fear that it would no longer

be the children's work. Parents would sit and tell them what to write and how to write.

And then the opposing view begins to intervene in the dialogue I have within. Parents would be spending time with their children, an element of education that is desired by teachers. How does this careful interaction provide support for their voices to be heard? What could parents learn from writing with their children? Would parents begin to use their hidden voices in the same way through journal writing? Would they begin to make meaning of their children's perspective? Perhaps by interacting with their children in a non-homework have-to, and instead as a joyful engagement in dialogue, parents' pedagogy of listening and rediscovering their languages would emerge. Could they begin to see their child in their mirror?

I see the child trying on my gestures, my ways of seeing and doing things, my ways of reacting, my ways of spending time....As he or she tries out the possibilities, I am reminded of the possibilities still open to myself. In this experience of pedagogical possibility lies the truth of the saying that children make us feel young again. (van Manen, 2002, pp. 12-13)

The child's point of view calls out to me with a shrill voice—What about me!?! What about my time, my space, my place in our conversation? I picture stunned faces, frowns and worry. This is their time to explore with no interference from adults. It is their time to talk about their family without the stress of “What if I say something they don't like? Will I be sent to my room? Will I get in trouble?” I know with my own two children at home, I am not invited to enter into their writing space. They would rather explore without me. Is it the role of ‘parent’ that creates this boundary? As a teacher, I do not enter into the production of the writing. I am not there to make judgments or changes. Illustrated conversations provide opportunities

for dialogue. Because of my experience and education, I understand children's voices, creativity, and fantasy to be true to early childhood education, while some parents may see writing on the lines and proper spelling more important than exploring the imagination. By sending journals home, would this not be an infringement or opportunity for some voices to be stolen away?

And so, I am left with another tension-filled space. I hope to include parents in the process by inviting them to view the journals at our evening plays, parent conferences, and a few interspersed evening gatherings. I believe that by informing parents about voice and keeping their voices alive throughout the schooling process may give children the support they need to excel in all areas of development. How might I help parents understand the voice and identity development of their children? Would outreach like this bridge the gap that pervades the home-school connection?

Carrying on the tradition. Seeing my children in the hallways prompts me to wonder what they have carried forth from kindergarten. Do they continue to write in journals at home, or does their storytelling come to a dead-end? What is the future of their meaning making? If "Education is the openness to a future that is beyond all futures" (Huebner, 1985/1999, p. 360), then what will their education be like after they leave kindergarten? Will their voices be open to being heard? In our tradition of dialogue, we talk together to share our views, our dreams, and our inner silliness. Will this time they treasure be treasured by others? I don't know the answers to these questions that swirl around in my head. By sharing my ideas with others, perhaps illustrated conversations or at least, reciprocal dialogue, could become an integral part of curriculum for young children. What would it mean to young children to walk into

a school building in which teachers and students engage in reciprocal care and trust throughout the day, not just during a storytelling conversation every other day. What would it be like if care were the curriculum?

Albert Bandura, a social learning theorist, developed a behaviorist model which states that a child will imitate individuals' social and emotional reactions (Gordon & Brown, 2003). For example, if adults in their life smoke, then the assumption is that the child will view this as acceptable and model that behavior. "If children live with sharing, they learn generosity...If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them...If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live" (Nolte & Harris, 1998, pp. vi-vii). As teachers, we must be constantly aware of our actions and our words. We must live in 'care'ful pedagogy. We must live like we want our children to live. We must engage in conversation if we want our children to learn conversation. If teachers re-membered what it was like as a child, perhaps our schools would be more engaging places to dwell for everyone. Laughter would fill the halls. Smiles and friendly greetings would abound. Respect for others wouldn't need to be taught—it would be a natural occurrence. Who wouldn't want to walk into a classroom, be greeted warmly, and invited to join in the exciting activities that engross their minds? So many people I talk to loved kindergarten because it was a place to learn and have fun. Perhaps we need to model other grade levels after kindergarten and not the reverse. The meaning my students and I make from our illustrated conversations can give voice to how teacher preparation programs, current practice, and administrators

engage with kindergarten curriculum in order to “explore strange new worlds...to seek out new life and new civilizations” (Phrase Finder, Retrieved August 4, 2009).

