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2002

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

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Publication Details

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

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Chapter IX

The Denouement

My research journey and my professional and personal narratives are interwoven and have developed dynamically and concurrently. To conclude the research project, it is instructive to view the findings of this narrative inquiry in terms of the research focus questions posed. It is also helpful to consider directions for future research arising out of the limitations of the current study as well as out of the rich data that was revealed. Lastly, to further demonstrate how qualitative research can change the participants personally and professionally, an epilogue is provided describing my own immersion in this work that has altered my educational views and practices.

Conclusion

Humans are storytelling organisms who individually and collectively lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

In this qualitative study, narrative was both the ‘method’ and the ‘phenomenon’ researched (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). This was an exploration with the purpose of revealing a theory regarding the relationship of narrative use to the theoretical base of teaching practice. The data collected from the in-depth interviews

with twelve teachers was composed of stories of their experiences using narrative in their particular classrooms and schools representative of four different ethos. A range of theoretical perspectives was employed to interpret the data which, due to its complexity, could not be adequately addressed in terms of any single pedagogy; rather, the data was viewed in the framework of the philosophy and practice of each school culture and interpreted with reference to the theories of prominent educators, psychologists and philosophers. Through this analysis the teachers' stories provided insight into the complexity of narrative use in primary education by foregrounding its use in curriculum and classroom practice for linguistic and literacy understanding, as an aid to understanding the human journey and personal narrative, and for personal transformation in cognitive, emotional and spiritual domains. These levels of understanding emerged in generating responses from the data to each of the research questions:

- What is the place of narrative in contemporary classroom teaching and learning? How do underlying philosophical traditions and beliefs influence the uses of narrative in different schools in Montessori, Steiner, Catholic and Government school settings?
- How is narrative used to support learning across the curriculum and in personal development in each setting?
- How do teachers describe and interpret effects on their own and children's learning?

Narrative in a Linguistic and Literacy Context

All four methodologies support the findings of educators, including developmental and cognitive psychologists, linguists, whole language theorists and constructivists, who note the development of narrative structure is age-related and its increasing complexity parallels children's cognitive and social development. Narrative is viewed as vital for reconstructing experiences into a meaningful and integrated form.

(Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Goodman, 1986; Sutton-Smith, 1986; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987; Garvie, 1990; Meek, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1990; Westby, 1991; Mandler, 1992). Further, narrative is considered to be the most appropriate context for observing the principles of natural learning and creating an integrated language experience (McCulla & Walshe, 1979; Cambourne, 1988; Fox, 1997b; Loeffler, 1993). There is also an acknowledgement that oral narrative prepares the child for subsequent communication through written narrative. It is accepted that oral retelling prepares children for reading and writing and that rhythm, rhyme and repetition of songs and poems help them to develop phonetic awareness and decoding skills (Ong, 1982; Egan, 1997). Although only the Steiner teachers emphasised the importance of supporting an extensive oracy period, Government educators voiced the belief that more focus needs to be made on oral skills as a prelude to literacy.

From the teachers' storied data, it became apparent that an integrated or balanced language approach evolving from whole language strategies is widely valued in the Government and Catholic schools to foster the development of literacy skills.

Children are introduced to a whole context in the form of a narrative poem or story from which comprehension, vocabulary, phonetic, and grammatical exercises are derived. Montessorians vary in how they have adopted the balanced language approach. Meaningful whole contexts have always been emphasised by adherents to this educational philosophy and some teachers have readily adopted a model by which a narrative is used to demonstrate an exploration of the language modalities and then followed up by a choice of literary activities. Other Montessorians place a greater emphasis on skill exploration using concrete materials to help isolate difficulties.

These literacy activities are brought together afterwards with an experiential narrative.

In the Steiner classroom the main lesson story of the day is often used as a context for exploration of language skills and concepts. At other times, mini-narratives are employed to demonstrate letters, parts of speech and types of sentences. One distinct difference between Montessori and Steiner classrooms was that Montessori students have a choice of activities based on their interest and level of development whereas, in Steiner classes, children explore skills in a whole class situation with some choice of related artistic exploration later. Observations in Government and Catholic schools revealed a combination of whole class explorations and small group activities often based on diagnosed needs or assessed skill levels.

All four approaches value purposeful language learning. In the Government and Catholic schools children write letters that will be answered and learn poems or write stories to share with other classes in their school and overseas. In the Steiner school, children create their own books and dramatise scenes based on the mythology explored in their big lesson. In the Montessori school, the purpose of language explorations is often linked to culture with plays, stories and reports written about indigenous people, world cultures, ancient animal species, or the universe. All four approaches value narrative as the meaningful context in which a child actively constructs an understanding of language and enhances encoding and decoding communication skills.

Narrative in the Context of the Human Journey

Teachers in relating their experiences indicated various ways that narrative is used in their schools to deepen children's understanding of their personal journey in the context of their community and culture. The use of narrative acknowledges that even

though young children are in a very concrete stage in terms of logico-scientific thinking, they are indeed capable of abstract thought in a narrative sense (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986; Bruner, 1988, 1990). They can apply images to their own lives and further their understanding of the world through creating imaginary roles and situations. They use metaphors, similes and personification in their language to express understanding of their world; they use images and rhythm to aid memory. In fact, they demonstrate many of the attributes of rich oral language displayed by traditional preliterate cultures (Piaget, 1929/1973, Cassirer, 1946; Montessori 1949/1988a; Steiner 1923/1996; Gardner & Winner, 1979; Bruner, 1990; Caldwell, 1997; Egan, 1997).

More than other methodologies, Steiner teachers believe these language characteristics give us insight into children's understandings. They thus view the value of oral narrative as far more than literary scaffolding. They believe that rhythm, rhyme and imagery relate to the mythic understanding of the child and thus these attributes of oracy are a basis of their early childhood curriculum. Steiner classrooms and those influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach tend to celebrate the animism in children's stories that helps them to make sense of their worlds rather than minimising its importance or treating these expressions as naïve or inferior. Each Steiner educator is also an adept oral storyteller. Oral storytelling is valued throughout the educational process for its power to create a meaningful interaction with a specific audience as well as using rhythm and image to enhance memory skills and vividly connect the listener to another time, place or culture (Bettleheim, 1977; Ong, 1982; Mellon, 1992; Edwards et al, 1993; Matthews, 1994, Egan, 1997, 2000a).

Montessori also placed great importance on imagination as a tool to abstraction. However she believed in fostering this imagination through images linked consistently to the real and natural world. Thus, an appropriate story for seven year olds would be *The Story of the Universe* in a Montessori school whereas in the Steiner school, fairy tales are chosen as appropriately corresponding to the challenges of that age group. Government and Catholic teachers are primarily concerned that children have a blend of fiction and non-fiction stories as a basis to their curriculum. As in the Steiner curriculum, fairy tales are frequently used with young primary school children along with a wide assortment of contemporary storybooks. Non-fiction works are also used to reinforce understandings about the natural world but this emphasis is in great contrast to Montessori where the children start with a “big story” of the origins of the universe, rather than starting with their immediate environment.

In addition to image creation, rhythm and ritual also help to define the complexity of the human journey for students. The rhythm of life is experienced in the rhythms and rituals of the classroom. Observations in all the schools revealed a rhythm in lesson plans that mirrored a narrative format. Steiner and Montessori classroom teachers are also attuned to the importance of altering periods of activity with periods of silence to aid a child’s self-construction. Steiner educators view this rhythm as connected to human breathing. In contrast to the other methodologies, they have found using rhythmic patterns to be an effective tool of classroom management. In the Steiner school, rhythm is a pulse in the class as a whole. Thus, collectively the children might engage in a choral verse preceding a time of quiet concentration. Steiner teachers also stress the importance of linking patterned movements to sound in order to nurture holistic development.

In Montessori, allowance is made for individual rhythms as children make guided selections of the day's activities. For Government and Catholic teachers, there is a rhythm to the scheduling of the day and the terms and rhythmic and rhyming texts are used frequently to aid language acquisition. However, the Steiner approach is unique in using music, movement and oral poetry recitation on a regular daily basis to consciously aid the student in gaining insight into the rhythm of his/her own being and journey.

The universal appeal of childhood games including chants and repetitions of narratives popular throughout history certainly supports the view that rhythms and rituals link us to our culture. Rituals, Traditions and festivals also celebrate human linear and circular tales. All of the schools visited have some nominated festivals and times for community gatherings that supported our journey in the community context. The Steiner and Montessori teachers also practise rituals connected with birthdays. Steiner teachers write birthday verses for their students. Montessori children reenact their yearly movement around the sun recalling significant moments on their journey. All the schools also have special celebrations for the graduating class, marking an end and a beginning in the human journey.

