

Battle-cries from the Front Lines:
A Hermeneutic Dialogue with a
Secondary Learning Assistance Teacher

by


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ABSTRACT

This study examines a secondary learning assistance (SLA) teacher's struggling practice. The purpose of the work is to question whether or not reflective practice will alter the teaching and growth of this teacher and, if having taught for over twenty years, how will her values and beliefs regarding teaching change through the process of reflection.

The methodology engaged in over a six-month period, is hermeneutics in the form of two hermeneutic conversations. The first conversation revealed five dominant themes relating to the SLA teacher's work: lack of time, lack of teaching, meeting, paperwork, and overwhelming responsibilities and duties. The teacher reviewed these themes. The second conversation, taking place in October, resulted in the immediate non-reflective confirmation of the themes seen as a text disembodied from her own practice. A request to read sections of this body of work led the teacher to see herself as an anonymous teacher. Berating the person, this teacher realized the narrative was this teacher. This visualization, that I have termed *reflection-in-the-making*, allowed for the co-participant to view her teaching life from a reflective standpoint. A more in-depth review of the themes through the telling of her own 'teacher life story', resulted in her decision to leave teaching.

Eight days later, this teacher began to recognize her core as 'teacher'. Having stripped away the extraneous duties of her job, she found the 'profession' of teaching. Returning to teach, having set her own terms, she worked with non-designated students.

This study relied on narrative for it is the center of teacher practice, recognizable across the profession and often embodied in the 'collective teacher voice'. The work itself illustrates the core of reflective practice; the relationship between reflective practice, narrative, and 'teacher'; and reveals the personal 'self' through story.

Moving from theory to practice, this work suggests that policy implications are directly related. Governing bodies must clearly define the SLA teacher and hear their narrative voices; school administrations need to provide more assistance of a secretarial nature to SLA teachers; university education programs need to teach about the importance of narrative, action research, and reflective practice through example rather than theory. More value needs to be given to narrative in educational research, as teachers *are* narrative.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As an out of province graduate student in the Faculty of Education, University of Victoria, I was unfamiliar with British Columbia's public school system. The best way to learn about the system was to volunteer in it. Volunteering as a literacy tutor in a secondary learning assistance (SLA) classroom, I read with several secondary students.

I became increasingly interested in my classroom's SLA teacher's practice. This interest intensified when, through conversation, it was revealed that the teacher Monty Presdonne, although she has taught for many years, is a newly hired SLA teacher. Thrown into an unfamiliar situation and made the head of the special education department, this teacher is experiencing stresses related to her practice. Lack of time, a heavy caseload, departmental obligations and responsibilities, and a new staff to orchestrate with minimal experience in a position of authority are all taking a toll on this teacher. As a reflective practitioner I have begun to question how reflective practice might benefit this teacher's practice, staff, and students.

Reflective Practice and the Teacher

For the past two decades, reflective practice has become more predominant as a method of educational action inquiry (Eraut, 1995; Ornstein, 1995; Quicke, 1996; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991; van Manen, 1991, 1995) focusing on the direct relationship between a teacher's practice and the foundations of that practice. It involves the teacher in the active process of reflection, an internal and on-going questioning of the 'self', culminating in the affirmation or alteration of beliefs and values that underpin the individual's practice.

Aware of the importance of questioning their actions, reflective teachers will act, reflect, and question their behaviours continually. As a result, they will change, alter, or validate the foundations that constitute their practice. This leads to a greater understanding of the 'who they are' and the 'why they are' as teachers (Cocran-Smith & Lytle, 1995).

In this teacher's life story, the Monty will be analyzing her own patterns of behaviour by reflecting on her teaching practice. By engaging in reflective practice, it is hoped that she will be encouraged to examine her practice as she is teaching and having become more aware of her foundational values and beliefs, will take action because of her reflections. Her analysis will be documented through dialogue in the form of hermeneutic conversation.

Reflection is not something that occurs "on the run" or in personal isolation.

Reflective practitioners must have time to consider the consequences of professional action and use the ideas of a variety of significant others to determine the implications of personal decisions. Those ideas are shared in a climate that encourages dialogue, questioning, and creativity; teachers are empowered to think *beyond what is to what might be* (Lasley & Matczynski, 1995, p. 308).

The Importance of Conversations

Conversations, a way of encouraging dialogue, are a form of interviewing and a popular method of data collection in qualitative research. They allow the researcher to explore the subject in a variety of ways and provide information that the researcher can utilize in telling the stories of their subjects. Hermeneutic conversations allow the researcher to obtain a data base that allows for unexpected themes to be recognized that

may otherwise have gone undetected if set interview questions were asked (Fontana, & Frey, 1994). Non-directive conversations are, as with non-directive interviews (Burgess, 1982), a form of unstructured interviewing, provides for exploration of new directions encountered enriching the overall data. Analysis of this data can be extended when the unexpected themes are established and further interviews expand on these new ideas.

Tape-recorded conversations provide a means for the researcher to retain the often invaluable information throughout the study. Taping enables the researcher to review the conversations again and again for patterns in vocabulary, tones in speech, and pauses in talk that may prove beneficial to understanding upon review (Silverman, 1993). Transcripts of conversations allow the researcher and the subject to review and reflect upon the material.

The act of conversations often requires a great deal of time to fully explore the subject matter. More than one session may be required because of time restraints or to further new directions after analyzing the transcripts. The participant then reviews the transcript for accuracy.

The purpose of the conversation, like the interview, is to "...[obtain] qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning" (Kvale, 1996, p. 124). This is best achieved through unstructured interviews or conversations. By asking open-ended questions, the subject reflects and speaks of incidents or events that have occurred in their lives.

Awareness of underlying themes results in further reflection and ultimately analysis of them. This is the 'hermeneutic interview' (van Manen, 1990) or the 'hermeneutic conversation'. "The art of the researcher...is to keep the question (of the

meaning of the phenomenon) open, to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned" (van Manen, 1990, p. 98).

The hermeneutic conversation lends well to reflective practice for it is the engagement of questioning, responding, and interpretation of the responses that draws out the reflective thoughts of the participant. It is through dialogue that we learn from one another.

The use of hermeneutic conversations in reflective practice.

Dialogue is an instrument of communication. Through spoken interactions can be defined an individual's position, a situation within a context, and an uncovering of layered meaning that may lie embedded but perhaps hidden in the spoken word. For centuries the use of question and response through dialogue has influenced how people think and react.

The study of hermeneutics allows for active participation between conversants. Ancient Greek philosophers and Talmudic scholars have long used the action of hermeneutics to gain a deeper meaning and understanding of the beliefs and values they hold. The importance of dialogue lies in the questioning that is used to elicit answers thus helping to provide a direction (Jacobs, 1984; Kidd, 1992; Kvale, 1996; Neusner, 1992) that might otherwise go undetected. Further questioning allows for more in-depth interpretations of meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1987; Kidd, 1992; Levinas, 1990; Neusner, 1992; Risser, 1997; Wilson, 1990).

Sociological researchers engage in questioning to understand the 'how' and 'why' of people or professions and the impact on societal situations (Krieger, 1983, 1991; Schön, 1983; Shaw, 1930; van Manen, 1990) and aspects of cultures (Hurstun, 1942;

Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927; Krieger, 1983). Inquiry within educational research falls under this umbrella (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Grimmett, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1987; Huber & Whelan, 1999; Schön, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1988, 1991; van Manen, 1990, 1991, 1995).

An inquiry involving reflective practice actively utilizes questioning as a technique to continually 'check and balance' the foundations underpinning personally held values and beliefs that constitute an individual's practice. This is especially true in teaching (Bengtsson, 1995; Cady, Distad, & Germundson, 1998; Dewey, 1916, 1922; Grimmett, 1988; Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Kruse, 1997; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991; Shulman, 1998; van Manen, 1995). Discovering the reasons for our reactions leads to alterations in our actions and therefore our beliefs. This domino effect alters how we approach events of a similar nature, sometimes enabling us to react preventatively before they reach a critical state or, if not before, during the events or incidents (Burgum and Bridge, 1997; Cole and Knowles, 1995; Lasley & Matczynski, 1995; Tripp, 1993). Without understanding the importance of reflective practice and its affect on teaching, educators continually experience similar situations that add pressure and responsibilities to an otherwise overloaded day.

Narrative

Through dialogue, narrative can be constructed. Much research has been conducted in the use of narrative (Clandinin, 1992; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991; Cole & Knowles, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1991; Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; Parsons & Beauchamp, 1989; Hurston, 1942; Kreiger, 1991; Richardson, 1997) as qualitative research inquiry. Narrative lends itself to the exploration and interpretation of

the storied lives of the participants of a study. As researchers, we use narrative to express this journey by using rich layers of events, characters, and settings that invite the reader into the study. Narrative researchers seek active involvement from the readers, thereby engaging in their own interpretations.

Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) confirm this.

[L]ayered stories...are one way that you might consider to offer research data in more than a neat package of findings and to fashion reports that emphasize the complexity and individuality of your search toward understanding. In our opinion, it helps to remember that research is discovery, bringing together multicolored threads of meaning in endless patterns of momentary emphasis and compactness, and then entangling them into new webs of meaning - always elusive, shimmering, and fascinating. Actually, the whole story can never be told, no matter how much space or what devices are used to tell it (p. 95).

Story, because of its nature, involves the use of voice - that of researcher, participant, and culture. The story of one teacher may become representative of others: one voice, the collective voice. This work is 'story'. It is 'teacher-as-story'. What began as a work of one person's voice, is now reminiscent of many teachers' experiences. True to the characteristic of 'story', the participant's voice is therefore the 'collective voice'. In this case, this is Monty's voice as it is her story, but it is representative of many teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to engage Monty, in an inquiry that focuses on her teaching. By actively participating in hermeneutic conversations Monty will tell her

story and help her 'self-as-teacher' discover, through reflection, the reasons for her struggling practice and the impact her decisions and actions have on her teaching.

As a researcher actively participating in the conversations, I will be gaining more insight into my practice and my assumption that teachers are naturally reflective practitioners. With this in mind, I will be able to take a more well-rounded approach in the instruction that I offer beginning teachers, and in turn, of the system that lies in place to educate future teachers both at a Ministry and university level.

The Research Question

The following question became the research focus: Having taught for many years, how might this teacher become aware of her established values and beliefs regarding teaching through the process of reflection?

Definitions

Struggling teacher. The term 'struggling teacher' conjures up an image of disheveled, frenetic, disorganized teachers, unable to adapt as flexibly to life in the classroom, and unable to utilize management strategies as effectively as others. However it occurs to this researcher that there are several types of 'struggling teachers'. One such type suggests a new teacher fresh out of a teacher training program; another infers a teacher who has switched grades or subject areas; still another might be a teacher who has changed schools, school boards, or even countries; another type might be a supply teacher in a different class; and finally a struggling teacher might be a supply or part-time teacher with a first contract. In this case, the 'struggling' secondary learning assistance teacher is a teacher of over twenty years experience. Monty has varied teaching experiences in grades 5, 6, 7, 11, and 12. Reentering the work force after an absence, this

SLA teacher switched subject areas with no secondary learning assistance background and became an administrator with no department head experience.

Learning assistance teacher. The learning assistance teacher meets challenges on a daily basis. Contact with the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, the school board, other schools, outside agencies, home-school administration, classroom teachers, departmental, team, and support staff, and parents, allows little time to be allocated to what should be the actual focus of the learning assistance teacher...the student. This results in the greatest challenge of all, teaching time affecting positive responses and learning environments for the student.

Secondary learning assistance teachers have the added responsibilities of effecting smooth transitions for students entering grades 8 and 10 and leaving grade 12 to enter into educational facilities or the community. Further to this, high schools that follow a semester system rather than a yearly calendar, experience student 'shifts' in the latter part of January. New school terms, mean new timetables and therefore new students. In consequence, a great deal of the secondary learning assistance teachers' school day is spent time-tabling, scheduling visits to classes, assessing and programming. The list of duties implies a more managerial position rather than that of teacher. However, there are ways to alleviate disparity between managerial duties and actual teaching time.

The lifelong commitment to education involving nurturing qualities paramount to teaching and caring for students, may attribute to the continued perseverance of learning assistance teachers in general but more specifically to those at the secondary level.

The learning assistant teacher's duties are outlined briefly in Section 17.1 of British Columbia's School Act (1991) and are outlined in greater detail in School

Regulation, Section 4 (1) and (2). The duties are those of every teacher and not until British Columbia's Special Education Services' publication, A Manual Of Policies, Procedures And Guidelines Roles And Responsibilities (1995), is the role of the special education teacher discussed.

"[The] teacher responsible for a student with special needs is responsible for designing, supervising and assessing the educational program for that student. Where the student requires specialized instruction, this is best done in consultation with resource personnel available, with the parents and with the student" (p. B-7).

A Manual also points out that in secondary schools co-ordination in planning is important as more than one teacher is often involved in the instruction of the student (B-7).

Learning assistance teachers attending a recent 1998 workshop, saw themselves as fulfilling a variety of responsibilities more clearly defined than in A Manual or The School Act. Itemizing twenty six points ranging from the writing and updating of IEP's to initiating, modifying, adapting, and implementing individualized programs for gifted, ESL and designated LA students, to communicating with parents, students and personnel, what appeared last on the list was direct instruction of students. It appears as if an afterthought. These teachers also listed 'time' as the number one item necessary to effectively performing their responsibilities.

The 'system'. British Columbia's education system has seen great activity in the past five years. A proliferation of manuals, briefs and publications have inundated the teaching profession.

Government documents have outlined new and additional duties restructuring the special education field. Issues related to staffing and class size were confronted in a response from the BCTF in December, 1996 and was directed to the Ministry of Skills Education and Training brief "Addressing student differences" (1996). Such issues considered class size, funding, reporting, support, and curriculum. Mandates state students' special needs must be met in reference to IEP's. With this lies the assumption that students' needs are generalized enough to be met however each IEP states different outcomes which accentuate the individual needs of the students. The BCTF feels there is an assumption that materials (Kuehn, 1996) must be currently available to meet these needs. Adapted and modified programming of content material and high school level as not yet been written.

Although the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training has mandated new initiatives like the K-12 Plan (1995), there seems to be a lack of teacher- time to be able to implement initiatives. Short time allotments for implementation, in-service workshops detracting from classroom time and inefficient in-service strategies for secondary teachers main concerns are voiced by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (November, 1995).

Assumptions

I realize that I hold one assumption at the beginning of this work. I assume that teachers are reflective practitioners. I hold this belief because the teachers that I know, whether secondary or elementary, are and it is innate in them.

Limitations

Limitations are recognized with this study. My experience as teacher has contributed greatly to the interpretations and writing of this work. It has influenced how I see Monty's behaviours, hear her words, and converse with her.

Although the participant's voice is being used to represent her experience of secondary learning assistance teaching, it is possible that her story does not represent other SLA teachers' viewpoints. This was the teacher's first year in the program and first year as the head of the special education department. She also had the responsibility of teaching with a new teaching staff. Major, new administrative and teaching duties confronted her each day. Her experience may not be representative of other, more experienced, SLA teachers.

Summary

This study is designed to address the importance of reflective practice in teaching. Through the two hermeneutic conversations the two co-participants, Monty Presdonne and the researcher/teacher, are able to engage in a deeper understanding of the impact of reflection on practice. As Monty, reflection and its importance may provide new ways to engage in a personal inquiry as to her struggling practice; for the researcher, this inquiry may further the importance of reflective practice on the profession as a whole. Reflection has already caused this researcher/teacher to reconsider the implications of how reflective practice might be taught in current education programs at the university level.

Chapter two of this work provides a literature review of special education in North America and more specifically in British Columbia, the duties and responsibilities of special education teachers, reflective practice, hermeneutics, and the importance of life

story and collective voice. The third chapter discusses the design of the study, relevance of the use of conversations and journals, and the procedure used. It also provides the environs and culture that Monty is involved in as well as instructional methods and a final analysis of the data compiled. Chapter four is the study itself and includes the two hermeneutic conversations and pertinent background information necessary to the first hermeneutic conversation. It also includes an epilogue to the conversations. The final part of this work, chapter five, defines 'teacher', discusses the relevancy of reflective practice in education, and the importance of narrative. Recommendations are given as a result of this body of work.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This work discusses three major elements: the secondary learning assistance classroom, reflective practice, and hermeneutics. Through two hermeneutic conversations this teacher will view her practice as a secondary learning assistant teacher. Questioning herself and evaluating herself. An understanding of all elements is necessary to understand this teacher's story.

Special Education

North America.

Recognizing the educational needs of individuals has been an on going practice since the mid-nineteenth century in North America. Implementing education programs into the public school system to meet these needs has been a different matter. Not until the middle of the twentieth century was the necessity of in-school special education programming even acknowledged.

An early beginning to recognizing 'special needs' in the United States in the mid 1850's centered on work with the blind. Talk of integrating blind students into 'regular schools' was initiated by Stanley Gridley Howe "...because of the social advantages of such a setting. He was advocating mainstreaming, or exposing the exceptional learner to an educational experience as close to that of the nonhandicapped as possible" [Online] Available TCP/IP: <http://www.edu.data.ca> (database).

Work with brain-injured survivors of World War I led to the research of Alfred Strauss and Heinz Werner. During the 1940's Strauss and Werner saw a correlation

between neurological functions and learning providing a focus for future work in learning disabilities (database). The 1957 launching of the Russian space satellite 'Sputnik' caused American educators to place value on educating the gifted student population (database; Graves & Dykstra, 1997).

Special education programming centered on an event marked by the address of Samuel Kirk presented in 1963 in Chicago at a conference attended by parents of children with special needs. His speech coined the phrase "learning disabilities". Thrilled parents accepted the term openly and they founded the Association of Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) later renaming it the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Under Kirk's tutelage a definition for learning disabilities was recognized and incorporated into federal law. Simultaneously, the formation of the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) acknowledged the need to represent the learning disabled populace of Canada.

Educational texts and other materials began to appear on the market in the 1960's focusing on the learning disabled. A teaching method for brain-injured and hyperactive children and The Illinois test of psycholinguistic abilities both appeared in 1961 and influenced working with special education students. Conflict in the classroom (Lang, Morse, & Newman, 1965) presented educators and prospective teachers with suggestions on how to work with learning disabled students. Head Start began in 1965 and focused on helping disadvantaged pre-schoolers. By the mid 1970's the American government mandated that 10% of Head Start's enrollment was to be left for children with disabilities (database).

The Education for all handicapped children act (1975) was passed providing public education for all handicapped students. Children with 'learning disabilities' were categorized in this act. Renamed the Individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA), (1990), it substituted the term 'handicapped' for 'disability' thereby providing a less pejorative label.

The movement in Canada in special education is fairly recent especially since the advent of the LDAC (1963). Membership has grown into 140 chapters across Canada and includes parents, educators, and medical personnel. The organization's objectives include meeting the needs of individuals, creating awareness among all people and the government, and in advocating the education and treatment of the learning disabled. "It is dedicated to advance the education, employment, social development, legal rights and general well-being of people with learning disabilities" (LDAC, 1996, web page).

Schools across Canada have incorporated special education programs much like those of the United States. Resource rooms, behavioural classes, gifted programs, reading clinics, and 'ld' rooms have all been a part of the education system since the late 1960's. Paralleled and influenced by the movement in the United States.

The focus of this work involves the current British Columbian secondary learning assistance environment that one teacher encounters.

The Ministry and special education of British Columbia.

FOREWORD

BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION

There will be those who hold to the view that the special education of slow learners as set forth in this report is unduly expensive. This could be a superficial and shortsighted point of view.

When these pupils remain in the regular student stream, the following are the economic results:

- (a) They experience several years of retardation at an additional average cost of \$ 250.00 per year.
- (b) They gain comparatively little in return for the \$ 2,000.00 to \$2,500.00 instructional cost invested in them during the eight to ten years of their school life.
- (c) Any tendency toward delinquency could be accelerated, with consequent additional public expenditure.
- (d) Many fail to achieve mature and self-supporting adulthood.

This foreword attributed to H. L. Campbell, Deputy Minister and Superintendent of Education appears in Précis of a report on the developmental education of slow learners in special classes in the public schools of British Columbia, 1955 - 1956.

Optimum conditions for a secondary slow learner class size is fifteen students with no more than three grade levels in attendance (1956, p. 6). It suggests that schools containing 200 - 1200 students “...are suitable for *one* special class...” (p. 8). In secondary classes time should be focused on English and what is termed ‘the Practical Arts’ (p. 11) and less time spent on “Health and Personal Development, Social Studies, and Music” (p. 11).

Implementation of special education programs within the British Columbia public school system has occurred over the past 30 years. As a precursor to academic special education classrooms, occupational programming flourished. In 1958 occupational programs were offered to students of grade 8 or higher to provide them with a chance to receive vocational training (Csapo, 1977). By 1964, B.C. secondary schools established three year vocational training programs.

In 1968, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation Commission on Education suggested that occupational classrooms be replaced with "...individualized programmes geared to the needs and abilities of the students..." (Csapo, p. 33). At this time students were placed "...according to rigidly defined categories of handicaps and their segregation from the regular stream of educational programming into 'special' classes with 'special' teachers, sometimes in 'special' schools" (Schwartz, 1979, p. 6). The provincial government finally recognized the need for such programmes when it established learning assistance (LA) classrooms in schools in the 1972/1973 school year (Csapo, 1977; Schwartz, 1979). Hammill (1972) defines the LA classroom "...as instructional settings to which children come for specified periods of time on a regularly scheduled basis for special training or services" (p. 351). Twenty years after the 1955 - 1956 report, the idea of the learning assistance classroom was about to materialize. This resulted in a shift in focus for British Columbia's special education programming.

In the past ten years British Columbia's education system has experienced an increase in activity with respect to special education. A proliferation of government manuals, briefs and publications has inundated the teaching profession. Documents have outlined new and additional duties which have restructured the special education field. "Addressing student differences" (Ministry of Skills, Education and Training, 1996) recommended ways teachers should approach working with students in special education. As a response to this Ministry document, the BCTF issued "Addressing student differences: a brief to the Ministry of Skills, Education and Training" (1996). This brief made recommendations based on what the BCTF felt were the real concerns of its members: staffing, staff support, funding, reporting, and curriculum requirements.

Students' special needs must be met in reference to the plans outlined by the special education teachers in the students' Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). IEP government guidelines make the assumption that students' needs are generalized enough to be met. However, in reality, each IEP states outcomes accentuating that all students have individual and varied needs. These needs cannot be met by teaching to the generalized assumptions made by the government.

Traditionally the implementation of special education programs has resulted in the segregation of special needs students from the 'mainstream'. The emphasis has been on ensuring the services are available making the assumption that programs that are in place meet the needs of the students and that all students who require learning assistance are serviced. And that segregating students is the answer.

The BCTF feels there is also an assumption made by the government that instructional materials (Kuehn, 1996) are currently available to meet the needs of the students. However, adapted and modified programming of content material at the high school level has not yet been developed by the Ministry. Without this content material readily accessible learning assistance teachers struggle to meet the students' IEP goals.

Although the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training has mandated new initiatives like the K-12 policy manual for B. C. schools (1995), there is a lack of teacher-time available to implement these initiatives. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (November, 1995) has concerns about short time allotments for implementation, in-service workshops detracting from classroom time, and inefficient in-service strategies for secondary teachers.

The responsibilities of the learning assistance teacher.

A Précis of a report on the developmental education of slow learners in special classes in the public schools of British Columbia, 1955 - 1956 outlines the desirable characteristics of the slow learner teacher important because the document recognizes in the need for specialized teachers in the field of special education.

There are certain characteristics, present in all good teachers to some degree that must be present to a greater extent in the teacher of special classes. Most frequently mentioned by teachers and administrators are these: Patience...; understanding, sympathy, and tact...; firmness in discipline...; emotional stability and evenness of disposition...; sense of humour...; flexibility in approach, versatility...; specific interest in this work and a desire to teach these pupils...; ability to improvise, ingenuity...; ability to comprehend the pupil's difficulties, an awareness of the needs to be met...; ability to inspire, encourage, and to give confidence...; true liking or love for all children...; kindness (not pity) and friendliness...; maturity and sound personal judgment....

Other characteristics...[are]: sound knowledge of psychology, including child and abnormal; previous teaching experience in regular classes; perseverance, persistence, and fortitude; knowledge of the child's abilities, backgrounds, etc.; enthusiasm; warm and vital personality; successful experience as a primary or reading teacher; ability to appreciate the worth of these children; grasp of specific teaching techniques...and of curriculum content; good health, both physical and mental; belief in the worthwhile nature of what can be achieved; consistency; sense of impartiality and justice; scientific mental attitude; realization that these

children must learn many things acquired incidentally by other children; tolerance; interest and experience in teaching handicrafts; optimism; broad outside interests; ability to gain the co-operation of parents; ability to meet disappointment without being disturbed; willingness to “accept” these children; knowledge of the field of work; ability to distinguish mechanical difficulties from emotional and intellectual difficulties; quiet and relaxed manner; wholesome and pleasant appearance; personality that gains co-operation from the staff; loyalty; teacher of same sex as class; experience in ungraded schools; ability to talk at the child’s level; shrewdness of observation; interest in child’s outside activities; parental attitude to the child (pp. 12-13).

More than forty years later many of the requirements mentioned in Précis of a report on the developmental education of slow learners in special classes in the public schools of British Columbia, 1955 - 1956 are unsuitable for today’s politically correct climate or are unwritten expectations of the LA teacher. What stands out in the 1956 list is the mention of the teacher’s need for previous experience within the regular classroom implying that prior to teaching in special education a solid background in classroom experience is beneficial. This is not the case currently. The mention of the teacher’s well being is another point to note: “...good health, both physical and mental...” (p13) and the “...emotional stability and evenness of disposition...” (p.13). The concern for the health of the teacher is less noticeable in today’s definition of the LA teacher’s role.

Learning assistance teachers, also referred to as resource room teachers (Adelman, 1972; Albinger, 1995; Heller, 1972; Jenkins & Mayhall, 1976; Goodman & Mann, 1976; Mattu & Janzen, 1991; McLoughin & Kass, 1978; Nagel, Peat & Wayne,

1985; Prager, 1983; Reger, 1972; Sabatino, 1972; Snapp, 1972; Speece & Mandell, 1980), are teachers who must assess, create, adapt or modify individualized instructional programs, implement these programs, and teach students. The Learning Disabilities Advisory Council for the B. C. Ministry of Education (1978) suggests that when "...planning programs for learning disabled children in the secondary school, the broad range of children involved should be kept in mind" (p.12). This planning is to be carried out by secondary learning assistance teachers. Rourke (1993) suggests that "...the major responsibility of the L.A.T. is to provide that individual assessment and then cooperatively plan with the [classroom] teacher" (p. 7).

In the province of British Columbia, the learning assistance teacher's duties are briefly described in Section 17.1 of British Columbia's Manual of school law (1991) and are outlined in greater detail in School Regulation, Section 4 (1) and (2). The duties are the same as those of every teacher. Not until British Columbia's Special Education Services' publication, Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines (1995), is the role of the special education teacher further defined.

[The] teacher responsible for a student with special needs is responsible for designing, supervising and assessing the educational program for that student. Where the student requires specialized instruction, this is best done in consultation with resource personnel available, with the parents and with the student (p. B-7).

Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines (1995) also points out that in secondary schools, co-ordination in planning is important as more than one teacher is often involved in the instruction of the student (B-7).

Today's effective special education teacher must produce programs that benefit the special needs of their students. McLaughlin (1993) refers to guidelines outlined in 1986 by the Center for Resource Management:

- ...[1] good teachers...need to have a clear grounding in both philosophy and practices of specific interventions
- ...[2] must hold high expectations for students with disabilities and their families
- ...[3] have a vision for longer-term goals of education for their students
- ...[4] understand curricula and can assess student needs and design programs that meet those needs within the context of a larger educational setting
- ...[5] can work collaboratively with other teachers and specialists to design and implement programs (McLaughlin, 1993).

Differing from the Précis of a report on the developmental education of slow learners in special classes in the public schools of British Columbia, 1955 - 1956 today's defined role focuses mainly upon the implementation of programming and the student, clearly steering away from the well being of the teacher. The duties are goal oriented and maintain a distance from need for the humanistic requirements necessary in teaching.

Recently in one workshop, learning assistance teachers were called upon to define their role. They saw themselves as fulfilling a variety of responsibilities more clearly defined than in Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines (1995) or Manual of school law (1991). These teachers were required to brainstorm and randomly list what they saw as necessary requirements to effectively perform their jobs. Time was noted as the first item. A further twenty-five points were identified and listed ranging from the writing and updating of IEPs to initiating,

modifying, adapting, and implementing individualized programs for gifted, English as a Second Language and designated LA students, to communicating with parents, students and personnel. Direct instruction of students was added as an afterthought as the twenty-sixth item.

The responsibilities of LA teachers trying to run effective programs are enormous. They attempt to meet the demands of time constraints, individualized programming, administrative agendas, and Ministry requirements. In the meantime LA teachers must juggle policy requirements and demands with the real focus of their jobs, the human element, the student.

Learning assistance teachers find themselves in dilemma. This thesis will attempt to help define the situation in which learning assistance teachers find themselves and outline the state of the current learning assistance system. It will demonstrate one teacher's practice and her attempts to meet these demands.

Reflective Practice

"For much of the fifty-year history of research on teaching, teachers and their work have been the topic of other people's research and study" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1995, p. 241). Within the last twenty years teachers have begun to focus more on their own growth and have taken action as researchers through reflective practice.

Schön's works (1983, 1987, 1988, 1991) have examined reflective practice among practitioners including teachers. He (1987) focuses upon the apprenticeships of designers, architects, and musicians as acknowledgment that the act of doing, reflecting on what is done, and using dialogue brings about a growth in individual practice.

Reflective practice grows from interaction with people, firsthand experiences, and a question of the self.

Researchers (Eraut, 1995; Ornstein, 1995; Quicke, 1996; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1988, 1991; van Manen, 1991, 1995) have shown that reflective practice has become a popular, practical, and useful research methodology. This is, perhaps, due to the fact that research of this sort is what could be termed 'teacher-as-teacher' centered. It is the teacher and how the teacher fulfills that role that lies at the center of reflective practice. The teacher surrounds himself with questions that involve his actions, the reasoning behind his actions, and his own thoughts behind the 'whys' of the situation. The questions the teacher asks of himself have relevant meaning affecting his practice. Questions "... reflect teachers' inexplicable responsibility to the here and now of school life as well as their ongoing need to construct intellectual perspectives for understanding their work" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1995, p. 242).

A common thread that ties researchers of reflective practice (Cady, Distad, & Germundson, 1998; Dewey, 1916, 1922; Grimmer, 1988; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991; Shulman, 1998; van Manen, 1995) together is the understanding that we must as teachers look within ourselves to examine our practice in order to look out and observe the influence that our practice has upon others. Reflective teachers are continually questioning their actions in order to strengthen their values and beliefs and ultimately their practice. For themselves and their students. Reflection "...begins with observations made by oneself or others in a directly experienced situation. These observations, in turn, suggest possible courses of action" (Grimmett, 1988, p. 6). The essence of reflection is introspection; its outcome is strengthened teaching.

"Reflective teachers actively reflect upon their teaching and upon the educational, social and political contexts in which their teaching is embedded" (Grant & Zeichner, 1984, p. 4). The reflective practitioner is able to see typical daily occurrences as having 'event potential'. Moments that require reflection. According to Dewey (1916, 1922) reflective teachers approach their practice with the following attitudes (attributes): open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Open-mindedness allows for questioning actions and reviewing all possibilities of solution. Responsibility leads to appropriate decision-making skills after considering consequences that might result from actions taken. Wholeheartedness refers to a belief in students. "The reflective teacher is wholehearted in accepting all students and is willing to learn about and affirm the uniqueness of each student for whom he or she accepts responsibility...teaching behavior is a manifestation of [the teacher's] teaching philosophy..." (Grant & Zeichner, 1984, p. 8).

Pre-reflective teachers confront only the immediate reality of their day, forgetting what their role of teacher means to them. They may have never even asked themselves. They try to cope with daily situations often brought about by administrators, colleagues, students, and parents (Grant & Zeichner, 1984). As a result they automatically proceed through the routines of the day with little knowledge of events beginning to surface unless they are disruptive to routine. These events are usually 'critical' as they often escalate into confrontational experiences if not caught in early stages. Eruptions might occur between student, teacher; student, student; teacher, administrator; teacher, teacher; administrator, student; parent, teacher; or any other possible combination of the mentioned participants. For these teachers the day continues clouded by the events that

have disrupted their routines. Recalling the incident to others will likely occur however the act of reflecting does not lead to the retelling. The story is a stress release.

Dewey's attributes may or may not be lacking in pre-reflective teachers. They simply may not be aware of them. Such teachers are unaware of how to access some or all of these qualities, a direct result of being pre-reflective. Their foundation is weaker than that of the reflective practitioner mainly because they may not have the building blocks available. As a consequence their values and beliefs are less formed. The pre-reflective teacher needs to be shown ways to access their hidden attributes.

In reality, teachers reflect unknowingly. Conversations in staff rooms, contributing ideas at meetings, sharing ideas with peers (Brandes & Erickson, 1998), and reviewing students' files are all acts of reflection especially when these acts involve change (Lasley, & Matczynski, 1995; van Manen, 1995). These reflections may be conscious actions or automatic responses. Yet these reflections actually represent changes made at the core of the individual teacher.

Teachers admit that they must be making countless decisions throughout the day. But when asking the same teacher how much reflective thinking went into each of these many decisions the teacher will equally readily admit that in actual fact they did not really make decisions in that sense (van Manen, 1995).

Engaging in reflective practice.

To be used effectively, the art of reflection takes time to understand and learn. Hectic daily schedules cause some teachers to feel that there is little time to reflect and act upon their reflections. "The immediacy, pace, and complexity of classroom life with thirty to thirty-five students, is such that a teacher is in a constant state of acting and

reacting" (Kilbourn, 1988, p. 93). Most teachers make intuitive responses to situations they encounter but do not take the time to reflect after the event occurs.

New or beginning teachers discover that their knowledge base and preparation might not be appropriate to classroom situations that confront them (van Manen, 1995). New teachers, taught the importance of reflective practice (Bengtsson, 1995), gain insight into their beliefs about their teaching when they enter classrooms. They often test theory encountered in university and restructure or even dispose of assumptions they were unaware of holding until practical teaching practice occurs. With appropriate guidance, teachers are able to identify areas of concern, reflect, and act upon the 'holes' that they have found in their practice.

As teachers progress in using reflection, they question underlying values and assumptions. They begin to identify personal beliefs (Kruse, 1997) and once identified, build a stronger scaffold to support their teaching. "The educational process involves teachers reflecting upon their self knowledge, making explicit their implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions and scrutinizing the various beliefs which underpin their practice" (Quicke, 1996, p.20). Kruse (1997) identifies three aspects integral to reflective practice: acknowledging oneself as a resource, realizing that other teachers are resources, "...and an understanding of the kinds of knowledge available from which to seek further assistance" (p. 57). Cole and Knowles (1995) write of the importance of life history studies of teachers. Examining everyday life "...is particularly useful for locating critical incidents or epiphanies in lives, the points of profound change and influence" (p. 141).

* * *

A reflection. As teachers we all have experiences that have already occurred to others. We know this because it is natural for us to share, listen, and observe. It is also natural for the experienced to advise. We reflect upon our known experiences. We question ourselves. Maintaining a ritual of constant questioning of our values, beliefs, and actions is imperative to progression as a reflective practitioner.

Our teaching practice reflects our soul. As teachers, we immerse ourselves in our students' joys and sorrows. We are vicarious participants. We share in their experience and they live within ours. From these happenings, our own experience is increased. Our practices begin to grow and spread to envelop us.

Experience is not theory. It is life. Reflections of happenings augment our growth. Intensely personal, we learn to look deeply into, rather than at, ourselves.

Teaching is personal. As is experience. Reflection, a private domain. A connection is made.

We cannot teach reflection. Only about it. We all become reflective at our own pace. It comes to us only when we beckon it forth.

And *only* when we are ready.

Thoughts of past experiences begin to act as guidance for our behaviours and ultimately we attempt to show the way to learning and achieving through meaning and interpretation. Through our teaching.

Reflective practice is an inner practice. A searching of our soul, or even for it. The teacher who partakes of the experiences offered through reflection, is one who 'feels'

their practice. Theory adds influence later when we are able to understand it. We only hear, internalize, and act upon what we are ready to believe. Theory does not contain a heart; it is our practice that does.

Change within us occurs through reflection. The perception of our knowledge grows much clearer. We begin to learn about ourselves. Why *we* are the way we are. Why *we* believe the way we believe. Why *we* teach the way we teach. Only when *we* learn about *ourselves*, can we truly begin to learn about others. Why *they* are the way they are. Why *they* believe the way they believe. Why *they* learn the way they learn. That is the heart of teaching. The essence. That is the art of teaching.

Another circle. A circle of continuous learning. Through our reflective learning, our teaching practice strengthens.

* * *

Critical incidents.

Most professions have a language that allows its professionals to communicate with an understanding of one another. Education is no different. Reflective practitioners and/or educational researchers will often refer to 'critical incidents' or 'attitudes' with respect to their actions or those of others. Terminology used as descriptors often employ more negative meanings than originally intended. Words often remain the same but the meanings evolve thus standardizing negative implications that have not previously existed.

In reflective practice situations are termed 'critical incidents' (Burgum and Bridge, 1997; Cole and Knowles, 1995; Tripp, 1993). Tripp (1993) defines critical incidents as events that have occurred to "...[mark] a significant turning point or change in the life of a person or an institution (such as a political party) or in some social phenomenon (industrialization, a war or some legal negotiations)" (Tripp, 1993, p.24). Hearing and thinking about wartime events, rather than simply collecting information about war, allows us "[to] consider the bearing of the occurrence upon what may be but is not yet..." (Dewey, 1916, p.147).

Thankfully incidents reflecting the magnitude of war are not regular occurrences in the teacher's daily practice. Tripp does clarify this and streamlines the historical meaning of the definition by stating that "[t]o create a critical incident one would have to say what the incident meant, which means moving out of the immediate context in which the incident occurred" (p.25). Again there is a problem with the wording, for 'create' implies that the practitioner has constructed the incident. And done so willingly. And with the knowledge of doing so.

The context within which we use words is important for context imparts meaning. The term 'critical' has many connotations reliant upon the context. The 'critical care unit' in a hospital implies serious illness. 'Critical mass' suggests the possibility of atomic explosion. If something is of 'critical importance' it demands immediate attention.

Another such word. 'Incident'. In British terminology 'incident rooms' are areas set up at scenes of crimes or in police stations to investigate serious crimes that have occurred. "There has been an incident" implies that something terrible has taken place.

The Oxford dictionary of current English (1990) defined 'critical' as:

1. fault-finding, censorious; expressing criticism; of or at a crisis, decisive, crucial; marking transition from one state etc. to another (*critical angle*); (of nuclear reactor) maintained a self-sustaining chain reaction (p.172)

'Incident' was defined as:

1. event or occurrence, esp. minor one; clash of armed forces (*frontier incident*); public event causing trouble (p. 173).

