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

Gayle C. Ward
University of Notre Dame Australia

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Chapter V

Constructing and Exploring Personal Narrative

We are on the pathway to self-discovery when we are aware that we are unique beings with an individual voice. Hearing the storied experiences of others with whom we feel a connection can influence the choices that contribute to our uniqueness. These ‘others’ might range from distant or ancient heroes to close friends and community associates. Personal journey choices can also be affected by an awareness of what endowments and interests contribute to a person’s individuality.

A literature review and interviews with teachers revealed some means by which students and their teachers are encouraged to explore their personal narratives and in so doing to discover their own voices and guideposts to assist them in life’s journey.

Approaches revealed included:

- creating opportunities for self-discovery through authentic dialogue including student-teacher dialogue, students finding an authentic voice and teachers finding an authentic voice in the staffroom;
- the use of sharing, autobiography and biography through sharing personal narrative, exploring and presenting our autobiography, biography, and communal and intergenerational sharing; and

- catering for individual differences by
 catering for differences in temperament,
 for gender differences, and
 multiculturalism.

Creating opportunities for Self-Discovery through Authentic Dialogue

Classrooms are socio-constructivist recognising that for individuals to “construct” themselves, they must be in a community experiencing authentic dialogue. There is an argument that the term “socio” is redundant, for can one construct oneself without social interaction? Even if a student were engaged in a solitary constructive cognitive activity, he/she would clearly be influenced by past interactions with family, teachers and peers. Vygotsky describes this as moving from an interpersonal process to an intrapersonal one.

An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Relationships are clearly a key influencing factor in the construction of our personal narratives by which we make meaning of our experiences. LaRouchelle and Bednarz

concur with Vygotsky's implication that constructivism is only possible in a social milieu.

At issue is the need to move forward from a world of facts and materials to a world of symbols and models which take account not only of the cognitive and deliberative experiences of doers and creators but also of the relationships which encompass experiences of either kind. (LaRouchelle and Bednarz, 1998, p. 7)

Perhaps the term "socio" is added to constructivism to acknowledge this aspect of the learning process. Instead of merely accepting that relationships are variables that affect our perceptions, perhaps we can actively use social factors to promote meaning making. This might be achieved through establishing authentic dialogue between teacher and student, by fostering collaborative learning and purposeful dialogue between and among students and by offering children opportunity to share stories of their own journeys. We can also provide them with models of other peoples' personal narratives and an exposure to individual and cultural similarities and differences.

Student-Teacher Dialogue

In addition to the principles outlined by Cambourne that were discussed in Chapter III, Mem Fox underscores the importance of actively considering relationships as a principle of learning (Cambourne, 1988; Fox, 1997). She emphasises that for efficient learning to occur, children must "feel safe enough to learn without fear; so they won't be afraid to take risks" (Fox, 1997, p. 123). This sense of safety ensues from genuine interpersonal relationships in the classroom.

Relationships are fundamental to learning. Teachers cannot be aloof, detached, or apolitical. We cannot withhold personal information, keep our first name a secret, pretend to have no emotions, or merely feign interest in children's worlds. We must interact honestly with our students. Real life literacy is always a social event, so our classrooms need that scaffold of social cohesion. (Fox, 1997, p. 123)

Parker Palmer (1997) expressed the similar view that good teachers “are able to weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (p.2). Like Fox, Palmer (1997) infers that this connectedness cannot be achieved if teachers keep their personal lives totally separate from their teaching lives. “Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self” (p. 2).

A first step towards achieving authentic dialogue in the classroom is for teachers to reveal themselves as multifaceted human beings by revealing some of their own journey to their students. Adult stories – the stories from their teachers and parents – “help children negotiate meaning from the mixed messages that bombard them daily. Stories help children to feel grounded” (Diz-Imbelli, 1998, p. 32). Montessorian, Nigel, shares aspects of his own life with his 6-9 year old class:

So in terms of my own personal narrative, this class is really lovely. I can catch them and bring them in at any time just telling them something about my own personal life. When we had Father's Day, we had a picture of [Nigel's

birthplace on another continent]. And I picked it up and showed them that I was going to be there and see that mountain and that beach...And the kids said, "Are you going to visit your father?" and I said, "Yes" and [one child] said, "Why doesn't he come here and visit you?" I said, "Why don't you write and tell him?" so she sat down and wrote a Father's Day letter to my father...Such a wonderful moment. True, I have a father and he is there. They would love to meet him. He is a great storyteller. He brought us up on stories.

(Nigel 1: 47)

Shawn describes how in her Montessori school's autobiography project – discussed further below – teachers made a concerted effort to reveal aspects of their life stories:

The children got over thinking we ate and slept here and raised our children here. They couldn't believe we had a husband and a home. What do you mean you live three blocks away? They thought that was so odd. So now they know I have a home and children and that I take a writing class. They have seen me write in my journal because I bring that in to the classroom.

(Shawn 1: 292)

Lynne decided that sharing her own stories would give her class confidence to write their own stories.

I was thinking that what I'll have to do as a motivation for this writing session, because it's separate from our other language...And what I was thinking of

doing was telling my own story on a particular topic and then getting them to write their own. Say, if it was, "The Funniest Thing that Ever Happened to Me" then I would have to tell the funniest thing that ever happened to me.

(Lynne 1: 81)

Lillian Katz reveals the disheartening observation that most of the time teachers spend talking to students is concerning classroom routines.

It is my general impression from observations of early childhood settings all over the U.S. that the content of teacher-child relationships seems similarly focused on the routines and the rules of classroom life, especially during informal activity periods; when children are painting or drawing, teachers seem very reluctant to engage the children in any kind of conversation at all. (Katz, 1993, p. 28)

Katz believes that the Reggio Emilia approach is a positive and dramatic contrast to this empty dialogue because the students and teachers are sharing an exploration.

(Refer to Appendix C).

My impression of Reggio Emilia practices is, in contrast, that to a large extent the content of teacher - child relationships is focused on the work itself, rather than mainly on routines or the children's performances on academic tasks. Adults' and children's minds meet on matters of interest to both of them. Both the children and the teachers

seem to be equally involved in the progress of the work, the ideas being explored, the techniques and materials to be used, and the progress of the projects themselves. The children's rules in the relationships were more as apprentices than as the targets of instruction or objects of praise. (Katz, 1993, p. 29)

Reggio Emilia influenced consulting teacher, Jan Phillips, supports Katz' views. On a recent visit to her pre-primary class, she shared her belief that it is important that teachers be seen as learners as well as teachers by the students. For this reason, she prefers the term 'educator' to 'teacher' because she feels it implies that we have flexible roles. She gave an example from that particular week in her class. She used her knowledge of biology to guide the children in their study of the interdependence of insects and plants and they subsequently collected ladybird eggs to study. She shared with them that she is learning to use technology as she set up a microscope to a computer for them to watch the eggs hatching and printed out colour photos of the stages (Phillips, 2000). Steiner teacher, Bernadette, voiced similar sentiments. Her children understood she was learning music alongside them as a fellow learner. They also understood that she had an incredible knowledge of Shakespeare that she could share with them as a teacher.

I am very conscious of giving that picture to the children - that I'm learning new things too. And with the music and things, I am only just one step ahead of them. ... They know that I have to go home and practise things too. That I'm preparing something that I'm going to share with them in a couple of weeks. (Bernadette: 200-205)

And they go home and say to their mothers, "Now Bernadette must be sitting on her verandah reading Shakespeare with a cup of tea." That's wonderful that they see that I am a striving human being, that I continue to learn and that I have things that I love. (Bernadette: 326)

Teacher-student dialogue can become a catalyst for learning if there is genuine sharing of personal narrative as well as dialogue regarding the joint exploration of interesting topics.

Students Finding an Authentic Voice

Student-student dialogue.

Teachers who are oriented toward socio-constructivism view the dialogue that occurs between and among children as an invaluable learning tool and thus the teachers create opportunities for discussion and collaborative learning. The Reggio Emilia approach claims to be influenced by Vygotsky in asserting that “children’s participation in communicative processes is the foundation, on which they build their understanding” (Caldwell, 1997, p. 62). Montessori interviewee, Shawn, began recording children’s dialogue in her classes after a visit to Reggio Emilia in Italy. She commented on the problem-solving skills revealed through the interaction of children and their project work. The children themselves provided the guidelines to help define an emerging curriculum.

I was fortunate enough to travel to Reggio Emilia, Italy, last summer with a study tour of the preschools in this small city. I was drawn there by my interest

in the hugely expressive individual and group project work they support in their beautiful schools. It has been exciting to witness the process and learn how to support it without dictating its direction. Starting from a place of ...trust in children, I have been led by them into these amazing projects.

(Shawn 2: 22)

Following is a transcript of the children's dialogue on their *Earthbird Project*. Notice how little input is required or expected of the teacher as the children explore this subject.

Scene: in the south room study, with a small group of children who have been working, listening to stories in progress, and discussing the birds. Jay has been thinking about the outdoors at school and all the reasons he loves it here. He made a blue clay sphere, the earth, and attached a dozen small golden birds around it with small toothpicks. They look like they are flying all around the earth. We are discussing the possibility of making a group (whoever wants to participate) model of the things we love about our outdoors. He writes...

"I like birds. We'll have lots and lots of birds in the yard [at school]. Everyone can hold the earth. My dad can hold the earth. We'll make lots of music for the birds. When they come here they can hear the music."

Shawn (teacher): How will they find the music?

J: They get it from theirselves. And if they want to find more music, I will whistle. I saw a flock of maybe 1000 birds! Maybe they will come here if they

hear my whistle. They'd make a circle all around. They'd follow the leader, like their moms. A lot of baby ones would follow their moms. They learned to fly. We can whistle songs.

S: Can all the children whistle?

J: I tried to whistle but I couldn't. So I learned for a long, long time, like 20,000 years! When I was born on September 21, I couldn't whistle. Now I whistle. Nobody taught me. I taught myself.

M: Kids could be singing!

N: We could write it on a sign for the birds to read when they fly over here. Maybe we could sing or something, a long, loud song. About loving, so they'd know it's safe here. I love birds. I hear them every morning I wake up. "Tweet-tweet!" Know what favorite bird is mine? A robin.

Shawn (teacher): Do you know what they eat?

N: Worms. I saw them in my neighbour's yard. The wife bird was out there looking for worms for their kids to eat while the husband bird took care of their babies in their nest. Maybe we could bring instruments and play them so the birds would hear singing and playing! Someone could play music on a flute. It's high, like tweeting.

J: And a guitar.

A: And horns - a trumpet and a coronet.

N: What about a drum? You could have a strap one and wear it around your neck and play it. Maybe if they were hanging on the trees, up high near the sky, the birds could hear them.

M: If a flute was up high in the trees, where the wind blows, IT could play the flute for the birds to hear.

G: A wind chime would work! We could make some. A bird was out there looking for worms for their kids to eat while the husband bird took care of their babies in their nest. Maybe we could bring instruments and play them so the birds would hear singing and playing!

M: I have one that's diamonds made of metal and when the metal bumps each other it sounds like a pretty whistle. If we made one we could use paper - no, not enough sound. And it would be a mess if it rained.

N: Let's tape something to a tree. What if we made a little house and when the birds came in their home, they'd hear the singing?

Shawn (teacher): I bet we could all find things that would make nice sounds. Would you like to put out a basket to collect things that people find? Then we could make them into wind chimes for the birds.

M: I got a good idea! We'll make a stick house for the birds. You know, glue them all together.

J: What if we blow in a jar and make a whistle sound?

N: Does that work? Do we have whistling jars?

G: And food. We need food, too. We need feeders. I could ask my daddy to bring ours from my house. He could bring some seed, too. Then the birds could eat here.

N: Yeah! Like a round dish. They could come out and eat and hear us singing for them. We could open the window and play all our instruments, and some people could be singing.

Shawn (teacher): We could give a concert for the birds.

N: Yeah! I got a great idea! We'll open the window and play the concert out the window.

Shawn (teacher): Maybe if we played the concert and taped it, then we could play it again.

N: Yeah! Even when we aren't here we could plug it in and play it and the birds could hear us.

J (wearing a yellow beak he just made with paper and tape): We need bird beaks for us. So we can be like the birds. And we can wear the beaks and whistle into them. They could be instruments for the birds. (Several children get paper and Jay shows them how to make a beak. They try them on. A few try to whistle.)

M: We need lights for the birds, too. We could catch fireflies in a jar for them when it's summer. We'll put a lot of fireflies in there.

N: And we could make a little umbrella for when it rains!

J: No, birds like to get wet. They need to have water. They like our birdbath.
(Shawn 2: 78-167)

American kindergarten teacher, Vivian Gussin Paley, has written extensively on how important young children's dialogue is in helping them to construct a view of themselves. She described her students as "actors on a moving stage, carrying on philosophical debates while borrowing fragments of floating dialogue...A relentless connection-making was going on, the children inventing and explaining their rules and traditions every time they talked and played" (Paley, 1988, p. 12).

Different challenges present themselves to the teachers of primary aged children. Rules and roles are still explored in playground games, but it is often in group dialogue around subject explorations, that children gain confidence in expressing and supporting their own opinions. Interviewee, Fran, described her goal of helping older primary aged children to experience having an authentic voice.

I really wanted them to become independent thinkers and to engage with the text from that personal point of view so they would have authentic comments. That was the challenge for me – have Year 3 children confident enough to express their own personal thought which may be different from someone else's about a text. (Fran 1: 75)

At an age when peer acceptance can work against independent thought, she found that working with small groups with meaningful engaging texts helped to support risk taking, critical thinking and dialogue that challenged children to reframe their perspectives. Like Shawn, she found that trusting the children to the point where one could suspend one's own judgement helped to nurture their authentic voices.

