

Creating a Learning Community Through a PE Teacher's Exploration of Inquiry:
A Collaborative Autoethnographic Study.

by

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ABSTRACT

This study was an autoethnography about inquiry learning and teaching through extraction and construction of meaning from experience. Using a collaborative autoethnography methodology I explored experiences in my past with others in the field through a “critical friend” Blog, to unpack what may have enabled me to value inquiry-based teaching as a physical education teacher. I created narratives from my autoethnographic data and again shared them with my Blog members, inviting critical responses. Over an eight month period I created a community of learners with purposefully selected colleagues working in an International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme curriculum school in the Middle East. I shared my narratives with my colleagues in order to support, question, connect or contrast my personal findings. Through our dialogues we came together to unpack our understandings of learning, who we were as learners, teaching, who we were as teachers and inquiry. As a community of learners exploring our experiences and perceptions, our understanding of constructivism evolved. This study revealed the tensions that exist between what teachers know about learning for meaningful understanding and the disabling learning and teaching environments they are and have been a part of.

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EPIGRAPH

Once you start a man [sic] thinking, there is no telling where he will go.

Dewey, 1969

*Who we understand ourselves to have been plays a powerful role in shaping our ideas
of who we might yet become.*

Holt, 1990

CHAPTER I -INTRODUCTION

This study began as an autoethnography exploring who I was as a learner and teacher in relation to constructivist notions of learning and inquiry-based teaching practice. Just as for so many years as a competitive swimmer, I set out to research ready to put my head under water and in a sense immerse myself in my journey. It quickly became apparent that my own individualistic values were going to be challenged. This study became a social collaborative exploration with my colleagues as my understandings, thoughts and stories inspired reflection, discussion and action within us all. The collective unpacking and connecting through our dialogues facilitated a critical examination of inquiry within our school, far beyond my own personally motivated intentions and understandings.

For me learning has always been about constructing meaning. Teaching and learning have made sense through the use of an inquiry process where the student is afforded the opportunity to be an active, engaged agent in the lesson. Inquiry is an approach to learning and teaching in schools based on a social constructivist process of learning. Inquiry is any activity geared toward extracting and constructing meaning from experience (Audet & Jordan, 2005). This study itself is an inquiry about inquiry learning in teaching and physical education (PE).

Objectives

How I have come to this understanding, and how teachers understand and come to understand learning lies at the heart of this research. The reasons I believe in this approach stem from my experience teaching, my stories of learning and my experiences of being taught. I have an ever evolving understanding of learning and teaching. By

exploring my own past experiences as a learner and a teacher, by continuing to reflect on my own knowledge and practice in teaching and by sharing my thoughts, questions and stories with other teachers I aimed to gain insights into why some teachers embrace an inquiry approach to teaching and learning. Consequently, I also provoked a dialogue and reflection about inquiry learning and teaching amongst my colleagues.

To represent my understanding of inquiry and what it looks like in my teaching world I have included an example from my memory demonstrating how inquiry has played out in an integrated unit of inquiry in a grade 3 class. I had been navigating my way through teaching physical education in an inquiry-based curriculum for three years at an international school and this is an example of what an inquiry experience in PE looked like to me.

Inquiry in PE

“How Did They, and How Do We, Find Our Way?”

The grade 3 class of 20 students was examining the social studies topic of “Exploring the World” focused under the larger transdisciplinary theme of “How the World Works”. This particular unit was meaningful and exciting as all the students were “explorers of their world” by the nature of the inquiry-based programme they were a part of, and as a result of the multi-cultural class environment. The students were from all corners of the world, with all different learning styles and abilities. The students had accessed and shared their own prior knowledge with regards to the topic area and negotiated a direction for further investigation with their homeroom teacher. They had considered “What is an explorer?” “How do people explore new territory?” and “How has

geographical exploration affected them?” They had some ideas about famous explorers and stories of how their countries were “founded” and from these, they, as a class amassed a variety of questions based on their knowledge and some teacher prompting. One of the main questions they wanted to explore further to provide a foundation for their inquiry was “How was and is new territory explored and recorded?”

Having collaborated with the 3rd grade classroom teacher and the other grade 3 specialist teachers we decided that I, the PE specialist, would explore the concept of orienteering with the students to support this line of inquiry. They enjoyed coming to PE as it was an active, interesting and supportive place in their school days. I presented problems that often related back to what they were doing in their homeroom classes and challenged the students to engage with their understandings in different ways (namely in a physical sense). In my class I presented the problem: "I wonder how you could direct your partner from one corner of the gym to a ‘treasure box’ on the other side of the gym following only the line markings on the floor and avoiding any and all obstacles?” Benches and chairs were strategically placed on most direct pathways. I then gave them some time to play with this question and physically explore the challenge.

In pursuit of the treasure, I asked “What do you need to do and to have in order to give and receive directions?” The students came up with many different responses facilitating the treasure retrieval: “Good listening...a way to tell them which way to go...number of steps to take... knowing what size steps to take...watching where you’re going...” were just a few of the responses. To

further this line of inquiry I asked: “What could we do in the gym to make this easier for the next time? And, how could we represent the directions for someone else to follow?” Excitedly the students began sharing their ideas and concurrently building on these ideas:

“We could learn our lefts from our rights... We could just tell them where to go... We could all practice taking big steps so they are the same-ish... We could put colours on the walls and use the colours to direct our partners towards... Yeah like North and South... Oh, we could put North, South, East and West on the walls... How do we know which way is North in here? We could go one at a time, that might make it easier... We could draw a pirate map to the treasure and give it to another group and see if they can find our X marks the spot... We could write out the directions...” And so the children’s excited discussion grew. Though not all students were as vocal in the discussion as others, all students were engaged when we started to physically explore. Some students watched the others with furrowed brows, some students jumped in and took the lead, some questioned those taking the lead and some asked for further direction from me.

We, both myself and the students, took time to explore their suggestions and questions. Then we took time to interpret some of the different suggested strategies. We came back together and discussed what had worked and what had not. Some of our ideas were successful straight away. Others were not, but as a result, these ideas were successful at helping us come to better understand the task and the concepts being explored. I tried to stress that all ideas were worth trying out, in order to come to the best solution.

I proposed that we try the same activity on a larger scale such as finding the treasure on the athletic field or within the school itself using some of their 'orienteering' strategies. We then went through the same process of searching out the treasure keeping in mind the focus questions: How do we direct our partners to the treasure? What helps us to find the treasure? And, how could we share the path to the treasure with others?

We came together and reflected on our proposed strategies for orienting ourselves and finding the treasure. We discussed some of the challenges, and some of the things that had worked well. I then asked them to think about and consider "How might this relate to how new territory was and may be explored? And, what could we do here in PE to become skilled explorers ourselves?" The students and I were beginning to gain new perspectives and to make connections to student learning as we personally reflected and planned the next stages of the inquiry.

The grade 3's took what we had explored in physical education and further built on what they had found as they began to explore more in-depth mapping concepts and creating their own treasure maps in art class. Building on what the students had discovered about explorers and maps in other subject areas, my class began to look at the concept of mapping the school grounds. Through questioning, contemplation and physical experimentation they began to explore using basic orienteering. The students began to develop skills using orienteering tools (maps, compasses, directions, scale) in different ways. We together created orienteering challenges around the school grounds and facilities

using maps and we continuously reflected on how our learning related to exploration of the world. Some of the students were thrilled by the chance to draw and use maps, others were super keen to be the ones to give directions to be followed, a few of the students were most interested in hiding “the treasures” challenging their classmates to effectively use the different strategies we were exploring, one student brought in a “real pirate map” to share and another student wanted to challenge another class to do a treasure hunt, they were all making meaning in their own ways.

This exploration was exciting and engaging for both myself as a teacher and for the students. The energy, the enjoyment and the learning of the students made the substantial planning, re-planning and continuous collaboration by the teachers involved, worthwhile. And though my recollection seems simple and neat, the whole process of setting up such an exploration was not a small challenge. Developing a beginning point to inspire inquiry and draw on prior knowledge, allowing the children to pursue their questions and their different lines of inquiry while ensuring interaction with conceptual ideas and content across subject areas is difficult. It asks of teachers something different than traditional approaches to learning.

In this particular example, the students took ownership of the content and the direction of their learning and as a teacher I helped to facilitate their general and more specific inquiries. This ownership of the content and direction allowed the students to engage in personally relevant ways: it built on their own previous experiences and encouraged meaningful construction of new knowledge and understanding. This was a

meaningful experience for the learners and for me, the teacher. It was particularly meaningful for myself as this exploration fit with how I understand teaching and learning. An inquiry learning experience such as the one described creates a frame for this proposed study.

Research Questions

This study will draw on an autoethnographic tradition (Burdell, 1999; Clandinin, & Connelly, 2000; Conle, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Goodson, 1992; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Sparkes, 2000). An autoethnographic study allows me to position my life experiences and my role identity, beliefs, knowledge and teaching practice within the larger social and political contexts. This study will therefore focus on the following research questions:

1. What in my past experience enables me to value inquiry-based teaching that is based on constructivist learning theories as a critical element of my approach to PE?
 - a. Why are some teachers in an inquiry-based school program able to commit to constructivist notions of learning within their teaching practice?
2. How does a collaborative autoethnography focused on inquiry-based teaching and learning inform practice in school based physical education programs?

To unpack this understanding of teaching and learning in a school and PE, I explore a context based on constructivist principles of learning and teaching, inquiry learning and teaching, teaching identity, teacher knowledge, physical education and communities of practice.

CHAPTER II -CONTEXT

Constructivist Principles of Learning

At the foundation of education is learning. “Learning” itself is a broad concept and term with no universally accepted definition (Shuell, 1986). The reason for this variety in definition is that, although people agree that learning is a fundamental process, there are a variety of views and theories explaining the causes, the processes and the consequences of learning (Schunk, 2004). In general, the term refers to change in thought, knowledge, behaviour, skill, or belief that improves a person’s capabilities (McCown, Driscoll, Roop, Saklofske, Schwean, Kelly & Haines, 1999).

Constructivism is an epistemology that is becoming more accepted in educational settings for acquiring knowledge. Constructivist theory as a philosophy of learning is supported by a substantial body of literature (Brooks & Brooks, 2002; Bruner, 1968; Davis, 2004; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 1994; Light, 2008; Marlowe & Page 1998; Piaget, 1973; Prawat, 1992; Rovegno & Dolly, 2006; von Glasersfeld, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). It is a philosophy proposing that learning involves “*constructing*, creating, inventing and developing our own knowledge” (Marlowe & Page, 1998 p.10). A constructivist perspective sees learning as “a process of adapting to and fitting into a constantly changing world. Understanding thus arises from the learner’s engagement in the world through perception, motor action and bodily senses” (Light, 2008, p.23).

Constructivism is based on the concept that when individuals learn they do not passively acquire or absorb a new understanding. Instead, new information is actively assimilated into existing knowledge structures while simultaneously altering these structures. The capacity to learn and the world that the person knows all change through

this process of restructuring. Therefore, what individuals learn is always framed within the context of what they already know; each of us generates our own models and our own individual understanding of the world. (Brooks & Brooks, 2002, p.xi)

Constructivism finds itself deeply rooted in developmental and educational theory (Crain, 2004). The basis of “constructivist philosophy” stems from early work by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Piaget. Rousseau believed that the classical education of his time (18th century), consisting of primarily reading and memorizing, did little to actively engage the learners and create understanding of the phenomena of the world. His opposition to traditional schooling contributed to the development of a constructivist view of learning (Marlowe & Page, 1998). Piaget also influenced the development of constructivist thought on the basis of numerous detailed observations of children. He suggests that learning was a result of an individual’s active, exploratory experiences with the world (Brooks & Brooks, 2002; Marlowe & Page, 1998; Wells, 2001). He also believed that “knowledge acquired by memorizing is not real knowledge that can be used” (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989, p.3: as cited in Audet & Jordan, 2005 p. 67). Piaget encouraged educators to allow learners to explore objects and situations until their understandings of concepts or language created disequilibrium. According to Piagetan beliefs, this state of discomfort and dissatisfaction of understanding spurs further inquiry and ultimately leads to new and deeper understandings (Crain, 2004).

The work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) proposes that learners’ interactions with the environment contribute to success in learning for understanding. He contends that in a learning context both activities and artifacts are transformed, as is the learner’s thinking and doing through adaptation, extension and modification of both intellectual and

material resources in order to solve the problems encountered and facilitate new understandings (Crain, 2004; McCown et al., 1999; Wells, 2001). Vygotsky's ideas are grounded in the belief that understandings of the world are jointly construed and that the social world shapes the individual (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Social constructivism based on Vygotsky's thoughts (1978) emphasizes social interaction and dialogue in that "the understandings and capabilities that emerge from social interaction with a group are greater than those that are possible at an intrapersonal level" (Light, 2008, p.25).

John Dewey (1938) believed that a child should learn through and in relation to living. He felt that the human mind is better equipped to gather information about the world by operating in it rather than by reading about it, hearing lectures on it, or studying abstract models of it (Crain, 2004). Dewey developed a child-centered curriculum, in which children were educated for living in the reality of the modern world. He felt that children would develop the inner motivation and abilities to learn if teachers gave students the freedom to construct their own understandings from their own investigations and experiences. He believed that learning happens through experiences of the eyes, ears, tactile sensations and combinations of senses (including thinking) as well as through social interaction (Light, 2008). Dewey's and others' research show that children as young as infants and toddlers actively inquire throughout their daily lives and are indeed able to understand complex thought (Dewey 1938; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Wells, 2001).

In fact, each of the ideas above contributes to a constructivist understanding of learning. A central link between these four theorists is that they all held the belief that meaningful learning is dependent on the context of learning (including the learner) and

the ability of the learner to adapt to the context. Learning is much more effective through active engagement with new information than by passive exposure to information (Audet & Jordan, 2005) thus supporting constructivist theory.

Constructivist theory of learning emphasizes the role that learners' "ever-transforming mental schemes play in their cognitive growth" (Brooks & Brooks, 1999 p.18). Each individual constructs their own understanding and meaning about issues, problems, and topics in the constructivist view (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; von Glasersfeld, 1988; Marlowe & Page, 1998; McCown et al., 1999). Everyone has had different experiences in the world and as a result understandings, interpretations and schemata of any concept cannot be exactly the same as anyone else's (Marlowe & Page, 1998). Each new construction of understanding will depend on- and be defined by- one's prior experiences, knowledge and learning as well as the ability one has to accommodate and interpret discrepant data into existing understandings (Brooks & Brooks, 2002; Lemlech, 2002). Marlowe and Page (1998) define learning in constructivist terms as:

- both the process and result of questioning, interpreting, and analyzing information
- using this information and thinking process to develop, build, and alter our meaning and understanding of concepts and ideas; and
- integrating current experiences with our past experiences and what we already know about a given subject. (p.10)

Constructivism is about the process of learning, it's about constructing knowledge not merely receiving it. As a result, constructivism as an educational philosophy has profound implications for education and the kinds of learning experiences schools provide for their students (Brooks & Brooks, 2002; Caine, Caine & McClintic, 2002;

Short & Burke, 1996). Constructivism calls attention to the fact that teachers must structure learning experiences to challenge students' thinking so that they will be able to construct new knowledge (Schunk, 2004). A constructivist framework challenges teachers to create learning environments in which they and their students are encouraged to inquire, explore, interpret, problem solve, reflect and construe new understandings of the intricacies of this world (Brooks & Brooks, 2002). For many teachers, adopting constructivist practices requires a paradigm shift, a potentially threatening shift. "For many, it requires the willingness to abandon familiar perspectives and practices and the adoption of new ones" (Brooks & Brooks, 2002, p.25). Those familiar perspectives and practices are traditional in that for the most part they reflect what today's teachers experienced as learners. These past experiences are the foundations of beliefs about teaching and they can be "best characterized as a 'transmission' approach to teaching and an 'absorptionist' approach to learning" (Prawat, 1992, p.356). According to Marlowe and Page (2005) constructivism is about: "thinking and analyzing, not accumulating and memorizing" (p.8), "understanding and applying, not repeating back" (p.9) and "being active, not passive" (p.9). This requires teachers to take on a new role "where he or she is seen as encouraging students to explore their world, discover knowledge, set and solve problems, and then to reflect and think critically" (Brooks & Brooks, 1993: as cited in Rovegno & Dolly, 2006, p.246).

Inquiry Learning

According to Lemlech (2002), "constructivism and inquiry go hand in hand; they are two sides of the same coin" (p.130). Inquiry-based approaches to learning and teaching encourage active participation of the learner. School curriculum is the planned

interaction of learners with instructional concepts and content, materials, resources, and processes for attaining educational objectives. So, from a constructivist perspective it is clear that it “needs to be purposeful in children's lives, starting from children's own experiences through which they find relationships among realities in the world around them past and present” (Pataray-Ching & Robertson, 2002 p.498). Inquiry as a curriculum framework is a way of thinking about learning that meets such goals. Educational theorist John Dewey is a constructivist who “places inquiry at the heart of the curriculum” in the form of experiential education (Wells, 2001 p.189).

In an inquiry approach, the nature of the problem determines the goal to be sought, and the goal determines the process. Grabe and Grabe (2000) define inquiry as both a methodology and a philosophy:

Inquiry involves finding sources of information appropriate to a task, working to understand the information resources and how they relate to the task, and then, in those cases for which some action is expected, applying this understanding in a productive way. (p. 21)

At the core of the inquiry-based curriculum is the premise that the content is built from learners' interests and should develop personally and socially significant questions and queries that really matter to the learners in order to encourage lifelong curiosities and construction of new and meaningful knowledge (Short & Harste with Burke, 1996: in Pataray-Ching & Robertson, 2002). Adoption of inquiry as an approach to curriculum actually questions how traditional schooling is approached. It frames itself in constructivist thought and changes the relationship between content, knowledge and the

process of thinking in schools. Inquiry is a means to construct learning in context while encouraging learners to deeply examine the complexity of issues (Harste, 1993).

Many current approaches in education describe environments and situations in which inquiry lies at the foundation of the learning process. Inductive method, discovery method, hypothetical mode of teaching, inferential learning, the deductive-inductive method, the inductive-deductive mode of learning, situated learning, experiential learning, active-learning, critical thinking and Reggio Emilia inspired (divergent discovery) approaches are all approaches to learning that put students at the center of the learning experiences across content areas and are based on constructivist theory (Colburn, 2004; Fraser, 2000). Inquiry also lies at the foundation of these approaches (Edelson, D., Gordin & Pea, 1999; Fraser, 2000; Owens, Hester & Teale, 2002; Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson, & Crawford, 1996). In these learning environments children pursue their learning through asking questions, discussion, field work, research representation, investigation, collaboration and reflection (Audet & Jordan, 2005; Edwards et al., 1998; Wells, 2001). They have ownership and a high level of engagement in the construction of their understandings of relevant phenomena in the world around them (Wells, 2001). This approach supports Dewey's constructivist educational theorizing that "people learn when they seek answers to questions that matter to them" (Dewey, 1933: as cited in Audet & Jordan, 2004 p.65).

Inquiry-based learning is presented under many different names as previously suggested (Edelson et al., 1999; Fraser, 2000; Owens et al., 2002; Murdoch, 1998; Short et al., 1996). As an instructional model, inquiry-based learning classroom environments can be described "as a set of recurring learning events commonly referred to as the

inquiry cycle” (Audet, 2005 p.14). There are many models representing this cycle. Two common models used in inquiry-based schools are based on the authoring cycle as a curricular framework for inquiry (Short et al., 1996) and Murdoch’s Inquiry Model (Murdoch, 1998). What these models have in common is that they all represent stages in a recursive cycle in which students: access and explore prior knowledge, ask a question or identify a problem to explore, gather resources, interpret, analyze and summarize information, draw conclusions, take some form of action and reflect on the process (Audet, 2005).

All inquiry models base themselves on students’ prior knowledge and the pursuit of personally meaningful questions. Getting students to ask questions that matter to them personally often requires the guidance of teachers as “learners are constantly drawn to the ambiguous rather than what they already understand in their worlds” (Short & Burke, 1989 p.195) and asking the right questions and engaging in purposeful inquiry to pursue their questions requires particular knowledge, skill and behaviours- all of which are learned over time (White & Fitzsimmons, 2005). In inquiry-based learning environments student questions and inquiry, combined with teacher questions can open up the door to understanding. Teachers proposing questions and supporting students’ inquiries is not as simple as just asking questions. Teachers must have the ability to ask the right question of the right child at the right time not just ask the higher order questions (Shalveston, 1973: as cited in Calderhead, 1996).

There is much theoretical writing on the subject of inquiry as an effective approach to curriculum and cross curricular integration (Audet & Jordan, 2005; Caine & Caine, 1990; Alvarado & Herr, 2003; Murdoch, 1998, Wells, 2001). In addition, there is

much written with regards to the implementation, the benefits and the challenges of incorporating inquiry into early childhood education, mathematics, language arts, social studies and science (Audet & Jordan, 2005; Edelson et al., 1999; Fraser, 2000; Grabe & Grabe 2000; Owens et al. 2002; Short & Burke 1996; Short et al. 1996). There is growing research now on the use of inquiry-based principles in music education and physical education both of which are traditionally didactic and skills based programmes (Allison & Barrett, 2000; Allsup & Baxter, 2004; Metzler, 2000; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Rovegno & Dolly, 2006; Scott, 2006).

Research related to inquiry as curriculum framework shows that inquiry, by placing the learners at the center of the learning experiences, promotes the production/construction of new understandings through critical thinking and increased levels of personal engagement (Audet & Jordan, 2005; Brooks & Brooks 2002; Edelson et al., 1999; Edwards, et al., 1998; Eisner, E. 1994; Fraser, S. 2000; Moran, 1998; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Short., & Burke 1996; Wells, 2001). In inquiry settings learners are empowered by pursuing their own questions and reflections. The learning involves multiple contexts and perspectives, and learners learn to live in an ambiguous present and become responsible for their own learning (Short & Burke, 1989). Marlowe and Page (2005) consider that for learners, “inquiry... leads to greater ownership of content, promotes more elaborate knowledge construction, encourages more empowered, informed, and independent thinking [and] fosters deeper understanding of concepts” (p.176). Ideally, inquiry supports the development of students who can effectively cope with change and pursue deeper understandings of the world’s phenomena. Another potential benefit of inquiry is that teachers in inquiry learning environments are afforded

the opportunity to facilitate and actively engage in meaningful learning with their students (Postman & Weingartner, 1969) .