Critical incidents in teaching are rarely as devastating as the definitions reflect. These meanings are of a much grander scale and lead to the event being construed as negative.

We often say as teachers or parents that someone has an 'attitude' and a negative connotation is inferred. Even students have been heard to say similar things about themselves, peers or teachers. The context of the term for students' use suggests whether the attitude is positive or negative but teachers and parents more often than not attach negative meanings to their use.

'Attitude' is defined in The compact edition of the Oxford English dictionary (1990) as:

1. a posture of the body proper to, or implying some action or mental state assumed by human beings or animals
2. settled behaviour or manner of acting as representative of feeling or opinion
3. deliberately adopted, or habitual, mode of regarding the object of thought (p. 553).

Having an attitude has no negative meaning and yet the language has evolved to imply one.

The effect of [these] definition[s] of descriptive phrases, as of all good definitions is to increase our understanding of certain sentences. And this is a benefit which the author of such a definition confers not only on others, but also on himself (Ayer, 1936, p. 50).

With Ayer's comments in mind and in contrast to current reflective practice terminology, 'critical incidents' will be referred to as 'events' and 'attitudes' will be termed 'attributes'. I believe that reflective practice concerns reflecting on both negative and positive events in our teaching. Events might be caused by any number of participants for any number of reasons. Miscommunication. Attempting to establish control in the classroom.

Understanding language and the power that individual words suggest is important. The knowledge of word meanings and how an individual uses words is reflective in itself and provides a grounding to aid in the inquiry of the 'self'.

* * *

Jane, a high school student on a spare, walks into a classroom that is reviewing for an exam. She asks the teacher, Mrs. Smythe, for a CD ROM that is in the computer. Jane is asked to return later. The student leaves mumbling that she really needed it at that moment. Mrs. Smythe resumes her discussion about what the students can expect on the exam. Kevin, a student in the class, gets up, removes the CD ROM from the computer,

and begins to leave the room saying that he will be right back. Interrupted again, Mrs. Smythe tells Kevin that if he leaves, he is not to return.

Three days later Kevin has not returned to the class and he has missed his exam. The parents are called.

Kevin has told them he has been kicked out because he helped someone.

* * *

Mr. Carls takes over for a teacher who is absent due to illness. He is the third supply teacher in four days. Grade nine English. And the supply teacher has never been in a high school English class. Mr. Carls begins reading from a class novel and then asks a student to pick up where he stopped reading. The student refuses and Mr. Carls says that the student has to read and he will wait. The student says he will not read and Mr. Carls trying to establish control in front of everyone tells the student not to be belligerent.

Unknown to the supply teacher, the student has a severe reading disability and receives reading instruction outside of the room.

Normally the student listens to what is read in class and reviews it with his learning assistance teacher.

* * *

Dave and Peter are waiting for their parents who are attending a function at their school. Taking a break, Dave and Peter decide to roller blade, near an elementary school that Dave had attended two years earlier. Roller blading is against their school rules but they decide to do so anyway and leave school property. Harboring ill feelings toward his old school Dave decides to roller blade through the children who are out at recess. Peter, sensing trouble returns to their school. Willing to accept the trouble he knows he will already be in, he tells the principal what Dave has decided to do. Dave is caught in the school ground and says that he is Peter. The new vice-principal of the elementary school threatens trespassing charges.

A teacher on yard duty in the playground recognizes Dave and calls his school. Dave's principal arrives and smoothes the problem.

Dave is suspended for his behaviour until he is ready to apologize to the school and Peter.

The parents are furious that he has been suspended for something so ridiculous.

Peter is deeply hurt by Dave's behaviour and their friendship is irreparably damaged.

* * *

More often than not incidents arise in teaching that escalate so quickly the teacher cannot control the ramifications. Or avoids doing so. Or has not seen it coming. Or

what appeared small to the teacher was huge to the student. Or denies that there is a problem. These are all actions of a teacher who is not a reflective practitioner.

And there is a scramble to deal with the problem. More people become involved. At this point the teacher is generally ill equipped to deal with the situation. Consider the number of people that have become involved in the event in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The escalation of a critical incident

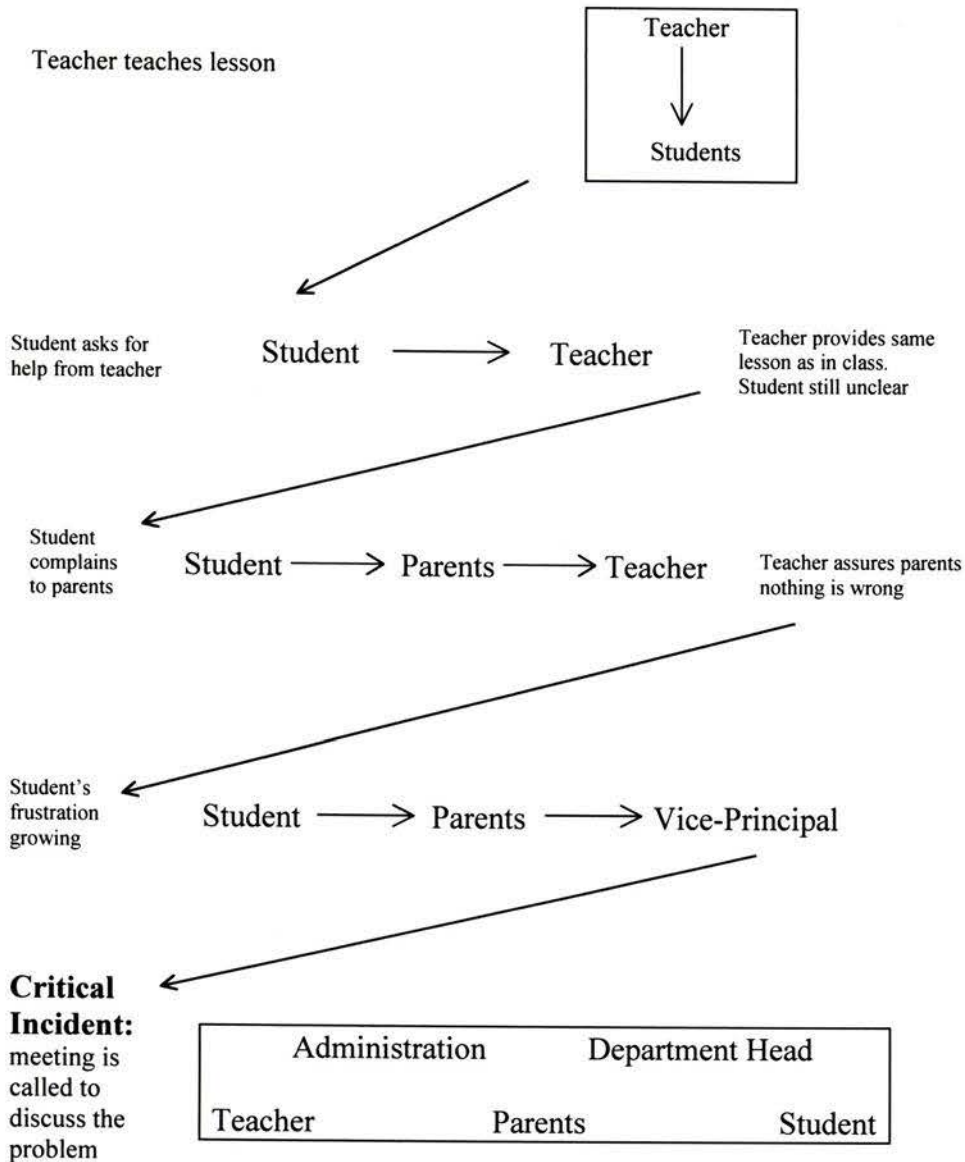


Figure 1. The escalation of a critical incident or event may involve a student not understanding a class lecture. The incident may have been curtailed if the teacher had clearly understood that repeating the lesson, even one-to-one, was not the correct approach to bring about an understanding of the material.

'Successful' events.

The negative connotations of 'critical incidents' imply that negative situations lead to reflective practice. In reality, teachers need to reflect not only on incidents that have stemmed from difficult situations but on what I term 'successful events' that occur. Thoughtful introspection relating to events that are positive might project 'positive-ness' within the teacher which will travel from the teacher to the surrounding environment. Reflective practice is instrumental in teaching us to recognize the reasons behind successful teaching practices.

'Successful event' reflection helps circumvent problems before they are able to take root. Values and beliefs are strengthened rather than weakened suggesting that these events are built upon a strong foundation. These situations occur when the teacher enters the profession with a solid base that considers Dewey's attributes. Reflection allows his building blocks to be continuously reinforced. The foundation is cemented with the mortar of beliefs and values. Constantly questioning values and beliefs strengthen any 'holes' or fissures that may be present. These positive underlying attributes are reflected out toward the environment resulting in more positive surroundings.

Reflective practice in any profession is for the individual's growth as a professional rather than for the growth of those that the individual is serving. In reflective teaching, the teacher looks into himself and becomes the focus, learning about his own reasons and approaches to his practice (Lasley & Matczynski, 1995; Quicke, 1996). "Good teachers think before they act (reflection-for-action), they think while they act (reflection-in-action), and think after they act (reflection-on-action)" (Lasley & Matczynski, 1995, p. 307).

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has traditionally been thought of as the interpretation of Biblical text. In fact I consider its history grounded in the Socratic method of questioning and self-interpretation. For the purpose of this work, recorded conversations have been transcribed and the transcriptions have become the text. In this way I have focused on the Socratic method of questioning and the method of interpretation similar to that used in Hebrew Talmudic interpretation.

The art of questioning employed by Socrates is immortalized in the works of Plato. As a scribe of Socrates, Plato documented conversations that took place between the teacher and his pupils. The dialogues are invaluable representations of oral inquiry. Kidd (1992) describes that "...the Socratic dialogues are organic developments... But the organic control of a dialogue lies in the direction of Socrates' questions" (pp. 84-85).

Plato's works offer us a written account illustrating the art of dialogue. It explores the art of searching for and drawing out information already held within the interlocutor but is unrecognized as yet. The questioning draws the participant into reflection and directs him toward knowledge. The paths followed may change direction according to where the responses lead. This is the true art of dialogue. The questioner allows the participant to unknowingly control the direction of the dialogue; at the same time remaining in 'overall' control by giving directions based on the answers. "The directive force is the question; and this, as teachers know very well from their experience in tutorials, is a very difficult thing to achieve..." (Kidd, 1992, p.85).

Kidd further suggests that there are three levels of importance of dialogue:

- (1) the elicitation of latent knowledge, which requires prodding;

- (2) the testing in agreement of each step in the process of the developing of argument as it occurs;
- (3) the direction of the argument (1992, p.92).

Wilson (1990) summarizes that although some of Plato's works are not great works what is brought about is "...questioning, provoking the participants in the discussion into deeper and more sustained reflection on the nature of the better society, the purpose of education, and human destiny" (p. 128). The idea of inquiry to extrapolate on already founded knowledge was the key to effective teaching in Socrates' time. It remains the key today. It is the journey of how to attain the knowledge that must be examined.

The conversation.

The following depicts a hypothetical conversation about hermeneutics among scholars. There are three scenarios presented throughout this section. The same characters do not appear within each conversation.

1. The conversation - representative of Plato's writings. They appear in dialogue format.
2. Talmudic hermeneutic circle (with a central figure) - the central figure represents the writing of the Talmud which appears in the center of the page; the Talmudic scholars write their interpretations around the central writing. In this case the Hebrew scholar sits in the center and the others encircle him.
3. Hermeneutical circle (with no central figure) - 'the hermeneutical circle' popular after Schleiermacher. Each member discusses his views reflective of the topic stated as the heading.

This design of this section is twofold. Firstly, it reflects the historical progression of hermeneutics in relation to its use for this case study: dialogue, hermeneutic conversation, and hermeneutic interpretation. Secondly, the explanation of hermeneutics as an interpretive tool. The vehicle of interpretation for this study is the hermeneutic conversation chosen because of my belief that true hermeneutic interpretation has its grounding in Hebrew and Greek scholarly history.

The characters.

Plato	pupil of Socrates; recorded thoughts of Socrates in dialogue format after Socrates' death; later dialogues such as <u>Meno</u> used Socrates as the main character but expresses a deeper interest in logic and knowledge; opened a school based on Socratic meaning and method but expanded on the ideas expressed
Socrates	recognized the importance of learning about the 'self'; professed that virtue is knowledge and that we already hold uncovered knowledge in our minds; the search for unknown knowledge comes through the art of dialectic (question and answer); the beginning of 'inquiry'
Schleiermacher	the father of 'hermeneutical philosophy'; an author relays messages to the reader as if the text is spoken; first to suggest the hermeneutical circle (Greene, 1983; Packer, 1985; van Havey, 1987)
Dilthey	hermeneutic interpretation involves knowing the author's influence or history brought to the text; understanding runs from the author's world, to the text as the author writes, is transferred to the reader and placed in the reader's world through the reader's interpretation - this is a hermeneutical circle
Heidegger	existential approach to hermeneutics; <u>Being and time</u> (1962); a person's daily life influences the interpretation of events (Greene, 1983; Packer, 1985)
Gadamer	student of Heidegger; author of <u>Wahreit und methode</u> (1960) (<u>Truth and method</u>); views hermeneutics as a way of achieving understanding through language
Levinas	Hebrew scholar and philosopher; his essays search for knowledge in response to his question: "What teachings about the human being do the Rabbis convey that cannot be found anywhere else but here but

which apply to the entire world?" (1990, p. xv); approaches his answer and interpretation of the Talmud hermeneutically

- Palmer author of Hermeneutics (1969) in which he discusses his interpretations of the hermeneutic experience
- Ricoeur combines dialogue and discourse in making full hermeneutic interpretations; interpretation relies on the world in which the text is situated and the experience of the reader brought to the text
- Hollnagel expresses his views on hermeneutics in an article entitled 'The paradigm of understanding in hermeneutics and cognition' (1978)
- Kvale his text Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing (1996) gives a general overview of the importance of the qualitative interview including hermeneutic interpretation
- Risser author of Hermeneutics and the voice of the other: Rereading Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (1997) a study of Gadamer's approach to philosophical hermeneutics

The dialogue.

[Plato and Socrates are advancing toward the room where the dialogue is to take place. In the distance approaches Levinas carrying a large poster of some sort.]

- Plato: I fear, Socrates, that this may be a difficult audience. You are used to extracting knowledge from your students. These men have much knowledge and have interpreted your teachings in any manner that they saw appropriate to their ways of thinking. I fear that some of these hermeneutists have backed away from the traditional ways we represent.
- Socrates I agree that this will be a very great challenge but must we not listen to what these great men have to say? Are not we bringing our own interpretations to this dialogue based on our own experiences?
- Plato I believe so.
- Socrates And are we not going to be experiencing new ideas?
- Plato I believe so, yes.

Socrates And will these new ideas or thoughts not require new interpretations of these ideas?

Plato I believe so, yes. You are right. But few have the same understanding as you of the art of questioning. They appear to focus more on the interpretation of text and not on the art of the dialogue that leads to the text.

Socrates I believe that you are correct and that shall be our goal. To express that very point. But we shall have help in that respect. Levinas....

[Levinas approaches]

Levinas Ah my friends. I have grave concern for this dialogue. I feel that they newer members of our group have digressed from the true meaning of hermeneutic interpretation.

Socrates You and Plato. I am more hopeful that for the purposes of this thesis the readers will interpret the importance of what the three of us have to say. I will clearly draw from them the importance of dialogue using our forum as the example.

Levinas And I purpose to tell of the history of the Talmudic interpretations based on many years of dialogue. Of how, Hebrew scholars dialogue and interpret what has been said and written before them in conjunction with the original writing before they can even consider their interpretation as a step closer to the Talmud's intended meaning.

Socrates And there you have it, Plato, the importance of dialogue. Both Hebrew scholars and Greek philosophers have behaved in like manners for

thousands of years. To come to a common end. I fear that Risser is correct when he writes that my work as interlocutor shall never be finished. Actually Risser writes favourably of my work, Levinas.

Plato Yes he states that “Socrates appears on the scene not to answer but to question, to be vigilant against unquestioned authority that would confuse what appears to be with what really is” (Risser, 1997, p. 169).

Levinas Truer words were not spoken....

Plato What, Levinas, do you carry?

Levinas Ah, I carry with me an explanation of what the Talmud looks like. I feel that the presentation speaks for itself. I want them to understand the importance of the history of hermeneutics. To see it.

The Hebrew text appears in the center of the page. Scholarly interpretations surround the text added only after many years of dialogue and study. Each interpretation reflects those that came before it and the original text.

The rhetoric of the Talmud may be described very simply: a preference for questions and answers, a willingness then to test the answers and to experiment through secondary and tertiary amplification, achieved through further questions and answers (Neusner, 1992, p. 183).

**For purposes
of this study
it is important
to visualize
the Talmud.
Fundamental
to
interpretation
is
presentation.**

Thus, the interpreter while bringing his or her entire person to bear on the text, must also pay extreme attention to the specificity of the text, which includes paying close attention to the way it is ordered, to its *symbolic* dimension (Levinas, 1990, p. xx).

THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD CONSISTS ALMOST ENTIRELY OF ARGUMENTS HAVING AS THEIR AIM THE ELUCIDITY OF THE LAW, RULING, RELIGIOUS TEACHING OR ETHICAL IDEA. THEORIES ARE ADVANCED AND THEN PREDICTED. THEY ARE EXAMINED FROM MANY POINTS OF VIEW AND QUALIFIED WHERE NECESSARY. ONE ARGUMENT LEADS TO ANOTHER WHEN LOGIC DEMANDS IT. THE CLAIMS OF CONFLICTING THEORIES ARE INVESTIGATED WITH GREAT THOROUGHNESS AND MUCH SUBTLETY. FINE DISTINCTIONS ABOUND BETWEEN APPARENTLY SIMILAR CONCEPTS (Jacobs, 1984, p.1).

Plato Let me speak too of the importance of the term hermeneutics. I shall discuss the etymology of the word. The term 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek Ἑρμῆς(Hermes), known to us as the messenger god of the ancient Greeks. Among his many responsibilities Ἑρμῆς was the god of oratory and eloquence (Zimmerman, 1971, p. 124). From his name evolved

ερμηνεύω - to interpret (Liddell & Scott, 1923, p. 690)

ερμηνεία - an interpretation, explanation, commentary (p. 690)

Levinas A sound introduction to the symposium. I will introduce them briefly to the history of the Talmud. Scholars in the Judaic world study the Babylonian Talmud. Historically there have been three major transitions in Hebrew writings. Rabbis refer to the Mishnah as the 'Oral Torah'. It contains narratives, the Pentateuch, and remainder of the Hebrew Bible. "In the schools of Palestine and Babylon the Mishnah became accepted as sacred text, taking its place by the side of the Bible" (Jacobs, 1984, p. xii). Interpreters of the Palestinian school published their arguments and interpretations of the Mishnah. This became the Palestinian Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud was published by the Babylonian school. It has been published in an English translation and is considered to be '*the* Talmud' (Jacobs, 1984). The Mishnah appears with the Babylonian text to compile a comprehensive work. Hebrew scholars read and interpret their text continually to provide guidance in daily living and understanding of the world. They attempt to interpret the text with the understanding that its

format is a part of the interpretation. A page of the Talmud would resemble my poster. Interpretations of scholars surround the Talmudic script.

Plato Very detailed, Levinas. At least perhaps it will impress upon them the age of interpretation.

Socrates Should we not prepare to enter the symposium? This dialogue is of utmost importance to the participants inside. Should we not let them make their interpretations without our insight? We must simply direct them to their thoughts, must we not?

Plato I believe that you speak justly, Socrates. I would like to first remind you that they will most identify with one of my dialogues. I also know of its appeal to educators (Grimmett, 1988; Kidd, 1992; Loughran, 1996; Schön, 1987) impressive for its techniques of inquiry. In *Meno* (Plato, trans. Lamb, 1927, 82B-D) in which a geometry lesson takes place between Socrates and a slave. Do you know of it Levinas? The young boy is questioned to elicit information that he already holds but does not recall until the 'right' inquiries are made. The geometry lesson draws upon the boy's knowledge and makes him recall his background in geometry. Socrates, you consider the boy's interest to be his 'opinions' on geometry. However, you point out that the young boy will sustain an understanding of the concept when he has been repeatedly questioned about the same subject in a variety of ways. I shall read to the group:

ΣΩ. Ουκουν ουδενος διδασκωντος αλλα' ερωτησανατος επιστησεται, αναλαμβων αυτον εν αυτω επιστημην;

MEN. Ναι.

ΣΩ. Το δε αναλαμβειν αυτον εν αυτω επιστημην ουκ αναμνησκεισθαι εστιν;

MEN. Πανυ γε.

ΣΩ. Αρ' ουν ου την επιστημην, ην νυν ουτος εχει, ητοι ελαβε ποτε η αι εχειν (Plato, trans. Lamb, 1924, pp. 318 - 319);

SOC. Without anyone having taught him, and only through questions put to him, he will understand, recovering the knowledge out of himself?

MEN. Yes.

SOC. And is it not this recovery of knowledge, in himself and by himself, recollection?

MEN. Certainly.

SOC. And must he not have either once acquired or always had the knowledge he now has (Plato, trans. Lamb, 1924, pp. 318 - 319)?

Socrates Yes, yes. A fine example. Let us go in and Levinas can place his poster upon the wall so that we all may see what meaning we can make of it.

Hermeneutic circle: Interpretation.

Gadamer: All meaning relies upon an interpretation already in existence. We take to our greater understanding one that we already possess. So our interpretations and therefore our understanding or meaning are constantly altered and expanded upon.

Kvale: Interpretation is "...a continuous back and forth process of the parts and the whole" (Kvale, 1996, p. 48). This type of interpretation moves us from a vague idea of what is meant to a more finite or a deeper interpretation.

Hollnagel: Ricoeur and I agree in the circle concept. The circle constitutes the whole made up of parts thus we interpret that these are representative of comprehension and explanation and *visa versa*.

Risser: Is not repetition circular? I think that experiences are repeated, brought back to us, causing a circular movement.

Ricoeur: "...the correlation between explanation and understanding, between understanding and explanation, is the hermeneutical circle" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 221)

Schleiermacher: We can only look at understanding a part of something if we understand the 'whole'. With this in mind I suggest that achieving meaning is a result of continuous, circular motion. Why? For we do not come to a complete understanding when we first begin an interpretation. We interpret until we have an understanding. This I have called the 'hermeneutical circle'.

Heidegger: "In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing..." (Heidegger, 1962, p. 153). We revise constantly, refining our past interpretations until what evolves is something satisfactory but never fully realized for there is no one and perfect understanding.

Dilthey: I see the circle as continually growing with the constant addition of understanding to achieve an ultimate universal understanding.

Hermeneutic questioning.

Gadamer: I believe that “...we can appeal to Plato if we want to foreground the place of the question in hermeneutics” (1960, p. 368). Giving definition to the ‘art of questioning’ is perhaps one of Plato’s greatest accomplishments.

Socrates: Tell me how do we define ‘questioning as an art’? Do we not see ‘questioning’ as a way of discovering an answer that we hold already within ourselves? And if this is so, do we consider that ‘art-worthy’?

Kvale: I believe that we need to stay within the parameters of textual interpretation if we are to remain within the relevance of this work. After all this thesis is an interpretation of a text.

Levinas: In the studies of the Talmud, scholars question the text in front of them through scholarly dialogue. Perhaps we need to look at ‘dialogue’ as the art with ‘questioning’ as its vehicle.

Risser: This thesis is an interpretation of a text but we must understand first the conversations that took place in order to understand how the conversations became text.

Heidegger: Surely we must state that there is but one question that we must ask ourselves and that is what I have stated in my writing already: What does it mean to be?

Plato: You only have to look at my Dialogues to see for yourselves how gracefully Socrates moves his participants through questioning to search for meaning they already hold for themselves.

Talmudic hermeneutic interpretation.

Socrates: Do I not
 "...enter the community
 neither to teach, nor
 instruct, nor prescribe,
 but to undertake an
 inquiry that is prior to all
 positing of knowledge"
 (Risser, 1997, p. 169)?
 Does this not help
 orchestrate
 understanding?

Palmer: "...the meaning
 of the text seizes..."
 (Palmer, 1969, p.248)
 the interpreter. I refer to
 my example in
Hermeneutics (1969) in
 which I suggest that we
 become caught up in
 what we read and see. I
 move that in
 hermeneutics the
 interpreter only
 participates in the text as
 the text is fixed. "...the
 process of coming to
 understand is more like
 a Socratic dialogue of
 dialectical circling and
 advancing through
 question and answer" (p.
 249). The reader gains
 far deeper understanding
 of his own world and
 self because his
 experience is taken to
 the text and used to
 compliment the text.

Hollnagel: In layman's
 terms, messages have
 several different
 possible interpretations
 when first received. The
 individual must 'guess'
 as Rudnitzky (1968)
 suggests in his writings.
 This he will continue
 until the possibilities are
 narrowed to uncover
 what is the intended
 meaning of the text.

Levinas: An interaction
 between text and reader
 occurs because we
 dialogue about the
 written text.

Risser: "Hermeneutic
 understanding is the
 work of repetition, of a
 conversation in which
 there is no last word just
 as there is no first word"
 (1997, p.169). Those
 who speak with me help
 my understanding
 become clearer. With
 this in mind we cannot
 overlook what others
 have said but we must
 include their voice and
 dispel aspects of what
 they say.

Heidegger: To me
 interpretation is circular.
 I outline three elements
 that interpretation is
 dependent upon:
 1. fore-having or
 prepossession
 2. fore-sight or preview
 3. fore-conception or
 preconception (Risser,
 1997, p.48)
 What results is a circle
 of interpretation. We
 understand because we
 already have the
 information that we
 need upon which to base
 our interpretations.
 Thus, I
 feel that our
 interpretations are
 already shaped. We
 carry those with us and
 alter our interpretations
 as we confront new text
 and we interact with that
 text.

Schleiermacher:
 Religious texts do not
 require any kind of
 interpretation. Textual
 interpretation relies, in
 general, on the
 experience of the author.
 And of the reader's
 understanding of this
 knowledge.

The importance of hermeneutics lies in the interpretation that we each take to the concept in question. My choice to engage in a hermeneutic conversation allowed my subject to approach this study through her experience as a teacher, reflect upon her past, and ultimately interpret her practice. We both engaged in hermeneutic textual interpretation. Mine occurred throughout the study with transcriptions of the two taped conversations; she reviewed and interpreted the themes I presented to her based upon my personal journals and the first recorded conversation.

Hermeneutics and Reflective Practice

Hermeneutics and reflective practice have much in common. Both involve a circular motion of an inner interpretation in order to have an outward understanding (Figure 2). We reflect upon our thoughts and actions. We interpret our thoughts and actions. We alter our understanding based on new thoughts and ideas that emerge. And we continue to do so.

Figure 2. Hermeneutic interview of reflective practice.

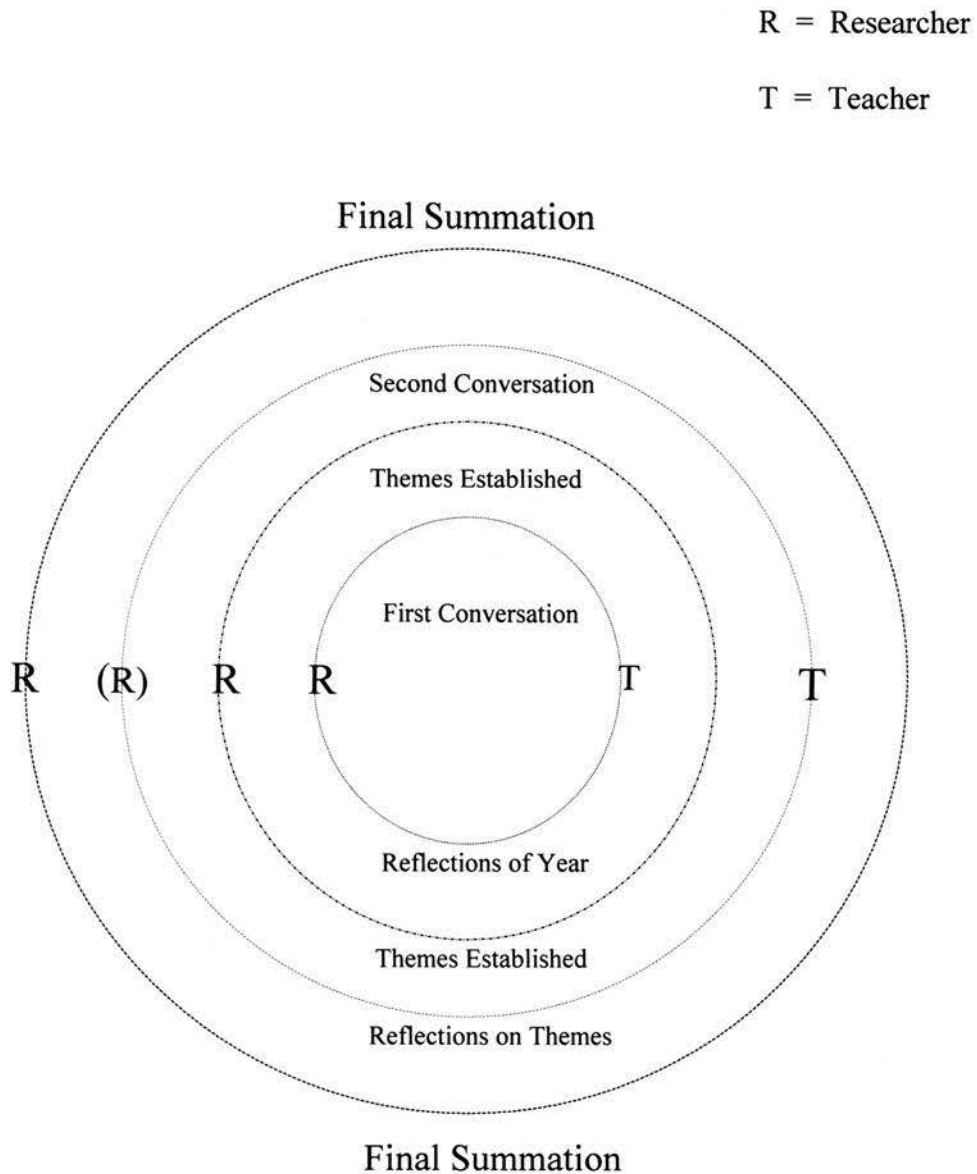


Figure 2. The inner circle represents the first hermeneutic conversation in which Monty reflects on the past year. Themes are established by the researcher, and presented for Monty in the second hermeneutic conversation, represented by the third circle. The outer circle represents the researcher's final summation of the two conversations. These circles reflect the ongoing interpretation of meaning in hermeneutic conversations.

A cycle of introspection.

A cycle of dialogue within ourselves.

An understanding that grows and uncovers layers of meaning.

* * *

A white rabbit is pulled out of a top hat...All mortals are born at the very tip of the white rabbit's fine hairs, where they are in a position to wonder at the impossibility of the trick. But as they grow older they work themselves ever deeper into the fur. And there they stay. They become so comfortable they never risk crawling back up the fragile hairs again. Only philosophers embark on this perilous expedition to the outermost reaches of language and existence. Some of them fall off, but others cling on desperately and yell at the people nestling deep in the snug softness, stuffing themselves with delicious food and drink.

"Ladies and gentlemen," they yell, "we are floating in space!" But none of the people down there care.

"What a bunch of troublemakers!" they say. And they keep on chatting: Would you pass the butter, please? How much have our stocks risen today? What is the price of tomatoes? (Gaarder, 1996, pp. 18-19)

* * *

Interpretation, reflection, analysis, and application to the text or practice bring about new meaning that affects the practitioner. This secondary learning assistance teacher has engaged in a journey that has strengthened, and constructed new values and beliefs related to her practice.

The Importance of Life Story

Social science researchers have authenticated the use of life history in their studies. The sociological documents of Thomas' and Znaniecki's (1927), The Polish peasant in Europe and America is attributed by Becker (1930) as being "the first published sociological life history" (p. v). The presentation of the autobiographical data of Wladek, a Polish immigrant, was collected and then interpreted by the authors. The work establishes the importance of life history data when situated in the context of the culture, and interactions within the cultural environment(s).

Wladek is, therefore, to be viewed not as a personality in general but as a resultant of the particular concrete (Polish) culture from which he came and as constantly living in interaction with the trends of development of this society (Dollard, 1949 p. 145).

The publication of The Jack-roller (Shaw, 1930) together with the work of Thomas and Znaniecki established the use of one person's voice as the 'collective voice'. Shaw's subject, Stanley, proffered autobiographical material describing his behaviours of robbing drunken men. Data gathered over a six year period was then interpreted by Shaw and the result, The Jack-roller, is a case study that was "published to illustrate the value of the "own story" in the study and treatment of the delinquent child" (p. 1). As with Wladek, Stanley's 'own story' is also recognized as the 'collective voice'.

Work in life history in social science research has been illustrated through narrative works in a variety of forms: self-study (Cole & Knowles, 1995), feminism (Krieger, 1983), and delinquency (Shaw, 1930). Its relevance in establishing profiles of personality types has been influential in the study of cultures (Hurstun, 1942; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927) and people (Cole & Knowles, 1995; Krieger, 1983, 1991; Richardson, 1997; Shaw, 1930). Through life history, one voice often represents a greater audience (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927; Shaw, 1930)

Interestingly enough, the collection of autobiographical material relies on the retelling of the individual's life or aspects of, the perspective of the details the 'owners'. Missing elements a possibility. The owner responding to questions, corresponding through written text and interviews; the researcher shouldering the responsibility for filling in the blanks.

Collective Voice and Collective Setting

There are certain 'nouns' that represent a place that most of us are able to identify with, not merely recognize, but that when heard, conjure up smells, sounds, moments. 'Home'. 'Car'. 'Airport'. 'School'. We attach different memories to those places and yet we all identify with them because we have experienced what takes place within those nouns. "When I went to school, I remember when..."; "When I went, we weren't allowed to...".

Teachers hear certain nouns and a similar presence occurs. 'Staff room'. 'School'. 'Office'. 'Copy room'. 'Library'. 'Classroom'. There is no need to explain a 'staff room' to other teachers. We identify immediately and the noun takes on a conceptual texture to it. We hold our meetings in 'staff room', have recess, get our

coffee, heat our lunches, and dialogue together. The concept of ‘staff room’ becomes collective to all of us, each of us somehow claiming a piece of ownership but contributing to the concept of its meaning. We know who sits in what chair, who gets the milk for the coffee, who belongs to what mug. And we do not cross the ownership. We know that these ideas traverse from staff room to staff room because as teachers we formulate its concept collectively.

The same occurs with ‘classroom’. Collectively, we have a conceptual texture to apply to ‘classroom’. The teacher of Room X takes ownership of the area and space within the walls of X. Posters, positioning of desks, displays, bulletin boards, centers, and books all contribute to ‘classroom’. To an idea that as teacher, we identify with through our own experience, but that are experiences of other teachers.

These nouns, ‘nouns of teaching’, represent a powerful image that bring about a ‘collective setting’ and through this setting, teachers are able to construct their stories. We identify with the language and therefore contribute our backgrounds and experiences when hearing stories and when telling them. We do not need to expound on the idea of ‘classroom’ to clarify, we bring a teacher’s idea to the story already. The stage is set. The picture is made clearer through ‘collective setting’.

The ‘landscape’ metaphor (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Huber & Whelan, 1999) illustrates the far-reaching scope of a teacher’s “space, place, and time...and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5). This contextual framework is seen on varying levels with reference to space, place, and time.

I define the contextual framework for this piece as:

‘space’: the learning assistance classroom,

the school,

other, individual schools

the Board of Education

the Ministry of Education

‘place’: the classroom

other, individual classes

the staff room

the parking lot

other, individual schools

the Board office

‘time’: prior-to-class

in-class

out-of-class

out-of school

after-school

For teachers the building of relationships and the resulting interactions, mark the importance of space, place, and time. There exists camaraderie and conflict within this framework, as its vastness dominates, allowing room for varying interactions at any given moment. The contextual framework becomes conceptual when mixed with the interactions of diverse people, and the specific knowledge each must contribute to the more physical landscape of space, place and time. Clandinin and Connelly define this as a ‘professional knowledge landscape’ (1995) which

...views teachers as actively engaged practitioners who are attempting to author meaningful lives, telling and retelling themselves through their classroom practice as they respond to the shifting (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) policy expectations and social issues which surround their work, and to the specific needs of their students (Huber & Whelan, 1999, p. 386).

This work, the telling of Monty's story is embedded in a contextual framework that is a 'collective setting'. Teaching is defined by the confines of education that provides, more often than not, an immediate understanding of setting, a familiarity with which we all have a shared experience. The 'collective setting' a common ground.

Teachers' stories are relevant depictions of instances of teaching. Moments captured. Expressed in a variety of venues (Cady, Distad, & Germundson, 1998; Goldin, 1998; Parsons & Beauchamp, 1991). Monty's teacher-life, that of a secondary learning assistance teacher, is represented in one such venue.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Design

This thesis is a case study of the reflective practice of a secondary learning assistance teacher. Case studies appear to be the predominant format in the presentation of reflective practice studies (Bencze & Hodson, 1998; Kwo, 1996; Kruse, 1997; Stake & Mabry, 1995; Wise, Nordberg, & Reitz, 1967; Yin, 1984).

Do we come to an adequate understanding of teaching by forming theories of teaching and by observing teaching casually? We think not....what is to be known is partially found in the deliberate study of individual teachers — not only as exemplars, as types, as instances of some subclass of all teachers but as unique, nongeneralizable human beings (Stake & Mabry, 1995, p. 294).

Case studies allow for an in-depth study of an individual to be expressed. It is expected that a deeper understanding will be gleaned with regard to this SLA teacher's teaching practice.

A study of this sort enables the researcher to gather detailed data about the subject (Wise, Nordberg, & Reitz, 1967) and to interpret the data to help explain the behaviours and overall being of the subject. The importance of the case study is not so much the study itself but "...because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case" (Stake, 1994, p. 236).

In this case study, the secondary learning assistance teacher will be analyzing her own patterns of behaviour by reflecting on her teaching practice. These patterns will be identified as themes. By engaging in reflective practice, she will be encouraged to

examine her practice as she is teaching and will hopefully take action because of her reflections. Her analysis will be documented through two hermeneutic conversations.

Integral to the study is an understanding of teacher's environment. As I have done, the reader too must climb into her space. Immerse in it. Peel the layers back. Climb back out; ultimately with a clearer understanding of the importance of reflective practice and secondary learning assistance teachers.

The Importance of Conversations

Just as interviewing is a popular method of data collection in qualitative research, so too is conversation. Dialogue allows the researcher to explore the subject in a variety of ways providing information that can be utilized in telling the stories of their subjects.

...conversation is now generally conceived of as a co-operative venture, governed by the maxims of truthfulness, relevance, informativeness and manner, which may be exploited for particular conversational effects (Wilson & Sperber, 1981).

More importantly conversation provides a natural way to reach an understanding.

Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says...Reaching an understanding in conversation presupposes that both partners are ready for it and are trying to recognize the full value of what is alien and opposed to them (Gadamer, 1960, pp. 385-387).

Conversations enable the researcher to obtain a data base that allows for unexpected themes to be recognized that may otherwise have gone undetected if set questions were asked such as in an interview situation (Fontana, & Frey, 1994). Analysis

of this data can be extended when the unexpected themes are established and further conversations expand on these new ideas.

As Plato uses Socrates to draw reflection from Glaucon and forces him to look at situations by questioning them, so too must teachers, their colleagues, and/or advisors draw upon verbal exchange to seek new roads to begin new journeys. Dialogue provides immediate feedback (Naysmith & Palma, 1998) and furthers it by taking new directions and expanding on new ideas. We must not discard what others have said but in fact must take everything into account and dispel those aspects that no longer fit the meaning and understanding that is derived (Risser, 1997). Through dialogue teachers can share their angst and support one another with the realization that they hold the solutions to their problems.

Cole (1997) points out that reflective practice through dialogue might have an immediate drawback. Opportunities to dialogue and try to implement changes brought about by reflection with colleagues may cause strife. Problems may arise when routines already well established in the school environment change (Cole, 1997).

Kvale (1996) states that the purpose of the qualitative interview is to "...[obtain] qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning" (p. 124). The same applies to the hermeneutic conversation. By allowing the conversation to take its own direction the subject reflects and speaks of incidents or events that have occurred in her life. From these incidents, themes appear.

The dialogic action of the hermeneutic conversation is circular in nature (Gadamer, 1960; Hollnagel, 1978; Ricoeur, 1988; Kvale, 1996). Verbal interchange relating to a topic begins at a surface level and is 'circulated' between the participants.

As the conversation continues, the dialogue becomes more refined, uncovering deeper layers of meaning within the conversation. These meanings are then delved into more deeply so that newer ones emerge ultimately providing a greater understanding. There exists an interplay between explanation and understanding that continues in a circular manner (Ricoeur, 1988).

...hermeneutical conversation, like real conversation, finds a common language, and that finding a common language is not, any more than in real conversation, preparing a tool for the purpose of reaching understanding but, rather, coincides with the act of understanding and reaching agreement (Gadamer, 1960, p. 388).

Awareness of underlying themes results in further reflection and ultimately analysis of them.

The art of the researcher...is to keep the question (of the meaning of the phenomenon) open, to keep himself or herself and the [subject] oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned (van Manen, 1990, p. 98).

The hermeneutic conversation requires that the researcher and subject remain focused on the purpose of the conversation although it allows for natural shifts in direction to occur. In the case of this study, the SLA teacher is questioning and analyzing her practice through reflection. So by setting up situations conducive to collaborative conversations, the researcher can mobilize participants to reflect on their meanings or themes of these experiences (van Manen, 1990).

The recording of hermeneutic conversations are treated similarly to recording interviews. Tape-recorded interviews provide a means for the researcher to retain the often-invaluable information throughout the study. Taping enables the researcher to

review the conversation or interview again and again for patterns in vocabulary, tones in speech, and pauses in conversation that may prove beneficial to understanding upon review (Silverman, 1993).

Conversations often require a great deal of time to fully explore the subject matter. More than one may be required because of time restraints or to further new directions after analyzing the transcriptions. The material must be reviewed by the subject to confirm the accuracy of statements. Transcripts of the conversations allow the researcher and the subject to review and reflect upon the material.

Transcribing conversations is tedious and demands accuracy. Transcriptions should take place as soon as possible after the session so that the taping is fresh in the researcher's mind. Details will be clearer. The researcher needs to keep in mind that while interviews or conversations are intended to reflect the ideas of the participant (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Patton, 1990) they may not be reliable as the only method of data collection.

This case study is partly based on two hermeneutic conversations. The first established the SLA teacher's reflections of her first year as an SLA teacher from which themes emerged. The second concerned reflections on the themes noted by both the researcher and the SLA teacher. The conversations occurred in an unstructured format to allow for the freedom to access free flowing thoughts necessary for reflection. These sessions were audiotaped and then transcribed.

The conversations were difficult to schedule due to the teacher's hectic timetabling. Fortunately, a rapport had already been established with the teacher as I had been volunteering in the classroom throughout this school year. Reflection during these

interviews provided the SLA teacher with guidance toward understanding the value of reflective practice.

The Importance of Journals

Journalling is a popular method of documenting inquiry. Often used in practicum experiences of new teachers (Bencze & Hodson, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1995; Harrington, Queen-Leering & Hodson, 1996; Kruse, 1997; Kwo, 1996; Newman, 1987, 1991; Pinnegar, 1995; Sakari & Miller, 1996; Tremmel, 1993; Welwood, 1996), journalling enables the new teacher to read, interpret, question, reread, and reinterpret their thought processes. Incidents, feelings, beliefs, or questions might all be expressed. Over time, the reflective practitioner builds the base of written material that allows for themes or paths to emerge. These paths may wind their way through a variety of documented situations converging upon variables or problems that demand resolution.

In this case study the journal being used is not the journal of the subject but rather my personal reflective journal (fgt-journal) kept while volunteering as a literacy tutor in the SLA teacher's classroom. When preparing for this work the value of the information included within the journal entries was noted and in turn was reflective of the type of observations that would enhance the overall work.

No stranger to observing classroom situations, I had automatically recorded settings, incidents, anecdotes and my thoughts about the environment in which I was volunteering. A different perspective on the classroom was offered as my journal entries were kept for personal reasons of monitoring my own practice and not with research in mind. My journal has enhanced the information revealed in the hermeneutic

conversations with Monty and has aided in reinforcing themes that emerged from the conversations.

Classroom Observation

Research is reliant upon observation whether it is a simple science experiment or a longitudinal ethnographic study. In educational inquiry, this practice “...has become a primary source of evidence for researchers as they study classrooms...” (Anderson & Burns, 1988, p. 135). Medley and Mitzel (1963) commented on the importance of observation when investigating “...teachers while they teach and pupils while they learn” (p. 247).

Observation is carried out using a variety of methods and data collections but generally two distinctions are made. Structured observational methodology (Anderson & Burns, 1988; Medley & Mitzel, 1963) depends on the recording of observations following set guidelines or criteria laid out by the principle researcher. Establishing the criteria before observing, researchers rely on collecting data surrounding fixed events. Types and frequency of occurrences are documented often using tabular formats or checklists maintaining consistency from event to event. Members of research teams can be in different classrooms recording similar data using facsimiles of the desired recording system (Anderson & Burns, 1988; Andrews & Barnes, 1990; Yin, 1985).

Structured observations allow the researcher, the ‘detached recorder’, to remain distant and removed from the situation being studied (Medley & Mitzel, 1963). This provides for less chance of personal bias affecting the study, lending itself to quantitative work.

Not all studies benefit from structured observations. This case study has relied in part on classroom observations recorded in my personal reflective journal and illustrates the second observational method often favoured by qualitative researchers.

Classroom studies that deal with the more 'humanistic' nature of teaching and the process of education require a different form of observation and therefore demand involvement from the researcher. The 'involved interpreter' (Anderson & Burns, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1987) observes and records the environment and its participants as interactive, affecting one another. The researcher tries to understand the events of the classroom, goes beyond simply recording observed dynamics and searches for causal meaning surrounding the dynamics. Events are situated within the school and classroom to allow for a greater interpretation and understanding of the events themselves but ultimately to see how they fit into the larger picture of education. The question 'why' becomes central to the search for meaning through the interpretation of the observations.

Unlike the structured observational form, the role of the observer often allows the researcher to participate in the classroom. Extended periods of time are spent observing in the room and conversing with the teachers and students. All of these observations are recorded as field notes.

This form of classroom observation allows researchers to see education in action. "As a consequence, observation is far more likely than other sources of evidence to provide linkages between teachers and students, teaching and learning, or instruction and achievement" (Anderson & Burns, p.141). A greater and more detailed picture of the process of learning and teaching is achieved.

We observe.

We interpret.

We search for meaning.

We begin to understand.

The Subject

Monty. Forty-six. Female. Married. Three teenage children. Teacher of twenty-two years. Elementary. Grades 7 and 8. An absence to raise a family. Pre-employment for one year.

A new school. A new position. As Brownstone Secondary's lead learning assistance teacher, Monty oversees two teachers. Together the teachers manage a seventy to eighty student caseload. Each of the four blocks averages twenty to twenty-five students and Monty teaches one of these if her schedule for the day is not interrupted by her multitude of other duties.

Monty tries to build a comfortable working environment. Attempts to build bonds between regular core teachers and the learning assistance staff. Stress. Tries to implement appropriate programming that will benefit the students. Stress.

We all experience personal and professional stress in our lives. It occurs in many guises. As argument. As movement. As closure. As abandonment. As death. Through family. Through friends. Through professions. Sometimes stress leaks from our personal to our professional lives.

A few weeks into school. A personal tragedy. An added burden. Concern for her family. Monty continues to attend to the demands of the job. Only an immediate circle is aware. Stress.

Another few weeks into school. A promotion. Head of the Special Education Department for Brownstone Secondary. Additional burdens. Financial budgets. Paperwork. Ordering materials. Building ties with support staff. Meetings. Steering committees. Professional workshops. Planning. Administration. District. Parents. Departments. School visits. In school. Out of school. All during school time. Disengaging from routines. Disrupting the continuity of the days' schedule. Missing the student contact. Distance. Reports. Writing and reading. Missives. Handouts. Announcements. Reminders. forms. foRMS. FORMS. More forms. A day inundated with paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork.

Paper

Pape

Pap

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Pap

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

Where has all the teaching gone?

Communication with her students is Monty's greatest strength and she regards it as integral to her own practice. Recognizing the need for students to feel important, she speaks their language, takes an interest in their issues, and acknowledges their opinions often very different from her own.

Each time a student enters Room 2, Monty confirms their presence by name. She approaches the student. She addresses a personal comment while pulling out a chair. Chattering away, Monty's hand often giving gentle guidance, eyes never wavering from the student's, the student becomes seated and receives direction for the class.

How is your mother doing? Let's look at what you brought today.

I saw your sister the other day. Let's look at what you brought today.

Did your dad get you to the dentist in time? Let's look at what you brought today.

Your aunt phoned me this morning to remind you of your appointment? Do I need to remind you to go? Remember you won't be here that period. Let's look at what you brought today.

Did somebody sign those sheets for you? Let's look at what you brought today.

A natural nurturer, Monty listens to a student's complaints, stories, and excuses. She tolerates lateness. Absenteeism ensures a connection by phone immediately. The student returns the call, an offering of respect, if they have not spoken directly to one another. No fear of consequence, merely loyalty.

As teachers we need to know our students. Monty understands this however it does expose her to the danger of leading to personal intrinsic involvement. A danger in the teaching profession for it leads to the potential for clouded judgment. Getting too close means we experience a greater intensity when we feel that we fail our students in aspects of our practice. Or when we feel that students have failed us.

There is tremendous mutual respect, signaling that Monty has captured the students' attention. Using respect, Monty begins a foundation to construct students' confidences something lacking in many of them. Characteristic of many special education designates self-esteem, self-confidence, and independence are not only lacking but are often non-existent. Monty understands the importance of her students believing in themselves. Sometimes it is the only person they will be able to rely on in difficult times.

Monty feels the pains and joys of her students. The difficulties have a tendency to occur more frequently in her learning assistance environment. Her mind becomes

plagued at times with worries, a result of caring so personally. And she takes these home to family and sleepless nights.

There has not yet been a separation from the position at her new school and 'parent'. Monty is in a difficult place. On the one hand, many of the students are needy for the caring parental figure she delivers to them; on the other, they require the teacher.

There is a fine line between parenting and teaching. Recognizing it is sometimes difficult and problematic. As educators our heart steers us one way but clouds our profession. It is not easy to leave the parent at home when preparing for work in the morning, walking in as a teacher upon arrival at school. This is particularly difficult when our children are the same age as those we teach. Students at times do not remain perceived as students and because of our actions they come to expect a fulfillment of parental obligations.

Two occasions. Both oddly enough involve money however the classroom phone is another happenstance:

A student asks Monty for a dollar. Automatically Monty passes it from her pocket to the student's outstretched hand. Monty is immersed in conversation with someone else. A parental move. A teacher's error. A small stop sign for student independence.

A dollar is needed. Another student. Monty: *You're lucky I've got one.*

How many times as parents have we used that line?

* * *

I met Monty in October and when I look back at this I recollect no outward signs of the personal stress that she was experiencing. I recognized the professional stresses that she was encountering immediately. I have traveled that path before myself. I realize now that I have only known Monty under stress, rarely seen her relaxed. Nor in an undemanding environment.

Stresses that affect us more profoundly depend on the value that we previously placed upon them. And upon the surrounding circumstances. Whether known to us at the time or not. Immediate. Unsuspecting. The result greater.

I reflect upon my stresses. A practice. Friends. A home. A city. A lifestyle. Roots yanked out and upended. Pieces of earth falling into new places. Others dangle from thin threads. A mourning nonetheless. New paths emerging.

Stress never occurs at convenient times. If it did, no time would ever be 'the right time'. We question our faiths, our beliefs, our actions. We restructure and reroute. And re-root. often taking years. two things are certain. One: The influence of stress is enormous. Two: Nothing really alters the influence; we accept it as part of our lives and we learn to cope. Accepting and coping strengthens us.

In teaching stress is a part of our life experience. We take on the stresses of students, parents, administrators, and the list could fill the pages. We accept and we cope. We teach acceptance and coping. It is what helps give our practices a heart. We send students every year out of our lives and into new ones releasing some stress. Students affect our practices in different ways. Some happily and some not.

Monty accepts and she tries to cope. just like all of us.

It is not an easy profession.

but who says that it is?

and again Monty prepares to confront the challenge. Another September.

The Subject's Staff

Monty oversees two female part time LA teachers, Cheryl and Chris, and one full time assistant, Louise. The three teachers divide the students among the four periods: Cheryl teaches in the first and second periods, Chris in the third, and Monty in the last period.

Cheryl was fresh out of teacher's college and accepted a part time learning assistance position in Monty's classroom. Familiar with the school, she had attended Brownstone Secondary on a practicum. In February Cheryl was also given a part time position with the history department.

Chris has been a teacher for ten years but has never been involved in a learning assistance classroom. Also a part time physical education teacher, the job demands that Chris' attention be elsewhere a great deal of the time. This is not only because she teaches within another discipline but also because she coaches the girls' floor hockey team and is expected to participate and travel with the team to compete in other schools. Her teaching career has always been in physical education but with staff changes and cutbacks, the position of a part time special education teacher was offered to Chris. This was Chris' first year in this situation.

Louise was the only member of the learning assistance staff who had experience in learning assistance. Having worked in this particular classroom for three years already, she was the only member who knew the students and the past routines. She is

also the only person who understands the math that the students need to take and so is dubbed the ‘math specialist’.

Louise tried to establish control of the room immediately by offering to organize the routines as they had once been. As the teaching staff began to establish their own rhythm of working and implementing program changes, Louise met them with resistance.

Two new to special education; one a brand new teacher. And one assistant. Left over from a past staff.

Classroom Instruction

Withdrawal learning assistance programs are not always able to provide instruction as support for a student’s learning difficulties. More typically, instruction in the LA room is directed at completing the student’s assignments. This is the case in Room 2.

Realistically, time is rarely available to teach strategies, review skills, or provide mini-lessons that reinforce concepts. Barely enough exists to complete the daily assignments administered in the students’ regular classrooms that arrive in Room 2. On occasion Monty has the assignment handed to her by the other teacher so that the student will attend Room 2 instead of the regular class that particular day. An added responsibility for Monty. An additional student needing one-to-one attention for eighty minutes. Instruction in Room 2 is assignment driven that it is best to describe the work performed through example.

Students are enrolled in the same courses and classes, even have similar problems and yet mini-lessons are hardly utilized. Individual attention is provided and preferred by the staff. In theory this is the ideal learning assistance support. However in reality this

places students at a disadvantage. Common practice in Room 2 allows the math specialist to move from student to student sometimes remaining with the individual for as long as twenty minutes while students wait for help often with the same question. During an eighty minute period, it is possible that only four students are helped. Waiting individuals do not work on other parts of their assignment but bide time talking to each other or sitting in what might be termed the 'wait' position, hands at their side, upper portion of their body leaning over the desk. Sometimes even laying over it. Folding like a hinge. Not raising a hand. Sitting. Waiting. Expressionless. Next?

As there is no set method of teaching in Room 2 it is necessary to mention specific examples to help illustrate the procedures of instruction. Or lack of it.

Many of the students are in the same core English program. At one point eight of twenty-two students are bringing their novel A patch of blue to class. Four students work independently; four will not stay on task. The Group of Four. The overall assignment is to read the book and answer the twelve pages of scrawled content and opinion questions.

The general gist of the book:
1950's. blindness. alcoholism. tolerance. prostitution.
abuse. racism. friendship. hate. anger. oppression.

Before reading the book the Group of Four begin answering the questions.

List the characters. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8. *Are there eight?*
Blah, blah, blah. What would a social worker find going into their apartment? *Mothers a prostitoot she beats her kid thats why shes blinde. Booze.* Blah, blah, blah. Outline the plot structure? *What the hell does that mean?* Blah, blah, blah. How do you think the main character felt? *like shit.* Describe the ending? *She goes on the bus to live at schol thats what hapened in the movie.* [Well, the book is always different.]

Blah, blah, blah. Twelve pages. *There that's it.*
I'm not writing any more and N-O-O-O I'm not stickin'
the answers in sentences.

Uncomfortable with the novel's subject matter, the Group of Four is balking at reading. A solution. A listening centre is set up each day these students are together. Monty arranges that the Group hear the book on tape and answer the questions using the recording. The voice that reads the book is monotone and reads with absolutely no expression. There are barely pauses between the sentences. The Group's attention wanders continuously and the boys rarely follow with the text as the voice drones on page after page. page after page. page after page. page after page. page after page. page after page. One student never follows in his book "Why? I don't have to it's on the tape" (fgt-journal).

Misbehaviour within the Group occurs due to admitted boredom often disrupting others in the class. A student sits with his headset around his neck similar to a quarterback's neck protector. He shoves the desks around or kicks the others under the table. He has two favourite sitting positions: hinged or seat tilting back and pivoting on its back legs. At one point he slides his arm across the desk toward the tape machine, fingers the volume, and turns it up to full. The sound, even though everyone has headsets on, is audible to the class. A flurry of activity erupts. Yelling above the sound. The droning voice. Only now it is screaming. Emanating from the headsets. Playful slapping. The boys yank the headsets down around their necks and laugh at the antics. One of Room 2's staff walks by: *Get it under control guys.* Giggling, there are now four quarterbacks with the volume turned down slightly. The chapter is almost completed and half of it has been missed.

The students who attend Room 2 for English bring other assignments.

Shakespeare. Short stories. Language-based tests. One test is based on a news article about a grandmother demanding visiting rights of her granddaughter. The mother of the child is an escort. One of the questions asks to define the term ‘escort’ as it applies in the article. The answers vary. One student writes “somebody who helps people get in and out of cars”.

Socials’ content is the greatest barrier for the students and staff of Monty’s learning assistance classroom. Fraught with difficulties in retaining the material, the students’ problems are a direct result of the heavily text-based material and its presentation.

Regular classroom teachers hand out faded worksheets. The words appearing in blurred type, fill the pages.

Intermittently lines are drawn for answers.

The space between the lines is barely able to receive the most carefully placed script.
The space is limited.

Sometimes the students’ answers wrap

around to the back
 becoming jumbled
 with others or

run
 along
 the
 sides
 of the
 pages.
 squishedanddifficulttoread.

The more pages of questions, the more content the student must retain. At times it seems that every sentence in the text has a question attached to it. The students can barely read the questions let alone the textbook.

For the students in a learning assistance environment, the pace of the required expectations of a regular classroom is insurmountable. Monty and her staff attempt to work with the students. The task is often overwhelming and the frustration levels are evident in student behaviours.

Sitting back.

Legs spread in a V under the table.

Looking at the ceiling. Tapping. tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap tap of a pen.

On the desk. Not the paper.

Socials' teachers are willing to accept students working with modified materials. A break through. But none exist. And the socials' department suggests the LA staff put something together. They accept the task.

Review of the material begins. Monty is notified that new textbooks have been issued for the new school year. The process will be futile if the old material is revamped. There is good news. The Ministry decides to include modified materials to meet the needs of all students recalling that Socials is a required course. Seems too good to be true. There is bad news. The modifications have not been written yet.

And how llll oooo nnnn gggg will that take??????? The prevailing question among staff. waitwaitwaitwaitwait.

The common view is that the learning assistance team write the modified material for use at Brownstone Secondary. A socials' teacher agrees to provide input. She is tired

of trying to teach with old, heavy, dry material. Monty is tiring of trying to make the students learn it.

A consensus.

The instruction of the students in Room 2 slams into many hurdles. These can only begin to be cleared by the reorganization of materials that meet the needs of the students. Lack of instruction is not the fault of the staff. They are too busy trying to keep their students' heads above water. And their own. Answering to the demands of the regular classroom teachers is an added headache.

The Setting

Brownstone Secondary's learning assistance classroom, Room 2, physically incorporates two smaller spaces into one. Originally two classrooms, they are now constructed as one with glass partitions as permanent dividers. This set up allows for possibilities of noise and

movement

silence and work.

The room is drab, institutional ivory. A few posters expressing the importance of doing well. A times table chart props against a wall. Drawings and paintings from the art department. Four metres up the wall. Too high to read the artists' names. None by the LA students. A bulletin board of students in Room 2. All visuals attract attention for the first few days.

Just

a part of the room

blending into the drab ivory walls

and

then

Hexagonal and rectangular tables are situated about the carpeted room. A maximum of five chairs each. Standard classroom furniture such as desks for teachers, file cabinets, and shelving units skirt the room.

A missing element. books? Books? BOOKS???? Some grammars and reference materials are placed in glass-doored cabinets. A few dictionaries sit on a small table near the teacher's desk. In some cases within arms reach; in others as many as

far as

ten metres. No need to ponder why the covers are hardly worn.

What literature is present is so hidden that it is almost impossible to see. Dated and unappealing. Maybe that's why? The novels are pushed way to the back of a deep shelf. Below an old set, almost a set, of encyclopaedia, salvaged from the school library's garbage.

Three computers are installed. Used for gaming when students have free time. or more likely when they snatch unattended moments. A fourth computer is strictly for independent course work connected via an ether net to another room. A solution for students who cannot adapt to traditional settings. The requirement for success...to work independently and complete tasks at your own pace.

The SLA teachers' work area adjoins the class. IEPs, testing materials, and schedules are kept in the office. A phone in a closet. A portable also available for use in the class. A kettle. Plugged simultaneously with the laminator blows fuses.

A LOUDSPEAKER in every room. Two in the main classroom, remnants of when it was two. BLARING VOICES THAT SCREAM ANNOUNCEMENTS. THE

TRICK TO REMove the intercom phone from its cradle. Now the voices drift in from the halls.

Room 2 is a mix of new furniture in an old setting. Representative perhaps of education in general. New ideas in an old system.

Collective Appearance

An overall lack of enthusiasm greets me every time I enter Room 2. But it is not the only thing missing from the room. I realize what it is. There is little sense of the students supporting one another. Emotionally. Academically. They remain distant in conversation and in their proximity to one another. Spreading throughout the room. Rarely in groups of more than two.

The largest camaraderie is evident at one lone center table. It intrigues me as this table is uncharacteristic of the others. Four to five students together. These are the peer tutors. Establishing them as different from the rest. Huddled as if afraid to be separated. They remain united until given specific students with which to work.

Movement in the room is constant and so much a part of its atmosphere that few notice. It is generally intentional. Getting from Point A to Point B. It is the A and B that vary.

The teachers move about the room. Answer the phone. Make a call. Find the portable. Assistant to student. Fix a frozen computer. Teacher to teacher. Get the printer to print. Teacher to student. Constant.

Visitors move. Regular classroom teachers. *Can I see you a minute?*
Administration. Outsiders.

The students move. C O N S T A N T L Y. *I just need to go and.* The computer lab. *It's in my.* The office. *I'll get it.* The locker. The phone. *Yeah it's important.* Another classroom. *If I don't.* The vending machine. The water fountain. The library. the, the, the, the, the, the, the...

Depending on the reason, the students move differently from the teachers. They flick each other's heads or hats. Karate kicks the air. Make gestures. Faces. Dance. Shuffle. Run. Rarely do they walk. What's the point? There's so many other ways to move. Unless. If the teacher asks the student to do something for him then the

w a l k
is vvvvvveeeeeerrrrryyyy sss ll ooo www. At this point the student stops to

gaze out the window.

look at the paintings.

read the notices.

look at the walls.

flip through a book.

Movement. And it is constant. It is the one thing that everyone has in common.

Another movement. Collective this time. As if the students have built in alarm systems, books are stacked and chairs pushed in a few minutes before the bell. When it rings, they are out the door having reminders called out to them to lift the chairs onto the tables if it is the last period. Unlike the beginning of class, time for dismissal is never an issue.

For the most part the learning assistance students at Brownstone Secondary resemble the 'regular' students. Varied clothing styles, haircuts, and attitudes do not set them apart from the others. Some with Walkmans, some without, they shuffle like everyone else from class to class four times a day.

Room 2 itself is different though. Although its number does not give it away, every member of Brownstone Secondary knows what this room accepts. The mere entrance into Room 2 acknowledges that the students cannot perform like the other 500 school students. These students admit to sometimes feeling chastised by their peers and even by teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously. They are able to articulate stories of what their respective lives at school have been like for them over the years.

Each day seventy to eighty students between the ages of fifteen and eighteen enter Room 2 for help in mathematics, English, or social sciences. Their problems are common and thematic: the explanations are too difficult, the chapters too long, the questions not understood. The majority of the students are male. Student numbers fluctuate per semester. A student's attendance may be in question. Kicked out of class. A court appearance. Slept in. Just not bothered.

At the beginning of each day, the students claim Room 2 as their own; some of them reluctantly. They enter the class each day and take their seats. They shout at each other across the room during idle perfunctory conversation, acknowledging each other's presence. Usually the round tables hold two or three bodies.

Room 2 has students of diverse backgrounds, diverse in their abilities and in their disabilities. Their private lives are varied. Some live at home with families, extended families, guardians, in group homes, with each other, or on their own. Some work,

busker, ‘hang out’, beg, or are on welfare. They deal with illness, physical handicaps, pregnancy, death, drugs, abuse, jail, probation, and prejudice. These students are caught between youth and adulthood.

Most prefer or are unable to look past the moment. One student thinks he might “...die young because [he’d] done so much shit...” (fgt-journal). Others have ambitions and have set what might be unrealistic goals for themselves - airline pilots or environmental engineers. Many try to grasp control of their situations often making ultimately harmful decisions.

The profiles that follow are representative of the student body of Brownstone Secondary’s learning assistance classroom.

Student Profiles

Kevin and Dan.

* * *

Two of the boys wore glasses, curiously enough the same kind: tiny, old-fashioned, with round steel rims. The larger of the two — and he was quite large, well over six feet — was dark-haired, with a square jaw and coarse, pale skin. He might have been handsome had his features been less set, or his eyes, behind the glasses, less expressionless and blank. He wore dark English suits and carried an umbrella (a bizarre site in Hampden) and he walked stiffly through the throngs of hippies and beatniks and preppies and punks with the self-conscious formality of an old ballerina, surprising in one so large as he. “Henry Winter,” said my friends

when I pointed him out, at a distance, making a wide circle to avoid a group of bongo players on the lawn.

The smaller of the two — but not by much — was a sloppy blonde boy, rosy cheeks and gum-chewing, with a relentlessly cheery demeanor and his fists thrust deep in the pockets of his knee-sprung trousers. He wore the same jacket every day, a shapeless brown tweed that was frayed at the elbows and short in the sleeves, and his sandy hair was parted on the left, so a long forelock fell over one bespeckled eye. Bunny Corcoran was his name, Bunny being somehow short for Edmund. His voice was loud and honking, and carried in the dining halls (Tartt, 1992, p.17).

* * *

New transfers from another school in September, Kevin and his closest friend Dan are enrolled in Grade 10 at Brownstone Secondary. Individual profiles do not paint an accurate picture of this pair for they move about as one, joined by invisible velcro. They are never apart: arriving as one, appearing in all of the same classes, and leaving together. You would not expect to see one without the other. Kevin and Dan are each other's lifeline and it is most prevalent in the confines of Room 2.

A photograph. A snapshot of candid classroom activity. Side:Side. Kevin:Dan. The velcro visible.

Both students receive similar assistance in Room 2, English and mathematics. They have similar problems in organization, reading, completion of assignments, and

algebraic concepts. The stronger character of the two, Dan tends to anchor Kevin with reminders of working, altering disruptive behaviour, giving away answers, and sharing his calculator.

These two students spend their time before school and between classes outside but they do not 'hang' on the corner as the other students. Kevin is the proud owner of a small car, battered and questionable in roadworthiness; a Mercedes to the boys. It is a vehicle central to the identity of Kevin and Dan. Leaning back in the seats, chatting until the bell, they observe the other students in the parking lot. The car considered sacrosanct, shields them from the other students.

Kevin and Dan have two years left in high school. Kevin's lack of enthusiasm, evident the moment he walks in the door, is one consistency that staff can be assured exists. The other is that Dan will care for him. Another day. Another chapter. Another algebra question. Another day for Dan to anchor Kevin. A lifeline.

lifelines being cast

inseparablefriendsremaintogetherinmindemotionandaction.throughitall

Mark.

Mark has been enrolled in Brownstone Secondary for three years. He remains distant from the life that the school offers its students. His private life is in his school records and remains in a file drawer only for those who need to see it. Disliking small talk, he rarely speaks to the other students or staff of Room 2, unless spoken to directly.

Gliding stealthily around the room, if he leaves his seat, Mark keeps his thoughts tightly under the baseball cap that is never removed.

Mark is a relief to the teachers of Room 2. Although he requires support help for his English class he works independently. He comes quietly into the room, picks his spot at a table removed from the others, and begins his work. He is usually prepared and does not need trips to his locker throughout the eighty-minute period that many of the students seem to require.

Working quietly and diligently Mark rarely asks for help. In order to monitor what he is working on, Monty needs to interrupt his work to ask how things are progressing. At this point, Mark swings his binder over toward the teacher or sits with his arms crossed on the table shielding his novel and answers questions orally in such a quiet voice that Monty leans in to hear.

As quietly as this student enters Room 2, he leaves at the bell.

Disappearing into student crowds. Hat bobbing. Blending in with all of the other covered heads. Reminders of someone standing at the edge of a crowd. The inner edge of a curious crowd. Slipping backwards through it. Turning and disappearing. People recalling his presence. But not him.

With one year left of Brownstone Secondary, his diligence and work habits are beginning to support him with success.

glide in

whisper through

glide o u t

Robert.

* * *

The third boy was the most exotic of the set. Angular and elegant, he was precariously thin, with nervous hands and a shrewd albino face and a short, fiery mop of the reddest hair I had ever seen. I thought (erroneously) that he was dressed like Alfred Douglas or the Comte de Montesquiou: beautiful starchy shirts with French cuffs; magnificent neckties; a black greatcoat that billowed behind him as he walked and made him look like a cross between a student prince and Jack the Ripper. Once, to my delight, I even saw him wearing pince-nez. (Later, I discovered that they weren't real pince-nez, but only had glass in them, and that his eyes were a good deal sharper than my own). Francis Abernathy was his name...(Tartt, 1992, pp.17-18).

* * *

Grade 11 at Brownstone Secondary has allowed Robert to begin to explore elective courses that are of interest to him. An interest in art has led him toward photography and dance. An avid listener of music Mozart, Enigma, and Enya he is rarely seen without a portable CD player and headset.

Excelling in social skills, Robert's cheerful entrance into Room 2 is like something from a précis to a film. He skillfully engages in conversation with each person present, acknowledging each in a manner that is personal, caring, and shows respect and interest in what they are saying. His comments and questions are never intrusive. Staff

and students are treated equally. Mondays are his busiest social times checking that the weekends of his classmates have been enjoyable. This is a marvel to watch as the entire process takes less than three minutes but means that sometimes he has engaged in individual conversations with twenty people. His contact is settling to everyone, but more importantly its completion marks the end of Robert's acclimatization to his environment.

Sensitive to his own problems, Robert struggles to complete assignments on socials and English of any length mainly due to impatience. Accepting of help, he yearns for the day when attendance in Room 2 is not required. At fifteen, Robert has difficulties in English. His writing is simplistic and cramped, hovering in the spaces between the lines. He rarely writes in full sentences; the least writing the better. Reading is a chore.

Scheduling in the second term does not accommodate a block for Robert to have learning assistance time. He is thrilled; Monty is not. Knowing that Robert requires the help especially since he is registered in a business/accounting course is going to require extra monitoring. Robert assures everyone that he will be fine.

Aspirations of becoming an interior designer, architecture is probably too complicated, helps focus Robert with a goal. One of the few students who has looked toward a future.

Set me free. But you will flounder. Set me free. But you will fall. Please set me free. I will be here to catch you. I am free. and you will flounder but i will be there.

Susan.

Susan has attended Brownstone Secondary for two years and is now in Grade 11.

The school operates a peer-tutoring program to help students who need academic assistance. Several of the females in Room 2 are peer tutors and are often indistinguishable from the students. Susan is friendly with them and works independently so it is difficult to tell that she receives support help.

Dealing with personal difficulties, she orchestrates caring for her mother and siblings and attending school. Susan often talks of her homesickness for other family, friends, and a city she loved, left behind as a result of her parents' problems. On the rare occasions requiring absence from school, she is travelling to her other distant home.

Receiving suggestions with organizational strategies and help in large assignments, Susan works much like Mark in that she is independent in her work habits. She uses her time effectively and has begun to take responsibility for her own work. Never hesitating to go to the library to gather information, Susan returns and often spreads her materials comfortably around her and attends to task.

A desire for success in her academic life and recent accomplishments in her classes provide Susan with more confidence and self-esteem than she entered with in earlier times. She is proud of her own accomplishments aware that her perseverance to tasks has 'paid off'. Room 2 has her well on her way to completing her final year in school.

Spreading books. Maps. Coloured pencils. Ruler. Pens. Glue. Scissors. Photocopies.
 Bristol board. Notes. Binder. Text book. Laying out before
 mounting. Moving the pieces. SUSAN A giant puzzle. Sizing.
 Shrinking. Enlarging. Lines. Titles. Subheadings. Charts.
 Name and date. Completion. Feeling proud of the accomplishment. Handing it in.

Brian.

At sixteen, Brian has attended Brownstone Secondary for two years. He struggles in any academic setting and with reason.

A history of drug use Brian will openly tell you “I wrecked my brains so I don’t remember stuff now” (fgt-journal). It is a cold, hard fact expressed with a frankness unnerving to a first time listener. And he proves it continually with blank stares and quizzical looks. Unfortunately, his explanation is the one thing that he can remember implying to educators that repetition does place information in long term memory.

This student receives support help in Room 2 in all subjects. Eighty minutes per day of academic assistance is not adequate for the severity of the problems surrounding Brian’s memory retention. He rarely recalls the class lessons. Assignments must be attended to on a one-to-one tutorial basis. Too time consuming with between twenty and twenty-five students in the room all with needs.

What Brian sees as a future is hard to say. He lives from moment to moment not recalling many of them. What he does remember is part of his ‘drugged-out’ past. Ill gain for his future worth.

Lost memory
 j u m d l e b t h g h t o u s
 i'M wReCkEd
 brain turns into brian

And there is a saddened sense of loss.

Nate.

Transferred from another school, Brownstone Secondary opened its doors to Nate this past year. The memory of his past environment is vivid and unpleasant. The recalling of a teacher's derogatory remark causing personal offense is still fresh in his mind. As a result Nate tells of his conscious effort to refrain from reading. A disruption that has affected his continued learning.

Admitting the error in his decision, he now panics about catching up in his English work. Removal from his current full-time English class due to disruptive behaviour places him in Room 2. His plans are to complete two years of English study in one full school year.

Nate is vocal of his dislike for the school system, his difficulties as a victim of fetal alcohol syndrome, and his reluctance to apply himself to work whether in or out of school. He enjoys sleeping in or a day outside rather than attending class.

A detailed story teller, he brags openly of enjoying vodka shooters even though aware of their potential harm. Whether his tales are true or not, Nate always gains a captive audience and only stops when the teacher needs him.

Aware of the need to fulfill academic obligations if he wants to graduate at the end of the next year, Nate begins to read again. Something he has held off on doing since the incident three years earlier.

I defied
 upheld what I believed
 stood my ground and refused to move.
 unrecognized by HER. activism gone wrong.
 Does SHE even know why?

Patrick.

In some ways Brownstone Secondary is a restricting environment for Patrick; in others it is exactly the environment that he desires. Structure versus an audience. The school administration sees a great deal of Patrick due largely to his behaviour.

Unfortunately there are people who enjoy making others uncomfortable. Patrick is such a person. At fifteen, he unnerves both students and staff by constantly trying to shock them through action or speech. Initial contact through conversation confirms first impressions of a well-mannered, articulate young man. However, in developing a relationship, his conversation becomes extremely self-centered exhibiting over-confidence and showiness. He is meticulously organized and tidy in his personal appearance.

Academically, Patrick attends Room 2 for assistance in his English and math. He appears to use his work time for observing others. Rarely is he observed with pen to paper. Disturbing to others in his staring or conversation, Patrick is often asked to focus on his work.

Patrick is a veteran observer. He watches everything around him capturing peripheral occurrences and storing them to use at a later time. His goal in school is not academic but admittedly is “to shock people. I love watching their reactions. It’s probably a control thing” (fgt-journal). He carries these measures to extremes and with calculated precision such as when he purposely cut himself and rubbed his bleeding arms along the hallway walls in front of the main school office.

Future goals include getting through school and working in a family business. Nate has already begun his training at the company resulting in a superior attitude in class. His future seemingly secure, he sees little reason to perform academically.

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Wayne.

Brownstone Secondary was a new environment for Wayne. Arriving in September, demanding an education. Immediately establishing himself in the control position, Wayne expected and received a position in the learning assistance classroom. This student meticulously organizes his own destiny aided by his parents. Testing throughout his school life indicates difficulties in reading and writing.

At the age of eighteen, Wayne survives much of his schooling by leaning on others. He negotiates himself through school and life, choosing strategies and avenues

that suit his needs regardless of others. His personality allows for this. Articulate, personable, and intelligent he manipulates the staff into scheduling his classes later in the day (he is admittedly not a morning person), receives the lunch program, orchestrates outside reading assistance made available to him at the school, and he seems to come and go as he pleases. The learning assistance staff provides him with deodorant, cookies, advice, and time.