I think, too, you need to suspend your own judgement, your own notion of where you think a child will go with an idea. Because, I know a tremendous example that I tell the [university] students. In this particular class, they were looking at good and evil, good and evil with regard to *Jack and the Beanstalk*. They have to list the good characters and the evil characters. Most children did what you would expect. One child came up with the mother was good, the

cow was good, the hen was good, and Jack was bad. Immediately you think, “Well, I didn’t expect that response.” And probably, unless you have enough confidence as a teacher, you might really say, “Well, that’s not right.” But because of this literature class and because of all the work done for children to have all these authentic thoughts, I was delighted because it was different. So I said to him, “Why did you say that?” And he said, “Because he went out of his culture (that was his word – “culture”) and started stealing things.”...The most important thing is how you interact with the text, and reflect on it and think about it. It’s so enriching to have someone with a different thought and to provide another idea. (Fran 1: 135)

Interestingly, Montessori interviewee, Carol, also used *Jack and the Beanstalk* as an example of a story that could be used to precipitate interpretive thought.

I try to pick stories that I think the children will enjoy and that we can discuss in an interpretive way so there's not just one right answer so that the children can share their ideas and support them with the text, but not just with one specific answer. In our Great Books Training, there was one question on *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Was Jack greedy? You can say "Yes. He went back a second and third times." Or you can say, "No. He only took the one golden hen and he needed it to support his mother." You can support it in different ways. And it's interesting to see. Some children are very superficial. You know they don't really dig deep. And some of them are great thinkers and can really get down and come up with ideas about the interpretive questions that you ask. (Carol: 62)

Questioning and collaboration – tools to the authentic voice.

In addition to Carol and Fran, several other interviewees indicated that they used levels of questioning to help children get in touch with their inner voices. In Kate's classroom children were asked to respond to and create questions for Aboriginal myths according to the *First Steps* (Education Department, 1994c) format of Right There, Think and Search, or On my Own.⁸⁴ Vicky (1: 75) reported that after working collaboratively with her class to write questions at different levels for the book, *The General*, they were able to apply this skill to discussing other texts in depth. My own whole language training made me conscious of using literal, inferential, evaluative and applied/creative questions⁸⁵ in discussing literary works as well as cultural subjects. Dr. Ginger McKenzie (1995) in an American Montessori lecture to teachers on curriculum design, encouraged them to use Bloom's Taxonomy⁸⁶ as a guide to writing questions for each subject that required students to think at increasing depth.

⁸⁴ First Steps : 3 Kinds of Questions:

- 1.Right There–The answer is in the story.
- 2.Think and Search (inferential) Search for Clues in the story and think about your answer.
- 3.On my Own (evaluative) The answer won't be told in the story. Find the answer in your head.

(Department of Education, 1994c)

⁸⁵ Levels of questioning include:

literal – an understanding of what is stated in text; inferential – making inferences from author's statements; evaluative – making judgement or having an opinion on text; applied/creative – going beyond text to gain additional insights, make new applications or generalisations.

⁸⁶ Bloom's Taxonomy – Levels of Thinking delineated as Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation.

There is a danger in applying these *Levels of Questioning* too mechanically. *Levels of Questioning* becomes a literary skill to analyse stories, but are students using this in-depth questioning to construct and evaluate their own personal narratives? *First Steps* does not include the applied/ creative level which is the step at which the text would be related to the student's own journey. This omission was also apparent in the Guided Reading handout (Hill, 2000) at an Australian Literacy Conference in which "Evaluative" or "On My Own" is replaced with the term "Critical". Levels of questioning is considered a tool of meaning making for the reader; by leaving out Applied/Creative levels of questioning, we could be failing to scaffold a process that would enable children to make connections to their own journey. In terms of Bloom's taxonomy this would be ignoring the possibility of attaining the Synthesis or Creative Level of Thinking (Bloom, 1956).

I think I could have gone farther in relating them [stories studied in class] to their own journey. ...I think that maybe that empowers children to go that one step further ... What might this mean to me? I think I stopped short of that. I kept it objective. When you are with children, particularly for three years, they become like your own in many ways and yet there's no reason you can't sensitively make these stories relate to their own personal narratives. I would do more that way next time round. (Allison: 142)

In addition to employing questions at varying levels, some teachers have also found it effective to structure the environment to encourage collaboration and feedback. Fran, for example, worked with her class to create an environment where individual thought

voiced in discussion sessions was valued. In small groups, her class engaged in some of the interactive, collaborative tasks suggested in *Tribes*⁸⁷ (Gibbs, 1995). In addition she used an activity to promote authentic talk:

We do an activity, actually an activity suggested by Glenda Raison who helped write *First Steps* called "What Shuts Out Talk?". And it's a really, really good thing to do with the students. We get up on the white board a whole list of things that shut out talk. But not only does it shut out talk, it shuts out that authentic thought. If I put a thought out there, and it's handled so that I am humiliated, I'm not going to go forward again. Then you get the reverse, if that all shuts out talk, how do you set up the environment to create this authentic talk? (Fran 1: 193)

Working together towards a task has the potential to contribute to an environment for positive dialogue. In Nigel's Montessori class, collaborative multi-age work was used to encourage children to problem solve and form opinions through dialogue. For instance, on one of my visits he gave each multi-aged student pair a situation that had occurred on camp and asked them to dramatise positive alternatives for dealing with the situation. In Kate's Catholic School class she also used small group drama to give

⁸⁷ Janet Gibbs recommends in her book, *Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being* (1995) that children be formed into tribes suggested by sociograms. Tribe size varies according to age. Children stay in tribes for a month. Tribes provide support and feedback for each other, work on projects and engage in activities together.

children an opportunity for task focused dialogue and problem solving. In the Steiner classes I visited, all the lessons focused on the whole class.

The lesson was whole group. Peer tutoring was allowed but not facilitated.

Children were seated in three rows and occasionally one

got up to help another while the teacher was checking work. (Observation of

Sam's class: 9/99)

Occasionally, there was small group collaboration in follow-on periods. Sam explained to me that there is often choice in these follow-on activities – e.g. one group might explore a subject in drama, one in poetry, one in painting.

In all the Montessori classes visited, children worked in small groups for many lessons throughout primary providing great opportunity for dialogue.

Usually, when we had a lesson, it was a small group. About half the class or one particular age level and we'd work on a specific topic or we would write a story from that or as a follow up from the cultural lessons we did. (Carol: 97)

Shawn explains how these small groups in a Montessori 9-12 year old class helped to provide a safe environment for children to tell their stories:

As they were putting together their stories and poems, they would also read them aloud to each other in small groups. It wasn't a whole class thing, but

just with the group of fourth graders. And that was also really good experience. Just that presentation. ...Some of the children who were very shy or were new to the school and didn't know very many people yet would just come alive in that group as they were telling their own stories. It's like magic. It's their own story. Then she [9-12 yr. old teacher] encouraged them to brainstorm on ways they could express some part of themselves. (Shawn 1: 59)

In my own 9-12 year old Montessori class, the group communication process was scaffolded by encouraging children to try different roles such as “manager, encourager, recorder, reporter” (Ed. Dept. of WA, 1994b, pp. 30-31) and to have some explorations in which children rotated as group members. This procedure was adopted after my colleagues and I observed that self-selected groups were not offering the students a chance to work with all their classmates and to try different group roles. The feedback from the students was positive as long as they were still encouraged to select their own work partners for most of the long exploration periods of the week.

Dialogue between children is a key variable in socio-constructivism. From my interviews and observations, I noticed that the potential for children to gain personal and cognitive meaning from the dialogue was enhanced by establishing a secure environment where risk taking could occur through encouraging collaborative groups, small discussion sessions and tribes. Children were more likely to express an authentic voice where individual response and interpretation was valued by the teacher and fellow students and scaffolded through questioning at various levels. At least one interviewee indicated that there should be more questioning that encourages

the student to apply narratives studied to their own personal journeys. In the following example, a lesson on fables is revisited with an implied conclusion that with different questioning, children could be helped to make the connection between the story and their own lives.

I almost think I would give them more ideas, more questions relating to stories from themselves...With fables, we dramatized them and we turned them into news articles. Changing genre was something I did often and I thought that was really a way to get them to think about it. ...But ...I would make it more their personal journey. I would do more with getting them to identify with a character and choose a setting and a conflict that maybe they can identify with metaphorically... This is what I didn't do enough of. That is what I'm starting to do in working with children. There is no reason not to take that bridge. That's how I would change. And I suspect it might help the writing too. (Allison: 156-160)

Teachers Finding an Authentic Voice in the Staff Room

The interview data suggests that we are far better at nurturing student- student dialogue and teacher-student dialogue than teacher-teacher dialogue.

Teachers in many schools meet briefly for “How are you?” conversations in the staff room where they may catch up on major family events, or a moment of sharing on the latest movie. They also meet on designated professional development days in which collaboratively they target and explore issues in education. However, there is rarely a

forum for sharing their personal lives and interests or their personal interpretations of classroom experiences.

Lynne attributed her feeling of isolation to a lack of sharing ideas and events related to daily classroom teaching. At the time of the interview she was teaching in a remedial support class and she felt she would have more sharing if she was in the mainstream.

In the State schools, you are in a classroom and I am left to teach without anyone wanting to know what I'm teaching. ...Everyone teaches in a different way...I'm in this room and someone else is in another room and I really wouldn't know how much they use story compared to what I use in here...I suppose if I was teaching in the mainstream area there'd be more opportunity to be more collaborative, to share, more sharing of programme ideas and so on. (Lynne 1:241-271)

Catholic Schoolteacher, Vicky, also had had varied experiences with opportunity for sharing in schools.

At most of the schools where I've worked, we had a small enclave where we've done that [shared ideas in teaching] with each other. One particular school where that didn't happen, I had to leave. It was cold and arid and I couldn't do it. I am a little like that at _____ [name of school], but I'm coping. I'm a little lonely for sharing...We don't get time to talk and to reflect and to really share. Often I see teachers who are desperate to

share...they say, “We need a drama specialist” and down the hall there is one.
(Vicky 1: 289-293)

Both Lynne and Vicky mentioned that they felt more effort should be made to create forums where teachers could share. Vicky envisioned a forum within each school.

Quite often you will get someone who will say, “I want to share more; I want to discuss my kids.” Someone else will say that. But they don’t manage to get together as there is no forum. ...Sometimes I’ve been saying to teachers when I’ve been doing *First Steps* [training], “Wouldn’t it be nice if we didn’t do any of this for one or two years, and just gave you time to sit down and share your ideas with each other and talk,” because I don’t think that ever happens.

(Vicky 1: 296-298)

Lynne envisioned sharing sessions within school districts. Although she viewed these ‘mega’-sessions as being beneficial for all teachers, she thought they would be particularly helpful for teachers with designated special jobs such as remedial work or special subjects as the forum would be larger than in a single school.

I would think that in a place like _____ [district name] with four or five schools in the area that those schools would get together. But there isn’t anything. There is something for the preprimary and year one but there isn’t anything for the middle school teachers to get together and share ideas. (Lynne 1: 278)

Interestingly, both Fran and Vicky remembered eras in Australia when sharing forums were part of teaching support. Fran remembered a time twenty years ago when there was enough funding to offer 10 day in-service courses that allowed for dialogue between teachers. (Fran 1: 212) The closest thing she has experienced to that since has been the *First Steps* networking meetings.

Catholic Education got teachers, *First Steps*’ teachers, in close proximity to have a network meeting once a term. I don’t think many are still going. ...I think they are very, very good, because you have this base connectedness that you are all trying to do something, and you all respect each other’s various points of view. Also, in that network group, we were able to say, “What are you doing about the *Curriculum Framework*? Is that a problem for you?” And they know your situation. So I think that’s a really healthy, positive environment, but I don’t think in the school. In the school, it tends to be for teachers – very insular. I don’t think it was always like that. I think it’s gotten worse. I don’t know why. Pressure, maybe? (Fran 1: 220)

Vicky advocated forums for general sharing in the absence of *First Steps* or *Curriculum Framework* task groups.

When I was working for Catholic Ed in an advisory capacity for one term we did that. Another advisory teacher and I would go to a meeting with teachers from a few schools, sit in a circle with afternoon tea and then we would ...jot down every idea that came up and give them a copy. ...They all brought something to share. It just worked so well...They let it go. It was partly a

funding thing. But it could be started so easily in a school. Especially in one stream schools. Teachers are stuck in their own little castles. They want to know what other teachers are doing. (Vicky 1: 302-306)

In a subsequent discussion, Vicky reiterated her views on the importance of teacher sharing. She was explaining how, in any workshops she runs for teachers, she now timetables significant sharing time as part of each session.

Being a sharing group, being given a chance to focus on us is transformational. We sometimes forget that we are learners too! (Vicky 2: 6)

Nigel too expressed his fatigue with the enormous pressures from workshops in *First Steps* and *Curriculum Framework*. When I mentioned Vicky's idea to him, he was most enthusiastic.

Gay: One person said we should just have a workshop where teachers just get together to talk and share ideas.

Nigel: That's it! Come to share your ideas! Create a curriculum based on your knowledge, your experience and your wisdom! (Nigel 1:185-188)

Palmer reports that great success in using critical incident brainstorming as a framework for sharing classroom experiences. He points out that critical moments⁸⁸ can be both negative and positive and that sharing rapidly ensues because all teachers relate in some way to the events shared.

As the critical moments brainstorming continues, a simple but vital thing happens: faculty talk openly about events that have perplexed and defeated them, as well as those they have managed with ease. That is, they⁸⁹ do what we must do if we are to help each other grow as teachers: speak openly and honestly about our struggles as well as our successes. (Palmer, 1998, p. 146)

Not every teacher was feeling isolated. Some teachers spoke of having the opportunity to discuss their experiences and it was apparent that some principals gave sharing a higher priority than others did. Kate felt that her Catholic school was very positive and supportive. She did feel that there had been efforts to promote sharing in this school and that her experience thus contrasted greatly with a previous teaching experience. She noted that staff meetings in her school had recently been changed to allow more “talk”. (Kate: 216) She was also experiencing a very positive team teaching experience.