These communal experiences highlighting the patterns of life prepare the student to incorporate experiences that help him/her find an authentic voice and recognise the elements of their unique journey (Vygotsky, 1978; Fox, 1997; Diz-Imbelli, 1998; LaRouchelle & Bednarz, 1998). In a respectful environment, they hear stories of their peers, teachers, and members of the community (Paley, 1988; Edwards et al,

1993; Sturm, 1997). Government, Catholic and Montessori teachers cite collaboration and questioning at various levels of interpretation as particularly important in this process. In the Steiner school, the teachers and students are on a seven-year journey together and part of each individual's journey is reflecting on the individual challenges and achievements of classmates and colleagues of varied temperaments.

More than the other schools, the Steiner ethos emphasises the importance of the teacher/learner community (Eisner, 1985; Grumet, 1988; Pinar, Lattery & Taubman, 1994; Fels, 1995; Houston, 1996; Langer, 1997; Palmer, 1998; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). Teachers view education as a lifelong process. Interestingly, particularly in the primary school, the teachers are viewed as being the knowledgeable ones with the stories to impart. Also, the classrooms are more traditionally structured with infrequent use of the collaborative learning model compared to the Government, Catholic and Montessori schools. However, there is still a sense of a shared journey as they learn to work together in exploring the great lessons and as they use experiences of classroom interaction to gain greater personal insight. In Montessori classrooms, the opportunity for the teacher to be on a shared journey with small groups of students as they explore concepts in varied chosen ways is fundamental to the philosophy. As teachers have students for three years, there is a similar sense of sharing an ongoing journey that exists in the Waldorf classrooms.

The teachers interviewed frequently create collaborative learning situations in their Catholic and Government school classrooms. However, the sense of shared journey is absent except in the English lessons when students are encouraged to develop an authentic voice in evaluating the text, the plot and the characters. In these schools, the

power of story or big theme to provide a centre for genuine exchange is not apparent in other subjects which were more fragmented than in the alternative schools.

Interviews and observations in schools where the new *Curriculum Framework* has been adopted indicate that a teacher/learner community model may become more prevalent with the opportunity to explore big themes or stories in an integrated subject manner. There is also indication that themes may become interclass or interschool so that teachers have more opportunity to collaborate in designing and implementing outcome-based activities. This is a movement away from the isolated classroom approach or the banded cross-setting that was contributing to fragmentation during my initial interviews and observations.

Studying the lives of others through autobiography and biography can also aid students in making sense of their life experiences thus far and in making choices aided by projecting into the future (Egan, 1986; Cusworth, 1996; Dougherty, 1999; Bateson, 2000). This process helps them appreciate the perspectives from different times, cultures and genders as they develop an understanding of their own unique combination of interests and attributes derived from these collective experiences.

Steiner teachers, believing that children's understandings parallel the development of historical consciousness, focus on the lives of fantasy figures in fairy tales and fables in the first few years. Subsequently, they study mythological figures with each selected myth responding to the challenges and needs of children of a designated age.

In contrast, Montessori, Government and Catholic teachers use a spectrum of biographical tools but with an emphasis on exposing children to real people in history and in the community. Catholic teacher Fran and Montessorian Carol both emphasise the importance of students experiencing the complex lives and interests of people who

contribute to our society. Biographies and autobiographies become life metaphors for students as they acquire models for problem solving and dealing with life crises.

Opportunities for students to hear the life stories of people in their communities from other cultures and other generations can provide rich cultural learning experiences (Paley, 1997; Holmes, 1997; Fatowna, 2001). Constructing their own autobiographies is also an effective means of helping children to make connections between multiple life experiences as was demonstrated in Shawn's Montessori school's autobiography project (Dougherty, 1999).

In Shawn's school teachers were also encouraged to share their autobiographies with the class. However, as in the other Montessori schools, Government and Catholic schools, there was little opportunity to share personal narrative with other staff members aside from prestaff meeting pleasantries. The Steiner teachers also identified this as an untapped support area for furthering the sense of community. However, both the Steiner teachers had recently had the opportunity to share their autobiographies with other members of staff in a weeklong workshop and they indicated that this had lessened the personal isolation that is prevalent in most teaching communities. There is thus indication that the positive effect of sharing personal narrative is undervalued in most school settings.

Narrative in the Context of Transformation

Data and literature reviews indicate that if students and teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on the influence of models and significant events in their lives, it can lead to personal transformation (Wolf, 1996, 1998; Kattner, 1997; Palmer, 1997; Fox, 1997b; Marshak, 1997). Transformation reflects a significant change in

how a person views his/her personal journey or how they view their part in the vast scheme of interdependent life (MacIntyre, 1984). Change can be precipitous prompted by a positive or negative critical incident or a positive or negative model.

Alternatively, transformation can be gradual (Yair, 2000). Montessori, Steiner and Catholic curriculums support a view that curriculum can support transformation of a spiritual nature. All specifically endorse the importance of giving young children the experience of wonder in their world – the wonder of being part of a vast, intricate and ordered cosmos. Orientation for a spiritual journey includes exposure to values and virtues (MacIntyre, 1984; Popov, 1990,1999). Data indicates that this is occurring with some regularity in Catholic, Montessori and Steiner schools all of whom use story to support value education. There also seems to be an increased focus on value education in Government schools responding to the challenges of the new *Curriculum Framework* (1998). Supporting a reflective process also helps children focus on an inward journey. Catholic schools provide practice in meditation and reflection as part of their religious education programme. To assist students in the process of thought clarification through prioritising values and making sense of their experiences, journalling has been tried by several interviewed teachers. Those who report the most success are those who have scaffolded the process through teacher modelling, oral journalling, and guided reflections at moments of significant experience (La Chapelle, 1997). Experiencing balance in one's life can also contribute to a realisation of connectedness or flow (Cameron, 1992; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Smith, 2000; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). Interviewed teachers all commented on the importance of balance and the challenge of trying to achieve it for themselves and in the classroom where the provision of a variety of learning pathways need to be provided in consideration of multi-learning domains and varied learning styles.

In a second stage of transformation the individual begins to plot his/her own journey coded by an internal monologue. Setting goals and adopting personal agency beliefs scaffolds this process (Garrett & Cole, 1993). Teachers' storied experiences reveal that life changes can be dramatically influenced by how one processes models – influential teachers and archetypes (Jung, 1933, 1968; Bettelheim, 1977; Bolen, 1984, 1989; Campbell & Moyers, 1998; Palmer, 1998; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). Steiner educators used mythological archetypes in accordance with the age-related challenges of children. Other teachers used ancient and modern archetypes in a more random way.

Personal transformation also entails resolving conflicts and reconstructing our narratives. Teachers report that new life directions – transformative learning – often result from discourse or woundedness leading to reconfiguration of life's priorities and values (Mezirow, 1985a, 1985b; Houston, 1996; Carrigg, 1997; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). Teachers have explored ways of scaffolding the conflict resolution process with children including peer mediation in a Montessori school, redrafting their stories in Waldorf and Montessori classes and archetypal story construction in Steiner and other mainstream settings. There is indication that as children mature, they are capable of more complex problem resolution as they begin to appreciate the nuances between binary opposites.

Spiritual transformation is making ultimate connections including experiencing the uniqueness of one's own journey against the backdrop of archetypal patterns.

Indications are that a strong cultural identity also makes one more open to new

connections of change. Transformation entails realising the irony that one can only fulfill a unique mission by realising one's interdependence with and moral responsibility for other creatures and the planet (Berry, 1988; MacIntyre, 1994; Sandlos, 1998; Swimme & Turner, 1999). We are now in an era where the merging of science and philosophy integrate human experience of the past millennium. Catholic religious education, Montessori cosmic education, and the Steiner model of the evolution of consciousness all attempt to prepare the child to experience this interconnection between 'bliss' and 'science' (Nigel: 2) in 'The Age of The Earth' (Turner and Swimme, 1999).

Each of these narrative understandings composes an aspect of the meta-narrative of meaningful connections. Language forms the basis of engagement with life and is the means by which we amass our experiences. Narrative can provide a context for learning about language but when this language vehicle is internalised, it becomes the vehicle by which one orders his/her experiences and finds an authentic voice (Garvie, 1990; Westby, 1991). A sense of personal journey is experienced as one prioritises each of these experiences into a unique pathway aided by viewing our own journey in terms of our community and culture. It is at this juncture that one is sometimes faced with the conflict or opposing expectations of the individual journey vs. the communal journey while at the same time realising that each can only be fulfilled in terms of the other. Resolution of this paradox is realised through transformation when meaning of self becomes interrelated with a sense of cosmic purpose and an appreciation for the interdependence of all life forms.

