

---

Theses

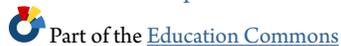
---

2002

Narrative, meaning making and personal development: Teachers' storied experience in Montessori, Steiner and other primary classrooms

Gayle C. Ward  
*University of Notre Dame Australia*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses>



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
Copyright Regulations 1969

WARNING

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further copying or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.

Do not remove this notice.

---

Publication Details

Ward, G. C. (2002). Narrative, meaning making and personal development: Teachers' storied experience in Montessori, Steiner and other primary classrooms (Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)). University of Notre Dame Australia. <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/32>

This dissertation/thesis is brought to you by ResearchOnline@ND. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of ResearchOnline@ND. For more information, please contact [researchonline@nd.edu.au](mailto:researchonline@nd.edu.au).



**NARRATIVE, MEANING MAKING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:  
TEACHERS' STORIED EXPERIENCE IN MONTESSORI, STEINER AND  
OTHER PRIMARY CLASSROOMS**

**Gayle Cuming Ward**

B.A. (Smith), Dip. Ed. (Murdoch U.), M.Ed.(Xavier U.)

A thesis submitted to The Graduate School of Education of  
The University of Notre Dame Australia  
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2001

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following individuals for assisting in my thesis preparation by contributing their expertise and stories to the research supporting it:

Professor Ann Zubrick, supervisor and mentor, for being a true Renaissance scholar in applying the breadth and depth of her knowledge and experience in guiding me on my multi-disciplinary journey.

Montessori, Steiner, Government and Catholic school primary teachers Vicky Carlton, Shawn Dougherty, Nigel Ipp, Michele Iriks, Lynne Jones, Fran Poole, Ellen Zink, Bernadette Gaskin and the other interviewees who generously shared their time and teaching/learning narratives with me.

The students of the teacher interviewees who welcomed me into their classrooms to observe them and my own primary school and university students who shared their learning journeys with me.

Richard Ward and Caroline Pearce for their editing assistance.

Consulting teacher, Victoria Biggs of Perth Ladies' College for sharing her integrated curriculum experiences as well as providing insight on the use of narrative to foster spiritual awareness, Barbara Bosich of Christ Church Grammar School and Curtin U. and Jan Phillips of Penrhos College for sharing their Reggio Emilia experiences and ideas for 'best practice' in early childhood education, and Elizabeth Peel of Mary MacKillop Primary School for clarifying the application of the religious education curriculum to children's personal narrative.

Professor Don Watts (Dean of Research and Postgraduate Studies) and Professor Tony Ryan (Dean of Education) at The University of Notre Dame Australia for their guidance and supervision.

Dr. John Carrigg, Head of School of Humanities at The University of Notre Dame Australia, for his insight into transformative learning, Dr. Grace Tarpey, formerly of The University of Notre Dame, for her assistance in exploring philosophical questions relating to narrative, and architect, Joy Cuming, for sharing her experience in merging metaphor and logical thinking.

Dr. John Carrigg and Dr. Roger Vallance of The University of Notre Dame Australia for their assistance using QSR NUD\*IST software.

Ministers, Geoff Blyth and Kevin Dilks, of the Perth Wesley Church and theologian, Sue Goodwin, for sharing insights into bibliocounseling, narrative therapy and reflection and meditation.

Crystal Dahlmeier, Associate Executive Director of Children, Inc. of Covington, Kentucky, Lesley Payne and Dr. Jan Currie of Murdoch U., Susan Takao and Jody Fitzhardinge of Curtin U., Jennifer Nevard and Clyde Cuming of TAFE, Carmel Bochenek of Notre Dame and Dr. Jane Figgis of AAAJ Consulting Group for providing support through professional dialogue and the sharing of resources.

Rosemary, Jack, Richard, Britt, Jaye, Tyler, Liz, Whitney, Mollie, Teagan, Harrison, Pam, David, Sue and Hunter for listening to my stories.

## **Abstract**

This study explored how narrative was being used to foster meaning-making in Montessori, Steiner, Government and Catholic schools. In-depth interviews of twelve teachers from the four educational settings were used to collect teachers' stories that comprised the data on narrative use. NUD\*IST software was employed to organise data and to focus on emerging concepts through data analysis. A wide spectrum of narrative uses related to meaning making was revealed. These varied understandings support using narrative to foster insight on three levels relating to several theoretical views of narrative and its importance.

