

**PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SELF-DISCOVERY  
THROUGH  
COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the process of collaborative autobiography as a means of facilitating teacher development. The model of collaborative autobiography studied was the course Teachers' Stories and Teacher Development (Ed. 5210) taught by Dr. Richard Butt. The research is couched in a qualitative context. Conversations were held with eight practising educators, as well as with Dr. Richard Butt. These conversations were taped, transcribed and interpreted for themes.

The research revealed the following thematic structure. The ground of collaborative autobiography saw the participants lives as the texts. Significant contextual factors were trust, confidentiality, and levels of disclosure. Whether a teacher was required to take the course, or opted to take the course, was also a vital factor. My research revealed the importance of the oral aspect of collaborative autobiography: that is, speaking, listening, and responding. Further, the role of the facilitator (in this case Dr. Richard Butt) as a sensitive and nurturing participant was essential to a pedagogy which viewed horizontal and collegial relationships as key.

Meaningful changes in teaching practise occurred as a result of participation in the process of collaborative autobiography. Teachers took greater risks and were more

open to change in their teaching, both in terms of teaching styles and curriculum. On the other hand, three out of eight participants did not see a significant change in their teaching practise as a result of walking through the collaborative process. The research further showed that sharing of teachers' stories in a collaborative setting helped teachers to examine, redefine, and finally articulate more clearly their teaching philosophies. Teachers gained self-confidence, took greater risks, had increased empathy for students, and were empowered to find their individual teacher voice. Only one out of the eight participants did not see a positive correlation between his participation in Teachers' Stories and the shaping of teacher beliefs. Finally, the research illustrated that typically what, how, and why teachers teach parallels their personal lives-- present, past and future. Exceptions to this were two out of eight participants who separated their private life from their professional life.

In terms of evaluation, teachers generally saw their participation in Ed. 5210 as having a tremendous impact in terms of teacher development. Highlights were the development of collegiality in a collaborative context; and the realization that teachers themselves are our greatest possible resource in teacher development.

A conclusive recommendation stemming from the research was that class size should be no more that ten people, and

that some use should be made of small groups. Several participants felt that Teachers' Stories should be followed up by a Practicum which would give follow through for effective teacher development. Some problematic issues surfaced from a participant who had taken Teachers' Stories in the larger, more complicated class of 16 students. This person was concerned over the issue of safety, and a seeming lack of adequate support for participants undergoing severe emotional trauma in their personal and/or professional lives.

In conclusion, the research clearly illustrated that the prime objective of collaborative autobiography is liberation and emancipation of teachers through individual and collective action.

My research is written in a conversational/dialogical format. My prologue and epilogue, as well as sketches of research participants lives in poetry segments, lend the paper a unique autobiographical and biographical flavor.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
ONE	PROLOGUE .....	1
TWO	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN..	6
	Theoretical framework.....	6
	Research Design.....	21
	Ethical Issues.....	22
	Conversations.....	22
	Questions.....	23
	Reflections on research.....	24
THREE	BIOGRAPHY OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS.....	29
FOUR	THE GROUND OF COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY..	34
	Garden of collaborative autobiography.....	34
	Trust.....	45
	Speaking, listening, responding.....	50
	The gardener.....	57



## PROLOGUE

I am a woman who entered the graduate program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge in September of 1994. This re-entry into full-time university as an adult learner came after a twenty year absence from school. I am also a woman who stepped back from a full-time career twenty years ago to become a "stay at home" mom.

Was I employed while I was studying? Yes, I have been a substitute teacher for over ten years. I also teach piano lessons in my studio at home. I obtained part-time work at the University of Lethbridge during my Master's program in the form of a graduate assistantship, and later, PS II supervision in the spring of 1997. These are jobs from which I received remuneration. Other hats I wear besides that of teacher and student are: wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, sister, aunt, and caregiver. I am the sole caregiver for my elderly mother of 85 as well as a 55 year old brother who is chronically ill. Throw into this pot a seasoning of responsibilities which every farm wife contends with--to say nothing of the grocery shopping, meals and housecleaning. You guessed it! I am not one of those liberated females whose spouse volunteered to take over as domestic engineer while I pursued my M.Ed.!

What is the nitty-gritty, the ground, the context of a female grad student who wears all these different hats? In the fall of 1994, one of my professors made the following statement to me: "The trouble with you, Edith, is that you don't think like a student". Upon reflection, I realize that this was an accurate and timely challenge.

The outcome? Gradually, as I became more deeply entwined with my intellectual pursuits in the grad program, I found myself acquiring the mind not only of a student, but of a stranger who has embarked on a celestial journey. In the fall of 1993, before being accepted into the graduate program, I enrolled in David Smith's course, Ed. 5703, Pedagogy and Global Culture. This course jolted me out of a mundane and comfortable reality, (at least what I thought was reality), jarring many thought patterns which had literally congealed in my conscious or sub-conscious over the years. The excitement of exploring post modernism and phenomenological thinking invaded my being like a fungus.

Being a student again was a re-minding and a re-membering of all that I once was and experienced. For our experience means nothing unless it can be brought back to ourselves for re-examination and re-enforcement.

I came into the graduate program with a great sense of

isolation, both personally and professionally. Having undergone the pain of a farm crisis during the last half of the eighties, and experienced the death of a family farm; I was, to a certain extent, isolated from the continuing community of 'successful farmers'. Having been a substitute teacher for over ten years, I felt a great sense of professional isolation from my colleagues and from current teaching practise.

At this point, Richard Butt's course, Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development, caught my eye. The concept of telling my life story really appealed to me. I needed a forum to express my fears, thoughts, hurts, disappointments, uncertainties about the future--both professionally and personally. As a student, I have used what I am and worked with it to make sense and meaning out of what I do now. The process of collaborative autobiography gave me the opportunity to re-root myself to the grounds of my life.

In staff rooms, I constantly encounter teachers who are in crisis, in burnout, due to severe economic cutbacks and changes implemented by the Department of Education. Teachers' Life Stories was a unique part of the graduate program where I could begin to take charge of my own life, personally and professionally; and become more authentic in an alienating system.