Research does indicate that facilitating non-traditional curricular approaches, such as inquiry, is challenging for a variety of reasons (Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997). Some of the challenges to inquiry as an approach to learning include surrendering “control” of specific content to be explored and methods of exploration (Hansen, 2001), developing students’ critical thinking and analytic abilities (Rovegno & Dolly, 2006) and having a lack of time for meaningful engagement with concepts. Finding time for collaboration between teachers to support authentic cross curricular learning is a challenge (Audet, 2005) and developing authentic assessment to support the learning experiences is also difficult (White & Fitzsimmons, 2005). Developing and supporting meaningful inquiry experiences asks something very different of teachers in the nature of planning, implementation, articulation, evaluation and reflection. Also the personal role teachers play in the learning process is different; one of the greatest potential challenges of an inquiry-based curriculum is it requires the teacher to see his role in the learning process in a very different light to a traditional teacher’s role (Lemlech, 2002).

Teacher Identity

Although potentially beneficial for children’s learning, constructivist theories of learning and inquiry-based models are difficult to learn to teach because they often necessitate dramatic changes in the how teachers view themselves in the teaching-learning relationship. Allison and Barrett (2000) go so far as to suggest that "teachers who teach using the constructivist approach reflect a certain personal identity" (p.14). A

statement such as that leads us to consider: What is this personal identity and how does it develop?

Becoming a teacher involves the formation of a perceived teacher role and identity. A teaching identity is a personal perception of how one identifies oneself as a teacher and how one feels as a teacher (Mayer, 1999: as cited in Walkington, 2005). Teacher identity is based on core beliefs an individual has about teaching: beliefs that are continuously shaped and reshaped through experience. Teaching role is closely intertwined with teaching identity but refers to what one does, or should do, as a teacher. It refers to the functions required of a teacher (Walkington, 2005) rather than the often implicit, unarticulated, unexamined beliefs and values that shape a teacher's behaviour.

Research has highlighted the multi-dimensional dynamic process of teacher role and identity development (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Goodson & Walker, 1991; Malm, 2004; Prawat, 1992; Tinning, 2004; Walkington, 2005). This dynamic process "entails an interplay between different and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs and practices" (Flores & Day, 2006, p.219). According to Britzman (1991) "learning to teach means coming to terms with particular orientations toward knowledge, power, and identity" (p.11). Teaching identities and role perceptions are constructed and deconstructed over time according to the relative strength of key influencing contexts (Bell, Schempp, Tan, Fincher & Manross 1995; Mitchell & Jean, 1985; Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Bullough and Gitlin (2005) suggest that:

Who you are as a person- the kinds of experiences you had inside and outside of school, values, beliefs, and aspirations- has profound influence on what you will

learn and who you will be as a teacher, what and how you will teach, and how you will respond to the changing context of teaching. (p. 45)

According to VanMaanen and Schein, (1979) an individual's learning of what behaviours and perspectives are customary and desirable within a professional role is the process of socialization. Literature on teacher socialization highlights the complex and interactive socializing agents that influence teachers' views of teaching and of themselves as teachers (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001; Clandinin & Connolly, 1999; Flores & Day, 2006; Lawson, 1983a; Lawson, 1983b; Lortie, 1975; Tinning, 2004). The socialization process involves the pressure to change, drop or adopt different behaviours or beliefs (Ennis, 1994). According to Lawson, (1983a) socialization into the role of a teacher- specifically as a physical educator- is a lifelong process beginning early in life and continuing throughout the educational career. Knowles (1992) specifically suggests that early childhood experiences, early teacher role models and previous teaching experiences are most important in the formation of an 'image of self as teacher'. Further research on teacher socialization and development also acknowledges that many components of teacher role and identity formation are deeply rooted in childhood and cultural experience (Britzman, 1991; Clandinin and Connelly, 1987; Goodson and Walker, 1991; Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992; Weber & Mitchell, 1996).

Beattie (1995) employs narrative study to reveal how teachers construct their role and identity in a variety of circumstances. In "Beginning With Myself" she reveals her own story of teaching and learning in a nonlinear direction through her own experiences to see "how all my beginnings have held within them the seeds of my beginnings" (p.1). She makes the connection that as a result of her empowered voice through discussion and

musical expression as a child, she as an adult now values and embraces the social, collaborative and interactive elements of learning and the power of relationships in her personal and professional life.

From a constructivist perspective, we know that learning refers to the meaning individuals construct from their experiences. This perspective recognizes that there is a significant connection between past experiences and the construction of knowledge related to understandings and practices. The epistemology also acknowledges the unique means by which individuals make meaning as well as the historical, social, cultural, political, and economical situations that influence how meaning is created (Goodson, 1992; Sparkes & Templin, 1992; Woods, 1987). There is a growing body of research that examines how teachers understand their practice, build professional knowledge base, and construct a professional identity (Beattie, 1995; Calderhead, 1996; Carter & Doyle, 1996; Ennis, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Schulz, 1997; Sparkes & Templin, 1992) all of which are based in constructivist principles.

There are growing bodies of research, and detailed theoretical writing exploring inquiry learning and teaching (Audet & Jordan, 2005; Manning, Manning & Long, 1994; Short, et al. 1996; Wells, 2001). There is little however about the role and identity development of the teacher in inquiry settings perhaps this is due to the fact that “in such [inquiry] settings traditional roles for students and teachers are blurred” (Audet, 2005). A general theme in the theoretical literature is that teachers in inquiry settings move away from the role of teacher as expert or authority and direct strategies of instruction towards the role of guide and co-participant in learning (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Edwards et al., 1998). Lemlech (2002) suggests that a teacher’s role during inquiry involves

raising questions, supporting questioning, exploration, data management, critical thinking, as well as challenging interpretations and new knowledge constructions. The teacher does not need to be the authority or expert in relation to the content being explored but does need to be comfortable as a guide in the learning process by supporting the development of skills to further inquire, asking the right questions at the right time and suggesting methods for further investigation and means for sharing new knowledge. In short, Lemlech suggests the teacher's role is to "stimulate the use of the inquiry process by students, to guide students' choice of materials, and to arrange an appropriate environment and climate for inquiry" (2002, p.125). The questions of why and how some teachers construct a perception of role and identity that suits inquiry-based learning is a central pillar of this proposed investigation.

Allison and Barrett (2000) suggest that teachers in the constructivist paradigm show commitment to involving and trusting students, a willingness to take risks in terms of the direction of the learning situation, and have low ego needs in terms of power and control of learning and they have patience for the learner to engage in the learning process. This suggests that teachers working in an inquiry-based framework would focus on and use more indirect strategies of instruction in addition to direct instruction. The reasons why some teachers embrace these individual strategies as core components of their teaching has been examined by several scholars (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Prawat, 1992; Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997). The research however has predominantly been based on pre-service teachers and newly qualified teachers. This research study explored the role and identity development of practicing teachers in an inquiry teaching and learning environment with an emphasis on physical education.

Teacher Knowledge

When exploring teacher identity development, the knowledge set is built on past experience as well as the knowledge that is developed in practice of identity and both must be acknowledged. Teachers work in complex and ever-changing environments; teachers' abilities to select and facilitate experiences appropriate to the learner in such environments requires a substantial knowledge base. Such a knowledge base is likely somewhat idiosyncratic and is continuously changing and being restructured as a result of the dynamic nature of teaching in schools today.

This idea of the knowledge that teachers hold in order to facilitate learning in classroom environments can be referred to as teacher knowledge. In the most general terms teacher knowledge is "taken to refer to factual propositions and the understandings that inform skilful action" (Calderhead, 1996, p.715). It refers to what is going on inside teachers' heads as they make sense of their professional world, their prior knowledge and experiences, and as they understand teaching, learning and children themselves (Tsangaridou, 2006). There has been much written on the topic of teacher knowledge particularly in the past two decades focusing on "how teachers understand their work and the thought processes, judgements, and decisions that their work involves" (Calderhead, 1996, p.709).

Teacher knowledge is obviously a broad, interesting and complex concept. Thus, as an entity, its nature is debated and it is defined and subdivided in a variety of ways by different people (Behets & Vergauwen, 2006; Calderhead, 1996; Clandinin & Connolly, 1987; Ennis, 1994; Munby, Russell & Martin, 2001; Rovegno, 2003). Various studies have yielded a variety of "knowledge" categories that have been applied to the working

knowledge of teachers (Calderhead, 1996). As a rule, according to Rovegno's (2003) framework of the nature of teacher's knowledge, characteristically all teacher knowledge is practical, situated and personal. Teacher knowledge is complex as suggested previously due to the intricacy of teaching practice where understandings, intuition, appraisal of situations, adjustment and improvisation are constantly called upon (Schön, 1983). Knowledge is practical in that it is oriented towards practice and it is the "knowing what to do", "how to do it" and "how to manage it all" of being a teacher (Rovegno, 2003). Situated knowledge is the third conception of Rovegno's (2003) framework building on the practical element in that knowledge is situated in practice, is developed in practice and ultimately develops practice. Finally and most relevant to this study, is the premise that teacher knowledge is personal, "it reflects individual teacher's biography, values, knowledge, and experiences in the school context" (Rovegno, 2003, p.296).

Research has highlighted the concept that the complex knowledge and belief structures that teachers hold related to teaching, learning and the learner are largely formed by past personal experiences (Calderhead, 1996). Constructivist theories of learning suggest that we make sense of new information in relation to what we already know and have experienced (Von Glasersfeld, 1988) thus the basis for constructing teacher knowledge must be in relation to prior knowledge and experiences (Rovegno, 2003).

Teacher knowledge is multifaceted, embodied, and embedded in the narrative history of teachers' lives (Beattie, 1995). Carter and Doyle (1996) summarize this concept quite clearly as they suggest the knowledge, acts and processes of learning to

teach, teachers' experiences and the resultant choices we make are all linked to one's identity and the stories behind the identity.

From a social constructivist perspective, knowledge is also constructed as a result of social interactions (Rovegno, 2003). This would take into account the importance of interactions teachers have with others related to school such as the interactions teachers had in their own school days with other students and teachers, and as teachers with other colleagues, students and professional personnel. Such relations with school communities over the course of teachers' lives can have both positive and negative effects on teachers' knowledge development (Behets & Vergauwen, 2006).

Tsangarido, (2006) states "There are indications in the literature that greater thought need to be given on what actually teachers know, how they come to know, and/or what they think they need to know about teaching and learning" (p.510). My research contributed to this need in this particular literature context. Construction of teacher knowledge based on a social constructivist perspective and based on prior personal experience and current practice are both relevant to this research study as we collaboratively unpacked teachers' past and current experiences in relation to their understandings of inquiry-based practice.

Teaching Physical Education

Another important context of this research is specifically related to role and identity as a physical educator in an inquiry-based learning environment. There is a gap in the literature specific to teaching physical education in an integrated inquiry-based framework. However there is evidence of a growing movement supporting the principles

of inquiry learning in a variety of forms in physical education (Allison & Barrett, 2000; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997).

Throughout history, PE programmes have evolved and continue to do so. Predominantly, the programmes and approaches have reflected larger patterns of culture, people's needs and choices regarding physical activity and the trends in the educational system of a particular time (Ziegler, 1989). At the moment there are several models, philosophies and approaches to teaching physical education (Allison & Barrett, 2000; Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Jewett & Bain, 1986; Kinchin, 2006; Kirk & Macdonald, 1998; MacDonald, 2003; McBride, 1999; Metzler, 2000; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Rink, 1993; Rovegno & Kirk, 1995; Silverman & Ennis, 2003; Siedentop, 2002; Thorburn & Collins, 2006). A brief historical review here of physical education as a domain will put the evolution of the teaching of the subject into context.

According to Michael Metzler, (2000) the earliest programmes of physical education in the 19th century, were established by people trained in medicine who used instructive and therapeutic techniques to help people learn and participate in physical activity. In Amelia Lee's (1996) overview of the first physical education programmes, she suggested that early in the 20th century the emphasis shifted to individual physical development, natural play and recreational activities -replacing the rigid military style exercises of the previous century. And, surviving the educational crisis of the 1930s, "education through the physical" (p.10) as an approach to physical education gained support and shaped programming and activity development into the 1960s. Although there was an emphasis on physical fitness throughout the first half of the 20th century, sport remained the dominant curricular offering.

The 1960s marked several changes in the field. New ideas began to emerge with regards to how to students engaged in the subject matter and how teachers could carry out instruction (Bain, 1990). Movement education, borrowed from British curricular models, challenged the traditional sport and fitness predominance (Lee, 1996). The movement approach emphasized an understanding of movement through problem solving, discovery and a movement education framework (Metzler, 2000). Research and support for the movement approach was limited and a sport dominated curriculum continued to be the primary emphasis of physical education programmes (Lee, 1996). However, with the advent of more sophisticated research methodology in the physical education domain there has been a marked increase in pedagogical research and consequently increased understanding of pedagogy in the field (Silverman & Skonie, 1997).

A variety of basic methods for teaching physical education have emerged in the past 40 years. These are often referred to as styles, approaches, strategies (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002) or “models of instruction” (Metzler, 2000). Each approach has its own pedagogical values offering different teacher-learner relationships, developmental effects and capacities for reproduction and production of knowledge (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). Some approaches in PE, as ways of teaching (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002) which incorporate aspects of inquiry learning and constructivist principles include teaching games for understanding, concept-based PE, sport education, movement education, educational gymnastics, skill themes, educational dance, problem solving and critical thinking, action learning, project based learning, theme immersion, experiential learning, and adventure challenge (Allison & Barrett, 2000; Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Jewett & Bain, 1986; Kirk & Macdonald, 1998; Kichin, 2006; McBride, 1999; Metzler, 2000;

Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Rink, 1993; Rovegno & Kirk, 1995; Siedentop, 2002; Thorburn & Collins, 2006). These approaches move away from the teacher-directed, sport-skill-focused physical education models that dominated instruction in PE for most of the 19th and 20th Centuries (Metzler, 2000). The constructivist approaches focus more specifically on the development of basic and generic movement skills, problem solving, conceptual understanding and other intellectual abilities as well as the capacities for expressive and creative movement. In these constructivist approaches, according to Rovegno and Kirk (1995), learning involves active and creative processes engaging individuals in interaction with their physical environment and with other learners. Such constructivist practices do exist in some PE programmes but Kirk and Macdonald (1998) suggest that in the 1990's these approaches "lack[ed] prominence and influence..." (p.377). One possible explanation for the lack of prominence of these approaches to teaching PE could be related to physical educators' perception of identity and relevant teacher knowledge.

Mosston and Ashworth acknowledge that most teachers "evolve a favourite way of teaching, a personal style that has been successful [in practice]" (p.16). Teachers' knowledge and understanding of learning and teaching, as well as teaching role and identity construction, have an influence on what that style may be. Most of today's teachers' early schooling, including physical education experience, was through traditional direct approaches to learning (Allison & Barrett, 2000). The socialization research has definitively linked a PE teacher's perception and enculturation into a career in PE to their time as students in school (Curtner-Smith, 2001; Lawson, 1983a; Lawson, 1983b, Tsangaridou, 2006). Bell et al. (1995) also found that most "physical education

teachers...seem to share a common trait: their childhood was characterized by successful, vigorous, and enthusiastic sport participation" (p.7). This is significant because traditionally physical education has been approached from a direct instructional base, in which the learning emphasis was based on reproduction of knowledge (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). Teachers tend to teach the way they were taught, model their teaching behaviours on those of their own teachers (Lortie, 1968) and construct knowledge based on their own personal experience (Rovegno, 2003). How then would one explain the development of teacher role identity valuing an inquiry-based approach, a non-traditional approach to PE?

According to Allison and Barrett (2000) some teachers have now come to a point in professional understanding where knowledge, beliefs, values and perceptions of learning and teaching have shifted. Some teaching identities are more closely aligned with constructivist notions of education than with traditional ones, thus challenging the more traditional didactic paradigm.

This is where the unpacking of my own significant experiences became significant. In this autoethnographic study I used narrative inquiry to explore where and how my own beliefs related to learning and teaching had developed, as well as how they had been reinforced and challenged, enabling me to value more radical constructivist principles of learning. By sharing my findings in the context of a community of practicing teachers, both PE specialists and not, who had committed to an inquiry approach to teaching, I put my understanding into social context. This added a collaborative element to the study exploring what elements in teachers' past experiences enabled them to value inquiry-based teaching.

Learning Communities

The sharing component of this study became the grounds for provoking a dialogue in an existent social community, a group of teachers in a new school using an inquiry-based curriculum framework. McDermott (2001) suggests “that a community of practice is a group of people who share knowledge, learn together and create common practices” (p.4). In essence my research created a professional learning community, a group of educators working together (Hargreaves, 2003) to unpack our pasts and share our thoughts related to teaching and learning in inquiry, ultimately becoming aware of who we were as teachers concurrently constructing deeper understanding of our practice. Definitions of professional learning communities vary depending on a variety of factors but generally the concept refers to a group of educators seeing and sharing learning and acting on their learning (Hargreaves, 2007).

The concept of professional learning communities supports social constructivist theory in that learning- including teacher learning- is a process where individuals build new knowledge from prior knowledge and perceptions (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). The interplay between new and existing knowledge is a process the learner undertakes and exploring new ideas, skills and approaches and making meaning of their significance. The work of Schlager and Fusco (2003: as cited in Kilpatrick, Barrett & Jones, 2003) states that teachers learn best when working in a dialogue and action community. Collaborative work and discussion among a school’s professional community build professional skills and understanding and keep a school progressing (Hargreaves, 2003). This builds on the theories of Vygotsky (social constructivism) and educational theorist Dewey and their recognition of the importance of the social nature of learning which in

turn from the philosophical underpinning of learning communities (Kilpatrick et al., 2003). Ideally, in a learning community, the skills, strengths and experiences of the members of the community are shared and explored to foster new learning for all.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) recommend that effective schools should operate as strong professional learning communities. McDermott (2001) suggests that in order to create such learning communities within schools the following conditions must exist:

- there must be a specific focus or aim for the community members
- a member of the learning community should facilitate the group's endeavours
- time must be created for reflection and interaction
- the learning should build on the values of the community
- the group should foster personal relationships within the community
- the group should incorporate thinking and sharing systems; and
- the group should provoke meaningful dialogue about significant issues

The obvious benefits of creating professional learning communities are that the members have a chance to share information, insight, experiences and understandings related to an issue or topic of common interests (Bullough, 2007; Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Hargreaves, 2003; McDermott, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

A community of learners of this nature becomes a professional development experience as teachers find out about new ideas, skills and approaches. They grapple with different issues and consider their significance (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). "Professional learning communities can be powerful staff development and a potent strategy for school change" (Berlinger-Gustafson, 2004, p. 1). Creation of a community of learners in a school leads to new experiences and awareness and ultimately this is reflected in practice

(DuFour, 2004; Chalmers & Keown, 2006). According to Berlinger-Gustafson (2004) professional learning communities in action lead to reduction of teachers isolation, increased commitment to values of school, creation of new knowledge about teaching and learning, and a higher likelihood that teachers feel professionally engaged and inspired in their own professional development. When teachers work in inquiry and learning communities, “teachers engage in joint construction of knowledge through conversation and other forms of collaborative analysis and interpretation” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p.294). This study investigated how creating a learning community through a collaborative autoethnography informs inquiry-based practice.

Contextual Summary

This autoethnographic study allowed me to position my life experiences and my role identity, beliefs, knowledge and teaching practice within the larger social and political contexts by focusing on my specific research questions pertaining to inquiry-based learning. The autoethnography, the sharing and the constructing meaning components of the study relied on a significant body of research to support the process and the findings. Examining existing literature based on constructivist principles of learning and teaching, inquiry learning and teaching, teaching identity, teacher knowledge, physical education and communities of practice provided the context from which my understanding of teaching and learning in an inquiry-based PE programme was based.

CHAPTER III -METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to explore and analyse critical experiences as socializing agents in my development of a teaching identity and the adoption of an inquiry-based approach in teaching physical education. I wanted to find out why I valued constructivist theory and how that connected to my colleagues working in an inquiry-based framework. I conducted my research while teaching PE at a new international school in the United Arab Emirates where the school curriculum framework was based on inquiry learning and teaching. The school was implementing the International Baccalaureate Organization's (IBO) Primary Years Programme (PYP) curriculum framework. It is an international inquiry-based, concept driven curriculum. The school teaching staff was made up of teachers from European, Australian, North American and the Middle Eastern backgrounds, all of whom had chosen to work in the international school system with an inquiry focused curriculum.

This particular context supported my study into inquiry teaching because:

1. I was able to reflect on my own practice while conducting the study.
2. With the assistance of web based technology I was able to share my autoethnographic thoughts, narratives and connections with "critical friends" outside of the study to invite challenges, disruptions and further discussion.
3. I was working with others who valued inquiry-based learning and teaching and had chosen to work in this type of environment.
4. I found patterns and connections between my past experiences and those of my colleagues which gave insight into why some teachers adopt of inquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning.

By focusing on the structure and essence of my personal experiences and those of my colleagues working within the inquiry-based framework, I investigated using a qualitative research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the design of "a naturalistic study... cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, unfold..."(p.25). Through my research design I attempted to construct understandings of my teaching identity and personal knowledge of teaching and learning from reflections on my interactions with the world around me in the past and in present practice. I then aimed to express this understanding of the world through narratives once I'd established a learning community within my own professional community. The intention behind this was to increase general understanding and provoke a dialogue related to personal espousal of constructivist principles and inquiry-based learning. I followed the framework of my originally proposed plan, however where it seemed reasonable to modify the design to meet the research goals I did so.

There were three main components to this qualitative journey:

1. Autoethnography as an exploration of commonalities and dissonances between significant experiences throughout my life that may have led me to value an inquiry-based approach to teaching physical education.
2. Establishing a community of learners with colleagues, then sharing my stories with these teachers working at the same inquiry-based international school. I was in search of resonances shaping beliefs related to inquiry learning and teaching.
3. Making meaning of the sharing process and analyzing how my own personal experiences connected to others using inquiry in education and how they

connected to inquiry as an approach to learning and teaching in a school programme.