⁸⁸ critical moment – “By critical moment, I mean one in which a learning opportunity for students will open up, or shut down – depending, in part, on how the teacher handles it” (Palmer, 1998, p. 145).

⁸⁹ “they” refers to attendees at Palmer’s faculty workshops. He implies that critical instant brainstorming could be a tool for other teacher groups (‘we’) as well.

We're really lucky because we have the open classrooms. D. and I do everything the same. So you do get to share your ideas. Something that she's taught in the past, maybe I haven't so we kind of swap. It might be language, it might be art. I take social studies in the other class and D. takes health in here so you swap around a bit. (Kate: 208)

Montessorian, Nigel, experienced a team situation which, while positive for several years, is now not as nurturing. He attributes this to different styles and needs as well as external pressures.

We used to be very close. However the focus shifted. My approach is a dialogue approach. It's a questioning approach. While for someone who just wants to get on and do something, that is a bit tedious, I think. I think it got to the time when my approach was a bit tedious for her. However, for the first four years we were very close. It was very intense. We planned together. I did certain lessons for both classes. She did certain lessons for both classes. It was a true unity and the best unity I could have hoped for. It really helped me a lot. ...We don't do as much now. I think we should have more unity. There isn't enough, but there is some and everyone is so busy trying to keep up with what they're doing. This is another issue. (Nigel 1: 183)

Undeniably, when team teaching works there is a positive energy exchange which Nigel experienced for a time and Kate is experiencing with D. I was a member of a positive team teaching situation for five years in which the energy and sharing of the classroom spilled over to support a friendship outside school. However, I have

witnessed many “teams” that just managed to co-exist without feeling that the sharing was positive – perhaps because differences in perspective couldn’t be reconciled. In many of the Government schools I have visited, there are accordion doors between classrooms – trophies of a time when team teaching was thought to benefit children and teachers. Some of these doors slide back today and there is a positive interchange between classes, but many more remain firmly fixed as a reminder that this cannot work for all teachers.

When we walk into our workplace, the classroom, we close the doors on our colleagues. When we emerge, we rarely talk about what happened or what needs to happen next for we have no shared experience to talk about. Then, instead of calling this the isolationism it is and trying to overcome it, we claim it as a virtue called “academic freedom”: my classroom is my castle and the sovereigns of other fiefdoms are not welcome here. (Palmer, 1998, p. 142)

Although Palmer was referring to tertiary teaching situations, I believe his words above appropriately describe the isolationism occurring in primary schools as well. Clearly, dialogue is critical for a person to construct himself or herself in a meaningful way. This is happening in the classrooms for students but not for teachers. Perhaps schools should look at techniques being successfully used for students and extend them to staff.

If work is to have personal relevance, it is important to find ways other than team teaching for primary teachers to share not just the technical aspects of their work, but the critical moments – involving classroom ideas, classroom relationships, outside

relationships and interests – that provide meaning to their lives (Palmer, 1998; Ritchie and Wilson, 2000). To foster similar essential dialogue for students, teachers must provide opportunities to explore and share both personal and classroom experiences in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. In turn, this environment is needed for teachers too. Whilst there is collaboration for students with a variety of partners, teachers need mentors with whom they can share inside and outside the school. In the interview, Fran expressed how exciting she found the experience of finding someone with whom she could share ideas:

Gay: I was in one situation where I found many like-minded (and by like-minded I mean interested in sharing ideas, not necessarily having the same ideas). I've also been in a situation where I had to find people outside school with whom I could talk about my work because the people at work were so insular.

Fran: I used to work at Brentwood Reading Centre with a girl, Sue Henderson, from America. She absolutely loved books and reading education and I think that was a wonderful time for both of us because we could say, "Guess what, there's this wonderful article written by (someone)" and "You'd really like that" or "You should look at this book; this is a great writer." I think that was a very exciting time, actually. (Fran 1: 217-220)

Waldorf teachers, Sam and Bernadette, also reported that they had weekly opportunities to share their thoughts on teaching. Steiner viewed this time for

professional sharing as “absolutely fundamental to running a Waldorf school”
(Steiner, 1996, p. 172).

According to one of its pedagogical impulses, it is not so much a statistical collection of the teachers’ observations expressed during the meetings that is important, but that a living and individual psychology should be jointly developed from out of the actual experience of teaching lessons. (Steiner, 1996, pp. 172-173)

In addition to sharing interests and reflections related to pedagogy, teachers need the opportunity to share more personal aspects of their narratives. Palmer (1998) emphasises that we lose our integrity, our sense of wholeness, if we construct a barrier between our professional and personal stories. Our teaching becomes richer if we weave these strands of our lives together reflecting on and sharing our experiences, our reactions and our decisions.

We can speak to the teacher within our students, only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves. (Palmer, 1998, p. 31)

Ritchie and Wilson (2000) also emphasise the importance of merging personal and professional narratives in teaching and learning communities. They encourage teacher apprentices to share their personal stories in a small writing group. The dialogue facilitated by these stories can be transformative because “personal and professional development [are] not cut off from each other” ... Teaching and learning

consist of more complex patterns of interaction than occur within the narrow boundaries of formal, didactic, authoritarian models of teaching and learning.” (pp. 49-50).

Finding the inner teacher involves participating in dialogue with those with whom there are trusting relationships in the workplace or in a friendship group. Without this, identity suffers resulting in feelings of frustration and fragmentation.

Government teacher, Dan, lamented the lack of opportunity for sharing interests with co-staff at his school. Although, he said there are always one or two kindred spirits, they are few and far between. He implies that some of the problem might be gender differences in that most primary school teachers are female.

You don't know people who are on the staff. I don't...I think because I'm male, too, and that makes it really hard because there's only two or at most three males on staff. So you go and sit down at a table and they're all talking about planning daughter's weddings and I'm not interested in that...Lots of interesting people, but I don't know, they don't seem to have my interests.

(Dan: 244-252)

Both Montessori and Steiner stressed that a teacher must know himself/herself before he/she can know the child in his/her care (Steiner 1923/1996; Montessori, 1949/1988a). To do this, one would have to view one's life as a single narrative with personal and professional experiences merged. Montessori emphasised that the teacher should know himself/herself to be able to guide the child and foster his/her

autonomy. She felt this attitude held a much higher priority than knowledge of the curriculum (Standing, 1957; Montessori, 1949/1988a).

The first step an intending Montessori teacher must take is to prepare herself [sic]. For one thing, she must keep her imagination alive; for while, in the traditional schools, the teacher sees the immediate behaviour of the pupils, knowing that she must look after them and what she has to teach, the Montessori teacher is constantly looking for a child who is not yet there. (Montessori, 1949/1988a, p. 252)

Interviewee, Sam, commented on Steiner's belief that the teacher as well as the student is evolving and so needs the opportunity to share and reflect on this dynamic process.

A class teacher who goes through for seven years has to be changing in development. Rudolf Steiner did talk about teaching as a pathway of development. He said that teachers need to work on themselves. We're here primarily to teach the children, but if you think you've got it made and you know most of the answers, you won't last very long. You do have to change. (Sam: 33)

Sam noted that although the teachers met every week to share professionally, he also had to find a support system outside school for personal sharing on a regular basis.

And there are a lot of things to deal with and it impacts on one's own inner life, personal life. If you don't have a way to deal with this, it isn't realistic. You have to have that balance. The way I manage it is to have a few close friends, one friend in particular and we get together and talk not just about teaching issues. And it doesn't happen as much within the school in meetings and such. We do have sharing from the week and we can share anything, but it is more professional. (Sam: 34)

Sam added, however, that during the annual staff in-school development week, they crossed the barrier between professional and personal narratives and had the opportunity to share their stories through biography work.

We've had some biography work with teachers sharing aspects of their own lives. That has been just tremendous. These are people you work with everyday and even though it's a deep work it can be an isolating work. You can be in your classroom and you know what you're doing, but you don't know what someone else is doing or what they're going through or who they are. And so when we had this biography work... When you see aspects of their lives, you say, Ah, I understand why that person might be like that. (Sam: 37)

We've done it in different ways. We've done it in life story ways like just taking the first seven years of your life and at another session taking the next seven. We work in seven-year cycles here. Human development goes in seven-year cycles. The one we did recently was really good... The exercise

was to draw. We had to draw three tables from our lives and then over three days take turns giving them a title and sharing. We looked at tables from their childhood or tables that they worked at once. These tables were the key to look at someone's life, a little window. Family tables all sorts of things. It was just a little snapshot. (Sam: 41-44)

Ellen reported that like the administrator, who instigated the biography work at the Waldorf School, her principal was also responsible for creating a safe environment for story sharing.

I was just thinking that the school I'm at is a community and (name of principal)'s definition of that is that we share our stories. As well as that, his interest in Playback Theatre looks at people's individual life stories and that's often used to bring a group together or to help an individual explore some aspect of his or her life further...I think in staff meetings and on PD⁹⁰ days we sometimes use these mechanisms – probably could use them more. There is a flexible attitude and diverse approaches within the class and sometimes in the staff meetings lateral thinking exercises are great fun and they can lead to stories. (Ellen 1:217-221)

⁹⁰ PD = professional development

Sharing stories needs to be punctuated with a time for reflection, decision making and adaptation. Teachers need this quiet time as part of the rhythm of their lives as much as their students do. We encourage children to reflect on their work and their lives at ever-deeper levels through encouraging them to question, to think about thinking, to express a voice that might be different from their peers. Teachers also need a time to reflect and to find their authentic voice. Some have found that meditation and journaling balance dialogue with students and colleagues and provides a regenerating rhythm.

And, even personally, I think journaling for myself is really important. So often, teaching is a very stressful occupation and very political. I would do that in a better way. I would be a bit clearer about just where my story is going. Reflection on teaching – I think that’s very important. That means changing schools sometimes. That means changing the way we teach sometimes. It’s a self-awareness that maybe is put on the back burner too much for teachers because it is so demanding and the pressure and preparation is so intense. (Allison: 325)

Palmer (1998) suggests that part of our reflection might be to create a metaphor that depicts our attitude to teaching. He claims he saw himself as a sheepdog “maintaining a space where the sheep can graze and feed themselves” (p. 148). Hagstrom et al (2000) concur that ‘root’ metaphors are a means of tapping into personal experience to “inform our teaching worlds” (p. 25).

I recently asked a group of education students to create a metaphor representing their image of their chosen career. In this student's poem the energy, challenges and exhilaration of teaching are apparent:

Teaching is like a yo-yo

Always up and down

Spinning around in endless circles

Taking off in wild escapades of joy

Only to be yanked back by reality.

Teaching is like bunjy jumping

Step off, free falling, touchdown

Touch the ground for a second

Then spring back into ecstasy.

Notre Dame Education Student 1999⁹¹

We are always learning and constructing ourselves. To do so in an integrated way, without fragmenting their personal and professional lives, teachers need to create an environment parallel to the one advocated for students. Staff rooms need to be safe non-judgmental venues where critical moments about teaching and lives can be shared. Because teachers can learn a great deal from each other, PD days or

⁹¹ Metaphor poem by UNDA student in Interpersonal Communications in Early Childhood Education course.

afternoons devoted to sharing ideas about teaching are extremely valuable. Teachers, as well as students, can obtain clues from biographies to guide them in constructing their lives. Thus, granting time for staff to share their stories is well spent.

The rhythm of the teacher's life should include a time for dialogue inside and outside school, and a time for reflection. Reflection may take the form of meditation, journaling, or even metaphor writing or drawing. Reflection fuels dialogue and self-construction.

The Use of Sharing, Autobiography and Biography

By sharing events from life journeys, experiences have a context. Stories need to be believable and cohesive for listeners. In creating and presenting them, one makes connections with other life experiences and with the lives of the audience. "Telling the story of one's life is often a way of stepping back and making it an object of reflection, of spectating on one's life. Cognitive psychologists call this 'decentering'; it allows one to step outside the busyness and make of it all some meaning" (Ritchie and Wilson, 2000, p. 23). Also, every time a listener is exposed to someone else's story through oral sharing or autobiographies, he/she has the opportunity to further define his/her voice by noting what is shared with the person and what places existing beliefs into question. In this way, sharing is a vehicle of both self-affirmation and change.

Langer (1997) claims that "a mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective" (p. 4). Through

sharing stories, people are exposed to multiple perspectives and this makes them appreciative of life's alternatives and choices within a narrative framework from birth to death.

Sharing Personal Narrative

News and The "ME" Box.

In my interviews and classroom observations, I was gratified to note that there has been a move away from "show and tell" as the primary vehicle of classroom sharing or "newstime" to a format that invites children to share personalised, coherent narratives.

'Show-and-Tell' has a very different interaction structure to a situation in which children are encouraged to share a past or projected experience. The patterning of talk in a show-and-tell situation would seem to discourage oral narrative – at least initially – as the 'shower-and-teller' is likely to be limited to a set role while the special object is displayed. (Cusworth, 1996, p. 61)

Cusworth (1996) indicates that children who bring in an object for news are limiting the possibilities of their oral language to descriptive and ownership terms rather than benefitting cognitively and emotionally from the properties of narrative. She questions whether newstime with its emphasis on oral language skills is viewed as "a forerunner to public speaking rather than as a venue for storytelling" (p. 60).

Showing an object does not help a child make sense of his/her life or help them to recognise the past, present and future of their own life stories. It does not help the child to reflect on his/her inner experiences. There is an argument for objects being brought in for young children but only as a mnemonic for events when relating personal stories. In my school, children shared objects but they had to be hand-made, collected, or researched so that the object had a story.

In Shawn's American Montessori school, the entire school is participating in what they refer to as an Autobiography project. Their 3-6 year old children take turns taking home the "Me" heartshaped box which they brought back with mementos – photos and objects that remind them of events in their lives. The objects are a prop rather than a focus of their sharing. As Shawn explained, "We are trying to make it concrete for the children" (Shawn: 10). The child presents his or her story using the "Me" Box items and then a teacher takes dictation from the child for the "Us" book in the classroom (Dougherty, 1999).