This project is an account of my journey as a researcher, and the stories of other teachers/ students/researchers who agreed to participate in my research about their experiences as grad students in Richard's class, and how these experiences have impacted on them personally and professionally.

To help you understand my journey through this research project, perhaps the following will be helpful:

*Italicized words* - are the research participants' actual words, spoken in conversation with myself.

Poetry segments - in the biography are often the research participants' actual words, re-arranged, to capture the essence of each person. All names, except Richard and myself, are fictitious.

First person segments --Prologue and Epilogue-- are taken directly from my own experience.

In approaching Richard with this inquiry, he supported me. Why? Student evaluations of Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development (Ed 5510) over 15 years have been very positive. However, from time to time, the course has not worked for certain individuals. For this reason, Richard withdrew the course from the required core of the M. Ed. Program to allow people to opt to take it, since this

course is very personal and different. Less frequent, on occasions, however, there are still some individuals for whom the course does not work. As well, graduate course enrolment limits were from 15 to 20, Richard wondered how this effected the class. This whole situation was brought to a head by a particularly large class in the fall in 1994 during the height of cutbacks in education, social welfare, and health. On occasion, the class became problematic. I was a member of this class. Richard felt that this seemed to be an appropriate time to look at what was happening and how these challenges might be met. In a sense, this difficult class could be seen as providing a view from the margins which might problematize and magnify concerns that needed to be dealt with.

The purpose of my research, then, will be to evaluate the process of collaborative autobiography as used in the course Teachers' Stories and Teacher Development (Ed 5210) taught by Richard Butt as a means of facilitating teacher development--both professionally, and personally.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**  
**AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

**The Theoretical framework**

The process of collaborative autobiography as evolved by Butt and Raymond (1987) initially began as a biographic inquiry into the nature of teacher's knowledge and teacher development.

"A biography is the formative history of an individual's life experience" (Berk, 1980, p. 90). Biography not only addresses attitudes, feelings, thoughts and actions, but also examines the relationship between early and later events. It attempts to infer how a person came to be the way he/she is (Butt, Raymond, 1987, p. 60). "Biographic study is a disciplined way of interpreting a person's thought and action in light of his or her past" (Berk, p. 94). Biography is not simply the chronological record of tapes, field notes, diaries, and so on. Biography is a deliberate procedure that aims to make educational sense of thoughts, actions, feelings, attitudes and experiences. Biography is a story, a construct: an artifact assembled from the record of someone's activities.

Biographic work dates from the late eighteenth century, and abounded during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

By the early twentieth century, biographical form embodied a literary tradition whose mode was sometimes historical, lyrical, or fictional--but whose theme was characteristically the formative influence of early experience.

Dewey's theory of education is essentially a biographic conception. Dewey offers a definition of education in Democracy and Education. Education, Dewey states, is "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (1966, p. 76).

Autobiographical study--the story of a person's life written by oneself--grew directly out of the tradition of biographic inquiry. Pinar (1983) speaks of the 'autobiographical consciousness'. Autobiography, Pinar states, is important not as a genre of literature, but as a form of consciousness. In Pinar's explanation of autobiographical consciousness, Pinar quotes William Earle who speaks to this and related points: "'Know thyself' invites me to become explicit as to who I am, what it is for me to exist; what my singular existence has been, where it is new, what lies before me. Ontological autobiography...is a question of a form of consciousness, rather than of literature'".

Any reading and writing of our lives presents us with the challenge that is at the heart of every educational experience: making sense of our lives in the world. Grumet (1978) states, "autobiography becomes a medium for both teaching and research because each entry expresses the particular peace its author has made between the individuality of his or her subjectivity and the intersubjective and public character of meaning" (p. 322). For Grumet, autobiography is 'both things': inner and outer, personal and public, spontaneous and considered, mind and body.

Peter Abbs initiated a philosophical and educational base for the practise of collaborative autobiography in the early 70's. In his book, Autobiography in Education (1974), Abbs introduced the subjective discipline and its central place in the education of teachers. He included a selection of passages from a variety of autobiographies, including those written by students. Abbs saw the central concern of autobiography to describe, evoke and re-create the development of the author's experience. Abbs states: "Autobiography, as an act of writing, perches in the present, gazing backwards into the past, while poised ready for flight in the future" (p. 7).

Abbs envisioned at least one semester of study--with

meetings every week lasting a minimum of one hour, with groups not more than twelve in number as essential for students writing their own autobiographies. Abbs also touches on the oral aspect of the process, suggesting each student read an excerpt from his own autobiography, which at that point, was in the process of being written. Abbs sees the tutor's influence as being subtle and indirect. By their presence, the tutor must be able to create a feeling of trust in which each student feels able to present himself to be who he is. Abbs explains, that given this spirit of trust and collaboration, the weekly meeting becomes an essential focus of the work. The meeting provides the private act of autobiography with a public face.

Butt and Raymond (1987), argue that the re-emergence of biographic inquiry in education and its extension to autobiographic inquiry was part of a metatheoretical shift in education in the 1970's and 1980's away from an overreliance on the empirical-analytic paradigm in education. Autobiographic inquiry was a moving toward a more qualitative form of inquiry including ethnography, phenomenology and critical theory. Note, however, that the move to biographic inquiry was not seen as an abandonment of the empirical-analytic tradition (see Butt, 1980), but rather a return to the qualitative ground of educational reality.

Autobiographical inquiry was initially developed as one approach to understanding teacher knowledge and development from teachers' perspective as co-researchers. In order to know what we wish to do next as teachers, we need to know ourselves, who we are, and how we came to be. For teachers, and other professionals, autobiography is a fundamental form of personal and professional inquiry. In that sense, it could be seen as a form of basic research (Raymond, Butt, Townsend, 1992).