Firstly, narrative was recognised by the interviewees as a powerful linguistic structure essential for decoding and encoding oral and literary communications. The importance of oracy was highlighted by several interviewees, and most effectively demonstrated in the Steiner classrooms. From the teachers' storied data, it became apparent that an integrated or balanced language approach evolving from whole language strategies is widely valued in the Government and Catholic schools to foster the development of literary skills. Montessorians varied in how they have adopted this balanced language approach..

In a second pattern, teachers indicated ways that narrative is used in their schools to deepen children's understanding of their personal journey in the context of their community and culture. Means of making children aware of the human journey

include exposure to life rhythms, festivals, rituals, and the stories of their communities representing various cultures and generations. Multiple approaches used to nurture an authentic voice in the classroom include collaborative literary explorations, sharing sessions, multi-level questioning, and biographical and autobiographical studies.

On a third level, some interviewees revealed that they used narrative to foster transformation by motivating students through experiences of wonder, encouraging reflection and journalling, and introducing virtue and value education through literary and personal narrative. Montessori, Steiner and some contemporary pedagogies support the view that a strong cultural identity and exposure to archetypes and universal themes contributes to spiritual transformation by celebrating an individual's uniqueness as well as his/her role in an interdependent universe. There is evidence that 'big stories', 'themes' or questions presented in narrative form contribute to integrating the disciplines of a curriculum and thus make it more meaningful.

## Table of Contents

<b>Title Page</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Declaration of Authorship</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Prologue</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Chapter</b>	
<b>I. Narrative, The Meaning Making Tool</b>	<b>1</b>
The Structure of Narrative	2
The Properties of Narrative	6
Two Narratives – A Novel and A History	23
<b>II. Identifying and Applying a Methodology</b>	<b>33</b>
Choosing Qualitative Research – A Historic Rationale	34
Qualitative Research – A Contemporary Choice	38
Data Collection	43
Data Analysis Methodology	64
<b>III. Narrative – A Context for Language Development</b>	

	<b>and Understanding</b>	72
	Is there is a link between language and thought that begins early and is developmental?	73
	How do children use narrative as a tool in constructing their knowledge and understanding?	79
	How is oracy a prelude to literacy?	82
	What are the effects of basing reading and writing curriculum activities on whole meaningful texts?	86
	Does effective language education mean heeding certain principles of natural learning?	88
	Do children learn most effectively when they are provided with an integrated approach to language exploration?	115
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Experiencing the Complexity of the Human Journey</b>	123
	Acknowledging the Importance of Narrative Thinking as well as Paradigmatic Thinking	125
	Provision for Imagery and Allegory	134
	Provision for Rhythm, Ritual and Memory	144
<b>V.</b>	<b>Constructing and Exploring Personal Narrative</b>	182
	Creating Opportunities for Self-Discovery through Authentic Dialogue	183
	The Use of Sharing, Autobiography and Biography	208
	Catering for Individual Differences	229
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Using Narrative for Personal Transformation</b>	258
	Engagement – Providing a Focus for Reflection and Self-Discovery	261
	The Plot – Exploring the Possibilities of Personal Change	287

<b>VII. Transformation – Making Connections</b>	316
Conflict and Resolution Strategies – Overcoming Obstacles to Achieve Change	317
A Narrative Conclusion – The Realisation of Connectedness	336
<b>VIII. Curriculum of Connectedness</b>	359
Models of Integrated and Narrative – Based Curriculum for Primary Students	361
Implications of Integrated and Narrative – Based Curriculum for Teacher Education	396
<b>IX. The Denouement</b>	416
Conclusion	416
Implications for Further Research	431
The Epilogue	442
<b>Bibliography</b>	467
<b>Appendices</b>	490
Appendix A: Maria Montessori and the Montessori Method	490
Appendix B: Rudolf Steiner and The Waldorf Schools	491
Appendix C: The Reggio Emilia Approach	492
Appendix D: Interview Questions	493
Appendix E: Letter to Principal	494
Appendix F: Letter to Teacher	495