Autoethnography

Woods (1987) suggested that “life history” is the unpacking of a teacher's story. He believed it has an important role to play in the "construction of a meaningful, relevant and living teacher knowledge" (p.122). By exploring my own story, I contribute to this body of knowledge while reflecting on my own personal practice. According to Ziegler (1989) every professional has a responsibility to examine herself carefully and to then construct an orderly, consistent set of personal and professional beliefs so that she may become a better person and a more effective practitioner. I explored my personal experiences as a form of reflection in order to gain insight into my own teaching identity, knowledge and practice.

Autoethnography as a way of knowing involves the studying of one's own culture and oneself as a part of that culture to understand and illuminate a way of life. MacIntyre (1984) puts it clearly with the statement “the story of our lives is always embedded in the story of the community from which we derive identity” (p. 224). Autoethnography is research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural (Ellis, 2004). The basic assumption in autoethnography is that there is immense value and potential in exploring the experience of the individual in relation to the other. Individual experiences are never really just about the individual – we are constantly impacted by, and impacting others – life history is not accumulated in a social vacuum (Stanley, 1993). The idea of autoethnography is that we construct understanding from our interactions with the world around us and that often our understanding of the world is

internalized and expressed through stories. Bullough and Gitlin, (2001) propose that "to know the past is to know oneself as an individual and as a representative of a socio-historical moment in time; each person is a victim, vehicle, and ultimately in some sense a resolution of a culture's dilemmas" (p. 23).

My autoethnography development, the participant dialoguing and the personal and collaborative reflection throughout the study formed an interwoven, multi-layered and non-linear experience that afforded my colleagues and myself to explore our current practices as result of our past experiences. It was a way to understand the present by exploring the past (Beattie, 2001). Throughout the whole study I was able to repeatedly make connections to my own prior knowledge, explore and expand on new questions, construct new understandings, share and reflect on these new understandings while continuously reconstructing my own understanding. The methodology challenged me to think about my own thinking; arrange techniques for arranging; and interpret my own interpretations, return to my writing and thoughts and assess them (Berthoff, 1988). The recursive element of this process embodied the nature of inquiry and supported Vygotsky's (1978) notion that an essential characteristic of understanding relies on the movement of thought both laterally and vertically for both myself and the other participants in this study.

Personal Reflection

As a starting point, my autoethnographic exploration began with considerable personal reflection. Some call it memory work (Sironen, 1994), others call it "systematic sociological introspection" (Ellis, 2000). Both involve deep reflection and interpretation of personal experiences. I spent time reflecting upon the experiences I felt had been

significant socializing agents in the formation of my teaching identity and my interest in inquiry learning and teaching. This reflective component of the study using journals as random access free writing and self-introspection offered me the chance to tune in to what I knew, thought and understood about teaching and my past experiences. From here I was able to develop some focus questions and consider: What are my significant experiences? What do they mean? How have the meanings emerged? How do the experiences connect with each other? How do the experiences connect with inquiry learning and teaching? And, how do the experiences connect to my teaching role identity?

I explored specific critical incidents in my life experience that I thought had been instrumental in shaping my understandings of learning and teaching with specific focus on being a PE teacher. These included experiences of my childhood and family, during my school years, in sport, at my summer camp and in teaching: all of which have significantly shaped how I approach life and my profession.

Autoethnography according to Friedwald (1996 p.126: as cited in Holman Jones, 2005, p.765) "takes you deeper inside yourself and back out again". The journal writing in my exploration was my main means of accessing the 'deeper inside myself'. I paid special attention to the emotional tone of the experiences and how they felt at the time mediated through memory, time and other experiences. From this random writing and dialectical engagement I created narratives representing personal experiences I felt significantly related to the nature of my teaching practice.

I engaged a few critical friends to challenge me in this personal reflection process and to add a dimension of collaboration to my own autoethnography. I used a Blog

(<http://www.blogger.com>), a website or online diary where I wrote on an ongoing basis about the autoethnographic process I was living. I set up an “invite only collaborative blog” focusing on autoethnography, inquiry and physical education. The Blog was a small discussion group of four graduate students, my graduate supervisor and the principal of my school acting as “critical friends” with whom I shared the autoethnographic process and my initial narratives. I invited the individuals to my Blog as a result of interactions I had had with them throughout my graduate studies, common understandings of teaching and learning, and their abilities to appropriately challenge me and my understandings. This created an online “space” in which I shared my own interpretations and thoughts, which were read, reflected on and discussed. It was a way of drawing on the professional knowledge of fellow graduate students and it linked me to a virtual community with them, overcoming the challenges of geography for support and feedback (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). The interactive dialogue allowed me to reflect even further, to inspire further introspection while taking into account different perspectives and challenging the authenticity of my interpretations and of my narratives.

The critical collaborative component of the autoethnographic data collection, the taking into account different perspectives within my own autoethnography actually challenged me to re-formulate the questions at the heart of my own autoethnography and consequently shaped the sharing component of this research. I realized that the questions I was really asking of myself were: What is learning? How have I come to this? What is inquiry? Who am I as a teacher? Who am I as a learner? How does this all connect to physical education? These questions were the foundation in creating a framework for further self-introspection and in establishing a common understanding and starting point

for shared reflection with my participants in the sharing component of this study.

I had also planned to write in my journals about the collection of artifacts such as photographs from the different times in my life. I thought the use of photographs would support my introspection as “photographs do not themselves preserve meaning...[they] preserve instant appearances...[they] help to unfreeze memories” (Bach, 2001, p. 8). However, as I took myself into the introspection and into the sharing with my critical friends I found that there was little need to further inspire memories, events, and deeper connections. The journaling process, writing the narratives and the responses I received from my critical friends were substantial enough in unfreezing my memories and inspiring deep reflection.

Personal Narratives

In autoethnography, the writing process and the product are deeply intertwined. My stories became the data for the research as I was the main participant and I am the person doing the analysis. Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) suggest that "the product cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production, or the method of knowing" (p. 962). I did not separate the process from the product as I used my own writing as inquiry and as a main component of the analysis.

I used a dialectical notebook, a place where I could use writing as a way of learning and knowing. The purpose of this form of writing and exploring observations of observations is thinking about thinking and figuring out what we're hearing and seeing (Berthoff, 1988). The dialectical notebook was used to create a space to look and look again, foster fluency, tolerate ambiguity and come to terms with the intricacies, complexities and understandings of my thoughts and experiences. This dialogic thought

was problem posing, thus creating disequilibrium and insisting on further investigation that helped me to organize, challenge and interpret thoughts and ideas. Chalmers (1999) suggests that such writing “can help us move forward through our lives while finding and remaining at home with ourselves at each moment” (p.158).

My journal was both a method for data collection and analysis. It challenged me to continuously reflect, re-question and connect thoughts, ideas and experiences pertinent to inquiry-based teaching, my teaching identity development and physical education. I read and re-read across the data noting similarities and contrasts identifying recurring patterns and themes. The dialectical nature, pencil memos and reflections as well as increasing depth of introspection helped to initially identify recurring themes and connections across the data. Concurrent to the data collection and analysis in the journaling, my personal narratives were evolving to represent emergent themes.

This qualitative study found me using narrative inquiry to weave disparate threads of my life into some type of cloth: finding commonalities and discrepancies between my experiences throughout life that may have led me to value an inquiry-based approach to teaching physical education. I worked to illuminate how I have constructed my professional practice, and narrative inquiry was appropriate for this investigation. As Beattie (1995) described, "narrative is a basic way of thinking and thus organizing human experience" (p.14). She also explained that narrative methods can help researchers focus on personal knowledge (Beattie, 2004). Doyle (1997) argued that only story offers the possibility for finding the "truth" of teaching. Through the development of my own personal narratives I searched for my own "truths" by considering what I knew, how I knew it and what and whom I cared about (Oliver, 1998).

My narratives were revised, re-written and re-analyzed with regards to their representation of the recurring patterns and themes developing in the personal reflection journal. These narratives of the self involved looking back at the past through the lens of the present and with the focus on inquiry, identity and physical education. Their purpose was to “extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” (Bochner, 2000, p.270). Throughout the writing process I kept in mind Bochner’s (2000) criteria for narratives of the self which involve: including concrete detail, structural complexity, believability of the self journey, ethical self-consciousness, and the narrative’s ability to move the reader’s heart and thought.

During my narrative writing, I came to understand key elements of who I am –or rather I was forced to consider them. The narratives reconfirmed the importance of my re-framed questions by connecting to significant elements of my past that have shaped how I see learning, who I am as a learner, who I am as a teacher, how I see inquiry and how it all connects to PE practice. In order to share my narratives with others, I had to figure out what they meant to me. I needed to carefully consider what had enabled me to value inquiry as an approach to teaching and learning.

Sharing

Life and stories or narratives are undeniably connected (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Sharing our stories helps us to create, interpret, and change our social, cultural, political, and personal lives. “Sharing stories, and teachers do a lot of story telling, is simultaneously an act of self-discovery and of discovery of the world we inhabit” (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p.24). This discovery and change is a direct result of the emotional response a reader may have to the stories and from the invitation for

meaningful personal reflections on their own experiences in light of the stories. It is a way to link micro and macro levels of personal and social understandings.

Walkington summarizes the necessity to create spaces for thoughtful reflection within learning communities in order to promote teacher development as follows: "The importance of dedicating sufficient time, reflecting on practice, empowering decision-making and learning through research in action is strongly recommended as means to promoting a positive and personally meaningful teacher identity" (2005, p.63).

Richardson and Placier, (2001) echo this in the discussion of value they place on reflection within learning communities in order to facilitate personal understandings of what are often tacit beliefs and understandings in order to implement change. They further suggest that it is dialogue within communities- specifically amongst colleagues who understand and share the work environment-which enhances personal reflection. This is how a collaborative autoethnography focused on inquiry-based teaching and learning informs practice in schools.

Colleague Recruitment

I shared my narratives with colleagues teaching in an inquiry-based framework at the same international school I was teaching at. This population was of interest as I attempted to make connections between my own personal teaching role and identity development with those in the profession working in the same environment. A goal of this study was to also provoke a dialogue and reflection related to learning and teaching within this particular professional community. The sharing component necessitated a common frame of reference that being a new international school offering an inquiry-based programme.

I presented the research study to my staff at a staff meeting, left participant consent forms with a “third-party neutral”, a teacher not involved in the study, for anyone who would like to participate. I stressed that teachers should not feel obliged to participate due to the nature of our professional or personal relationships. Five volunteers agreed to participate. The participants had varied experience working within inquiry-based settings and represented a cross-section of specializations within the school. The participants were asked to take part in two informal individual conversations that were recorded and transcribed. They were also asked to reflect in written form on the process of being involved in the study post-dialogue sharing. To ensure my participants continued consent to participate I verbally reminded them of their right to withdraw and I had them initial and date a record of their consent at each interview.

Colleague Dialogues

The colleague dialogues -or loosely structured conversations- were framed to provoke a dialogue amongst practicing teachers in an inquiry-based framework, inviting them to reflect on their own knowledge and beliefs related to the processes of inquiry learning and teaching. I wanted to make connections between my “truths” of my past with the experiences of others who find themselves at an international school embracing inquiry learning and teaching. I was in search of patterns in our pasts that have enabled us to share beliefs related to inquiry-based learning and teaching and our roles as teachers within such environments.

I approached this component of my study through open-ended dialogue focused on inquiry teaching and learning drawing on past experiences with colleagues on my staff who had agreed to participate in my study. Initially I met with my colleagues to begin to

establish an understanding and a place for reflection with regards to inquiry learning and teaching and teaching role identity development. I used the same focus questions I had used to guide my own autoethnographic exploration to prompt the discussion. Questions such as: “What is your story of learning?”, “What is your understanding of learning and teaching?”, “How have you come to this understanding?”, “What is inquiry?”, “What does it look like?”, “How have you come to know what inquiry is?”, “How have you learned how to facilitate inquiry?” and “How do you view yourselves as participants in the learning and teaching process?” were used to create transcripts rich in description. Despite having used some prompting questions, it was my goal to let the participants direct their own story telling and, they did just that. I recorded the initial conversations using Audacity Software (Mazzoni and Dannenberg, 2000), then transcribed them and requested them to complete member checks.

In follow-up conversations I aimed to elicit responses relating to teaching, learning and inquiry from my colleagues by sharing my own personal narratives. From my experiences and the representation of my experiences as personal narratives, I connected to my own personal culture of teaching through my own introspection, reflection and the input of my critical friends. I connected to the greater social culture of inquiry learning and of teacher identity development in general by sharing my narratives with others working at an inquiry-based school. By "making the past explicit, finding themes, identifying continuities and discontinuities sharpen[ing] and darken[ing] the lines around self and, simultaneously, the other" (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001 p. 24), these narratives created “a space for conversation, reflection and critique” (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p. 25). The development and sharing of my narratives acted as a

platform to inspire further personal understanding and community understanding of teaching identity and knowledge in inquiry-based settings supporting Bochner's (2000) suggestion that narratives open up the door as opposed to leading to closure of an exploration.

These "narrative sharing" conversations were used to inspire connections to my colleagues own pasts and to their understandings of teaching and learning in an inquiry-based environment. I wanted to know: "Do my stories resonate with their experiences?" and "If so, how?" I wanted to inspire conversations that began to explore what we as a staff may or may not have had in common in our pasts. Consequently this helped us to better understand the nature of our beliefs related to learning and teaching. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest one of the main purposes of narratives is to provoke readers to "reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathetically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogues regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered" (p. 748). Again these conversations were recorded using Audacity Software (Mazzoni and Dannenberg, 2000) and transcribed. Member checks were requested and reflections were encouraged.

Constructing Meaning

Due to the cyclical nature of narrative inquiry and the collaborative element in this study, meaning construction was on-going and recursive right from the first journal entry. Through my own dialectical notebook and the writing and sharing of my narratives I was deepening my understanding of my own experiences and likewise that of the others. Richardson and St Pierre (2005) are the authorities on writing as a method of discovery and speak to the notions of writing as thinking and as analysis itself, hence the

continuous construction of meaning from my experiences and that of my colleagues. The colleague dialogues and reflections also allowed us all to consider who we are and the kinds of experiences we had inside and outside of school, values, beliefs, and aspirations; all of which had profound influence on who we were as teachers. Sorting through all the data and making some meaning of it was messy, complicated and uncertain as qualitative data often is (Bochner, 2000). The process of constructing meaning in order to address the original research questions required creative manipulation and careful thought and interpretation of the data.

Colleague Dialogue Analysis

The conversations with colleagues were recorded and transcribed, and subsequently reflected on by each respective colleague and myself. Initially I engaged with my colleagues' data with the use of coloured pen, memoing as a form of semantic analysis of the transcripts. I was looking for patterns in language and the primitive formation of cultural categories. I also used NUD*IST Vivo (Richards, 1999-2000) software (NVivo) to identify recurring patterns of data associated with our experiences pertinent to inquiry-based teaching and learning and role identity development. I read across the data noting similarities and contrasts and highlighting cultural categories as an element of the componential analysis (Spradley, 1979). Nodes and Tree clusters were formed to highlight such commonalities and contrasts between participant transcripts in NVivo. This component of the analysis helped me to organize my data and also to manage the untidiness of the data itself.

Engaging with the transcripts in a non-linear fashion and identifying key words and sentences allowed me to further interpret and consider the following questions: What

were my colleagues experiences? What did and do their experiences mean? How do they connect to me, each other, and to teaching and learning in an inquiry-based learning environment?

The representations of my participants' data evolved as a form of attribute table in columns highlighting different demographic characteristics and a domain table of respective understandings and experiences. These tables were a basic way of showing commonality and contrast across symbols in a domain (Spradley, 1980). This portion of the study aimed to make meaning of the sharing process in order to locate my own and my colleagues' past experiences in the context of beliefs about inquiry learning and teaching.

With an interest in maintaining the integrity of my colleagues' data in the domain table, I pared down the data into dominant ideas and themes. I presented summaries of the data in relation to the questions I used to frame my own autoethnography. Having established my domains for analysis in the framing questions and having analyzed the data through the use of a variety of methods as suggested above, I then inventoried the contrasts and connections looking for relationships to my colleagues and my experiences and our understandings of inquiry learning and teaching (Spradley, 1980).

Colleague Debriefing/Reflection

I shared my meaning making throughout the study with the participating colleagues to inspire further reflection and discussion. The sharing referred to above and the analysis of the sharing process indicated the credibility and value of the study. I created space for the participants in my study to challenge my interpretations and the meanings of our stories. An initial reflection was proposed via email to the participants

with regards to the value of their participation in the sharing process from their perspective. I asked for feedback based on what the process was like for each individual, what was taken away from the conversations we had and how the process deepened understanding of the topic in question (their relationship to inquiry-based learning). This colleague debriefing and reflection was used to inspire continued dialogue amongst my participants, a developing “learning community” (Hargreaves, 2003).

Ethical Concerns

Due to the nature of the research questions and the autoethnographic means used for investigation, I was mindful of the need for openness, self-awareness and commitment to self-exposure, integrity and honesty in my introspection and representation of my personal experiences. I was also conscious of the need to respect privacy and confidentiality of those who were present in my represented experiences. Due to the nature of their relationship to me, or with me in the experiences, I could not guarantee complete anonymity of those who played significant roles. However with the use of pseudonyms and indistinguishable settings I did make an effort to conceal their true identities. While some significant characters in my stories are identifiable, I have done my best to represent them in a dignified way.

The colleagues who participated in the sharing component of my research were made well aware of the expectations and the demands of their participation in this research study. They were given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during the process. They all signed participant consent forms prior to commencing the interview style conversations and again before each subsequent engagement.

I did have a prior relationship with the colleagues participating in my research: I was their professional colleague and friend. I was conscious of the fact that I had an understanding of them, their personal histories, their teaching and their learning from a collegial and friendly perspective. This did allow for a richness and a deeper level of discussion in our conversations, and I could draw on our common experience in the development of our dialogues without compromising the integrity of their responses. I thought it was also important that I position myself as a listening facilitator of the conversations who provided ample space and time for personal reflection and construction of new understandings despite my prior knowledge of the participants' experiences. I tried to separate my subjective knowledge of my colleagues in the formal data analysis and stick to the meanings articulated through their responses in our "on the record" conversations.

The colleagues I shared my narratives with had their anonymity protected by the use of pseudonyms. Again however, due to the nature of their personal experiences and the professional proximity they have to me, their identities may be discernable. They were made aware of this potential.

Judging Authenticity of Approach

I made several choices to increase "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to minimize concerns over authenticity of this research. An autoethnographer's litmus test for validity is the notion of verisimilitude (Sparkes, 2002, p. 204). The stories told should have a ring of truth to them and evoke a connection with the reader. Winograd said in his self-study of teacher emotions, "the believability of the study, in the end, will be the readers' responsibility to imagine themselves in my shoes" (2003, p.1650). My

challenge was to connect with readers outside of my particular teaching context and have them relate my stories to their own contexts. I wrote my narratives with an air of verisimilitude as I attempted to make sense of my world, locating my particular biographical experiences in larger historical and sociological contexts. The ability of my narratives to inspire connections to the reader's experience, evoke emotional responses and provoke a dialogue about understanding and practice of inquiry in school learning environments also contribute to the credibility, transferability and value of the research process. The credibility and coherence were also attended to through peer debriefing and collaboration with my 'critical friends' in the autoethnography component. The sharing of my narratives, the member checks of the transcripts and debriefing with regards to my findings with colleagues working in an inquiry-based framework also contributed to the coherence of this study.

Ultimately, if my insights on inquiry learning and teaching helped others construct an understanding of where their beliefs and knowledge to teach this way comes from then the autoethnographic research design was appropriate. The aim was to create a place, space and time for personal reflection, connection, construction of new understandings for all those involved and thus offering an authentic and meaningful learning experience.

Challenges of Method

In an autoethnography, the findings of the study are subjective and deeply rooted in personal interpretation. A challenge of autoethnography put forth by Holman Jones (2005) is that of telling and showing our stories. These stories "are not only necessary but also full of possibilities" (Ellis, 2000, p. 275) and they have the potential to make the

personal political (Burdell & Swadener, 1999). One of the primary criticisms of autoethnography as a genre suggests self-indulgence and narcissism however this focus on the self is necessary as "writing of the self involves at the same time, writing about the 'other'" (Mykhlovskiy, 1996 p. 133: as cited in Sparkes, 2002 p. 92).

In order to create meaningful stories and thoroughly investigate myself and my own interpretations of my experiences, I required openness, self-awareness and commitment to self-exposure, all of which were challenging. Also, meaningful selection, rejection, presentation and representation of experiences in creating personal narratives was a difficult task in order to create the desired aesthetic merit of narratives. I found cutting information out to be extremely challenging. I struggled with the subjective nature of the creative process. It was difficult to choose what to represent and what really has been important in my development of my understanding of identity, teaching, learning and inquiry. The writing process was non-linear particularly as a result of the continuous engagements with my dialectical notebook. It involved synthesizing, assembling, composing and digesting ongoing developments in my data.

Another challenge that was presented during the sharing process was the notion of different personal interpretations of the learning and teaching process and more specifically of inquiry learning and teaching. There was a sense of an implicit common identity evident in the fact that the teachers at this particular school have selected to teach in an inquiry learning and teaching environment in an international school setting. However, interpretations and subsequent practices differ due to the fact that each teacher has had different experiences and insights shaping teacher knowledge and beliefs. Identifying some common thread in our understanding of, or reflection on, inquiry

learning and teaching in the classroom was fundamental in order to get at the commonalities in the experiences of our pasts. Along the same lines, this was not a study appraising teacher's effectiveness at applying inquiry-based practices in their teaching. It was an exploration of our understandings and past experiences ideally leading to new perspectives and understandings, and as Conle (2000) suggests, this exploration using autoethnography and narratives may have inspired investigation of a problem or tension in practice.

Finally, the notion of time was a challenge in the process of this autoethnographic exploration. As each day passed, with each new experience, my view of the world continued to change as a result of time. Where do I stop writing? Learning and growing is a process that will continue far beyond my research here. Also, as my colleagues and I shared our understandings, new constructions of meaning resulted, informing and changing my own interpretations of teaching and learning. Bochner summarizes the openness of the methodology quite eloquently as "the narrative does not lead to closure, to a problem resolved. Rather it leads to a situation revealed, an open-ended instance that invites questioning and further dialogue on conforming ways in which we can learn...It is a text to be continued" (2000, p.141).