The model of collaborative autobiography (or autobiographic praxis), is based on the following assumptions (Butt, et al., 1988, p. 2-3):

1. The teacher is the major actor and arbitrator within the many influences that impinge on classroom curriculum, pedagogy and change.
2. The teacher possesses knowledge built up through experience of personal interactions in real situations of a personal, practical, and professional nature.
3. This knowledge is neither purely theoretical nor not purely practical in nature but a synergy of both.
4. Within the context of teacher knowledge, then, the relationship between theory and practice is horizontal, dialectical and interactive, whereby each is of equal value, each informs the other, each being a different facet of the same phenomena.

5. It is important to understand how teachers experience their working realities, how they act within their classrooms, and how they got to be that way through personal/professional developments and changes.
6. Inquiring into the nature of these phenomena requires a collaborative and dialogical approach among teachers and researchers within which the expression of the teacher's perspective and voice is facilitated.

Emerging notions of teachers' knowledge, such as Pinar's 'architecture of self' (cited by Butt, 1988, p. 14) pointed to the private and personal self that teachers bring with them into teaching. Pinar also used the idea of currere, the course of life's experiences, past, present and future; whereby an individual interacting with context continually lives out and evolves an architecture of self.

Further, the collaborative model was envisioned by Dewey. Dewey's ethic of becoming (1932) envisions a self which is a social and ethical self, which changes, never in isolation, but in a relation to a community of others. Implicated in the education of the individual is the realization of one's connectedness to others and to society. "All education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race" (Dewey, 1932, p.3).

Smyth (1991) also advances the collaborative model for adult learners. Smyth quotes Willie and Howey in his argument that as adults mature there is an increasing life-time search for relationships in which one individual is able to confide in another, talk about self, and disclose problems without fear of recrimination. What is needed is "small groups of teachers, who trust one another, work together on an extended basis to deepen that sense of trust and respect by providing each other with accurate and precise and humane feedback about their behavior in the classroom" (Smyth, 1991, pg. 86).

Other research to support the collaborative model is found in Butt, et al., (1995). This research states that a synergy between person and context, the individual and organization, the big picture and individual incremental efforts, need to be created to achieve collegiality and professional development. This research points to the fact that contexts which enable teachers to collaborate in solving problems enhance teachers' own individual efforts at professional development. Mutual interests, trust and support that develop within groups appear to provide encouraging environments necessary for taking individual and collective risks. A collective commitment and challenge provokes and requires action, and the collective climate that

develops also supports and promotes that action (Butt et al., 1995, p. 20-21).

A case study of the collaborative model in a school-based context is presented in Teachers' Stories as Ground and Form for Collaborative Action Research, (Butt et al., 1992). This case study illustrates that collaborative autobiography is a powerful means for assisting individual and collective teacher development, especially when applied at the school level. An ultimate contribution of collaborative autobiography is to project individuals and the group into futures that are personally and collectively authentic.

A typical example of collaborative autobiography serving to facilitate teacher development is the graduate course, Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development, (TLSTD), as taught by Dr. Richard Butt. It is an approach to collaborative development which enables teachers to construct personal and professional autobiographies (See Appendix B for course outline). This course facilitates the process of autobiographical expression and interpretation by peers who are involved in similar realities. Butt, as co-investigator, gives his own vignettes of autobiographical inquiry--taking his turn as one of a group of learners and presenters.

In this course, four categories of activity and writing are worked through by the graduate students: a depiction of the context of their current working reality; a description of their current pedagogy and curriculum-in-use; stories of their past personal and professional lives in so far as they might relate to an understanding of present professional thoughts and actions; and finally, a projection into their preferred personal/professional futures as related to a personal critical appraisal of the previous three accounts.

In each category, several phases of reflection are involved. Phase one involves exploratory writing on a particular aspect of personal or professional life. Phase two involves sharing parts of this work orally with peers in weekly class seminars. Each member of the group, including the instructor, presents excerpts of exploratory writing on each assignment. Participants attempt to discern the perspective and reality of the presenter, and ask questions that would deepen the understanding of the presenter. Here the presenters take note of comments of peers that may aid in further elaboration and perspicacity in their writing. Phase three involves redrafting autobiographical writings which will incorporate ideas from the collective discussion of presenters and participants. Phase four involves handing in the final draft and receiving written feedback from Dr. Butt.

To facilitate a high quality of personal reflection, sharing and collaboration, a number of conditions are essential. They include making "I" statements in identifying and describing feelings; being honest about oneself' engaging in non-critical acceptance of others; and providing confidentiality. Participants are reminded that there are a number of different levels of disclosure that are possible, and that they have complete control of the levels of disclosure they decide to make known about their personal and professional lives. Disclosure includes: public discussion in class, private conversations with a friend or friends in or outside the class, discussion with the instructor, the written autobiography, and of course, what one discloses to oneself (Butt et al., 1988, p. 38,39).

The final written autobiographies evolve from this process, as well as through some readings which pertain to biography and classroom reality assigned after exploratory work has been completed.

In each category of TLSTD, several phases of reflection are involved. The university course begins with each student looking at their current reality.

Flanders (1983), in his research on teachers' realities states that teachers feel that what is presented in teacher

education is, in fact, utopian, unrealizable in real classrooms with real kids. In exploring the common realities of teaching, Flanders points to such issues as relentless time pressures, cellular isolation, information overload, unrealistic expectations, lack of preparation time, and job insecurity. Similarly, Butt sees it as paramount for teachers to begin the process of collaborative autobiography by examining their teaching realities, both for positive and negative aspects. This immediately brings out themes of similarities and differences; commonalities and uniqueness.

At this point, one may raise the question: is the establishment of common themes or metaphors in the beginning of this process not problematic in the work of autobiography? (Butt, et al., 1992) Specific reference is made here to R. Donmoyer's discussion of individual experience as expressed within one's story related to the formation of a teacher's 'craft' in the statement, "A generality can suggest possibilities, but never dictate an action" (pg. 26). The structure of a teacher's craft knowledge whether habit, routine, principle, image or metaphor is a series of generalities based on repeated individual experiences. These generalities are not determining rules but serve as a starting point from which a teacher might adapt for specific action. To understand contextual commonalities or differences within one teacher's knowledge, it is essential

to further examine the details of the person's life, and the individual context with which they interacted to construct their meaning and craft knowledge.