Others Exploring Space

I am not alone in living teaching. There are many called to teach, who, like me, find children an extricable part of who they are. What would teacher preparation programs look like if we attended to nurturing the natural order of being called by a profession instead of concentrating on what objectives need to be met in order for children to become successful? How could current teachers learn to engage in meaningful dialogue with young children, balancing the new mandates with their zone of comfort of early childhood practice? Perhaps “being able to tell our story to others and listen to the narratives of teachers who take their calling seriously may give us a picture, a moving picture, of where we have been, where we are, and where we are going” (Huebner, 1987/1999, p. 382). As noted in a narrative research study of preservice teachers by Olson and Craig (2009), one participant experienced a silencing of her voice while longing to hear the voices of her students:

However, when Susan entered the school context, she soon found she had moved from one institutional narrative to another. Neither of the two contexts seemed to have a place for the stories of people as individuals. Here in the school, Susan found theory replaced by policy...Susan was learning that school was a place that valued conformity, and this conformity could mask individual concerns. (pp. 554-555)

Listening to the voices of teachers who have not experienced the tensions of being in schools where academic instruction takes precedence over social/emotional development would provide springboards, like the pictures and text of my kindergartners, to understanding how teachers perceive their role in education. Would

care and tactful relationships emerge as curriculum? What can those who already reside in schools learn from them and them from us?

Illustrated conversations are pathways to balancing curriculum. What would happen if preservice teachers engaged in illustrated conversations during clinical experiences and made meaning of the rich data that springs forth? How might current kindergarten teachers approach data analysis differently? Elements not fully explored in this study but critical to balancing quantitative data with qualitative data, are how to analyze children's drawings and written text for cognitive, language, and social/emotional development. While teacher preparation programs and professional development courses already address how to teach reading and writing in isolation, using illustrated conversations as the mode of data collection allows teachers to do more than collect data to be used to drive instruction. It gives children and teachers the opportunity to come together and understand one another personally, on a level that is not, and perhaps, cannot be directly taught. It is lived. It requires time and patience to understand how to engage with young children aside from the mandated reading and math groups. It is a 'care'ful look inside the whole child, making meaning of how the child dwells in the kindergarten space and allowing teachers to also reflect on their own pedagogy.

Technical spaces. No Child Left Behind (2001) has spurred educational institutions to collect, analyze, and use data to create instructional progress for all children. The collection of data by teachers of young children relies on observation and informal assessment to drive instruction, rather than paper and pencil standardized tests. The formal assessments, reading groups, and math instruction that

kindergartners are required to complete are times of “hard work” for children. Since play is a self-chosen activity yet, one that young children learn from, could illustrated conversations, our play on paper, become a thought-provoking tool for curriculum development? Do schools force this distinction between work and play by the very nature of the roles that children and teachers assume in classrooms? Does work become hard when I am the authoritarian figure of ‘teacher’ while play becomes more valued by children when I am in my trusted adult role during conversation? The children have observed and assessed illustrated conversations as a careful learning and playful experience where volition is the data that should be analyzed. Examining illustrated conversations quantitatively and qualitatively can lead to insights into the cognitive and social/emotional development of young children. While the focus of this study is qualitative, teachers can also use the children’s drawings, written entries, and spoken dialogue to drive their literacy instruction.

Research on children’s drawings outlines stages of developmental growth to evaluate the level of a child’s abilities (Cox, 1997; Di Leo, 1970). For example, if one were to have examined Alex’s journal drawings from this perspective, it could be said that his representations of human figures lacked the detail often found in the drawings of peers his age. How could this information benefit teachers entering into classrooms where children’s levels are so diverse? What meaning could be made about how to support children if preservice teachers were trained to identify areas that need further attention? How might understanding what children’s drawings bring forth tell us about the social/emotional development and fine motor development of young children?