Excuses. Excuses. For everything. moving. again. illness. sleeping in. appointments. lost books. missing assignments. friend's court appearance. no money. wild nights. DJ job. forgot. hitchhiked home. *was there school today?*

Never willing to work independently, rarely showing up for classes, often ill equipped when in attendance, the staff begin to feel animosity toward Wayne because of the time he demands of them without first trying to do something independently. He talks of wanting to finish high school but his efforts as is often the case with Wayne do not reflect what he says. His parents living out of the area describe him as always waiting to do his own thing. Both professionals within government agencies, they 'talk the talk' of knowing what his needs are and how they should be answered. They have taught him not how to read and write but how to manipulate systems for personal gain. They tell him to "...take advantage..." of the help that he is offered (fgt-journal). A philosophy that has been promulgated throughout his schooling.

Nineteenth birthday. To Wayne this means that he will receive welfare assistance. Worth celebrating. He talks of parties and busking on the street and enjoys travelling which he announces he will do in the fall if he doesn't return to school.

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 therefore
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 AM
 you
 do
 for
 ME
 because
 you have to and will

Procedure

Two hermeneutic conversations figure predominantly in this case study of reflective practice. The conversations take place at the secondary learning assistant teacher's home to provide an atmosphere that retains the anonymity of the teacher.

The first hermeneutic conversation focuses on the secondary learning assistance teacher's reflections after completing her first year as an SLA teacher. This conversation takes place in the summer after the year has ended and the teacher has had time to adapt to another shift in schedule.

Conversing in Monty's home. Privacy and truth. Unfettered by restraints of school. Anonymity. A story built layer upon layer. Uncovering the practice of this teacher. Hunting for themes.

My reflective journals. Written while volunteering in Monty's class as a literacy tutor. And reflections of my own practice. Combined, the herb and onion flavours blend. An undiscovered taste sensation. Reflections of a first year as a secondary learning assistance teacher. The first conversation revealing the thoughts and feelings of a ten month *life*. How similar the word *strife* when in script.

Monty's life. Reflections of a near past. a year past. Monty's story.

Prior to the second conversation the SLA teacher received a written summary of the themes compiled by the researcher. These themes were partly based upon my personal reflective journals kept while volunteering in her classroom and on the first conversation.

An interlude. The conversation when in type becomes a text. Hermeneutic interpretation. Historical. A style of interpretation steeped in history. Talmud. Plato's dialogues. Interpretation to discover meaning.

Interpreting the layers. Searching for themes. Too great still while uncovering to derive full meaning. My meaning.

Monty views the themes. Alone. Thoughts only. Reflects. Refutes. Agrees. Rebuilds. Reflects. Develops. Growth. Inward; outward. New layers.

Thoughts not yet turned into words.

Monty's meaning.

The second hermeneutic conversation, occurring at the end of September, allows the SLA teacher to reflect, refute, agree, and discuss the themes. This teacher is able to stand back, establish her own themes, and reflect upon all that has been presented and discussed. The teacher has the opportunity to question her values, further identify or enhance a focus in her practice, and it allows her the possibility to see that reflective practice may help provide a growth in an individual's attitudes and beliefs.

September. A second year anniversary as an SLA teacher. A twenty-third year anniversary in the profession. For us all an anniversary. Every September. Back to teaching. Back to school.

October. The second hermeneutic conversation. Same place. Now two thematic interpretations. Monty's. Mine. Searching for one meaning. Hermeneutic.

Reflects. Refutes. Agrees. Rebuilds. Reflects. Develops. Growth. Inward; outward. New layers.

Thoughts turned into words.

An onion. New layers. Old layers. Peeling, peeling, peeling. Revealing. Questioning. Values. Identifying. Focusing.

A practice revealed. A reflection. A searching. A meaning found. An awakening. A reflective practice. A new look at an old practice.

Final Analysis

After completion of the two hermeneutic conversations, the data was reviewed and a further interpretation occurred. This led to my ultimate conclusions. The second hermeneutic conversation furthered the first interpretations by examining the themes that I had established prior to the October meeting. Monty's reflections of those themes and our further discussion, culminated in a bird's eye view of Monty's practice. Through her reflections she was able to examine her practice, to step outside of it, and to look back at herself. She provided herself with a deeper understanding of her teaching and the meaning behind it.

CHAPTER 4

The Study

The First Hermeneutic Conversation

Monty discussed her year during the first hermeneutic conversation. It is best reflected in a typical day in her teaching, though no day is typical for her.

7:45 Monday morning. Monty's mind has begun to focus on the day ahead. A half-hour drive. A half-hour of mental preparation. Conscious; sub-conscious. A restful weekend becoming undone. The knot clearly there Friday. Gone Saturday. Appearing again on Sunday late afternoon. Now tightening in the pit of Monty's stomach.

8:15 Monty parks in the school lot overcrowded already with the students' vehicles. Teenage mothers approach the nearby daycare with strollers to leave their children and attend school. Monty grabs her briefcase, acknowledging students as they head into the school. *Hi Justin. Hey Freddy, why weren't you in class on Friday. I missed you. I had a doctor's appointment on Friday. I thought my mother called the school. Not that I know of...make sure you're in every class today. I'll be checking. Sure Mrs. Presdonne.* Briefcase open and bulging. Files protruding from the top. Too full to close. The weight providing a slightly off balance tilt to Monty's walk. Another day of teaching, nurturing, helping, planning, budgeting,....

So far the day is empty of extra duties.

Monty: I come into the school in the morning. What do I have to do? I've got to go find my kids. I've got to see where they are. And then I've got to go and find all of these other kids that I've taken on. And that's happening more and more. I don't know if [Chris and Cheryl, the two other LA teachers] feel that same way. They're saying to me 'They're not designated, we can't do it.' I say they're not designated that's why we *have* to do it (First Conversation).

8:19 Crowds of students. Shouldering with the students in the hall, a walk to the office. Check the box. School ends early on Fridays and Monty had left immediately to attend a meeting at another school. The box is full. Administrative missives. Pink phone slips. One square predominates.

Please return the phone call. Please return the phone call. Please return the phone call. Please return the phone call.

Please return the phone call.

Please return the phone

Please return the

Please return

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Returned your call

Returned

your call

Called while you were out

From the board. From the superintendent. Call for a conference call at 1:30. From

parents: 1 2 3 4. From a student. From two other schools. From the

psychologist. From theThe secretary hands Monty two more. Please ret Please

return the call.

The vice-principal walks by. "I need you at 10:00. Noel's mother's coming in. She phoned Friday at 2:00 but you were gone ranting about something that happened in Socials. *I was at a meeting at....* I told her we'd all meet together. You better fill me in though before she gets here. *I'm tracking then.* Do it later. I can't help now I'm on my way to meet...

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The term vice-principal or principal includes the word *pal* but somewhere along the way that part of the word went missing.

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8:28 Class in two minutes. A clock set five minutes fast everywhere in the building.

Busy halls. Students running to class. *No running.* Walking. Shuffling. Pushing by.

Monty proceeds to Room 2 papers and briefcase in tow. Students hovering around the

closed door. Where are the other staff members? This isn't my teaching block. The door should already be open. *Hold this for me Jason and I'll get my key.*

8:29 SSSSSCCCRRRRRREEEEEEETCH ANNOUNCEMENTS BLAST FROM THE LOUDSPEAKER *OOPS SORRY ABOUT THAT. GOOD MORNING EVERYONE. A FEW ANNOUNCEMENTS* a different voice *THIS IS UMMM MR. TUNE. MUSIC PEOPLE AND YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE HAVE UMM [COUGH] SORRY, A PRACTICE*

Monty has the door open and she heads to her office through the classroom. The students pull their chairs down talking over the

UMMM IS BEING HELD TODAY AT 3:30. BE IN THE GYM. OH YES. BRING YOUR MUSIC SHEETS. I'M NOT HAVING WHAT HAP

8:31 Monty in her office removes the inter-office phone from its hook to muffle the announcements.

PENned last time. Thank you Mr. Tune. Remember staff to check your boxes. There will be a staff meeting today at 11:45 and you need to have the forms that are in your box filled out by then. There should be one for each of your students so if not call the office and tell them whose forms are missing. Next here's Sheila to tell you about tomorrow's photos. VOLLEYBALL PEOSSSSCCCRRRRRREEEEEEETCH [Don't stand so close. Oh, sorry] Volleyball people, have your gear tomorrow. Your picture is going to be done at 12:45 so tell your teachers. Thank you. Those are the announcements for this morning. Have a good morning. And a reminder that there's no

smoking on school property. You have to go across the street. But don't stand on the neighbours' lawns. Thank you. Teachers don't forget 11:45 and bring your forms and your lunch. That's it. Good. Have a good day. SSSSCCCRRRRRREEEEEEETCH

8:32 Monty sees her desk. The other staff had stayed to catch up on paperwork on Friday. Monty is now behind in last weeks even though she worked at home all weekend, has additional work from Friday's meeting, and what has been left for her by the other staff that they accomplished on Friday. Her desk has three piles.

Files

Memos

Pink slips

The day is already slipping out of her hands.

- Returned your call
- Returned your call
- Called while you were out
- URGENT please call by 8:15 on Monday.

Sticky notes leave instructions on files:

*These need your
signatures please*

read and
comment

*Include response
and signature*

Where is
the rest of
this?

Cheryl Towne, one of the three learning assistance teachers enters the office through the door that is the office's escape door to the main school hall. In her hand a

take-out gourmet coffee from a neighbouring shop nearby on her desk. She offers an explanation for her lateness. Stopping at her box, she has been told about the meeting for Noel and wants Monty to go alone as she is teaching that period. Noel had not shown up for Cheryl's session on Friday and when she phoned his home no one had answered. Placing her satchel on her desk, she tosses the coffee container in the garbage, gathers her daybook and the attendance binder, and heads toward the classroom through the adjoining door pushing it open with her back. Hesitating, the door partially open, she looks to see that she has everything, Cheryl asks Monty to check an IEP that she left for her on her desk. She has a meeting at 11:00 with a parent and wants some feedback from Monty.

8:45 Monty begins her list of today's jobs:

return phone calls

find out what happened on Friday in Noel's Socials' class

10:00 meeting with v-p and Noel's mother

feedback for Cheryl re. IEP

tracking

fill out forms

respond to sticky notes

12:00 staff meeting

1:30 call superintendent for conference call

assessment for Michelle Gates

This is standard for Monty. At the beginning of each day, she makes a list of items that must be attended to, if possible. Those not completed at the end of the day top the next day's list but often are moved down the list in order of importance such as "*assessment Michelle Gates*" an item that appeared on last Wednesday's list and has been moved over every day since. At the end of the school day the checked column of items will be thrown into the garbage. "It's how I feel accomplished" (fgt-journal). There are no records of day plans.

Important notes about students are recorded in a binder. The notes are categorized by student alphabetically; each student receiving a section. A new sheet for each event is placed in the binder topped by date and point form notes outline the situation and ensuing circumstances. Incidents of meetings, conflicts, other teachers' comments or concerns, program alterations, and phone calls are all documented in the binder. The life history of a student in Room 2. All different. Monty begins a new page for Noel and quickly scans other notes in his section that refreshes her memory about any past problems.

8:48 A student enters Monty's office. She is a student of Cheryl Towne's when Cheryl is teaching in Room 2 for Block 2. Monty asks where the student is supposed to be. She states math but she has been sent out to work on her math test this period in the learning

assistance room. The remainder of the class is writing in their regular classroom. Mr. Integer, the math teacher, often sends his students in with no warning. Like many of the regular teachers, they feel Room 2 best services *their* needs through a ‘drop-in’ approach. What this student needs in order to complete the test is someone to read the instructions to her.

Monty tells her to go into the main room and to see if Mrs. Towne can help. Monty anticipates the response that this will not be a problem. Cheryl, like Monty, is always willing to take on one more. There may even be a peer tutor available in the room.

* * *

Peer Tutoring

This is the first year that peer tutoring has been implemented at Brownstone Secondary. Some students from the ‘regular’ stream spend a period in the LA classroom helping the LA students with their work. These tutors, usually in their final year of high school, have taken many of the courses that Room 2’s students are now attending. The peer tutors are given a high school credit for this work provided they attend each period, work with the students, and maintain logs outlining what transpired in each class.

Peer tutoring is an effective tool when working with students with learning difficulties. For the teacher it alleviates some of the classroom stresses of trying to meet with everyone individually.

Monty's peer tutoring program is implemented but not effective. It is experiencing growing pains mainly because the staff is unaware of how to set up an effective program. Monty's peer tutors typically sit at a table in the center of the room working on assignments of their own (fgt-journal). They often require that the students come and sit beside them so that the peer tutor can continue working.

One complication that arises in Monty's room is that many of the LA students do not necessarily like working with the peer tutors. They feel embarrassed by showing their weaknesses to fellow students especially if it involves reading aloud. A waste of support help. The LA student does not see the peer tutors perspective as valuable information: insight into what the regular classroom teacher wants now and was probably similar when the peer tutor took the course previously.

What occurs as well is a refusal on behalf of the peer tutor to help the staff:

I'm not going to write out flashcards. I beg your pardon. I have asked you to help me do something. No. I'm supposed to help the students not write out flash cards. If I don't have somebody to help then I'll do my own work (fgt-journal).

It takes three of us to help complete the flashcard task over a three day period: a supply teacher, Cheryl, and me, the volunteer.

Incidents like this add to Monty's frustration.

Monty: If I'm in charge of the classroom, and the peer tutor is here, I expect them to provide the help that I need (First Conversation)

Monty's expectation is that the peer tutors help the students when they see that help is required. This is not possible if the tutors are working busily on their own assignments; they are unaware of what to look for as the process of identifying a student in need of help has not been modeled specifically for them. There is however another problem. What the tutors are seeing is that the majority of the time the staff moves about to answer a phone or to work specifically with one student over a lengthy period of time. They rarely see teachers that float from student to student checking over shoulders or asking if they would like help. And the tutors wonder why they should have to do so.

It is important to show the tutors what needs to be done and *how* they are to do perform their duties. Monty decides to delegate the task to Chris who has shown a previous interest in working with the tutors.

With difficulties arising, Chris is put in charge of developing peer tutor guidelines that address the duties and responsibilities for learning assistance staff, sponsor teachers, and tutors. The program allows other classrooms to utilize the tutors with a classroom teacher being the sponsor teacher and the LA teacher in charge.

Chris volunteers to co-ordinate the program. She is now responsible for meetings and assignments. Potential candidates will fill out an application and submit it to the department. The Special Education Department will assess each application. Each LA teacher is responsible for tutors within their own block.

LA teachers' responsibilities include:

- assigning the log book
- maintaining the peer tutor binder
- reviewing the log book
- assigning a letter or percentage grade
- communicating with the sponsor teacher

Sponsor teachers' responsibilities include:

- attendance for peer tutor
- constructive feedback for tutor
- communication between LA teacher responsible for tutor
- assist LA teacher in grading tutor (fgt - journal)

Effective peer tutoring provides the teacher with more time to help students who need a more intensive lesson. In Monty's case, she believes peer tutors need to listen to reading groups, help quiz students for tests, and review questions on the assignments of the LA students. If free time is available then Monty needs still to establish with the tutors that they are required to do things relating to the LA classroom when asked by the LA staff.

8:53 The phone rings as the student leaves the office.

Monty answers. It is *Office Supply Hut, Janice speaking. What had they decided on the laminator. Which one did they want? They have been waiting since last Tuesday to hear back and the rest of the order is on hold until a decision is made. What laminator? Chris has placed an order, supplies they discussed months ago but the order has just been approved. Monty will have to get back to them once she finds out what Chris wants. Janice repeats the styles while Monty scratches the notes...the 300L41 at \$139.50 takes 8 1/2" x 11" sheets, the 456XL priced at \$ 320.00 will take letter and legal size sheets sideways including 11" x 17" sheets. Packs of laminate are \$50.75 for 50 letter size pockets and \$63.80 for 40 legal size pockets. They are out of 11" x 17" pockets and who knows when their shipment will be in next. And for the next two days the letter size pockets will be an 'in-store special' at \$43.60. But the person who placed the order would have to pick those up because that price is only included as the in-store price. And their school discount is thirty percent. Monty talks Janice into 43 percent and delivery of all items. Monty decides to take the first machine discussed. No one has time to play around with phoning back and forth. After all as head of the department she has to agree to any purchase orders. If she responds to the request now this is one less step for later. Because this is the first order with Office Supply Hut it will have to go on Monty's credit card. Janice thanks Monty for doing business with Office Supply Hut and would somebody please respond to the call next time? (fgt-journal)*

Monty needs the receipts to put in for reimbursement. Which the school will do later. When they get to it.

8:59 Using the inter-school phone, Monty calls through to Mr. Mappings' room. As the Socials' teacher, he can perhaps explain what took place in his class on Friday. The voice on the other end of the phone explains that Mr. Mappings is away and that she was the supply teacher in the room.

Monty looks up Mr. Mappings home number in her address book. She used to have a computerized daytimer/phone book but it was either lost or stolen. Whoever has it now has all of her staff and student phone numbers. She dials and Mappings answers. The call is futile; he was also away Friday and there was different supply in the room. Monty calls the vice-principal but before she can start talking, Monty is informed that the mother cannot make it to the appointment and it has been canceled.

9:07 Monty gathers her binder and prepares to go tracking. She checks off two of the items on her list.

find out what happened on Friday in Noel's Socials' class □

10:00 meeting with v-p and Noel's mother □

Noel's sheet for the binder is tossed in the garbage.

9:09 One of Monty's students enters the room. *Mrs. Presdonne, I need a letter from you for my father's lawyer. My dad got in trouble over the weekend and we need a letter.*

The student appears visibly upset. Monty asks what happened to try and clarify the details. The decision is made to speak to the vice-principal. Administration can call the lawyer and find out what is happening. The student leaves the room and Monty calls down to the office to relay the news.

9:14 Monty escapes through the door into the hallway and begins her tracking. “I have a route that I take” (First Conversation).

The route begins. Computer Lab. Accounting. Communications. Math. She meets a student in the hall, acknowledges him and stops to talk. Body half turned to leave, she turns back and asks how his artwork is progressing. Slowly. He does not have the money to buy supplies; that is why he has come to visit the art teacher. Maybe there is some leftover stuff he can have. This young man is no longer a student at Brownstone Secondary. Monty asks if he is hungry and without waiting for a reply, takes him to one of the kitchens where coffee is made and oversized cookies sit on a tray. She leaves him leaning against the counter sipping and munching with parting words that request a viewing of some of his art.

Tracking continues but it is almost 10:15 and Monty needs to review the IEP for Cheryl.

A quick stop at her box. A message from the vice-principal:

Brownstone Secondary
Office of the Vice-Principal

Re. peer tutoring marks meeting request
See me at 10:45. I've got somebody to cover Room 2.
I'm away at a conference tomorrow so this is the only chance I have.

u-p

* * *

Tracking

For one period of each day, the learning assistance teachers each track their students. Monty explains the purpose behind tracking:

Monty: Tracking...[it's] seeing the whole kid. It's finding out what's happening in their classrooms so when they come in to work with us, we know what they're doing. It is that contact of seeing the kid outside of whatever kind of framework we normally see them in. So I can see them where they shine because they're really doing auto body career prep. I get to see them [in shop] where they're really good and not sitting in Math or Social Studies that they hate. It's just knowing what's going on. And you bet it makes a difference. You should see this kid I just picked up [had added to her caseload]. He's a gray kid. And he sees me [in his regular class] and says 'Oh you checkin' up on me!' 'Yeah I will because you're [inaudible] here. I'm going to see you're in class too.'...It's just part of it. I make notes, document it (First Conversation).

The concept of tracking is twofold. Firstly, the student sees that he is being monitored; secondly, the regular classroom teacher sees that the student is being monitored. Unfortunately some teachers see this as an intrusion. They confuse who is being monitored and perceive themselves and their teaching as the focus.

While tracking a student in the Home Economics class, Monty speaks with Mrs. Chiffon, the Home Economics teacher. Since a large part of the work is done on

old, photocopied handouts, Monty wants a copy of them to have someone in the business class key them in and print them off on the computer so they are more legible. This means too the learning assistance room will have a class set to use with the students for review. She also suggests helping adapt the program to best accommodate the students. Mrs. Chiffon responds in a brusque manner telling Monty "...to back off..." and that Monty's students will not be allowed in her class again (fgt-journal).

Rarely showing emotional frustration Monty comments once outside the room:

I was only trying to help. The woman uses a text that was printed in 1975! How useful does she think teaching these kids how to make angel food cake is? They need to know how to make nutritious meals that they can stretch on a small budget. They need to know what to buy! (fgt-journal).

What is interesting to watch while Monty tracks, is her approach toward the student. If a lesson is being taught she does not disrupt the proceedings but stands quietly and makes eye contact with both the teacher and student. If students are working independently or in small groups, Monty approaches the student, crouches beside them at eye level or just below and asks how things are going. "I want to be in their face. These kids need to know I'm there" (First Conversation). She ends her sessions with the students by reminding them she will see them last period in Room 2.

On occasion, the regular classroom teacher will use this time to give Monty materials or copies of handouts they are using in class. Or they chat about the student's progress. It is never idle chat. Mainly because with twenty to twenty-six students to see

in eighty minutes there is no time for much else. Especially when shop and mechanics are at opposite ends of the school.

When students have not appeared for their regular class, Monty speaks directly to the teacher. She finds out if the teacher has tried to find the student or if there has been notification of a pending absence. If not, she calls the student's home to inquire about the absence.

It is not realistic that Monty sees all of her students in one period. She is frustrated claiming that paperwork and meetings are responsible for this.

Monty: I'm not like in kids' faces enough right now. I'm doing so much paper work. I have one class where I'm teaching kids. I see 10, 15 kids. I go around to talk to them in their classrooms but I'm not responsible for what they do. I think I would be happier sometimes in a classroom setting.

Hah. *Way* happier in a classroom setting and not just doing paper work and IEPs and checking off squares for the Ministry in the boxes so that they can have adjudication for their exams (First Conversation).

Monty's final comments on tracking: "It's a big job. We're going to get T-shirts made: 'Keep on tracking' [Laughs] (First Conversation).

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10:18 Monty hurries to Room 2. Chris is in the room standing at her desk and begins to mention the meeting to Monty who waves the note in acknowledgment. Chris says that she began to fill in the forms for the staff meeting and will finish those before they go to see the vice-principal. Sharing duties helps alleviate some of the stresses of the learning assistance environment. Working as a team the three teachers have developed strategies to try and help each other wherever possible but with diverse schedules, and as Head of the Special Education Department, Monty carries the full brunt of the classroom load compounded with other duties.

Time to review the IEP.

* * *

Individual Education Plans

Special education services: A manual of policies procedures and guidelines: Guidelines for services and programs, (1995) defines and states the purpose of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) as

...a written plan, developed for a student, which describes the program modifications and/or adaptations for the student and the services that are to be provided. It serves as a tool for collaborative planning among the school, the parents, the student (where appropriate) and, as necessary, school district personnel, other ministries and/or community agencies (Section C, p.8).

Further to this definition, Individual education planning for students with special needs: A resource guide to support teachers (1995) includes what an IEP is and is not:

The IEP is:

- a concise and usable document which summarizes the plan for the student's education program
- a tool to assist teachers in monitoring and communicating student growth
- a plan developed, implemented, and monitored by school staff in consultation with others involved with the student
- a flexible, working document with meaning for all contributors
- an ongoing record to ensure continuity in programming (p. 2).

The IEP is not:

- "written in stone"
- a daily plan, or a description of everything that will be taught to one student
- a means to monitor the effectiveness of teachers
- a report card (however, the report card should comment on progress towards IEP goals) (p. 2).

Special education services: A manual of policies procedures and guidelines:

Guidelines for services and programs, (1995) describes what an IEP must contain.

The IEP document does not describe every aspect of the student's program. It only makes reference to those aspects of the education program that are modified or adapted, and identifies the support services to be provided. The IEP must set out:

- the present levels of educational performance of the student;

- the learning outcomes set for that student for that school year where the learning outcomes are different from the learning outcomes set out in the applicable educational program guide;
- all the required adaptations to educational materials, and instructional and assessment methods;
- all the support services to be provided;
- a description of the place where the educational program is to be provided;
- the names of all personnel who will be providing the educational program and the support services for the student during the school year; and
- the period of time and process for review of the IEP

In addition, the IEP should include, when applicable, plans for the next transition point in the student's education (including transitions beyond school completion)... (Section C, p. 9).

Before an IEP is established, a student must be identified as having “special needs”. Individual education planning for students with special needs: A resource guide to support teachers (1995) outlines the requirements for identification: assessment and evaluation, consultation among staff and support members of the school, strategies applied and their effect upon the student, and referral to the school-based team for more specialized assessments.

Referral to the school-based team, often made up of the classroom support workers, administration, parents/guardians, and district and school board personnel, aids in identifying problems more clearly and in providing suitable programming requirements. According to Individual education planning for students with special

needs: A resource guide to support teachers (1995) the team's IEP should include the following:

- what the student now knows and can do
- what and how the student should learn next
- instruction plans:

Who will provide instruction?

Where will it take place?

For how long?

- what the student will do to demonstrate learning (p. 8)

The length of an IEP depends on the complexity of the student's needs. Special education services: A manual of policies procedures and guidelines: Guidelines for services and programs, (1995) confirms this as does Individual education planning for students with special needs: A resource guide to support teachers (1995). The latter goes one step further in anticipating a teacher's reluctance at compiling an IEP. "Teachers may feel apprehensive...This is a natural feeling that disappears once teachers discover they already have knowledge and skills that can be applied to the process..." (p.1).

Apparently not all teachers agree with the sentiment expressed above. Recent e-mail on an open bulletin board reflects the reality of the teachers experiences and the variety of demands that the writing of IEPs place on them. Especially the demands of time.

I started my first 2 IEP's today and it was like getting hit over the head. The paperwork is beyond reasonable. Rationale's for everything are written in triplicate. ... I always state test title and scores, results of curriculum based measures, findings from work samples, etc. Right? Doesn't everyone else? So about 3-4 pages later (get that, that's pages) I come to a section that asks me to specify the measurements the IEP is based upon. DUH! I already had it written, so I wrote it again.

This happens all over the place. There are at least three places where we give the rationale for the services. In another place I must detail the specific processing problems (if it is LD), then at the bottom of the same page there are boxes to check that provide the exact same information. It sadly looks to me like we have let the paper pushers tell us how to do our jobs and we are running scared. So scared, that we have IEPs that tells them what we are going to tell them, tells them, then tells them what we told them. Looks like a document created to "cover the butt." 50% of the document would have offered parents and teachers more than enough information. Oh, also, sections to detail the child's community involvement. These are lovely ideas and I enjoy knowing when my students are star little league players or singers in the church choir, but these activities are the responsibility of the family.....

The old IEP took an hour to write (I mean physically write, if you wrote it (a draft only, of course) from beginning to end before the meeting. Now, let's plan on two and if you try to follow the letter of the law and write it at a meeting, make that 3. Plus, most of the parents will be asleep long before the end of the meeting.

For all you fine parents on here, we do try to accomodate parents, it just happens that many parents make it clear through body language that they do not appreciate a terribly lengthy meeting (Anitya, September 11, 1998).

... on the side of reality, given that I do over 30 IEP meetings per year, if the majority of my parents wanted 2+ hour meetings, I'd be in a jam. Fortunately most parents want the 45 minute variety. When we have parents who want more or a student with enough problems that more is needed, we arrange it (Rose, September 12, 1998).

My school corporation recently created new IEPs for our Special Education students. They are 13-15 pages long. That's right! They are toying with the idea of computerizing them, but for the time being they are hand written and must be copied and distributed to all parties involved. The pages are not pressure sensitive. This means a full set must go to every person/department involved with the student. Reams of paper(just think of the trees). I am a Learning Disabilities Specialist... Spending time with parents is critical. I have never had an IEP conference last less than 2 hours...since I need to have some of them during school time, I request and receive a Substitute so that the conference can be held without interrupting the instruction of students (Konnice, September 14, 1998).

Monty finds the time restraints of writing updates restricting. "We are always writing IEPs. We are always updating IEPs" (First Conversation). On the other hand she believes in the importance of vigilantly attending to the plans. Some teachers have ways to alleviate the stresses of writing by feeding the information into computers. This

however is as time consuming. One needs a computer program. And to know how to use it.

We're trying to put our IEP objectives on WordPerfect Macros at work. We're typing each objective and the various ways to teach it on its own separate macro. Does anyone know a better way to do this?

We're trying to "train" our computers to help us with the written part of creating IEPs and lesson plans without giving up our own experience and the individualization of our IEPs and plans (Ann, June 24, 1998).

In response a teacher sends this e-mail:

Depending on what state you live in the state dept. may have a IEP program for you. I live in TN and have used an IEP computer Program for @two years. It can be a great time saver if you take alittle time up front to learn it. There is an area you can go into to type in your own objectives and give each one a code number. You can print out this page for easy reach of these numbers, then when you get to your goal sheet all you have to do is type in the objectives you what for that particular child. Sorry I don't know much about help with wordperfect, but I hope this may be alittle useful anyway (Keena, July 1, 1998).

Monty has no such program.

Of concern to Monty are the 'gray area' students. Unofficial LA 'lingo'. The ones whose academic difficulties are not severe enough to meet the standard requirements of the Ministry. Falling through the cracks, these students have difficulties meeting the expectations of the regular classroom teachers. The regular classroom technically the only placement offered them.

Monty sees this as heinous.

Monty: It's the gray area kids that I don't know what's happening about. The ones that can't get the designation and I only find out if they go through student services and I ask for a record of their report card...I mean right

away I look at gray kids and I ask a question. ‘Why is somebody testing and measuring and ‘i.d.-ing’ one kid make them more valuable and this other kid is just going to have to do the best they can? Unless he gets some help. It’s so unfair. Most of them don’t feel like what they have to say is worthy of being heard. They just exist. Sometimes I feel like...it’s such a disservice. (First Conversation).

The regular classroom teachers often notify Monty when particular students are having difficulties. Or she makes inquiries on her own. Noticing sometimes takes weeks. Usually the first report card of the year is the most glaring sign of trouble in a student’s academic life.

Monty: It takes ten weeks into a term to do a report card. Then it takes another two weeks to collate the sucker. So we’re in twelve weeks of a twenty-four week term. [Sometimes] there are eight weeks left and I’m finding all these kids that are failing. Everything (First Conversation).

Furthering the thought, Monty provides an example:

[The student] will not be designated. He won’t bring in money. He’ll just be another kid to look after because he’s already been assessed and tested and he doesn’t need the Ministry’s [help]. He is not eligible for the funding. He’s already had a full psych. assessment and he doesn’t fall

within what the Ministry guidelines say...He had [the assessment] done two years ago in grade 9 so it's still valid. Because I know he's there [I feel] I have a moral responsibility to watch out for him.

I think they [the teachers] all try and look out for him. His name came on a list from his feeder school as a gray area kid and I said I'd watch for him (First Conversation).

Complications within student timetabling cause additional problems in monitoring 'gray area' students. The system of 'spinning out' timetables means that courses matched to the student are scheduled at random. For Monty this is an issue that needs to be confronted to head off disastrous results. A case in point:

Monty: ...when I looked more closely, and it wasn't until second term, the computer had programmed [a student] in for three electives first semester and three academics second semester. Well *excuse me*, you know we've had a kid who's done really well in his electives first semester, well not really well but he's got C's and he's passed everything. In second term he's trying to do Socials, English - regular English, and a Science course. How the hell these kids get programmed is another issue that really needs to be dealt with and the way the computer spins timetables. The language says they're spinning these timetables. It's like a lottery. You could end up with all of your electives first semester and a heavy course load for second.

[The students are] not going to change it because they don't know. One they don't know they have the power to change it; they don't know how to plan that far ahead. So there has to be something else (First Conversation).

* * *

Monty prepares for the meeting but refers to her list first.

return phone calls

find out what happened on Friday in Noel's Socials' class ✓

10:00 meeting with u-p and Noel's mother ✓

feedback for Cheryl re. IEP ✓

10:45 meeting u-p ✓

tracking ✓

fill out forms ✓

respond to sticky notes

12:00 staff meeting

1:30 call superintendent for conference call

assessment for Michelle Gates

* * *

Meetings

Meetings CONTROL the bulk of Monty's day. It is a rare day that she is able to attend to servicing her students directly through instruction. As head of the special education department, Monty has obligatory meetings with the school administration, other department heads, her department, her immediate staff, counselors, and other 'regular' classroom teachers. She is also required to attend all school staff meetings.

Monty's position demands that she acts as the school liaison for the special education (SPED) department between her class and other schools' SPED programs. This involves attending and sometimes organizing meetings with regards to transition, programming, and any other issues that arise in learning assistance or SPED as a whole.

Heads of secondary learning assistance departments from different schools gather at regular monthly round table discussions.

School board meetings also require attendance.

Administration expects Monty to attend workshops. In the morning. The afternoon. The entire day. The evening. The weekend.

* * *

A weekend. Part I of a two-weekend workshop. Secondary LA teachers. A retreat.

Oxford: [a] period of seclusion for prayer and meditation (p. 639)

Random House: a place of refuge, seclusion, or privacy (p. 1644)

January. Half way through the year.

Discovering, defining, and dialoguing the conditions necessary to effectively operate a secondary learning assistance classroom.

The dialogue centers on:

1. time
2. support - increased number of LA teachers
 smaller numbers of teachers/students
 more materials, computers, ready-to-use programs
3. job definition
4. division of duties (Monty, personal workshop notes)

Dividing into groups.

Say the first things that come to mind and write them down.

Brainstorming LA teaching responsibilities. Spontaneous responses. Randomly listed. Blank experience chart paper filling quickly.

1. IEPs and updating
2. tracking - designated/gray area
3. resources
4. support for regular classroom teachers; IEP communication
5. peer-tutoring programs
6. assessments and referrals
7. gifted programs
8. organizing SSAs

9. student services -meetings, teams, planning, etc.
10. writing, implementing, evaluating individual student courses
11. work experience
12. ESL programs
13. individual student report inserts
14. professional development
15. modifying/adapting assignments/tests
16. courses - Pathfinders, etc.
17. updating/mainstreaming behaviour designations
18. communication with parents
19. budgets, department heads, more meetings...
20. writing student designations re. funding
21. transition 7 > 8, 10 > 11, 12 > community
22. adjudication
23. scheduling final exams, scribes, readers, re. secondary exams
24. counseling
25. timetabling - troubleshooting student timetables

Reviewing the list. Silence. Hesitation. A realization of one group member.

We forgot that we are supposed to teach too.

Point 26. Teaching - direct instruction.

Disbelief.

Twenty-five LA obligations have circumvented, danced, and slid by the focus of the program. The students. Only their edges have been touched. Students central to the concept of learning assistance.

And Point 26. An afterthought. The last obligation.

Should it not have been first?

* * *

Monty shows me the list after the workshop and tells of its birth. She is dismayed at the time. But more so later.

At another meeting, Monty and her counterparts list their duties in their respective SPED departments.

1. budgeting
2. meetings
3. department scheduling/timetabling
4. inventory/equipment/resources
5. shopping
6. coordination and distribution of information, materials, mail
7. sharing of information/materials/etc.
8. assisting department members with curriculum/materials/new implementation

9. co-ordinating/meeting deadlines

10. orientation of SPED teachers/students

Monty: The way life is, is I'm tracking and I'm finding kids. I've gotta do these g***** IEPs. Contact parents. Go to a f***** lot of meetings.

Meetings. Meetings. Meetings. I have meetings with the vice-principal, LA teachers...Recording events of the day. Talking to colleagues...transition work. The LSA [Learning Specialist Association]...budgeting...resources. Dealing with staff. Colleagues. PAPERWORK. The kids.

I want to see 'The 26 Points'. I want to rewrite them.

fgt: Why don't you just write out what you personally see as your obligations. Make your own list then we can compare them.

Monty: Okay. There won't be twenty-six points again. I think that some of those can be combined. [Monty rewrites the list and reads them back]

1. *tracking*

2. *finding kids - gray area and taking these kids on*

3. *IEPs*

4. *Get on the phone*

5. *Meetings. Meetings. Meetings.*

- *with u-p*

- *teachers*

- department

- parents - phone calls

- kids

6. *Student services*

7. *Reporting - recording*

8. *talking to colleagues*

9. *transition work - ongoing Sept. > June*

10. *valuable LSA - local support*

support requires support from outside

11. *budgeting - resources*

- *staff*

12. *dealing with staff*

There. Only twelve points. Oh no. No, no, no. [lapsed silence] I can't believe it. I can't believe what just happened. S***.

[Monty writes on the paper and reads Point 13.]

13. *Kids - teaching*

Monty's afterthought. She is troubled.

And half of 26 happens to be 13...	But the problem is a whole.
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The problem for LA teachers is endemic. Several e-mail responses from the LD On-line bulletin board affirm 'The 26 Points' and Monty's list.

40 students to monitor would break any teacher who had to stay intouch with up to several teachers per student to track progress, make modifications, etc. Not to mention testing (oops, one period per day is for testing, now we serve our 40 during 5 periods) which runs around 2 hours per student just to prepare for annual reviews and that many IEP meetings leaves no time to do the remainder of the job, which is teach. Forget the prep period that most secondary teachers get. A person would have to be insane or masochistic to sign on for a job like that and think they could help students, too (Unknown, May 27, 1998).

The problem I have is with new referrals. How many more students can I handle. Every year at the beginning it is so nice to have 20-25 students. I've often said I wish I could just put a sign out on my door that says FULL. The problem I have is keeping up with the new referral paperwork. I have asked my supervisor to hire people just to do the referrals for our county, but he won't even consider it. How much more can they put on us???? I want to teach, and I don't care to meet with parents because I feel parent involvement is very important, and I don't even care to keep up with the IEP's, but where do we get some relief from all the other duties??? (Keena, April 23, 1998)

Even in resource classes, there is never enough of "me" to go around, esp. knowing how much direct instruction they need. I'm wondering how I'm going to remediate deficit areas, help with content classes (i.e. reteach the material), teach study skills, etc., within a 90 min. class every other day, often with 9 or 10 kids. It's sort of like teaching seven or so courses, all different, at the same time (you can tell mainstream teachers that when they complain about their 150 students (in 5 classes..which equals 5 wholes, etc.) and the "small" classes we have and say they wish their jobs were as easy as ours (sorry..you touched a nerve, I guess). I often challenge them to learn the curriucula of 4 levels of English, 3 of social studies, etc. In short, a jack of all trades and trivia master (Sharon, August 23, 1998).
For those of us who sincerely go the 150% to do the best job we can, continue to find ourselves buried under more and more paperwork, requirements, timelines, and meetings. All of these endeavors do encroach on the time that we must spend planning and preparing to teach an often diverse student population, many of whom have individual needs. We probably prepare more different lessons/activities on a daily basis than the typical elementary school teacher. While some of this paperwork and some meetings are productive, everytime our Congress looks at Special Education, they heap more upon us. All this adds up to the teaching speciality with the highest teacher burn-out (Shelby, June 23, 1998).

...in the next breath 'they' [administration] tell me to be closer to curriculum and the state goals. I finally entered our curriculum as goals into the computer. Did I get school time - hell no! Can you feel my heat about this subject. Just a little personal side line, I have no planning time because I always have a student available to teach. If my principal sees me working on the computer she says to me 'Don't you have students to see?' It gets a little overwhelming and I take my job seriously but the paper work is a drawback. But I also need the paperwork to do an effective job on my students, incoming & outgoing students. My personal solution is to get into regular education (Kelly, May 24, 1998).