The second category deals specifically with the teacher's practice in the classroom. I have referred already to a teacher's 'craft' knowledge, a phrase expounded on by Eisner in The Art and Craft of Teaching (1983). Eisner sees the image of a teacher as a crafts person and artist as an ideal towards which we as teachers should strive. Eisner describes the craft of teaching as the unroutineness; the intuitive ability of teachers to read dynamic structures of signification; the invention of specific, personal moves that create an educationally productive tempo within a class. The aesthetic. It is this educational imagination which Butt appeals to in phase two. Phase two calls on teachers to examine teaching style and practise, preferred strategies, vignettes, critical incidents, metaphor and images that guide instruction.

The third category of the course goes beyond the teachers' description of their current curriculum-in-use to their past personal and professional lives. Raymond, Butt, and Townsend (1992) conducted a long-term research project with over 80 teachers' autobiographies. In this paper, three case studies are analyzed that illustrate that collaborative

autobiography as a process for gathering teachers' stories, is a process not just for the purpose of research into teacher development, but is a potentially powerful means for facilitating teacher development. One significant aspect of teacher development identified in this study was the pre-teaching influence. Various sources and influences (parents, relatives, school teachers, family, home, ethnicity, religion and location) are reconstructed to establish an emotional and moral ground that form teachers' professional commitment and identity.

Category Four of the course requires the teachers to envision a future personal and professional goal, which will anticipate and implement change. Pinar (1980), in his commentary on autobiography as a 'form of consciousness', emphasizes that understandings of ones life is significant and useful only as they "contribute to release from past patterns". The work of autobiography, then, is "emancipatory, release from the past, release from arrest, into movement" (Pinar, 1980, p.173). Pinar stresses that it is not the knowledge of details of life history, but a "certain relation to knowledge and knowing" that is essential. Thus, the thrust for new issues, into an unlived biographic-intellectual present and future.

A thrust for the significance of a future vision is the essence of Viktor Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning, in

which Frankl recounts his experiences as a long-time prisoner in bestial concentration camps. In the midst of the dehumanization of man, Frankl held out a strong sense of hope for his comrades, a vision for the future. Frankl states: "Mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is, and what one should become--man needs the striving and struggling of some goal worthy for him" (p. 166).

Clearly, each category involves various levels of collaboration. The task of collaborative autobiography "becomes one of facilitating the process of the autobiographical impulse and expression, autobiographical interpretation and reconstruction of experience, without interfering with the substance of the teacher's story" (Butt, et al., 1988, pg. 32).

The approach to collaborative autobiography in the model being considered, as mentioned earlier, involves a group of graduate students working together with Butt as co-presenter, facilitator, co-researcher. In the seminars, all teachers and the instructor are researchers; each participant is expert with respect to self. Individually, each writes their own song and lyrics; name and identify themes and patterns about what they see and what they want--both personally and

professionally.

It is possible that this process may reveal moral and emotional issues. The process is a sensitive one, which must be handled in a sensitive and non-judgmental way by all participants. Ambitious autobiography, states Abbs, is not easy and may take the writer, where he is ready for such a confrontation, back to traumatic childhood experiences and early and late adolescent experiences (Abbs. 1974,pg. 11). Both Abbs and Butt contend that the student of collaborative autobiography will only remember and share those past events and inner feelings which he/she is capable, at that point, of assimilating into his/her personality. The terms of autobiography are provided by each participant. The instructor is there to provide, when necessary, a support--for the instructor having made a similar journey into the self knows what difficulties may lay in wait (Abbs, 1974, pg.23).

This, then, is the model of collaborative autobiography which I am examining in my research.

## **Research Design**

In order to collect data for this project, conversations were held with eight practising educators who are presently teaching or in administration. These educators were chosen from those who have participated in the course Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development with Dr. Richard Butt. I chose a random, stratified sample from the class lists of the course from 1984 to 1995. Four groups of teachers were interviewed: kindergarten to grade 3, grades 4 to 6, grades 7 to 9, and grades 10 to 12. I also drew on my own experience as a participant in the class.

Course participants who were excluded were:

1. Those whose profession is not education.
2. Educators not involved in k-12.
3. Educators not located in local area.
4. Educators who have not had time to apply personal benefits from the course to their teaching and professional life for whatever reason, for example, maternity leave.

## **Ethical issues**

Since my supervisor taught this course, special measures were taken to keep the participants' identity confidential.

The following procedures were followed:

1. Class lists for 1984-1995 were obtained from the registrar.
2. In the absence of Dr. Richard Butt, I randomly selected participants as outlined above.

## **Conversations**

The conversations took place between May 2, 1996 and July 8, 1996. The conversations were 30 to 60 minutes, were taped, and were mostly conducted within a dialogical context. In asking someone to participate in an interview, I was, in a sense, "extending an invitation to conversation", as Webber (1986) so aptly puts it. Through dialogue, the conversation became a joint reflection on the phenomenon of collaborative autobiography, a deepening of experience for both myself and the participant in my study. As Weber states: "The interview holds a potential for the development of trust and commitment, and for growth of a new human relationship, and of new or deepened understanding" (Webber, p.66).

## Questions

### General Questions

1. What do you recall about the nature of the course, Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development?
2. What did participation in the course do for you as a person?
3. How did the course impact on how you view your working reality?
4. Did you make any changes in your work?
5. Have you been able to achieve most of the future goals you set for yourself in the course?

### Specific questions

1. How did the sharing of teachers' life stories impact on your beliefs as a teacher?
2. How did the sharing of teachers' life stories impact on your teaching practise?
3. How did the course hinder or foster collegiality in your teaching context?
4. How did the course help you to deal with problems currently facing teachers, such as stress and isolation?

### Critically reflective questions

1. As a result of participating in the course, can you recall any specific insights relating to teaching and learning?
2. Thinking back on the course, how could it be modified

to be more effective in terms of professional development?

3. Could you see any means by which you could have better maximized the benefits of this particular course on your thoughts and actions as a teacher?