Implications are that for narrative to be fully utilised as a tool to make these multi-level connections in their lives, students need to experience an integrated or balanced curriculum (Montessori, 1948/1989a; McCulla & Walshe, 1979; Kahn, 1992, 1995; Gardner, 1993; Loeffler, 1994; Langer, 1997; Murdoch & Hornsby, 1997; McGuire, 1997; Curriculum Council, 1998). Steiner and Montessori provide long-established models of constructivist-like education. In these methodologies, the child is viewed as being in the centre making connections motivated by a 'big story' catering for his/her level of understanding. Learning is facilitated by a rich environment and a mentor. To assist the student in making connections, there is recognition that fictional narrative and metaphors can serve to clarify reality; thus, the interweaving of varied types of narrative is encouraged. If one accepts that such an integrated or balanced curriculum is the most effective model for meaning-making then there is scope for significant change in teacher education so that student teachers can make more connections between curriculum areas and between pedagogies and their own experiences (Steiner, 1923/1996; Montessori, 1949, 1988a; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Eisner, 1991; Weber, 1993; Palmer, 1998).

As in any life journey, narratives overlap and often the ending of one story marks the beginning of another. Interview data from twelve teachers has created a profile of the use of narrative in four types of schools with differing ethos. Collectively, their experiences have unearthed many guidelines for using narrative as an agent for meaning in the classroom and in life. The interview data and literature review have also identified new areas for exploration. Referring to the property of narrative, *Changing Perspective*, one might predict that as the following areas implicated for further research are explored, new information will shed light on the past and help

educators plan for further application of narrative to linguistic, cognitive, cultural, social and spiritual learning domains.

Implications for Further Research

As discussed in the conclusion, the qualitative research model using in-depth interviewing was an appropriate means of gathering data to theorise on the use and effects of using narrative in primary school classrooms. There were, however, certain limitations in the study which along with the interviewee data provide direction for future related research studies.

Research in Response to Limitations

Sampling.

The first area to be addressed is sampling. Because of the immense amount of data generated in in-depth interviews, the sample was, by necessity, limited. An effort was made to gather storied experiences of teachers who followed varying educational pedagogies, and, indeed, there was sufficient data in which to detect emerging patterns. However, representatives from other ethos, as informed others, provided important input during the course of the study. I would thus invite the Reggio Emilia experienced teachers to participate in a future study focusing on narrative in early childhood education because of the unique insights into the importance of dialogue and project work provided by these consulting educators. The contributions of a Presbyterian Ladies' College teacher in the area of virtue education and the

Curriculum Framework made me aware that there are other educational milieus that should be included in any future study of narrative in primary schools. I would want the sampling to include representatives of other Independent schools such as the Uniting Church schools in Western Australia as well as other religious and non-sectarian schools. Multiple interviews and observations at systemic Catholic and Government schools would help to construct a more accurate profile of the range of narrative use within the framework of the pedagogy of these school systems catering for diverse populations and employing teachers from a variety of teacher training backgrounds.

Another future study defined by varying the sample would be to view the data from the point of view of an intercountry comparison. In this current project, two of the interviewees were Montessorians from the USA. Although their stories greatly enriched the storied data, cross cultural patterns could not be detected or explored because there were no representatives of the other pedagogies from the USA. A future study could be designed for such comparative purposes. A comparative study could also be designed with a split sample between those, as in this purposeful sample study, who are committed to using narrative and those teachers who do not see this as part of a deliberately applied pedagogy. What are the comparative effects?

The sample was also limited in that it only included teachers' storied experiences. A complementary study gathering student experiences might also contribute significantly to educators' insight on the use of narrative in teaching.

Another identified limitation that could lead to further research actually emerged from the results. It became very apparent that the teachers and teacher education students perceive that they gain enormous benefit from sharing and reflecting upon teachers' stories. As a result of this insight, suggestions have been made to make alterations to schools and higher education to enable more sharing of personal and professional narratives. In this research model, however, I was the connector between the interviewees who never had the opportunity to engage directly with each other. They were therefore deprived of the benefit of assimilating and benefitting from each other's experience other than from my second hand reports. Carter (1993) states that the latter type of story sharing is usually neglected in favour of a model in which teachers tell anecdotes to researchers. To remedy this imbalance, an effective model for research of teachers' storied experience that would be relevant to all participants might be a weekend retreat for the express purpose of sharing stories about using narrative. A follow-up retreat might be used to share stories on how participants have used the ideas they gained from the first gathering. This new model would ensure a greater transferability of data than was possible in the current study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Evolving Teacher Narratives.

What could be considered a third limitation to this research model is its evolving nature. It is impossible to present defined, finite results when the teachers' personal and professional narratives and their teaching circumstances are always evolving. An example is the collaboration which some previously isolated teachers experienced as a result of the introduction of the *Curriculum Framework* in Western Australia during the course of this study. Another example was that of Shawn's visit to Reggio Emilia

which prompted her to incorporate more opportunity for dialogue and project work in her classroom. This ongoing transformation presents difficulty in regards to definitive reporting, but it also highlights a benefit of qualitative research – it is participatory research with the purpose of highlighting new directions being as essential to teaching pedagogy as recording the present or the journey thus far.

Implications for Further Research Emerging from the Storied Experiences

Through collecting stories from teachers, an array of ideas for using narrative has been recorded to help children understand the structure of their language and the narrative genre, to foster an understanding of the human journey, and to assist them in experiencing transformation in cognitive, emotional, behavioural and spiritual ways. The range of narrative applications revealed is so vast, in fact, that one can't help but feel that researching several of these suggestions is important to determine the potential benefits for improving primary school education for students and teachers.

Narrative as a Language Genre and a Literacy Tool

As reported in this thesis, teachers believe that oral language skill acquisition prepares their students for literacy and concept formation as well as aiding interpersonal communication. This belief is supported by researchers who have explored language development including Vygotsky (1962,1978), Sutton-Smith (1986), Bruner (1990), Westby (1991), Mandler (1992). Some of the teachers interviewed representing both Government and Montessori schools expressed their opinion that educational pedagogy should acknowledge these developmental findings and incorporate far more

oral work than is currently being emphasised. To offer support for these curriculum strategy modifications, it is important to research the effects of emphasising oracy as a preparation for literacy in early childhood classrooms¹¹⁰. The Steiner classroom might be used as a comparative point because the Waldorf teachers emphasise the importance of a lengthy period of oral literacy and do not introduce written symbols until age 7.

Montessori pedagogy also offers several ideas that might be trialled in other school settings. The Montessori classrooms are multi-aged. What language skills are fostered in a multi-age setting? How could this setting be used to model the construction and deconstruction of narrative? Montessori also has a comprehensive system of teaching grammar in a multisensory way using concrete symbols for parts of speech and symbols and arrows for sentence parts. If the whole from which the parts are to be analysed is related to the big themes or stories being explored in the class or to the children's own narratives, will motivation be enhanced? If similar concrete systems are introduced in non-Montessori settings, will grammar rules be applied more successfully and consistently than they are presently?

¹¹⁰ Early Childhood – Early childhood encompasses 8 years (0-8), but the years designated for inclusion in early childhood teacher education depend on practices within states. For example, five years (3 years – 8 years) form the focus of early childhood teacher education in Western Australia; however, theoretical and practical work in NSW is provided at universities responding to the demand created by the necessity of having a certified teacher in large childcare centres.

The teachers interviewed for this thesis all advocated using narrative as a backdrop for teaching language. Garvie (1990) also asserts that story is a more effective stimulus in teaching language than other choices.

The advantage of story as a stimulus over topics introduced through chart, poster, picture, model, etc. or simply discussion, is that it is structured. It is going somewhere and the learner wants to reach the end of the journey.

(Garvie, 1990, p. 31)

There is scope here for researching the effectiveness of different wholes that provide the basis for studying language parts. It would also be interesting to investigate whether the selection of stories used to support language learning related to a central story or theme would also enhance language skill acquisition as well as the ability to apply the narrative genre.