Appendix G: Parental Permission Form	496
Appendix H: Use of Name Form	497
Appendix I: Observation Sheet	498
Appendix J: Sample Coding – Montessori	500
Appendix K: God With No Hands	505
Appendix L: The Big Bang	510
Appendix M: The Fusion Curriculum	513
Appendix N: Order vs. Chaos	514

## Prologue

My quest began one unseasonably rainy day in April, 1989. I was then a mature age student at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia, enrolled in a Reading focus module in *English and the Primary Curriculum* taught by lecturers Jo-Anne Reid and Bill Green. It was a pleasant surprise that day to come in out of the dripping weather and note that students were sitting around small tables introducing themselves. I remember thinking what a refreshing change this was from the lecture/tutorial format as I found an empty seat and learned the names of a few people previously known only by sight. By the end of a day of interaction and dialogue we had all learned the value of collaborative learning and formed some friendships as well.

The first activity was to read poems silently, then select one in our group which we later performed. At each step of the lesson we reflected on our learning in our 'log books'. For me this was the first time that I had used journalling to reflect on my own learning – seizing critical moments to connect my thoughts and experiences. These entries constituted the first chapter of a process that has now extended for twelve years.

For the next activity we were given the title of an adult story, *Aunt Jane*. From the title alone we wrote down our predictions as to the characters, settings and events and then shared our ideas with our group partners. Then we revised our predictions after reading the first few paragraphs and shared an outline of what we thought the plot of the story would be. By now I was totally engaged in the narrative process. I had become part of the story and I felt ownership. I was also fairly accurate in my

prediction of the time and the setting although I never suspected Aunt Jane would have a hidden life!

We next applied these skills to a novel for young people entitled *Pinballs* by Betsy Byars (1977). I became instantly involved in predicting the conflict and resolution that would surround the three foster children in the story. By the time we got to explore the structure and grammar of the text I was convinced that I was experiencing something that would change my teaching forever. Even identifying parts of speech was interesting against the backdrop of the *Pinballs*' plot.

Affirming the temporal power of narrative, I began to revisit past events in my life seeing them from a new perspective in light of this meaningful experience of becoming totally engaged in learning. I recalled how the first time I enjoyed going to school was when I moved to a new town in Grade 2 and Miss Borden greeted me at the door. I now realised that I had such fond memories for this class because Miss Borden was all about story! She was interested in my personal narrative and that of every child in the class. We each felt that we were adding to her day by even appearing in the classroom. She also read stories to us daily – adventure stories, bible stories, fairy tales and varied our reading books whenever possible. This year was such a contrast to other boring primary school years characterised by ‘round-robin’ reading and basal readers<sup>1</sup>. I realised decades later that my engagement and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Round Robin* reading – refers to taking turns to read the text aloud. *Basal reader* refers to readers artificially structured to introduce vocabulary in order of level of difficulty of the word structures.

motivation was maintained because Miss Borden used real and meaningful narratives in her teaching.

My other positive memory from primary school was studying ancient civilisations in Miss Oser's sixth grade class. I became interested in the history of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans as well as their mythologies. I have not forgotten the skills she taught us including taking notes, making outlines and writing reports – possibly because the historical and mythological narrative context of these skills was so engaging. Again, this was a great contrast to the next two years of diagramming random sentences and plodding page by page through the grey grammar book.

So, almost three decades later, I gained insight into the significance of these random childhood experiences in contributing to my teaching narrative. As an adult in a teacher training class, I experienced first-hand the power of using narrative to provide the structure for an integrated or balanced study of language<sup>2</sup> incorporating the skills of encoding and decoding language.

The next significant event in my adult learning journey occurred in July, 1990, when during the school holiday break from teaching my 6-9 year old class, I attended a

---

<sup>2</sup> Integrated or balanced approach to language teaching implies teaching decoding (reading and listening) and encoding (speaking and writing) as well as the corresponding phonetic, grammar and comprehension skills in a meaningful text or theme context.

workshop where I heard visiting California-based Montessorian, Ursula Thrush, relate *The Story of the Development of Life*.<sup>3</sup>