Analyzing the written text found in children's journals also provides data that could help teachers scaffold instruction and interaction for each child. Children like Jorge and Alex need more instruction in letter-sound correspondence, whereas Peter and Katie would benefit from editing and proofreading strategies. Brian and Becky need more practice writing b's and d's to overcome their many reversals. Providing direct instruction on the formal writing level of children could be determined using the true indices of illustrated conversation text. This is not to imply that these skills would be taught during illustrated conversations. It would require teachers to learn how to gather and analyze the data, plan for each child's growth and development, and create lessons for literacy instruction to accommodate these skills. It is the zone of between that allows one to utilize both curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived.

Language development for young children is another facet of illustrated conversations that springs forth from this study. How can I get Kim to slow down? How do I help Ashley get beyond the "go-ed" and "see-ed" stage and into a 'went' and 'saw' mode? Observation of children's developmental levels captured in these anecdotal notes provides the necessary documentation if long term concerns persist. These informal assessments become useful tools in parent conferences. They also become avenues for engaging other professionals in addressing the needs of each child. James' rapid speech was one such concern this year. As a result of our engaging in lengthy dialogue, I was able to tune into the difficulties I was having connecting with him. My response in the midst of dialogue was to continue our conversation without revealing to him my concerns. In the back of my mind I knew that I would address this rapid slurred speech with our speech/language teacher.

Bringing in specialists for concerns about development is a part of what evolved from our dialogues. How would children's expressive language development differ for children who engaged in illustrated conversations? Would the freedom to express themselves and make deeper meaning of their illustrations through story contribute further to the comprehension of reading texts?

Personal spaces. It is the area of social and emotional development that focuses this study of illustrated conversation and, thus, provides the most comprehensive picture of how we meet each child individually in tactful relation. Looking at the content of children's stories brings to the forefront lifeworlds of young children. What is meaningful for Samantha today? How can we address this together—today? How can I support Nicholas in his crumbling world? Where are Margery's friends? By engaging in illustrated conversations at the beginning of the day, I am able to hear their needs and respond to them before the academic mandates. Feeling safe and cared for gives children the power they need to accomplish their dreams. My children are my priority. The relationships we develop creates a curriculum

that acknowledges the importance of lived experience for children and teachers; that understands growth as more than an interior, private, individual matter of unfolding development; that situates teaching and learning within the context of an educative community; and that asks hard questions about the fuzzy, feel-good legacy of much of what teachers now do in the name of 'progressive' practice. (Clifford & Friesen, 2003, p. 17)

Illustrated conversations provide opportunities to explore children's lifeworlds with other professionals as well. This year, topics that arose during illustrated conversation provided the impetus for creating smaller spaces for children to address

their stories. The counselor and I would meet to discuss how we could form small discussion groups for the children who exhibited regular concerns. We created a “worry” group for Samantha, Jorge, Nicholas, and Brian that would visit with the counselor once a week during lunch time. Another group formed among the boys about violence and the importance of using words in real life situations. The girls visited with her and discussed “how to be friends” in the early part of the year when Ashley and Katie competed for social dominance. The boys also met to discuss the natural occurrence of flatulence and how to respect those that accidentally “let one go” in class. Our professional relationship deepened as we worked together to help each of our children adjust to life’s stresses and joys. She came to know more about each child through dialogue spurred by illustrated conversations. Together we “communicate[d] and search[ed] for new values and meanings...listen[ing] and shar[ing] conversation about what we [were] doing, how the young people of this year differ from those of past years, about the developments in our traditions, about the conflicts between young people and the traditions, and between students and school rules” (Huebner, 1987/1999, p. 385).

True spaces of reflection. Preservice candidates engaging in illustrated conversations could use reflection to narrate their own path of how they interact with others, navigate and balance the standardized mandates found in schools today, and find how living in teaching is a tactful engagement with others. To ask questions and reflect upon engagement with children in educational environments can begin “by developing a theory of education and then let our actions be informed by this theory. Or, on the other hand, we can start with life itself and let our reflections about our

living with children and young people help us to better understand pedagogical life” (van Manen, 1991, p. 214). Illustrated conversations begin with life. We must reflect upon the realities of engagement with young children in reciprocal dialogue, being true to ourselves as educators. New teachers inundated with new policies and procedures could find comfort in hearing the truth of their inner teacher. What meaning could be made if administrators heard the voices of their newest educators understanding how they position themselves in their new space and how they hope to create places where voices are heard and valued?