Narrative for an Understanding of the Human Journey

Both Steiner teachers interviewed presented very convincing support for a strong emphasis on oracy in early childhood. Steiner's belief that oracy not only prepares the student for literacy but also represents a distinct type of understanding that underlies later developed ways of interpreting experience is supported by contemporary educators and linguists including Ong (1982), Bruner (1990) and Egan (1997). Aiding children in interpreting their worlds through oracy attributes involves defining a difference between logico-scientific and narrative thinking processes and thereby acknowledging that early childhood students are capable of abstract thinking

in the narrative form (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986; Bruner, 1988). Some contemporary approaches to early childhood education have used these insights to invite students to explore big stories and big projects. In Reggio Emilia classes and those influenced by this approach children's dialogue is key in defining how big questions are to be answered (Katz, 1993; Hendrick, 1997). In her preprimary classes, Vivian Paley (1992,1995,1997) used oral narrative including stories shared from the community, Leo Lionni's (1997) contemporary fables, children's own story constructions and a class construction to jointly explore major themes such as inclusion vs. exclusion, multiculturalism and identity. Research focused specifically on exploring the expression of abstract concepts through oral and written narrative from a developmental perspective could help guide teachers in promoting a more meaningful engagement with literature and life themes by appealing to the tools of a child's understanding.

It would be interesting, for example, to examine the nature of image representation used by preschool and primary children. Why do preschool children create metaphors with such facility and what function are they serving for them conceptually? Why does metaphoric expression diminish with the onset of literacy (Gardner and Winner, 1979; Egan, 1997)? Will more practice with image creation and aesthetic expression during story telling help children's comprehension especially reluctant readers as is hypothesised by Interviewee Victoria? Would more storytelling without visual props aid image formation?

In the Waldorf schools, a primary role of the teachers is to be a storyteller. Currently, this is not an assumed role in any other methodology despite an increasing interest in

revisiting this oral tradition apparent in other educational circles (Egan, 1986; Van Groenou, 1995; Sillick, 1997; Diaz-Imbelli, 1998; Kelly, 2000). If teachers are taught to be story tellers as occurs in Steiner training and begin to do more story telling, will this strengthen children's ability to create images and how will this affect their ability to structure their own narratives? If they become storytellers, will teachers use story as a focus for integrated explorations? How would this new skill change their perception of themselves as teachers?

What if not only the teachers, but also the students are taught to be story tellers? Dougherty's oral journalling (1999) and Millstone's class sharing of the Odyssey (1997) in Montessori classrooms indicates the extraordinary insight children can gain from telling their own or classic tales. Not only is it a means of fostering linguistic and memory skills and learning the elements of narrative, but it provides links to the culture and community. All of these potential effects could be researched to ascertain the potential effective uses of oral narrative in the primary classrooms.

In addition to exploring how teachers and children can be successfully guided in oral storytelling skills, it would also be relevant to determine which stories are most meaningful for them to learn. Steiner and Montessori philosophies both emphasise using big stories as a basis for classroom exploration. Steiner emphasises the mythologies and Montessori the historical narratives, but each can lead into a study of the other in the upper primary grades where mythologies reflect historical truth. Despite similar focuses in the upper grades, the focus on fantasy in the early grades in Steiner directly contrasts with the Montessori focus on reality. A longitudinal study

could help to ascertain how these contrasting beginnings affect the way young adults view their worlds and their role in it.

Steiner, Montessori, Catholic and Government teachers interviewed all indicated that it was important to include tales of indigenous people in their curriculum. In this they concurred with Holmes (1997) who asserted that teachers and students learning these stories was essential to multicultural understandings.

Practicing teachers in indigenous communities, in all communities, need to bring elders and their stories into their classrooms, helping students to find bridges between orality and written text, indigenous and non-indigenous experience. These narratives must not be merely appropriated as peripheral add-ons or entertainment – these lessons must be learned. (Holmes, 1997, p. 6)

As well as bringing cultural stories into the curriculum, there is scope for researching the potential contribution of ritual and tradition in creating a positive culture in the school community. Celebrations may be of a universal nature such as Solstice festivals, historic such as national holidays or specific to the ethnic or religious groups represented at the school. Alternatively, they may emerge from the school community itself. Rituals may reflect the cultures of the school, but might also be instituted as part of the rhythm of the school day such as the candle lighting and verses of the Steiner school or the meditation and reflection at the Catholic schools. It would be worthwhile to explore how introducing more rituals and noncompetitive celebrations might contribute to the positive culture of Government schools.

Alongside community festivals and rituals it is important to celebrate the uniqueness of the human journey as well. Birthday rituals such as the Steiner verses or the Montessori sharing of significant events while moving around the sun can contribute to this sense of individual journey. Such rituals might be tried in other types of schools in preference to a public address system announcement.

Interview data also reflects the acknowledgement by teachers that it is important for children to have the opportunity to share something about their lives, their personal narratives at school. However, very few teachers have the opportunity to share their personal and professional narratives with other staff on a consistent basis. Through implementing a regular sharing programme in schools that have not previously had this avenue for dialogue one might ascertain the effects on collaborative teaching and resource sharing and the application of new teaching practice ideas. From an affective viewpoint, would such sharing result in a greater appreciation of individual talents as well as an experience of colleague support in this shared journey? Would more professional development in communication skills enrich the opportunity for sharing? Will the adoption of integrated curriculums naturally lead to more sharing and collaboration?

With the introduction of the *Curriculum Framework* (Curriculum Council, 1998) in Western Australia and the *Integrated Curriculum* (Murdoch and Hornsby, 1997) in Victoria, varied “big themes” have been trialled. The implication in these curriculums and in Egan’s proposed story curriculum (1986, 1997) is that big stories will make the curriculum more meaningful by integrating ideas and thereby aiding the child in making connections. There is no doubt that it would aid schools and teachers if case

studies were prepared that followed the journey of students and teachers exploring these themes through varied subjects. Not only would these case studies highlight big stories that are effective connecting catalysts, but they would also help teachers who require more structured guidelines in curriculum planning (Carlton, 2001).

Research as to how the introduction of integrated curriculums affects the traditional methods of introducing children to the concepts of society and environment could address such questions as:

- Will they become more like the Montessori primary schools where children start with the story of the universe? This is a total reversal of the traditional curriculum which moves from family to neighbourhood, to community, to country, to world before exploring the universe.
- Will children be more engaged if we acknowledge their narrative abstract thinking and offer them the universe much earlier (Montessori, 1948/1989, 1949/1988; Egan, 1986,1997; Turner and Swimme, 1999)? If students are introduced to the wonder and magnificence of the planet at a young age, will this help to result in an attitude of community responsibility when they are faced with local problems in adolescence (Scott, 1997)?
- Will teaching children the ecologically centered stories of oral cultures help them to feel an emotional and moral link to their planet (Ong, 1982; Berry, 1988, 1991; Sandlos, 1998)?

Using Narrative for Personal Transformation

Emerging from the new curricula is a focus on individual pathways to the achievement of outcomes which is fundamental to constructivist methodology. What

are the best means of empowering students to be responsible for their own learning journey? There is scope here for researching types of portfolios. What types most adequately portray the individual's learning experiences? Is the child involved in setting his own goals by envisioning the future of his/her narrative? Is the child encouraged to reflect on his/her journey?

It has been suggested in this thesis that, although journalling is potentially a tool for the individual's reflection, it has often been used for other purposes such as practising recount genre. How can the journal process be implemented so that students use it to clarify their thoughts and make connections rather than viewing it as a recount for a public audience? Would guiding teachers in using journalling result in more effective journal use in the classrooms?

Greater emphasis on personal narrative invites greater awareness of personal behaviour tendencies and consequently a greater emphasis on internal rather than external control. Observations of Montessori and Steiner school classrooms reveal such alternatives to behaviour management that could be trialled in other schools. In Montessori classrooms, much management is achieved by providing meaningful content, choice and collaboration – three alternatives suggested by Kohn (1993) for fostering internal motivation. A research project could assess the change in behavioural concerns as a result of providing more open-ended tasks in classrooms organised around an inspiring central theme or story. In Steiner schools, stories are told to children in response to specific situations to model alternative appropriate choices of behaviour. Research could trial using bibliocounselling in lieu of tokens in schools that have previously relied on these systems. Narrative therapy

(Polkinghorne, 1988; Hughes, 1991) might also be trialled for effectiveness in school counselling with children assisted in identifying choices of possible pathways and then implementing new endings for their envisioned life scripts.