CHAPTER IV-UNPACKING THE PAST AND WHO I HAD BECOME

My Autoethnography

The “text to be continued” that is my story started off in a reflection journal. Articulating, interacting with, and considering different thoughts ideas and experiences through my journal gave way to identifying significant socializing agents and personal past experiences that have helped me construct my teacher knowledge and establish my own personal teaching identity. Upon revisiting, rearranging and constantly reflecting with the written notebook, I began to generate autoethnographic data and eventually came to notice that I was writing about a few issues over and over again, always in different contexts. They were personal tensions; the dialogue I was having with myself was creating discomfort. By unpacking these tensions and my past experiences, more questions and answers about who I was continued to emerge. I was as honest as I could possibly be in exploring unexplored memories and experiences. The tensions were based on my past as a person, student, athlete, daughter, sister, and teacher. Underlying the tensions were themes of trust, voice, responsibility, experiential learning, empowerment, family values, social learning, problem solving, support, role of teacher, respect and the notion of success. I began to write about significant experiences to deeply consider my past and further explore the developing themes. Also, the unpacking and narrative writing allowed me to see in a different light how my experiences resonated and were connected. I began to see that they were all parts of a puzzle, a puzzle leading me to how I understand learning and myself.

Critical Friends

I shared my reflections on the process and my initial narratives with my critical friends -invited members of my web based Blog, titled “Critical Friends: Autoethnography and Inquiry”. Their responses ranged from sharing their own personal experiences to challenging me to further explore developing ideas and thoughts. My critical friends also began to confirm some of the themes I was beginning to identify. The following is an example of my initial post inviting my critical friends into my inquiry, PE and autoethnographic exploration.

Miranda's Autoethnography Inquiry and PE: Critical Friends' Discussion

I am embarking on a journey exploring and reflecting on my past experiences looking to identify significant socializing agents in the formation of my teaching identity and my interest in inquiry learning and teaching, specifically in PE. I hope to consider and unpack: What are my significant experiences? What do they mean? How have the meanings emerged? How do the experiences connect with each other? How do the experiences connect with inquiry learning and teaching. And, how do the experiences connect to my teaching role identity. I will be using personal journals to help in my own self-introspection and ultimately narratives representing my lived experiences related to the nature of my teaching practice and understanding of identity. This Blog site will offer a space for me to share my personal data, receive feedback and challenge me further in my introspection. It will also add an element of collaboration to my autoethnographic exploration. Of you, my critical friends, because of your experiences in teaching and in understanding of autoethnographic research as well as your critical abilities, I ask for you to challenge me in this process. Read through my posts, respond,

challenge and question my interpretations. I think it will be an exciting journey for us all.

I started exploring both through the Blog and further into my own dialectical notebook and began to find a voice and share my thoughts, ideas and questions. The following is a post from my Blog representing how I was feeling throughout the unpacking and systematic sociological introspection.

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in stories because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is in the getting lost [for] if you're lost you really start to look around and listen." (Metzger, 1986, p.104) I am lost in my stories... I am circling about in practice, in reflection and trying to make connections. It's amazing but it's got my head spinning. My journal is a "mess" I have scratchings - mostly on where I am now- teaching PE- why? -what and how? -team teaching- masculinity in PE- how/where do I fit? -what is important to me as a teacher of these students? -what do I see? -what do I look for? -how do I know? -who are my kids and does that shape how I teach? I have my eyes and ears open observing other teachers in our school and their understandings of inquiry- especially those new to an inquiry-based curriculum, why are some getting it and some not so much... What happened to me when inquiry was first presented to me? -did I have an AH HA moment?.. I have found the easiest place to start is where I'm at now. I am focusing on: what I actually do- and it's beginning to link to why I do it - which starts the circles spinning... How do I know what's important to really write

about?

POSTED BY MIRANDA ROSE AT 12:32 AM

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2006

Sorting through these stories and engaging with memories from my past was shedding light on different experiences and incidents in my life that had enabled me to value inquiry-based teaching as a critical element of learning in PE. I began to see connections and develop more questions to pursue. And thus, from the questions, reflections and engaging with my memories, my own personal narratives developed to represent these experiences.

Narratives

The themes I referred to, such as trust, voice, responsibility, experiential learning, empowerment, family values, social learning, problem solving, support, role of teacher, respect and the notions of success are explored through my narratives. They in some way represent events or experiences that were vital to my understanding and thinking about the world. They were the partial answers to the questions of who I was (Palmer, 1998). My personal narratives represent significant critical incidents in my life (Bullough & Gitlin, 2001). The themes evolved, changed direction and fostered new interpretations of the past and present. The narrative construction explored events that happened to me, they are experiences seared in my memory, captured on the page. Roald Dahl shares some of his own personal stories in “*Boy Tales of Childhood*” (1984) and explains that “none of these things is important, but each of them made such a tremendous impression on me that I have never been able to get them out of my mind” (p.7), summarizing clearly

how I feel about my narratives. The creation and initial sharing of these narratives inspired me to further unpack the themes they represented.

Responsibility, Trust and Inspiration to Act

The following narrative embodies an experience I had in high school. The themes it represents include trust, experiential learning, responsibility, empowerment, action and teacher role.

“The Water Project”

It was the same classroom I'd had the year before for grade nine science. The rows of desks attached to chairs were the same as they'd been when I'd left the year before. The tall black lab benches were shiny and clean, the corkboards were blank, the glass cupboards were locked and full of microscopes and there was the familiar faint smell of science.

All twelve of us came in and took our seats. We were the students in grade 10 who could afford to skip the “standard” advanced grade 10 science course. We had applied to be in this “other” class, we'd been accepted, and there we were, on the first day –with no idea where we were going.

The teacher, Mr Hayes, a tall softly spoken man stood amongst us. He didn't make any speeches, he didn't perform a first day rules and regulations dance. Instead he simply asked us to write something/anything about 3 environmental issues that mattered to us. As we wrote he introduced himself to each of us individually. He took his time and with each of us took sincere interest in what we were writing about. He made his way around the class and eventually under my watchful eyes made his way to the front of the class. He didn't say

anything. Mr Hayes went to the chalkboard and simply wrote "Why?" And "What are you going to do about it?" I clearly remember shifting in my seat at the back of the classroom and thinking "What does he mean? Shouldn't we just be going over the course syllabus today?" It was only the first day.

Mr Hayes left the questions on the board and gave us an uncomfortably long silent time to ponder. He then asked us to share our issues and see if we could figure out how our identified concerns related to each other if they did at all? The conversation took off- from greenhouse gases to radioactivity, animal extinction to waste management. We had quite a discussion and eventually came to the conclusion that all our issues were related in many ways. One connection Mr Hayes highlighted from our discussion was that in some way all of the concerns we had were also all related to water. Water in our world would be our central focus for the class and of our exploration for the rest of the semester.

That semester the desks were in rows in our classroom, just like they'd been in grade nine, but we rarely sat in them. We were far too busy. We had a class van from General Motors and we used it. We were out in the world learning...

We lived smack in the middle of the world's largest fresh water supply- the Great Lakes. The Trent Valley is what the geographical area is called. There is a combination of natural rivers and lakes as well as a man made canal system called the Trent-Severn waterway that connects two of the five Great Lakes. It's cottage country, a boating heaven, fishing paradise and endless miles of beautiful back-country to be explored. It is also an important transportation waterway.

We travelled about, we researched, we tested, we monitored, we recorded, we shared and we presented about the quality of water in our watershed. We found and created gizmos and gadgets to perform our eight tests for water quality. Unfortunately what we were finding in our tests was alarming. We presented to local authorities, we took part in rallies, we gave up our weekends, we even took part in a video-conference with a gathering of UN representatives sharing our findings and concerns. The internet in that time known as the World Wide Web was a new medium to all of us- including Mr Hayes. With his guidance, and a high tech dial up modem in our classroom, we learned to post our findings on message boards. We received responses and feedback from environmental agencies and activist groups. We were doing something important. We were taking action. It was exciting and I was so proud to be a part of the class.

We also continued to investigate our own environmental concerns- we had to choose one of the concerns we identified on the very first day of the semester. I chose damming rivers as my issue. I had read an article about a dam planned in China in the newspaper the weekend before the semester started. Though my research was on the cultural implication of damming, I, a 15 year old girl, was approached to become a point person for advocacy against damming in North America by an underground Malaysian environmental agency... I didn't even know where Malaysia was! Mr Hayes suggested I inform the group that maybe I wasn't the person they were looking for unless I was seriously interested. I agreed that maybe I wasn't the best person for the job. What an amazing compliment to be taken seriously by an outside, real world organization, even if they were an

underground movement millions of miles away. What I was learning was meaningful and actually mattered.

Throughout the whole class Mr. Hayes walked with us- not behind us and not in front of us. He was learning with us and he was just as excited about the whole project as we were. He asked us questions he didn't know the answers to. He asked us questions there were no answers to. He had a quiet way of challenging us to find out more and then always encouraged us to share our findings. He listened carefully, he helped us adjust our sails, but he never really captained the ship we were on. We were doing the steering. Even though the chairs were attached to the desks, we could arrange those desks whichever way suited us. We were doing the learning. We were responsible. What we were doing mattered. And, I remember it like it was yesterday.

This narrative represents a 'critical incident' in my life in which I was afforded the opportunity to be involved in meaningful action through my own schooling. It was experiential learning in which our classroom was out in the world and our eyes were opened to the potential we had, to make a difference. It was amazing and challenging for me. We, the year 10 students, were supported by a teacher who was challenging the norms of traditional schooling at the time in terms of pedagogy and teaching practice. Through his facilitation, he empowered his students to inquire, investigate, share and act. He put his trust in us and gave us responsibility to steer our learning. His teaching style inspired me. He was a role model for me and he helped shape the conception I had constructed of a teacher's role and the type of teacher I aspired to be.

My critical friends reflected on the initial drafts of "The Water Project" and the

dialogue challenged me to reflect even further taking into account different perspectives. It forced me to consider the authenticity of my interpretations and of my narratives. A significant measure of the verisimilitude of the narratives was provoking a variety of “threaded” discussions in my Blog. The following is an example of a thread that started a discussion and further reflection:

Lola said:

The most beautiful part of your story for me was your comment: he asked questions that he didn't know the answers to. As teachers we are often afraid of 'not knowing' since 'knowing' is a socially constructed part of a teacher identity. How do we disrupt this socially constructed perception of teachers - for teachers, parents, and students.

JANUARY 21, 2007 4:33:00 PM PST

From this post, I was inspired to reflect in the Blog on the socially constructed perception of teachers and learning, my own perceived role as a teacher and how Mr Hayes fit with my understandings

Miranda Rose said...

"Mr Hayes" had courage. He had passion. He had us at the centre of the programme. This was one of my few- "meaningful" learning experiences at high school. And I guess my first real inquiry-based learning within the parameters of public high school.

January 24, 2007 7:33:00 AM PST

Mr Hayes was a model teacher for me. He created an active and experiential learning environment filled with trust and inspired action. He gave us responsibility for

our own learning and for sharing our learning. Grade 10 science challenged me and influenced how I see learning and teaching.

Collaborative Girl Power

Another memorable experience that helped me to construct my understanding of learning, teaching and who I was in the midst of it all takes place on the shores of a beautiful lake in northern Ontario. This represents the developing themes of trust, responsibility, empowerment, problem solving and social learning.

“How to Build a Fence”

There’s a buzz around the campfire- everyone’s busy recounting the past winter’s events. We’ve all had busy seasons in our respective corners of the world and for months we’ve been looking forward to re-uniting with our camp “sisters” in our little all-girls camp summer paradise.

Tomorrow official counsellor/work week begins. We, this summer’s staff need to take this wilderness lakefront residential summer camp out of hibernation in preparation for the coming season. Everything from cleaning out cobwebs, moving furniture and equipment, painting, weed-whacking and lawn-mowing, to building docks and basic maintenance around camp are now the responsibility of an eclectic bunch of girls from all over the globe. Most of us have been through this before and we know the hard work ahead of us this week. The list of “to do’s” is comprehensive and at first glance looks way too long to fathom.

After a mosquito infested first night sleep in the wilderness, in bunk beds in “the most clean cabin” and a brisk June morning early bird dip in the lake, we’re all eager to get this camp up and running. Though the job lists seem

endless, we've got our enthusiasm and confidence that we'll make it- we always do.

We divide ourselves into work groups and set off to tackle the "to do's". Myself, Laila and Lindsay decide to tackle the tasks of the back fields and courts. I've been at camp 4 years now, as a camper, as a junior counselor and now as a senior counsellor. My family home is just under 4 hours away, which makes me pretty much a local around here. Laila is from Australia. She takes time away from Australian winter and her studies to become a teacher, to play with us up here. She is madly in love with camp, she has more energy than anyone I've ever met and she has a wicked sense of humour. Lindsay has come through the ranks at camp, as a camper and counsellor in training. She comes to us from the US and she's one of the hardest working people I've ever met. It should be a great day working with these two fabulous girls.

We start with the tennis courts. They definitely need weeding, the lines have faded but also the net is lopsided and the backstop is completely useless. The frame for the chain link fence backstop that prevents the balls from bouncing out onto the archery range and golf driving range is still up but the chain link fence has suffered years of wear and tear, little maintenance and a few hard northern Ontario winters. The backstop is torn, seriously rusted and is tragically succumbing to gravity. It's one of the first views of camp as you reach the clearing after the 1.5 km wooded dirt road that leads from the main country road to camp. It must be addressed- if even just for aesthetic merits. We certainly have

a challenge ahead of us. We need to rebuild a backstop and we need to do it quickly.

We try to figure out how the original fence was supported on the frame. We spend about one half hour examining the structure. I had watched the “fence men” build a fence around my family’s swimming pool about 20 years ago, and Laila assures us that her skills with tools will get us through. Lindsay, well she’s the artist and she has a vision of how this project will pan out. We trust in each other as resources and get down to work. Laila and I head to the tool and maintenance sheds to see if we can find any resources that may be of use. Meanwhile, Lindsay attempts to disassemble what’s left of the current backstop. After a serious wrestling match and a few close calls, the old backstop ends up in a heaping mess of a pile.

Laila and I find a large roll of green shiny chain link fence, we find the tallest ladder on the property, a few random pieces of wire, wire cutters and a few other tools that look like they may be of use. We think we’re set. We however have no idea how we’re going to get the fence up on the steel pipe frame that’s still standing. We explore several ideas- some of which are completely ridiculous and some of which would require some serious technical skills. The bottom line is, this backstop needs to be functional, look good and it needs to be up pronto. We admit that none of us are experienced chain link fence builders- actually for that matter, none of us are builders at all. For some this may be a reason to quit- but to this group- just one more reason to dive further in.

We come up with a rough plan. We'll cut three sections of the fencing the width of the frame and attach the three sheets of the three meter high chain link fence together to have roughly eight meters in height. From the ground where we've attached the sections of fencing, we will hoist it up and hang it on the frame using a sophisticated rope pulley system. With the rope pulley system still in place for support we will then, while balancing carefully the massive ladder, attach our big backstop fence to the frame using smaller wires.

Its mid morning and the sun is high in the sky. Jasmine, a counsellor from the East coast of Canada, is out with us on the backfields whipping about on the riding lawnmower. All we can hear is the murmur of the lawnmower and the birds off in the forest. It's getting hot. We decide to get down to work.

We have the old fence down and the frame still in tact and standing tall. We cut the new green chain link fence to measure using some 'interesting' wire cutting techniques (and a few minor injuries as a result). We set up a pulley system using nylon yellow ropes -the yellow rope that is difficult to tie, and really hurts your hands if you try to work with it for too long. With the ropes somewhat securely fastened and a few large "heave-ho's" under the afternoon sun, we quickly realize our first plan isn't quite going to cut it. We are a bit disappointed, and now a bit stumped at what we're going to do. We need to go back, reassess, re-evaluate and modify our plan. We need to regroup. It must be time for a water break.

Sitting in the dining hall out of the strong sun for a few minutes in the historic main-house surrounded by faces who have built and played at camp in

the 70+ summers past, is good for our brains. We make our way back to the tennis courts with newfound inspiration in the camp spirit and the girls who have come before us as well as a battery powered radio blaring Australian pop tunes. Laila thought we needed some soul music. So, trying to learn the lingo of the imported songs, we get back to work. Lindsay has been thinking long and hard about what we need to do to get this fence up. She is convinced our original plan will work, we simply need more hands to get it up.

We recruit Jasmine from her post on the riding lawnmower off in the distance. With her help, and much laughter, we hoist the fence up using our ropes. We attach the ground end ropes to the old water well and to Laila who has agreed to act as an anchor. I wish I had a camera! I climb up the unsteady ladder that's leaning on the backstop frame and start frantically weaving wire around the top of the new green fence and the frame. It's hot, we're all a bit delirious and many moments I fear for my safety and ultimately I fear that this project is going to fail miserably.

My fingers are raw and my cheeks are killing me I've been laughing so hard. Our backstop is up and barely hanging on. It's far from perfect but it's a backstop. Lindsay the artist and slight perfectionist, takes her turn up on the ladder and tries to clean up my work. We slowly make our way across the whole frame and it seems to be staying up. We let Laila out from her anchor position and still the fence stays. I really can't believe it's staying up. I'm not convinced it will stay up and so I climb back up and add more than enough reinforcements. I'd rather be safe than sorry; it's getting a bit excessive though when I've practically

attached every square of the chain link fence that comes in contact with the frame individually to the frame. Now the true test; we let the anchor ropes to the water well out slowly and still our backstop stays. We are proud of our structure, we do a little dance to the Australian music and we laugh some more.

Up close this backstop is not pretty, but from afar it looks great. It should withstand some serious tennis ball pounding and the summer weather at least. We needed a new backstop, and so we three girls built one.

Almost ten years later, I drive up the camp road – memories flood my head and heart. I can hear the songs and laughter of the past. This camp has made me the person I am today. I come through the clearing and I smile when I see where that backdrop used to stand- it didn't last the first winter- but it served its' purpose that summer when Laila, Lindsay and I built it.

This is a story from the camp where I spent my summers. It is a mere glimpse of a world I was a part of. This particular residential camp was an annual summer community. It was a safe environment for girls to be ourselves, to develop our physical and social skills and to challenge us to grow into women of the world who could affect change. We made mistakes, we learned, we trusted, we were given responsibility and we had no choice but to work together and learn through our experiences.

The narrative of the fence building connects to my understanding of learning in the sense that we had to believe in ourselves to persevere, pool our knowledge, share perspectives, commit and engage in the process. We had a vested interest in learning how to build a fence, the whole process was meaningful to us. This connects to what I

understood learning to be. Learning must connect to existing cognitive structures, have a social element to it and be inspired by need or interest.

We were empowered as girls at this camp and it shaped not only how I saw myself but also, the types of experiences I looked to create for my learners. When given the chance, we can inquire, take responsibility and care about what we do, even in the face of the status quo norms. I want to facilitate experiential learning, hand over responsibility to my students, challenge them and support them in the process, all of which are essential to constructivist teaching and learning.

Respect: A Two Way Street

My next narrative taps in to who I was as an athlete, and how that has shaped my identity as a PE teacher and coach. The themes of respect, role of coach/PE teacher, the notion of success, empowerment as learner, voice and social learning are all embodied in this story. All these themes again relate to my valuing inquiry as a PE teacher.

“The Coach”

“Hi I’m Dave, I expect a lot from my swimmers, we work hard, we workout a lot and I can be moody. Do you still want to come swim with us?”

These were the first words he ever spoke to me. He was a new coach in our region and he was the coach at the club I was about to transfer to. He didn’t know much about me, nor did I know much about him. That afternoon between heats and finals at a regional championship meet, we had a nice chat about expectations, goals, my swimming history, my training programme and life in general. He wasn’t sure about taking me on: I was a senior swimmer about to jump ship on a programme I’d swum in for over 10 years, the drive from my home to this new

pool was 60km, and I was a sprinter and he was more inclined to coach distance athletes. Fortunately, he was willing to give me a chance.

Dave quickly realized I was not a typical swimmer, that my body couldn't handle the huge amount of miles some swimmers put in the pool. His background had been in big "mileage" programmes. He was more or less a distance coach and most of the swimmers at the club were distance swimmers. I was not. The thing that puzzled him about me was that I was making half the workouts the squad had and yet I was swimming just as fast as those making every workout. I think I actually made him re-think his philosophy with regards to quality and quantity of miles in the water. The programme I'd come from probably swam the fewest number of miles total in the country and yet we had national and international level swimmers in the programme. We always worked hard at workouts and we had sound technical skills. All of our miles were quality. My previous coach had been a swimming technician and challenged us to really think about our swimming and our technique. I learned how to think about my strokes from her and I understood when something was off or if something could be improved.

I swam for Dave for two years, my last years of high school, and they were good years. I felt good about my swimming and I felt good about who I was as an athlete. I imagined it would be the same at the next club I swam for. And so after high school graduation, I set off for university with little thought about Dave. I was onto the next coach and the next chapter in my swimming life.

I showed up to swim at university and I quickly realized didn't have quite the same respect for my new coach as I did for Dave or my childhood coach. My university coach was fun, he was young and hip, and had been an excellent swimmer himself, but he couldn't answer my questions and he didn't really inspire me. He was a swimmer who had become a coach on route to his next career move. He was coaching as an interim position; he wasn't passionate about coaching swimming. He wasn't passionate about coaching us as athletes.

As in any sport, some people wear success and disappointment on their sleeves. I was pretty neutral on the outside; success or disappointment, I didn't let many people into what I was thinking or feeling. And I especially didn't share how I was feeling with a coach who I didn't think took the time to get to know his swimmers and appreciate us as individual athletes. I'm sure this frustrated my university coach but I just didn't trust him. I struggled my first two years of university swimming as an injured athlete unable to communicate with my coach. I didn't have faith that he had his swimmers' best interests in mind when making decisions about training and in my case, healing. He didn't listen the way my others coaches did, he didn't have any apparent regard for pastoral care of his athletes, unlike Dave or my childhood coach. They made decisions that would benefit the athlete –me, and my development as opposed to being completely driven by immediate performance results. I actually resented him because I blamed him for my injuries in the first place. My body just couldn't handle the mileage he asked of me, and in spite of my injuries, he continued to push.

I made it through those first two years of university swimming but I was not sure what the future held for me and swimming from that point on. I wasn't happy as a swimmer. In the spring of my second year, my university coach announced he was moving on. He had accepted a different posting in a different profession altogether. He was being replaced. And to my delight, my former coach Dave was moving to my college town to take over the city club and the university squad.