Would novice teacher attrition be lower if administrators heard and listened to the voices of their youngest ‘students’? As cited by Varrati et al. (2009), “First-year teachers leave the profession [because of] the discrepancy between their preparation and the actual requirements of the job, and the disparity between the first-year teacher’s expectations and the realities of the job (Brighton, 1999). Perhaps the real key to the problem of teacher attrition lies in the ability of a school to provide ongoing support, assistance, and training to new teachers” (p. 492). Perhaps also, if administrators spent less time adding more curriculum and more time engaging with and listening to the hearts and voices of the children they educate, schools would be places children would want to dwell in all year long. His Holiness the Dalai Lama believes that “The Western educational system, although it is very impressive to see the high standard of the facilities, the many material resources, and the perfection of so many different aspects of intellectual development, ...[is] lacking...the dimension of enhancing and developing the heart” (Dalai Lama, 1999, p. 87).

How to develop and enhance the heart would result from patience and practice in observing young children in their natural settings engaged in meaningful writing and dialogue. The relationships that would develop, coupled with training on the technical aspects mentioned above, could further develop literacy instruction and integrated curriculum development keeping the languages of young children alive. Is it possible that illustrated conversations might be the mode that could help administrators and teachers balance curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived with young children, while connecting parents and community to the learning process? What if dialogue and mutual reciprocity created by tactful educators and children became the curriculum from which we could still close the achievement gap? What a wonderful world that would be!

Treasured Places

Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the Voice of truth
(Casting Crowns, Voice of Truth, 2003)

I have spent over twenty years engaging in learning with young children, in particular, kindergarten students. Each year I enter my classroom with hopes and dreams of making each child a lifelong learner. I allow them to experience the fantastic world of kindergarten with its finger paint messes, tall block towers, exploding volcanoes, clay sculptures, performed plays, and dances with ribbons and scarves. The hope that my children learn that school is life and life is school pervades, and that no matter where we are or who we are with, the possibilities of discovering something new are endless. I need their youthful hundred, hundred, hundred voices to keep my hundred voices alive. To engage in conversation, hear their giggles, laugh at

their silly jokes, and give them a hug when they need one are engagements that keep me in place in kindergarten. Listening to my own reflections about my children places me face-to-face with truths to uncover. The conversation I have with myself opens the way to understanding how I dwell in kindergarten.

Truth is an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline. Truth cannot possibly be found in the conclusions of the conversation, because the conclusions keep changing...We must find a way to live in the continuing conversation, with all its conflicts and complexities, while staying in close touch with our own inner teacher. (Palmer, 2004, p. 127)

Moments spent with my children are times when I return to the saying, “Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.” Saying “Good Morning” or hugging them good-bye each day of our 180 days brings me the comfort that I touched their life, an encounter “that shuts out the rest of the world. In it lies the possibility of genuine interpersonal contact” (van Manen, 2002, p. 33). We create shared space to create our place of being.

Our place is built on commitment and care. Commitment to our journey together finds its way into my pedagogy and in their participation in our engagements. I commit myself to my children through careful planning of engaging and motivating lessons that propel their minds forward searching for more questions and answers. Why does...? What would happen if...? Suppose I...? They enter the classroom with open minds and hearts. They dedicate themselves as learners seeking to uncover the meaning of dwelling with me. The care I have for my children goes deep. I am lucky to be with young children who have not “lost touch with the sustaining qualities of spirit, community, and earth” when “beliefs, desires, and judgments are placed, undigested, in [their] minds” (Glazer, 1999, p. 80). I commit

myself to providing my children with opportunities to experience identity of spirit, “cultivating [their] sense of openness and engagement” (Glazer, 1999, p. 81). In our classroom, a “place where care dwells, a place of ingathering and belonging, where the indwelling of [myself and my] students is made possible by the presence of care that each has for the other” (Aoki, 2005b, p. 191), our hearts will forever be intertwined.