Allyson Goldin (1998) confirms of 'The 26 Points'. "I spend a portion of my dashing around asking teachers what they've assigned, like an academic secret agent" (p. 56). She continues, "We attend some classes with the SPED kids, reteaching the curriculum an hour later a different way....We modify their homework, consult with their teachers, meet with their parents and counselors" (p. 58).

Further to the workshops defining the obligations of LA teachers, a meeting that Monty attended of SPED department heads resulted in a list of what they see as their obligations.

1. curriculum development/materials
2. team teaching
3. exploring teaching strategies
4. evaluating strategies
5. implementing technology
6. analysis of what does and doesn't work
7. professional development
8. transition
9. communication with community resources
10. community partnerships

11. remediation for students
12. servicing all students
13. process for receiving new students
14. adaptation and modification of SPED students' programs

Cross-referencing and combining similar items from 'The 26 Points', Monty's, and the SPED department heads' lists resulted in what the teachers define clearly as the obligations and responsibilities of secondary learning assistance teachers. And number 58. Most are fulfilled in a week. If not a day.

1. IEPs and updating
2. tracking - designated/gray area
3. resources
4. support for regular classroom teachers; IEP communication
5. peer-tutoring programs
6. assessments and referrals
7. gifted programs
8. organizing SSAs
9. student services -meetings, teams, planning, etc.
10. writing, implementing, evaluating individual student courses
11. work experience
12. ESL programs
13. individual student report inserts

14. professional development
15. courses - Pathfinders, etc.
16. updating/mainstreaming behaviour designations
17. communication with parents
18. budgets, department heads, more meetings...
19. transition 7 > 8, 10 > 11, 12 > community
20. ongoing Sept. > June
21. adjudication
22. scheduling final exams, scribes, readers, re. secondary exams
23. counseling
24. timetabling - troubleshooting student timetables
25. teaching - direct instruction
26. department scheduling/timetabling
27. inventory/equipment/resources
28. shopping
29. co-ordination and distribution of information, materials, mail
30. sharing of information/materials/etc.
31. assisting department members with curriculum/materials/new
implementation
32. co-ordinating/meeting deadlines
33. orientation of SPED teachers/students
34. finding kids - gray area and taking these kids on
35. IEPs

36. get on the phone
37. Meetings. Meetings. Meetings.
 - with v-p
 - teachers
 - department
 - parents - phone calls
 - kids
38. students' services
39. reporting - recording
40. talking to colleagues
41. valuable LSA - local support
42. support requires support from outside
43. budgeting - resources
44. staff
45. dealing with staff
46. kids - provincial exams
47. curriculum development/materials
48. team teaching
49. exploring teaching strategies
50. evaluating strategies
51. implementing technology
52. analysis of what does and doesn't work
53. communication with community resources

54. community partnerships
55. remediation for students
56. servicing all students
57. process for receiving new students
58. adaptation and modification of SPED students' programs,
assignments, and tests

* * *

Learning assistance staff from several schools within Monty's district meet at an afternoon workshop. Present at the district administrative level are the superintendent and a member of his staff. The meeting has been called to offer support and guidance to the LA personnel.

The superintendent's colleague presents her material and suggests supportive resources to the teachers. *All materials can be loaned out to you but keep in mind that we have only one copy each; so you'll have to share. Now some of these books might be for younger children but I really find them useful for classroom management. I think that you could adapt them* (fgt - journal). [The dreaded word. Adapt. These teachers spend their days adapting and modifying programs, assignments, and tests. Now the district wants them to adapt behavioural management strategies.] Looks across the room. One teacher to the other. Thoughts clearly expressed: *If you can't manage your class by now...*

Let's pass these around so you can see them. Thirty-five people in the room sit in a large, round-table format. The books slide from one to another. Covers closed. Spines uncracked.

The superintendent calls for a break. Food always entices involvement. And invites dialogue. Whether students or teachers. A rush for sandwiches, cheeses, pickles, and olives. Fruit juices, coffee, and tea.

Thank heavens they've got food. It's the only reason worth coming.

How have you been?

I'm glad that we have these meetings; it's the only time we get to see each other.

Listen I've got a student transferring to you...

Mingle. Chit chat.

The superintendent speaks. Years of elementary experience behind him. His first year with secondary. *Alright let's gather 'round and get back at it. I'm really excited about what we're going to do now. In front of me are some file folders. All contain the same information. I want you into groups of four.* [People eye and signal each other across the room.] *You can chose who you wish to work with. Each team will receive a folder. This is a hypothetical transfer student. Well, not really. He really exists but because of confidentiality, his name has been whited out. What you'll find is that everything pertains to the student's history. Your team needs to decide upon the student's designation. Look at what you consider to be the relevant information. You have twenty minutes and at that point in time [a redundancy, a point is a place in time...] we will discuss your findings. You may get into your working groups. One member can*

get the folder. Remember that what you need is a designation for this student (fgt - journal).

People begin to move into groups and as each group forms, one member steps forward to receive the 2” thick file. The teachers immediately leaf through familiar sheets and forms. Ones that they see all day long. Day in and day out throughout the school year. These secondary LA teachers have filled out similar forms and received like files. Examined them intimately, not in twenty minutes, but over a period of hours that have integrated phone conversations and consultations with key players involved in a students’ academic and personal history. Perhaps some of the forms of this not-so hypothetical student have been filled out by some of these teachers.

Murmurings. Flipping through sheets. Turning pages. *He’s going into nine (fgt - journal).* A letter from five years previously. Letterhead from a centre for autistic children. Assessment reports. ‘Standard’ behavioural comments. Poor academic record. Attendance sporadic. *Is there a prize for getting the designation right? Yeah, the kid.* (fgt - journal). Shuffling papers. More murmurs.

I resent being called away for the day to do this. I have my own files to do this to.

Do these people think that this is valuable now? We should have done this last June (fgt - journal).

It is now February.

Okay. Let’s take a look at your findings. What would your designations be? What did you find out? It might be faster to call out rather than raise your hand. [None are raised.]

Behavioural.

Why?

His documentation shows reports of disturbance in just about every academic situation.

What about autistic?

The letter's from years ago and states that there are no tendencies toward autism.

Where was he assessed? I don't mean the name but where?

Out-of-province.

So could we say that the letter applies?

It's too old.

Ah, but look. [The superintendent walks to the blackboard and holding chalk, half turns toward his audience.] How much do you get for a behavioural designation?

\$3725.00

[Writes the figure on the board] Now do you know what you get for an autistic designation?

Silence.

Just over \$30000. [Writes 30000 in large numerals on the board and underlines once for emphasis.] So...

The faces look back at him. Pursed eyebrows and bewilderment. A dawning beginning on their faces.

He continues. *Look. Bottom line. If your class is running in the black...call him behavioural. If your class is running in the red...call him autistic. You have enough to do it if the diagnosis has even been considered. His behavioural records show existing problems. Especially because he's from out of province. We would hesitate contacting*

out-of-province people to confirm. So \$30000 if you're in the red. It may be enough to float you (fgt - journal).

Someone asks for confirmation of this information. And receives it. Emphasized by more UNDERLINING.

The teachers remained hushed (fgt - journal).

How many students has this occurred to within the system?

A sterling moment in education.

These secondary learning assistance teachers have just been told to apply a designation to a student that will alter the very way people perceive him for the rest of his academic life.

If not longer.

Not for the student.

For financial reasons.

Autistic if in the red.

Behavioural if in the black.

In public: Meeting *the needs* of the students.

Behind closed doors: Meeting the *financial needs* of the program.

Perspective skewed.

This is not the only travesty of this meeting.

It is held two weeks before spring break.

Seven months after school has started.

Three months before school ends.

How to examine a case file of an incoming student.

Seven months of caseload files already examined.

Completions of new designations for the following September half completed.

This is considered the first 'training' for these secondary LA teachers. Most have been in the field for years.

* * *

Some meetings with administration have to do with budgeting. The special education budget for Monty's school is slightly over \$500000.00. This is not for Room 2 alone but incorporates all programs that fall under SPED such as ESL, Pre-employment, and learning assistance. The moneys allotted to SPED are directly related to caseload designates. Each student's designation has a monetary value that brings in a fixed amount for a school year of servicing. Straight learning assistance designations contribute the lowest financial amount, \$3725.00.

GRAY AREA STUDENTS BRING IN NO FUNDING.

Number of staff, resources, furniture, and supplies are directly contingent upon the money provided through the caseloads. Classrooms in special education may run in the red or black. Programs are not directly related to the successes of students or on the caliber of teaching, but on monetary prescriptions.

If you're running in the red, call him autistic.

If you're running in the black, call him behavioural.

\$30000 for autistic.

\$3000 for behavioural.

A thought: Suppose a program's closure hinged on \$30000.00. One more student. Or ten more. Labeled designates.

Monty's responsibilities as head of special education mean that all financial decisions and management of monetary issues run past her. She orchestrates the funding allotted to the various programs and provides the leaders with their share. From the moneys she hires staff, pays supply teachers, purchases equipment and maintains her programs.

SPED is a small business within a larger structure. With no managerial, accounting, nor financial business grounding, Monty has been placed in charge of a budget slightly in excess of \$500000.00 per school annum. The price of a house. The budget for over one hundred special education students.

The budget makes Monty angry. Often floundering to make ends meet, she must carefully weigh the money before it is utilized. Students' allotments are to be related only to their needs. But leaks occur. And they have to, to make ends meet. Money used

to purchase supplies for one student may benefit more than one. Deals are orchestrated. One new item shared inter-departmentally might mean that Monty may be able to acquire something else in return. A 'print-blind' designate may need a voice-activated computer program that others might use. These students are entitled to accessing texts and other books from agencies that tape record the material. Borrowed and copied, the materials are available in Monty's room for the other students to use who would not otherwise have the right to do so. No purchase necessary.

It is all in how you wheel and deal.

* * *

Pro-D days often result in meetings or workshops that require attendance. Monty describes one such meeting. Department heads and the school's staffing committee met to discuss a necessary staffing cutback within a particular department. It was to be reduced by one member.

Monty: ...nobody wanted to leave. One person declared themselves 'excess to need' which they could go out [and be there when needed] but they didn't really want to do that. They were playing their cards. So the group, the [department in question], asked the staffing committee and the department heads to vote. It was an experience. That went on. We broke for lunch...we voted. Someone asked what [the principal] wanted. It was a difficult situation. So we sat like a group with these people [the

department] present and wrote their names on a grid up on the board. We did not vote [so that everyone could see the voting] but at the end [the principal] did read out the number of votes...[They all sat there] as we dissected the four people. We put their qualifications on the board, the number of years they have been there. It was awful. For the whole day...we went through that.

This was our professional development day. *The day we met to trash a teacher* (First Conversation).

* * *

1:45 Block 4. Monty's teaching block. Eighty minutes. Twenty-four students. And Louise, the assistant.

Making contact with everyone as they enter, Monty takes attendance. Twice. Office record attendance. LA room attendance. Office attendance is programmed into the computer for report cards. LA's notes absences a useful reference for meetings, counseling with students, or consultations with staff.

Circulating around the room, Monty monitors what everyone is doing. She either sits beside or within arms reach of the student she is helping. Louise, considered the math specialist among the staff, begins helping a student.

The positive rapport that Monty has developed with her students is evident by their behaviour. Using humour, she is able to deflect most incidents that arise because of students' frustrations. What these students need most are boundaries drawn that set

expectations within their grasp. Their needs vary. Monty feels her own need to accommodate each.

Monty's teaching block is best expressed through example. It is a typical day. If she is there. And not at a meeting.

* * *

A student. Handouts. Sheets every which way. No notebook. No binder.

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(7 2 15 4 20...)

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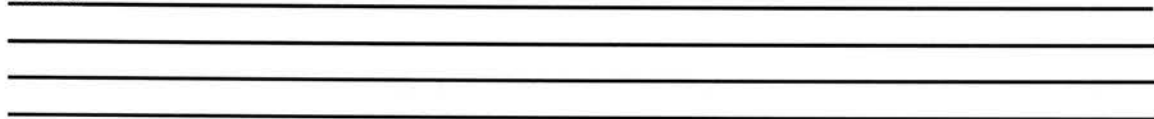
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Pen.

Pencil.

Lined



blank

Monty explains the importance of being organized. The student sits back from the table. Jacket on, even though the room is hot. Legs spread, waving open and closed. Hands resting in his lap. He tilts his head back while Monty surveys the mess of papers. She reminds him that this is serious and tells him she has a spare binder.

Monty: You have three texts for this [course]; so you need three sections.

Student: Well at the end of one book, I'll just throw these out.

Monty: *No!* You need all three sections for your final exam.

Student: Well, how many questions are there on the final?

Monty: About 200. So you need all of these. You put these [the sheets] into order chronologically. That means in date order.

Student: Yeah. [He begins to lean forward] Okay (fgt - journal).

Organization before starting on his assignment.

*

Monty leaves the student to speak with another. She requests that he read the text aloud to her. Partly because he is sitting looking toward the window rather than concentrating on the text in front of him.

Student: Why?

Monty: You need to read it and then we'll look for the answers.

Student: I already read it.

Monty: Read it to *me* please (fgt - journal).

He begins reading but has problems. Monty helps him struggle through his attempt that is so disjointed the text no longer makes any sense. And there is a lot to get through and comprehend in order to answer the homework questions. Touching his arm, he stops reading and Monty carries on with the text. They review the questions together. She tells him how to word the answers.

An assignment to complete.

*

The student organizing his papers is finished. Monty scans his progress. She asks him to read passage from his text to her.

The same as the last student.

An assignment to complete.

*

A regular classroom teacher pokes his head in the door looking for a student. He walks in, surveys the room and leaves.

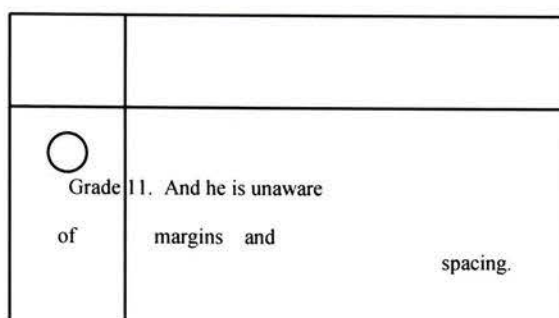
*

Monty moves to a student writing a test and scans her work. Things are moving smoothly in this corner of the room.

*

Sitting near a student who is working on an English assignment, Monty reminds a student at an adjacent table to read the work quietly aloud. It will keep him focused on the work and because of her proximity, Monty will be able to hear his reading.

A student stands behind Monty waiting for help. Jacket wrapped around his crossed arms. A muff. He is surveying the other students who are looking back at him. Monty's attention remains focused on the English student. She is trying to get hiscrampedwritingorganized. He needs to know how the paper is used more effectively.



Monty: Don't write here. [points] Write on the other side of the red line...the margin.

Student: What for? Writing is writing.

Monty: That's the correct way.

Student: Is everybody doing it? [He looks up from the paper at Monty.]

Packs up his books.

Leaves the room.

The books
remain
stacked
on the table.

No one tries to find him or appears concerned about his absence. Four and a half minutes pass. He saunters back into the room. Stands. Smirks at the student working with Monty while she is recording his answer. Sits down and spreads his books while continuing to stare.

*

Two other students begin talking. Monty puts a stop to the disturbance by eyeing them.

*

The student writing the test independently begins talking to another. Monty interrupts them and tells the one with the test to start the essay part and to pace herself.

*

Monty's attention focuses on reading the test questions aloud but frustration at having to do this is building. Unaware of the burdens of dealing with 'drop-in' test

students is a problem that needs to be addressed with regular classroom teachers. The LA staff does not have time to offer this much attention to ‘drop-ins’ even though the desire is there. Monty’s concern is justified because when something like this occurs, the other students are neglected. And they take advantage of her ‘absence’.

*

A student wanders to the window. THUMPING MUSIC COMES IN. The students are distracted. Several rush to the window to see whose car is pounding out the music. Some stand at their seats and look out. One begins tap, tap, tapping the beat, beat, beat.

Another muses “I hate thinking” (fgt - journal).

Two students begin talking about an assignment.

The girl writing the test, starts talking again.

The student with Monty has finished and quickly and leaves.

*

Monty begins circulating. The music has driven away and the students begin to settle. She explains a word to the girl still writing her test. Monty discovers that this is why no work has been done in the last several minutes. The student, not understanding the word, began speaking to her neighbour rather than proceeding to the next question until help was available.

*

Louise, the assistant, moves away from the student that she has been working with since the block started. She is reluctant to circulate around the room and will rarely work with more than one at a time. A failed attempt at a group mini-lesson sealed any hope of small group work. Control seems to be an issue.

Louise takes a harder approach than the teachers do when working with the students. She rarely laughs and is firm in her tone of voice. Some students do not work well in this environment; others are accepting of it. During the mathematics group mini-lesson two of the students entered into separate battles of wills with Louise only to have the LA teacher intervene. The result: Louise now moves from student to student and works with them independently rather than together. When they are all working on the same homework questions. Rarely is everyone serviced that needs her help.

Standing in the center of the room, typical of her viewing of the students, Louise approaches the student now using the margin correctly.

*

Two students begin collaborating in their work. As it is constructive, they are allowed to do so.

*

The test student has another vocabulary problem. 'Automatic'. Monty reads the question aloud and explains the term. It is central to the question. "So there's the key

word” (fgt - journal). The student thinks looking down at the test paper. And gives an interpretation of the question. Monty agrees.

*

Unknowingly, Louise changes what Monty has asked the student to do.

Student: [Snapping] That's two teachers that told me two different ways. Now I have to change it.

Louise: Just leave it (fgt - journal).

Louise walks away.

Monty approaches the student and sits beside him. His face is pursed. Sensing his frustration, Monty attempts to help him by reminding him to write on the lines in larger cursive. She shows him an example, writing lightly in pencil on his paper.

Student: *You're wrecking my good copy!*

Monty: I'll erase it. I'm just showing you (fgt - journal).

*

Another student needs a binder organized. Monty helps; borrowing notes from one student, sending someone to make photocopies and hole punches them. She organizes them with the student who admittedly has no idea where the handouts go.

Undated notes further complicate the issue. Other subjects' handouts are mixed together.

The student shows surprise.

Wonders how they got *there*.

Magic.

*

A student enters the room. Chris walks in behind him and goes into the LA office.

*

The binder is now organized. Monty and the student begin to review a Socials' vocabulary list.

*

A student working at the same table pushes his text across the table. Turning away. Leaning elbows on knees. Monty asks him to show her where 'reciprocity' appears on the page. He drags the text toward him and remains half turned away. Searching.

*

Waiting patiently, a student sits waiting for Louise who is busy with her third student. She asks Monty for help.

Monty: Can I just ask you a question? What did she [the regular teacher] want you to do today? Just work on these?

Student: Yeah.

Monty: Will you ask her [Mrs. Harding] to help you with this?

Student: Number 10. Yeah. Okay.

Monty: She'll help you (fgt - journal).

* * *

2:57 It is almost the end of the day. Students are already packing belongings. Monty begins to circulate. The English student waves his assignment to be checked. The test is handed in unfinished.

A student walks in and asks Monty about an assignment from another class.

Another Student: [Putting work in her binder does not look up]...if he was in class, he'd know.

Monty: [looks at the student] *If* he was in class! Did you hear that? (fgt - journal).

3:00 The bell sounds and the students evacuate before Monty can remind them to place the chairs on the tables. Louise, buttoning her coat, says goodnight. Her habits follow union rules to the letter especially for coffee breaks and lunch. Asked to remain behind

one evening to talk about an incident in the class, Monty receives a bill for overtime the next day.

Monty moves into her office to try and catch up on phone calls. She checks her list.

return phone calls

find out what happened on Friday in Noel's Socials' class ✓

10:00 meeting with u-p and Noel's mother ✓

feedback for Cheryl re. IEP ✓

10:45 meeting u-p ✓

tracking ✓

fill out forms ✓

respond to sticky notes

12:00 staff meeting ✓

1:30 call superintendent for conference call

assessment for Michelle Gates

The 1:30 conference call did not take place. Monty would have to call and find out what happened. For now she would begin with the other calls. The assessment

would be moved to the day after tomorrow. Monty would be visiting other schools for most of the day coordinating with teachers about transition students.

Placing the list on the table, Monty sees a pink phone message filled out by one of the LA staff. The superintendent had called at 2:05 but Monty was busy scribing for a student's test so she was not disturbed. Monty sits down. Annoyance showing on her face. She picks up the phone and dials. *Is the superintendent in? It's Monty Presdonne from Brownstone Secondary...*

Themes

* * *

When I was in the doghouse, I felt as if I were assembling a jigsaw puzzle in which each piece had a specific place. Before I put the puzzle together, it all seemed incomprehensible to me, but I was sure that if I ever managed to complete it, the separate parts would each have meaning and the whole would be harmonious. Each piece has a reason for being the way it is....At times I feel as if I had lived this before and that I have already written these very words, but I know it was not I: it was another woman, who kept her notebooks so that one day I could use them. I write, she wrote, that memory is fragile and the space of a single life is brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events; we cannot gauge the consequences of our acts, and we believe in the fiction of past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously...who could see the spirits of all eras mingled

in space. That's why my Grandmother...wrote in her notebooks, in order to see things in their true dimension and to define her own poor memory.

(Allende, 1982, p. 432)

* * *

The first hermeneutic conversation with Monty provided a wealth of information surrounding not only her day but reflected the duties of the secondary learning assistance profession in general. Armed with what seemed like mountains of transcripts, personal journal entries, and Monty's handouts detailing her work, I began to search through the layers of data to peel away relevant themes.

Several themes emerged. Themes current in teaching. Many vying for first place but the central theme appeared to be the overwhelming task of the job that confronted Monty. Leading to a sense of frustration, inadequacy, and failure.

Listing the themes in a linear fashion seems impossible. Reflective of hermeneutics, the themes themselves are best presented in a layered representation. The most important rests at the heart or center and progresses in an outward manner. The onion. Finding the heart is the task. Peeling the layers back.

Revealing.

Uncovering.

Exposing.

To begin we will read them from the outward layer peeling toward the heart.

Intermingled with concrete themes (ex. paperwork) appeared more abstract ones

(ex. inadequacy). A direct correlation. The concrete representative of the job; the abstract more personally involving Monty.

Lack of teaching: Concrete.

hopelessness

failure

frustration

lack of teaching

Although Point 26 on the SLA teachers' obligations and duties list, direct instruction is the most directly related theme that connects Monty to her students. And the connection, or lack of it, is a concern.

Bogged down by other responsibilities listed in the '58 Points' the students are continually moved aside, looked after by other staff or supply teachers. *Michelle Gates* representative of attending to the students another day.

Monty's day revolves around the students. Everything links to them - the meetings, the paperwork, the phone calls - but the one-to-one contact is often missing. This cannot provide constructive and effective instruction. The students' programs are adapted to assignments and passing 'regular' courses rather than receiving relevant, consistent, remedial assistance that would help lead to overall success.

Lack of teaching: Abstract

Monty's feelings of helplessness, failure, and frustration regarding the lack of student instruction are well founded.

Hopelessness at helping engage in effective instruction at a more 'hands-on' level.

Failure to provide the learning assistance that the students have a right to receive.

And do not.

Frustration because the system refuses to allow her to teach her students. The paperwork more important than the student between the pages. A true ‘paper kid’.

hopelessness

failure

frustration

lack of teaching

Meetings: Concrete.

uselessness

frustration

futility

meetings

Scattered throughout the day, week, month, and year ‘meetings’ are as prevalent in the consumption of time as paperwork. Appearing as the next layer, meetings generate paperwork. More forms, more handouts, more, more, more.... In Monty’s mind more time wasted. More time away from students.

The types of meetings vary.

Directly related to the student: IEPs, transitions, teacher conferencing, parents, programming.

Indirectly related to the student: evaluating caseloads, designing new forms, adapting/modifying curricula, recording grades.

Professional development: How students learn, defining responsibilities, sharing SLA procedures.

The repetitiveness of these meetings occurs when the similar meetings take place. Under different guises, or ‘dis-guises’. Where the gathering takes place: the vice-

principal's office, another school, the district office. The time changes to suit availability of attendees. Another 'dis-guise'. During school, after school, in the evening, weekend retreats. Who leads the meeting another factor: school administration, district staff, educational entrepreneurs.

As head of the SLA department at Brownstone Secondary, Monty's meetings are multiplied. Sometimes having to send other staff to one meeting while she attends another. Then there are meetings to report back on the meetings. Meetings breed meetings.

Meetings: Abstract.

Uselessness, frustration, and futility result in 'meeting overload' for Monty.

Uselessness is twofold: a meeting that repeats itself or does not relate to Monty or her SLA department.

Frustration a direct relation to having to co-ordinate her schedule organize supply teachers to replace her absence, travel time to get to meetings, attending, and dealing with what occurred while she was absent.

Monty's futility stems from seeing no benefit to attending seemingly countless gatherings.

The educational system seems to thrive on coordinating, scheduling, and informing its teachers of items they already have under their control. The workshop on 'caseload evaluation' a perfect example. Held way too late for new SLA teachers and unnecessary for seasoned ones.

hopelessness

failure

frustration

lack of teaching

uselessness

frustration

futility

meetings

And meetings lead to the next layer.

Paperwork: Concrete.

repetitiveness

frustration

redundancy

paperwork

Paperwork. Paperwork. Paperwork. The underlying dispute in the issuance of paperwork is the time it takes to prepare documentation. Time taken from other obligations. And from students.

Paperwork means filing, organizing, updating, filling out forms, AND reading every piece that crosses Monty's mailbox, in-box, desk, and from one hand to another. And one piece usually leads to another. Trails piled mile high.

Notification of meetings. Paper.

Agendas. Paper.

Handouts. Paper.

Reports. Paper.

Forms. Paper.

Messages. Paper.

Purchase orders. Paper.

Memos, notes, paper, paper.

Paperwork: Abstract.

Repetitiveness, frustration and redundancy. Familiar abstract themes already.

With a fluctuating caseload of seventy to seventy-five students the first year, Monty was unused to the sheer volume of paperwork contained within the caseload files.

Comments continually expressed in meetings reflected the repetitiveness of information required in the IEPs (fgt-journal). Transferring information from one paper to another seems impossible since most of the information is written by hand. Name, registration number, address, parents' names.... All entered on piece after piece of paper. Frustrating. Time consuming. The fact that all of the forms are different between schools leads to further frustration.

The paperwork weighs Monty down heavily.

hopelessness	failure	frustration
	lack of teaching	
uselessness	frustration	futility
	meetings	
repetitiveness	frustration	redundancy
	paperwork	

Lack of time: concrete.

hopelessness	frustration	futility
	lack of time	

Noted in the workshop retreat, SLA teachers dialogued about the lack of time to perform all of their responsibilities. Monty seems to run from appointment to appointment, meeting to meeting, student to student. Moving *Michelle Gates* from her daily 'To Do' list to the next day confirms the need for more time.

The lack of time to instruct, finish reports, attend meetings, and listen to students' problems and stories all lead to the SLA teachers' concern regarding time or rather the lack of it.

Lack of time: Abstract.

Monty's sense of hopelessness, frustration, and futility are reoccurring abstract themes.

Hopelessness at having to find the time to be with her students.

Frustration at never having enough time to deal with situations fully at a less stressful pace.

Futility brought on by the frustration and sense of hopelessness.

hopelessness	failure	frustration
	lack of teaching	
uselessness	frustration	futility
	meetings	
repetitiveness	frustration	redundancy
	paperwork	
hopelessness	frustration	futility
	lack of time	

Another layer closer to the heart.

Overwhelming responsibilities and obligations: Concrete.

frustration futility inadequacy failure hopelessness

overwhelming responsibilities and obligations

The first hermeneutic conversation unveiled not only Monty's but also other SLA teachers' impressions regarding the size of the job that confronts them. The responsibilities and obligations that confront Monty on a daily basis are overwhelmingly compounded as each day turns into a new one. The growth from 'The 26 Points' to 'The 58 Points' illustrates this fact.

'The 58 Points' account for the lack of time. These duties and obligations keep SLA teachers running in endless circles. Lack of time in general is the result of overwhelming volumes of paperwork and meetings.

Overwhelming responsibilities and obligations: Abstract.

Monty's feelings of frustration, futility, inadequacy, failure, and hopelessness are direct results of a system that makes huge demands upon its workers. The educational system is wearing down its teachers. Offering them inadequacy and hopelessness instead of encouragement and praise. Expectations upon expectation are piled upon Monty and her cohorts at unreasonable and unrealistic speeds. One job done, another fills its place.

There is no time for Monty to breathe.

Trying to surface for air.

The heart of the onion squashed.

hopelessness failure frustration
 lack of teaching
 frustration futility
 meetings
 repetitiveness frustration redundancy
 paperwork
 frustration futility
 lack of time
 frustration futility inadequacy failure hopelessness
overwhelming responsibilities and obligations

The overwhelming size of the task confronting Monty became evident in the recognition of the themes. Frustration and futility became abstract and repetitive issues throughout the layering. The result: hopelessness, inadequacy, and failure.

Hopelessness at making a significant difference to the education of the students.

Inadequacy at trying to sustain the level of energy and acquire the multi-faceted levels of expertise necessary to run an effective program.

Failure at not helping all of the students, especially the gray areas.

The futility of the tasks. Endless.

hopelessness		failure		frustration
		lack of teaching		
uselessness		frustration		futility
		meetings		
repetitiveness		frustration		redundancy
		paperwork		
hopelessness		frustration		futility
		lack of time		
frustration	futility	inadequacy	failure	hopelessness
overwhelming responsibilities and obligations				
frustration	futility	inadequacy	failure	hopelessness
		lack of time		
hopelessness		frustration		futility
		paperwork		
repetitiveness		frustration		redundancy
		meetings		
uselessness		frustration		futility
		lack of teaching		
hopelessness		failure		frustration

Monty is presented with the themes and given several days before the second hermeneutic conversation takes place. The idea to reflect on the themes, build upon them, refute the ones that Monty disagrees with, and dialogue with new themes emerging. Allowing me to reflect on the new outcomes and summarize the overall findings.

The Second Hermeneutic Conversation

The second conversation that took place has eight divisions. The first, reflection of the themes presented; the second, the schedule of events within the first three weeks of school; the third, Monty's early teaching; the fourth, what Monty sees as a problem; the fifth, self-discovery of a solution; the sixth, the future; the seventh, warning signs; the eighth, teaching.

Division one: Reflection of the themes presented.

Monty and I scheduled to meet in her home for our second conversation but conflicting times made it easier to meet in my home. October. Her second school year in Room 2. Armed with the themes presented to her for reflection, the conversation begins.

Monty: Well, that was summed up in a nutshell. No wonder I'm upset and so tired.

fgt: We need to talk about the themes that I gave to you.

Monty: I can't add any more and I wouldn't change anything.

A researcher's nightmare. The entire second hermeneutic conversation over with in seconds. Recalling my research questions mentally. Thinking the answers.

1. How will reflective practice alter the teaching and growth of this secondary learning assistance teacher?

Answer: It won't. Monty has not discovered reflective practice yet. She has not stepped out and looked at herself inwardly.

2. Having taught for many years, how might this teacher's established values and beliefs regarding teaching change through the process of reflection?

Answer: Through all of the paper sifting, I could not find evidence of the foundational values and beliefs that were within this teacher. She had the student always in mind but what were her actions based on, if anything. And so, I thought, what was there for her to change if she did not search for and acknowledge the values upholding her practice. Especially if reflection had not taken place.

Monty had read the themes and internalized them like any other piece of paper that passed through her hands.

Seconds of silence. And then Monty asked to see some of what I had already written. Hesitation on my part and a gut instinct that it might further reflection. I handed her the description of Monty, the students, and Room 2.

Taking the papers in her hands she began to read.

What I witnessed was reflective practice-in-action. But it was not Schön's idea of 'in-action'. It was reflective practice *'in-the-making'*.

I saw Monty as she began to read and talk, begin to step out of herself and look at her own practice. Reading about an anonymous person, with anonymous students, in an anonymous school, with an anonymous staff.

Monty began questioning herself. To herself. By herself. With herself. She began to dialogue alone.

And the tape recorder was still running.

I sat and listened while she talked ratifying all of the themes and pushing past her own protective layering. The skins shedding and peeling away. Layering that had helped her 'survive' a career of teaching.

Division two: The first three weeks of school.

Week One

Students attend Room 2 from Day 1 of the new school year. New students; old students. The classroom is busy but the teachers are all unfamiliar. That's understandable; they are all supply teachers. The only one permanent is the new aide. And some may know her.

I was able to spot a really good assistant last year who came in. That I really liked. She was dead-on within the first two days of subbing. She was in the kids'

faces and knew what she was talking about. So I said, 'I want you next year.'

And she's with us now (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 163-167).

Where's Ms. Presdonne?

Where's Mrs. Towne?

Where's...?

Who are you? I'm new here.

I'm the new assistant.

So where are they?

Monty and her staff have sequestered themselves in their office. Paperwork has already begun to rule the year. Just as distressing as last year. Forms. Files. Letters. Records. Reports. All aiding in the transition of students, the placing, the updating, the scheduling, the,

the,

the,

the....

Monty's thoughts on the issue:

It's sick. [Pause] I told them [the administration] last year that I would like to do this in the summer. Can you pay us? I don't want to come again...I'd come in the summer, for two or three days. There's a lot of paperwork and behind the scenes

stuff that needs to be done before school starts (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 112-126).

Monty and her team decide that the piles of student folders have increased since last year. They calculate seven more students each. No gray area students included. Designated only.

“We’ve gone up from about sixteen in each to about twenty-three each now”
(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 134-135).

The team’s caseload has increased dramatically. Monty and the others are frustrated.

In learning assistance there are sixty-seven; in [another special education program] there are twenty-four (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 144-145).

One of Monty’s concerns is the gray area students; who will help them? Monty has always been accommodating and aided staff by seeing non-designated students. Students that are struggling but do not qualify for official help. It is something Monty, and her team just does. Now with an increased caseload there is a concern of time. Too many students and not enough help.

“We’re not even looking at gray kids any more. Gray kids aren’t going to get *any* attention” (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 145-147).

Monty’s impression of what will happen to these students vivid.

Gray kids are toast. They are.

They’re *toast*

(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 147).

The caseload divvied within ten days (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 151-152), the real work can start.

Week two

But we’re much quicker [this September] getting kids off the starting block.

We’re much more efficient (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll.148-149).

And Monty and her team are. For three main reasons.

1. *This year none of the team is new;*

last year they all were.

2. *Now they have a year of experience in Room 2;*

last year they did not.

3. *This year, they each have one year of special education experience;*

last year they did not.

The team has a system in place now that did not exist in previous years so tracking is well under way.

The tracking has started...but what hasn't happened... we don't have time to even talk to the classroom teacher who actually has the kid in their face. That hasn't happened yet because we're too busy doing IEPs and paperwork (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 152-155).

There are drawbacks even with a system in place.

* * *

'I suppose,' Timothy thought as he watched the contestants roll on the ground, or kick each other, or move the winning tape, 'that there is no order here because there is no meaning. But how can you decide to have a meaning in the first place? And who decides what meaning you should have? Can you just make it up as you go along? It is all very queer. Very queer indeed' (Ackroyd, 1992, p.36).

* * *

Shortly adjudications will take place, January exams, and planning for the new semester's students and for the next school year. Monty is already beginning to feel overwhelmed.

It's the most ridiculous thing. We are running around in circles. Everything [is] paper, paper, paper...I'm hiring and deploying staff because I'm more cognizant now of the fact that we have a say in hiring our own assistants (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 158-163).

Hiring the staff comes along with her job. Her workload the same as last year. Monty had stepped down as Head of Special Education for Brownstone Secondary. With that step went the duties and meetings attached. However, for the second year in a row Monty is department head. By default. She remains in charge of everything and everyone in Special Education at Brownstone Secondary.

I am department head [again] and I was made it by default but I told [two team teachers] that we'd have to share the load...Well, somebody has to have the red dot on their box in the main office to receive news and pass out info. We're going to share the load of going to the meetings (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 135-137).

Again Monty is in charge of the department budget.

I deal with paper and money. I am a paper and money person...I have the biggest budget in the school. No training to deal with budget...But you know, how many teachers are trained to be managers and administrators? But we're really teachers. It doesn't make sense (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll.160-162; ll. 172-174).

Monty's concern for lack of direct teaching time is evident throughout our conversation. "And so the last thing again that I do is *teach* even though I have two blocks" (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 174-175). The reasons numerous. And usual. Paperwork. Meetings. The phone.

We're going to hire a substitute to come in and teach for us all day so we can go off and be isolated and just do paperwork...And we're also looking at maybe there's just one person who is hired to come in and work in the learning centre to teach and someone else who just is hired to do paperwork (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 184-189).

We had a PRO-D Day. I was so excited. But then I had to go and do more f*****, miserable paperwork on the Pro-D. All I wanted to do was go and do my own paperwork and not administrative directed paperwork (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 180-183).

Week three

Brownstone Secondary is in full swing.

An incident over the signing of an IEP by a parent emphasizes the time taken out of classroom. The situation escalates quickly.

The problem:

The student is half time at Brownstone Secondary. The home school owns the paperwork and the money. Monty needs to do her own IEP and have it signed.

[The student] came part way through [last] year and no one ever told us he was in our school (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 322-333).

This September Monty discovers that he is there without learning assistance but is designated.

The solution:

Have the parent sign the IEP and begin the official LA sessions.

What takes place:

He's since changed parents that he lived with. He's gone from mum to dad...

[Mum] was at school on my first day and she just pops in, 'Just thought I'd check up on Marcus.' And I said, 'Well I've just arrived back from my summer holiday and there's ninety-six kids and I really haven't had a chance to look in on him yet. But he's here.' And said I'll have a meeting with you soon.' I thought, 'Geez, this is the perfect parent to call. We'll sit down and do our IEP meeting together.'

So I called mum to set up the meeting for this week. And I saw Marcus in the hall and I said, 'Oh your mum's coming in tomorrow.' And there was this absolute look of horror on his face when I told him... The next morning there was a letter in my box from the father saying if I 'meet with the mother, you'll be hearing from my lawyer.' j****. You know? And the lawyer's name was in the letter. So I said, 'Here [vice-principal], look at this. We're getting phone calls or letters from parents now that...we're going to have meetings with lawyers now because I'm getting an IEP signed by the wrong parent. There's nothing I know of about court restraining orders.' She said, 'Let's call the lawyer.' We sat down in her office, called the lawyer's office and asked if there is something there that I can't meet with the mother. 'No, no, no.' So, we called the dad at work and ended up in this conference call, put on speaker phone and the three of us had this conversation. He was really blown away that we'd called the lawyer, called his bluff, hadn't done anything about it. But he said, 'I want to be the one....'... The dad came to see me today and said, 'Oh well, if there's a bill from the lawyer, I'll be presenting it to you. Hahaha.' j****. [Laughs.] Let's just get on with business. The dad didn't know what an IEP was so I went through this whole 8:30 educational meeting with a parent about what he's got to do for his child. Later mum's on the phone, and I said, 'Look I'm not going to keep any of this from you. This is what's happened. This is what your ex-husband's done. I don't want to get in the middle of this.' So the next thing the mother's on the phone to the counsellor saying, 'I won't tell you what I want to meet about now but I need to have a meeting now.' 4:00 Friday afternoon. No mum we'll see you

next week. So we both arranged to meet with mother next week...So, now I have to meet with mother too. I told [the vice-principal] that I'm going to have a fifteen-minute meeting with this mother. She said she wanted a half-hour. I said, 'I've got fifteen minutes...'. The mother needs to be heard...Dad did sign it today. I can write up another document that's identical and we'll just have two (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 327-380).