I was moved backwards 345,000,000 years to the Paleozoic Era when life was all in the sea and trilobites were the protagonists until they were superceded by the crinoids.<sup>4</sup> The drama became more complex as land emerged from the waters and amphibians and then reptiles evolved. The Mesozoic era was the time of the dinosaurs and huge insects. It was also distinguished by many large plants and the origins of coral reefs. I was astounded to learn that our finite coal and oil resources date back to this time – animal and plant matter pushed underground and under pressure by the evolving geology of the planet. Then 65,000,000 years ago the Cenozoic era began dominated by mammals – haired creatures who usually give birth to live young and then cared for them and modern flowering plants emerged that were interdependent with insects and birds. Human mammals' arrival is noted by calling the era Neozoic. In listening to this story, one is struck by how short a time humans have populated earth considering the history of the planet. Relating the advent of humans to the preceding narrative, I gained a perspective for the complexity of

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Story of the Development of Life* is also referred to as *The Timeline of Life*.

This is one of the five great Montessori stories. The others are *The Story of the Creation of the Universe*, *The Story of the Coming of Human Beings*, *The Story of Mathematics* and *The Story of Language*.

<sup>4</sup> Trilobite – an ancient marine arthropod with a 3 lobed furrowed body. The trilobites ingested calcium from the sea. This job was taken over later in the era by the crinoids. Also known as sealillies, these are echinoderms resembling plants with feathery arms.

our species. Here is the most advanced creature physically, cognitively and spiritually and yet the most dependent on other creatures and with young who require care for the longest period of time.

Never before had I felt so energised by a narrative or motivated towards productivity. Along with my fellow teachers, I explored zoology, botany, geography and history as a result of this cultural encounter with an eminent Montessorian sharing a megastory with us. This was my introduction to the Cosmic curriculum<sup>5</sup> – an integrated curriculum that starts with a narrative so powerful that it potentially motivates study in a range of other subjects.

Another experience influential in my adult learning journey occurred during 1994-1995 when I travelled to the USA to pursue a Master's Degree while working as a Montessori teacher. During this time, I had the opportunity to visit many American classrooms. At that point I became aware that the way 'whole language'<sup>6</sup> was being

---

<sup>5</sup> Cosmic curriculum – paradigm for guiding the whole child as he/she explores the whole universe and the purpose of all things with the cosmos ultimately gaining a realisation of the importance of his/her own being in the vast plan. Cosmic curriculum designed by Montessori is an integrated curriculum she proposed for primary school with the great stories at the center motivating study in varied disciplines. This has also been referred to as a 'fusion' curriculum (Kahn, 1995a, 1995b).

<sup>6</sup> Whole language – The term 'whole language' is used to denote meaningful language learning in a whole context. In America it is often equated with its original premise that given an interesting, engaging text, children will learn the skills of decoding and encoding, as they require them to make meaning without having to be taught them explicitly in a carefully sequenced order. Awareness that

realised as an ‘integrated’<sup>7</sup> language approach in Australia was quite innovative; this is intriguing when one considers that in the 70’s and 80’s whole language practitioners in Australia were greatly influenced by American educators advocating process and genre writing and the reading of real and meaningful texts in lieu of basal readers. Indeed, at the American university where I was studying, a language textbook supplementing the Montessori curriculum for trainee teachers was written by an American who came to Australia for training (Routman, 1991).

Observations that I made over a period of more than a decade in the USA and Australia revealed that, despite the high degree of similarity in Montessori schools worldwide, the approach to language teaching varied enormously. Some schools embraced whole language – an integrated approach offering opportunity for a wide choice of contemporary literature-based activities incorporating big books, Great Books<sup>8</sup> and stories from many cultures. In other schools, the language curriculum was defined with reference to specific traditional Montessori didactic materials to

---

many children did not pick up the necessary skills has led to a ‘back to basics’ movement in the USA and Canada.

<sup>7</sup> In Australia, ‘whole language’ does not have the negative connotation that it has in North America as it has evolved into an integrated or balanced approach to language teaching. Meaningful engaging texts are used, but they are broken down into parts to ensure that skills are taught and grammar and spelling rules discovered with guidance.

<sup>8</sup> Great Books refers to classics republished as sets for use in schools.

foster an understanding of grammar including function games<sup>9</sup>, grammar boxes<sup>10</sup> and sentence analysis materials<sup>11</sup> as well as specific activities to reinforce the reading of sentences from simple to complex. In some classrooms literary explorations were minimal and classified nomenclature for the cultural areas<sup>12</sup> provided a main source for reading practice and interpretation. In many classes there was little integration between the traditional Montessori grammar activities and literature. In other words, the sentences students were analysing or constructing were not related to what they were reading. I began to wonder if these variations indicated that Montessori teachers believed the language programme should be reconstructed, but were not sure how to do this most effectively.