Interview data and a literature review revealed an increasing concern with value education and peace education in non-sectarian schools. Interviewees and consultants have reported trying to address this in varied ways. All classrooms were trying to foster an appreciation for diversity through exposure to multiculturalism. A few classes were encouraging a respect for generations through grandparents' days. The acknowledgement of varied temperaments in Steiner classes and multi-intelligences in other classes is possibly nurturing an appreciation for individual uniqueness. Interviewee Nigel used a vocabulary of virtues in redrafting difficult classroom situations and in having children retell stories of virtuous actions by their peers. Consultant Victoria B. used terms of virtues to analyse characters in stories and to have children assess their own work and classroom interactions. Each of these ideas has been tried on a very limited basis. If they could be trialled in a more defined and systematic way, guidelines might result that would aid teachers in nurturing spirituality in non-sectarian ways using story as a vehicle.

However, narrative is a complex phenomenon. "Children need experience to acquire and develop language: children need language to cope with new experience" (Gardie, 1990, p. 31). It is narrative that links language to experience. Personal stories celebrate our uniqueness, but are meaningless unless revealed in a communal context. Narrative links personal and cultural experiences. Although an appreciation for narrative's complex and multiple uses in the classroom is apparent, there are many

areas indicated where further research would aid teachers in applying this powerful tool to linguistic, cognitive, cultural, social and spiritual domains.

She placed at my feet the treasures of the Orient, the moon, and beyond. She reduced me to the size of an ant so I could experience the universe from that smallness; she gave me wings to see it from the heavens; she gave me the tail of a fish so I would know the depths of the sea. When she was telling a story, her characters peopled my world... (Allende, 1987, p. 21)

The Epilogue

On my journey I have learned that all great educators are storytellers and all great storytellers borrow narratives, synthesise them and make them their own. I aspire to be a great educator and a great storyteller. On the way to this aspiration, I have borrowed the stories of my interviewees and integrated them into my own journey. I believe my interviewees have also taken 'on board' my shared offerings to interweave with their own teaching narratives. To me this merging is the essence of qualitative research in the form of narrative inquiry. One starts with individual stories that, when shared, are interwoven in myriad ways to create not one meta-story, but a meta-story for each person who participated. My meta-narrative now incorporates meaning-making strategies at varied levels of understanding. Each strategy is a thread linking an interviewee's storied experience to my own. My teaching methods, my philosophy, and my personal narrative have changed and will continue to transform as reflections

on the stories I have heard lead me to view my own and my students' potential in new ways.

My Understanding of Narrative and Language Arts

Waldorf teachers, Sam and Bernadette, and Montessorians, Nigel and Ellen, have taught me that storytelling is a learned art in which one gains competency with practice. It is not a replacement for story reading which is a different genre. Oral storytelling is unique in that it relies on rhythm and patterns rather than rote learned words to preserve the essence of the narrative. It also differs from written stories in that the engagement with a specific audience becomes part of the telling. I find I am telling more and more stories and reading fewer. I am now comfortable relating stories to primary students, parents, teacher education students and colleagues. I have realised that oral narratives invite stories in response and am no longer surprised when I leave such a gathering with more storied experiences than I have shared. These new stories become part of my own at the next telling. In the future, I would like to teach my student teachers to be story tellers and to invite others including their own primary students to rekindle an art which links them to their audience and their cultures in a profound way.

As a result of dialogue with the Waldorf teachers and with Government teacher, Lynne, I am much more aware of the importance of oracy as a preparation for literacy. Lynne had tremendous success with scaffolding literacy skills by using more oral poetry and rhyme as was the accustomed practice in the Steiner classrooms of Sam and Bernadette. In the work I have done with children since these interviews, I have been conscious of focusing on the sounds revealed through rhyme, rhythm and

repetition without rushing the children to commit these sounds to written symbols. I now place more value on inviting discussion and I advocate encouraging children to try varying genres in oral form before written expression including descriptions, instructions, recounts, narratives and expositions. Although I don't believe I would ever discourage any child from reading and learning these symbols when ready, I do know that, like the Waldorf teachers, I will advocate much more oral language work in early childhood classrooms. I have now experienced that oral proficiency is as important an outcome as reading and writing in communication.

I find too that I am encouraging much more oral language work in the form of drama and role-playing in my work with teachers and primary students. I attribute my increased appreciation of the dramatic arts to the inspiration of Bernadette and Sam's classes where I became aware that all students and teachers can benefit from drama despite variations in temperaments. The plays in the Steiner classes were based on mythologies and gave students the opportunity to face conflicts in the shoes of mythical heroes. I was also inspired by the use of drama in other schools. The play I witnessed in Kate's class was a situational drama based on sea creatures. In Victoria's class, students were writing their own skit depicting crises faced by Australians in the eras of Federation. In all these instances, students benefitted enormously from constructing their own dialogues and from having an opportunity to try different identities and interaction patterns than they normally experienced. I now view drama as an essential focus of oral work that should be experienced regularly rather than occasionally employed as an assembly item.

In selecting texts as a basis for encoding and decoding activities, I have been strongly influenced by Catholic school teacher, Vicky, and Montessorian, Ellen. Both of these teachers have acquired collections of beautiful story books. Each of them looks for a story that sympathetically portrays a human dilemma and is artistically presented. Both include folk tales in their collection which link to a specific culture and yet portray concerns of all cultures. I have also been influenced by Montessorian, Carol, who includes great classics in her selection of classroom novels and Steiner teacher, Bernadette, who enjoys sharing Shakespeare with her Year 4 class. As a result of these encounters, I have viewed my own collection of children's literature in a new way identifying why I treasure each book. In every teacher training language class or conference workshop that I have conducted recently in Australia, Korea, and the United States, I have shared some of my collection and the rationale for acquiring them. I am now urging all teachers to have a broad knowledge of available resources in children's literature. I believe to link one book to a specific skill can greatly reduce the potential of achieving a meaningful curriculum. Depending on the "big theme" and current interests of the children in the class, the teacher should have a number of beautiful and engaging fiction and non-fiction resources in mind for the students' explorations.

My views on the broad applicability of children's literature resources were strengthened by noting the contrast between my interviewees who value the extensive use of narrative and other teachers I have visited in connection with my supervision work who view it only as a language tool so that certain stories are for "Year 1" and certain stories for "Year 2". Beautiful stories that support 'big thoughts' should not

be relegated to a specified year or time. They can be visited and revisited at any time, any age and still be meaningful.

Noting the similarity in Vicky and Ellen's book collections, I began to revisit the possibilities of sharing between the Montessori language initiatives and the integrated language approach. I have reflected on Catholic teachers, Fran, Vicky and Kate and Government teachers, Lynne and Dan's use of literary based integrated language strategies and I am increasingly convinced that they can be readily implemented in Montessori classrooms. I now believe that this can occur without sacrificing fundamentals of the Montessori pedagogy including multi-sensory concrete materials, multi-age groupings and autonomy in learning expressed through activity choice.

When I expressed my concerns about potential conflicts in combining these approaches in the prologue of my journey (Refer to Prologue, p. viii), I had made the assumption that 'integrated language' usually implied that every student would be focusing on the same literary text or genre at the same time. This procedure is rarely the context of learning in a Montessori class where children may be exploring multiple subjects in the class at the same time. I was also worried that worksheets linking the text to language exploration might have to replace concrete equipment and children creating their own textbooks. The alternative, which I myself had tried, seemed to be that the teacher repeatedly prepared materials related to multiple texts being explored in the class that could be used with the didactic equipment. However, my interviews and observations helped to resolve this conflict for me. As I watched the older and younger pairs working on constructing stories in Nigel's class and when Carol mentioned that her students meet in small groups to help edit each other's work, I realised that I was forgetting some of the fundamentals of Montessori that could help

the contemporary integrated language curriculum work in these environments. Montessori did not only emphasise taking a whole and breaking it down to view its parts, but she also claimed that the parts need to be reconstructed to create the whole. She did not only mean that the teachers apply this dual approach in modelling, but that the students also deconstruct and construct as they explored concepts. One way for students to practise this is to teach others and prepare materials for others. Thus, for example, students in small groups could study a literary work and prepare materials for peers who might subsequently select this book. This might include providing sentences to be analysed using sentence analysis materials or symbolised with parts of speech symbols or making word cards for the grammar boxes. (Refer to Prologue endnotes.) It might also mean that in vocabulary focus, students might create sequencing exercises, word sleuths or clozes¹¹¹ for each other. In each of these cases the child who prepares the context for deconstruction is reinforcing concepts as much as the child who elects to do this work. Other integrated language activity suggestions can be placed in a basket on the language shelf. Once a child has experienced making a story map, a story grammar, a plot graph, a character grid or

¹¹¹ Sequencing Exercises, Word Sleuths and Clozes – A Sequencing exercise would have the student organise pictures or sentences to depict the sequence of story. A word sleuth hides key words in a maze of letters and is considered an appropriate activity to practice decoding in reading. A Cloze is an extract from the text with words missing that need to be filled in to create meaning. It is thus an activity to reinforce the function of parts of speech and sentence construction as well as comprehension of the original text.

converted a text from one genre to another¹¹², these skills can be applied to stories of the child's choice.