Step 1. Mother speaks to Monty at Brownstone (unscheduled appointment)

Step 2. Monty sees vice-principal about letter in box re. Lawyer.

- a. conference call lawyer
- b. conference call to father

Step 3: Monty meets with father who signs IEP

Step 4: Monty speaks to mother over phone

Step 5: Counsellor calls Monty.

Step 6: To meet with mother the following week.

Meetings. For one student. Escalation due to complexity. Trying to keep one step ahead.

Another problem arises. New students from a school closure. All from alternative programs. Sixteen behavioural designations.

We are bringing in a group of kids now high-needs, special needs kids that have come out of alternative schools 'cause one of the alternative schools...has shut down...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 15-17).

The team is upset. Already **rumblings** of **d i s r u p t i o n s** are heard from the regular classroom teachers. The conduit heading straight to Monty and bypassing the office. Louder than the announcements.

“...when they’re in the regular classroom, they’re causing real trouble. *Havoc*.
(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 143-144).

The science teacher, Frank Satellite, has gone to see Monty. He has been given a class of twenty-eight students to teach science to...most displaced from the closure of the alternative school. Students that really should have learning assistance designations. Already there are difficulties. Teaching science to these students is difficult. This is the regular Science 10 program. Satellite discovers that they have difficulties reading their science materials. But then they seem to have difficulties reading anything. He also discovers that they can’t do the necessary math either.

“...kids that *don’t* read, they *don’t* know anything, they *can’t* do math, they have *no* study skills, they have *nothing*, and he has *no* support. It’s a *dreadful* situation
(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 27-30).

Satellite has come to Monty to make his voice clearly heard. To complain. To make demands. And for suggestions. Solutions: a classroom aide, more records, an adapted program; of course, not right away. All part of Monty's usual job. Not part of Satellite's, a regular classroom teacher.

So we have had Frank Satellite frothing at the mouth at our student services meetings saying, 'This is criminal. This is wrong. I need help. Who's thinking of these kids? Dadadada. So immediately we're getting an assistant into his classroom. We're gathering material from Juvie [Juvenile Hall] to get some adapted curriculum for him (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 30-36).

This is going to take time. Monty comes up with a temporary solution to hold the fort until reinforcements arrive. She increases her workload.

"...we've had...okay...the assistants be in the room, I've had two assistants in the room. I've been pulling the kids into the [Learning Assistance] room. I'm taking care of them" (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 42-44).

These are additions to Monty's workload that she has taken upon herself. She is angered by the responsibility that no one seems to be claiming for these students. And is frightened by it.

I mean there are lapses in some of their educations. They may not have been in a regular school since grade 8 and they have all of a sudden been thrown into [Brownstone Secondary]. In a science lab. Sitting there. It's pretty scary. So the school didn't do a good job preparing for these kids, right? What's new?
 (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 96-99).

Monty realizes that this is just the beginning of the school year.

September. g. I think, 'Soon it's October'**

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 180).

Division three: Early teaching.

Monty addresses my question, "What made you go into teaching? (Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 387). She seems hesitant of her answer as she looks into her past:

It wasn't altruistic. It wasn't noble. I didn't know much about kids. I'll tell you, I look back and I think it was a joke (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 388-389).

Monty's families' education led her to the understanding that university is automatic in an individual's life.

I grew up in a family that it was really important to have an education. You know dad had the Ph.D., Mom had the Masters degree, and I knew university existed before I knew there was a high school. I knew I had to go to university. I didn't even know I had to go to high school (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 394-397).

University in the United States is filled with a variety of courses but no direction.

So here I am at university, taking all these courses at the University of — and still nobody thought, 'Oh what are you doing? What are you going to go in for? What do you want to study?' I never even thought about it (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 402-405).

It is not until a transfer to a Canadian university, that Monty is asked to declare a major. With no direction for course work in the past, the decision seems to put Monty 'on the spot'.

“...all of a sudden I had to declare a major. 'Oh!' My sister-in-law was visiting here from the States. She was a teacher and she was telling me what it [was] like. And I thought, 'Oh. I could do that.' And that's about how much consideration I gave it (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 405-409).

Monty reflects on a decision that has now affected her life for the past twenty-four years.

And I know if I look back now as the adult woman, at that child that was making that decision, because I was a twenty-one year old child, I would never do it. I would *never, ever* be a teacher because things that make me uncomfortable, are often times being in front of a crowd, addressing a crowd...I don't believe it. It's b*****. I *hate* it. What bothers me is the whole idea of...ultimately being responsible for the organization...of [the kids] future...frightens me (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 409-415).

Monty's reflection of her early past reveals something to her. She enjoys the solitude that she has experienced in the past, albeit not through teaching.

When I look back to the jobs that I've done, the one that I liked the very most, and this is so bizarre, was a university summer working for the Agricultural Research Station as a research assistant, being outdoors, driving tractors, conducting experiments, and stuff. I loved it but I really wasn't dealing with people; I was dealing with things (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 592-596).

Yet, Monty has made some progressive changes to the system early in her career.

... I went on a sabbatical when I went [to the United States.] I was an elementary teacher before that I was in a new district, a new state, I had no [state] teaching

certificate and I ended up in a place where they wanted somebody to work with junior high kids who didn't read. So they thought, 'Elementary teaching background. We'll offer her the job.' I was young enough and gutsy enough so I said 'Okay, I'll do it and I'll coach your soccer team too.' And I ended up working with these kids and I really liked the age level. I liked adolescents. I just thought they were wonderful. And so when I returned back to B. C. after that year, a job came up and I said, 'I'll take it. I've done this. I know I can do junior high special ed.' I did and I liked it. I got good at it. And then I realized that there was no secondary senior programs for these kids and so I made a bit of noise and stink and contacted parents, and contacted our school board. There might have been in other parts of British Columbia but [Monty's area] had nothing at that point for 11 and 12s. Because they decided that kids left at grade 10. They're old enough [inaudible.] They can get a job. And I said, 'No, some of these kids aren't ready. They're really immature. They really need more skills.' And so I ended up in senior high. And that's kind of what happened...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 233-251).

Division four: The problem.

Monty asks to read pieces that I have written for the thesis. This is a dilemma for me. I do not wish her to be influenced by what she reads and yet if I do not allow Monty to read, the conversation will dissipate. I know that she is having difficulty seeing herself and I sense that she is frustrated with something far larger than her day. Monty is given the section of the thesis 'The Subject' as it appears in chapter 3.

What occurs is unexpected.

[Places papers back on the table and points at them with her hand. I am standing roughly a metre from where she is sitting and remain frozen where I am.]

How could a person put themselves through that? That's like mental abuse. A bad marriage. I would tell [someone in an abusive marriage] to get the f*** out of there. And don't you dare put up with that. Get out....

[Long pause.]

Oh my g**.

[Long pause.]

Oh my g** [pause] *this is* me...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 205-218).

* * *

The announcer's face gave way to film of a different quality, blurred and shadowy. On this film a small group of people stumbled in line, like dominoes. The foremost person, a squat man in a business suit, tore something from his chest. An arm loomed out. Another man backed jerkily away, half hidden by a tall, thin woman in a light-colored raincoat. The man and woman disappeared.

Several faces swam forward, and someone put a white scarf or handkerchief to his or her eyes. I was fascinated. I'd never before been able to observe a room after I had left it (Tyler, 1977, p.21).

* * *

I am aware of what has just taken place but unsure if Monty is. For the first time, Monty has not thought of herself as the focus; she has removed herself from her 'self' and seen someone else. She had been reading of a secondary learning assistance teacher called 'Monty'. Not her 'self' as teacher. One thought floats through my mind: UNTIL WE SEE WHERE WE HAVE BEEN, WE CANNOT SEE WHERE WE ARE GOING.

* * *

It is obviously unlikely that you will ever stumble upon a creature from another planet. We do not even know that there is life on other planets. But you might stumble upon yourself one day. You might suddenly stop short and see yourself one day in a completely new light. On just such a walk in the woods. (Gaarder, p. 16)

* * *

At this point the conversation has much more of a focus on Monty, the teacher. She is no longer speaking of herself peripherally as often occurred earlier in the conversation or if asked a direct question, but is the central fixture. The conversation

experiences internal shifts that are marked when Monty speaks as a member of Brownstone Secondary's LA team and when she talks of her personal feelings and problems resulting from her stresses at work.

Monty is experiencing frustration, fatigue, and impatience, all now occurring at school. "I feel constantly just overwhelmed" (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 315-316). Monty's team teachers, according to Monty, share similar feelings.

[The vice-principal] came up and said, 'I want you to know what an amazing job you guys [Monty's team] are doing.' I thought, 'S***! Don't give me that c***.' I said, 'Well the department is doing it. We're working together as a team.' And she goes, 'Well, whatever. But you guys are doing an amazing job' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 106-110).

I don't get to see a product ever! I do *not* see products. I had one kid. A moment of what would be a product but it's so tiny. [The student] asked for help. We've had him in the learning centre for a year and another September and it's taken that long and he finally [raises her hand] and said, 'Can you help me with a question?' I mean we got really excited about that. I look at a piece of art on a wall; I want a product. I want to make something like that. j****, what a price to pay [for a product.] A year and a month. It was exciting and we all rejoiced...[Is] that moment enough to carry me? I need a little bit more at this stage. [A student] asking for help isn't going to feed me enough right now and what I need at this stage in my life (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 441-453).

I went to my doctor before I left [a summer holiday out of the country] and I said when I get back I know what it is going to be like. And I know that within four days of being back, I know that everything I undid while I was away will be just in a knot again. I'm in a knot...I guess that inner strength that I can kick into autopilot. I'm probably doing it right now. And I looked around me today and the scary part was that Cheryl was doing it too. And that we are all *frantic* (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 637-645).

[Cheryl's] tired. Chris is tired; she's not sleeping at night. None of us are. We just look at each other and think we're basket cases. And we are. Look at these red eyes...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 261-263).

Monty finds that even humour, something that used to keep the team together especially in hectic times, is waning on her part.

[There] was a new phone system and they had programmed into it that there were one hundred phone messages [laughs], and they'd taken every file they could find and Monty's in-box on her desk was stacked about three feet high. I walked in and I saw it and said, 'Oh s***!' I almost burst into tears and then they started laughing. I really thought it was for me and I thought, 'Oh f***.' As soon as I realized that it was a joke I saw it was funny. My instant [reaction] was 'I'll never get through this.' You should see our tracking binders already...I'd be glad to go out the door...When I walked in that first week of school. I didn't know my

way about the office. I didn't know where anything was. It was scary. It was very disconcerting to get back into things. Disorienting. They [Cheryl and Chris] had started their books and had everything organized. And none of that had really [inaudible] it seems like a long time ago now. A long time. I've only been at school for ten days. S***. I haven't even thought of that. It feels...it feels... (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll.661-675).

Monty's life extends now past the boundaries of her teaching as she incorporates home life experiences into her story. Her problems figure dominantly 'behind the scenes'.

When [my own kids] listen to me talk at home, they just look at me and don't understand why I do what I do. And they say to me, 'Why don't you just come and teach kids like *us*, mummy?' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 220-222).

I am so f***** fatigued when I get home. I went out with a walk with [my daughter], she wanted me to go out for a walk the other night, and I couldn't keep up with her and she says, 'Come on. Come on, mom. Come on.' I said, 'I can't keep up with you,' and she said, 'Oh yes you can, just try a little harder.' [Laughs.] [Daughter], you don't understand (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 263-268).

The severity of what Monty feels is accentuated by her actions.

I started having this year for the first time, my dreams that I will have...I've always had dreams in August. 'Oh g** I've got to go back to school.' Last couple of years they've been in July. This year I had one in June before school was over. I was having the 'dread dreams.' That's scary. And I remember waking up and going, 'Oh f***' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 285-290).

...even in the summer, I felt like I'm just...I ended up feeling all of these...they're not insecurities, well maybe they are, but they were fears of this ebbing strength going away from me which really frightened me because I felt weak. And when I feel weak, then I can feel that sort of vulnerability (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 491-495).

So I see my doctor who happens to live with a teacher and knows how stressful teaching is. I've already checked that one off the list. Oh, Monty's already needing medication to get through September. She's taking anxiety medication to get through the day and sleeping medication to get through the night (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 540-544).

My whole body just feels worn out and I pulled [a medical magazine] and there was this whole thing about depression. It was an advertisement for some kind of medication for depression and I just looked at it and it said: are you loosing sleep, loss of energy, dadadada and dadada. I just thought, 'Oh g**, this is describing

me. Maybe I'm clinically depressed and I don't even know it.' Wow. Wow
(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 579-584).

And I get home now and Frances, I can't even tell [my husband] any more when he says, 'What was your day like?' I don't even want to talk about it. I don't want to pretend that I can explain it. 'Cause he will *never* understand. And it makes me more fatigued to try and explain what my day was like (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 15-16).

I am *numb*. Frances, right now, I am numb. I feel vacant. I'm f***** vacant. I go to the grocery store and I'm vacant. I left my list in my pocket yesterday to go to the grocery store last night. Changed my clothes and didn't have my list with me and I just wandered. I had four or five things on the list and I bought \$104.00 worth of stuff. I thought, 'Oh g**.' Two of the four things on the list, I didn't get (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 742-748).

* * *

You see, Tim, we live in time. But in the fallen world time simply recurs. The same events or situations happen again and again...No wonder when you understand the pattern, you begin to feel a sense of futility or despair. You don't even have to understand it to feel its effects (Ackroyd, 1992, p. 224).

* * *

Division five: The solution.

Monty struggles with a direction during the later part of the conversation. She clearly knows what she wants to do:

I have to get out of this job

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. p20).

It is not a matter of changing classrooms or schools.

...there's a part of me that thinks that to get back into doing that would require doing so much creative energy for a year to create programs and work in new curriculum and everything and motivate a whole large group. I don't think I could do that at this stage. Yet I know that I can't keep doing what I'm doing (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 227-230).

Monty's concern is not leaving Brownstone Secondary but on how best to approach her leaving and yet maintain her dignity:

I feel I need to justify it. I don't want to be perceived as a 'wuss' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 462-463).

Monty speculates on the reactions of others at Brownstone. "All the things that go through my mind about what people will say" (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 721-722).

[They'll say], 'Let's see if we can fix this.' The vice-principal would be right there doing that, forward posture and the whole thing (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 733-735).

Cheryl knows that I'm really concerned with where I'm going with this stuff. I haven't said anything to Chris. But Cheryl came up to me this week and said, 'Are you okay, Monty?' And I said, 'Why?' And she said, 'Well, you have sort of thrown out some hints.' I said, 'Do I look like it?' and she said, 'No but just from what you've said. I know. I don't want you to go. I don't want you not to be here because I couldn't do this.' And I said, 'Well, I've got to do something.' And I haven't told her [that] I've made an appointment to see a counsellor. I've told you and I've told [husband.] And I don't want to say that to anyone. I wanted to blurt out to the [vice-principal] something today when she comes in and says that we're doing such a good job and I thought, 'Well if you only knew what I'm really thinking' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 293-304).

Monty refers to a teacher on stress leave and a minister that quit. Her perspective of the fellow staff person, a concern for how others will react.

One of our teachers is on stress leave right now and she's a department head of History and just finished her Masters last year. Now she's on a stress leave. And you should hear the things that people say. 'Oh well, now she's getting full time Masters pay, now she's taking time off.' And she's got kids and done all of the same sort of things that I've done; being department head, taking on university, and then there's all the other stuff, and then trying to work full time. She's paying for it. I'm sure she really is stressed. But the perception is 'Oh they're on a stress leave! Hahaha' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 463-471).

I heard a thing on CBC [radio station] the other day about this woman who was a minister with an incredibly stressful job. And I figure probably a lot like what I do with people just comin' at you all the time, for everything. And she quit her practice and became a cleaning lady (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 510-514).

Monty fluctuates between feeling responsibility for those she wishes to leave behind and being aloof as to how it will affect others.

I'm not a single teacher. I'm a part of a team. I *am* part of a team. If I was just to walk out of my class like [other teacher on leave] did with her...class, she's leaving the kids but the kids are just names on a piece of paper to her. She's never even met them. She never showed up in September. She has no ownership over them. I am part of a team but...first of all I have all those kids. All my

tracking kids, the kids I've worked with. Cheryl and Chris and I are so much of a little unit that if you take out a part of it you're hurting the other two (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 649-656).

It terrifies to do that because I don't like confrontation but then it's not confrontation but it is a form of presentation that I have always been...the...you know, as the child in the family I was the good little girl. The 'do everything right' kind of person. The 'keep everybody happy...'it's really hard for me to speak up for myself (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 727-731).

I don't want to wait until I'm not strong enough. The part that worries me...is leaving Cheryl and Chris...but they would be just fine. But that isn't my responsibility. It isn't and I know that (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 532-535).

They're not my responsibility. I know [intellectually] that I'm not letting them down really. They'll be fine. They'll be okay (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 658-659).

I don't know who would step in to take my job. But that's not my problem. I don't know what they'd [administration] do. They can do whatever they want (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 698-700).

Monty reaches her solution in a circuitous manner. Although she has mentioned throughout our conversation her desire to leave her teaching, whether on a stress leave or quitting, it is most strongly noted by Monty on a few occasions.

I think I need a little rest. Because I can't do a good job and if I get sick, really, really sick...I'll be sick and I won't do anybody any good; including my family (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 459-461).

Do I go to the end of the year and do I do the honourable thing or take a leave of absence or what? (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 604-606).

When I was twenty-one nobody helped me think through [what I wanted to do.] You look back and ...oh g**. For twenty-five years I've been doing the wrong thing...twenty-five years (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 599-602).

I'm going to take that paper [thesis segments read by Monty] and I'm going to get [my doctor] to just read it...I will take parts and say that this is me and I can't cope with it (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 689-691).

I [need to be] proactive. I know it in my heart. It's so scary. It's like saying in my heart, well [Monty], it's time to find a new job (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 621-623).

I need to heal

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 624).

“I’m ready to cut out. That’s what I’ll call it ‘cutting out’”

(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 602-603).

“I want to leave. It’s what I want. I know that”

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 741).

Monty, unaware of my own decision to leave teaching, had expected me to convince her to continue teaching.

Did you know I [had] this in mind? I thought I’d talk some of this out with you, get it off my chest, and be back for another year (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 739-741).

I want to hear you say, ‘Get out.’ I’m ready to hear it

(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 782-783).

Monty listened to her ‘self’, hearing both indecision and decision and was able to sort through her problem and begin to take control and thereby plot her own action.

Oh [Monty's] shutting down right now. But think what I have to say is I am shutting down right now in order to survive. If other people don't understand it well, 'f*** 'em' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 758-760).

You know, I'll be fine.

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 787).

* * *

And anyway I would have done anything to get out of the House that Glass built. And that is exactly what I did. It is called survival and I wanted to survive. And I did get out - didn't I? (Gibson, 1997, p.79)

* * *

Division six: Monty's thoughts of the future.

Monty's decision to leave frees her thoughts of potential possibilities for her immediate future.

If I take time off, I'm not doing anything for awhile. I'd read books. I'd have some fun. I'm getting a little too serious...I can do whatever. I don't even know what whatever is. I'm young enough to go out and do (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 571-576).

The scary part is here I am, kind of as I look at my golden years of my career, and I'm finally starting to think what do I really want to do? I don't want accidental plans any more. [Pause.] I look at this [the thesis] and I think also '[Monty] you don't have the energy' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 255-258).

...when I look at me as a person, I think, 'g**', what would I really like to do?' I would like to be doing far more creative things than what I perceive my teaching to be. My teaching is so much a *gut* response. It's not creative. I'd like to be taking water colour, drawing, or art and making something beautiful and standing back and looking at the product (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll.436-441).

I want to be able to...if I'm going to make a change, in my mind to...step out of this and into something else. I can't do that. I can't do it without some space and distance. I know. I may step out and never step back in again (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 588-591).

If I took a stress leave, here is what I'd do. Do you want to hear what I would do? I'd go to the library and get books and read, I'd exercise every day, I'd ride my horse, I would take art classes because I want to learn to draw. I think that's something that would be really fun and would feed me, I would even some day watch t.v. I'd go for walks. Bag the ironing and bag the sewing. All those things I used to do. I'd like to go and try something new. But I would get myself strong again physically, like physically and with that physical strength would come the

mental strength again. I would just take care of myself. I would eat properly. I would cook for my family, nice healthy meals. Do all of these things that sound to me just so wonderful and so simple. Simple is the key word in here (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 499-510).

And then [the ex-minister] was talking about being the cleaning lady and working in peoples' homes and going into these teenagers' rooms and talking about her observations of life in the family where these teenagers aren't made to do anything even as simple as helping contribute to the unit of a family and make it work. And her whole thing was a message to parents like get your kids with you, work together, be a unit. And I thought, 'I want to be a cleaning lady.' [Laughs.] I could cope with that. It's so easy. Because it has something to do with ordering things. I think I need to be organizing and ordering things and putting order in my life (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 514-523).

So I can find other things to do. I will, I suppose, find other things to do but I need to be in a space where I feel good enough about myself again (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 773-775).

Distant thoughts of the future are clear in what Monty does *not* want to do.

What if they say, 'Why don't you work half-time?' [Pause.] No. And the reason is there is no such thing as half-time in this job (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 573-575).

I don't want to be the one that does administrative stuff. When I look at administration in the schools...I don't want that (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 598-599).

I don't know honestly even if I could [return to a regular classroom]. I don't know if I could...do it. I've been so far removed from it. I'm sure I could. But there's a part of me that thinks that to get back into doing that would require doing so much creative energy for a year to create programs and work in new curriculum and everything and motivate a whole large group (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 225-229).

I might go back and teach a class but I don't know. I don't even want to talk about it. I want to go skiing. (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll.696-697).

Division seven: The warning signs.

Monty acknowledges that the warning signs were already beginning to surround her. "...I'd started having my dreams early" (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll.285-289). Medication to sleep and function were distressing to Monty.

Oh, Monty's already needing medication to get through September. She's taking anxiety medication to get through the day and sleeping medication to get through the night (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 542-545).

“I feel constantly just overwhelmed”

(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 315-316).

“I just have less patience for this nonsense”

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 389).

Do you think I look older than I did a year ago? I think I do. Look at my face. I look tired (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 577-578).

You wake up in the morning tired. And I've just slept (Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 588).

* * *

I am reminded of the Harper's article. Allyson Goldin (1998) confirms what Monty is experiencing:

I can't sleep. School starts again in five hours, and I'm falling fast in the business of finding ways to help my kids. Plunged deep into these pillows, my large, above-average brain feels sodden, immobile, stumped... We are all of us loosing

faith, they in themselves, and I in the existence of those detours around their disabilities (p.64).

* * *

[What has happened is] probably a real festering. It's been festering since way before last year (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 625-626).

...when I wrote to you about floating in the Sea [postcard from a holiday] of lying there and just being massaged by the sea, the bright sky above, and the sun...I just felt so wonderful. And yet I'm back in this. I knew it would happen (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 634-637).

You see I feel...it feels...I just get numb (Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 682).

It's [the job] in my face (Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 692).

The only time I've taken a leave...was I fell at school and hurt my knee really badly...and I had to get physiotherapy. I thought 'S***, I'll get off school for three weeks. I'll go do my physiotherapy stuff. Get the massage stuff. Get the works. Then I'll go back to work.' I just wanted to get out of that school.

Warning signals were there oh about four years ago. And they were going off before that...They haven't gone away. The language is there. I mean everything in my body says they are...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 707-714).

I thought I would go and do this ed. technology thing [Masters degree]. I just added more on my plate. So I went off and did my ten week, I mean ten days, and we all got together, my mentor group and I sat with this group of people on Saturday and I was not physically outside of the group but mentally outside of the group. I know in my heart I'm not going to pay the rest of my tuition. I've written my cheque for \$100.00. They're not going to get the rest of it. I'm not going to do it...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 750-757).

Sometimes I end up feeling so totally worthless, I just don't know what to do...and what can I do for myself (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 776-778).

**I have approached,
or am approaching,
even, no,
I'm *in* a critical space**

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 764).

Division eight: Teaching.

Monty declares her feelings about the system that is behind 'teaching'.

So the school didn't do a good job preparing for these kids, right? What's new? (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 100-101).

The counselors come in for a week [before school starts] and then they get a week off [later in the year.] They do all the paperwork, organizing the timetables, and then they take time when they need it during the year. We can't do that. Okay something's wrong...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 127-130).

I deal with paper and money. I am a paper and money person now. I have the biggest budget in the school. No training to deal with budget (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 160-162).

...we have to be very crafty in the way we get her because there are other people ahead of her with more seniority that would definitely get the job if it went to posting so I'm just not posting the job so that I can have her because that's what's going to be best for the kids (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 167-171).

We are *so fractured* (Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 186).

I have never had a year off. Two months isn't enough time to regenerate and recharge. I spend the first month...well...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 283-284).

But there's ummm, [pause] just so much that needs to be done and the kids need so much help. It kinda looks peripherally nice but I know that underneath it isn't all done. It will never be all done and there's no way that it will ever be all done

(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 311-315).

I tell my mother how unhappy I am with my work and she says, 'Wouldn't it be nice if you didn't have to do this?' And I don't. [My husband] says, 'Who says you have to work?' And then there's that little part of me that goes off on a selfish tangent, it's nothing selfish but it's, oh, but there's a part of me that says there's the pension and there's the money (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 563-567).

And that we are all *frantic*. Just *frantic* and someone has the power to make us be like that or something. The system with all its injustices has the power to do that and we are driven by it. A system that's out there to validate itself somehow with...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 645-649).

I mean anybody that comes in to start a job working....[Sigh.] It's [the job] in my face. It's me; it's you. And [a school district's] entire special ed. team walked out. That was a year ago. And...the head of that entire department has gone back only half time. She will never go back full time. (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 691-695).

I worry about how I'm going to deal with my own personal identity if I'm not 'the teacher.' I guess I'd just be [Monty], the getting healed person and then go out... (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 700-702).

Don't you think it's sad? I think it's very sad...There's a recognition of limits.

(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 714-715).

*...I'm in an abusive relationship with my job. It is. Yeah....*In this job I guess it's the insidiousness [sic]. It's just there (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 720-721).

You can be scrutinized in your professional life by your colleagues, your peers, your friends, whatever...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 748-749).

Having taught doesn't mean you have to teach (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 760-761).

I believe truly [the job] could cut the years from my life (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 767-768).

Why or how is the profession hanging in there? Are teachers dropping like flies?...I am not [the primary wage earner.] So why am I doing this? If I choose not to spend the same amount of money that I'd really like to spend, I don't have to make as much money (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 770-773).

...I think this is so destructive on your sort of soul and whole being...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 775-776).

Like what can I go there and do now, to earn money. That's one of the things that has held me back. What can I possibly do that would give me the same kind of time off and the same salary? And benefits and everything else. And because I can't answer it I think I better stay and do this ...(Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 778-782).

It's mentally abusive to stay there. I get concerned for my well being when I get in this state of mind (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 785-786).

It might be a moment to rejoice actually. I don't know...I probably feel so good that I'd go back to work again. I'm a dutiful employee (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 787-789).

The conversation ends and Monty looks more relaxed than I have ever seen her. She seems almost buoyant.

Epilogue

After reading parts of this work Monty spent several days in turmoil. She came to the decision that she must leave the profession. The question was when to go. Monty did not want to abandon her students or staff. What she realized was that if she stayed, she *would* be harming them. And herself.

Monty thought of a variety of approaches to leave, wanting to make sure that everything was in place to ensure a smooth adjustment for anyone. In the front of her mind she verbalized concerns about what others would say. I responded that rumours

only start when people do not hear from the source. Be up front and candid with everyone. And yourself.

Monty asked me a question: do good teachers quit?

The response: This is not quitting. This is leaving to learn to breathe again.

There is great strength in recognizing when the time is right. For you. Because the time will never be right for anyone else. But the healing is faster if you leave when you decide for yourself.

For several days after our final conversation, I received e-mail outlining Monty's daily activities and thoughts. Always debating what would be an easy transition. And then anger. And then despair. An early morning phone call.

A decision.

Two weeks later, Monty walked out the front door of Brownstone Secondary.

Service to teaching for over twenty years.

Email 1

From: Monty

To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>

Subject:

Date: Fri [one week after our meeting] 13:44:20 -0700

...[Daughter] can't understand why I don't just get on with things and leave this job. That's the 13 year old spin on it. Interesting day yesterday. The team has been alerted to the fact that something is rotten in Denmark. I told them I needed today to sleep, which I did in fact do. I slept til 12:00, unheard of for me. Felt so good. Rose, had a hot tub out there in the wind and loved it. Now I must do what I must do. I will withdraw from [Masters] program this afternoon. This lion will not find what she needs there. I am gearing up for a visit to my physician on Mon. and questions from colleagues as well. [LA team] asked me point blank on Thurs. just what is bothering me. I told them, #1, it was not them, I love working with them. What is bothering me is so big, it is this job of ours and the demands it places on us. I feel now like a soldier taken from the front line, fed and healed and rested, and then returned to front line again, only to be rebattered, and reduced yet again. I can not do this any more. So, of course [administration] has a meeting with us Thurs. re buying more staff so that we have more time to do all that we're supposed to. She's organized sending us all to a huge 3 day workshop (mostly at night on our time) to learn to modify and adapt curriculum. I asked her how we will actually do that on top of what we already are trying to do. More staff?

The monster is devouring us. I was not in a good state when I left the school yesterday, I had meetings until 5:00 (Dept. head bulls***) and my thinking was not clear nor positive. A week ago I sat with you. I was revived on Sun. and Mon., but I am in the battlefield again, and I must remove myself. I listened to something on CBC last night about the young men of WW1 signing on and getting in over their heads once they realized what they'd done. They could not escape, they were trapped and how fearful that must have been for these lads. I can escape, I am capable and the system will allow it, though not a lot go through that door. [I need] succinct lists of all the things you have witnessed and seen. I need my fodder to be prepared to meet the troops (officers) that I will need to speak too as I leave the force...I don't want to deal with [the LA team's] reactions of me letting them down and messing around with a good working team. I know all the intellectual reasons, I need the words to explain...Enough for now. Love Monty

Email 2

From: Monty
To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>
Subject: Rrrrrrr
Date: Mon

It's the morning, I feel well, slept well. Great article in the paper this am re shortage of teachers in BC and especially those in special fields ie, working with behavioural disorders, bla bla... Anyway, I am credible, I am strong...Talk later. Monty

Email 3

From: Monty
To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>
Subject: it's endemic
Date: Tue

I'm up and running and feeling just terrible. [Chris] said something like, "So when are you bailing?" to me yesterday and really helped. [Cheryl] figures it's just Sept. and maybe I should just work part time. The Lion [Monty] had some difficulty with this. Today I'll deal with admin. I won't leave until I inservice a replacement just to keep the wrath of [Chris] and [Cheryl] minimal. I know this ticks them off royally as they do the same job and also feel they have external responsibilities and duties. I hate this. Can you tell? My GP said to start by taking a month off and we'll go from there. You know, this is a nasty way to end a 20 year career. I wish it was June and I could go out glowing. I feel like I'm crawling down some back alley and just want to disappear... Why does the system do this to us?... I ride this afternoon for the first time in two months. Yes.

Email 4

From: Monty
To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>
Subject: Where's the champagne?
Date: Wed

Well, well, I'm almost there. A letter of intent has been handed over to [administration] with a cc to our Human Resources office. I've spoken with [administration] and several friends and colleagues. The worst is over now, I've stated my intentions. The amazing part is the reactions from people of total support. That has been so empowering. Teaching staff, office staff, admin, other teachers. [Cheryl] is having more trouble than anyone and doesn't know what to do. She asked me to not talk about it, because she doesn't want to feel my negativity. I was sorry to hear that, however she must also do what she must. I know I impact on her the most, and that has been the hardest part for me. I will be curious to see where our friendship goes now... [Administration] even said, "You were giving us all the signals last year, I shouldn't have been so surprised." She was surprised however. I'm going to help wrap up this week, Fri. I walk out. My doc said take a month to start, but you know what? I do not think I'll be going back. At least, the way things look at this moment. I feel good. I feel relieved. Amazing. I can picture you thinking, "yes, it's as it should be." I believe it is...

Monty

Email 5

From: Monty
To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>
Date: Wed

Holy S*** Frances, we are some amazing women! It's late so I won't phone you now... What a sleep I will have tonight. I feel so good...Let's celebrate the anniversary, do you have the date in your record books? I'm freeeeeeee. So, now I'll have to fit visits in between my trips to the book store and fitness trainer and horse sessions. Oh, to have such a busy schedule....talk tomorrow dear comrade.

Email 6

From: Monty
To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>
Subject: One more day
Date: Thu

Tomorrow I will go in for the last time to try and tie things up. I won't stay all day, because it will be too hard to say farewell to [Cheryl] for now. [Past assistant] is in a snit because the team doesn't want her to sub and admin wants to post the job and [she] wants it until then. Bla, bla, bla. Is it my problem,? No, but I've created the problem. Can't protect everybody though, can I! My friends at school have been so good to me. I feel very fortunate to have such amazing people around me. The other thing is that I have discovered how many have been in similar circumstances and have chosen similar routes...I know leaving will be difficult at the end.

Now I'm going to bed. I'm tired, and I'll just read. Next week will be a whole new chapter. Talk later Sweetie. My sentences are short and choppy, revealing my fatigue. S***, what a battle it's been.

Monty

Email 7

From: Monty
To: "fgt" <fgt@UVic.CA>
Subject: howdy sweetie
Date: Mon

So, when did we leave off? Have I written you since I left work Fri. am at 8:40? It was a very difficult set of steps for me, I tell you now. I went in, prepared to help the substitute organize a day, meet some of my caseload, etc. No, I thought, this just won't work. He was there to work, so I let him go to it. I told him to ask administration if he had questions, not [the LA teachers]...With that, I took my little empty briefcase and my little lunch bag and walked down the stairs and left. I wanted to cry, but didn't. I then stopped and bought myself some flowers, went to a bookstore and got two books, one entitled 'Don't Sweat the Small Stuff' and the other, "When Work Doesn't Work Any more, Women, Work, and Identity" by Elizabeth Perle McKenna. It's excellent. So I came home, looked around, thought to myself, "You've done it, honey!" and started to read. There is no turning back, I have made a statement and I now must blaze some new trails...I am prepared. (Can't be wishy washy any more, can I?!)...

Love,
Monty

Monty-as-teacher

After a six-month rest Monty made a decision to return to teaching. She returned however on her own terms, presenting a proposal to the school to help gray area students learn to read. She outlined her duties, designed the program, and made the paperwork only what she deemed necessary, and implemented it.

Here's how I see it unfolding to start...I'll work 4 afternoons/wk and one morning. The morning will be used for inservice, meetings, networking, working with the [volunteers], setting up and establishing a presence. I can also use it to do make up sessions with kids who miss a session. I think I should start with a solid, relatively small core group, set up the paper work etc, and then expand...(Monty, Email, February 14, 1999).

For the first time Monty felt in control of her self as 'teacher'. Her actions showed that the essence of true 'teacher' lies within an inner core.

...day one of 'The Project'. [The Principal] just said to me yesterday, "Monty, I'm handing this one to you." No [Principal], just me. Imagine. How fun. I'm really looking forward to this ...(Monty, Email, February 16, 1999).

Defying that 'the system' claims her, Monty set her focus once again on the students and helped them achieve. An important aspect of Monty's program is approaching the students and asking if they are interested in being involved. For the first

time for many of the gray area students, they are being given a choice to respond to their learning. And they are taking responsibility for it.

So I went out today and approached kids on my list. Just was me, talking like I do. Everyone I asked wanted to participate. I've already got 6 'for sure' candidates (Monty, Email, February 17, 1999).

I have two neat kids who want extra help right now. Non designated, fairly good readers who want to do more...see you in the morning (Monty, Email, February 22, 1999).

I am having such a good time working, the bubble will burst soon no doubt. (Funding crises are looming everywhere) I love my reading kids. I want more documentation that what I am doing is a very good way to teach...(Monty, Email, April 12, 1999).

Summary

The two hermeneutic conversations revealed a tremendous amount not only about Monty but also about secondary learning assistance in general. My themes were confirmed from the first conversation and magnified in the second.

Unable to refute the themes uncovered in Conversation One, Monty acknowledged the overwhelming task that confronts her daily. Her job. Unrealistic responsibilities, additional duties, and goals are constant frustrations. The reasons painfully obvious. A job that:

- rarely sees success;
- deals with students who are ignored by the system because of a failure to allow its teachers to teach;
- a focus that seems to be on managerial duties and paperwork;
- unrealistic deadlines for documentation;
- pushing students through an academic life that does not meet their needs for survival.

The teachers seem to be drowning; as are the students. Students names on files; life stories in paperwork. To the system, just names and numbers. To the teachers, daily reminders of a failing system. The focus lost.

Monty and many, many others like her continually throw lifelines to the systems victims. But now the teachers are the systems' victims too.

Unable to dispute the themes, Monty saw how they have scaffolded her SLA career. And written down, the words confronted her in a more concrete manner. A mirror. The only realistic part of the system, the *unrealistic* expectations.

* * *

“The sand never stops. The baskets and the three-wheeler keep going the whole night through.”

“But this means you exist only for the purpose of clearing away the sand, doesn't it?”

“Yes, but we just can’t sneak away at night you know...The village keeps going because we never let up clearing away the sand like this. If we stopped, in ten days the village would be completely buried” (Abé, 1972, p. 39).

* * *

The piles of endless sand covering a village unless continually cleared away is mirrored in Monty’s feelings toward her task. Overwhelmed by the job. In need of help. But whose? And for what purpose? The systems’?

* * *

CHAPTER 5

Results

This study has taken many twists and turns along its path to finding what it is really revealing. This work has helped further the idea of ‘teacher’, establishing the concept of ‘collective teacher’ through ‘collective voice’, confirming the thoughts and feelings of so many of us who have experienced similar situations. It has established the idea that for many teaching is a calling that beckons to us to return upon leaving the profession. It has also shown that no matter how insidious the system is, some of us will fight it to help focus upon the student and not on itself. Monty’s routines have displayed the realistic life of a learning assistance teacher, the workload itself going against its purpose. In the end, if there actually is one, it has ratified the benefit of narrative both in reflective practice and in the use of teacher’s story.

Defining ‘teacher’

Defining ‘teacher’ is onerous and difficult. At the surface level, the teacher is someone that we can all identify with through personal experience, and at this point is a tangible being. Helping us construct a definition of ‘teacher’ is the knowledge of audience.