It is because of my children that I am who I am. Eternally grateful that I have been given the language of teaching to hear and help preserve my children’s hundred languages is a treasured gift that will continue to guide me along the paths of my journey, giving me the strength to climb every mountain that stands before me.

Climb every mountain, search high and low
Follow every by way, every path you know
Climb every mountain, ford every stream
Follow every rainbow, till you find your dream
A dream that will need, all the love you can give
Every day of your life, for as long as you live
(Rogers & Hammerstein, Climb Every Mountain, 1965)

APPENDIX A: PARENT LETTER

February 3, 2009

Dear Parents,

As many of you are aware, I am working on my doctorate at the University of Maryland College Park in Education Policy Studies with a focus on Curriculum Theory and Development in Early Childhood practices. The purpose of the study is to illuminate the many wondrous stories and lifework your children compose during the course of our 'illustrated conversations' or journaling time. Their voices are so precious and we truly want the world to hear them, appreciate them, and understand what they find of interest. Amidst the reading groups and math groups, often our children find little opportunity to express what matters most. Our journaling is a time for just that. With your permission, I would like to invite your child and his/her stories to become part of this telling of their lived experiences.

Please join me this Thursday, February 5, 2009 at 6:30 pm for light dinner and an informative session outlining the details of this study. I know this is short notice but I just got the approval and would like to move ahead on collecting stories. I look forward to working with you and your child as we journey together in our imaginations!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 301-xxx-xxxx or email me at Michele_A_Dean@xxxxxxx.

Thank you,

Michele Dean

Cc: D. Xxxxxxx

APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Page 1 of 4
Initials _____ Date _____

CONSENT FORM

Project Title	Illustrated Conversations: A Path for Listening to the Voices of Kindergartners
Why is this research being done?	<p>This is a research project being conducted by Michele Dean under the guidance of Dr. Francine Hultgren (principal investigator) at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because your child is enrolled in my kindergarten class and currently participates in journal writing as part of the curriculum</p> <p>The purpose of this research project is to provide opportunities for young children to express themselves, engage in discourse about their ideas, elaborate upon their stories, and understand better how their stories illustrate their lives.</p> <p>The writing and language arts activities that are a part of the current kindergarten curriculum include a Writer’s Workshop program to teach the mechanics of writing, journal writing time in which children write what interests them, literacy center writing which provides various activities to practice basic sight words in their writing, opportunities to examine and analyze literature selections, and a sharing time in which children are given opportunities to share their ideas and writing with classmates. Illustrated conversations, a method that combines journal writing, sharing, and self-expression, is a research activity that may help to reveal how children perceive writing in kindergarten and how it uncovers the meanings they create during the kindergarten year.</p>
What will I be asked to do?	<p>Your child will participate in conversations that further describe their illustrations that they create in their biweekly journal entries. These conversations will be taped recorded in order to transcribe their stories and provide a fuller and more detailed account of their ideas. The process lasts anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes depending upon how long they engage in the initial drawing and writing of their own ideas. The conversation with the teacher does not last longer than 5-10 minutes twice a week. Your child’s journal will be kept at school during the year and will be taken home by the teacher in June in order to complete the research. The original documents will be returned to you in the Fall 2009. If your child’s entry contains an example of a theme that may be uncovered, I will scan the illustration and written text in order to include it in the final report. Any names that appear in the text will be blanked out to protect their identification if you do not grant permission for your child’s first name to appear. Additionally, their names will not be used in the final report if permission is not granted. A pseudonym will be assigned instead.</p>

APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FORM

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Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	Illustrated Conversations: A Path for Listening to the Voices of Kindergartners
What about confidentiality?	<p>We will do our best to keep your child’s personal information confidential. To help protect your child’s confidentiality, the following will occur: (1) Permission to use the child’s first name only in text and in photo copies of their written entries will be requested from the parents. If permission is denied, pseudonyms will be assigned to children’s stories after the completion of their journals in June. (2) The journal entries that may be scanned and used in the final report will block out and/or alter the any names not permitted by parents that may appear as part of students’ writing. (3) The original journals will be returned to students in Fall 2009 after the final research has concluded. (4) Transcribed journal entries, all scanned materials, consent forms, any human subject files, and computer information will be held by the teacher for a period of ten years and then destroyed.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I agree to the tape recording of my child’s stories for transcription purposes only.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to the tape recording of my child’s stories for transcription purposes only.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your child’s identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. This information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if your child or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p> <p>In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to your child or others.</p>

APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Page 3 of 4
Initials _____ Date _____

What are the risks of this research?	<p>There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project, but the benefits are numerous. Students are engaging in personal communication with the teacher but are only revealing to her and others what they feel they are capable of. The teacher does not probe into the personal lives of the children, just upon the details of their stories. The children are able to express themselves and create their own stories without the pressures of spelling, grammar, and punctuation requirements. Children are able to explore and create stories from their lives and imagination.</p> <p>Participation in the illustrated conversations is part of the current curriculum, but the extent to which the children reveal themselves is left entirely up to them. The conversations help to uncover their interests and desires and how they interact with their world. Through illustrated conversations, young children reflect upon their own stories and from where they may originate.</p>
What are the benefits of this research?	<p>This research is not designed to help your child personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about how children experience writing in kindergarten settings. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how journaling with kindergartners allows for teachers and students to come together on the written page creating a lasting relationship and better understanding of what it means to care and teach our young children.</p>
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	<p>Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. While their participation in journal writing is part of the curriculum, you may choose for your child's entries not to be a part of the research report. If you decide to have your child participate in this research, you may also stop participating at any time. If you decide not to allow participation in this study or if you stop your child from participating at any time, your child will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which he/she otherwise qualify. Your decision on whether your child will participate will not affect your child's grades." Participation or non-participation in this study does not affect a kindergartner's grade in any manner.</p>

APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Page 4 of 4
Initials _____ Date _____

What if I have questions?	<p>This research is being conducted by Michele Dean under the guidance of Dr. Francine Hultgren at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Francine Hultgren at 3110 Benjamin Building, EDPS, University of Maryland, College Park, 20742 (email) fh@umd.edu or (telephone) 301-405-4562.</p> <p>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>						
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:;</i> <i>the research has been explained to you;</i> <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i> <i>you freely and voluntarily choose for your child to participate in this research project.</i></p>						
Signature and Date	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%; padding: 5px;">NAME OF SUBJECT</td> <td style="width: 40%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT'S PARENT</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">DATE</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	NAME OF SUBJECT		SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT'S PARENT		DATE	
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APPENDIX C: DATA ACQUISITION REQUEST

Office of Shared Accountability

February 4, 2009

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. F, Deputy Superintendent of Schools

From: S, Associate Superintendent, Office of Shared Accountability

Subject: Approval of Request to Conduct Research

The attached request to conduct research is approved. Ms. Michele Dean, graduate student, requests permission to conduct a research study in that examines the conversations of kindergarten students as they engage in conversations with their teacher about their journal writings. The students' conversations will be audiotaped and then analyzed to better understand how young children learn to elaborate and express their ideas. The research is part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in the Department of Education Policy, University of Maryland. The study site is Elementary School.

Data collection activities are scheduled between February and June 2009. Participation in the study is voluntary. Parents of kindergarten students will receive an invitation to attend an information meeting about the study. During the meeting parents will be given information that explains the study, the confidentiality of the data collection, and a consent form. Only those students whose parents return a signed consent form indicating their agreement to allow their children to participate will be included in the data collection activities. Ms. B, principal, Elementary School, supports the study.

All data will be reported in summary format. Names of participants, the school, and the school district will not be used in the summary of results. Ms. Dean agrees to provide the Office of Shared Accountability (OSA), and Ms. B with a summary of the results.

If you have questions regarding this request, please contact Mrs. C, logistics support specialist, Applied Research Unit, OSA, at - or via e-mail at

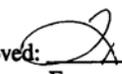
SLS:c

Attachment

Copy to:

✓ Ms.
Ms. Dean

Mrs.
Dr.

Approved:  F, Deputy Superintendent of Schools

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