### **Reflections on research**

I really found the things Weber said about the interview true in my research. For about half of my interviews, I sent out my entire list of questions before the interview. Later, I selected only three or four out of the list to make it less structured. The first interview was very formal. We went through the questions pretty well in the sequence in which they were listed. The research participant did most of the talking. In reflecting on this interview, I decided this was not what I wanted to do in my research. So in subsequent interviews I did not have the list of questions physically with me, but rather mentally held the broad overview of the subjects they touched on. Gradually, I developed a more conversational style which involved more participation from myself. I also encouraged the participants to reflect on comments of previous participants (anonymity in place of course). So gradually, a dialogical style developed. Generally, most research participants were actively interested in my research and some noted that the course had

obviously made a real impact upon me. At first, I was not eager to share my reflections, but I had to deal with this as I realized my research colleagues were actively interested in my impressions of the course as well. I was impressed too that they were all eager to help me with my research to the best of their ability. To me this was a prime example of how doing research as graduate students changes our attitude towards research.

I also had an interview with Richard Butt. This interview helped heighten my sense of the logic and organic flavor underlying the theoretical framework of collaborative autobiography.

I transcribed the tapes. These transcriptions were analyzed. Common themes were identified and illustrated using qualitative data from the transcribed tapes. I also made reference to the spoken word in its personal context on the tapes. Some telephone conversations were made subsequent to interviews to clarify issues that arose during my research.

Doing this research was rigorous and laborious work. For about a year, I have been sifting through themes, stories, and the lives of my participants; as well as my own. To begin with, I read and re-read the transcribed interviews,

and attempted to glean the themes out of these. Then I had to sort out which of these themes belonged to process and which of these dealt with outcomes. I finally arrived at some basic meta-themes which were personal, professional, the process itself, and recommendations. I color coded these and went through the transcriptions accordingly. Flowing out of these were numerous sub-themes. For example, in terms of outcomes I needed to look at issues of teacher voice, empowerment, and teacher change. Symbolism in the lives of my research participants was a penetrating theme. Then there were the aspects of attitudes or beliefs of teachers as opposed to teacher practise. There were fringe themes, such as why did these teachers take this course? I saw all these themes as being under the huge umbrella of evaluation, which continually cast its shadow over my research.

After identifying the meta-themes, I attempted to write down categories of themes which flowed out of these with specific reference to interviews, pages and line numbers. I wrote and rewrote these in several different ways. This was the skeleton of my writing. Then of course, I had to decide how I was going to write up this information. First, I tried the logical, sequential approach. This I found extremely frustrating. After some discussions with Richard, I decided to couch my research findings in a metaphor, and for this purpose, I chose the metaphor of a garden. As well, I chose

a conversational style of writing which I felt suited my dialogical approach.

In looking at the themes, there were many collective themes which recurred in my research. There were also themes which were more individualized. This did not mean these themes were less significant. Then, having participated in the course myself, I also had all my own experiences and thoughts about the process as it relates to my individual self and my professional development. Writing about personal experience is also complicated as autobiography is an ongoing thing in ones' life. If I took the course from Richard this semester, I would no doubt write about totally different things than I did in the fall of 1994.

Then there was the interview that was really difficult to make sense of. Reading and re-reading it did not seem to help. I finally decided to put it aside, and not become sidetracked with it. There was also the idea of thinking I had to deal with everything everyone said. After a discussion with Dr. Chambers one day, I felt good about the fact that I know I never touched on everything that was said by my research participants; it is impossible. Even in the silences of the interview there is a lot being said, and I can not deal with this easily in my writing.

In conclusion, I am happy that I had as long as I did to re-reflect and re-write my research findings. I have lived and re-lived the conversations, interpreted and re-interpreted themes and metathemes, and searched and re-searched meanings.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**BIOGRAPHY OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

*I am KEN, I serve 2 roles*

*acting vice-principal...grade four teacher*

*I am the*

*concrete,*

*sequential*

*type*

*Why did I take the course? Because I genuinely*

*wanted to take it!*

*I still remember my stories vividly.*

*I am ELAINE,*

*I'm the assistant principal, and...*

*I teach early intervention to grade ones, half-time.*

*I took this course the first time it was offered in the  
program--*

*we were the guinea pigs!*

*It was unlike anything we had ever taken...*

*I thought personal meaning, personal meaning, what does that  
mean?*

*there were a whole core of us who*

*really enjoyed it!*

*For those of us who were part-time students,*

*it made us feel like*

*GRADUATE STUDENTS*

*I am ASHLEY,*

*I teach kindergarten, grades one, two and three music..*

*and special education in the past six years in a*

*NATIVE SETTING*

*The course acted rather negatively on me...its so*

*busy...you're spending so much time*

*surviving...*

*coping...*

*no time for reflection*

*Why am I doing this?*

*Teaching feels like*

*glorified baby sitting*

*maybe I can't stand this. Maybe its time to get out--*

*I did feel the whole time that my reality was quite*

*different.*

*I am STUART.*

*I'm the principal of a junior-senior high school in*

*Lethbridge.*

*When I took the course I was*

*teaching grade six, vice-principal.*

*My first graduate level course...*

*a very difficult course in terms of writing*

you do a lot of

soul

searching???

I am JEN.

I teach special education, junior, high school level.

What to expect of a Master's course?

I didn't know. It was a  
surprise!!

It wasn't

structured

or concrete

There were 14 or 15 in our class...

some pretty heavy experiences.

I am BEV.

I've been in French immersion for awhile...

teaching grade one English for the past two years at a  
regular elementary school .

Some people learn--in different ways--

I'm an A type

I like to know what I'm doing

And then I'll do it.