Audience.

Understanding the audience that teachers are accountable to, is necessary when considering a definition of ‘teacher’ because as teachers, we are responsible to not one audience, but several.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL BOARD
INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION
[TEAM TEACHERS]
OTHER CLASSROOM TEACHERS
PARENTS
STUDENTS

Reading the list ‘Top-down’ is representative of an audience hierarchy familiar to education. How we perceive the reading of the list is differential. School administration will read the list in a manner that differs with a teacher’s. The order depends on what experience we have had and what interpretations we bring to the reading of the list. The influence of each layer in the hierarchy above, though not daily, permeates our behaviours as teachers.

The above is the formation that Monty is expected to follow however her actions displace the order. Monty sees the students as coming first: concern for the displacement of students (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 20), looking at the ‘whole’ student (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 56-60), providing help for gray area students and students in the LA classroom (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 145-147), recognizing ‘good’ staff to help students (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 163-164), arranging to get a student’s IEP signed (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 325-385).

Monty's perceived audience list therefore varies, not only in its hierarchy but also in its groupings.

STUDENTS

OTHER CLASSROOM TEACHERS, TEAM TEACHERS, INDIVIDUAL
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, PARENTS

SCHOOL BOARD

SCHOOL DISTRICT

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Interference continually confronts Monty interrupting her perceived audience focus. In turn, her behaviours question the order in the hierarchy for other staff and administration members placing them in positions that shake what they perceive as their audience: the incident with the Home Economics teacher, the student whose IEP had to be signed, teachers not allowing Monty into their rooms, incidents with the LA aide.

Monty continues to hold her stance. "Let's just teach your kid" (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 381). "Let's just get on with business" (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 358). These personal expressions of frustration, clearly state what Monty sees as the priority in the role of teacher. And this perception of

audience is veiled because the duties of LA teachers stated in ‘The 58 Points’ show a very different audience commanded by paperwork: an administrative one.

The influence of audience.

The sources of influence upon Monty are both indirect and direct, in-classroom and out-of-classroom. They occur on daily, weekly, and monthly basis and are on a continuous calendar. Every school year is dictated by the Ministry and follows similar yearly ‘paper-oriented’ events. Provincial exams. Report cards. As teachers we know what goals are to be reached by when because of the curriculum. In special education, these are often adapted or modified to meet the students’ capabilities. What varies in special education is the concept of ‘report card’. Regular classroom teachers fulfil the mandate of grading however; Monty is the one who must help her students try and reach the predetermined goals of the curriculum and meet the provincial exam requirements.

Unlike the regular classroom teacher, Monty’s paperwork begins well before September, transitions, and writing IEPs. Documentation and reporting continues throughout the year. The paper generated represents money. Each student’s designation comes with a price tag; the more disabled, the more money your budget receives. Cutbacks imposed by ‘the system’ increase Monty’s responsibilities and push her to fund her classroom more creatively. Paper == students == \$\$\$\$ and money means business (Roe, 1971).

Demands are made upon all of us as teachers. Ministry. School District. School Board. School Administration. Teachers. Students. Parents. Each group has their own agenda and influences our behaviours. “You can be scrutinized in your professional life by your colleagues, your peers, your friends, whatever...” (Second Hermeneutic

Conversation, ll. 748-749). The demands leave a huge paper trail detracting from the concrete focus upon the student, direct teaching. In special education, the student is buried under a paper mound of documentation. Monty makes reference to the situation “It’s the third week of school and I haven’t even met the kids on my class list yet...” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 112-113). The solution available to Monty only increases the tension resultant of the paperwork, “We had to hire substitutes so we could go off and do paperwork” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 116-117). Another disruption in direct teaching. The concept to Monty “...[is] sick” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 122). “Everything we do [is] paper, paper, paper (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 159).

Administration from Brownstone Secondary and up the hierarchy, dictates the need for paperwork. Contributing toward the definition of the role of teacher is the need to administer and manage through paper. “...how many teachers are trained to be managers and administrators? But we’re really teachers” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 172-173).

But ‘teacher’ is really a concept far larger than we see concretely. A definition would have to encompass so much more than the ‘physical-ness’ that is teaching, the presence in a classroom, working with students, meetings, paperwork, parent-teacher interviews, and direct teaching. Much of teaching is intangible and does not apply on an individual basis either for teachers or students.

‘Teacher’ focus

Eavey (1953) defines an effective teacher as one who “...assists each individual pupil to live as he was created to live, in order that he may become what his Creator

destined him to be” (p. 14). I believe that the definition of ‘teacher’ can be divided easily into two distinct categories. A teacher is one who exhibits the following characteristics:

1. concrete - job position requirements, responsibilities, and duties
2. abstract - rapport, caring, organized, cooperative

It is interesting to note that the Précis of a report on the developmental education of slow learners in special classes in the public schools of British Columbia, 1955 – 1956

outlined several abstract characteristics defining the ‘slow learner’ teacher mentioning that *all* good teachers may illustrate similar characteristics. Patience. Understanding. Sympathy. Emotional stability. Ingenuity. Perseverance. Enthusiasm. Fortitude. Tolerance. Optimism.

Actually teaching...is trying, constant, hard work to be done by a dynamic, enthusiastic, hopeful, trained person who can use imagination, initiative and judgement freely and well. It demands creativity, originality and inventive power. It demands insight into the mental reactions of pupils, quick thinking, ability to stimulate the thinking of pupils, and the capacity for organizing complex learning activities and keeping them in movement toward a definite goal. It demands leadership ability based upon a broad background of professional preparation (Eavey, 1953, p.22).

In comparison, today’s descriptions of teachers detail fewer abstract potentials. The Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines, 1995 relies heavily on understanding curricula, setting goals and expectations for students, and designing individualized programs based on assessments with other educational personnel (McLaughlin, 1986).

The 'teacher' in Monty defines her role in 'Learning Assistance', inadvertently re-defining 'teacher'. The '58 Points' based on Monty's workshops, list responsibilities and duties of LA teachers. Her conversations bring out both concrete and abstract characteristics that might be added to a definition of 'teacher': ability to cope with stress, highly organized, excellent communication skills, adaptable, flexible, independent, positive outlook, and able to react to change. Monty is part moderator, mediator, convener, social worker, counsellor, accountant, manager, facilitator, psychiatrist, leader, team co-ordinator, administrator, and gatekeeper (Dodd, 1970; Eavey, 1953; Green, 1971; Hansen, 1995; Palmer, 1910; Pullias & Young, 1968; Roe, 1971). Monty has begun to establish her idea of 'teacher'.

Monty's actions contribute to her 'job' of 'teacher'. By fulfilling her duties and responsibilities, regardless of how numerous and diverse they were, Monty engages in 'teaching'. When Monty refers to the idea that teaching is a 'job' (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 455; 459; 461-462) she is retelling about her duties. To some, teaching might very well be a 'job' – when the 'personal-ness', or the humanity, of teaching is kept divorced from the work. The teacher is "...merely an occupant of the role...[the job is] a necessary means to secure the time or resources to do something else" (Hansen, 1995, p.3). However, at the end of reflecting on her teaching career, after recognizing that her problem has a solution, Monty refers to 'teaching' as a profession. The main ingredient 'humanity' and she confirms this when she returns to work with the gray area students.

And with this in mind, we can look at the role of ‘teacher’ as being a ‘profession’. And by association, as a professional. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines a ‘profession’ as:

[T]he occupation which one professes to be skilled in to follow

- a. A vocation in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or in the practice of an art founded upon it
- b. In a wider sense: Any calling or occupation by which a person habitually earns his living (p. 2316)

Monty’s decision to return to teaching, albeit on her own terms, confirms the definition of professionalism – one of answering a ‘calling’, a ‘vocation’: “...divine influence or guidance towards a definite (esp. religious) career...” (p. 3649). But her decision reaches far past this definition. Monty’s actions spoke loudly of the disparity in the system for ‘gray area’ students. Taking control of her ‘self’ as ‘teacher’, Monty returned to acknowledge students that she has always tried to help and recognize. It is not the money, the pension, the camaraderie, the routines, the ‘job’ that drives her to return, but what has been her focus all along, the students. “[T]eaching as a vocation comprises a form of public service to others that at the same time provides the individual a sense of identity and personal fulfillment” (Hansen, 1995, p.2).

Monty established for herself an identity as ‘teacher’. This identity lies at the heart of her inner ‘self’, her core. For many of us ‘teacher’ is a concept, not a job, but a profession that calls to us allowing us to show the way to others and impart knowledge

that contributes to their identities (Hansen, 1995; Parsons & Beauchamp, 1989; Pullias & Young, 1968). If necessary, it may mean resisting the ‘system’.

[For some teachers the] key to their professionalism is the notion of professional autonomy, the ability to control their own work and the space to develop their own practices. Professionalism fuels their resistance to pressure for conformity from management and parents (Connell, 1985, p. 173).

The signs of the teacher-as-professional are mixed. What other professional tidies rooms that have had up to thirty individuals in it at one time, scrapes crayons off desks, cleans animal cages, answers phone calls throughout the day, marks during lunch hours, is constantly adapting to changing rules and regulations set by a governing body, and organizes a minimum of thirty people daily? What other professional is told by the administration to “Dress like a professional, dress like the secretaries” (fgt-conversation with a fellow teacher)? All of this, and more, after four years of training in university. Rabbits eating through clothing, glue spilling down \$200.00 trousers, paints jamming and exploding on your shirt, vomiting, bleeding noses, students pulling out a hand grenade, a knifing in the school yard during recess, someone ‘freaking out’ on drugs, standing in freezing weather watching over 400 students, constantly proving yourself to administration and parents (fgt - personal teaching journals and notes).

Monty teaches because there exists a need that she has witnessed. For other teachers the “...notion of independent responsibility is important...the sense of meeting tough challenges” (Connelly, 1985, p. 173). She has grown, from once standing in a line and declaring a major that she gave no thought to, to living within the identity of ‘teacher’.

Monty asks the question: “Why or how is the profession hanging in there?”

(Transcript: Second Conversation, l. 770). Monty has really answered the question. The need that Monty sees with gray area students is far greater than the system. Teachers like Monty witness a communal tragedy daily – that some students do not receive the academic help they require because the system says that they do not deserve to be designated ‘learning assistance’. And by ‘deserving’ a student must be lacking more severely in a skill.

To Monty the student is a person, each one an individual (Green, 1995). As Monty looks at the ‘whole kid’ she sees the person pained and hurting. And they are very real.

The whole kid is that kid that’s in front of you in the class. The whole kid is the whole person. It’s their background. It’s everything about that person that’s going to make me be able to teach or help me teach that child what they need to know to pass the course. It isn’t the content; it isn’t the curriculum... when I used to teach Communications to these kids, the first thing I wanted also was their timetables to see their whole day. I’m a little part of it. I want to know what else is going on. Where do they work? What are they doing? Who do they live with? What’s their parents’ name? (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 57-60, 74-78).

Monty sees her responsibility to the student as tantamount, however demands placed upon her by the administration and its environs increase her duties adding unrealistically to her responsibilities.

There is no clear-cut answer to the problem as a whole. In special education, as Monty realizes, the tracking of ‘the system’ is done through paperwork. The idea of a ‘paper student’ very real. To the system, students are numbers, not faces; to the system, education is about money, not the students [who would allow the disregard for a student’s well being by mislabeling a student because a classroom was running in the red?]; to the system, education is curricula and paper. If not, the system would have a better solution when displacing students to new schools, would be assuring that specialized teachers would be in place to help designated ‘behavioural’ youth, would be safeguarding and protecting their teachers from burn out, and would be attending to gray area youth. There is no way to change ‘the system’ unless it realizes that its focus – money - differs from the focus of teachers - the students.

Monty and her cohorts know what teaching is. It is much more than being able to impart knowledge, delegate, and set budgets. It is about being adaptable and flexible. It is about being able to react to stressful situations immediately. It is about being alert. It is about equal opportunities for *all* students, including the gray area ones. It is about people’s lives.

Teacher Knowledge

Teachers determine their actions through a pre-constructed framework or ‘frame’ (Barnes, 1992; Schön, 1983) of strategies. This repertoire enables teachers to respond to situations, teach, and deal with a variety of personalities (student, principal, parent, school psychologist, other teachers). It is this body of skills and their diversity that contributes to ‘teacher’. Frames are constructed through both theoretical (usually in teacher education programs) and practical (experience in the classroom) knowledge.

Practical knowledge is acquired through experience: an event or situation occurs, a reaction takes place, and knowledge is gained (Fenstermacher 1994; Fenstermacher and Solstis, 1992). Research in teacher's practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986; Elbaz, 1983; Fenstermacher, 1994) has confirmed that this knowledge is undervalued. Schön's work (1983) has been instrumental in pointing out that there is significance in learning more about teachers experiences and their influence upon practical knowledge (Munby & Russell, 1992). "Teacher research is concerned with the questions that arise from the lived experiences of teachers and the everyday life of teaching expressed in a language that emanates from practice' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, p.59).

In a field such as teaching, where much is learned through experience and practical activities (Green, 1971), researchers seem to imply that teachers' knowledge is somewhat undervalued. 'Technical Rationality' (Schön, 1983) argues that theoretical methods of problem solving are not valid in everyday situations that might arise as in teaching. Instead, teachers base their actions on their practical knowledge for which Technical Rationality does not make room. Monty's frames are heavily weighted in the practical experience of "...swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solutions" (Schön, 1983, p. 42).

In reality, teachers learn from their experiences and apply what is learned to new situations (Carter, 1992). They teach having learned of others stories. Teachers are adapting and modifying their strategies and behaviors *because of* their experience. Storied experience, or narrative, is representative of a teacher's practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986, 1992; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Elbaz, 1983; Huber & Whelan, 1999).

Unfortunately even when educational researchers have addressed problems that are of interest to teachers, their findings have frequently been reported in ways that are inaccessible, seemingly unrelated to the everyday realities of teaching, and counterintuitive to lessons learned from experience (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 89).

For this reason, it is vital that Monty be given a voice to tell of her ‘teacher-life-story’ to give credence to her work, practical knowledge, and to the realities of teacher’s daily experiences. Monty’s voice stretches past the isolation of Room 2 and its environs, and therefore learning assistance, and reaches out to the worlds of education and educational research. Monty offers “...a knowledge type that is not only different from formal [scientific] knowledge but [is] perhaps more powerful for understanding and advancing teaching” (Fenstermacher, 1994, p.47). And to teachers, Monty’s story is not only in the language of their everyday; it is in a voice that provides the comfort of similar experiences.

I look at Monty’s ‘teacher life story’ through a framework made up of my theoretical and practical knowledge. Although our experiences differ provincially, we have both dealt with a ‘one room schoolhouse’ of students who vary in grades, learning abilities, and ages. I am able to listen to Monty’s story as a removed colleague, in that I understand and have participated in ‘teaching’, but am not involved in her classroom as a co-teacher. We therefore have a communal relationship. We speak the same ‘teacher-ese’ and work from similar frames that are constantly being juggled and adapted to fit diverse daily situations. This enabled her to ‘clear-cut’ through background information that would be necessary for a non-teacher to hear and try to understand. My

experiences provide a ‘zone of comfort’ for Monty. Through our experiences, we built a collaborative atmosphere (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991; Connelly & Clandinin 1991; Huber & Whelan, 1999) aiding in Monty’s openness, honesty, and truthfulness throughout her ‘teacher’s life story’.

It is my belief that we often teach within a framework that we built in our initial teacher education programs, that of theory (Munby & Russell, 1992), but some of us are more able to adapt our frames via an increase in diverse experience of the practical. Special education teachers deal with problematic events continually. It is the unwritten nature of the situation; students are designated to learning assistance rooms, Room 2s, because they are having difficulties. Teachers’ “...frames determine their strategies of attention and thereby set the directions in which they will try to change the situation, the values that will shape their practice” (Schön, 1983, p. 309).

Some teachers may be unaware of their frames, seeing things only in one context. Others may be resistant to changing frames that have sufficed throughout their career. By looking at individual students, their backgrounds, and problems, Monty’s frames continually adapt, shift, and even change. Problems arise, as in Monty’s case, when frameworks differ from other teachers. Monty’s flexibility in her teaching has occurred, and worked, because of her nature to look at her students individually, the ‘whole kid’ (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 56-59) an ideal accentuated because of the learning assistance environment.

Monty tries to influence those around her (home economics and art teachers) to do the same, unaware that she is questioning their frames thereby causing tension. This strengthens the idea that secondary teachers tend not to provide mutual support or respect

for one another (Little, 1992; Louis, 1992). Subject area teachers tend to teach to the subject - English, art, chemistry, “[the] math teacher, the chemistry teacher, looks at the subject” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 50-51), and deal with students within the subject’s context (Barnes, 1992). For these teachers, the teaching strategies and their practical experience that make up their frames differ (Barnes & Shemilt, 1974). And they differ greatly from Monty’s. Sometimes divergent frames result in oppression, threats upon territory, or permanent conflict.

The balance between the subject area teachers’ frames and Monty’s is broken, and requiring balance for her students, she is unable to provide a ‘zone of comfort’ for all concerned. Tipping the balance, she has placed herself in an offensive position. This, I believe, has contributed to Monty’s ‘burnout’. “The term ‘burn out’ is real to me right now” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 480-481). The constant modification of her frames has left Monty feeling exhausted and overwhelmed: “I am so... fatigued when I get home” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 263); “...I feel constantly just overwhelmed...” (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, ll. 315-316). These feelings are to such a magnified degree that she is finding it more difficult to bring balance to her repertoire of strategies.

The fact that Monty has to alter her framework adds pressures that are not only daily adaptations. As learning assistance is highly subject driven at the secondary level, Monty must be able to help her students in all content areas. Her strengths in one area will be overshadowed by a lack of knowledge in another, more necessary, and immediate subject directed by the needs of the student at that moment. Finding no one on her staff comfortable enough to help LA students in mathematics, Monty “took” [self-taught]

grade 11 math the summer before (fgt – journal). Teachers who teach in single subject areas, often held by themselves to be of a superior nature (Elbaz, 1983), tend to have more isolated frames and their practical knowledge differs (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994).

To understanding high school teachers and their work it is important to register the emotional texture of the relationships they have with changing, growing, sometimes tense and mistrustful, adolescents....Multiply [one high school student] by 100 or 150, with some relationships worsening while others improve and others reach impasse; flavour with the odd confrontation, teenage crush, flood or laughter and burst of tears; stir in relationships with the colleagues in the staff room; and you have an idea of the complexity of the emotional currents flowing through one teacher's week at work...And that is only at the one-to-one level. Teachers' work is mainly organized in terms of classes; and each class has a distinctive character, which reacts on the teachers' emotions (Connell, 1985, pp. 116-117).

Add to all of the above, the fact that Monty deals with the added frustrations and troubles brought on by her students' learning difficulties. Mathematics, science, socials, business, accounting. There is no one area that Monty can rely on for her expertise. Her frames are shaken. She is strategy driven to provide aide that will enable the students to pass the course, not to impart subject area knowledge. This goes against her fundamental principle and focus, the student – not the curriculum (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 60).

Reflective Practice

Monty has recognized the systems' defects throughout her teaching career. But the problems became more concrete when seen in writing. Through her reflection.

Work in reflective practice has appeared in a variety of contexts as is evident in the literature review. Schön's work enabled me as the researcher to understand the concepts of reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action (Lasley & Matczynski, 1995; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991; van Manen, 1991, 1995). The research in this area has not touched on '*reflection-in-the-making*'; the witnessing of the actual act of reflective practice occurring as it is discovered by the pre-reflective teacher. For Monty, it occurred when she began reading about herself "...this is me..." (Second Hermeneutic Conversation, l. 216). I am struck by the thought that what has been assumed in the research is that reflection can be taught. In fact, I now have strengthened my belief that it is not taught especially through theory. However, through narrative – teachers' experiences, the storied lives of teachers, educators can illustrate examples of teachers engaging in reflective practice. Of importance should be how to access reflection to benefit our practices. Theory will not show such a path. It is the sharing of how reflective practitioners have come to hear their own voices and continue to do so. Altering and strengthening their values and beliefs.

We must as teachers introduce ourselves to our past. In order to move effectively into our future. And into the future of others. Just as Monty moved through her past in our conversation. Skau (1995) writes of her practice "[t]he real journey...is the inner gnosis –the gradual growing awareness of the self. It has been a long time for me to

come to understand that what I'm looking for as a person and a teacher is not 'out there'. It is in me. *It is me*" (p. 83).

It is reflective practice. And its purpose. It is not theory.

Cole and Knowles (1995) state "...locating critical incidents or epiphanies in lives, [are] the points of profound change and influence" (p.141), might be thought of as crossing the bridge from the pre-reflective teacher to the reflective practitioner. Once reflection has begun, spurred as in Monty's case by reviewing her teaching by stepping out of it, the bridge has been crossed.

The choice to tell Monty's story through hermeneutic conversations allowed for the richness of her teacher's life story and for reflective practice to begin to take place. Communication in the form of questioning is integral to reflective practice. Through the conversations, Monty was able to communicate introspectively and with me. She questioned and dialogued with, and about, the 'Monty' of the thesis when reading parts of the work. "[W]hat presented itself for me was a double-edged task that was both difficult and disquieting. The task was difficult because it was very personal, and thus potentially so revealing of what and who I am" (Gordon, 1995, p.61).

The first hermeneutic conversation set the stage for Monty's story. Listed the characters and outlined the plot. Turning out to be the vehicle for Monty's search and her findings. Interpreting the text in her own way, Monty was able to follow paths of her own dialogue. Her introspective comments probing her 'self'. Proving Kidds' levels of dialogue.

Monty has sought her 'self' through questioning in a manner reflective of Plato, Levinas (1990), and Risser (1997). In hermeneutic style, she examined the writings

taking her own knowledge to the text and interpreting it. Uncovering hidden meanings and expanding her own knowledge (Palmer, 1969; Rudnitzky, 1968). Monty analyzed the context that she finds her ‘teacher-self’ embedded in - both social and political contexts (Gordon, 1995).

I believe that Monty has had with her the knowledge that she uncovered. It was hidden within her (Heidegger, 1962; Plato; Risser, 1997). Perhaps not ready until now to be unearthed. “Reflection empowers because it makes us attend to the uncertainties and the ambiguities in professional practice...” (Gordon, 1995, p.81).

The Relevance of Teacher’s Life Stories

This work has relied on a teacher’s life story. A story of a learning assistance teacher. A story of hardship. A story of finding the true self as ‘teacher’, an identity. The moment that Monty realized that this was her story, the importance of narrative was solidified for me. Monty identified with the story of an anonymous character that Monty could identify with because it was another teacher, a ‘collective’ teacher, and within the pages of narrative, Monty found her ‘teacher self’.

Monty’s ‘collective voice’ helped define the ‘collective teacher’. Similarities abound in teaching, from teacher to teacher. We understand through personal experiences, what ‘staff room’, ‘classroom’, ‘September’, ‘report cards’, and ‘curriculum’ mean. We all have similar education, work loads, and administrations. We work with the same types of people: principals, vice-principals, librarians, specialist teachers, regular classroom teachers, school psychologists, and school district personnel. We share similar stories about incidents in the classrooms that have been humorous and sad. Bolstering the concept of ‘teacher’ and adding to the ‘collective teacher’, are all of

the stories that we share as having once been students. We have seen and fully experienced ‘teacher’ from both sides, something that few professions can say.

What Monty relayed as her teacher’s life story, was what she had gathered over her teaching career, her practical knowledge. Her responses to daily situations built her a repertoire to ‘survive’ through difficulties, until her dilemma became too large to ‘fix’ by behaving as she had all along. Hence, Monty’s sense of ‘burnout’ (Transcript: Second Conversation, ll. 480-481).

Significance

Although this teacher is ‘new’ to secondary learning assistance, her experience throughout her professional career has allowed her to enter this reflective practice case study to begin recognizing her own values and beliefs that would encourage reflection and ultimately change. She was led back to teaching after she felt a continuing desire to help those students not acknowledged as needy enough to need designations.

The study is of importance to all members of the teaching profession, especially to those in special education departments as it reflects the views of a colleague. Throughout the writing of this work I have had readers listening to and reading this work. Most involved in education. Their responses have been reflective of my journey through its writing. Aspects of this have been so many other peoples’ stories. Teachers too frustrated to understand how to make a difference.

“This isn’t Monty, or you, or Sam, or Patty, or me...it’s all of us.”

And not all of us were in special education.

But we are teachers.

And none of us laughed.

It will also be important to school administrators, members of boards of education, and the Ministry as it will help identify relevant themes and issues that occur in this SLA teacher's practice and are representative of secondary learning assistance teachers' duties and obligations.

Limitations

Limitations are recognized with this study. Although the participant's voice is being used to represent her experience of secondary learning assistance teaching, it is possible that her story does not represent other SLA teachers' viewpoints. This was the teacher's first year in the program and first year as the head of the special education department. She also had the responsibility of working with new teaching staff. Major new administrative and teaching duties confronted her each day. Her experience may not be representative of other, more experienced, SLA teachers. A further limitation is that this is a qualitative and narrative case study and is not supported by statistical research.

A search for statistical articles in reflective practice unearthed nothing. Reflective practice does not lend itself to statistics. At least not if it is the life story of the teacher that you are interested in relaying. This may be perceived by some as a drawback. Easily, a survey approach might have been utilized. But written questions restrict the free-flowing narrative seen here. Dialogue allows for growth and introspection. More voices would have been heard but the messages similar. And sometimes there is more power from one voice echoing many. The many stand behind and support the one. For purposes of using the power of this teacher's voice to reach a large audience I chose a manner that I felt would be the most far reaching. The story presented here had a voice of its own.

Recommendations

The state of education appears to have been thrust upon teachers who are trying to cope with unrealistic goals and duties. If the student does not pass or get an expected grade, it is often perceived by the student and sometimes the parents as the fault of the regular classroom teacher. Is there really a fault? If so, it lies in the fact that no one is willing to take a fair share in the responsibility of educating the students of today, including the students. Education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education Skills and Training, teachers, school administration, the parents, and the students. Everyone must be involved and held accountable for their actions. I believe that we all need to understand this concept before changes can be made and implemented successfully. And we need to keep in mind that the students need to be the focus of each element.

'The System'

The focus of the Ministry of Education Skills and Training must shift drastically money to the students. Understanding their needs as presented by teachers is the underpinning of a successful education program. It is the teachers who experience the daily school life of their students. They see problems with content, testing, beginning a school day at 8:30 when many classes have students that sleep in late, and a school year that is too short. They are aware of stresses that exist for the youth of today; living on their own, working to support their parents' families, and giving birth to their own.

Cost efficient programs can exist and be run with effective trainers implementing them. Ministry officials must understand the concept of teaching and the requirements of the real world (job opportunities) before they can enforce unrealistic expectations upon their teachers. It is not enough and, I believe, unethically unrealistic for government

personnel to say that they understand teaching, because they had once been in school, or because they ‘dabbled’ in teaching. Mike Harris, Ontario Premier, proudly stating that he “...started my professional career as a teacher in North Bay...” (Premier of Ontario, October 23, 1997) and knows all there is to know about education, is frightening. Over twenty years have passed and a lot has happened since then both with teachers and students.

In order to understand teaching, you have to have been teaching for a number of years to fully comprehend the workings of school culture, teacher interaction, and most importantly, the students and how the nature of ‘students’ changes over a brief time. Non-teachers working within the system cannot impart the practical knowledge necessary to foster effective programs. And, in turn, teachers who have taught in ‘old styles’, have taught for twenty years, should *not* be utilized to write new curricula or help implement new strategies. They are unable to see through their established teaching framework. Active, progressive teachers, with a proven record of valuable classroom experience should be seconded after a panel of teachers and students observes their teaching. They need to fully understand the language of teaching.

Gray area students’ existence must be acknowledged. Their problems are, to the students and teachers like Monty, very real. Denying them attention and help is blatantly disregarding the concept of education for all.

Secondary students need to be allowed an active role in the Ministry. A panel of students from across the province representing *all* facets of secondary school life needs to be implemented, and members rotated yearly. They *must* have a voice. Students need to

know that their opinions count and that the information that they hold about school culture is valuable. School will then have more meaning.

Listening and recording conversations with this secondary learning assistance teacher and hearing the voices of others, all ‘front-liners’, has illustrated the need for altering the current system of special education teaching responsibilities. Monty wants the needs of these teachers recognized, acknowledged, and met. Doing so can only benefit the entire system. The Ministry of Education Skills and Training needs to clearly define them for a start. The responsibilities listed in this work have come straight from the teachers, the sources. They should know. And it’s about time that their voices were heard. And acted upon.

Secondary special education is a specialized field; assistance routed via subject areas. Motivated by content, and therefore the curriculum, the common and ultimate goal to pass the provincial tests, needs to be met more easily within the special education environment. I suggest strongly that to meet the needs of designated students, the Ministry be prepared to staff a learning assistance room with subject-oriented teachers who have special education training or who receive workshop orientations in learning assistance. This can take a variety of forms and can be run cost-effectively.

A learning assistance teacher, specifically trained in the area of disabilities, needs to head the team. Subject –oriented teachers should, as part of their workload, be assigned to teach in small group situations, one block a minimum of one time a week. This would assure that designated students would be receiving classroom instruction time that would be reinforced with subject-oriented LA times. This is extremely beneficial during study and prep times for tests and examinations. LA teachers can focus on

establishing study routines, working on research skills, overseeing regular classroom assignments, reading with students, and providing further reinforcement when necessary.

LA aides need to be trained to work in small group situations. Rather than helping one student at a time with a similar problem, groups can be formed and issues addressed collectively, saving time and allowing students to see that there are others with similar problems. Displacing the isolation felt by individual students is often the key to breaking a cycle for a student in a learning assistance environment.

Aside from the teachers mentioned above, extensive use of volunteers and peer tutoring needs to be implemented to provide support for the students in learning assistance. Workshops need to be offered to show teachers, volunteers, and peer tutors how to work cooperatively and effectively in the LA classroom environment. The price is right for volunteers and the Ministry needs to have a program modelled to show how effective it can be, cost-wise and working-wise.

Volunteers can be used to read with students (either reading to them or listening to students), quiz for studying, invigilate tests and exams, scribe, make flashcards of subject oriented information (helpful in multiple choice exams), and help one-to-one when interpreting questions and discussing readings. Their duties can and should extend into regular classroom environments so volunteers are grouped with subject teachers, making them aware of the content and expectations outlined in specific classes. Volunteers from teacher education programs should be utilized, as should senior citizens. Peer tutors can be involved with LA students in helping clarify classroom expectations and work on assignments.

LA teachers must be freed to be more involved in direct teaching. Commitments to committees need to be team shared, allowing for a representative to appear at alternate meetings; information discussed at an agreed upon time when returning to school.

To meet the ever changing needs of students and teachers, and to have an efficient and strong education system, the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training needs to shift its focus and hear the voices that know and understand change.

Responsibility.

The onus is not only on ‘the system’ or on the teachers. School administration must take a progressive stance in setting high standards for both the students and teachers. They need to let students know that a learning assistance designation does not invite lower standards. This leaves students feeling different, stupid, and useless. Administration needs to share in the load of the LA teachers recognizing the increase of responsibilities it often lays upon them. The focus needs to be on the students and therefore their voice and input needs to be asked for in order to represent and acknowledge the needs of the LA room.

Parents must take a much more active stance in their children’s schooling. They will need the help of the schools to do so. Setting up a school rule regarding homework and a class monitoring and parental monitoring system is necessary. The homework must have value, be relevant to studies and allow the students to experience a variety of ways of expressing the assignments. Showing parents and students together how to keep a daily agenda, making sure assignments are entered, having parents and teachers initial daily entries helps provide a communication that rarely exists now. Comments written by both teachers and parents can be entered when necessary, opening up a further means of

communication and often bypassing time spent on the phone. Setting up school or classroom web pages that list nightly homework and instructions for each subject area makes parents and students aware of expectations. Accountability on behalf of the parents, as illustrated above, paves the way for active participation.

Classrooms need to have an open door policy for parents with clear guidelines outlining what this means. They need to know it is not an interview session but a time that parents can see what happens on a daily basis. Parents should also be allowed to volunteer, and be trained in the aforementioned volunteer program. Contrary to what may be thought, many students appreciate involvement from parents and like boundaries in place.

This system of monitoring students reinforces the idea that the students are the focus of everyone. It opens up paths of communication that may not have existed before. And makes another part of the puzzle share in accountability.

Students need to take a more active involvement in their education, especially when in learning assistance classrooms. Secondary students in the LA room are more apt to 'forget' work, sit idly by unless receiving one-to-one attention, or not attend a session because 'something else came up'.

In order to appreciate the reason for attending school, it needs to be made clear to the students why they must attend. Clear guidelines help establish this as does the knowledge that there is a built-in communication system between parents, teachers, and students. The importance of gaining knowledge needs to be expressed and that knowledge takes many different forms, especially content and practical. LA students need to feel that they have a voice in setting up programs. Their needs may be very

different than those thought of by the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Often theirs are of survival in the real world, 'the system's' of passing the provincials. Voice will begin to give the students a feeling of belonging which in turn brings with it great responsibility. And voice teaches them that what is said, has meaning.

LA students have a practical knowledge of how to work together under difficult and extenuating circumstances. They need to actively help new students in the room and give value to why they are there.

The responsibilities of education rely on 'the system', school administrations, teachers, parents, and students. *All* must equally share in the importance of their duties. *All* must place the focus on the student. The solution lies in active involvement and open communication.

University education programs.

Education programs in universities need to change. Undergraduate students are expected to write reflective journals or summaries with respect to their learning. They hear of theory and still are unable to grasp the concept's importance. But how can they? These prospective teachers need to experience, learn, and understand the art of questioning and dialogue. They must know how to listen to what is said and to interpret, searching for underlying meanings. They need to know themselves and how they have learned well before they can begin to understand why they teach and how they teach. Then they will be able to hear the voices of their students.

Reflective practice will make new teachers understand the importance of recognizing their actions and responses. It holds them accountable to themselves and then to others. In a learning assistance situation, new teachers will benefit from reflection

especially as they are exposed to a variety of people simultaneously. It will help them understand the importance of flexibility and adaptability.

Narrative in research.

Teacher research needs to give more value to narrative than it has in the past. Archaeology and anthropology have listened to the voices of the past and present for many years. The value hidden in the words have enabled sociologists to understand entire cultures. The importance of story has been evident in many of our lives. We learn about our families and our heritage through narrative.

As teachers we use narrative daily in our teaching. And we tell each other stories about situations, other teachers, and our students. We use our stories and those of others in order to teach effectively.

There is valuable information in 'teacher's life stories'. Accessing them can only increase awareness of school life and its implications. It is the voice of story that gives credence to teachers' experiences. It needs to be acknowledged as having value.

There is much merit in believing that teachers know a great deal and in seeking to learn what they know, but that merit is corrupted and demeaned when it is implied that this knowledge is not subject to justification or cannot or should not be justified. The challenge for teacher knowledge research is not simply one of showing us that teachers think, believe, or have opinions but that they know. And, even more important, that they know that they know (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 51).

Final Words

This study has examined a secondary learning assistance teacher's story through self-discovery. What it has come to illustrate is the overwhelming need for us to listen to one another. And to our 'selves'. As teachers. As educators. As individuals. To hear our voice and take action when necessary. To hear other voices and internalize the messages offering direction, comradeship, support, advice.

To the teacher feeling overwhelmed, downtrodden, and abandoned, this work shares in the experiences and voices of many. If this echoes your voice, especially in silence or as a whisper, you stand not alone but together with Monty, with me, and with many others. We have all felt alone. Afraid to question the system that looms over us as teachers. Especially fearing to confront our weaknesses and the potential of their strengths.

Too tired to face them.

Too nervous to speak of them.

Monty has stepped up and out of the circle of silence. She learned of the importance of reflective practice and of having a voice. She hopes that others will read her story and acknowledge stresses that they might be experiencing.

In order for voices to be heard the system needs to hear them. But the system needs ears. Those who are within then must begin to realize that people are at the heart of education. Teachers. Students. Administrators. And the voices need hearing.

Monty's story has been a difficult one to tell. Monty opened her teaching 'self' to me, something that few of us would probably do. It takes great courage to be scrutinized by a colleague but Monty feels she has a valuable message to get out into the real world. More importantly, I feel that Monty has realized that she has value to her students, other teachers, and her teaching 'self'. I admire her for speaking. And I value what she has taught me. Our stories *do* have a greater value than we think. They do not fall upon deaf ears, and they fall upon more than one.

“What better way to grapple with making sense of our rapidly changing world than through the study of stories” (Casey, 1995, p.240).

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Appendix:
Transcript, Second Conversation

Monty: Well, that was summed up in a nutshell. No wonder I'm upset and so tired.

fgt: We need to talk about the themes that I gave to you.

Monty: I can't add any more and I wouldn't change anything. [Long pause.] I want to read some of what you've written. Can I do that?

fgt: [Pause.] All right.

[Break. Monty reads the sections of the thesis 'Student Profiles' and 'Collective Appearance' appearing in chapter 3. Throughout she makes comments correctly identifying the students such as 'S***. I sure know who that is; it's [correct identification], isn't it?' The conversation resumes.]

Monty: Okay. Let me tell you what happened yesterday. Here is the profound...it's not even a revelation, but it was an interesting observation. It's beyond interesting. It is profound. We are bringing in a group of kids now high-needs, special needs kids that have come out of alternative schools 'cause one of the alternative schools in the city has shut down so that they can open one for younger kids that have no place to go. So they've got something now happening for the grades 8s, and 9s, and 10s but all of these grades 11s and 12s have been displaced so they've been feeding them back into our school. There really isn't a machine in place to deal with these kids. They don't have mentors; they're kind of attached to a program but they've been thrown in. Frank Satellite [science teacher

at Brownstone Secondary] has been the recipient of a new Science 10 class...We've got this Science 10 class so he's got twenty-eight *really* needy kids in his class and he's not going to have [an assistant.] And he does Chemistry, Physics and Math. So he's got these Science 10 kids that *don't* read, they *don't* know anything, they *can't* do math, they have *no* study skills, they have *nothing*, and he has *no* support. It's a *dreadful* situation. And he's probably not the best person to be doing it. So we have had Frank Satellite frothing at the mouth at our student services meetings saying, 'This is criminal. This is wrong. I need help. Who's thinking of these kids? Dadadada. So immediately we're getting an assistant into his classroom. We're gathering material from Juvie [Juvenile Hall] to get some adapted curriculum for him. And if somebody had been organizing this, *this* would have been in place *before* September. Wasn't Frank's fault, *real-ly*.

fgt: Yes.