My old coach Dave was about to become my new coach. I was ecstatic. I had a relationship with him, I trusted him. I actually trusted him even more than I had as a swimmer at our former club. Dave had coached my brother the past two years. My brother is quite similar to me, but he was far more gifted physically and much more committed to swimming and success in swimming. Dave had coached my brother to national success. Most importantly my brother had success in the sprint disciplines; not Dave's specialty, the distance events. I think my little brother reinforced the theories Dave started considering when I was his athlete. I think Dave changed his views of the sport, of individual athletes, of training and of coaching in part due to my brother and I. He realized there were different types of athletes, different perspectives on the sport and a need for individualization in programming and facilitation. He became a much more "holistic" coach who listened to his athletes.

Dave came into our university programme and immediately sang a different tune to the one he'd sung to me the first time we'd met. He would run the

squad in distinct programmes: one for sprinters and one for long distance swimmers.

He got to know the swimmers on our team. He was committed to helping us meet our goals in the pool and in life. He would hold up his end of the bargain, as long as we as athletes were committed to working hard and holding up our end. I had a whole new love for swimming, and I wanted to get faster. I was inspired. I felt valued in my efforts and trusted in my abilities to know myself, and what I needed.

As the next two years unfolded, Dave stepped back as a coach and learned with my team-mates and I. He would suggest different ideas and we would try them out. He would ask for and listen to our feedback. He gave me more responsibility in my training; Dave would ask what I thought I needed and he would make an effort to fit it in. We had some great discussions and a few disagreements but he treated me as a partner in my swimming journey and he respected me as an athlete. I also really loved his enthusiasm and excitement at his swimmers accomplishments. He was passionate about coaching. He loved it when athletes worked hard, he loved engaging in discussions about swimming, he was open-minded to new innovations in the sport and he was willing to do whatever he needed to do to support his athletes.

I had the best swim seasons of my life in my final two years of university with Dave as my coach. Mostly I felt accomplished and proud of my own development, even if my times weren't my best ever. I had control and direction of

my “course”. Dave as a coach supported me. Dave gave me the room to grow as an athlete and the room to become the swimmer I wanted to be.

My critical friends validated the themes this narrative represents in their comments and in their sharing of personal experiences in my Blog. Their comments challenged me to further explore the influence this particular coach had in shaping how I coach and teach PE. Their comments also gave authenticity to the tensions I was beginning to explore related to teaching PE and coaching related to responsibility, voice, trust, success in sport, respect and role.

Lola said...

Coaching is often viewed as the epitome of teaching because the pressure is on to prove success (often in your players' performance). I too tried to initially coach basketball players and fast-pitch players where they were at -meeting their needs - but my basketball coaching was questioned and replaced by two other coaches who came in and coached for a championship - they didn't listen to anyone. I see that listening is key here to learner-based settings. I then question how we help teachers learn how to create these spaces of backing off as Dave did and tap into the potential of each student. I find that many student teachers are nervous about not seeming in control - I think they are not used to seeing learning occur that is loud, random, or not quite what they had planned learning to look like. Some of this ability to create spaces for students to learn is to have confidence that you are doing the right thing and that others will recognize your teaching style as beneficial or powerful.

FEBRUARY 23, 2007 1:02:00 PM PST

Lola's connection to the narrative and her experience coaching re-affirmed for me the idea that Dave was exceptional in the world of coaching. His actions challenged a traditional didactic approach that Lola eluded to. She also challenged me to consider what this means in the larger picture of sport and PE world. The listening, the empowerment and the success he facilitated were critical in my construction of coaching role and identity. They were also significant as I developed an understanding of teaching in the physical education domain.

Dylan supported the value I attributed to my experience with Dave as a coach and his learner/swimmer centred approach and she also connected this experience and the theme of respect with a greater "inquiry" community with the following Blog comment:

Dylan said...

I read with interest your story about swimming - and Dave - the difference in your coaches and how you interacted. But really, the question I began to wonder about - came because as I got to know you just a little bit as a professional - it seems to me that respect features extremely strongly in all that you do - which is very interesting as the colleague of mine who is doing her doctorate work on what makes teachers come to or be a part of the inquiry learning process has much the same thread running through her work - respect for oneself, for others, for the process - comes through loud and clear - what does that mean for teachers who effectively facilitate inquiry?

FEBRUARY 28, 2007 12:55:00 AM PST

Dylan's comment made me further reflect on the theme of respect in my life, in teaching and in sport to compliment my experiences with Dave as a coach:

Miranda Rose said...

I have been thinking about "respect" a lot lately. I have an understanding of what it feels like to be respected as a learner and as an athlete. Also, from my journaling and reflection- I have come to realise that one of my most significant role models in education and in life is one of the most respectful people I can imagine. I can't remember any explicit lessons about RESPECT from my dad, but in everything he did and does, he does with the utmost respect for those around him and the environments in which he finds himself. He was a school principal in the public system in Ontario who saw the "something special" in every staff member, every student and every opportunity he came across in his career. He worked in rural villages turning schools around, he was the principal of the Children's Aid school programme in our town, he worked in low socio-economic schools and he worked in more affluent school populations making a difference. He made an impact and was respected in all of his roles. To this day, my dad assumes good will in all even when disappointed, or challenged. He can step beyond, gain perspective and appreciate individuals' circumstances, histories and make every attempt to understand the underlying issues. He was a highly respected professional, a highly respected member of the community and obviously is still a highly respected dad!

I look at my brother as well. He is a professional/amateur athlete and one of the qualities I most admire in him is his ability to respect and admire his competition. When beaten he appreciates the performances of those who have challenged him to work harder. And, as one can imagine there are many different personalities in

his sporting world. Matt values the diversity within a fairly "streamlined" (no pun intended) community. In a "profession" that is literally a "race to be the best" my brother is a really respectful and respected elite athlete. It's fascinating to start making these connections!!!

MARCH 2, 2007 1:14:00 AM PST

Respect continued to be an important concept to me, and it shaped the teaching style and philosophy that I valued. Inquiry is learner-centred and it is dependent on respect for the learners involved, respect for self as teacher, respect for the learning process and respect for the potential we have to construct meaningful understanding in our own directions. I was given respect and empowered as a learner/athlete. I was trusted and given a voice in my training and learning. I had a basketball coach who gave me a voice to speak on behalf of my team in high school and a swim coach who when I told him I was tired or injured or unsure of something, he would deeply consider this and we would modify my workouts accordingly. I had coaches who trusted me, and respected what I knew about myself. I also saw respect modelled by significant persons in my family life. These all enabled me to understand how important the concept of respect is in relation to powerful learning.

To Be a Teacher: Challenging and Reinforcing My Identity

I learned more about respect and learner-centred approaches to teaching through my first teaching job. The following describes the tensions I felt as I explored who I was as a teacher in a foreign curriculum framework. It was a framework that resonated with how I understood learning but challenged the traditional system I had grown up in and done my pre-service teacher training in. This narrative specifically represents the themes

of teacher role and identity as well as my conceptualisation of learning itself.

“I Thought I Knew”

I was fresh out of teacher’s college- I thought I knew what I was doing. I had read all the books, I had come through my practical experience with flying colours and I had more than enough job offers for a first year teacher. I was sure I wanted to teach in some sense, but not in a public school, not around home- really not in just any school, and not in just any classroom.

I decided to go overseas and work in a boarding school, as a teacher, team teaching with an experienced teacher and as a supervisor in the school boarding house. I made the journey with really little idea of what lay ahead. I arrived, settled in, and got straight into work and living in a foreign land.

What amazed me first off was that the students were so similar to the students I knew back in Canada. The students at this international school were from diverse cultural backgrounds, for the most part privileged upbringings and they came from fairly wealthy and educated backgrounds; but they were none the less kids at school, day in day out going through a school system. Some students did their homework, some didn’t and just like at home they all had strengths and weaknesses. There were students with learning disabilities, social issues, and interesting behaviour just like students I knew back in Canada.

I was so fortunate in this experience for many reasons. It was my first taste of truly living an adventure; I was learning so much everyday about the world, about teaching and learning, about life and about myself.

A large part of this remarkable first teaching experience can be accredited to the staff I was so lucky to be a part of. Looking back I can see just how amazing the assembled teachers at this particular international school were. They came from all corners of the world, they had some incredible stories and experiences and they were all at this new school for an adventure and challenge. I think also, many of them shared a common understanding of teaching and learning. Going into that first job, I thought I knew a lot about teaching, learning and students; I had no idea my journey was really just beginning.

The school in Northern Thailand was operating as an International Baccalaureate (IB) candidate school. The teachers on staff were building a programme to meet the requirements of the Primary Years Programme (PYP), and Diploma Programme (IB Dip) and ultimately the Middle Years Programme (MYP) frameworks. My timing could not have been any better -I came on board just in time.

The language of these programmes was new to me, the approach was quite different to the curriculum documents I was used to. The planning was different and the documentation was different. The ideas did make sense to me, and though it was different than what I'd had personal experience with, I could recognize it was good teaching practice. However, the application of the programme to what I was doing was another story. The notions of student centered learning, of integration, and of inquiry-based learning were cool and we'd touched on them in my teacher training, but had I really seen or used them in practice? And, in the context of foreign language learning and physical

education, I was really thrown for a loop. It was overwhelming. I was faced with ideas that made me consider my role as a teacher, my teaching practice, the PE programmes I knew and was working in, and my understanding of learning. It was actually a bit threatening. I thought I knew teaching...

I had my year plans, I had my unit plans, I had my daybook and my assessment book. I planned great lessons and I “performed” well in front of a crowd (the students). My students were happy and followed along with me in the driver’s seat for the first year. I spent lots of time having everything in order for my students when they arrived to either French or PE and I spent a lot of time “teaching” in my lessons. I was in control.

Something wasn’t sitting right though. As the staff went through the development of the PYP framework for our school, discussion, reflection and quite frankly experimentation ensued. I was thinking a great deal about how I was going about my programme. What were my students really learning in my classes? And how were they actually learning? What was I doing that complemented the inquiry-based learning expectation of the curriculum framework? Was my programme learner centred?

Being on my own in the primary French department and pretty isolated in the early childhood PE section of the PE department left me few colleagues specific to my subject area with whom to explore my questions. As a result I spent a great deal of time with primary level homeroom teachers in the school. I was trying to understand how they operated in the framework and how they facilitated such active and vibrant learning communities within the walls of their

classrooms. I became fascinated with the learning process, and student engagement. I liked the “noisy” classrooms, I was wowed by the independence and responsibility students demonstrated when given the opportunity.

The more I saw, the more I explored, the more I knew it made sense to me. But more and more questions came to my mind. These questions were related to practice, to learning, to understanding, to assessment, to PE, to teaching PE, to sport and ultimately to my role as a teacher. It was uncomfortable. As a person who likes to know both in what direction I’m heading and in being able to package thoughts up into nice little theories, I was struggling to figure out where I fit, how I fit, and if I fit at all. I thought I knew teaching...

My first years teaching in this particular school were uncomfortable but exciting. I was dealing with familiar but new ideas in terms of pedagogy, collaboration and instruction. I felt isolated and challenged but also inspired, as my understanding developed and changed. I realized that I was in a challenging situation teaching a foreign language and PE, both of which are predominantly taught through didactic approaches. I had questions that I kept asking, questions that people didn’t have answers to. I was working in a framework where inquiry was said to be at the heart of the curriculum yet I struggled to make it work in my own subjects. This narrative attempts to represent the tension I was feeling in figuring out who I was as a teacher and what I was doing.

The questions I had shaped my practice, and my practice informed my understanding. I was constantly trying new and different activities, stepping back, observing and asking anyone around me for feedback and thoughts. I was learning, I was exploring and constructing a conception of role as a teacher. The whole process, when I

think about it, encapsulates “learning” to me. I attended to different perspectives, asked questions, explored ideas and reframed my questions.

As I explored inquiry in general, it was my teaching in kindergarten PE classes that formed the foundation of my understanding. It was the curiosity of the students and their abilities to explore when given an open-ended task that gave me a glimpse of inquiring minds. Their abilities to respond to questions that inspired thinking and further questions along with the interests they showed when learning was differentiated and supported based on the students own inquiries was so natural and powerful. Lola made me consider this further and pinpoint an ah-ha moment with her critical response on my Blog when I shared this story.

Lola said...

I have a couple of questions based on this info you have described. What does powerful learning look like in PE - my experience was sport driven PE lessons - Can you describe a situation where you could 'see' powerful or meaningful learning in PE? I look forward to hearing your experiences!

APRIL 18, 2007 8:46:00 PM PDT

I was challenged to think further about my first teaching experience, and my ideas of what meaningful and powerful learning in PE looked like. Her comment and this narrative through which I was sorting and learning about what I considered my role as teacher to be made me consider what my idea of learning, teaching and inquiry was. My first teaching job presented me an in-practice experience was foundational for what I understood about learning. My first years were full of inspired dialogue and reflection within myself as to who I was and what I was doing. The curriculum framework helped

me put inquiry into practice and it resonated with how I saw learning and teaching thus supporting my valuing constructivist practice.

Reframing My Inquiry

The initial dialogue from the Blog and the writing of the narratives themselves inspired me to reframe my questions to come back to the central line of inquiry in this research study- What in my past experience enables me to value inquiry-based teaching as a critical element of learning in PE and commit to constructivist practice? As a result of my dialectical journaling, the critical Blog, and the process of narrative construction, I defined learning, being a learner, being a teacher and inquiry. Of course, I was keeping in mind that my understandings and representations were still evolving and constantly being challenged and re-negotiated...

Who Am I?

What is Learning?

I came to the temporary conclusion that to me, the complicated and uncomfortable process of learning is dealing with the dynamic nature of our world. It is about reforming, recreating and challenging what we already know; re-arranging and playing with existing cognitive structures to develop new understandings. It's colourful, it's confusing, it's larger than life and I agree that "there is virtually an infinite variety of ways to know the world" (Marlowe & Page, 2000, p.111). It's messy, noisy, non-linear and social. Learning is cyclic, recursive, elaborative and constantly growing in different directions. It is playful and my understanding is not supported by traditional teaching approaches meant to inspire learning.

How have I come to this?

Through my systematic sociological introspection, I discovered that I was supported as a learner, encouraged and afforded opportunities to explore learning meta-cognitively, physically and emotionally. I reflected on my own experiences as a learner in school and out. Through my adult life I continued to learn and explore “learning” in my own world and I constantly reflected my understandings. Watching children explore, be excited and really question and grapple with concepts has helped me to understand “learning”. By pursuing questions that really matter to me, I have an understanding of my own learning process. I have always been an inquirer and an observer. I have constructed my own understandings and have reflected on the process.

Who Am I as a Learner?

As a learner, I have always wanted to understand, I have questions and I ask questions. I listen, look and consider “answers” and ask more questions. I am curious. When I am inspired by a question that really matters to me, I pursue an explanation with a vengeance. I have lived in foreign lands watching and experiencing the colours and cultures of our planet because I am interested. I am out in the world trying to make sense of the world by synthesizing new experiences into what I have previously come to understand.

As a student in school, I received consistently high grades and never worked too hard at it. Looking back on that time I can see that I wasn’t overly engaged in the learning process. I kept my teachers happy and met the expectations with little stress. I knew how to play the game. I had figured out how to regurgitate information that was disseminated for test taking and I was creative in the products I handed in. The rare instances where I was actually offered the opportunity to control the direction of my own

learning and pursue topics and questions that were important to me are the experiences that stand out in my mind. The independent research projects, science fairs and outdoor education experiences that I took part in appealed to me as a learner and challenged me to deepen my understanding in a variety of topics.

The most meaningful and memorable learning I did in my public school experiences was as a result of the privileges I had as a “gifted student”. I was in pull-out programmes from the time I was nine years old. We met for our gifted enrichment class made up of students from other schools in the county up to 6 times a year. We were empowered as learners and challenged in a different way than our every day schooling offered us. The “gifted enrichment” experience I had throughout my elementary schooling shaped how I view myself as a learner because it’s where value was placed on the process of learning; we were encouraged to think about problems, consider perspectives, build critical thinking skills, ask questions and interact in a social domain to construct “content irrelevant” knowledge. Into adulthood I continued to be a learner who enjoyed solving problems and considering different perspectives. I can see the need for such learning environments in school

As an athlete I was a learner. In team sports coaches called me a smart player as I understood the game, the strategies and I had the physical abilities to put them into practice. In retrospect, teammates I had at school who didn’t “understand” the game or see it conceptually frustrated me to no end. Conceptual understanding became a huge part of what I aimed for as a PE teacher in order to support all my students regardless of physical ability. I understood how important it was to both strong and weaker players to understand the game. As a swimmer, I could take specific directions and apply them to

my strokes with little effort and I understood training concepts. I was also, and remain still a very reflective learner. The time I spent engaged training in individual sports allowed significant and consistent time for reflection and consideration of my experiences and thoughts. This type of self-awareness and reflection is a very important element of inquiry-based learning.

These sporting opportunities were also memorable and significant due to the social development and learning I was doing. I enjoyed the notion of a team working towards a goal, each of us having defined roles, events, perspectives and skills to bring to the table. I learned to negotiate my role in a variety of teams and sporting environments. I learned from those around me with enthusiasm. I continued to be a “team learner”; I enjoyed watching and discussing with others involved in similar processes. The sharing component of inquiry and the attending to different perspectives, often through discussion, supports my appreciation for social learning.

I was a strong student and a strong athlete. Although I was proud of my accomplishments and talents, there were times when scoring the top marks on tests, meeting the expectations and winning the competitions became uncomfortable. I was actually insecure as a result of the success I had in the systems. The measured nature of these pursuits put me at the top repeatedly causing what I interpreted as jealousy amongst my peers and self-consciousness on my part. As a learner, opportunities to collaborate with others and to pursue learning that was not compared to others’ appealed to me. This may have fostered some of the tensions I feel towards assessment and the commitment I felt towards differentiation and individualization of learning the constructivist paradigm.

As a learner I have always valued experience and the opportunity to play with ideas. I am most effective constructing knowledge in the midst of it all. I learn best when the experience envelops me and I am forced to make mistakes, ask questions, consider, discuss and interpret the world around me. I learned to guide canoe trips by guiding canoe trips, not by reading the manuals or taking a course. I learned to play games and sports by playing games, asking questions of my coaches and teammates –by losing and winning. I learned to be a camp counsellor by being a camp counsellor, just as I learned to be a teacher by being a teacher.

I was fortunate to have been supported by my family in my learning endeavours. They challenged me, supported me and fostered a love of learning and confidence in my abilities to learn the secrets of the world. My parents facilitated learning experiences for my brother and I beyond the school walls through sport, travel, discussion and reflection. They themselves were active learners enthusiastically asking questions and building new knowledge about matters of interest to them. They modelled learning to me, and I now am an enthusiastic learner and I continue to this day to develop a more confident voice in my own inquiries and pride in my learning.

My graduate studies also reaffirmed my understanding of who I am as a learner, I was supported throughout the inquiry cycle in different studies, I have dealt with disequilibrium, asked and pursued questions, grappled with different perspectives, reflected on new information and constructed new understanding in my own way and time. I feel strongly that when engaging with topics of interest building and challenging what we already know is when the most meaningful learning happens, even when we do not get “the correct answer”. I can see that as a learner, an inquiry-based framework

would have suited me. The incidents I've had as a learner in open-ended, inquiry, critical thinking and concept based learning environments connect to the principles of inquiry and fall under the constructivist paradigm- hence I'm suggesting that as a learner inquiry appeals to me and so I value it.

I will be the first to admit that I have been afforded numerous opportunities that could be seen as "elite". I was an elite athlete, I was pulled- out of the populous class of the public schools I went to, I have studied at tertiary educational institutions, I have travelled extensively and I have always been seen as special in some way, all of which have contributed to my sense of being a teacher and how I learn. I am not sure what it all looks like from the "other side" but I am aware of this. As a learner who continues to explore who and where I am in different contexts, I yearn to understand different perspectives and motivations for learning -including my own.

Who am I as a Teacher?

Rousamaniere suggests that "when teachers reflect on their own schooling experiences... they can see their own personal and professional development in a new light that can enlighten their current work in the classroom" (2000, p. 87). This reflection component of my research challenged me to do just that. Also, as a teacher I see myself as a learner. I am learning with my students about the intricacies of the world. I respect the process of learning and the power my students have to learn. I am able to hand over control in the classroom and gym to support my students learning. I am constantly listening to and observing my students trying to understand where they are at, where they are going and how they are going to get there. I see myself as a facilitator supporting my students to learn for themselves as opposed to teacher disseminating information to

students. I see myself as challenging, engaging and travelling with my students and colleagues.

I develop relationships based on trust with my students. I respect their abilities and their interests. I am fair and hold students accountable for their behaviours. Ultimately they need to be responsible for their own learning and I try to encourage this through my practice. I challenge them, offering support and acceptance at whatever stage in their learning they are. I am very aware of the varying abilities in my classes and aim to differentiate to meet the needs of the individuals. I am enthusiastic, caring and interested in my students learning. Being a teacher is like being a dancer with many different partners, we spin a bit together, we step on toes, we maybe even fall down, we go off and do our own steps then we meet up again to twirl and do new and exciting tricks.

Coming to how we see ourselves as teachers is a complicated socialization process. I had early teacher role models in my parents and a few significant teachers who embraced constructivist practice. Based on my own years at school, at home, at camp and in the world, I had a vision of what a teacher was. This vision was constructed as I experienced teaching of sorts that excited, engaged and empowered me. On the other hand, I constructed my teaching identity based on those who I didn't want to be, based on learning experiences that didn't suit me as a learner.

My early days in teaching were full of questions and reflective practice. I viewed myself as a learner in the school environment drawing from as many sources of experience as I could. I was reflective in my practice, constantly modifying and experimenting with my practice to meet the needs of my students. I took it upon myself

to challenge my own understandings and further explore the theoretical to support the practical knowledge I was developing. I valued discussions, collaboration and reflection with my colleagues, that built on what I knew and challenged me to understand and consider more.

In my classes I set up explorations then listened, modified and supported connections being made. I asked a great deal of questions and challenged my students to reflect on their learning and behaviours. In PE I put focus on conceptual understanding and cognitive engagement in play and skill development. We played modified games and did extensive skill explorations in order to construct understanding of the skills and ultimately apply them appropriately in games. PE to me is very much about setting up students to be successful in games they play through understanding but also it is about having experiences with a wide variety of skills in a safe and supportive environment.