On the day I visited Shawn's school a child had brought back the "Me" box with some assorted items. Her dictation clearly reflected her growing awareness of her own unique combination of interests.

I brang my bathers because I like to swim. I brang my ballet slippers because I love to dance...I brang my hat because when I was born, they put that on my head to keep me warm. *Haleigh*. (Shawn: 17-21)

A slightly older child, Lisa, weaves her memories into a narrative that is more cohesive:

I love my Mom and my brother who plays with me in the car. He makes my knees tickle. We colour. He draws Batman and I draw flowers. I can sleep in his room. We get some chocolate in the middle of the night. He gets the chair and stands on it to get the chocolate. He climbs down and he gives me some chocolate. Someone knocks on the door and me and my brother open it. It was just a kitty cat knocking on the door. Then we head downstairs. We watched TV down there. Then we started throwing a ball. I stubbed my toe but it didn't hurt. Then we jumped off. Then it was morning. We went downstairs and did it all over again. Then it was night and we went downstairs with a football. *Leah.* (Shawn: 33-37)

Cusworth (1996) asserts that children need an audience for stories such as this.

“Children need more than just a venue to share their personal narratives; they need to have them accepted, even honoured, by others” (p. 62). In Shawn's class, children share their stories from the “Me” box. Usually, the teacher gathers the children and invites them to hear the personal narrative. Sometimes the children themselves independently gather a small group who want to hear their story again. The comments and questions from the peer group help to clarify the stories and positively affirm the identity of the teller.

The children just bring and tell each other. And if anyone has questions they can ask them. So if Gina was having her meeting that day and Heidi had a question she would raise her and Gina would call her name and she could ask her question. She's in charge of it and it really is a celebration. It's so much fun. (Shawn 1: 31)

Rosen (1986) thought it was critical for children to have the opportunity to tell their stories to others because we need to make events coherent for an audience to understand. This, in turn, makes the events coherent in our own inner reflection. "The internalised, private story is itself an impossibility without a prior sharing, prior discourse, without social memory and social action" (p. 230).

Although Cusworth (1996) is concerned that – in over half the 392 classrooms she surveyed – news is a whole class exercise with the teacher sitting at the front or side of the room, my observations of narrative-rich classrooms revealed that many teachers are using a pattern of small group news sharing. This was certainly the case in Kate's Catholic school classroom, Lynne's Government school classroom and Sam's Steiner class. At least once a week, children in these classes had an opportunity to share their stories, to listen and be listened to. In my Montessori school, "sharing" time was a whole school time. Although children had the opportunity of being listened to by a multi-age audience, this venue did not foster the question and answer clarification that Cusworth (1996) and Dougherty (1999) have identified as being instrumental in linking oracy to meaning making. I believe that children in Montessori classes – through working in pairs and small groups all day – have many informal opportunities to share their stories. However, this process can be enhanced by creating more

opportunities for children “to personalise someone else’s story to meet their own needs” by insuring that they participate in story sharing in small interactive groups (Cusworth, 1996, p. 55). Interactive sharing can also give teachers a window into children’s concerns and imagination if they are able to witness or to participate in the small group sharing.

Gay: With the children, how are personal narratives acknowledged in the class? You have some sharing times?

Sam: Well, it depends on the age. In Class 2, it's more like news. We share news. Each child gets the opportunity but doesn't have to take it. I try to stay alert to the fact - oh, this child said something. I think, “Oh this could be a class discussion.” It might be the death of a pet or someone in the family. The death of a pet, I might say, “Who else has had a pet die?” They just want to share... Sometimes I have them share with a partner. Say, we were talking about pets – well then I might tell them to turn to the person beside them and tell their stories. (Sam: 51-56)

Timelines and Family Trees.

In the 6-9 year old class at Shawn’s Montessori school, the format for exploring and sharing their autobiographies moves from “the Me Box” of the 3-6 year old class to illustrated timelines in the 6-9 year old class. Flags representing their countries of ancestry are part of these time lines and children (9-10 year olds) have the opportunity to research these countries. In addition, children create family trees and this provides a platform for exploring their family histories and cultural traditions (Dougherty,

1999, p. 41) The middle primary teacher in the school described one child's discovery in this project.

Yeah, that was a lot of fun. The parents got into it too. I had one girl. Andrea's family is from Boston and are African-American. They did an article in the newspaper in Boston about the history of her family and there are pictures in her book of her great, great, great grandmother that are hanging in the Smithsonian. So that was something very serendipitous that came up when we were doing that... *Mary, 6-9 year old teacher from Shawn's school* (Shawn 1: 163)

The middle primary teacher went on to emphasise that part of the beauty of the project was that it involved entire families in putting together a portrait of their unique combination of cultural histories.

We certainly did open a lot of discussion at home. We had one child who came in and said he was Chinese, but he looks Caucasian...It turned out his grandfather had remarried a Chinese woman. But that was exciting to come up with that diversity in his family. *Mary* (Shawn 1: 169)

Sharing and Exploring Names.

Ellen, a Montessorian, working with this same age group began the celebration of autobiography by looking at the origins of each child's name. This also drew in the entire families as parents revealed why a name was chosen. Some names revealed

cultural traditions or ancestry. Even stories that revealed names selected from a namebook resource or simply because the parents liked the sound created meaningful links for the child because the name for whatever reason was selected especially for her or him. Sometimes finding the name's origins was a journey of discovery for the child and his family. Ellen carefully calligraphied each name and its origin on a lovely card and placed them in a basket on the language shelf for children to read, share, and ponder.

Ellen's classroom exploration is linking a child into a process that connects us with all cultures, all generations and all mythologies. Cassirer (1946) viewed naming as an example of the merging of word and essence.

For even a person's ego, his very self and personality, is indissolubly linked, in mythic thinking, with his name. Here the name is never a mere symbol, but is part of the personal property of the bearer...In other ways, too, the unity and uniqueness of the name is not only a mark of the unity and uniqueness of the person, but actually constitutes it; the name is what first makes man [sic] and individual. (pp. 49-51)

Lively, in her novel, *Spiderweb*, based on the life of an anthropologist also pays tribute to the importance of names – not only personal names, but family names and place names.

Names, names...she thought. The ultimate signifier for those of us who like to ferret away at such things. Inside the cottage were card indexes and

notebooks in which she had diligently recorded hundreds upon hundreds of names. These harvests could then be assembled into patterns – clusters of similar sounds which make kinship groupings and lineage structures. We all of us bear witness to our genes and are labelled accordingly.” (Lively, 1998, p. 93)

Lineage connections are dramatically highlighted through the naming ceremony of his grandfather described by Alex Haley (1976) in *Roots*:

Omoro then walked out before all of the assembled people of the village. Moving to his wife’s side, he lifted up the infant and, as all watched, whispered three times into his son’s ear the name he had chosen for him. It was the first time the name had ever been spoken as this child’s name, for Omoro’s people felt that each human being should be the first to know who he was...One by one, the arafang recited the names of the Mauretanian forefathers of whom the baby’s grandfather, old Kairaba Kinte, had often told. The names, which were great and many, went back more than two hundred rains. (p. 3)

Just as personal names are a link to our lineage, place names reflect the cultural history of our habitat. Even in a mobile world, these place names are a clue to the unique combination of our heritage and experiences. Daily I hear Aboriginal place names such as Coogee, Kojonup, Narrogin, and the Porongurups. Aboriginal names are part of the landscape and the history of our country. I remember the native American names dotting the landscape where I spent my childhood: Connecticut and

Massachusetts –the states, Ildewild – the airport, Cos Cob, Narragansett and Willimantic – the villages, Lake Winnepesaukee – site of a summer camp. I grew up with these special names but never contemplated their link to history until I returned as an adult. Now I see my own story as linked to the indigenous names of America and Australia.

Helping children to realise the significance of the names of places in their region is thus another means of linking them into their own story. Some of my former students were recently involved in a reconciliation art project in our city. They carried lanterns with individual art motifs celebrating our multiculturalism in the naming ceremony of Booyeembara Park. During the project, children were told stories about the Aboriginal naming of places in our state. On their lanterns, they placed symbols representing some of these place and names as well as motifs representing other cultures in their own heritage. In this instance the naming of Booyeembara Park was the ritual of applying a name to a newly recreated recreational place just as personal names mark the beginning of a life journey. Because of the context in which it was named, it is likely that the name Booyeembara Park will signify the hope of reconciliation for the participants just as the naming of a person signifies hope for a meaningful life journey.

Exploring and Presenting Autobiography

In the 9-12 year old class at Shawn's school, during the first year, children research their autobiographies by interviewing family members. Their final presentation might include essays, poetry, interviews, dioramas and even game boards noting significant life events. The next year they do in-depth research of American culture and the

cultures represented in their family trees. It is a year of celebrating diversity as they become aware of customs and social concerns linked to the cultures represented in their community. The bookshelves in the room have a wide assortment of biographies and stories that children used to explore their roots in Africa, Asia, Europe and America and the teacher in this class is an accomplished storyteller who draws children in through “symbolism and connections...She sees that part of community building as really important. People who know where they come from just have a different level of confidence...” (Shawn 1:137-145) In the final year, they present their lives through pen pal letters and exchange visits to children in a more diverse public school.

As a follow-up to the more in-depth self-study, this provides opportunities to discuss their lives, values, families, attitudes, and goals with others whose experience is different from their own and to have fun together. The goal is to break stereotypes on both sides and allow students to come to a greater mutual understanding and respect. This is basic peace education at a personal and age-appropriate level. (Dougherty, 1999, p. 41)

At Shawn’s school they continually link the autobiography project with the concept of peace education. The staff feel that the more children know and celebrate their own uniqueness as well as their shared experience, the more they will tolerate and celebrate diversity. “We have talked about the importance of knowing who your ancestors were and where they came from and having that really strong identity. We

were talking not even a week ago about Littleton, Colorado⁹², and how hard it is if you don't have that strong sense...It is that village sense that you have other people you can count on and that's really this place" (Shawn 1: 145).

Biography

Studying the lives of others can help to clarify our own journeys as we find pathways to emulate and pathways to repudiate. The wonder of the personal journey is enhanced by realising that every human being finds some common ground in every other human's story, whether it be revealed in stories of heroes or heroines or in a story shared by a grandparent visiting the classroom. Because life's passages share common attributes in all cultures, we can marvel in noting what is shared. At the same time, we can find fascination in recognising what is different in lives lived in other cultures or times or settings. Both children and adults, as they go through passages in their lives, clarify their identities by being exposed to biographies that provide clues for their personal journeys. American academic, Mary Catherine Bateson, has discovered that her audiences are more moved and more challenged by hearing narratives uncluttered with generalities and jargon.

People learn from stories in a different way from the way they learn from generalities. When I'm writing I often start out with abstractions and

⁹² Littleton, Colorado was the site of a mass shooting of high school students ending with the suicide of the student murderers in April, 1999. Much debate and speculation among the public and especially educators resulted from this incident prompting varied demands including greater gun control, smaller schools with more mentoring, better mental health facilities, etc.

academic jargon, and purge it. The red pencil goes through page after page, while I try to make sure that the stories and examples remain to carry the kernel of the ideas, and in the process the ideas become more nuanced, less cut and dried (Bateson, 2000, p.1).

Similarly, Australian businesswoman and feminist, Wendy McCarthy, has learned that narrative is a far more powerful teaching tool than sequenced manuals.

I worried sometimes that I was not providing them with the ‘how to’ manual, which I knew some of them wanted, but I persuaded myself that that’s training, not education, and manuals can be found on the internet. I prefer learning through narrative, and women’s stories are a powerful and reaffirming format for such learning. They help provide a script for the documentary we are making as we challenge old ideas and old ways of doing business. (McCarthy, 2000, p. 253)

Many of the teachers interviewed have discovered the power of using biography in the classroom. Collectively, they have noted the effectiveness of studying famous lives in engaging students’ interests in a variety of subjects including literature, mathematics, social studies and value education. The study of these lives should be detailed enough that students become aware of the real person they are studying from the thinker’s “psyche, body, relationships, passions, political and social context. Objectivism tries to protect its fantasy of detached truth by presenting ideas as cut flowers, uprooted from their earthy origins. But good teachers help students see the

persons behind the ideas, persons whose ideas often arose in response to some great suffering or hope that is with us still today” (Palmer, 1999, p. 4).

In her interview, Carol mentioned that she was greatly influenced in her use of biography in the teaching of mathematics by a workshop with Kieran Egan who inspired this direction in her work by emphasizing how meaning is created by humanness.

Mathematics is not an inhuman activity. People made it for human purposes. The key to humanising it, or, better, rehumanising it for children is to tie the computational tasks back to the human intentions, hopes, fears, etc. that generated them in the first place. If children can see a particular mathematical computation not simply as a dehumanised skill to be mastered but rather as a particular solution to a particular human hope, intention, fear, or whatever, then we can embed the skill in a context that is meaningful. (Egan, 1986, p. 77)

Carol introduces new concepts by telling the story of the mathematician’s life. Children explore Napier’s bones,⁹³ for instance, after learning what an extraordinary problem solver he was. John Napier lived in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth

⁹³ John Napier devised a system referred to as Napier’s Bones, an arithmetic multiplication tool. He also devised logarithms and explored the binary system.

century Scotland at a time when Protestants and Catholics were feuding. He was known for speaking his mind and being a problem solver.