Monty: He didn't know who the clientele was going to be and we had been assured that when these kids came to the school it wouldn't impact our regular classrooms. It's impacted *everything*. *Tremendously*. Anyway, Frank came in...and we've had...okay...the assistants be in the room, I've had two assistants in the room. I've been pulling the kids into the [Learning Assistance] room. I'm taking care of them. He's taking care of them as best he can. He's putting fires out all over the place. He's phoning parents. Finally he came in, and this was the profound moment,

he said, 'I want a timetable on every one of these kids. I want to see what else they're doing in the day.' [I said], 'Frank, this is it. Something has happened because you want to see the whole kid, don't you?' I said, 'This is special ed.; you look at the 'whole kid'. The math teacher, the chemistry teacher, looks at the subject.' It was amazing. Frank looked at me and said 'Yeah. I guess so.' And it was...I thought after he'd left, 'There's hope for this man!' He can do this job if he cares about the 'whole kid.' It was amazing.

fgt: So to you what's the 'whole kid'?

Monty: What is the 'whole kid'? The whole kid is that kid that's in front of you in the class. The whole kid is the whole person. It's their background. It's everything about that person that's going to make me be able to teach or help me teach that child what they need to know to pass the course. It isn't the content; it isn't the curriculum.

Fascinating, eh? I just was blown away and I told Chris and Cheryl today. I said, 'This happened yesterday.' Three weeks into the school year. Frank has been flipping out on us because he's p***** off at everybody. You know, 'Why do I have these kids in my class? Why do I have no help? Who is out there to help these kids? This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. I'm not teaching Science 10. I'm teaching 'watered down' Science 10.' Dadadada. But what he's had to do to survive is adapt himself, as well as his curriculum, and his approach to these kids. And he knew he couldn't do it the way he was doing it.

fgt: It's what you do everyday.

Monty: He's never had to do that before.

fgt: Interesting.

Monty: g**. It was interesting. Because when I saw him coming in and saying, 'I want to know...' And I said to him, 'You know, Frank, when I used to teach Communications to these kids, the first thing I wanted also was their timetables to see their whole day. I'm a little part of it. I want to know what else is going on. Where do they work? What are they doing? Who do they live with? What's their parents' name? Interesting. This man came to that realization. You know just a glimmering...

fgt: How long has he been teaching?

Monty: He hasn't been teaching that long. Probably nine or ten years. Twelve years.

fgt: Yes but ten years and he's only decided to look at the whole kid?

Monty: He hasn't had to. Because when you have academic classes, they come in and sit down, and you teach Chemistry. He didn't care.

fgt: [Pause.] See, I would want to look at the whole kid anyway.

Monty: He just wanted to do Chemistry or whatever. I just found it so in-my-face so profound that this has been happening...He couldn't handle this and it was a matter of an attitudinal kind of insight. Interesting. He's been much nicer in the last twenty-four hours. To me it means that there is hope for these kids in his class. I said to Frank, 'You'll probably quite come to love these kids when you know the whole kid. You will. You'll love

them and you can't help it.' He said, 'I'm never going to do this again if I don't get some help.' And I think, 'Yeah, well, he needs help. And I think he deserves some. And he's entitled to some. Twenty-eight kids that really don't...I mean there are lapses in some of their educations. They may not have been in a regular school since grade 8 and they have all of a sudden been thrown into [Brownstone Secondary.] In a science lab. Sitting there. It's pretty scary.

So the school didn't do a good job preparing for these kids, right? What's new? [Long pause.] I want to read more.

[Break. Monty reads the sections of the thesis 'The Subject's Staff' and 'Classroom Instruction' appearing in chapter 3. The conversation resumes.]

Monty: [The vice-principal] came up and said, 'I want you to know what an amazing job you guys [Monty's team] are doing.' I thought, 'S***! Don't give me that c***.' I said, 'Well the department is doing it. We're working together as a team.' And she goes, 'Well, whatever. But you guys are doing an amazing job.' And I said, [Vice-principal], next year we come in August for a week and you're going to pay us and we'll do the paperwork in August so in September we can...It's the third week of school and I haven't even met the kids on my class list yet and I'm supposed to be their special education...[Pause]

fgt: Are the kids in there yet?

- Monty: Oh, yeah. They were in there the first day but the teachers weren't. We had to hire substitutes so we could go off and do paperwork. For seven days. For seven straight days.
- fgt: Are you joking?
- Monty: g** no. I'm telling you the *honest* truth. We hired a substitute and we weren't even in our classrooms for the first seven days with new kids, from new schools, and we were in the [office] doing paperwork. It's sick. [Pause] I told them last year that I would like to do this in the summer. Can you pay us? I don't want to come again...I'd come in the summer, for two or three days. There's a lot of paperwork and behind the scene stuff that needs to be done before school starts.
- The counselors come in for a week [before school starts] and then they get a week off [later in the year.] They do all the paperwork, organizing the timetables, and then they take time when they need it during the year. We can't do that. Okay something's wrong...Next year it will happen...or...[laughs] So can you believe that?...[There's a] 50% new intake every year [to the school.]
- fgt: So how many on your caseload this year?
- Monty: We've gone up from about sixteen in each to about twenty-three each now. And I have less time to do it. I'm teaching two blocks. I am department head [again] and I was made it by default but I told [two team teachers] that we'd have to share the load...
- fgt: Why are you the department head again?

Monty: Well, somebody has to have the red dot on their box in the main office to receive news and pass out info. We're going to share the load of going to the meetings. [Pause.] Ninety-six designated kids. Sixteen from the new Grade 10 program. All behavioural designations; all from alternative school programs. So when they're in the regular classroom, they're causing real trouble. *Havoc*. In learning assistance there are sixty-seven; in [another special education program] there are twenty-four. We're not even looking at gray kids any more. Gray kids aren't going to get *any* attention. Gray kids are toast. They are. They're *toast*. So, yeah. But we're much quicker [this September] getting kids off the starting block. We're much more efficient.

fgt: You've got a system now. You're not all new this year.

Monty: Yeah. We're much more efficient. The caseload was divvied up within the first ten days. The tracking has started...but what hasn't happened... we don't have time to even talk to the classroom teacher who actually has the kid in their face. That hasn't happened yet because we're too busy doing IEPs and paperwork. And before we know it, within the next ten days or so we have to have all of the adjudications in...for the provincials that are in January.

It's the most ridiculous thing. We are running around in circles.

Everything [is] paper, paper, paper. Just like you said on your paper [list of themes.] I deal with paper and money. I am a paper and money person now. I have the biggest budget in the school. No training to deal with

budget. I'm hiring and deploying staff because I'm more cognizant now of the fact that we have a say in hiring our own assistants. I was able to spot a really good assistant last year who came in. That I really liked. She was dead-on within the first two days of subbing. She was in the kids' faces and knew what she was talking about. So I said, 'I want you next year.' And she's with us now. But we have to be very crafty in the way we get her because there are other people ahead of her with more seniority that would definitely get the job if it went to posting so I'm just not posting the job so that I can have her because that's what's going to be best for the kids and she's working as a substitute but when it's time to post, I'll post it. And we'll hire her. But you know, how many teachers are trained to be managers and administrators? But we're really teachers. It doesn't make sense. No. And so the last thing again that I do is *teach* even though I have two blocks. I'm constantly answering the phone. We have a new phone system in the school that takes messages but if they can't get me in one room they ring me in the next. So it rings in my classroom. But we do have a new phone system and that's very nice.

[Long pause.] [Laughter.] Umm...[Long pause.]

September. g**. I think, 'Soon it's October.' We had a PRO-D Day. I was so excited. But then I had to go and do more f*****, miserable paperwork on the Pro-D. All I wanted to do was go and do my own paperwork and not administrative directed paperwork. We have a new plan to deal with paperwork. We're going to hire a substitute to come in

and teach for us all day so we can go off and be isolated and just do paperwork rather than be so fractured. We are *so fractured*. And we're also looking at maybe there's just one person who is hired to come in and work in the learning centre to teach and someone else who just is hired to do paperwork.

fgt: Maybe what you guys need is a secretary?

Monty: Yeah. Except they won't let secretaries *do* some of this paperwork.

fgt: But somebody who is hired just to do that paperwork and that's all they do.

Monty: Like a secretary? So maybe we could hire an assistant who just does paperwork. That's actually a thought.

fgt: It's actually you that gets to hire, right?

Monty: Yeah.

fgt: You tell them...

Monty: Yeah. And they'd do whatever. You'd need somebody really dandy.

[Pause.] [Laughter...] I want to read some more of what you've written.

[Break. Monty reads the section of the thesis 'The Subject' appearing in chapter 3.]

Monty: [Places papers back on the table and points at them with her hand. I am standing roughly a metre from where she is sitting and remain frozen where I am.] How could a person put themselves through that? That's like mental abuse. A bad marriage. I would tell [someone in an abusive

marriage] to get the f*** out of there. And don't you dare put up with that. Get out....

[Long pause.]

Oh my g**.

[Long pause.]

Oh my g** [pause] *this is* me.

[Long pause.]

When [my own kids] listen to me talk at home, they just look at me and don't understand why I do what I do. And they say to me, 'Why don't you just come and teach kids like *us*, mummy?' Why don't you just...[Long pause.]

fgt: And so why don't you?

Monty: [Long pause.] I don't know honestly even if I could do it. I don't know if I could...do it. I've been so far removed from it. I'm sure I could. But there's a part of me that thinks that to get back into doing that would require doing so much creative energy for a year to create programs and work in new curriculum and everything and motivate a whole large group.

I don't think I could do that at this stage. Yet I know that I can't keep doing what I'm doing.

fgt: What made you go into teaching special ed.?

Monty: It happened because I, well I went on a sabbatical when I went [to the United States.] I was an elementary teacher before that I was in a new district, a new state, I had no [state] teaching certificate and I ended up in a place where they wanted somebody to work with junior high kids who didn't read. So they thought, 'Elementary teaching background. We'll offer her the job.' I was young enough and gutsy enough so I said 'Okay, I'll do it and I'll coach your soccer team too.' And I ended up working with these kids and I really liked the age level. I liked adolescents. I just thought they were wonderful. And so when I returned back to B.C. after that year, a job came up and I said, 'I'll take it. I've done this. I know I can do junior high special ed.' I did and I liked it. I got good at it. And then I realized that there was no secondary senior programs for these kids and so I made a bit of noise and stink and contacted parents, and contacted our school board. There might have been in other parts of British Columbia but [Monty's area] had nothing at that point for 11 and 12s. Because they decided that kids left at grade 10. They're old enough [inaudible.] They can get a job. And I said, 'No, some of these kids aren't ready. They're really immature. They really need more skills.' And so I ended up in senior high. And that's kind of what happened. It

was default. It wasn't a plan. One of those accidental plans. Are there such things?

fgt: There are lots...

Monty: The scary part is here I am, kind of as I look at my golden years of my career, and I'm finally starting to think what do I really want to do? I don't want accidental plans any more. [Pause.] I look at this [the thesis] and I think also '[Monty] you don't have the energy.' My partners, well you know Cheryl? Well, Cheryl's in her second year of teaching and so there's all this kind of is newness to her. And she's so good at what she does. But she's tired. Chris is tired; she's not sleeping at night. None of us are. We just look at each other and think we're basket cases. And we are. Look at these red eyes... I am so f***** fatigued when I get home. I went out with a walk with [my daughter], she wanted me to go out for a walk the other night, and I couldn't keep up with her and she says, 'Come on. Come on, mom. Come on.' I said, 'I can't keep up with you,' and she said, 'Oh yes you can, just try a little harder.' [Laughs.] [Daughter], you don't understand.

fgt: She'll be a teacher one day...

Monty: No. I've told her never. I wouldn't wish it on my kids.

fgt: Now that's interesting. Why wouldn't you?

Monty: Think about it. Would you? [Laughs.]

fgt: Why would you say that?

- Monty: Would you? [Laughs.] Would you wish this on somebody else to do? I don't think it's physically good for me. I don't...
- fgt: I would wish it on somebody for three year increments...
- Monty: Wish it on somebody for three-year increments and then have them go away?
- fgt: For a break. I think you're still fresh...
- Monty: Or do it on an all school year and do it in three-month increments. Three months but then the kids...
- fgt: Three years and then one year off.
- Monty: I have never had a year off. Two months isn't enough time to regenerate and recharge. I spend the first month...well, and then I started that university thing this summer, which was kind of fool-hearty...I started having this year for the first time, my dreams that I will have...I've always had dreams in August. 'Oh g** I've got to go back to school.' Last couple of years they've been in July. This year I had one in June before school was over. I was having the 'dread dreams.' That's scary. And I remember waking up and going, 'Oh f***.' And I went to [friends] and said that I'd started having my dreams early. Does that say something?
- fgt: Yes. Do you talk to Chris and Cheryl about any of this?
- Monty: Cheryl knows that I'm really concerned with where I'm going with this stuff. I haven't said anything to Chris. But Cheryl came up to me this week and said, 'Are you okay, Monty?' And I said, 'Why?' And she said, 'Well, you have sort of thrown out some hints.' I said, 'Do I look

like it?’ and she said, ‘No but just from what you’ve said. I know. I don’t want you to go. I don’t want you not to be here because I couldn’t do this.’ And I said, ‘Well, I’ve got to do something.’ And I haven’t told her [that] I’ve made an appointment to see a counselor. I’ve told you and I’ve told [husband.] And I don’t want to say that to anyone. I wanted to blurt out to the [vice-principal] something today when she comes in and says that we’re doing such a good job and I thought, ‘Well if you only knew what I’m really thinking.’ And Cheryl and Chris and I were only saying the other day, well we pat each other on the back. Like Cheryl said, ‘You know, Monty, it would be so neat if we had the reputation of having the best learning centre, resource room anywhere. I mean look at what we’ve done in a year.’ I mean if you were to come in now you would see big changes. This year the classroom is full. We have two assistants sitting in there with us, the kids all have their little folders that they check in every day and it’s a nice atmosphere. But there’s umm, [pause] just so much that needs to be done and the kids need so much help. It kinda looks peripherally nice but I know that underneath it isn’t all done. It will never be all done and there’s no way that it will ever be all done and I carry enough of all of that, that I feel constantly just overwhelmed. And I get home now and Frances, I can’t even tell [my husband] any more when he says, ‘What was your day like?’ I don’t even want to talk about it. I don’t want to pretend that I can explain it. ‘Cause

he will *never* understand. And it makes me more fatigued to try and explain what my day was like.

Like I've got a new kid, well Marcus, I don't know if you ever met him? He came part way through the year and no one ever told us he was in our school. He came from [another high school...]

fgt: You didn't have his IEP...

Monty: That's right. Nothing. He was half time with [his other school] and half time with us. [The other high school] owned the IEP, owned the money, the kid was in the school floundering. He's since changed parents that he lived with. He's gone from mum to dad. And mum is a wacko. She's a little bit on the wacko side. She was at school on my first day and she just pops in, 'Just thought I'd check up on Marcus.' And I said, 'Well I've just arrived back from my summer holiday and there's ninety-six kids and I really haven't had a chance to look in on him yet. But he's here.' And I said I'll have a meeting with you soon.' I thought, 'Jeez, this is the perfect parent to call. We'll sit down and do our IEP meeting together.' So I called mum to set up the meeting for this week. And I saw Marcus in the hall and I said, 'Oh your mum's coming in tomorrow.' And there was this absolute look of horror on his face when I told him. And he says, 'Well, do you know that I'm living with my dad now?' I said, 'Oh yeah, but you know mum's kinda been involved in our education up to this point.' And he said, 'Oh.' And he just left. The next morning there was a letter in my box from the father saying if I 'meet with the mother, you'll be hearing

from my lawyer.' j****. You know? And the lawyer's name was in the letter. So I said, 'Here [vice-principal], look at this. We're getting phone calls or letters from parents now that...we're going to have meetings with lawyers now because I'm getting an IEP signed by the wrong parent. There's nothing I know of about court restraining orders.' She said, 'Let's call the lawyer.' We sat down in her office, called the lawyer's office and asked if there is something there that I can't meet with the mother. 'No, no, no.' So we called the dad at work and ended up in this conference call, put on speakerphone and the three of us had this conversation. He was really blown away that we'd called the lawyer, called his bluff, hadn't done anything about it. But he said, 'I want to be the one...' I said, 'That's fine. I don't care. But I'm not getting involved in your domestic disputes. I don't care. I want to serve your kids needs. I don't care if I sign the IEP, you sign the IEP, nobody signs the IEP, the kid will get some help here.' The dad came to see me today and said, 'Oh well, if there's a bill from the lawyer, I'll be presenting it to you. Hahaha.' j****.

[Laughs.] Let's just get on with business. The dad didn't know what an IEP was so I went through this whole 8:30 educational meeting with a parent about what he's got to do for his child. Later mum's on the phone, and I said, 'Look I'm not going to keep any of this from you. This is what's happened. This is what your ex-husband's done. I don't want to get in the middle of this.' So the next thing the mother's on the phone to the counselor saying, 'I won't tell you what I want to meet about now but I

need to have a meeting now.’ 4:00 Friday afternoon. No mum we’ll see you next week. So we both arranged to meet with mother next week and I know this sounds kind of confusing and convoluted but I just thought, ‘This is one f***** kid.’ And it’s all so stupid. And yet the kid needs help. The kid needs major, major help and is barely coping. And that’s okay. That’s what we’re there for [laughs.] Sign the g***** IEP and let’s get on with business. So now I have to meet with mother too. I told [the vice-principal] that I’m going to have a fifteen-minute meeting with this mother. She said she wanted a half-hour. I said, ‘I’ve got fifteen minutes...’ The mother needs to be heard and I did say that [the father] I don’t know if I actually disclosed the content of the letter, I didn’t, I just said he wanted to be in to sign the IEP because Marcus is now living with him...The wacko mother...It’s very unstable and very unhealthy for the kid and I see now why the kid freaked out. He can sign his own g***** IEP when he’s nineteen. Dad did sign it today. I can write up another document that’s identical and we’ll just have two. But you know, like give me a break. Let’s just teach your kid. The kid needs help. And I think the mother’s interest is with her kid’s success but the kid doesn’t want to be with her. I mean obviously we all care for the kids’ well being. I am going to...I just have less patience for this nonsense. I have not got the time. Oh, Frances. Fractured. It’s a *fractured* existence. [Long pause.]

fgt: What made you go into teaching?

Monty: You don't want to know. It wasn't altruistic. It wasn't noble. I didn't know much about kids. I'll tell you, I look back and I think it was a joke. I was...It was about '73 or '74. I'm a twenty-one or twenty-two year old. I was pretty young at the time. And it [was] kinda fun. And somebody said, 'Well, what are you going to do [Monty]? You're going to university?' And no one had ever asked me that question.

I grew up in a family that it was really important to have an education. You know dad had the Ph.D., Mom had the Masters degree, and I knew university existed before I knew there was a high school. I knew I had to go to university. I didn't even know I had to go to high school. And I was the girl out of three boys and no one spent time talking to the girl. It's scary. I look back and I think, 'g** something was wrong.' The girl didn't spend time talking to the girl. The girl didn't ask the questions. But somewhere in there it never occurred to me...that you plan your life and what you're going to do. So here I am at university, taking all these courses at the University of — and still nobody thought, 'Oh what are you doing? What are you going to go in for? What do you want to study?' I never even thought about it. [When I transferred because of a move] all of a sudden I had to declare a major. 'Oh!' My sister-in-law was visiting here from the States. She was a teacher and she was telling me what it [was] like. And I thought, 'Oh. I could do that.' And that's about how much consideration I gave it. And I know if I look back now as the adult woman, at that child that was making that decision, because I was a

twenty-one year old child, I would never do it. I would *never, ever* be a teacher because things that make me uncomfortable, are often times being in front of a crowd, addressing a crowd...I don't believe it. It's b*****. I *hate* it. What bothers me is the whole idea of...ultimately being responsible for the organization...of [the kids] future...frightens me. What if one of those kids got up and walked out? Then I'd have to deal with...whoa whoa. What about you?

fgt: [On the first day I had the school open] the kids were sitting on the floor looking up at me and I thought, 'Oh my g**', why did I go and do this? These people...I have their future in my hands'

Monty: And planning it.

fgt: Yeah. And that is when I decided to turn it, their learning, over to them. That's what I learned at that moment. That I did not have a right to control that.

Monty: Well, that was an insight that you were probably fortunate to possess because the moment you did that you probably became very powerful. I mean not in the sense of power but important in the...I don't know how to say that...it would have been far more influential because they're learning rather than somebody just doling it out.

fgt: That's the way I've always taught.

Monty: Yeah. And maybe I've done that a little bit intuitively and the whole idea, and when you say why haven't you say, 'Why haven't you gone back into a regular classroom?', I think sometimes that really frightens me because I

would be responsible for *the learning*. And, yes, I'm responsible for the learning now but someone else brings it. I'm responsible for helping; not their learning. But also when I look at me as a person, I think, 'g**', what would I really like to do?' I would like to be doing far more creative things than what I perceive my teaching to be. My teaching is so much a *gut* response. It's not creative. I'd like to be taking watercolour, drawing, or art and making something beautiful and standing back and looking at the product. *I don't get to see a product ever!* I do *not* see products. I had one kid. A moment of what would be a product but it's so tiny. [The student] asked for help. We've had him in the learning centre for a year and another September and it's taken that long and he finally [raises her hand] and said, 'Can you help me with a question?' I mean we got really excited about that. I look at a piece of art on a wall; I want a product. I want to make something like that. j****, what a price to pay [for a product.] A year and a month. It was exciting and we all rejoiced.

fgt: That is an art that happened...

Monty: I know...

fgt: because he may have finished school...

Monty: ...and never have done it. I know but is that moment enough to carry me? I need a little bit more at this stage. [A student] asking for help isn't going to feed me enough right now and what I need at this stage in my life. Healthy and whole. To get away. I have to get out of this job.

The only thing that I can see right now and I'm already plotting in my mind, is taking a leave. I'm laying groundwork...I think I can take a stress leave. I'm entitled to do that after serving a school district for twenty-five years. Yeah. I think I need a little rest. Because I can't do a good job and if I get sick, really, really sick...I'll be sick and I won't do anybody any good; including my family. It's scary to see the job's taking that kind of a toll on me. I feel I need to justify it. I don't want to be perceived as a 'wuss.' One of our [teachers...]my reputation is at stake. One of our teachers is on stress leave right now and she's a department head of History and just finished her Masters last year. Now she's on a stress leave. And you should hear the things that people say. 'Oh well, now she's getting full time Masters pay, now she's taking time off.' And she's got kids and done all of the same sort of things that I've done; being department head, taking on university, and then there's all the other stuff, and then trying to work full time. She's paying for it. I'm sure she really is stressed. But the perception is 'Oh they're on a stress leave! Hahaha.' I need it; I know it. The term 'burn-out' is real to me right now.

fgt: Do you really think that people see you as that?

Monty: I don't know.

fgt: I've basically done that. It's when I stopped teaching...when I was in your spot...I realized that it was too much...

Monty: I need that. I know I do. If I've gone to the point of making an appointment to see a counselor, I know I need to. That's not a [Monty]

thing to do. [Pause.] Like today when the [vice-principal] came in I just wanted to say, 'If you only knew.' The term 'burn out' is real to me right now. How do you go in and tell a career counselor that I'm burned out? When everyone is saying, 'You're so good at what you're doing.'

fgt: It's a mask that you're wearing because a lot of things, even though your job is so different, you have daily differences that occur, hourly differences that occur...

Monty: ...minute differences...

fgt: ... minute differences, you wear a mask with it and you shoulder a great deal. And you get used to it. So it becomes mechanical...

Monty: I'm even afraid to go back on my horse. I'm afraid that I'll not be able to ride any more. To me that is going to be the big measure. Next week I start [riding] again and I'm afraid to. And a part of me, even in the summer, I felt like I'm just...I ended up feeling all of these...they're not insecurities, well maybe they are, but they were fears of this ebbing strength going away from me which really frightened me because I felt weak. And when I feel weak, then I can feel that sort of vulnerability. And I don't like it. I don't like feeling it in my life at home. I hate it when I'm around [husband] because he has all of these wonderful things going on and then all of a sudden I think, 'If I'm not doing my work or whatever how will I ever...?' If I took a stress leave, here is what I'd do. Do you want to hear what I would do? I'd go to the library and get books and read, I'd exercise every day, I'd ride my horse, I would take art

classes because I want to learn to draw. I think that's something that would be really fun and would feed me, I would even some day watch t.v. I'd go for walks. Bag the ironing and bag the sewing. All those things I used to do. I'd like to go and try something new. But I would get myself strong again physically, like physically and with that physical strength would come the mental strength again. I would just take care of myself. I would eat properly. I would cook for my family, nice healthy meals. Do all of these things that sound to me just so wonderful and so simple. Simple is the key word in here. Simple, I mean...[laughs] I heard a thing on CBC [radio station] the other day about this woman who was a minister with an incredibly stressful job. And I figure probably a lot like what I do with people just comin' at you all the time, for everything. And she quit her practice and became a cleaning lady. And then she was talking about being the cleaning lady and working in peoples' homes and going into these teenagers' rooms and talking about her observations of life in the family where these teenagers aren't made to do anything even as simple as helping contribute to the unit of a family and make it work. And her whole thing was a message to parents like get your kids with you, work together, be a unit. And I thought, 'I want to be a cleaning lady.'

[Laughs.] I could cope with that. It's so easy. Because it has something to do with ordering things. I think I need to be organizing and ordering things and putting order in my life. Does that make sense?

fgt:

[Pause.] Yes.

- Monty: I'm on the verge here I think. [Long pause]
- fgt: You know that term 'cleaning house'?
- Monty: Hmmm?
- fgt: You know that term 'cleaning house'? There's a very literal meaning here.
- Monty: Oh g** and I'm a very literal person.
- fgt: You are strong enough to take a leave.
- Monty: Oh I can do it this year I think. I don't want to wait until I'm not strong enough. The part that worries me...is leaving Cheryl and Chris...but they would be just fine. But that isn't my responsibility. It isn't and I know that.
- fgt: Do you feel afraid to take a leave?
- Monty: [Pause.] Oh, yeah.
- fgt: What are the ramifications of it?
- Monty: [Taking a leave] is really frightening. I see little steps, laying groundwork. Then it will be okay. So I see my doctor who happens to live with a teacher and knows how stressful teaching is. I've already checked that one off the list. Oh, Monty's already needing medication to get through September. She's taking anxiety medication to get through the day and sleeping medication to get through the night. Now this is scary. This is not good stuff. Right? This is bad news. This is physically really bad for me. Humph! Do I really need to see a counselor to confirm all of this? I'm curious. You know employee assistance...somebody

must... and I don't know who this person is...I mean somebody
must...They're contracted by the school district. They contract out to
counselors.

fgt: So they work for the school district?

Monty: They don't work for the school district. They're private contractors that
contract themselves. I guess...

fgt: Why don't you see someone independent?

Monty: I can talk to you. [Laughs.] Okay, Frances...[laughs.]
There's a part of this woman that you're sitting here with that will do the
ostrich thing, put the head in the sand and carry on and do the whole thing.
[Pause] I will break eventually. I don't want to that to happen...I know...I
know...

[Break.]

Monty: I tell my mother how unhappy I am with my work and she says, 'Wouldn't
it be nice if you didn't have to do this?' And I don't. [My husband] says,
'Who says you have to work?' And then there's that little part of me that
goes off on a selfish tangent, it's nothing selfish but it's, oh, but there's a
part of me that says there's the pension and there's the money.

fgt: Is that worth it?

Monty: Pensions and money? Hmmm. I said to [my husband], 'If I keep this up,
I don't think I'll be here when we're old.' He said, 'I don't want that.'

It's time for me to care for myself. Oh and I did hire a cleaning lady. If I take time off, I'm not doing anything for awhile. I'd read books. I'd have some fun. I'm getting a little too serious. Ummhmmm. [Pause.] What if they say, 'Why don't you work half-time?' [Pause.] No. And the reason is there is no such thing as half time in this job. I can do whatever. I don't even know what whatever is. I'm young enough to go out and do. Do you think I look older than I did a year ago? I think I do. Look at my face. I look tired. I don't like that [laughs.] It scares me. I look at myself and I think 'Oh g**....' My whole body just feels worn out and I pulled [a medical magazine] and there was this whole thing about depression. It was an advertisement for some kind of medication for depression and I just looked at it and it said: are you loosing sleep, loss of energy, dadadada and dadada. I just thought, 'Oh g**, this is describing me. Maybe I'm clinically depressed and I don't even know it.' Wow. Wow.

fgt: I described it as feeling tired inside out.

Monty: Yeah.

fgt: That it's so tired on the inside, you think there's nothing left.

Monty: Yeah. You wake up in the morning tired. And I've just slept...I want to be able to...if I'm going to make a change, in my mind to...step out of this and into something else. I can't do that. I can't do it without some space and distance. I know. I may step out and never step back in again. I just don't know. When I look back to the jobs that I've done, the one that I liked the very most, and this is so bizarre, was a university summer

working for the Agricultural Research Station as a research assistant, being outdoors, driving tractors, conducting experiments, and stuff. I loved it but I really wasn't dealing with people; I was dealing with things. I don't want to make decisions. That's what I don't want...I don't want to make decisions. I don't want to be the one that does administrative stuff. When I look at administration in the schools...I don't want that.... When I was twenty-one nobody helped me think through [what I wanted to do.] You look back and ...oh g**. For twenty-five years I've been doing the wrong thing...twenty-five years. That's scary. I'm ready to cut out. That's what I'll call it 'cutting out'. [Pause.] I know I'm a good teacher. Do good teachers quit? And I'm quitting... That's my question. Do I go to the end of the year and do I do the honourable thing or take a leave of absence or what? I have fear. I joke about stuff. It's survival. It's coping. I don't know how, like if I go home and I talk to [my husband...] he knows it's serious. I'm going to him and asking him for a hug before I go in to work. I need [his] support and I need him to do this. He's the person I'd go to and yet I can't talk to him about it....And when I listen to [my daughter], because she's the one who will articulate it, she wrote a piece for her teacher about change and the whole thing was about how her family's changing and as we all get more and more wrapped up in our lives we have less time for each other. And she says something as simple as a Sunday dinner sometimes just doesn't happen any more. And she said there's certain things that should not change and the family is one of

them. This, from my little grade 8 kid who I would die for. And yet I go out and I'm killing myself...Here I am saying that I would die for this kid and I'm...I feel particularly vulnerable I think from where I am. Twenty-five years is a quarter of a century. That's a long, long time...[My husband] just wants me to do something at this point. To be proactive. I [need to be] proactive. I know it in my heart. It's so scary. It's like saying in my heart, well [Monty], it's time to find a new job. In my life I've always sort of had everything in place...I need to heal...It will fester and grow if I don't [leave.] I'm afraid. It's beyond an analogy. It's probably a real festering. It's been festering since way before last year...If another person was in that job would there be a problem? Is it the job? Is it the person? What is the problem? You see, I don't want to have a problem. That bugs me.

fgt: Look. It's somebody who is a person who cares a great deal and sees injustice in the system. Who knows the focus should be the kids and they feel on a cycle of not being able to help. And you are a very caring and nurturing person...And you're dealing with ninety-six children [that way.]

Monty: I would like to...well you know when I wrote to you about floating in the Sea [postcard from a holiday] of lying there and just being massaged by the sea, the bright sky above, and the sun...I just felt so wonderful. And yet I'm back in this. I knew it would happen. I went to my doctor before I left [a summer holiday out of the country] and I said when I get back I know what it is going to be like. And I know that within four days of

being back, I know that everything I undid while I was away will be just in a knot again. I'm in a knot...It's not as hard as it was a year ago. My [relative is] not dying. I look back. How the f*** I survived it? I don't know how I did it. I guess that inner strength that I can kick into auto-pilot. I'm probably doing it right now. And I looked around me today and the scary part was that Cheryl was doing it too. And that we are all *frantic*. Just *frantic* and someone has the power to make us be like that or something. The system with all its injustices has the power to do that and we are driven by it. A system that's out there to validate itself somehow with...I'm not a single teacher. I'm a part of a team. I *am* part of a team. If I was just to walk out of my class like [other teacher on leave] did with her...class, she's leaving the kids but the kids are just names on a piece of paper to her. She's never even met them. She never showed up in September. She has no ownership over them. I am part of a team but...first of all I have all those kids. All my tracking kids; the kids I've worked with. Cheryl and Chris and I are so much of a little unit that if you take out a part of it you're hurting the other two.

fgt: But in fairness to yourself, you cannot look at it that way.

Monty: I know...They're not my responsibility. I know [intellectually] that I'm not letting them down really. They'll be fine. They'll be okay. They did a bang up job starting the year without me [while still out of the country.] They were great. [There] was a new phone system and they had programmed into it that there were one hundred phone messages [laughs],

and they'd taken every file they could find and Monty's in-box on her desk was stacked about three feet high. I walked in and I saw it and said, 'Oh s***!' I almost burst into tears and then they started laughing. I really thought it was for me and I thought, 'Oh f***.' As soon as I realized that it was a joke I saw it was funny. My instant [reaction] was 'I'll never get through this.' You should see our tracking binders already...I'd be glad to go out the door...When I walked in that first week of school. I didn't know my way about the office. I didn't know where anything was. It was scary. It was very disconcerting to get back into things. Disorienting. They [Cheryl and Chris] had started their books and had everything organized. And none of that had really [inaudible] it seems like a long time ago now. A long time. I've only been at school for ten days. S***. I haven't even thought of that. It feels...it feels... [Pause.] Let me read something else.

[Break.]

[The conversation resumes.]

Monty: S***. You see I feel...it feels...I just get numb.

fgt: [Monty] these are messages...

Monty: I know.

fgt: If I came to you and said, [Monty], I've been teaching and I'm numb, I'm tired inside and out, I can't face going in the morning, I don't sleep well at night and I'm on medication to help me sleep and [I] still can't sleep properly, and I can't even talk to anybody about it...

Monty: That's too depressing. I'm going to take that paper [thesis segments read by Monty] and I'm going to get [my doctor] to just read it...I will take parts and say that this is me and I can't cope with it. I mean anybody that comes in to start a job working...[Sigh.] It's [the job] in my face. It's me; it's you. And [a school district's] entire special ed. team walked out. That was a year ago. And...the head of that entire department has gone back only half time. She will never go back full time. I'd like to see how she's doing. I might go back and teach a class but I don't know. I don't even want to talk about it. I want to go skiing. Well [long pause...]
 Oh... [long pause...] I don't know who would step in to take my job. But that's not my problem. I don't know what they'd [administration] do. They can do whatever they want. [Pause.] I worry about how I'm going to deal with my own personal identity if I'm not 'the teacher.' I guess I'd just be [Monty], the getting healed person and then go out...

fgt: You'll never stop being [Monty] the teacher.

Monty: Oh yuck.

fgt: How's educator instead?

Monty: Yeah. That's better. Do you see what's the scariest thing here for me to say? 'I can't do it.' The only time I've taken a leave...was I fell at school

and hurt my knee really badly...and I had to get physiotherapy. I thought 'S***, I'll get off school for three weeks. I'll go do my physiotherapy stuff. Get the massage stuff. Get the works. Then I'll go back to work.' I just wanted to get out of that school. Warning signals were there oh about four years ago. And they were going off before that...They haven't gone away. The language is there. I mean everything in my body says they are...Oh, Frances, it's sad. Don't you think it's sad? I think it's very sad...There's a recognition of limits.

fgt: This is not limiting. This is not saying you can't do this again or you won't do this again...[There is] tremendous strength in recognizing what's happening. Think of who you no who are in marriages...this is a marriage with your classroom...

Monty: *...I'm in an abusive relationship with my job. It is. Yeah...In this job I guess it's the insidiousness [sic]. It's just there...All the things that go through my mind about what people will say. [Long pause.]*

fgt: You can stop that by telling your department and administration together why you are leaving and that it's not open for discussion. They can hear it from you....Then rumours don't start because you have told them up front.

Monty: Holy s***. [Long pause] I believe you're right. I believe they'll do...respect me. It terrifies to do that because I don't like confrontation but then it's not confrontation but it is a form of presentation that I have always been...the...you know, as the child in the family I was the good

little girl. The 'do everything right' kind of person. The 'keep everybody happy...'it's really hard for me to speak up for myself.

fgt: Do you not feel that you did that last year in the meetings?

Monty: Actually I did. I know that. Holy s***. [They'll say], 'Let's see if we can fix this.' The vice-principal would be right there doing that, forward posture and the whole thing.

fgt: You know when you see sports figures announce their retirement they announce it to lessen rumours...[Monty], rumours start because there is no information but you can lay it all out.

Monty: Exactly. Pretty clear. Did you know I [had] this in mind? I thought I'd talk some of this out with you, get it off my chest, and be back for another year. I want to leave. It's what I want. I know that...I don't want detail. I don't want to have to deal with it...I am *numb*. Frances, right now, I am numb. I feel vacant. I'm f***** vacant. I go to the grocery store and I'm vacant. I left my list in my pocket yesterday to go to the grocery store last night. Changed my clothes and didn't have my list with me and I just wandered. I had four or five things on the list and I bought \$104.00 worth of stuff. I thought, 'Oh g**.' Two of the four things on the list, I didn't get. Whatever...You can be scrutinized in your professional life by your colleagues, your peers, your friends, whatever...and umm, well a lot of things have happened. Like I thought I would go and do this ed. technology thing [Masters degree]. I just added more on my plate. So I went off and did my ten week, I mean ten days, and we all got together,

my mentor group and I sat with this group of people on Saturday and I was not physically outside of the group but mentally outside of the group. I know in my heart I'm not going to pay the rest of my tuition. I've written my cheque for \$100.00. They're not going to get the rest of it. I'm not going to do it... Oh well, I can't take courses; I can't do my job. Oh [Monty's] shutting down right now. But think what I have to say is I am shutting down right now in order to survive. If other people don't understand it well, 'f*** 'em.' [Pause.] Having taught doesn't mean you have to teach.

fgt: There are other ways to teach. You can sit and listen and still be teaching...

Monty: I have approached, or am approaching, even, no, I'm in a critical space. I...oh, well...It's the whole responsibility of having to take action...it's really scary. It's *so* scary...When I read what [my daughter] wrote... It could be the hardest thing I will ever have to do. I believe truly [the job] could cut the years from my life.

fgt: Look. You're a social worker, a doctor, a teacher, to them...

Monty: Why or how is the profession hanging in there? Are teachers dropping like flies?...I am not [the primary wage earner.] So why am I doing this? If I choose not to spend the same amount of money that I'd really like to spend, I don't have to make as much money. So I can find other things to do. I will, I suppose, find other things to do but I need to be in a space where I feel good enough about myself again because I think this is so

destructive on your sort of soul and whole being...Sometimes I end up feeling so totally worthless, I just don't know what to do...and what can I do for myself. Like what can I go there and do now, to earn money. That's one of the things that has held me back. What can I possibly do that would give me the same kind of time off and the same salary? And benefits and everything else. And because I can't answer it I think I better stay and do this. I don't even know what's out there as possibilities...I want to hear you say, 'Get out.' I'm ready to hear it. [My husband] doesn't want to say it. He'll just listen to me. He's not going to tell me what to do one way or the other. Excuse me I'm going to leave. It's mentally abusive to stay there. I get concerned for my well being when I get in this state of mind. You know, I'll be fine. It's very scary. It might be a moment to rejoice actually. I don't know...I probably feel so good that I'd go back to work again. I'm a dutiful employee. g**.

Okay...that's enough.

[Long pause. End of the second hermeneutic conversation.]

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