In terms of attitudes specifically geared towards teaching physical education, issues related to assessment and physical education programming emerged in my consideration of who I am as a teacher. The challenges of assessment and the need for more meaningful and current programming that emphasizes participation and life long skill development frustrated me within the current framework of physical education in North America. I turned to an international system; it is here where in theory I fit. I felt this framework was more in line with my identity and values. Self-assessment and reporting are the main means of assessment and the programme is inquiry-based, emphasizing movement exploration, fundamental motor skill development, active engagement, and conceptual understanding as opposed to the more traditional sport skill focus.

I feel strongly that children should have a voice and significant control over their learning. I had a voice as a child and I learned how to make decisions for myself. I think this is very important for children and giving them the opportunities to make their learning relevant and meaningful is how I see as my role as a teacher. Unfortunately such is not commonly supported in physical education settings where high student numbers, scarce resources, limited time and support as well an emphasis on isolated skill development rather than conceptual understandings are the norms. This is a combination of both the situations and teacher beliefs. I will not say that inquiry in such contexts is incomprehensible, just challenging. I value a learner centered approach to teaching where the learning is focused on building on prior knowledge and it is geared towards learners' interests and centered on their own inquiries.

As a teacher I have an appreciation and an awareness of different individual levels of physical success. I had a sister born with Spina Bifida and a brother who is an Olympic athlete. I see it as my role to help children have success regardless of their abilities. I approach my lessons with success for all as my goal, encouraging confidence and personal achievement for each individual. I can appreciate the spectrum of abilities, competition and motivations of individuals and I do strongly believe that in my teaching role I should inspire exploration of such with my students. I see myself as a facilitator in my physical education programmes setting up such exploration to support individual abilities and inquiries. I will always act as a support for my students in whatever ways necessary. I see myself as a figure situated in the middle of student learning experiences, learning with them and because of them, rather than at the front dictating to them.

In summary, as a teacher I facilitate, I question, I explore, I challenge, I support,

I play and I learn. All of which allow me to commit to constructivist notions in my PE and teaching environments.

What is Inquiry?

I knew that my experiences resonated with constructivist theories of learning, but in order to connect my previous experiences with my teaching practice and current understanding of learning, I had to unpack and define my understanding of inquiry. Ultimately, inquiry-based learning values learning the way I understand it. It involves building on prior knowledge to create new understandings. It is non-linear, it is recursive, it is social, it is experiential, it is thinking based, it creates disequilibrium and it is personal. In my mind, it is an engagement with concepts that can be questioned, meaningfully explored, investigated, sorted through, and reassembled to form new understandings. In an inquiry, the nature of the problem determines the goal, the goal determines the process and it becomes the students' responsibility to navigate the process. It challenges traditional transmission models of education, putting the student in the driver's seat and the teacher in the facilitator's role.

I came to this understanding of inquiry through personal experience as a learner, professional practice, personal exploration of the concept, theoretical study, and collaboration. Primarily, I have been an inquirer myself and I have felt the enthusiasm of exploring questions that matter to me, the discomfort of attending to different perspectives and often challenging what I thought I knew and the satisfaction of figuring out how it all fits to create new understandings.

I wonder what my schooling would have been like if it had been predominantly facilitated in an inquiry-based environment. Particularly of interest would be my

experience in PE. Inquiry in PE remains difficult for me to articulate. I was a student of a system where skills and sports based drills were the means of teaching PE in schools. PE was not challenging for me, but it was fun because I could do the skills. However in terms of learning as a programme, it was questionable. I remember the struggles of trying to apply skills in games in which 24 students were attempting to play. I remember the disengagement of high school students in learning that wasn't meaningful to them but mandatory as the curriculum demanded it. I remember being assessed based on the repetition of accurate skills and regurgitation of rules through written tests as opposed to understanding games concepts and engagement in the learning process. Again, my understanding of inquiry, particularly in PE, is a result of the contrast I see in relation to my experience in school, and the discomfort I feel with traditional transmission style teaching practice in relation to how I see learning.

I have been able to see how elements of trust, voice, responsibility, experiential learning, empowerment, social learning, problem solving, respect and the notion of success are all highly valued in inquiry-based learning environments which again resonate with the tensions I feel towards more traditional PE practice. These connections and contrast enable me to define and value inquiry in my own PE teaching practice.

Autoethnography Summary

I identified significant socializing agents and past personal experiences that influenced my ability to value constructivist notions of teaching and learning. I considered how my personal teacher knowledge and my own personal teaching identity were formed in relation to inquiry-based practice. I generated autoethnographic data that highlighted tensions and inspired dialogic engagement. Unpacking these tensions and my

past experiences led me to better understand who I was. The tensions were based on my past as a person, student, athlete, daughter, sister, and teacher. Themes of trust, voice, responsibility, experiential learning, empowerment, family values, social learning, problem solving, support, role of teacher, respect and the notion of success became apparent through my introspection. I wrote to explore the developing themes. I was pulling from memory and intricately weaving together a colourful cloth of core experiences, themes and the essence of who I was.

CHAPTER V -UNPACKING THE PAST AND WHO WE HAD BECOME

Sharing

Creating a Learning Community

As stated in my methodology, I shared my essential questions and my narratives with colleagues I was working with. I was able to make connections between my own personal teaching role and identity development and those in the profession working in the same particular learning environment. This sharing component allowed me to situate my beliefs in a larger context and allowed me to explore why some teachers in an inquiry-based school program are able to commit to constructivist notions of learning within their teaching practice. Also, a goal of this study was to provoke a dialogue and reflection related to learning and teaching within a particular professional community. As a result of the collaborative nature of my autoethnography and this sharing component, I was able to do just this.

Introducing My Colleagues

Initially, I met with the participants to begin to establish an understanding and a space for reflection with regards to inquiry learning and teaching and teaching role identity development. I used some initial questions pertaining to personal history to frame the biographies of my colleagues. The basic demographic and personal history information of my colleagues (represented by pseudonyms) is read as follows.

Phoebe

Phoebe was a 29 year old, Australian who had been teaching for 5 years in England and the United Arab Emirates. Her own schooling history included having been a student at a Montessori School, an All-girls Presbyterian School, a co-ed private

experiential secondary school and Universities in Adelaide, Australia. She lived overseas for a number of years in Canada, England and the UAE. Phoebe's first teaching job was at a low-socio economic school in rural England. Subsequently, she ended up with her husband at our school, her first inquiry-based curriculum, in the UAE upon its opening. She has training in the British and Australian curricula and as a result of her time at our school she has done some professional development in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme.

Maggie

Maggie was a curriculum coordinator at our school in the UAE. She was a 37 year old Australian, with 15 years of teaching experience. Her own schooling history included a combination of rural and urban public schools in South Australia. She received her Diploma of Education and her Bachelor of Education in South Australia as well. Her first teaching experience was in a high behavioural needs school in a low socio-economic area of South Australia. Maggie followed that with work overseas. She did some short term work in Canada and the UK then committed to more permanent contracts in Tanzania, Singapore, Thailand and ultimately in the UAE. Her international experience was mostly work in early schooling years in both British and inquiry-based schools. She was a Primary Years Programme (PYP) trainer working for the International Baccalaureate Organization (IB), she was European Council of International Schools accreditation team member and she was pursuing her Master's of Education degree at the University of Southern Australia in Education.

Roya

Roya was a 39 year old Canadian, and she had been teaching for 15 years at the time of the study. She did her elementary and secondary schooling in the British Columbia (BC) public system in a small town on Vancouver Island, Canada. She went to six different universities in search of a programme that suited her learning needs en route to a Bachelor of Education degree. Roya started teaching back in the BC public system where she herself had been a student. The school in the UAE was her first time teaching in an international school and in an inquiry-based curriculum. Roya came into the school as an early elementary teacher.

Seymour

Seymour, one of my male colleagues, was a grade five teacher at the school. He was 30 years old from England and had five years of teaching experience. His primary education was spent at a Church of England school and his secondary, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) experience, was shared between a Church of England school and a boys boarding school. He studied Political Science at two different universities and his Post Graduate Certificate Education (PGCE) was completed at another English university. His first teaching job was in a low socio-economic junior school in a small city in England. His experience at our new school in the UAE was his first international teaching job and his first engagement with an inquiry-based curriculum. He brought with him knowledge of the British Curriculum and he had a particular interest in math education.

Gus

Gus was a 35 year old Australian male PE teacher. As a student he attended a rural public school and a Catholic all-boys boarding school in Australia. Gus studied PE

for a Bachelor's degree in Canberra in Australia. At the time of the study he had 8 years teaching experience working in Australia, the UK and Austria prior to moving to the UAE. Gus' previous school in Austria was his first experience teaching in an inquiry model where he'd spent 3 years.

Colleague Demographic Summary

In order to summarize my colleague demographic data I have included a summary in Table 1. It becomes clear the varied backgrounds, experiences and teaching positions within the school creating a diverse though purposeful community of learners group.

Table 1
Colleague Demographic Summary

Colleague	Age	Sex	Nationality	Years Teaching	International Teaching Experience	Teaching Position
Miranda	28	F	Canadian	~5	Thailand, UAE	PE Teacher Curriculum
Phoebe	29	F	Australian	~5	England, UAE	Grade 3
Maggie	37	F	Australian	~15	England, Canada, Tanzania, Singapore, Thailand, UAE	Administration
Roya	39	F	Canadian	~15	Canada, UAE	Grade 1
Seymour	30	M	British	~5	England, UAE	Grade 5
Gus	35	M	Australian	~8	England, Austria, UAE	PE Teacher

The Dialogues...

Having established a basic conceptualization of where my colleagues were coming from in terms of demographics, we began a dialogue exploring our understandings of inquiry learning and teaching and teaching role identity development. I used the same focus questions to prompt the discussion that I had used to guide my own

autoethnographic exploration. Despite having used some prompting questions, it was my goal to let the participants direct their own story telling. Also, using my narratives as a “vehicle for talking to each other, often across the borders of discipline and identity locations” (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p.21), we began to create a learning community opening up spaces to engage with each other, our experiences and understandings of inquiry teaching and learning and ultimately, our practice (Clandinin, 2001).

Thoughts on Learning

The school I was working at and at which my research participants were also employed was a new school. We had come from our respective corners of the world to set up an inquiry-based learning environment. The founding leadership created a collaborative environment clearly defining the philosophy and the vision of the school consequently developing a professional culture rooting itself in constructivist theory. As a result, the staff assembled had similar views of learning supporting the foundation of the school community development. Regardless of our pasts, as I observed in my data, we all had similar views on the nature of learning.

As shown in Table 2 the understanding that learning is social, experimental, reflective, purposeful, complex, process based, owned by learners and personally relevant came to light in each of the participants’ data highlighted by my analysis using NVivo 2.0 (Richards, 1999-2000). Knowing that all these teachers had come from different backgrounds, it was interesting to establish this common understanding of learning. It seemed that all the colleagues working in this school understood learning from a constructivist perspective. They believed that learning involved linking new knowledge with former knowledge. From the colleague conversations I found that this understanding

had been based on personal learning experiences and reflective teaching practice. This understanding was theoretical, however -what actually takes place in the classroom was not evaluated in this study nor was how teachers construe their practice of inquiry.

Table 2
Thoughts on learning

Colleague	Learning	Understanding based on...
Phoebe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -learning as investment -social -learning looks like the senses, it is, it's doing, it's touching, its feeling, it's smelling, it's seeing and it's hearing. -experimental -various styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personal experience -reflective teaching practice -open-mind
Maggie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -learning is constructing understanding and knowledge -it can look like so many different things can't it? -social process -purposeful -trust needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personal experience as learner -reflective teaching practice -personal social learning
Roya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -learning is a change. -stems from reflection and discussion -trial and error -complex and non-linear -process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -reflection on personal experience -challenging school experiences -learning for me, changes me
Seymour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personally meaningful -owned by learner -social and individual process -supported by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -values social learning -environment based -listening -reflective teaching
Gus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -learning motivated for end product (more knowledge or skill) -application of skill is learning -personally relevant/purposeful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personal experience -personal motivation to learn -frustration of lack of personal conceptual understanding in games where skills developed

The underlying theoretical understanding I have of learning resonates with the understandings my colleagues had of learning. This dialogue, sharing of thoughts, experiences, reflections and the narratives allowed my colleagues and me the chance to create a space and a starting place to explore what learning was and ultimately unpack ourselves as learners and as teachers to find out where and how inquiry all fit together.

As Learners...

Constructivist approaches, particularly inquiry-based learning and teaching, require teachers to understand and facilitate learning in ways that most teachers rarely experienced as students (Revegno & Bandhauer, 1997). Development of a teachers' understanding of learning must be rooted in their own understanding of themselves as learners -hence the reason for engaging with the question "Who are you as a learner?" became significant in establishing why some teachers may have been able to commit to constructivist notions of learning within their teaching practice. I interpreted and represented how my colleagues viewed themselves as learners from the data I collected in our conversations as follows. I did this in order to further develop support for the notion that who we are as learners influences our teaching practice.

Phoebe viewed herself as a hands-on learner who had had experience in a wide variety of educational models. She appreciated differentiation, challenge and active learning. She attributed who she was as a learner to her early schooling experience in a Montessori programme and to her mom, a Montessori School teacher. When asked "how do you think you've come to this understanding of learning?" she responded:

I think it actually goes way back, and I know that this sounds really kind of way back. It goes back to the tweezers and the little jar of rice in the soap dish like

putting the rice onto the little suckers on the thing. I can remember doing that in my mom's house and with my mom at preschool and, the pouring jugs, and the noun farm, all those kind of things that I can remember from Montessori. I can remember doing all those things and being responsible. Like, nobody's going to cut my fruit for me, I have to cut my own fruit for myself as a four year old. I know it's a sharp knife, and I know I might get cut but it's an experience. I'm going to have to cut it myself to learn that.

She was empowered to be responsible and learn about the world in her own way, in her own time and she still saw herself learning this way. She maintained that she needs to give things a go, make mistakes, re-evaluate and continue to learn about the wonders of the world. She understood herself to be an inquirer. Inquiry is an effective means for her to learn hence her valuing an inquiry-based framework.

Maggie, another colleague of mine, saw herself as a learner learning with her students, as a learner studying for a graduate degree in education, and as a learner of the world on a "learning journey". She enjoyed and valued the scope and process of learning articulated by her statement "I do see learning as being really really small things like learning how to do something fun, or learning something that's more in-depth or academic. I see the whole gamut of things to be learned and I enjoy all aspects of it". She felt she learned better when she was with other people discussing and provoking thoughts and new understandings. She placed importance on the social nature of inquiry-based learning for herself and for her students. Maggie said:

I think as a learner, I find myself so similar to some of the children whom [sic] I teach so I understand them. If I'm unmotivated or I don't see the point, then I just

don't want to do it and I find it very difficult to find the motivation and inspiration, which is very similar to a lot of people in terms of learning, particularly children.

Maggie had success in school as a child, but in high school she “went through stages of being an average student, a dedicated student, a rebellious student and then quite focused...[She] found high school um, a little bit boring.

She strongly believed that learning should be personally relevant and meaningful. In inquiry-based learning, because it comes from the learner and the teacher facilitates further understanding, Maggie could see the connection between inquiry-based practice and her understanding of herself as a learner.

Roya's experiences as a learner were quite different to those previously mentioned. She maintained that she was an enthusiastic but cautious learner. She valued structure and organized learning. She had extensive support as a learner in school as she struggled to “get it right away” in a traditional instructional model. She defined herself as a “fairly slow learner” needing repetition and modelling. She experienced assessment anxiety, particularly related to test-taking which was the main means of assessment during her school years. Roya went to six different universities in search of a programme that suited her needs and one that she could “tailor it to what I [she] wanted”, with small class sizes, differentiated assessments and personal relationships with the professors and instructors. As a learner, an individualized programme with elements of one-on-one learning and less restricted time constraints supported Roya.

As an adult, Roya said she saw learning as “hard”. She often felt threatened that she was “not on the same level as someone else” and the relationship to, and perception

of, that other person was very important. In relation to a curriculum coordinator at our school in which Roya was learning about inquiry-based practice, Roya stated “It’s interesting, at the beginning I really felt like ‘she hates me, she thinks I’m horrible, I think I’m horrible’, but now I feel like I’m ready to be supported. I have enough of a foundation that I can be supported now and I can go”. She directed the discomfort she had with learning towards the person who was supporting her. With time and engagement with the disequilibrium she persevered and eventually felt more confident in her learning.

Roya had a thirst for knowledge of the world around her, though she suggested that she pursued new learning with hesitation. It was important to her that she felt safe and supported in her endeavours. Coming to our school -her first teaching post abroad- she had a personal connection with the administration team and “it was that connection, it was that little safety net there” that brought her to the UAE. When she did not understand something she spent time thinking about her queries, reflecting on them and investigating them in her own way individually then when confident in her knowledge, she would share her learning with others. She had a unique perspective on learning in a variety of traditional transmission model schools. As a result of her experiences as a learner, her reflections and the challenge learning presented to her, she attempted to realign her teaching in a more constructivist way.

Seymour, another colleague of mine, called himself a methodical and reflective learner. He was quiet in nature and independent in his learning style. He said “I’m aware that I was the sort of kid who would be happy to open a text book and work through several pages of math for an hour”. That being said, Seymour enjoyed new experiences and was open-minded to new ideas and different perspectives. He suggested in our

conversation that “I’m not somebody who needs to know everything- I can’t remember which philosopher said: ‘all that we can truly know is that we know nothing’ so I’m not seeking answers to everything. For me, I’m happy if I’ve got something new and engaging and it doesn’t need to be something far away and exotic.” He had confidence in his abilities to construct new knowledge when it interested him; “I do have a lot of confidence in my own ability if I set my sights on something I am quite capable of achieving it and I think I’ve sort of done that with most of the major things in my life”. He enjoyed the social aspect of the schools he attended, commenting mostly on his friendships as opposed to the academic learning he had done. In fact, “boredom” was used in our conversations to describe his actual school time at a few different schools. He did find one of the schools he attended challenged him to learn “how to work hard” setting him up for success at university.

As an adult learner Seymour enjoyed “bouncing ideas off people” valuing the collaboration and support in his learning endeavours. He was not afraid to take risks and “see how things go” when learning something new. Seymour said, with regards to learning and making mistakes, “that’s where you do have to be a risk-taker and be prepared to get things wrong and learn from it and reflect on it”. He also liked to be challenged in his thinking and to explore different perspectives. Seymour was an inquirer himself and saw the authenticity and meaningfulness of learning for himself within the constructivist paradigm and hence transfers this to his practice.

Gus was a PE teacher and he saw himself as a learner who was still learning a lot and still had a lot he wanted to learn. He valued trying new things and experimenting with new ideas. Gus learned by doing and by watching. He was quite adamant that for

him to learn, it had to be something meaningful to him. To Gus learning meant being engaged and he needed to be focused on whatever it was he was learning because it was personally relevant. Learning happened for him when he could see the benefit of having more knowledge or being able to do something with more ability. He had confidence in his abilities when he felt the need to know. As a learner he has always looked to see how things worked for him, and made connections to what he already knew.

As a learner at school Gus had success. He was a good student. In PE he excelled as a learner in a skills based programme. He could replicate the physical skills and he felt he had adequate understanding at a variety of games but had difficulty applying his skills in game contexts. Gus confessed that with regards to learning a new approach to teaching PE [inquiry-based] “it just had a really strong connection with me because I knew a skills-based programme had failed me because of my own experience”. Gus also shared his feelings related to being “respected” as an athlete and learner saying, “the coaches I respected and who I felt respected me in return were the ones where I performed the best for as well, and same as a learner in school”. Gus was a learner who did well in a traditional instructional model in school and sport, however he sees the potential for more constructivist based approaches in terms of “what could have been” for him, and hence “what could be” for his learners.

As a community there was a common understanding that we were all learners building new knowledge about the world. From our discussions based on our past histories and my narratives, we began to see how our views of ourselves as learners influenced what we valued as teachers. The colleagues who participated in this study were all open-minded as learners, they were willing to try new things and take risks, both

of which are imperative in inquiry learning. They after all, had all moved to the Middle East to start a brand new project in a foreign country. All of my colleagues touched on the relationship side of learning and how important trust and respect were to them as learners. This echoed my own autoethnographic findings. The wide variety of learning styles and preferences my colleagues spoke of also led me to believe that inquiry-based learning can also meet the needs of a variety of learners and support differentiation within a classroom, which also reinforced the themes from my own data of learner-centred practice, individualized success and empowerment of learners. Most of the colleagues I conversed with also, at some point, suggested the importance of social learning, discussion and reflection in their own learning again supporting constructivist notions of teaching and learning.

We believed that learning refers to the meaning individuals construct from their personal experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 2002; Caine & Caine, 2002; Marlowe & Page, 1998). Learning, or developing an understanding of learning as a result of how it relates to each individual based on personal experience would constitute teacher knowledge (Beattie, 1995; Calderhead, 1996; Rovegno, 2003). Teacher knowledge and the understanding a teacher has of learning are inevitably connected to each teacher's experiences as learners in some sense, influencing one's identity as a teacher (Carter & Doyle, 1996). All of my participants understand themselves as learners in constructivist terms hence impacting their abilities to value constructivist theory as a framework for their practice.

As Teachers...