My working reality was in an upheaval

Why did I take the course? it

sounded interesting

talked about classroom practise

*I am JOSH.*

*I teach high school in Lethbridge.*

*enjoyed the course*

*I really remember...*

*the stories...*

*the novel I wrote, the history of myself!*

*The group I was with...we were..*

*s*

*i*

*n*

*k*

*or*

*s w i m*

*TOGETHER*

*I am DAVE.*

*teach physics and chemistry at a rural high school*

*one of the first 25 in the Masters' program*

*took the course in 1987*

*I am...*

*a type A work ethic personality*

*a recluse*

*I don't do...*

*social parties*

*stuff*

*I work.*

*I don't remember*

*my 16 grad courses*

*things I did nine years ago*

*details*

*I remember*

*the class*

*Richard taught it*

*writing my autobiography*

*I got a passing mark.*

*I don't deal with too many esoteric things in my life.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE GROUND OF COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Having lived most of my life on the farm, I have always been part of the gardening process. Over the years, I have gradually discovered the quality of the plants in the garden depends on a multitude of conditions, most significantly, the ground I used for planting. I have kneaded various consistencies of soil, ranging from coal-black loam of Central Alberta to the light brown loam of Southern Alberta. Factors making the soil difficult for plants to thrive have been dryness, hard-packed soil, excessive moisture, weeds, rocks, hard lumps, and erosion.

The total environment is crucial: amounts of wind, rainfall, frost in June or August, application of fertilizer, which plants are seeded, and where. For example, I have found that an attractive spattering of flowers not only adds vivid color to my garden, but attracts the bees thus increasing pollination. Certain varieties thrive and yield bountifully east of Lethbridge, for example, extra early super sweet corn. Some young plants such as tomato plants, need a box or container placed around them to shield them from the ruthless west winds and hot sun--a safe place to take root.

To have a really green thumb, I always have to worry

about next year, or years. If I have a particular spot for the garden, I have to think about how I will work the soil up for next year. If my garden is in a field, the next year is always an unknown, which field will it be in, will someone remember to leave a spot? What crops will I grow? Should I be risky, perhaps plant watermelon, cantaloupe, or maybe get into growing herbs which I know nothing about.

Collaborative autobiography is a garden which is couched in a certain context. The participants grow from a ground that results in them blossoming along a continuum from life that is flourishing to growth that may be less productive.

How many grounds or contexts are represented in my research? I am looking at five varying contexts, between the years of 1985 and 1994. In the earlier years, the TLSTD course was part of the core requirement, later it became an option. Three of my contexts involve a core course, while the other two illustrate the course in the role of an option. Contexts are varying sizes. Different individuals attend different classes. Each class has its own unique dynamic. In our discussion, I will be take the common threads I have found between all of these contexts and attempt to weave them together into a representative tapestry.

Ken and I met in a warm day in May in his vice-principal's office. True to his character, both his office and his desk are neat and well-organized. Two blank pieces of paper and a pen are the only things occupying space on the desk. Ken sat expectantly behind his desk. Leaning forward slightly, and choosing his words carefully, Ken said:

*I guess my feeling with this course is that the people in the course were texts. Richard did supply readings, there were a number, but there was no mandatory text. I think that when you're talking about autobiographies, how can you use a text book? I mean our autobiographies are ourselves.*

I met with Josh on a Saturday afternoon, in the kitchen of his home. There were some interruptions, such as his wife coming in with groceries, not realizing I was there. But overall, Josh was extremely relaxed with his home environment, being very authentic during the interview. Josh felt that:

*...self examination isn't always easy..I also think, that you know, you have to examine yourself to go on...Who I am today is a result of what happened yesterday, and who I am today is going to determine what I going to be tomorrow. Those three are integrally related.*

Elaine and I chatted at her university desk, at 5:00 p.m. on a normal working day. It seemed to take her a few

minutes to focus after what a very harried day at her school. As the conversation developed, Elaine continued:

*When I got into my past, that was what was really significant to me, and all of a sudden the whole process took on a great deal of significance, because the past triggered so much of what I was, and I started to understand why I was the way I am.*

For Elaine, a transition in thinking occurred part way through the course. Elaine took the course the first year it was offered, at which time it was a core course. Elaine explained how vastly different this course was from the first curriculum course she took, which was academically literature based, with high expectations on research. Elaine's initial reaction on the first night of the class was *you've got to be kidding!*. A few weeks later, Elaine explains:

*There was a real shift in my approach to that course, so initially you might be kidding to this is really significant, and it wasn't out of the literature, it was out of my life!*

Ashley, beautiful and confident, seemed eager to talk with me. As we sat and talked in the grad grotto, Ashley pointed out:

*Anybody can go to a textbook and regurgitate what's there. But if you use yourself, you've got to really look. And find words for that stuff, that you've never given words*

*to before...I mean its, its taking your essence so to speak, and writing it down, formalizing it, making it concrete.*

I met with Stuart on Wednesday morning at his school. Walking into the school, I noted the comradery between students and staff, and between colleagues, during an early morning break. After a few instructions to his Secretary, Stuart took me into the hallowed environs of this office, Stuart, obviously busy but very focused on our conversation, stated:

*I really think it should be a core course because I think teachers should be doing that kind of soul searching and looking into your own life with a microscope and saying...why do you do those things? ...when I look at the overall experience of that course, I'm finding that of all the courses I've taken in university, its probably the best one...*

On a sultry Sunday evening in July, I drove out to Jen's house. As I entered, I could see that she, a single mother of four, had been busy washing, and catching up on the more mundane things of life. We chatted about the latest grad gossip as she poured each of us a fresh cup of coffee. Then we moved into her office. In the ensuing conversation, I found Jen very talkative, certainly glad to have an audience for her frustrations. Jen explained:

*I really wasn't comfortable with there's no information handed out to you, no texts, no handouts per se or anything, and that you are the text book, because I didn't want to be the text book...you want to keep your private life separate from your career...I guess we were expected to put aside roles we have and come together, and that's a lofty idea, I don't know if in reality he can make it work all the time.*

We can see clearly from the foregoing that in the garden of collaborative autobiography the individual plant or life is especially symbolic: each flourishes and requires special tending. As in any garden, for whatever reason, there are always some plants that do not thrive, in this case Jen was the representation of that. Jen was not willing to put her professional role aside and bare her personal life.