I think it's interesting to find out more behind the mathematician. ...I tell them about Napier. He was a farmer and planting his seeds, but every morning the birds were out eating his seeds and he tried to talk to the king because he knew they were the king's birds to keep his birds at home. The king said, "Oh, they're not mine; they're not mine!" So Napier put whiskey on bread and put it out amongst the seeds. The birds ate it and were a little inebriated and lay on the ground. So, he picked them up. Of course, they were the king's birds and he wouldn't give them back to the king until the king paid him for the birds. (Carol: 17; 240)

The other story we share with the children is that Napier believed that one of the servants was stealing from him and he pondered ...and he decided he would use his rooster to discover who this servant was who was stealing. So, he told all his servants that the rooster would tell him. And they all had to go into the basement and pat the rooster. One servant chose not to pat the rooster. When he came out of the basement, Napier looked at him and said, "Why are you stealing from me?" And he said, "Well, how did you know? I didn't pat the rooster." Napier said, "Yes, your hands give you away. Your hands are clean." He had coated the rooster with lampblack or soot from the fireplace and so all the other ones had patted the rooster, but this guy was afraid because he was afraid that the rooster would crow. Children laugh and they enjoy hearing about it and thinking about it. (Carol: 242)

Carol also credits her interest in motivating children through story to her training with Montessorian, Harvey Hallenberg, who is famed for enacting historic events for his 9-12 year old students and teacher trainees in Florida. For instance, he delights in recounting (and partially enacting) the story of Archimedes shouting "Eureka" and running naked through the streets after rising from his bath when he figured out how to measure the gold in the king's crown. The Law of Hydrostatics was discovered (Hallenberg and Turner, 1997).

I was turned on a lot by Harvey Hallenberg who was my trainer in the math and culture areas. You know he really uses story and has the children acting out a lot of these stories. When he does slavery he has the children lying on the floor with chains over them. He tells the story of how they were transported from Africa to America on the boats and the children have to lay there while he's telling the story so they can kind of experience what it might be like...Yes, it motivates them. They want to come and hear what you are going to do next or they want to do it. So yes, motivation and appreciation for how people lived before, experienced. (Carol: 222)

Telling children biographies of historical persons can help them to understand periods of history while at the same time underscoring character traits that appear throughout history and universal needs that must be met on every life journey. Montessorian, Kathleen Allen reminds teachers to "make history come alive by putting it into a

social context. History is about the lives of people, not just a record to be memorised” (Allen, 1999, p. 228). She also reminds us that as we tell the stories of historic personages, we are modelling biographical storytelling techniques and highlighting elements that are important in a biography. For example, she tells the story of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine who became the Queen of two countries in her lifetime and the mother of two kings in the 12th century.

This biographical piece also serves as modelling, showing the children how a story of someone’s life can be told, not just when the person was born and died and what she was famous for, but some hints of her character and the world she lived in. (Allen, 1999, p. 231)

Catholic school teacher, Fran, selects biographical stories to help children explore journeys and quests and relate them to their own journey. She emphasises that if children only hear an outline of the story and the journey including birthdate, where he went and on which islands he stopped, they have no hooks to relate it to their journey of self.

Captain Cook's journey...What I want them to think about it is “What sort of a man was he? And why do you think he did that? And how old was he?” It's quite a long journey for an old man. His life is interesting. He got married quite late [for the 18th century], and he was a farm labourer and a grocer’s assistant [before] he went on these boats. ...I think that would reflect more truth of the journey. The hardships. (Fran 1: 240-244)

Biographies can become life metaphors for students, models to be remembered in times of crisis, adversity or enormous challenge.

About that time I presented Helen Keller's story to children and ...none of them have forgotten. These children are now of university age and many refer to Helen Keller when I see them...We really looked at the setting too.

Prediction, and then the setting, putting ourselves in her shoes. What was it like not to be able to speak or see or hear? We tried to put ourselves in that situation and consider how one could be educated. We brought in Braille books and not until I really felt that they knew what she was facing, did we proceed with her story. It was a really powerful experience for all of us.

(Allison: 25)

By exploring biographies, students begin to appreciate the complexities of the human condition and to develop an awareness of the number of roles a single person plays in a lifetime.

You realise the people have other sides. It's important for children to ...realise that...we're not just a mathematician, or we're not just an historian, or a banker, but we have other sides to our lives. I think [biography] helps children realise...there are other sides to people that they might want to know.

(Carol: 29)

Montessorian, Ellen had a large selection of biographies in her 6-9 year old classroom including *Alexander the Great*, *Henry Ford*, *Eric the Red*, *William Shakespeare*, *Hans*

Christian Anderson, Galileo, Captain Cook and St. Francis of Assisi. Both she and Nigel indicated that they choose biographies and other literature to demonstrate virtues.

Study the characters in terms of which virtues were and weren't there and then consider how this affected relationships. (Nigel 1: 292)

Some stories are told to work in with the virtues and to incite, inspire moral development, I suppose. I also like to use a lot of biographies that way. They have uplifting examples. (Ellen 1: 16)

Sam in his Year 2 Steiner class was studying stories of the saints so the children heard many biographies in that year's curriculum. An effort was made to tell many events in the lives of saints so that children could appreciate their varied strengths and challenges. During my visit, the children were studying St. Francis of Assisi and had heard a story of how he ministered to the dying Pope and another on how he went out to meet the wolves.

Hallenberg implies that learning about people's lives can have a transcending effect by expanding the boundaries we impose on our own life journey. Learning about people's lives seems to free children by providing evidence of a multiplicity of pathways one can choose to have a meaningful life. Biographies are models of life choices and problem solving.

Often a child may struggle with the chains of classroom bondage until he or she begins reading biographies at about the age of 9. Reading biographies seems to begin the liberation process. There is something about the biography of a famous person that allows a reader to achieve some objectivity with respect to his or her own life. The reader naturally compares it to the life of the famous person. Many consciously change their behaviour or their goals in life as soon as they begin reading biographies. (Hallenberg, 1997, p. 33)

I believe that Steiner teacher, Bernadette, observed a similar phenomenon in the changing consciousness of the 9-10 year old students. She explained that Steiner carefully chose mythological biographies of Vikings to address the insecurities of this age group.

The reason why we do that - the reason we use Norse Mythology at that age is quite prophetic too. Because this is the age in the 9th and 10th year that children go through a real change in their consciousness, in their relationship to the world. In the years between seven and nine, they are living in that Golden Age where they very much live in that fairy tale world and they still feel a kind of oneness. They still operate very much as one whole class and they are still very connected to their family. At the time of 9 or 10, Class 4 or beginning in Class 3, they really begin to experience themselves as separate from the world and they really begin to experience this loss of the Gods. That kind of golden aura of childhood fades away. They begin to experience themselves as individuals which of course can lead to feelings of isolation and fears and uncertainties, insecurity - all of

those things. And so the things they need to develop are first of all the security - they are going through something, but it will be okay at the end. (Bernadette: 142-143)

Kieran Egan (1997) would concur with the Steiner view that we need to choose the stories we tell according to the child's level of understanding. He would agree with Hallenberg that for children from the age of 9 or 10 years, biography caters for their Romantic way of understanding. Egan (1997) emphasises that historically, Romanticists were concerned with the margins of reality. Thus, historians like Herodotus who used dramatic narrative to portray history, used extreme examples of heroes and events to define the reality of history. "The Romantic Movement shares the commitment to the extremes of reality, the limits of experience, the fascination with the mysterious..." (p. 96).

Romanticism explains cause and effect through the emotions and actions of heroes. "The archetypal romantic figure is the hero. The hero lives, like the rest of us, within the constraints of the everyday world but, unlike the rest of us, manages somehow to transcend the constraints that hem us in" (p. 88). Children from nine or ten to fifteen might feel insecure and that they are at the mercy of a world of "rules and regulations- parental, society and, and not least, natural" (p. 90). These romantic heroes provide examples of heroic qualities – strength, compassion, endurance, courage, etc. – that give the student fuel to spiritually transcend life's limitations and constrictions.

I think it is reasonable to see the ability to form “romantic” associations with human qualities in transcendent degree as one aspect of what has traditionally been called “spiritual development.” (Egan, 1997, p. 92)

Egan insists that ideally old understandings of the world merge with new understandings. As teachers, we might well be at a philosophic or even ironic level of understanding,⁹⁴ but it is apparent from my interviews, that adults are still influenced by biography and by heroes.

I think of books that always stay with me as part of me are books or writers that have given to me what I try to do with children – an authentic journey that tells you about your landscape, the people in your life. I don't have a lot of time for books that have that fake touch to it, that someone's crafted a great story and it may be listed as a best seller. (Fran 1: 278)

Steiner teacher, Sam, claimed he found the most meaning in religious and mythical biographical stories and poems:

Well the greatest story that always touches me is the Easter passion.

That is really - every time I hear that, that's probably my key story,

⁹⁴ Egan (1997) describes five levels of understanding possible for the human being that parallel historic development: Somatic, Mythic, Romantic, Philosophic and Ironic.

the death and resurrection. Other ones - certainly *The Odyssey*, the great journey about the fate of the gods and doing your own thing. All those episodes with the Cyclops and everything. I love songs and I do love poetry. But one song that I've really listened to is called *Spencer, the Rover* which is a traditional English ballad, and it's about a man who ... leaves home and goes roving. And while he is roving, he gets insight and goes back home to his wife and children. He's like a stranger. It's like the prodigal son. That image of leaving something and going to the wilderness and coming back. It's a journey story. (Sam: 352-258)

Dan selects biographies that clarify historical themes he is exploring. While he was personally reading adult biographies and other works on World War II, children in his class were reading *I Am David* and *When Hitler Stole My Pink Rabbit*.

I've been looking at war. I've been revisiting that section for a number of reasons ... It might be that I start off with The German Hitler Youth Movement and then about the doctor in a German concentration camp, *The War Diaries of Children* - a wonderful American woman edited that. These are adult ones. They are just so sad. Why can't I go to school? Where has Heinz gone? Then I might read about Chinese Dynasty, you know *The Last Emperor* or the one before that *The Dowager Empress*. Then I might be reading the history of Opium...Then *Wild Swans* and *Fallen Leaves*. (Dan: 349-360)

My own interview prompted me to journal books that I viewed as meaningful in my life journey. A number of these works were biographical. Clearly different works were influential depending upon how they related to my own life stages and passages.

I grew up in the very positive America of the 50's and 60's . The message I got was that if I were to be well-educated, I would get a good job, have a good marriage and live happily ever after. It was also a time of emerging individualism - community consciousness was not emphasized. In my early teens I enjoyed reading about women who made successful lives despite odds against them such as *Helen Keller, Madame Curie*. Thus readings in my late teens and early twenties that defied this formula really struck me. I remember reading a book whose title escapes me where a very successful man lost everything in the depression and ended up as a street beggar. I have never forgotten the effect this had on me. To be good and to work hard and to end up as a beggar was shocking to consider. This was the beginning of a literary journey of texts that included that aspect of fate or circumstance that could so alter what should have been charmed lives. ...*The Diary of Anne Frank* must surely be a text that has always returned to my consciousness. In this case her enemy wasn't "fate" but something much more evil. It was text such as this concerning the holocaust that set me pondering the nature of good and evil. ...Also in my late teens, I remember being struck that people could devote their lives to a cause even if it meant losing their lives. This was in such contradiction of the individualistic society in which I lived.

Certainly reading *Exodus* by Leon Uris influenced me at that time. I was also still interested in the narratives of women but now in context of other women. I was still reading about women who overcame odds to create a successful life such as Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. I was listening to feminists such as Kate Millett, Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan -fascinated by their personal narratives but up to that time I had never experienced prejudice for being a woman. I could see that there were many miserable "rich" housewives in my community and began to understand the conflict they experienced in abandoning careers. It wasn't until I lived in Alabama and then Australia that I experienced what I had read - segregation of women on pedestals, lower salaries, and physical appearance as a chief hiring criterion. It also wasn't until I tried to raise a family that I understood that women would always feel "schizophrenic" if they wanted a career and family. So...I did revisit women's literature and women's narratives with new eyes. Now I am drawn to what might be stories of ordinary lives such as Margaret Forster's *Hidden Lives* (1995) and *Precious Lives* (1998) and Bonnie Burnard's *A Good House* (1999). These three books epitomise a genre that highlights the heroic qualities in each individual as he/she copes with inevitable conflicts and tragedies of the human journey. (Journal 12: 12-18)

The more we can relate to human variables in a biography, the more the story will influence our own life journey. Realising this has prompted teachers to integrate biography study with many subject areas. It has also prompted many educators to invite communal and intergenerational sharing of oral autobiographies in the classroom.

Communal and Intergenerational Sharing

Bateson: Famous people are interesting, but there's a kind of distancing phenomenon there. I'm interested in the creativity that we all put into our lives. Picasso's life story is not empowering to the creativity of ordinary people. What is empowering is looking at someone that they can identify with. And becoming aware of what they're already doing. (Bateson, 2000, p. 1)

Montessorians Allison and Ellen, Government schoolteacher, Dan, and Steiner teacher, Sam, all brought community members into the classroom to tell their stories. Sam used these visits to encourage children to reflect on a variety of occupations.

One thing I did when I had Class 3 was to invite the parents in once a week to talk about their lives, because in Class 3 we do building and farming and things of practical living like the farmer's life. (Sam: 532)

Dan invited the grandparents to join his class for a simulated "old-fashioned" school class and The Childhood Museum and then to share their memories.

It was really interesting. The kids were sitting at the desks. And the guy was beating the cane and raising mayhem. And all the grandparents were at the back. Even if they weren't very old, they said they remembered being taught like that. And the kids couldn't believe it. When [comments] were coming

from the grandparents, it was so good. Mary used to go to school on horseback...We went and had a picnic after that ...and we had old-fashioned games like skipping. Some of the ‘grands’ were playing. (Dan: 231)

Allison invited grandparents to tell their stories when her upper primary class were studying Australian history including World War II experiences.

One of the most interesting times I had was when I had grandparents in to talk about war years or early life in Australia. The war came into it. It was suggested that they interview someone who lived through the war. One of my students interviewed her Japanese grandfather who wrote a long sensitive letter about his view of the war for her to share with the class...I also had a grandfather visit the class who talked about what it was like to be one of the “boat” children⁹⁵, and how he made his way. The kids were open-mouthed. He also talked about things like the first traffic lights in Perth. (Allison: 224;233)

Ellen expressed her view that elders should be invited into the classroom to share their personal narratives and stories written by wise elders should be read to children.