The shared experiences of Vicky and Victoria also helped me to revitalise my language programme applicable to a Montessori school. They have found using multi-intelligence activities insures that children have experience exploring texts in a variety of ways allowing them to build on their challenge areas through their strengths. For example, a child with spatial ability might choose to create a diorama of a story, which will help build his/her language comprehension skills. This type of activity choice is readily applied in Montessori settings where children traditionally have work choice and collaborative learning opportunities. Victoria's story of her students' success in applying *Bloom's Taxonomy* to language studies has also expanded my application of this process. (Refer to endnotes Chapter V). Although, I had previously placed suggested topics of exploration based on these levels in the classroom cultural area, I had never used it to encourage children to explore literary texts at deeper levels. This is an alternative to asking them literal, inferential and

¹¹² These are some commonly used 'integrated language' activities. The term story map and story grammar are often used interchangeably, but I prefer to use the term story map for a visual portrayal of the plot or form of the story through pictures, pictures and labels, or sentences sequenced with arrows to portray the movement of the story. I use the term story grammar to mean an analysis of the components of the narrative including characters, significant events, conflict and resolution, ending as well as the author's purpose. A plot graph uses events as one axis and an affective measure of excitement or incident as the other access. A character grid would necessitate matching characters and descriptive adjectives. Genre conversion means putting the ideas of the text into a different format, e.g. from a literary text to a play, poem, or news article, etc.

applied/evaluative questions. Again, I have been reminded that students can learn as much from creating activities and questions as from responding to them. I have also started practising some wider applications of Montessori activities. The *Who Am I?* game is often a choice of activity in zoology or geography where the child is given increasingly specific classification clues as required to guess the identity of a place or creature. I had previously noticed that children gain a great deal from creating these quiz cards for each other. Influenced by the stories of non-Montessori teachers, I realised that this activity is very appropriate for literary exploration as well and I have included it as an idea in both my Montessori and non-Montessori teacher training language classes.

I believe one of the reasons I have found so much applicability of integrated language approach ideas to the Montessori setting recently is that with the *Curriculum Framework* (1998) implementation, teachers are encouraged to view children's progress on an individual basis in providing lessons and activities related to outcome goals. I have witnessed more and more classrooms trialling small group and collaborative learning models as a way of meeting a spectrum of needs. One can no longer distinguish a Montessori classroom from a Government or Catholic classroom based on how the children are grouped or whether the teacher is standing at the front of the classroom. For this reason, classroom organisation strategies that I used to discuss with Montessori teacher students are now very relevant to non-Montessori teacher training as well.

Although recent classroom observations have helped me appreciate the benefit of small group and collaborative learning in all educational settings, I have also been

reminded that it is still important to create occasions when the whole class is exploring the same narrative. This affirms the class identity as they make predictions, identify with the characters, and experience the conflict and resolution collectively. Class narratives become part of class memories of shared experiences. My interviewee teachers from all four educational cultural milieus referred to the peace that descends on the class as they collectively listen to a story. Sam and Bernadette also made me realise that although it is a group experience, listening to the same narrative highlights the individuality of the listeners as well. They identify with different characters, experience emotion, excitement or curiosity at different places in the narrative. Thus, reading or telling a story to the class as an audience helps the teacher and the student listeners to appreciate that their class is a unique interweaving of individual personalities. In my own primary class I used to read to the students as a group on some afternoons. Now I think group reading or story telling should be a daily occurrence in all classrooms – children’s and adults’. For Montessori teachers who prepare shelf activities and integrated language teachers who might create learning stations, whole class stories –literary or historically based – can provide an engaging basis for language tasks that can later be pursued independently or in small groups. I have also learned that meaningful text for use with language activities can be created from the real narrative of the class and might relate to excursions, themes, and “big stories” as well as individual interests. I now believe that material based on actual experience is engaging as a context for language study because it relates to the children’s own journey.

My Understanding of the Human Journey

I have long valued the extended work periods available in the Montessori classroom in which children can explore interests at their own pace. I noticed in the Reggio Emilia influenced classrooms that there was a similar acknowledgement that some children benefit from spending long periods of time exploring a single subject, while others may change more frequently. By the end of my study, I was gratified to see some of the more traditional classrooms having language mornings or maths mornings more like Bernadette and Sam's main lesson in the Steiner class and in great contrast to the previously fragmented curriculum. Not only did my research uphold the importance of long work periods, but I became more conscious of catering for the rhythm of the individuals and the class. It occurred to me in interviewing the Steiner teachers in particular that a narrative format of lesson plan within the narrative pattern of the day reflects the rhythm of the human journey. In my own classes I am now much more conscious of beginning each day with a catalyst of engagement and ending each day with a time for reflection as well as each lesson along the way. Without these rhythmic patterns, the learning experience is disjointed. The Steiner teachers also made me aware that the group rhythm can be catered for as well as individual rhythms which are particularly respected in the Montessori environment. Many Montessori teachers have reported the period of restlessness mid-morning in the classroom which Montessori termed 'false-fatigue' (Montessori, 1917/1964). I always believed this was something to be tolerated especially when I noted that children consistently become refocused in their work, often concentrating intensely following this time of inattentiveness. Steiner teachers, Sam and Bernadette, made me realise that despite the varied rhythms of the individual children, there is a class rhythm. This inattentive time, rather than a time to "get through" might be a time to

sing a song, say a verse or otherwise refocus students in a rhythmic pattern. Through my study, I have also been reminded by Montessori and Steiner teachers of the importance of alternating periods of activity with periods of quiet or even silence. The implementation of such a rhythmic pattern has enabled me to teach 3 hour and even 8 hour intensive university classes without complaints of fatigue.

Related to the rhythms of the classroom are the rituals and traditions that contribute to the cultural milieu of the school. Aside from celebrating birthdays Montessori style, with a pantomime around the globe, I had not considered the importance of ritual and tradition in school settings prior to this research. Perhaps, like others educated during positivistic eras, I viewed most rituals as belonging to unscientific, antiquated cultures and times. My views on this subject have changed dramatically. Some of the experiences that altered my views were: sharing a time of meditation and watching children preparing for their first Communion in the Catholic classroom and viewing candles being lit and hearing birthday poems and choral poetry in the Steiner class. Also, I had long enjoyed the demonstration of the summer and winter solstices using a globe and torch in Montessori geography studies. Seeing the solstices celebrated through festivals at Ellen's Montessori school and Sam and Bernadette's Waldorf school added a depth and appreciation for the seasonal rhythm of our journey. Part of the magic of these festivals was provided by merging logico-scientific and narrative thought in the celebration. Lantern parades, puppetry portraying creation tales and rhythmic songs all contributed to a narrative appreciation of the scientific phenomenon.

In a way, my new appreciation for these rituals also reinforced my awareness that it is extremely important to merge paradigmatic and narrative thinking. I began to really listen to young children's animistic explanations that aided them in understanding their worlds and to marvel at this evidence of abstract thinking. I stopped viewing these stories as evidence of immature thought processing and began to view them as characteristic of a different type of understanding. These experiences have motivated me to use more metaphor in my teaching including inviting student and practicing teachers to have a 'root' metaphor in mind for their work that can change as their own perceptions and goals evolve. My own 'root' metaphor at the commencement of my journey was a roller coaster. To me this accurately reflected the highs and lows of primary school teaching, the complex emotions of fear, hope and exhilaration and the lack of directness or clarity in the curriculum pathway. My 'root' metaphor now is an entirely different image:

I am in a circle with my class of 20+ students dressed in a variety of colours and representing multi-cultural origins. Their expressions display a variety of temperaments. Nevertheless, they all watch intently as I share a narrative with them portrayed through dance. Varied students begin to join in until the whole group are performing the choreography with joy, skill and concentration. Then the students move off – some alone and some into small groups. After a time of practice, they take turns sharing their dances with the group. Each dance is unique and yet each incorporates some of the steps we performed as a class. Then we all dance together again but each person has added a few new steps that they have observed from the performances of their peers.