How one identifies oneself as a teacher constitutes a teaching identity according to Mayer (2000; as cited in Walkington, 2005). During the conversations with my colleagues we discussed what it meant to be a teacher, who they were as teachers and how they reflected on their identities through their responses to my narratives. Domains were explored (Spradley, 1979) and I created a response table to organize my colleagues' understanding of what it meant to be a teacher and how they may have come to know this. Data from our conversational style interviews is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Thoughts on Teaching

Colleague	What is a teacher	Understanding based on...
Phoebe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -views role as multi-dimensional -creator of an environment -listener -enthusiasm -prepared and flexible -balancing needs of students -providing choice and tools for learning -modeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -personal experience in Montessori system -belief in experiential learning (high school) -early teaching in a “teaching school -reflective practice and modification
Maggie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -facilitating reflection -providing opportunities and sufficient time for exploration -learner alongside students -questioning how I teach -aware of students needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -observation of colleagues and students -expectation of students and self to engage in learning socially -own parents put responsibility on her and brothers to sort selves out -gave students responsibility for social and academic disequilibrium
Roya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -what teaching is for me, it's very personal. -it's very hard. -it's who and what I am -controlled -structured -caring -patience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -over years, feedback from parents and students -from what I wanted as a learner

Seymour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -student centered -role as facilitator -assessing and understanding students needs -guiding reflection and self-awareness in learners -player in the process -respectful of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -system focus on traditional “test taking”, teacher instruction -challenging first teaching years -critical self-reflection -discomfort with traditional role “giver of knowledge” -exploring philosophy of teaching
Gus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understanding of what children basically need in a teacher-someone that they can relate to. -self as a tool that children can use to go in a direction they want to go-compass metaphor -self as learner -dependent on students needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I think it’s something that just happens naturally (experience) -role of teacher challenged with particular experience -personal experience as learner in traditional school settings

In keeping with constructivist theories of learning, most of my colleagues acknowledged that a teaching identity and their personal understanding of what it meant to be a teacher was constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed over time (Beattie, 2001). Roya stated in terms of her learning how to teach in an inquiry-based framework “it’s a different way of teaching, you know when you came out of university you have your bag of tricks and everything but you don’t really become a good confident teacher until you’ve been doing it for awhile, and you have to take the time, it’s a process, it does take time”. One of the purposes of this research was to unpack past experiences with fellow colleagues to identify similarities and contrast that may have enabled us to value constructivist notions of teaching and learning. Through the process of this research study, our learning community evolved and offered us all a chance to reconsider and deeply reflect on our understandings of who we were as teachers.

From the data represented in Table 3 and the analysis using NVivo 2.0 (Richards, 1999-2000), I connected my colleagues’ data to my own autoethnographic data thematically. In terms of my teaching role and the identity themes which recurred in my

colleagues' transcripts (and in my own autoethnographic exploration) were the ideas of facilitation, giving students a voice, responsibility, learning partnership, supportive role and the importance of a safe environment; all of which are imperative to operate in an inquiry-based curriculum.

Similar to my own experience, Phoebe had a variety of learning experiences during her schooling that supported constructivist principles –those that shaped her teaching identity. She was a student in a Montessori programme in her early years and her high school was inquiry-based and individualized. She valued those experiential programmes and felt she did meaningful learning during those years. Through reflective practice, her own inquiries and experimentation in her own teaching she has continued to develop a teaching identity valuing constructivist notions of teaching and learning. Phoebe's open-minded nature and her enthusiasm for new and meaningful engagements for herself and her students have also enabled her to embrace a non-traditional approach to teaching and learning.

Maggie's teaching identity was shaped over years of teaching in different environments. Her experiences in school were framed by traditional teaching models, in which she experienced very little stimulation or satisfaction. She had a few teachers in her youth who made an impact on her teaching role and identity as they modelled facilitation in the classroom in a less dictator type style. Those were the teachers she really liked and responded to, hence shaping her idea of good teaching. In her family, her parents believed firmly in placing responsibility on her and her brothers. They were challenged and empowered to solve problems themselves and she valued this aspect of her childhood. Her description of herself as someone who sets up experiences and allows

time for exploration and grappling with different problems was likely shaped by the parenting style she had experienced as a child.

Maggie took on the role of a teacher in her home country and then in searching for a challenge, moved abroad. She worked in a variety of different frameworks and curricula. Through observation and collaboration with peers she felt she learned about less didactic teaching and about assessing for understanding. Originally an early years teacher, she understood the value of setting up experiences for young students to draw on their natural curiosity and explore in their own ways and in their own time. The success she had experimenting with inquiry in early years education helped solidify her understanding of learning and hence her teaching identity.

Roya, another one of my colleagues, claimed in our second conversation with that early in her experience as a teacher in an inquiry-based framework she'd "been struggling with, you know, everything at school and thinking 'this isn't for me, Primary Years Programme (PYP) isn't for me, inquiry isn't for me' and my confidence as a teacher was going downhill". She was uncomfortable with the challenge to her teaching identity working in an inquiry-based framework. The notions of constructivist teaching were difficult for Roya to put into practice because, while in theory she appreciated them, they didn't fully connect with her teaching identity. Her identity involved a more traditional, controlled and specifically structured learning environment. This could be attributed to the fact that she had very little experiences with constructivist learning in her school years, "I never had any type of schooling even remotely like this, so not like even close to that. I'm trying to think if I was ever even allowed to move my desk, I don't think I was. I think I would have done well in some ways with this approach to learning" she said in

response to my narrative 'The Water Project'. The thought that it would have worked for her as a student however, made her consider the potential of teaching and learning through inquiry. This connection happened despite the challenge to her teaching role identity and how she experienced learning as a student in school.

Both Seymour and Gus reflected on their traditional schooling experiences and both, discussed their discomfort with the teaching identity in those situations where the teacher is the giver of all knowledge or the front of all knowledge. And though they both say they started off teaching using very traditional approaches, their identities were challenged and their views of themselves as teachers shifted as they were exposed to more constructivist learning environments which connected to their past experiences.

Seymour's early teaching years were spent in a traditional junior school in the UK in which there was little time for reflection; covering the content of the curriculum through thematic hands-on activities was the goal. School wasn't about the quality of what the kids were learning, it was objectives based and test assessment orientated, similar to the evaluative model he had been a pupil in. He was teaching and succeeding as a teacher in that system but he said,

I was very aware that I didn't have, or I wasn't convinced by a philosophy of teaching, um, I saw that developing as I gained experience because I knew that there were different ways of doing things and, you know I hadn't made my mind up on them and it's something I'm still doing, it's been a process that I'm doing to get my philosophy of teaching.

When joining our staff in the UAE, he was challenged professionally; "I had to really think about my role, the system I came from there was a great emphasis on " you should

always be teaching” maximizing your time with kids sharing what you as the teacher knew.” By coming to a new school Seymour took himself out of his comfort zone. He felt he knew what he was doing as a teacher in a traditional model. At our school he found himself in the role of a learner experimenting with a different approach. From his experience he said that the idea of “being a facilitator here is something I’ve seen the value of more and more... I’m not directly teaching but I’m questioning the kids and finding out what they can and cannot do and going with them.” Seymour’s prior experience as a teacher, his self-reflective nature and his open-minded attitude toward learning enable him to embody a constructivist approach in his teaching identity.

Gus reflected on his experiences engaging with non-traditional approaches to PE in our conversational style interviews. He commented, “I thought there was only one way to teach PE and that was from a skills-based approach and that was my own personal experience, that was what I’d learned at university, and that was what I’d seen done around me by teachers.” When he first arrived at a school working in an inquiry-based framework, he began to reframe his teaching identity despite inquiry being completely new to him. He hadn’t come across it in his studies as a student or his early experience as a teacher. Gus reflected, “It made a lot of sense through my background which was about having a lot of skills but not having the game sense and understanding to apply it.” He went on to say, “I knew a skills-based programme had failed me because of my own experience”. He suggested in our conversations that he had begun to ask more questions of the students in his classes rather than being so didactic in his instruction. He said, “Now I can see an understanding of a sport come through from the kids rather than an ability to technically perform something...” And he has continued to explore this

approach in his practice. When I asked him, “if once you had the concept of teaching from a more constructivist approach, was it easy putting it into practice or did you resort back to more traditional approaches?” His response was, “Yeah, well I’ve learned bit by bit, it just seems like my approach is different now [learning about inquiry-based teaching] made me really re-think everything I was doing.” He clearly articulated what he thought a PE teacher was:

I always thought that teaching was, especially in PE, that teachers should be the master of all sports... he [the teacher] is the one who’s saying this is the best way to do it... he knows the best way to do it, not you show me the best way or do you know a better way and I can learn from you.

Teaching through inquiry conflicted with how Gus understood teaching PE and it contrasted with his experiences as a learner but he could see its potential and hence he valued constructivist approaches to PE.

In summary, based on my own data and that of my colleagues related to how we see ourselves as teachers, it became apparent, though we all had very different experiences that shaped who we are as teachers, we had something that brought us together at this new international school. We all also in some way had some connection to non-traditional teaching practices. In essence the mere fact that all of my colleagues had in some ways, rejected their own national education systems in search of something else, a philosophy or a curriculum that fit with their understanding of what teaching looked like was a common link. We did our teacher training in traditional models that were most prevalent in our educational systems during that time. But for many of us, the systems we did our early teaching in, were abandoned for one reason or another. Our

identities had been constructed in a variety of ways, by various experiences all leading us to become the teachers we were when the study took place. I believe that who we are as teachers, who we think we are as teachers, and how we understand ourselves as a result of our past experiences affected our abilities to commit to constructivist notions of learning within our teaching identities, philosophies and practice. In terms of teaching role and identity, the themes that connected to constructivist practice in my colleagues' transcripts and in my own autoethnographic exploration were elements of facilitation, giving students a voice, responsibility, learning partnership, supportive role, and the importance of a safe environment. We had similar views of our roles as teachers, though to different degrees of understanding of inquiry-based learning. Our roles manifested themselves differently in practice but because we had some common understanding of what we valued as teachers in our school, we were enabled to work together in a collaborative inquiry-based framework.

Thoughts on Inquiry

This study took place in an inquiry-based framework so it was important to further unpack the concept of a constructivist approach to learning and how we had come to our understandings. When we began our conversations, my colleagues had varying degrees of experience working in inquiry-based learning environments developed through different past learning and teaching experiences. This component of our discussion was not only valuable to establish my colleagues' understanding of inquiry and where that had come from but also it was thought provoking, discussion inspiring and practice informing.

From my colleagues' transcripts, based on our interviews discussing their pasts, their understandings of teaching, learning and inquiry and their responses to my narratives, I was able to identify some common language and understandings of inquiry. Present in the majority of articulations related to inquiry were the ideas of problem solving, student centred learning, responsibility, exploration of meaningful questions and social learning. All of the teachers were working in an inquiry-based learning environment at the time of the study and had a basic understanding of what constructivist teaching and learning entailed. I sorted through the responses and again created a form of response table focusing on their definitions of inquiry and how they personally felt they had developed their understandings.

How the participants came to these understandings was varied, as was how they came to view themselves as teachers and learners. However, again there were elements of connection with their pasts as learners, as young teachers and to their current understandings and experiences. It is important to note that all the participants, as they viewed themselves as learners, admitted to becoming more familiar and comfortable with inquiry as they learned more about it, and worked longer within the framework which suggested to me the importance of their current experiences informing practice. What inquiry actually looked like in their particular practice was not expanded upon in this study but could be a direction for future research.

Phoebe defined inquiry as explorations of different ideas in which the students are responsible for the direction of their learning. She described it as being often hands-on and real-life experience-based. It also involves the teacher surrendering control of the direction or means by which the students begin and construct their learning. She said,

I think it's [inquiry] kind of like that whole experiment stuff, it's like you put ideas out there and then you ask: What are you going to do with it? How are you going to change it? How are you going to find out more about it? And what are you going to do with it? What are you going to do with that information or that idea or that concept? And then you have the choice of where you're going to take it.

Phoebe felt she came to this from personal experience as a student in a Montessori school, and an experiential high school. She had been empowered as a learner and had a strong vision, of a classroom that "shouldn't be 'you are going to do this, this and this', it should be that you have that choice in how you're going to do it." Also, since she'd become a teacher at our school, Phoebe had explored inquiry in practice with experimentation and support from those around her. She experienced personal discomfort and disequilibrium in what she knew about teaching, reflection and refinement. She felt that she could better understand the process of learning as a result and how inquiry effectively supported it.

Maggie, a colleague who had been working with inquiry for many years in a few different school systems, summarized inquiry learning as "when you do construct your new knowledge based on knowledge you already have even if it's nothing but you start at a starting point where you already are constructing, developing, and acquiring new knowledge and understanding". According to Maggie, students explore and ask questions and reflect on what they have learned in inquiry learning. She valued inquiry because she saw it as a social process or an individual one wherein the learners actually realize that what they have learned may not be correct and that there are different perspectives on

ideas and concepts. Also, there are always opportunities to re-construct understandings and challenge what is “known”. Inquiry is very dependent upon trial, error and reflection. “It is ongoing and it does allow students to actually develop their own knowledge and their own understanding as long as they are motivated to learn,” she thought. Maggie also made reference to the fact that inquiry-based learning takes many different forms and as a teacher one needs to be aware of this.

Maggie thought she had come to her understanding of inquiry-based learning through careful observation of her students and other teachers in the framework. From her work in a developing country in which resources were limited, she began to see authentic and meaningful learning motivated by students’ needs and interests. Her initial introduction to explicit inquiry-based learning curriculum involved inquiry on the part of the teaching team implementing the programme. Maggie and her colleagues were developing a community of learners exploring a different teaching model (inquiry). When they were initially introduced the less traditional instructional framework, she experienced the power of inquiry first hand as a teacher- asking questions, exploring, refining, re-exploring personally relevant information. Her work as an early education teacher, an English as a second language teacher and as a curriculum coordinator in inquiry-based frameworks gave her a chance to engage with the concept of inquiry-based learning in a number of different teaching roles and learning environments. This supported her understanding of what inquiry looks like in different domains. Ultimately Maggie felt strongly about the value of honouring children’s questions and this was a result of the understanding of learning she had developed over her years in practice.

Roya, who was new to an inquiry-based learning framework said, “Inquiry is fun, out of the box, rebellious, student centred, real learning about change, and the world opening up for learners”. She valued the notion of inquiry in which learners learn together and on their own, both giving them social skills and independence while fostering personal responsibility for learning. She also saw inquiry as a way for students to engage with their own questions and explore the questions of others.

For her, how she had come to understand this was still very much “evolving”. She said, her experiences at that point in the school we were at were, “challenging her deepest beliefs about teaching.” She found guiding inquiry to be frustrating and sensed personal disequilibrium as she was forced to re-examine her teaching philosophy. Through extensive discussion, reflection and experimentation she struggled through the long process, and commented, “Given that I have a good understanding of what it is [inquiry], I think, to be perfectly honest, I’m closer to it but I don’t think I am seeing true inquiry in my classroom yet... I see myself getting closer to it.” Inquiry is something very different than what Roya was used to and different from her own learning of the concept of inquiry-based teaching and learning, she said, “It’s been horrible. Learning is hard. It’s really hard and it’s good for teachers to have to do that.” She valued that she was learning something new and challenging herself, as uncomfortable as it may have been.

Seymour considered the essence of inquiry-based learning to be the students’ responsibility for their own learning and taking learning beyond the teacher’s direction. He suggested that inquiry looks very different to everyone and for everyone. As a way of teaching and learning he felt that inquiry was not neat and tidy, that it was time consuming and required significant commitment to students’ individual needs. Seymour

thought that inquiry -in contrast to the thematic approach he'd been using previously- involved using questions and encouraging kids to ask their own questions, letting them explore and take learning further by actually doing something with their new knowledge.

Seymour referred to his understanding of inquiry by stating, "I'm definitely at the stage where I ask a lot of questions to the people who know more about it [inquiry] than me." He was an inquirer himself as he came to better understand the framework. Through trial and error and the willingness to be a "risk-taker" in his words, he learned that inquiry involves "moving away from just the final product, the end product, and um, thinking more about the process and valuing the learning that's going on in the process not just the end thing". As a learner, he had had experience in traditional didactic models of instruction and as a teacher in a thematic curriculum. Both were predominantly test based. He realized that this may not have been the most engaging and effective means of teaching and assessing for understanding thus shaping his understanding of inquiry. As a reflective practitioner, Seymour felt that by teaching in an inquiry-based learning environment, he had had the opportunity and greater necessity to reflect and question the worth in what was being explored in his classes. He appreciated the support for his own learning and engagement in the exploration of what he was doing in his classroom. Also, he inferred that the support he had from colleagues who seemed to share a common understanding of learning was instrumental in his exploring and developing his own understanding of inquiry. He valued highly the social and collaborative nature of the inquiry-based programme both as a teacher and for his students.

Gus, my PE teaching colleague, was developing his understanding of inquiry from a physical education context. He defined inquiry-based learning as "self-motivated,

meaningful exploration of a challenge given by a teacher”. He said it looks like “children trying something out and then seeing how it works for them and then using it and making a connection”. Instruction was question-driven and as the teacher he felt that helping the students make connections with what they were working out, exploring why they were doing it and how they were actually constructing their understanding in an inquiry-based programme was the teacher’s role. Ultimately he described inquiry as handing the responsibility over to the students to drive their units and learning.

Inquiry in this sense contrasted what Gus had experienced as a learner in PE and as a teacher in his first years of teaching. He said in our first conversation, “I’d never come across any other way to teaching PE other than a skills-based approach. That’s why I’m so critical of it now. You know it’s because I can’t believe it was the only way it was ever shown to me through my own school and in my own education at university to be a teacher.” Gus was first introduced to a more constructivist PE teaching practice at a professional development workshop in Europe. As an open-minded teacher who was enthusiastic to try new teaching strategies and develop his own teaching philosophy, Gus embraced the ideas presented to him. As opposed to isolated skill development, he began to embrace the notions of teaching through questions, structuring his lessons for guided exploration and focusing on the understanding of concepts his students were constructing as opposed to isolated skill development. He attributed his understanding and valuing of inquiry to the lack of personal responsibility he himself had had as a student. The method contradicted what he knew about teaching PE, but it resonated with him personally as he felt he would have had more success in an inquiry-based learning environment as a learner. Gus thought he would have had improved understanding of concepts and the

ability to effectively apply his skills and he stated, “As I learned more about it [inquiry] it just really became the obvious best way for me because it was something that resonated so strongly in my own personal experience so far as learning from skills and not learning them tactically”. Gus enjoyed trying new teaching strategies, and he was an enthusiastic learner in a teaching community. These helped him develop his understanding of inquiry.

All of us agreed that by learning through inquiry the emphasis is placed on the learners constructing knowledge and understanding through questions, explorations and renegotiating information. An inquiry-based curriculum begins with an interest, issue or tension that is explored, and the questions grow out of the exploration -broadening thinking and building new knowledge. We all came to our understandings through various routes, different experiences and backgrounds. Oberg and Underwood describe how teachers come to be the persons they are in terms of development as “unique, affected by his or her own history, insights, talents, and desires” (1992, p.163). And though the specifics of our experiences were different, we came to our understanding of inquiry through personal experience as learners, professional practice, personal exploration of the concept, theoretical study, and collaboration.

How we all connected

We were all developing our understandings of learning, teaching and inquiry as a result of our prior knowledge, and through our experiences, current practice and engagement in this study. We may not all have been exposed to constructivist teaching and learning throughout our years as students and our early years as teachers, but we were all moving towards embracing it. Perhaps we were dissatisfied with existing beliefs and we found inquiry a useful alternative and/or complement to intelligible traditional

approaches in some way. Constructivism connected with some element of our beliefs related to teaching, learning and to our identities as teachers -which supports Posner, Striken, Hewson and Gertzog's (1982) criteria for the process of conceptual change in teachers. Some of us had had positive experiences in constructivist environments as learners and teachers connecting to our understandings and supporting our teaching role identity and inquiry-based practice development (Hollingsworth, 1989; Knowles, 1992; Short et al.1996). Others had experiences that directly contrasted constructivist notions of learning and teaching throughout their time as students and teachers in fact facilitating their acceptance and creating appropriate tensions to look to more constructivist practice (Posner et al. 1982; Rovegno, 1992). This resonance, whether in terms of contrasting or connecting to our past experiences, enabled us to value constructivist notions of learning and teaching.

In the community that was created through this study, my colleagues and I were given the opportunity to discuss, share and carefully reflect on who we were as teachers and as learners, how we came to these understandings and how they shaped our abilities to value inquiry as an approach to learning. Regardless of our pasts, as I observed in my data, we all had similar views of the nature of learning. Also, all of my participants and I understood ourselves to be learners in constructivist terms, hence impacting our abilities to value constructivist theory as a framework for our practice. Prawat (1992) suggests that, compared to traditional teaching approaches, approaching teaching and learning constructively requires a greater element of risk. It is fair to assume that my colleagues and I, away from our native countries and education systems, are inherent risk-takers

connecting us to one another and enabling us to be open to taking risks in our teaching practice.

CHAPTER VI - INFORMING PRACTICE

Narrative Sharing to Inspire Reflection

Narrative research, in this case collaborative autoethnography, “has an unrivalled capacity to reach teachers- to really engage them- and, as a result, to change them and their practices (Armour, 2006 p.467). Maggie, one of my colleagues, reflected back on the process and said,

having the chance to make connections between my experiences and your autoethnographic narratives has been powerful; again I come back to your stories in my head and continually reflect, draw parallels, and at times differences, between your stories and my life as a student and then later as an educator. I get the feeling the voyage of discovery for me will continue as I develop my own understanding about learning.

Engaging in this research study allowed Maggie to reflect not only on her past, but on her present and future experiences –as well as on her teaching practice itself.

Hooks’ (1994) statement that “it is crucial that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practice talk to one another, collaborate in discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention (p.129; as cited in Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p.25) captures the foundation of this research study and the power of a collaborative autoethnography. Our conversations, my narratives and autoethnography facilitated both reflection of and continued dialogue about our practice and our developing understandings of learning, teaching and inquiry. Thus challenging us to continue sculpting our identities as teachers. According to Maggie and Gus this study

inspired teachers to further their understandings. Gus added that he has a much better understanding of what learning is as a result of his taking part in this process.

Conle, referring to her own narrative research experience, explained that: “the personal inquiry touched not only personal circumstances but cultural conditions. It is therefore a legitimate question to ask, whether my personal, narrative inquiry was not only useful in my life but is potentially useful in the life of others” (2000, p. 208). If I ask myself a similar question, I feel strongly that by sharing my narratives and creating a space for reflection, I inspired a dialogue. This dialogue informed my colleagues’ teaching practice and they likewise shaped my story of learning, teaching and my understanding of inquiry. It is as if my colleagues were co-authors of my narratives through their engagement and reflection and the fact that our stories come from and through the communities from which we derive our identities (MacIntyre, 1984). My own teaching identity and understanding of learning, teaching and identity at the time of this study was obviously shaped by my past experiences. In addition, this study and the school I was working in both had a significant impact on my understandings. A study such as this made me think about practice and consider what I do, why I do it and how I do it, and concomitantly it made my colleagues think about practice and consider what they do, why they do it and how they do it.