On the other hand, Ken, Stuart, Josh and Ashley were willing to accept that their life was the text, and meet the challenge of writing their autobiography. Elaine took the course because it was mandatory, which perhaps explains why it took her a little longer to become aware of the significance of her individuality in the class.

You, the reader, and I, the writer, need to take time here to reflect on Josh's statement, *who I am today is a result of what happened yesterday and who I am today is going*

*to determine what I'm going to be tomorrow.*

PRESENT, PAST AND FUTURE--the threads of your personal and professional life tied together, by looking at today, yesterday and tomorrow. An essential framework or context for the journey called collaborative autobiography.

To be very specific, I am not talking here about William Pinar's 'currere', which goes past, present and future (Pinar, 1980. 1981). Collaborative autobiography is different.

Back to the university in July 1996, I am in conversation with Richard Butt. I queried, *do you mind me asking you how you arrived at this framework for autobiography (see introduction)? Was it just by looking at teachers' stories?*

*I followed my nose. I discovered it, Richard explained. I'm an inductive learner, an experiential learner. I was working in educational change, in implementation, for years... I learned a lot from talking to teachers...hanging around classrooms...I started working in a school based way in 1970-72 in Montreal. I worked with school staffs, trying to become a part of the school staffs by hanging around a lot and working in classrooms. After two years in Solomon Schecter I said I wanted to leave, and Rosa Finestone said,*

"Richard, you can't!", so I ended up being there on and off for 7 years.

Through that process I found out how deeply personal teaching was, ...and how deeply personal the ways in which teachers could actually consider and engage in change was. First of all, it had to be something they invented, created, chose to do. The ownership had to be theirs, clearly.

...So I thought to myself, how can I help teachers understand the personal nature of their teaching?...They had to have an agenda that was very deeply personal, so hence the 4 questions.

I chose to start in the present, with the working reality, because this old 60's phrase, 'you start where the learner is at', was vitally important. ...So talk about your working reality right here and now, what's great about it, what isn't great about it? Also, its a more comfortable thing to talk about your working reality than to talk about your teaching right away. I wanted to leave that until they're ready to deal with that, so it's like a preparatory thing, a readiness thing. We use the working reality to talk passionately about common things. This facilitates the whole process and building up of trust. People begin to open up more and more...So you talk about the context, this is where I'm at as a worker.

Then you talk about what you do in that context, uh, you talk about your teaching and then you go into your past.

*Originally I was just going to have people examine their professional career experiences to try and understand how they develop as teachers. But it then became very clear that participants in these classes began to talk about their personal lives. It became very clear that not only was their personal life very important, it was profoundly fundamental in the shaping of the way they teach. I realized then how deeply the "personal" in teaching is.*

*And then having understood all that, we have a ground from which to say, so what do I like about it, what don't I like about it? What do I want to change? And out of that type of conversation comes the whole notion of creating a professional development agenda that is yours --deeply personal, and professional, that you want to pursue in the future.*

*So there is logic to it. There is an organic flavor to it, and there's structure to it.*

PRESENT, PAST, FUTURE...logic, organic flavor, structure. To examine the organic flavor, we can start by considering the attitude of the participants. Attitude of participants is a significant environmental influence for the garden of collaborative autobiography. Will there be rain or drought? Heat or cold? Sun or clouds? Hard, unyielding soil, or fertile soil?

Josh spoke slowly and deliberately to me as we talked in his kitchen:

*You've got to come to this course with an accepting attitude, accepting of yourself as well as other participants.*

*...I think had I had a better attitude going into this course I would have got more out of it.*

Stuart explained why some participants did not blossom like others:

*...one of the things about that course is that we respect each other, and all the struggles that we may have had in the past, and where you are going, and are you prepared to do something about that? There were students who sat back and were really not prepared to share their story. They're the ones who probably will not grow as quickly as the ones that were prepared to share.*

Ken was very enthusiastic:

*I took the course because I genuinely wanted to take it...even before we got the syllabus, I had heard from other students about the impact it had made...*

Dave and I met in his science lab after a hot day in school. He greeted me in his usually sardonic style. Having taught all of my teens Physics and Chemistry, I feel we not

only share a bond as colleagues, but also as teacher and parent. Dave was dressed in his usual western shirt, and wranglers, topped off with an attractive pair of leather boots. He carried a large mug of strong, black coffee-- the kind that burns over the long hours of the school day. I graciously accepted his offer of a coffee, to be sure this was only to be sociable! In an indifferent manner he explained:

*...I'm a person where discussing my own life doesn't make an impact on me. I don't think my own life is particularly neat, cool, fun, or groovy.*

Jen complained:

*...we just present this material, week after week, and in the end, we get an A and walk out and for what? 500 bucks a course. I think a lot of people are starting to look at this, we're consumers, and so far, I'm really sorry to say it, I don't know what I learned.*

For Dave the ground appears to be hard and unyielding; for Jen the soil is unresponsive, lacking fertility. On the other hand, Josh, Stuart and Ken have prepared ground, moist, fertile, and warm--waiting with expectation for the seeds to sprout.

If we consider the ecosystem of the garden, what factors

came into play? In my research, trust was very significant. Remember here that the participants came from varying context in different classes.

Ken smiled, leaning confidently forward:

*I think he (Richard) did a great job of developing a sense of trust and everything that was shared in the room was held in strict confidence, at least on my part, and I'm assuming on everyone else's part too...everybody seemed free to share. I mean, there were a lot of personal things that people chose to share...I think that he encouraged that whole atmosphere and people could take risks.*

Ashley, sitting very straight, stated matter of factly:

*I think people are only going to tell you what they feel safe enough to tell you, and I don't think there is one thing you can do about that.*

Stuart explained:

*...one of the things about that course is that we respect each other, and all the struggles that we may have had in the past, and where you are going, and are you prepared to do something about that? At first we only put things in that I would consider in the safety zone, but as the course progressed, then we would open up a bit more and more, so it took some time...It takes times to relax and*

trust...