Communally, we share the music, the rhythm and the enjoyment of the activity but each choreography is unique.

I believe my 'root' metaphor reflects my new awareness of the importance of education in listening for the voice of each child. Due to my Montessori background, I have long viewed the primary role of a teacher to be that of a 'facilitator'. Although this term implies that the teacher respects the child and his/her job of self-construction, I no longer believe that this adequately describes the dynamic relationship that can occur in a classroom where the learning process is viewed as a shared journey. This altered view was partially influenced by my interviews with Steiner teachers Bernadette and Sam who teach the same class of children for seven years and reflect on their own evolvment as they participate in the children's 'unfolding'. I was also inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach educators including Montessori teacher, Shawn. They value the dialogue of children out of which project interests are identified to be explored individually and as a community. If the curriculum is a fluid evolving interaction based on a subject (Grumet, 1988; Pinar et al, 1994; Palmer, 1998), then a teaching/learning community is established in which teachers and students explore a subject together and acknowledge that each can learn from the other.

This positive and safe milieu where dialogue is valued can lead to fostering what interviewee, Fran, termed 'an authentic voice'. Through small group discussions and careful sensitive questioning, children can learn to value their own opinions and tolerate different views. Fran, Vicky, Nigel and Victoria were models for me in

getting children to find their own authentic voice through discussing characters in literary works and in biographies. Children who can identify motivations and virtues in characters can find these characteristics in themselves and others.

From Carol and Ellen, I learned to use biography more effectively to motivate children. Just as in my 'dance' metaphor, children can begin to absorb ideas and attitudes from these life stories that provide them with a multiplicity of potential pathways. As a result, my recent lectures on primary school education to teachers and parents have included biographical descriptions as models of life choices and problem solving. Egan's work (1986,1997) on understandings and the Steiner view on human development paralleling historic development has reinforced my curriculum choices for primary school children. It seems highly appropriate to motivate children with stories of heroes and phenomena when they are interested in viewing the extremes of reality. Likewise, I have found support for my view that, contrary to a common misconception by many Montessori teachers, selected fairy tales and fantasy stories are not harmful for young children providing that their image formation is not dictated and that they are also exposed to the wonders of the natural world. In fact, the Steiner teachers and Bettelheim (1977) provide a convincing argument that there are many universal themes in folk and fairy tales that help children understand life's journey at a time when their thinking is mythical and animistic.

My views on sharing news have also evolved. I think it is important to encourage children to share what they *are*, rather than what they *have* (Wolf, 1996). The autobiography project of Shawn's class was an excellent model in how to do this. For young children, objects in the "Me Box" are reminders of events, not the focus of the

sharing. I also felt that the news sharing in small groups that I observed in Kate's class was important in providing a small safe group for sharing and practising listening skills. For the middle primary children in Shawn, Dan and Ellen's classes, researching the countries and cultures of the students' origins as well as name origins seemed a very appropriate way to celebrate each child's uniqueness as well as cultural identities. In Shawn's school this culminated in a study of American society with a focus on its common ideals as well as cultural diversity. I would like to encourage a similar study in Australian classrooms which in my experience are very culturally diverse.

In the year prior to commencing this research, I invited older generations into my upper primary classroom to share their stories about their childhoods in Australia and their memories of the war and depression. I would continue to encourage this intergenerational sharing or sharing by the elders also endorsed by Dan and Ellen. In addition, I would ensure that representatives of various cultures in the community came to my classroom to share their stories. A literature review (Paley, 1997; Holmes, 1997), a workshop (Fatowna, 2001) and interview data from Dan and Fran convinced me of the effectiveness of multicultural sharing with students from preprimary to adulthood. Like Holmes (1997) and Fatowna (2001), I would recommend that student teachers and new teachers interview elders of the indigenous people in their communities so that they are in a position to benefit from the richness of the diversity in their classrooms as well as encouraging an understanding of the values, concerns and protocol of these cultures.

I have realised from my interviewees that the opportunity to share our stories with other adults working in education should be realised more often. All the teachers interviewed indicated that they would welcome more opportunity to share their ideas with other teachers. As my study progressed, I noted more collaboration between teachers in programme planning in the Government and Catholic schools usually as a result of the *Curriculum Framework* implementation. However, there was little evidence of personal narrative sharing except for Playback Theatre in Ellen's Montessori school and the autobiography workshop noted by both Steiner teachers. In that particular workshop, teachers drew three tables from their lives and then described the memories and experiences associated with those table images. I have tried this exercise with student teachers on a few occasions resulting in meaningful sharing. In the future, I will implement this type of exercise early in the course rather than for closure. Sharing at the beginning helps to establish networks. In the last intensive course I co-ordinated, I devoted the first six hours to sharing between the teachers. It amazed me that I was able to cover the entire course in the shortened time period because so many liaisons had been formed as a result of the sharing. The consequent networking of students made the workshop portions of the class much more efficient in cooperative problem solving. From now on the first day of any course I implement will be devoted to sharing personal narrative.

As a Montessori teacher, I have always had a great appreciation for the benefits of multi-sensory experiences in learning concepts. Before commencing this research, I also had a knowledge of learning styles which I tried to address by offering a wide choice of learning activities to cater for visual, kinesthetic and auditory orientations. Through reading and interview data I have become much more aware of the

application of MI (Gardner, 1983,1993; Biggs, 2001b), Myers Briggs type (Murphy, 1992) and Steiner temperament theories to understanding personal narrative as well as programme planning. All of these models have made me aware of the tendency of teachers to invite students to explore concepts in their own preferred style or orientation. As a visual learner, I had to learn to appreciate the inclination to learn through movement and the necessity of hearing instructions several times for other types of learners. Aware that I favour linguistic, musical, logico-mathematical and intrapersonal intelligence, I am working to incorporate more spatial, kinesthetic and nature activities and more opportunities for collaboration and interpersonal dialogue in my classrooms. Like Vicky and Victoria, I am encouraging my students to recognise their own intelligences so that they can develop others as well as working on their strengths through their weaknesses. For example, I believe I am meeting the needs of more student teachers by inviting more role playing and artistic activities in workshops.

After interviewing Sam and Bernadette, I began to appreciate that temperament theory is not about limiting people by putting them in boxes. Rather it is about helping people to understand their natural tendencies of interacting with the world and appreciating how they are different from others. Being aware of one's orientations also helps to define challenges for the self. I would probably be a *melancholic* in Steiner terms, although *Phlegmatic* traits are also probably strong. However, I have come to appreciate the extroversion of the *Sanguine* and the energy of the *Choleric*. (Refer to Chapter V endnotes). This Steiner introduction to temperament theory and interviewee Vicky's interest in Jung's work led me to eagerly explore the Jungian based Myers Briggs when it was presented as part of a communications course I was

teaching for teacher education. I found the multiple personality combinations acknowledged through this theory more applicable to my self-understanding and teaching practices than the quadrant models such as Steiner. This past year in my Interpersonal Communication course for teachers, I had one Extrovert. In previous years, I might have been irritated by tendency to socialise at the beginning of each class and to call out responses at will. As a result of appreciating varied temperaments, I found myself grateful for the fun she injected into the class and for her eagerness to role play which inspired her more intraverted peers. Likewise in my Early Childhood Play-based Curriculum class, I had three Sensate students who requested very specific details of assignment expectations. Previously, I would have felt impatient with these requests when I felt I had issued clear instructions. Now I recognised their need for these details. I also recognised that for the Intuitive students this review of assignment specifications was tedious, so the sessions for this purpose were at the end of class and voluntary. I thus found applicability of my new found knowledge that temperaments are an important variable of our personal narrative – not to be treated positively or negatively, but to be understood as varied approaches to processing interactions with the external world on the human journey.

My Understanding of the Use of Narrative for Transformation

In my view, one of the fundamentals of the Montessori philosophy is the view that wonder should be nourished in the young child. This view was reinforced by my interview encounters with all the Montessori teachers who were committed to nurturing a sense of wonder which they linked strongly to a love of learning and a sense of purpose. Waldorf teacher, Sam, also identified wonder as a key learning goal of early childhood and Catholic school teacher, Liz Peel, explained that it is

viewed as essential to spiritual development in R.E. Just as those who have done extensive work on oracy (Ong,1982; Egan,1997) caution that we should try to maintain some of the important attributes of this way of thinking, so too should a sense of wonder be nourished throughout life. It was naturalist, Eric McCrum, who helped me start to see nature with amazement once again. However, I realise that listening to the observations of children such as exemplified in Shawn's bird conversation, can also reawaken teachers' sense of wonder. This can only happen in a teacher/learner community where each participant is open to learning from every other one – regardless of age or experience.