These varied language profiles contrasted greatly with the consistency in the Montessori classrooms I visited where a cultural theme was a catalyst for most of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Function Game – Game to introduce or reinforce the concept of the use of a part of speech designed to be a key experience that incites the imagination often using objects and miniature environments or situational drama.

<sup>10</sup> Grammar Boxes – Grammar Boxes are viewed as an activity designed to reinforce the parts of speech and to provide a visual presentation of the structure of sentences (Payne, 1997). Corresponding Command Boxes reinforce the classification of the grammar boxes with drama and movement.

<sup>11</sup> Sentence Analysis Materials – Sentence analysis materials include activities for reading analysis when arrows with questions and symbolic disks are used to divide the whole of the sentence into its parts according to the questions these parts answer. Sentence analysis also incorporates sentence construction in which the student uses the questions highlighted by the materials to construct a sentence and logical analysis in which the student analyses the parts of the sentence.

<sup>12</sup> Classified nomenclature – refers to three part definition cards (picture, label, and definition) for terms used in cultural subjects (history, geography, and biology).

classroom subjects. In some classrooms historical narrative formed the basis for integrated study; the wonderful universal narratives, the five great stories<sup>ii</sup>, launched both children and teachers into many exciting interdisciplinary explorations similar to those I first experienced in Ursula Thrush's 1990 workshop. Personally, as a teacher, I experienced great motivation and enthusiasm each time I told one of these great stories in my classroom and guided children in exploring interesting pathways that emerged from the stories. I felt fortunate to be able to share their excitement in discovering the links between disciplines and understood why Montessori referred to this as a "Cosmic Plan"<sup>iv</sup> (Montessori, 1948/1989). Other Montessori classrooms based their integrated studies on geography – selecting a continent, country or biome<sup>13</sup> as an investigative base. As children in these classrooms explored the fundamental needs of humans in varying geographic settings, they were often guided into exploring not only geography and history, but also biology, literature, religion, music and art.

In contrast, in the Australian mainstream schools that I visited, the efforts towards integrated learning were primarily in the literature-based or thematic-based language programmes rather than in the social studies area. I witnessed an exciting myriad of activities suitable to the development of the children and catering for listening, speaking, reading and writing. In response to demands for more structural support in

---

<sup>13</sup> Biome – A biome in an interdependent community of plants and animals with the composition of the land area affected by climatic conditions (e.g. a savannah biome, a tropical rainforest biome, etc.)

whole language *First Steps*<sup>14</sup> had been introduced and broadly implemented in Western Australia. Using this programme framework, teachers plotted a child's level of literacy on a developmental continuum and then had guidelines for strategies utilising rich text activities to cater for varied rates of learning in whole class or small group contexts. As a result of this programme, more teachers were demonstrating an ability to cater for individual rates of learning and to offer small group activities at varied levels of difficulty. Previously, I had not seen this type of teaching except in alternative, child-centered schools such as Montessori. At the same time, that wonderful experience of engagement that I had first experienced at Murdoch in 1989 was maintained and fostered with creative activities including, for example, reader's theatre, changing one genre to another (e.g. turning a story into a poem or a news article), asking questions at varied levels to foster more in-depth thinking, and creating story maps and plot profiles.

In talking to other teachers trained in the 80's and 90's and from observing trainee teachers in the 90's, I learned that my impression of the power of whole-integrated language is not an isolated one. Teachers and students are excited about language learning in ways that those of us schooled in the 50's and 60's would never have dreamed possible. Nevertheless, I retained a concern from my otherwise inspiring visits to whole language classrooms that, despite the wonderful integration of the language modalities, there still seemed to be fragmentation in the overall curriculum. The language programme either did not relate to other subjects or a thematic approach

---

<sup>14</sup> *First Steps* – an integrated and developmental approach to teaching language in primary school developed by The Ministry of Education, Western Australia, in 1992.

was being followed where teachers went to great effort to relate everything to the story being studied to create “Circus Week” or “Pirate Week” or “Pet Week”. The thematic curriculum provided many teacher-designed links that probably helped to broaden the concepts for the children, but there was still fragmentation from theme to theme and little evidence of themes being revisited at varied levels as children had more experience to bring to the subject.