⁹⁵ The “boat children” refers to orphaned and otherwise disadvantaged children who were sent out to Australia from the United Kingdom in the 1930’s-1950’s to be raised and educated in-group homes. There has been considerable publicity and lawsuits recently related to abuses that these children suffered. Some had living parents and siblings in the UK whom they have been able to trace.

“The elders in the community have the responsibility to turn the lights on for the young ones” (Ellen 1: 11).

Ann Zubrick revealed what a powerful experience her Psychology 100 students had interviewing an “older person”.

It was amazing how many said, “This is the first time I have talked to anyone who is older than my parents.” That is terribly sad. Terribly, terribly sad. It gave them a really genuine respect for the knowledge and life experiences of people. ...It was a very powerful experience for them to have to sit down and seriously talk to someone about their life and the kinds of things that have shaped that life and the ways they had viewed life 80 years down the road.

(Dr. Zubrick’s interview with Gay: 288-289)

A program that acknowledges the power of celebrating our heroes who emerge from our own communities is *The Giraffe Heroes Program for Kids* (Giraffe, 1996) which is now in schools in 47 American states and lauded especially for its positive effects in inner city schools. Advocates of this programme believe that by hearing the stories of local heroes who, like giraffes, stick their necks out, students will be inspired to work for change in their own towns. From a bank of hero stories including many ‘ordinary’ people who stuck their necks out, the teacher selects stories to tell her class. She/he might relate the story of Rosa Parks who, by refusing to give up her rightful seat on the bus, made a huge contribution to integration in the USA or someone who drove drug dealers out of a neighbourhood. Secondly, the children are encouraged to find their own heroes with their families and to report back to the class. Thirdly, the

children determine how they can ‘stick their necks out’ to make a positive change in their community. Children study the story of a hero. Children become the story. In this way biography bridges individual narrative and community.

The opportunity to interview parents and grandparents and other people working in our communities and to hear their personal narratives is an invaluable educational resource. Students are made aware of the sorrows and joys, the challenges and successes of the personal journey – often beginning to understand that heroism and fame are not synonyms. They also have an opportunity to follow the threads of a life from childhood through adolescence and adulthood and to put these stages in a historic setting. Because these examined lives are close to them and they can therefore relate to the journeys, they are particularly poignant guideposts for their own life decision-making. By studying heroic qualities in the stories of people living near them or in similar situations, students can feel empowered to make a difference in their own communities.

Good teachers help students see the persons behind the ideas, persons whose ideas often arose in response to some great suffering or hope that is with us still today. (Palmer, 1999, p. 4)

Catering for Individual Differences

By acknowledging individual differences in the classroom, teachers help their students to recognise that despite apparently common attributes and similar passages,

each person's journey is unique, a whole composed of parts arranged differently in some way from every other person in the universe. Treating all children the same results in reaching only a few children in the imaginary median. However, changing this outlook has meant shifting from a teacher-centered orientation to a student-centered one. To heed personal relevance, the curriculum must be bottom-up rather than top-down (Eisner, 1985).

Traditional educational programmes are developed out of principles that identify educational value within particular subject matters or disciplines. Becoming educated means learning how to use the ideas within these disciplines. This approach it is argued, has two educationally devastating consequences. First, it is often irrelevant to the child. Second, it fails to cultivate the child's idiosyncrasy by providing few opportunities that are of particular importance to the individual child. (Eisner, 1985, p. 70)

Eisner (1985) and Grumet (1988) imply that by acknowledging personal narrative, individual learning journeys, we invite commitment to education. This commitment is enhanced by:

- catering for differences in temperament and learning style,
- catering for gender differences, and
- multiculturalism.

Catering for Differences in Temperament and Learning Style

There is a growing awareness among schoolteachers that in order to achieve learning outcomes, we need to cater for individual differences in how children develop understandings. In recent years, theories about temperament and personality types as well as learning styles and multi-intelligences have added to our knowledge base of learning differences which previously was viewed primarily in the context of special education. This has led to dramatic changes in some classrooms where teachers, having experienced these new approaches, have varied their teaching style, assignments and classroom environments to cater for the learning differences of their students.

Temperaments and Personality Types.

Personality type or temperament theories endeavour to explain how we behave and process information. The Steiner philosophy encourages teachers to know their own temperament and that of the children that they guide for seven years. The temperaments are the Melancholic, Phlegmatic, Sanguine and Choleric.⁹⁶ These are related respectively to the four elements earth, water, air and fire (Wilkinson, 1993, p.61). “Many people are dominated by a single temperament, but others clearly manifest two or more. Also a person’s temperamental orientation can change during

⁹⁶ Steiner viewed *the temperaments* as being manifested in the human body and character.

The Melancholic has an introspective orientation. The Phlegmatic tends toward stability and inertia and are usually pleasant and good-natured. The Sanguine is associated with an extroverted orientation. They are active, dynamic and dominated by feelings. The Choleric are sturdy and energetic, swing between introverted and extroverted (Marshak, 1997, pp. 37-38).

the course of his [sic] life (Marshak, 1997, p. 37). Matthews believes that part of the human journey is to work for a balance.

First, it needs to be said that ‘temperament’ does not refer to the deepest individuality of a person, but rather to the given instrument through which they express themselves in life. As such, it can be experienced as both a gift and a limitation. Ideally, the temperaments are balanced within the adult person, or a balance can be worked for. (Matthews, 1996, p. 11)

Bernadette implies that modern day complexities have possibly altered how one can use temperament in teaching.

It’s not something that I’ve worked with strongly. Steiner often talks about feeding the children according to temperament. I find that this doesn’t always work. There are so many more variables today. They are so much more awake and awakened earlier than they were in Steiner’s time. I haven’t had great success with that although some teachers have. I do use the temperaments in various ways. When you tell stories, different types of things appeal to different temperaments. Of course, the choleric love the dangerous parts. (Bernadette: 356)

Sam also expressed an awareness that children of different temperaments would respond to different parts of a story.

And with the temperaments, and Rudolf Steiner brought this up too, that in every story we find some aspect of the temperament. So when St. Francis died, it's the melancholic or when the Pope died, everyone deserted him because they thought he had the plague, but St. Francis stayed with him. When you get to the part, where the villagers went out and they had their sticks, the choleric children want to jump up. Or the phlegmatics who love their home comforts, their food and being comfortable and they had a wonderful big feast and then you describe the food. So when there are those parts, you make contact with those children. (Sam: 227)

Sam explained that he also uses his knowledge of the different temperaments to design appropriate choices in follow-on activities.

What I've aimed to do is that once or twice every main lesson block, I have a lesson based on the temperaments and what I do is that I give the children a choice of four activities and I try to have the activities that I feel will appeal to the different temperaments... One might be drawing St Francis beside the Pope, his friend who is dying. I want to touch the sadness, melancholic feeling. Another one is to act out the part where St. Francis goes out to meet the wolf so there are all those people there with sticks and everything. And so that was more aimed at the Choleric. There were four activities which I thought would appeal to the four temperaments. Then I said, "You can choose what you want to do." At the end of the morning, we shared with the class what was done. So in the drama, they rehearsed it and performed it. With the

drawings, we put those up. Another girl wrote a poem with my help based on St. Francis' poems. And the others did wax modelling of the great feast. So they can choose. (Sam: 200-204)

Sam and I discussed the importance of allowing for choice but refraining from putting students into categories that might limit their development.

Gay: In any system, it can be used in two ways. One is, "Oh, what a relief. I can now put them into categories." The other way is to recognise that we all have a little bit of each (temperament). I get the impression that that is more of the Steiner philosophy.

Sam: Yes, but I do believe that there has been a lot of the former, myself included. I've got a child who is this. What can I do to suit that? This other way I'm working is much better. As we are a mixture of those temperaments plus ... personal and other experiences that come into it. And I got some lovely surprises. Children I thought were choleric and would love to get in there and act were doing these beautiful pictures of the sad, dying Pope. Others I thought were very shy were out doing drama. Some chose as I would have guessed.

Gay: Knowledge of temperament is probably important in helping children to understand themselves. ...Knowing what they are can be a key, but making them stay there is not really fair, either.

Sam: I agree with that 100%. It's the positive. You acknowledge the child or some aspect of him. There may be a sanguine child that has sanguine qualities. They jump out of the seat and all day long you're saying, "Sit down" but then once or twice in four weeks you can choose, it might be to form a dance and a sanguine would love to do that. (Sam: 206-214)

Relating other curriculum aspects to the temperaments also fosters an appreciation and tolerance for varied temperaments. Matthews explains how they can be related to types of sentence expressions, which reflect ways of relating to the world. The strongly persevering *Choleric* is the *Command*; the easily aroused and not persevering *Sanguine* is the *Exclamation*; the strongly persevering and not easily aroused *Melancholic* is the *Question* and the *Phlegmatic* whose attention is the least easily aroused and is the least strongly persevering is the *Statement* (Matthews, 1996, pp. 12-13).

Interviewee Sam created characters for the math functions based on the temperaments. In addition to subtly making children aware that four temperaments exist, the stories engage them because they can relate to at least one of the temperaments.

Each of the names has a particular temperament. So I've got a fiery Great Divide. The choleric likes to be in charge and give out jobs. She likes to give out and be sure each one has the same number. In those stories, the children like them because they relate to them. (Sam: 184)

Consideration of the temperaments is an aspect of Steiner education that is quite well known. However, although the terms of choleric, sanguine, melancholic and phlegmatic are unique to that philosophy, consideration of personality orientations is not limited to Waldorf educators. The Jungian influence of the 20th century was instrumental in promoting an awareness of personality types and influencing the emergence of a variety of assessment paradigms.

Jung distinguished two major attitudes or orientations of personality. The attitude of extraversion describes a person who gets his/her energy from the external world. The attitude of introversion describes a person who gets his/her energy from the inner, subjective world (Jung, 1933; Zubrick, 1998). Jung (1968, p. 49) identified four functions by which consciousness receives its input:

Sensation: Tells you something exists

Thinking: Tells you what it is

Feeling: Tells you whether it is agreeable or not

Intuition: Tells you when it comes and where it is going.

Thinking and feeling are called rational functions because they make use of reason, judgment, abstraction, and generalization. . . Sensation and intuition are considered to be irrational functions because they are based upon the perception of the concrete, particular, and accidental. (Hall and Lindzey, 1957, p.87)

Many personality and learning style quadrant paradigms are based on Jung's work.

In my school, at a staff workshop in 1994, appreciation for different ways of functioning was fostered by administering an inventory designed by Honey and Mumford (1983, 1998) by which we were identified as Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists.⁹⁷ Although this proved helpful for staff dynamics, it was difficult to apply it to an understanding of children in the classroom. However, I readily applied Patricia Princiotti's Thrust, Shape, Swing and Hang⁹⁸ patterns introduced at an American Montessori Society Regional Conference in 1994. This workshop particularly helped me to appreciate the learning style of the Hangers – those who wandered around the room getting into other's spaces. I began to ask myself what they were learning on these journeys to the pencil sharpener and sometimes surprised myself when I realised how many creative connections they were making.

In the 1940's Myers and Briggs devised a personality inventory based on Jung to help assess personality types. In addition to the orientations of Introversion and Extroversion and the functions of Sensing/iNtuition and Feeling/Thinking, they added Judgment /Perception. Although this instrument has been widely used to diagnose adult personality types and the effects in the workplace, it is relatively recently that educators have realised its potential for assessing and catering for

⁹⁷ *Activists* like to leap on a bike and have a go. They learn by doing.

Reflectors like to think about things before having a go, and to learn by watching other people try to ride bikes. *Theorists* like to understand the theory and to have a clear grasp of the concept before having a go. *Pragmatists* like to have some practical tips and techniques from someone with experience before having a go.

⁹⁸ Thrust-visual,sensating, part in light of whole, hands-on, functional, setting – security

Shape – auditory, thinking, part to whole sequencing, theoretical and sequencing, setting – recognition

Swing – mixed mode, feeling, weigh value, creates images, practical and playful, setting – interaction

Hang – kinetic, intuiting, whole to part, experiential, aesthetic, setting – risk. (Princiotti, 1994)

variations in type among staff and students (Murphy, 1992; Zubrick, 1998). None of the interviewees specifically mentioned applying knowledge of Myers-Briggs to their classroom teaching. However, feedback from teachers enrolled in the Interpersonal Communications course at my university indicates that this could be an important, presently underutilised tool for meeting individual needs in the classroom. These students, who are practising teachers, indicated that knowledge of children's types has helped them to facilitate more appropriate and varied choices in the classroom. It has also helped them to facilitate communication with staff, children and parents.

My personal experience is that awareness of personality types has increased my tolerance of differences and my effectiveness in fostering better communication between different personality types. Recently I counselled a parent who complained to me that her child's very creative teacher did not understand her serious and motivated child who needed feedback and was not into taking risks. After our discussion, she was able to explain the needs of what appeared to be her ISFJ child to ENTP⁹⁹ teacher. She explained to the teacher that her child needed structure and

⁹⁹ Preferences: (We use all eight preferences although they are not equally preferred.)

E or I (Where we draw energy): E represents Extraverted people who get their energy from without – from other people and the activities in the environment. They are sociable and enjoy active participation. I represents Introverted people who get their energy from within and focus on ideas, concepts, and impressions. They work well alone or in small groups.

S or N (Ways of attending to information): S represents people with a sensing preference who receive information primarily through the five senses and are pragmatic and realistic.

N represents people with an intuitive preference; they have a 'sixth' sense and tend to be imaginative, creative, and visionary.

feedback and time to work alone. The teacher ceased to equate this child's lack of risk-taking to be a lack of motivation and their relationship improved. Although, philosophically, she believed children should not require feedback other than work satisfaction, she began to provide more verbal feedback. The child enjoyed going to school for the rest of the year and the parent began to appreciate the energy of this classroom with its multitude of choices and project-based curriculum.