Dialogues such as the ones inspired by my autoethnography, and the sharing of my understandings through my narratives with my colleagues challenged us all to reflect on our understandings of teaching, learning, inquiry and our practice. This study invited us all to share our respective experiences thereby creating a shared experience from which a learning community of teachers was formed. Creating spaces for such dialogue

fostered “re-engagement, resistance, and reading ourselves into the process of education and change” (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p. 25). Creating such reflective communities and sharing our stories in schools is an essential component to improving our teaching practices.

Learning within the learning community

The experiences we all had as a result of our participation in this study were varied. For some of us it was uncomfortable but rewarding, for some it was thought provoking and for some it challenged and reinforced elements of our practice and how we saw ourselves as teachers. Phoebe was appreciative of the chance she had to really think about learning and being a researcher of herself. For Maggie her participation in the sharing component of my research was significant in terms of her own professional learning ultimately influencing her practice. She reflects:

First and foremost being a participant of the interview/conversations is something that keeps on giving. For example, I often think back to the conversations we had, your narratives, your questions and the discussion. I revisit frequently as both sessions promoted reflection and deep thought about a professional topic that interests me, yet also challenges me. By expressing my experiences, thoughts and understandings I was allowed to make connections between what I believe about learning and inquiry and my prior experiences that have influenced me to embrace this philosophy. Such understanding and insight is something prior to discussions with you that I had not given much thought to; yet I find very interesting as both an educator and learner as it allows me to make meaning. For me to learn and to really understand I need time to think things through, thus the process has

supported me as a learner and has provoked me to consider and reconsider my understanding of learning, teaching and inquiry.

This study forced us, as a learning community, to consider deeply where we have come from as teachers and where we are going. Walkington states:

Reflection on one's own perceptions, beliefs, experiences and practices is a core activity for all teachers-pre-service and in-service, in schools and universities.

Outwardly challenging ideas that one holds dear is not always particularly comfortable, but as a practice serves to affirm as well as to confront existing positions” (2005 p.59)

Roya experienced what was described by Walkington and she shared her reflection on her experience of being a participant in the study highlighting the impact our conversations had on her.

I mean for me it was sort of like a breakthrough for me. I reinforced my philosophy of education but also talking with you I kind of had a better idea of inquiry and the PYP [Primary Years Programme] and it was sort of like I had some “ah ha” moments and it was really exciting for me... And, of course it's funny because it was really powerful having that chance to talk with you, it was really powerful. I was walking, walking around on a high for like two weeks. No seriously, I'm starting to get excited about it again. It was funny because I was sitting there and up until I'd had that meeting with you I was like “I'm not really sure about this inquiry thing” and “I don't really get it.” I'm doing it but it was really you know it was like, cognitive dissonance you know when you're like,

“arrgh” and then after speaking with you I sort of felt like, or I was like, “oh, ok, I’ve got it.”

This collaborative autoethnography informed Roya’s practice as she began to work through what she was doing, what she believed and who she was as a teacher in an inquiry-based framework. In a supportive environment she was able to engage in a dialogue about herself, her past and current experiences and her teaching practice. It was emotionally charged, with both ups and downs. She also further reflected on the non-linear learning process as she worked to construct her own understanding and connect her understanding to her practice. My first experience as a teacher in an inquiry-based framework was quite similar despite the contrast of our particular pasts and current practices.

Phoebe was also feeling a certain disequilibrium with regards to how inquiry was facilitated and what inquiry looked like in her classroom at the time of my study. In the new environment, though she knew inquiry resonated with what she believed about learning, she was challenged with how to put it into practice, just as I had struggled in my first experience in an inquiry-based learning framework. Phoebe was experiencing learning about inquiry, and was discovering the reality of Dewey’s words that “when there is disruption, there is emotional discomfort; there is tension and a desire for resolution of that tension.” (as cited in Conle 2000 p.194). Phoebe stated in her reflection on the research process that:

Inquiry was a new 'label' to use for classroom practice. It was beneficial to talk about my educational experiences in relation to inquiry and at the same time I was deciding how my prior knowledge of working in a school was going to help me to

facilitate inquiry in my classroom. They [our conversations] reinforced ideas I had about what I had already done and what I would keep doing, as well as what I would stop!

When describing how she felt throughout the process, Maggie alluded to the impact the disruptions her participation had had. “Connected, valued, challenged, provoked and confronted are words that come to mind [when thinking about her participation]. I want to think more about the tensions that have arisen from being part of the process”. My narrative writing, our conversations and subsequent dialogues with others in this collaborative autoethnography helped us both become aware of and resolve some existing tensions.

Gus shared the sentiment. His participation in this learning community had helped him become aware of underlying tensions and thereby re-frame how he understood learning. He said he was excited to be “Learning about learning, knowledge of knowledge and understanding of understanding.” Of great significance was how, in different ways, he thought about what learning and “being educated” meant to him. He said, “It provided me with the opportunity to realize how specific experiences in my past had formed what I believed being educated to be; and to question whether they [what he understood] were effective or not.” Initially, he engaged his own reflection at a fairly broad level and then he connected his reflections to his past and current experiences. Participation in this study made him think about learning and connect to ways in which his own two-year old daughter was making sense of the world. In his reflection he shared that “as a parent I see these connections made in the purest form, not made or designed for learning’s sake but occurring naturally as part of ‘normal’ development, with a child’s

inquiring mind”. Consequently he considered what it all meant to teaching in general and teaching PE. Gus and I had similar experiences in that through considering our respective learning, teaching and our pasts we were led to think about PE from a different “space”. My autoethnographic data connected us to one another and in effect challenged us to further consider what our PE practice looked like. Rousemaniere stated, “When teachers reflect on their own schooling experiences through educational autobiography, they can see their own personal and professional development in a new light that can enlighten their current work in the classroom” (2000, p.87; as cited in Armour, 2006 p. 470). This collective autoethnography had that effect on me and on Gus as well.

Participating in such a learning community and supporting the inquiry of a colleague is fundamental to professional development, particularly in an inquiry-based school. If teachers are to develop their understanding of teaching, learning and inquiry they must have the opportunity to participate in learning communities with other colleagues in a manner similar to that which they are trying to create for their students (Prawat, 1992). Again, this study allowed for this hence challenging and informing practice.

What Next?

It became apparent that teachers appreciated the opportunity to explore their own pasts and understandings in a social and supportive context. In order to promote further dialogue and reflection related to both who we are as teachers and how we have come to be who we are, I believe firmly that such occasions need to be further developed in schools. Having considered our understandings of learning, teaching, and inquiry and then engaging with these understandings with these understandings from a life-history

perspective, we facilitated construction of new understandings (Woods, 1987). This process also informed and promoted change in our practice. Promoting and supporting learning communities in schools is not only essential for building professional skills and understandings, but also for keeping practices progressing (Hargreaves, 2003) and for creating change (Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997). Research concerned with the development of professional learning communities in schools should continue in order to encourage their effective and meaningful realization. Long and short-term monitoring of such learning communities and the subsequent provocation of meaningful dialogue within them would be an asset to the teaching profession.

Meaningful dialogues based on teachers' own stories through learning communities can help teachers value constructivist notions of learning and teaching and explore inquiry as a curriculum framework. We need to continue to study teachers themselves in a variety of situations and offer them the opportunities to share their stories. The ability to make connections with each other and each other's stories was important in inspiring a meaningful dialogue in this study. How these dialogues take shape and their ability to inspire changes in practice should be studied to encourage more opportunities for narrative sharing to take place in schools.

Inquiry-based learning and teaching also needs to be experienced through pre-service practical experiences and/or through challenges to existing practice. Both careful reflection upon and the search for connections and/or contrasts to these past learning experiences should promote awareness of inquiry as an alternative teaching and learning approach. Inquiry puts the learner at the centre of the learning experience and challenges a traditional teacher's role (Lemlech, 2002). As we move further into the 21st century this

traditional teacher's role needs to continue to be challenged. Research related to challenging traditional teacher identities would help further develop our understanding of what it means to be a teacher in the world and how we can continue to evolve to compliment the changing times.

For PE in particular, changing times also mean changing practice. We need to encourage pre-service teachers, beginning teachers, teachers new to different curriculum frameworks as well as experienced PE teachers to reflect upon their teaching identities and how these have developed. Careful consideration of what learning is, who we were as learners, what teaching is, who we are as teachers and what it all translates into in actual practice could challenge pre-existing teaching identities and promote awareness and espousal of more constructivist practices. This in turn should inspire PE teaching practice to re-align itself with current understandings of teaching and learning which would promote more progressive programming in general.

Physical education itself has traditionally been approached from a direct instructional base in which the emphasis was on the reproduction of knowledge (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). Current and new PE teachers should be challenged to consider evolving PE teaching practices more in line with constructivist perspectives on learning and teaching. While indeed a sensitive issue, it needs to be acknowledged that the common traditional PE teacher identity is typically constructed on past experiences as students in didactic PE programmes (Curtner-Smith, 2001) and hegemonic masculinity (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997). Teachers need to be supported in understanding their own learning. Seeing themselves as teachers as supported and committed learners, the perceived threat to teaching identity and challenge to personal teacher knowledge that

may accompany constructivist notions of teaching and learning could be lessened (Rovegno & Banhauer, 1997). This could in effect encourage movement towards more constructivist practice in PE programmes.

CHAPTER VII -WHAT IT ALL MEANS

Through my own autoethnography and our conversations, my participants and I have challenged ourselves to deeply consider how we understand teaching, learning and inquiry. From my journaling and my narratives I engaged with my own past and unpacked where I had come from. Significant themes I identified from my autoethnographic data that were important to me as a learner were those of trust, voice, responsibility, empowerment, social learning and respect. The experiences I spoke of in my narratives to represent “my past” all challenged the social norms that one would expect in the respective environments –they are snapshots of me, a female PE teacher challenging traditional approaches to PE in schools. I know these particular instances, amongst many other experiences in my past, have shaped who I am, and how I understand learning. In the larger context of “me” they are lived experiences that have enabled me to value inquiry-based teaching. Essentially I challenged my understanding of learning and how and where inquiry fits into it. I challenged my awareness of myself - of who I am as a learner and as a teacher as a result of this study. I re-affirmed that my beliefs in learner-centred practice, individualized success and the empowerment of learners form the foundation of the type of teacher I aspire to be.

I now also acknowledge there is a need for further critical reflection of my own experiences exploring the variety of social contexts which my identity derives from. In this study I considered general experiential connections I had to learning and inquiry shaping enabling me to value constructivist notions of learning. However, I stopped short at fully examining and representing the contexts of gender, privilege, subject domain (PE) and class. All of which would have likely led me in different directions and to new

understandings. This autoethnography has raised my awareness of such varied contexts that at some point should be explored. I have also developed a deeper understanding of the complex nature of my own personal teaching identity and teacher knowledge development and as a result, I have a different lens through which to view my own practice.

In my role as a teacher I now find myself considering daily the “why” of what I am doing, the “what” of what am I listening for, and the “how” of how it will frame the direction of our (the students’ and my) time together in the gym. I spend much less time “talking” to my students – telling them how to perform skills and play games. Rather, they spend much of our time exploring, experimenting, sharing and reflecting in order to come to understandings. I have seen a change in the ownership the students have taken in their learning.

In a recent exploration with my Grade 1 class focusing on “How to run faster”, we had looked at what we do with all our body parts when we run. Students had experimented with different body shapes, styles of running and directions to see how they could run “fastest”. They came up with lots of physical cues and shared them with each other and reflected further. Eventually as a class we decided on a few key “tricks” for running fast and we talked about why and how these help us. A few days later, I had a Grade 1 male student, Lee, decide to help a female classmate, Ella, catch up on what we had learned about running while she had been away. Out of the corner of my eye I watched Lee as he gave Ella chances to run and then he would ask her questions. Some of his questions were: “What can you do with your arms?”, “Should you stay on your toes?”, “Where do you think you should be looking?” and “What body parts do you need

to use?” Lee gave Ella time to consider and play with each question. What amazed me was that he came up with these questions to guide her learning of his own accord. Lee finished his mini-lesson with a challenge: Ella could race him, if she wanted to. They raced a short sprint, and Ella won. One would expect a Grade 1 boy to be a bit disappointed having been beaten but Lee was not. On the contrary, he came over to me glowing, “I am such a good teacher, Ella is able to beat me cause **she figured out** how to run so fast now!” I smiled, gave him a high five and said to him, “Now you know how I feel every day as a teacher!”

I am also working with teachers in our school in a coordinator’s role and find myself thinking about how to support them in their learning and explorations of inquiry as a result of my own understanding of inquiry. I have a better understanding of asking the right questions at the right time and a newfound trust in that learning happens for different people at different times and in very different ways, depending on prior knowledge and experiences. Negotiating this space is the challenge for me as a teacher and as a colleague. I understand that what teachers do in the classroom is very personal and I try to support them and challenge them, when they are ready, and in ways that I think will work for them. I have learned that for some they may never be really ready to engage in learning and teaching in ways so foreign from those they have experienced, ways they know, understand and have perceived learning and teaching to be. Yet I still have to find a way to encourage and support them.

From my reflections in this study in this study and my ongoing practice, I have changed the context of my own teaching, the notions I have of learning and of the learner. The power of the study however comes from my interaction with “the other”.

Just as Conle (2000) desired, I too “wanted to see if my inquiry story was a socially shared one” (p.210). Although my narratives were a variety of stories related to my past (and inquiry as an approach to teaching and learning) and Conle’s related to her experience as a researcher, the desired effect of the method was the same: to “create a space for conversation, reflection and critique” (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p.25).

Clandinin explained the power of narratives between teachers by stating:

When teachers told their stories and responded to others’ stories in sustained conversation groups, they came to understand their own practices in new ways. Their participation in these groups led them, many said, to new insights, new re-storied knowledge. Many described their experiences in these groups as their most powerful professional development (2001, p.viii)

The sharing of my narratives with others became the heart of this study. I was able to locate my own personal experiences and beliefs within a larger context. The themes I identified and developed through my narratives connected us and led us to consider how we create learning in our own teaching spaces. Among the themes that developed through this sharing component of my research were facilitation, giving students a voice, responsibility, learning partnership, supportive role, and the importance of a safe environment, complementing the themes from my autoethnographic data.

By unpacking my past, sharing my stories with my colleagues and asking them to consider their pasts, we explored experiences, made connections and identified both disabling and enabling experiences that may have led us to value inquiry. Together we explored the complex idea of learning and what inquiry-based learning and teaching is within our own frames of reference. This unpacking of what we knew and how we knew

it was informing practice according to Munby et al. (2001) as "how teachers' knowledge develops and the extent to which teachers understand the development of their own knowledge make all the difference to children's learning" (p. 891).

My narratives were a starting point for our discussion of past experiences related to learning and to who we are as learners and teachers. Table 4 and Table 5 (drawing on Tables 2 and 3 in Chapter 5) summarize our thoughts on learning and teaching respectively. What our understandings are based on demonstrates the spaces, conceptualizations and understandings upon which each of us based our own constructions of meaning.

Table 4
Summary Thoughts on Learning

Colleague	Learning	Understanding based on...
Phoebe	-learning as investment	-open-mind
Maggie	-learning is constructing understanding and knowledge	-personal experience as learner
Roya	-learning is a change.	-learning for me, changes me
Seymour	-personally meaningful	-values social learning -listening
Gus	-learning motivated for end product	-personal motivation to learn
Miranda	-dealing with dynamic nature of our world.	-“learning” in my own world -watching young children learn

Table 4 demonstrates that there was a common understanding of learning referring to the meaning individuals construct from their personal experiences. All the representations summarized reflect constructivist notions of learning. Though we have

different interpretations stemming from different personal experiences, the understandings we have influenced our identities as teachers.

Table 5 summarizes our thoughts about teaching and where we think they have come from. During the conversations and my narrative sharing with my colleagues we discussed what it meant to be a teacher, who we were as teachers and how we had come to know what we knew. Our identities had been constructed in a variety of ways, by various experiences all leading us to become the teachers we were when the study took place. I believe, that who we were as teachers, who we thought we were as teachers and how we understood ourselves as a result of our past experiences affected our abilities to commit to constructivist notions of learning within our teaching identities, philosophies and practice.

Table 5
Summary Thoughts on Teaching

Colleague	Teaching	Understanding based on...
Phoebe	-views role as multi-dimensional -active participant	-Montessori system -belief in experiential learning (high school)
Maggie	-facilitating reflection	-expectation of students and self to engage in learning socially
Roya	-it's very personal. -it's very hard.	-from what I wanted as a learner
Seymour	-role as facilitator -player in the process	-discomfort with traditional role "giver of knowledge" -exploring philosophy of teaching
Gus	-self as learner -dependent on students needs	-I think it's something that just happens naturally (experience)
Miranda	-challenging, engaging and travelling with students	-empowered as youth -through practice

Our dialogues created open space in which we could freely consider our experiences of being learners and teachers. Despite the fact that our experiences as learners were in predominantly traditional (and one could suggest “disabling”) systems in terms of how we now understand learning, we were all teaching –creating learning, in an inquiry-based curriculum framework. Some of us sought out such an environment because it resonated with how we experienced meaningful learning. For some of us, we found ourselves seeking out such an environment as a direct result of the “disabling” nature of the learning environments we grew up in. We were looking to teach in a way consistent with constructivist accounts of learning but we were not taught this way. Awareness of this contrast to the majority of our in-school experiences in itself was contributing to the development of our teacher knowledge and ultimately our understanding of learning (Munby et al., 2001). Essentially we were all looking to “surrender” the teacher control we had been modelled for one reason or another –and with varying levels of success.

This past semester, a year on from our initial creation of the learning community in our school, I worked closely with Seymour, our grade 5 teacher, on the culminating component of our PYP programme. It was an independent inquiry-based unit. We set the parameters for the students based on the central idea that “We can communicate messages powerfully”. The students needed to inquire into something that was important to them, then identify and share their “messages” and take action based on their learning. They needed to be able to record, reflect on and articulate the learning process they were going through. Seymour facilitated this with 22 students doing 22 different inquiries. He had to move away from the “giver of knowledge” notion of teaching noted in table 5, to a

more responsive, shaping of experiences into knowledge. These were international school students aged 9-11. The focus of the student initiated inquiries ranged from being the daughter of divorced parents and the subsequent blame she felt to the need for High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes in our city to relieve the stress of traffic congestion. There were some students whose engagement was as simple as raising funds for children in less affluent nations, though the depth of inquiry was less developed. Still, for those students it was a successful and empowering endeavour. Seymour challenged himself to support and facilitate the learning process for all his students in all the different directions they chose to pursue. He was constantly reflecting on the process and his role within the experience. Though the unit itself ended, the action some of the students had taken carried on. One student continued working at an endangered animal shelter, one began organizing desert cleanup drives to save the camels, and one was even working in marketing for the local rugby club. The students were involved, active, empowered and challenged by this unit, and so was Seymour. He was completely exhausted after the exhibition in which the students shared their learning with the community. The process of challenging himself to support the independent learning that was going on in so many different directions and the subsequent surrendering of control was literally exhausting.

Though his experience facilitating such an independent inquiry was new and relatively unfamiliar, Seymour began to understand that which his students were already demonstrating with their continued activism. The combination of constant support, reflection and awareness created a space where Seymour (and his students) were able to not only foster new understandings, but to become increasingly aware of the processes involved in learning. As the teacher Seymour was engaging with his students in the

learning process by “improvising, occasioning, structuring, framing and participating” (Davis, 2004). Seymour was supported by his colleagues and by our learning community to take on this project the way he did. He was learning about himself as a teacher, about how to facilitate meaningful learning and about learning itself. According to Roya, learning is something that changes you and “change starts with social support and action that leads to change then in turn leads to new awareness” (T. Hopper, personal communication, June 26, 2008).

I had a teacher who influenced me. Mr Hayes opened up the world of inquiry to me in a school-based programme he, (as stated in my narrative):

Asked us questions he didn't know the answers to. He asked us questions there were no answers to. He had a quiet way of challenging us to find out more and then always encouraged us to share our findings. He listened carefully, he helped us adjust our sails, but he never really captained the ship we were on.

I saw this reflected in Seymour with his grade 5's. Seymour walked with his students, asking, challenging, listening and supporting them in their own inquiries. As exhausting as it was, he handed over control. I imagine if I shared my narrative, “The water project” with the students in Seymour's class, it would resonate in many ways with their experience in grade 5 this past year. Seymour found the support structure and confidence in his own understanding to challenge himself to engage with his students in a way Mr Hayes had with me.

Mr Hayes had a profound effect on my understanding of learning and ultimately teaching. The tension I felt as a new teacher stemmed from my experiences as a learner, partially due to my experience in his class. That tension inspired my research. By

exploring that tension and sharing my narratives of experience, and creating a community of learners exploring collective and individual tensions, we made connections to our own personal histories, experiences, learning, teaching and inquiry.

Seymour identified tensions in his own practice- he is puzzled by how to use inquiry in mathematics. And, as a result of this study he saw the potential for collective learning and exploring these tensions through his own learning community. He very recently proposed to set up a “teacher inquiry group” exploring mathematical inquiry. His objectives are to collaboratively explore how teachers are approaching maths and unpack together how inquiry can be used- essentially provoking a dialogue to increase awareness and affect practice.

As a result of this study and the exploration of learning, inquiry and who we are as learners and teachers, I can conclude that we, myself and my colleagues, are all thinking about learning and our teaching from different places. We have shared the experience of this study and our own dialogues and those of our community continue. We are all learners, and “the purpose of the inquiry method is to help learners increase their competence as learners” (Postman and Weingartner, 1969, p.31). Sarason (1996) states that “teachers cannot create and sustain contexts for productive learning unless those conditions exist for them” (p.367: as cited in Munby et al. 2001, p.895). We experienced, as participants, learning of our own in our own ways and beyond through this study. Lather (1986) speaks of catalytic validity in terms of “the degree to which the research process energizes participants and alters their consciousness so that they know reality and can better transform it.” (p.201). This collaborative autoethnography though motivated and inspired by my own personal introspection and representations of experiences

perturbed some of the structures and assumptions we all held related to teaching, learning and inquiry thereby increasing our awareness of who we were as learners and teachers empowering us to challenge and/or change our teaching practice. In essence, that is how this collaborative autoethnography has contributed to our understanding of inquiry-based practice in our school.

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