I began to wonder if whole language and Montessori teachers might benefit from an exchange of ideas on the use of narrative in teaching. I wondered:

Is it possible for Montessori teachers to adopt contemporary whole language curriculum suggestions without sacrificing some basic tenets of Montessori such as child-centered learning, integrated subject explorations and choice in learning activities?

Is it possible for mainstream whole-language teachers to achieve a wholly integrated curriculum without fundamental changes in their school pedagogies and to allow children more input and choice in their individual programmes?

Will current curriculum innovations allow the adoption of an integrating force such as the universal themes portrayed in the Montessori Great Stories?

As I personally explored these questions, it occurred to me that *narrative* was the common denominator of my two methodology experiences. Whole language explorations are often in the motivating context of story or *narrative*. The Montessori cosmic curriculum is based on historical *narrative*. When I had the opportunity to attend a few Waldorf School<sup>15</sup> open-days, I noted that their integrated curriculum is also based on narrative, but in this curriculum mythological *narrative* is the catalyst. I then realised that different types of narrative could be used to integrate a curriculum. As a result of this experience, the setting for my exploration was broadened as I became curious to know:

How are teachers of other pedagogies using narrative in their primary classrooms?

I was pondering how much each of these educational perspectives could learn from each other through adopting broader views of the use of narrative, when I received a catalyst in the form of an address at a Montessori national conference in Chicago in 1997 by Dr. Margaret Loeffler, Teacher Research Network<sup>16</sup> founder and Montessori teacher educator. She urged Montessori educators to “join the mainstream,” “learn

---

<sup>15</sup> Waldorf School: Steiner Schools are often referred to as Waldorf schools after the first one, which was opened in the Waldorf cigarette factory.

<sup>16</sup> The Teachers Research Network was founded in the USA in 1985. Montessori teachers who enroll meet regionally to study research methodology and then to provide support for each other as they conduct action based research in their classrooms.

what others have to offer” and to add “our own ideas.” She asserted that as we reach out, “we must develop a new attitude among ourselves that says it’s all right to reexamine Montessori’s ideas in light of new things that are learned” (Loeffler, 1998). I was further influenced at the conference by Montessori Principal and teacher, Dr. Judith Scott (1997) who in her address on *Evolution as Philosophy* noted that “All the greatest teachers were storytellers. Story unites all subjects and gives meaning to life.” These educators inspired me to delve more deeply into the use of narrative in education and to use my experiences both as a whole language, government-trained teacher and as a Montessori-trained teacher to launch an exploration of how a varied use of narrative impacts our classrooms and children’s learning.

Thus, by 1998 when I began my Ph.D. study, a decade had elapsed since I first began to marvel at the power of narrative in teaching. During this decade, qualitative research tools and guidelines had evolved to a point where humanitarian concerns such as meaning making could be effectively explored. I began a qualitative quest hoping through my research to learn about the use of story through stories – the stories of teachers in both Montessori and non-Montessori schools. Specifically, I hoped to examine my own assumptions about the use of narrative based on my own classroom observations and experiences and to be able to competently theorise about the use of narrative as a teaching tool by finding answers to the following:

What is the place of narrative in contemporary classroom teaching and learning?

How do underlying philosophical traditions and beliefs influence the uses of narrative in different schools in Montessori, Steiner, Catholic and Government school settings?

How is narrative used to support learning across the curriculum and in personal development in each educational setting?

How do teachers describe and interpret effects on their own and children's learning?

These questions emerged from the reconstructing of my own teaching narrative in terms of significant events such as the whole language reading class of 1989, the Ursula Thrush lecture of 1990, and the Loeffler lecture in 1997. As each of these experiences called my previous teaching pedagogy into question, I viewed previous events in my life such as second grade with Miss Borden in a new perspective. My vision of my future teaching was also altered. For me teaching would henceforth comprise more story telling and less knowledge imparting, more meaningful texts and less isolated skill study. I decided that before commencing my research of these questions, it was essential to explore the extraordinary powers of narrative that enable one to make connections that restructure the present as well as the past and future.