Catholic teachers Vicky, Fran and Kate and Montessori teacher, Nigel, along with educators, Wolf (1996) and Palmer (1998), made me realise that when wonder is experienced, it can contribute to personal transformation if it is reflected upon. I have tried to prioritise quiet, reflective or meditative times into my own day and encourage this in my students. This represents a significant change from my previous frantic pace of living and teaching. For me journalling has long been a critical tool for reflection and I have experienced that writing for me can precipitate change as I connect ideas and experiences. However, prior to this research journey, I had not been effective in scaffolding the journalling process with most of my primary or tertiary students. Interview dialogue with Fran, Shawn and Vicky as well as the influence of La Chapelle (1997) have provided me with insight that has changed how I facilitate the journalling process. From La Chapelle (1997), Vicky and Fran, I was reminded that the purpose of journalling should be clear – it is a safe place to use writing to explore one's thoughts and the audience is only the writer. They also made me aware that journalling time should be flexible – used when something has

occurred in class that can precipitate reflection. Written work of a reflective nature can result from the journal, but the journal should never be assessed as a genre of writing. From Shawn, I became aware of the potential of scaffolding journalling with children by inviting them to journal orally with a scribe – always reinforcing that the scribe is a tool, not an audience. It is important to remember that in early primary years, most children do not use their writing to engage with their thoughts. Journalling can be scaffolded by inviting these children to reflect at appropriate moments during the class day so that they begin to associate writing with thought clarification and personal change. Although tertiary students have the capability of reflecting through writing, I believe utilising some creative journalling ideas such as dialogues, continuous writing and imaginative visualisations can help them to recognise the versatility of this reflection method (La Chapelle, 1997). I will thus continue to use journalling in my tertiary teaching courses, but I will place more emphasis on the personal empowerment of exploring thoughts and ideas on paper.

Striving for virtues is another focus area that I had implemented in my upper primary classroom and used in parent education. Nigel, Fran, and Victoria demonstrated how fictional narrative could help children to identify and understand the importance of virtues. From Nigel, I also obtained the idea of combining a virtue focus with rituals celebrating personal change in the form of “virtue stones”. My teacher education students reported that they were very moved by the opportunity to hear stories about their own virtues and to provide feedback on positive qualities and changes observed in their peers. This acknowledgement of positive personal attributes will become a tradition in my teaching of all age groups.

Using the virtues to define personal goals is one way to explore the possibility of personal change and it readily complements the individual goal setting that has long been a part of Montessori classrooms. Victoria made me realise that self-evaluation as an important aspect of the learning journey is now being recognised as important in more traditional school settings. Outcome based goal setting such as that incorporated in the *Curriculum Framework* helps teachers and students define both class and individual goals. In my future teaching, I will make more effort to involve students of whatever age in selecting and self-assessing outcomes and goals; I am now convinced that life cannot be experienced as meaningful and purposeful unless one has a sense of past, present and future events in the personal journey (Dilks, 2000).

I know (Refer to Prologue) that teachers in my life have influenced my choice of goals and my perception of education. As Ritchie and Wilson, (2000), I plan to consistently afford student teachers the opportunity to revisit their own teaching/learning experiences and to use these personal experiences as a foundation to formulating their own pedagogies. There is definitely a place for personal narrative in the university classroom and that place should be acknowledged during the first day (Refer Chapter VIII). Also for university teacher education students, I will continue to do what has worked successfully for me in the past year – arranging meetings between teacher education students and committed teachers who are passionate about their work and elected pedagogy.

Mentors can clearly influence one's goal setting and that can begin early in life. In future, I will advocate inviting people into the classroom, who might be considered

community heroes, as mentors for children. For younger children, these mentors provide models of hope. For older children, they can inspire them to perform their own community 'heroic' works (Giraffe, 1996).

Although prior to this research, I was conscious of sharing hero stories and mythologies with my primary classes, activities and discussion were primarily linked to literature exploration. My interviews with Sam and Bernadette made me aware that studying archetypes is a way to gain insight into universal human tendencies and universal conflicts and resolutions. Nigel's literary archetypes and Kate and Fran's biblical archetypes seemed to be viewed in a similar way. I am now very aware that personal transformation entails gaining insight into one's uniqueness, but in a context of universal patterns of meaning. In future teaching, I will encourage students to go beyond a superficial exploration of character, to detect these universal patterns and find the relevance to their own life decisions.

Story can also provide models of conflict resolution. Prior to my research, I considered myself a peacemaker with adequate conflict resolution skills. My investigation of narrative applications has given me a new perspective on this narrative property. Conflict is not something to be endured or avoided; it is inherent in all narratives including personal ones. I am now viewing it as an essential ingredient for change. This has put a different slant on my teaching of mediation skills to primary students and communication skills to teacher education students. Learning to listen to and value the stories of others in a non-judgmental way is easier if one views a difference of opinion as a stepping stone to greater meaning in life.

Using 'third party' stories of allegories can also help alter behaviour in a non-judgmental way. In fact, as I became exposed to the effective use of bibliocounselling by Sam, Bernadette and Nigel, I became more adept at using story to promote reflection on behaviour and better able to support my previously held view that behaviour modification token reward system is a tool that should be used only as a last resort. As noted by Kohn (1999) and experienced by my student teacher, Sharon, such systems, if used extensively, destroy the rhythm of the class, distort the teacher/learner relationship and detract from the important lesson that each child is responsible for his/her own narrative.

Conflicts can also be created by a critical incident in one's life, often experienced as a wounding or a disorientation (Mezirow, 1985a, 1985b; Carrigg, 1997; Houston 1996). Interview data revealed that many of the interviewees had had experiences that launched them on new pathways as they endeavoured to resolve the conflict and find new meaning in their lives. For me, my journey began with two profound experiences involving narrative (See Prologue) which made me dissatisfied with the fragmentation I was observing in many classrooms including my own. These experiences led to transformative learning. I now feel that narrative and meaning are inextricably linked and using narrative to integrate and connect experience can lead to cognitive, personal and even spiritual change.

I am indebted to Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Aline Wolf (1998) for clarifying that religion is one guided pathway to spirituality, but not the only one. Their work and the reflections of Vicky and Nigel helped me to address my concern that as a result of the separation of church and state in school systems, we are unable to give children a

means of finding purpose in their lives. Wonder, an awareness of values and virtues, and reflection can be nurtured in varied educational settings, Christian or non-sectarian. When humans begin to make universal connections that are beyond their immediate experience, they can be transformed spiritually. I now realise that the reason I am profoundly moved when listening or relating the 'big stories' in Montessori is that they lead to connection making by celebrating the magnificence of a purposeful, meaningful interdependent universe in which I have a role to play. This journey has helped me to understand the paradox described by MacIntyre (1984) that to fully realise the potential of our own journey, we must assume communal responsibility.

Narrative helps people to make connections by bridging all disciplines and learning domains as well as all cultures. Whether the engaging narrative is mythological as in Steiner education, historical as in Montessori, literary as in many Government schools or Biblical as in many Catholic schools, it still has the power to foster meaning-making. As a result of this realisation, I find that I am now quite comfortable in using fictional stories to explain scientific phenomenon and make scientific and social studies non-fiction resources available to help students better understand stories and novels. Likewise, I am finding imaginary and real archetype figures that make my life meaningful. I am thus able to encourage my students to seek theirs in mythology, literature, and biography. Interwoven through any curriculum I design is an opportunity to share personal narrative. I now recognise that these varied curriculum domains and types of thinking are all tools for understanding universal questions of the human journey – a quest for meaning that begins with the emergence of abstract thinking in early childhood and continues throughout the human life cycle.

For me, the completion of this research marks the beginning of many more journeys. As I have reflected on what I have learned, many new questions have arisen to which I hope to find answers in explorations with my education students and in the community schools at my next educational milieu, The University of Wisconsin at River Falls. What I want to teach is how to use narrative to make connections that lead to meaningful communication, understanding oneself and one's community, and experiencing transformation. I want to convey the excitement of participating in creating a meta-story which continuously unfolds with each new connection marking another chapter.

I was writing a new episode each day, totally immersed in the world I was creating with the all-encompassing power of words, transformed into a multifaceted being, reproduced to infinity, seeing my own reflection in multiple mirrors, living countless lives, speaking with many voices. (Allende, 1987, p. 263)