I have also applied my knowledge of personality types to my university work. I had to design and present a university course with a very sensate person. We finally decided that on her days, she would present the parts first or as she put it "isolate the difficulties" before the experiential component of the lesson. On my days, in my intuitive way, I presented the whole picture experientially and then dealt with the parts. Both approaches seemed effective – possibly because the students rotated between classes and so had the benefit of both styles. I am now much more patient with sensate university students who require detailed instructions including exact length of an assignment. In one of my classes last year, I welcomed the single extravert who energised the whole class with her enthusiasm. I noticed how she

T or F (How judgements or decisions are made): T represents the thinking orientation of those who readily apply logic and objectivity to decision-making. F people are those with a preference for feeling make decisions based on personal values and consider the impact on others of these decisions.

J or P (How one is oriented to the outer world): J represents people with a preference for an organised, planned approach to life who tend to complete projects. P represents people with a preference for perceiving who take a spontaneous, flexible approach to life. They are curious and open to new experiences.

(Adapted from Zubrick, 1998)

enjoyed role playing and collaborative lessons, but I was careful to have reflective, individual work times as well. Although as a 'J', I usually work to a plan and take pride in completion, I have learned to appreciate my colleagues and students with a Perception orientation. They are able to brainstorm numerous projects at once and, in exchange, need some help working backwards from a deadline to complete any of these projects. Acknowledging variations in the way students learn and express that knowledge has helped me to counteract the tendency noted by Elizabeth Murphy (1992) for teaching lessons to be “designed in the style of the teacher” (p. 80).

Teachers interviewed have also been assisted in appreciating the individual learning styles of children in their classes by exposure to other learning style theories including the visual, kinesthetic aural triad (Center for Discoveries in Learning, 1996) and Gardner's multi-intelligence theory (Gardner, 1983, 1993; Gibbs, 1995), which will be discussed further in Chapter VIII, for its curriculum implications.

Visual learners think in images or pictures. They can see the written word and efficiently process it through images. Visual learners tend to be very successful at school.

In a classroom the visual learner performs very well because all testing is conducted in a written “visual” format. This requires that visual images be made when recalling information. Good readers read the black and white text and then convert the information into pictures. (Center for Discoveries in Learning, 1996a, p. 1)

The Kinesthetic learner learns through body or feelings, needing to touch or feel whatever they are learning about. These children respond well to learning situations that require building and acting. The Auditory learner learns best by hearing or listening. They “filter incoming information through their listening and repeating skills” and “solve problems by talking about them” (Center for New Discovery, 1996a, p. 2)

A report by the Oklahoma State Dept of Education (1983) suggests that aware teachers can teach children of any style providing they recognise the importance of “finding the activities and resources which would present the material in the style of the learner” (p. 27). Furthermore they note that “research has shown that approximately 30% of elementary school children have visual modality strength, 25% have an auditory strength and 15% are kinesthetically oriented. The remaining 30% have mixed modality strength” (p. 28).

To help children to feel successful at school, it would seem important to help them recognise how they learn and to teach in a multi-sensory way. In Montessori classrooms, for example, equipment provides a multi-sensory way to learn concepts. A kinesthetic child may want to physically manipulate material to practice a concept whereas a visual child may only have to watch it once to make a mental picture that he/she can readily access. Auditory children probably benefit from dialogue and oral sequencing involving the task.

In my experience, it helps children to understand their own learning style. I recall explaining to a child, who was frustrated because he never understood the math lesson the first time, that he seemed to be an auditory learner and thus might need to hear things twice unlike visual learners. I carefully explained that this had nothing to do with mathematical intelligence and invited him to participate in two lessons (we had small group lessons) on the same concept. He went home and shared this interchange with his father who responded, “That’s how I learn too.” After that, the student voluntarily attended the lesson twice knowing that it did not mean he was “stupid”.

The Centre for Discovery Learning (1996b) suggests that understanding their own learning style helps students, but that they should be taught the strategies of visual learners to ensure more success in the classroom. Interviewee, Vicky, concurs with this view. She shared how children in her remedial class complained that they could not readily visualise. This was not their learning style.

I’ve got kids that can’t visualize when you’re reading and they’ve complained about it. They’ve said that they can’t see what is happening so they can’t actually comprehend the story... Yes, that's where we need to stop and say, think about this or draw or paint. I always say to parents who have children who are non-visual, “Get that TV off.” (Vicky 1: 176-179)

Vicky scaffolds the image creating process so that the children experience the visual learning style. Uhrmacher (1993) reports a similar process of teaching images in the Steiner schools. He describes a workshop conducted by Waldorf teacher Gary

Solomon that he attended where teachers were taught how to build on the teaching of images. The story he heard was of Hannibal trying to cross the Alps to conquer Rome.

At one point, obstructed by a boulder blocking a small passageway through the mountains, Hannibal commanded that everything the army had be burned – even spears and saddles. The fire heated the boulder, and then the boulder was red hot, Hannibal poured wine on it and it cracked. “You can carry this over into geology class next year, “ Solomon noted, reminding teachers that the image of Hannibal cracking the boulder would be useful in teaching about limestone. (Uhrmacher, 1993, pp. 91-92)

Uhrmacher (1993) concludes that “attaching images to the learning of new words, ideas, and concepts is an important pedagogical approach. One could go so far as to say, if one cannot see it (using ‘seeing’ metaphorically), one may not know it” (p. 92). He notes that educator, John Dewey, also acclaimed the importance of image creation for students.

I believe that the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it. (Dewey, 1972, p.92)

Griss (1998) proposes an equal emphasis on teaching with movement. She suggests that younger children learn kinesthetically and we can enhance their comprehension by teaching with movement. In fact, she feels a kinesthetic orientation can benefit children throughout primary and high school because this understanding is a rudimentary part of their personal narrative.

Even as children move on to the next stage of development, at which thought can precede action, they are still secure in their active/physical relations in the world. Introducing or reinforcing lessons through kinesthetic experience can therefore greatly assist their understanding of material that is being taught.

(Griss, 1998, p. 28)

Griss (1998) uses dance to teach direction and sequence of math. The children physically experience the main ideas of stories and lives of characters through dramatic movement. They even learn punctuation marks through movement. Students are encouraged to make “whole body shapes symbolising the punctuation marks” and then “walked” through unpunctuated sentences. Even with a high school class, she found their vocabulary test scores dramatically increased after acting out words in class (p.31). Langer (1997) in *Mindful Learning* suggests that this might be achieved by variation of normal activity. However, the Steiner educators, who have always linked movement with cognitive activities, also believe that this is a proven, effective way to learn. In my observation of Sam’s class, I watched the children reviewing number skills with hand claps and movement around the room.

(Observation 2/9/99) In an interview, Sam explained that children also use

movements to interpret sounds and thus experience them in a multi-sensory way.

“There are movements for the sounds, but they are not tied to the form of the letter in writing” (Sam: 172). For instance, the hard sound of K might be interpreted with hard movements. (Sam: 173-176). Steiner suggests that the “air-gestures” of sound can be transformed into movement as well as into speech.

We know that, in speaking, air is moved... These air movements are studied carefully. But instead of letting the larynx and the other speech organs transform the air-gestures into speech or song, they are turned into gestures performed by the arms, the hands, or the entire human figure, and also by groups of eurythmists¹⁰⁰ moving in specific patterns. (Steiner, 1996, pp. 191-192)

The physical aspect of the wholeness of learning is certainly abandoned early in the traditional educational process when evidence such as presented by Steiner educators and Griss (1998) indicates that a physical, sensorial component can be part of a lifelong orientation even if a kinesthetic orientation is not identified as a person’s primary learning style.

In the Waldorf classes, I observed oral story telling and recapitulation of stories, and regular and repeated choral recitations of poems. According to learning style theory, these methods should help the auditory learner to grasp new concepts. In the

¹⁰⁰ eurythmy: “a form of artistic movement that integrates spoken poetry and dance” (Marshak, 1997, p. 23).

Montessori classes where children had opportunity to explain what they had learned to other children the auditory learner was also being catered for. The Catholic and Government school classrooms that were using collaborative learning, Tribes and discussion sessions were also demonstrating an understanding of this learning style preference.

In her interview, Lynne noted that story-based lessons were the best way to cater for varied learning styles.

I think story gives them (what they need) whether they're oral or visual or whatever. I think there's an opportunity for all of them to have something to do. With a story, you can include a variety of activities to follow on such as art and craft. (Lynne 1: 218)

Fran also expressed a view that in literacy based programmes all children's learning styles can be engaged.

Certainly one needs to be conscious of different learning styles as a teacher. However, when looking at literature, you're actually engaging the inner person in a sense, aren't you? I think if you know the children well enough and if you select the text accordingly, engagement follows. (Fran: 127)

By recognising their own and their students individual temperaments and learning styles, teachers create a positive learning culture in which it is acknowledged that there

are many ways that an individual can reach his/her potential. Narrative, because it appeals to all students and can be explored in such a multitude of ways is viewed by interviewees as being an appropriate format for meeting the spectrum of individual needs and interests.

Catering for Gender Differences

Primary school experiences help to reinforce a child's sense of identity. The child goes through a three-phase process of gender development. First, the child acquires a sense of basic gender identity that involves recognition that she is a girl or he is a boy. Secondly there is a phase of gender stability during which the girl appreciates that she will grow up to be a woman and the boy that he will be a man. Finally, there is a stage of gender constancy when "the young person recognises that gender remains the same despite dress, hairstyle, occupation, and so on. It is a more biological conception of gender" (Elkind, 1992, p. 192).

Elkind (1992) further suggests that the girls and boys will organise their experiences according to their gender orientation. He claims that boys will remember masculine toys and objects better and girls will remember feminine toys and objects better. Following from this, it would seem that girls may find literature with feminine characters more meaningful than boys and boys may become more engaged with male characters. "Children's books play a significant part in transmitting a society's culture to children. Gender roles are an important part of this culture. How genders are portrayed in children's books thus contributes to the image children develop of their own role and that of their gender in society" (Singh, 1998, p. 1).

Everything we read...constructs us, makes us who we are, by presenting our image of ourselves as girls and women, as boys and men. We who write children's books, and we who teach through literature, need to be sure we are opening the doors to full human potential, not closing them (Fox, 1993, p. 84).

Current research has revealed that male characters dominate children's literature (Singh, 1998; Davis and McDaniel, 1999). The teacher education students of Davis and McDaniel analysed the Caldecott winners from 1972 through 1997 and found that males made up 60% of instances of characters portrayed through pictures and females only 40%. Text references were 61% male compared to 39% female.

Also of concern is the stereotypical portrayal of roles in literature. Girls are frequently portrayed as acted upon rather than active (Fox, 1993, Singh, 1998). Girls are more often conforming and dependent while boys are more adventurous and independent (Singh, 1998). Children's exposure to these narratives are influencing their view of gender norms and their vision of their place in society (Fox, 1993; Singh, 1998).

Because they are in a position to select literature and guide students in interpreting it, teachers can work to perpetuate or counteract gender bias. All the teachers interviewed instructed co-educational classes and so were in a position to consider gender differences. Montessorian Ellen who had taught children aged 3-12, clearly was trying to decide what aspects of gender were nature vs. nurture although she felt she countered bias by presenting a "mixed medley" of stories (Ellen 1: 166).

What is it with girls and fairies? I know that generation after generation it reappears and the boys have had the good/bad archetypes – the cowboys and Indians and the pirates. They need their heroes, don't they? (Ellen 1: 322)

Allison and Bernadette also observed gender differences in the children's writing.

They rewrote fairy tales. The boys and the girls treated this so differently. The boys – even quite gentle children – all have violence. They are all shooting each other. The girls got into relationships much more...I found this gender difference. I suspect other teachers would find the same. Boys are going through different phases in life at different times.... (Allison:184-188)

They write wonderful stories. If they are writing their own text, I usually give them something to start with because some children find it very hard to start.

So I might give them a couple of lines to start like

"My name is ..." and they have to make up a Viking Name "Harold Hairy Legs or something" and "I come from Norway or wherever" "Long ago I made a dangerous journey." That was their beginning. And they wrote wonderful stories about heading out on the high seas. Some met sea monsters. The girls' ones seemed to be much more fantasy oriented about meeting sea monsters and coming to strange lands and things like that. (Bernadette: 84)

Allison expressed an awareness of the predominance of male characters in children's literature, and reflected on how this might affect the children. She makes the observation that girls don't object to reading books about boys, but doubts if boys would choose books with all female protagonists.

I have thought about what would appeal to both genders in my mixed classes. I also think about providing books that will appeal to one or the other and there are obviously some. I think this is really important. I remember reading a story about going to camp in Canada and the children loved it. Then it occurred to me that all the main characters were boys and I thought that this was interesting that the girls did enjoy it very much. We did an incredible study on it and I tried to relate it to girls at camp as well, but I wondered if boys would have enjoyed it if it had had all girl characters. I really spent a lot of time thinking about this. Now, is that our society? Or is it just that teachers like me persist in reading "boys" books to girls? The same thing with *Indian in the Cupboard*. They all loved that, but again the main characters are male. Coming back from that, *Charlotte's Web* is fine. They're both in that. I consciously want models of both male and female characters in their reading but it is very hard to achieve. (Allison: 126)

Because males dominate so many mythologies, I was interested in how the Steiner teachers dealt with the issue of gender bias.

Gay: Are you conscious with the younger children of choosing stories that cater for different gender...?

Sam: Well, with gender, we aim for a balance. With saints, there are female saints. So I choose, maybe not [quite] half and half. We spent a long time on Saint Francis as he was so rich and interesting. The children were almost in tears on the last day when he died. But, I told the story of Saint Brigid and other saints to get a balance.

Gay: Sometimes it must be hard to choose a gender balance as some of the mythologies are very male dominated.

Sam: That's true, but you just have to search. There's Joan of Arc.

Gay: I remember seeing a film on a Steiner School and the older girls were asked which stories they liked best and it was the ones on powerful Egyptian women. Gender may have something to do with it. (Sam: 227-233)

Although like Sam, Bernadette noted the many female characters in myths, she was also aware of the male dominance in Norse Mythology which was the focus of her curriculum with Class 4.

Gay: Are there any female Vikings in these stories?

Bernadette: It is very male. One of the things we did in connection with that was that we wrote stories and we wrote it from the male point of view, but I told them we will do one from the female point of view. But, of course, the Viking culture is very male dominated in that sense.

Gay: I just wasn't sure, because in opera there are some powerful women. I didn't know if that was just an interpretation.

Bernadette: Well, in the myths, there are lots of female characters, although probably most of the characters in Norse mythology much more so than in Greek mythology are men. The women in Greek mythology are very integrated and very integral to all the action, even to the battles and things.

Gay: That's next year?

Bernadette: That's next year. You don't get that so strongly in the Norse mythology. It is very male. (Bernadette: 71-82)

Research indicates that gender stereotypes can limit children in making choices and in expressing themselves (Fox 1993). “At the same time, however, books containing images that conflict with gender stereotypes provide children with the opportunity to re-examine their gender beliefs and assumptions. Thus texts can provide children with alternative role models and inspire them to adopt more egalitarian gender attitudes” (Singh, 1998, p. 2). For example, the strong Greek women that Bernadette mentioned might help to counter gender stereotyping.

Montessorian, Nigel, mentioned in one meeting that *Tough Boris* (Mem Fox , 1994) was a text he liked to use to counter male stereotypes.¹⁰¹

Once upon a time, there lived a pirate named Boris von der Borch.

He was tough. All pirates are tough. He was massive. All pirates are massive.

He was scruffy. All pirates are scruffy. He was greedy. All pirates are greedy.

He was fearless. All pirates are fearless. He was scary. All pirates are scary.

But when his pirate died, he cried and cried. All pirates cry. (Mem Fox, 1994, text of *Tough Boris*)

When I examined some of Montessorian Ellen's favourite books, I realised that several of her selections also helped to counter gender stereotyping. *Miss Rumphius* (Cooney, 1981) describes a woman living in the early 20th century who has vision and ambition. She travels the world and meets the challenge of finding a way to make the world more beautiful. She doesn't marry or have children or assume the role of a housekeeper; she does find personal satisfaction. Another favourite of Ellen's is *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* (Wojciechowski, 1995). This story takes place at about the same time as *Miss Rumphius*. The characters have traditional roles,

¹⁰¹ Mem Fox reports that in addition to *Tough Boris*, she has embedded counter-sexist attitudes in *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*, *The Secret World of Leo Kipinski* and *Ben Again*. (Fox, 1993, p. 85)

but stereotyping is challenged because it is a book about feelings and relationships. Seven year old Thomas helps the carpenter, Jonathan Toomey, to overcome his grief and to find a reason to live once again.

There is evidence that in helping children to realise their identities, they need to be provided with literature that offers a range of male and female characters as well as stories that exemplify a range of masculine and feminine choices not limited by stereotyping. If this is to occur, teachers' awareness of these issues needs to be maintained through teacher education. Although choice of literary texts indicated some acknowledgement of this issue by all interviewees, only the Steiner and Montessori teachers wanted to further explore this issue during the interview situation. This contrasted with the eager response to my question on catering for multiculturalism and may have been because the latter has been a priority focus for Government and Catholic teachers in recent years.

Multiculturalism

A child is getting a multicultural experience when he/she has the opportunity to affirm an identity with a specific cultural group and at the same time develop an awareness of other cultural groups. In *Kwanzaa and Me*¹⁰² (1995), early childhood teacher, Vivian Paley describes her disturbing realisation that some African American parents

¹⁰² Kwanzaa is an African American holiday celebrated for seven days from 26 December to 1 January. 7 Candles are lit, one each day, representing unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, collective economics, purpose, creativity, faith, self-motivation, and sharing. Symbols and terms link the African Americans with their African ancestry.

were moving their children to all black schools to elicit more pride in culture and eliminate that feeling of being on the fringe. These views contrasted with other black parents who sought out a multicultural school because they thought there was a gap in a child's life if not exposed to multicultural society. Paley believed there must be a way to achieve cultural identity in a multicultural setting. She was supported by a parent who in response to a query of whether white people could be a role model for her children said, "You bet...as long as they respect and encourage my children to express their differences, their particular culture and knowledge" (1995, p.19). To achieve these dual aims, Paley used story in a sociodramatic way. She had an ongoing fantasy story she created with the children, but it integrated the different customs of the different ethnic groups represented in her classroom. She also had parents in to share their real experiences related to their cultural backgrounds. Children's own stories were modelled on those of the parents and revealed their own particular concerns. Thus each child's personal narrative was modified by the input from real and imaginary stories about cultural identity. The issue of segregation vs. integration was transformed to a focus on cultural identity and multicultural awareness.

Sturm (1997) concurs that inviting parents to tell their stories is a window to understanding the individuality of children in her care. She reports the difficult lesson of realising that one's own cultural values can create a defensive wall preventing appreciation of values that challenge long held beliefs. She suggests that getting parents to tell their stories can help to break down these barriers.

Bicultural parents often shared more about their cultural perspectives when the teacher asked direct but sensitive questions about culture of ethnicity. (e.g. “How do you think your ethnic background influenced your experience growing up?”) (Sturm, 1997, p. 37)

Children experiencing cultural conflict may become confused and insecure. They gain confidence when the values learned at home are affirmed. This occurs when the classroom nurtures intercultural competence (Sturm, 1997).

Dan made frequent mention of the importance of multiculturalism in his classroom. Firstly, he tried to awaken students to appreciate the culture of each child in the class.

Gay: Are you conscious of balancing your choices of story according to gender or learning styles or cultures?

Dan: Well, mainly cultures. I think because Australia is so diverse and because I'm a New Zealander, I know where they are coming from and what it's like for them. They may not have any relatives of things like that. It's just like you coming from America. You're still proud of where you came from. American and Australian at the same time. It's really difficult you know. That's important and M's Mum suggested that we go to the Japanese Prefecture for an excursion. So I do try to tie that in. And if it's an English person, I might suggest that we have "a nice cup of tea". It's good. Because I've travelled quite a bit too, so you know quite a few idiosyncrasies say if

someone comes from Ireland so you can discuss that sort of thing. (Dan: 110-113)

Sometimes a child's nationality can lead to class discussion that fosters an awareness that we can be of an ethnic group without living in the country of origin for that group.

Dan: Someone's Dad's in Kosovo at the moment.

Another girl's family moved here. So we discuss why Sonia's mum and dad might have made the decision to come here and why Stephanie's dad might have decided to go there and help out. (Dan: 222)

Dan proceeds to explain how at the same time that he is acknowledging the cultures represented in his class, he is nurturing their identity as Australians. He describes sending a numbat to a pen pal class in America with Australian memorabilia.

When we sent that parcel, there are so many things that are uniquely Australian, and uniquely WA. We put in *The Deep* by Tim Winton. And one of the Mother's last year sent off the story of the Duyfken¹⁰³ and that kind of thing. So, and kids are bringing in paper flags and stamps and money. And we are putting in gum leaves and we're classifying them - shapes and no that's not

¹⁰³ The Duyfken – a Dutch spice trading ship that sailed to Australia in the early 17th century. A replica was recently built in Fremantle, Western Australia and launched in 2000.

native, it can't go in that pile...One of the little girls made a phone for the numbat. Little phone with numbers. They made a suitcase. They made up everything that the numbat would need. (Dan: 331-332)

Montessorians Ellen and Nigel both studied various cultures in conjunction with continent studies. They brought in folktales as part of their studies. Government school teacher, Lynne, used Aboriginal tales as a classroom resource to introduce the class to the Aboriginal culture and to affirm the cultural identity of Aboriginal children.

I've used a lot of Aboriginal stories when I've had Aboriginal children in the class so that has been a way of making sure that their culture is recognised. In fact, I still use Aboriginal stories this year and I don't have any Aboriginal children...I like to look at different cultures. (Lynne 1: 115)

As discussed above (see Timelines and Family Trees), in Shawn's Montessori school, primary children explored their family trees and researched cultures represented on their tree. This gave them a sense of their uniqueness in the combination of their ancestral cultures. It also involved children's families in telling stories of their cultures.

At the holidays we have a multicultural feast and families bring dishes that represent their cultures and the children have a chance to share their research on their origins. (Shawn 4: 8)

In the upper primary class, as mentioned above (see Exploring and Presenting Autobiography), there was considerable evidence of multicultural study. Children's own stories with reference to their cultural heritage were artistically presented. The class was studying American history and varied groups were represented in biographies and folklore including European, Scandinavian, Asian and African stories. In still another area of the classroom, students were creating personal Buddhist based Wheels of life inspired by the sharing of Asian children (Observation of Shawn's school: 26/4/99).

In the Steiner school, each mythology study also entailed understanding the culture of origin. In Sam's class, when the children were studying the Celtic Saint stories, they studied the landscape and culture of Ireland. In Bernadette's Class 4, the students studied the countries of Scandinavia as part of their focus on Norse Mythology. They also studied their own country and there was evidence of an in-depth exploration of Aboriginal myths and art as part of this.

None of the teachers interviewed was working primarily with indigenous people. However, Fran had previously worked with Aboriginal children. She explained that you have to take down the barriers and help children find their authentic voice wherever they are. She provided the example of a poem written by a 13-year-old Apache girl for her teacher (Martin, 1972, p.199):

In Memoriam

He is gone, friend of the Apache.

He sailed away on the deep blue waters of the wide, wide river.

The low notes of the soft green wind called him.
The song singing of the deep blue waters put him to sleep.
I saw him, this friend of the Apache, across the big wide desk.
He said to me, "Do you like school, little Apache girl?"
My tongue stuck and would not say "Yes."
He smiled at me, and I heard him go home
with the leaves sounding as he walked.
Now he is gone, friend of my people.
He sailed away with a soft green wind
on the deep blue waters of the wide, wide river.

-Lucille Victor, Age 13

San Carlos, Arizona Indian School

Published with this poem is a letter by Lucille to her real teacher, Mrs. C. who encouraged her to write her own thoughts in English. She encouraged her to express herself in the poetry of her culture, but introduced her to the wider culture of their country too. "She knows we are Apache Indians, but she wants us to understand we are American citizens, too" (Martin, 1972, p. 198).

Fran: Why would he (Bill Martin, Jr.) choose that unless he knew that girl was marginalised and vulnerable but valuable? Why did that teacher help her unless she knew that this girl was valuable? Why did this girl write this letter unless she knew this teacher was a good teacher? All the stuff that gets in the way of our classrooms. "I don't like you because you're making a noise." "I don't like you because you're giving me the wrong answers." "All day I'm

sitting there and nobody likes me." There's none of that here. You feel that value.

Gay: It's the unconditional message, the joint exploration.

Fran: Well, it provides for growth. What comes out of here is authentic. This poem - these are her words. The teacher wouldn't talk like that.

Gay: No, because she isn't Apache.

Fran: Exactly, and that's the same with the Aboriginal children at Gogo station. Everything that probably interests me in a sense is that inner person and it grows off that. You know why? Because it's right, it's justice. It's wrong not to do it. (Fran 1: 292-299)

Multicultural education helps fight prejudice and stereotyping by teaching children to appreciate difference.

As educators and parents, we can help to assure that our children are accepting of difference – whether they be racial, religious, ethnic, generational, or due to disability. We do this by not accepting prejudice when it occurs, by living in multicultural, multigenerational communities, by reading stories about different countries, by having friends and associates who share their various backgrounds, and by the simple act of accepting and spending time with people who are different from ourselves. (Korngold, 1994, p. 21)

Furthermore, multicultural education encourages children to appreciate the influence of their unique cultural past on their journey. It also fosters wonder in the amazing customs and traditions that exist in the world and helps children to identify the idiosyncrasies that define their own culture.

When teachers view a principal educational goal as helping children to recognise that they are on a personal and unique journey, aspects of their teaching are revolutionised. British schoolteacher, Jonathan Smith in *The Learning Game* (2000) advises new teachers, "Get to know your pupils as individuals not as units in a class" (p. 89). Jo Karolis, Principal of St. Catherine's in Sydney, has found the same key to effective teaching. She attributes a dramatic change in her success as a teacher to realising that she had to consider her students as individuals. She notes that a student once said to her, "You don't teach us as people. You only teach us as a class." She reflects that, "It was true. When I returned, I made a point of visualising each student in my difficult Year 9 class, and focusing on them as I spoke or listened, not as a recipient of my lesson, but as a person with a hundred concerns, interests and preoccupations. I no longer focused on what I had to say but on what they were thinking, where they were at" (Karolis, 2000, p 13).

Being effective in helping children to appreciate their own uniqueness is working towards self and community awareness at the same time. For children or adults to be able to reflect on their individuality in an intrapersonal way, they require the dialogue

of interpersonal relationships. This takes many forms: collaborative learning in which children join forces to achieve an outcome, sharing of personal stories by children and their teachers and discovering an authentic voice by having an opinion recognised in group discussion. For students to determine the course of their own journey, it is critical to study the lives of others through biography and autobiography. This might take the form of literary works or it might involve the sharing of oral histories. The more a student relates to the life story studied, the more influence it can have on choices in his/her life. Teachers can also help students to acknowledge their uniqueness through providing opportunities to explore and appreciate individual differences in temperament and learning styles. To help children to realise their identity, it is also important that they have opportunities to explore the human potential of being a man or woman by being in a class where models of both without gender stereotyping are provided in literature and other curriculum explorations. Multiculturalism is another doorway to celebrate individual uniqueness, tolerance of difference and communal sharing. The critical literacy movement has assisted in fostering an awareness of gender, racial and cultural bias and consequently highlighting the potential for positively defining individual uniqueness in terms of these variables (Fox, 2000).

The approaches identified in this chapter help children and teachers to understand the nature of a personal journey and what represents the unique characteristics of their own pathway. Fostering this self-awareness and authentic voice in a caring community is the first step towards establishing goals and achieving them through personal transformation the topic to which I now turn.