Jen looked at me with a quizzical expression, and taking a sip of coffee, asked--

*...did we sign a thing for confidentiality, or was it just read out as being the rules for this class? That should be up front too. I mean a lot of people knowing that you are going to be expected to share confidential things, maybe some people know that they can't handle that...the confidentiality thing is only as true as each person makes it, and I don't know those people, I don't know how trustworthy they are. ...the largest problem was the size of that class...this is a very small area and as you know there was a parent of students I taught in attendance...that's going to be someone intimidating. No matter how much you trust that person, there's still that person, the parent, who now knows something about me.*

*Were you talking about me?, I asked in disbelief. Laughter! (Actually, I thought I was the one that was intimidated, having to face a former teacher of my daughter, and a known colleague!) I'm just surprised you found me intimidating.*

*Well no, but the idea a parent is now in attendance-- you want to keep your private life separate from your career,*

*your employment, your place in that community that you work with. And here I am, talking about my emotionally abusive marriage, and the heartache, you know, embarrassing things that I certainly wouldn't be sharing with any other parent.*

I met with Bev in the beginning of July, at her home. It was a lazy Saturday morning. We sat in her living room, with a refreshing breeze blowing through the window. The street noises were at times distracting, so I finally asked her to shut the window. Bev sat crossed legged on her couch. As she sipped her water, she explained:

*...It was different for me because I knew several of the people in the class, and I have always found it far easier to talk to strangers. Because I don't care what strangers think, but I do care about what my friends think. And so for me it was kind of difficult, because I had my close friends in there.*

Josh had this to say:

*I went into the class reluctantly, but as I gained confidence in the group I started to look at myself more honestly.*

Dave, who claims to be a recluse, explains:

*...it can become quite a self-defeating exercise. You know, you can talk too much about things. You can over*

analyze.

The foregoing comments on trust illustrate that developing trust takes time, and trust develops on different levels. Contextual factors such as who is in the group, whether you relate more easily to friends or strangers, how large the group is, as well as personality types, all play an important part. Dave, who is a loner and cultivates the puritan work ethic, really isn't interested in developing trust with colleagues. Jen was uneasy with the confidentiality issue among strangers, finds the class too large, and the presence of a parent of a student intimidating, especially since she is sorting out the pieces of a broken marriage. Bev also finds it easier to relate personal aspects of her life to people who are strangers. In contrast, Ken, Stuart and Josh all recognize the value of trust; and work hard to cultivate it. Stuart acknowledges the fact that it take time to build trust relationships. Ashley is rather matter of fact, whatever will be will be.

In relationship to trust and disclosure, I asked Richard to comment on the fact that some participants feel it is an illusion that a haven of safety can be created in the context of a fairly small city and community. Richard's comments verified what I had found in my research:

*The ideal case is where you have people, from all sorts*

*of different schools who don't normally know each other. In that instance, actually, the level of disclosure goes up quite rapidly, with strangers...the group is a cluster of people in life, with existing relationships. However, regardless as to whether class participants know each other or not, it is our job to learn to speak to each other. If we learn to speak and listen to each other more, we learn to understand each others' perspectives. That creates positive relationships; in a professional sense, with co-workers--that creates collegiality. From this perspective, it is important to learn to interact with people we know and work with.*

From Richard's statement, we also recognize the importance of the oral and collaborative aspect of the process of collaborative autobiography. Like my garden whose ecosystem is determined by factors such as soil, moisture, sun, weeds, predators; the collaborative or collective nature of collaborative autobiography is shaped by such factors as attitude and trust, and in particular, in the oral aspect of the course where participants speak to each other, and listen. Telling authentic stories; listening to authentic stories. Tied into this ground of collaboration is the component of each person suspending judgment on another, and working hard to understand the other person.

What did the research participants have to say on speaking, listening and responding?

Ken referred several times to the *expertise of the circle* in my interview with him. Ken explained:

*You were always sitting in a circle, which is important to me, because that tells me that we were talking and communicating a lot and sharing stories. I think because teachers are so isolated, they want to just share their stories, because they seldom have an audience to listen to their stories...its nice to put things into perspective...One author has pictured teachers as being like an egg carton. You're all together in this egg carton, but you are all in you own little cubicle and you really don't know what anyone else is doing. Just meeting with individuals, and having an atmosphere where you can take risks and lay it all out on the line for other people to hear, and to hear that other people are struggling with the same things that you are struggling with, or looking for the same things you are looking for, I think that was very, very valuable.*

Elaine's comments on the collaborative nature of the course were:

*I think that people have that right to opt in and out of how much they want to say. I remember that there was a woman*

*in our class, a nursing student. She had had trauma in her life and she just couldn't share, and certainly we had to respect that. Some people shared more than I was comfortable with. We had a really creative person who did neat stuff. I guess we didn't know what we were doing or where we were going with it. And so--you do this, and then it was sort of the aha at the end of the road. So I guess its process.*

Ashley exclaimed, enthusiastically:

*I absolutely loved, I craved going to class every week and hearing everybody's stories. I absolutely loved that!...I'd just sit there the whole class writing things down when I listened to other people like, oh my gosh, that's just like the thing that happened to me, or, oh yea, I've felt that way too, or, can you believe this guy, is he for real? Having to listen to all of the other people, and reflecting on what they've said, helps to define and give words to what I wanted to say. I don't think I could have done it without listening to their stories.*

Ashley's perception was that in the first few weeks of her course, the teachers were not always 'authentic', and there was a lot of 'this is what you're supposed to be, this is what a good teacher does'. She felt there was a gradual transition into the telling of real teacher's stories. In her words:

*...to be honest, we don't hear a lot of authentic teachers' stories, we just don't tell them.*

*Stuart's comments on the collaborative and oral aspect:*

*You talk with emotion, people cry, uh--we comforted each other, supported each other, and we start to think well, is that healthy? Sure its healthy, because you know there are people out there who care...that sense of belonging is so critical in a person's life.*

*I think we have a lot to learn from other teachers--they are our greatest resource.*

*Bev had a somewhat different perspective:*

*I thought the course was interesting. It really, really made me think about things when I had to tell what I believe and why I believe it, and also to realize that everyone is coming from a different place. I grew up in a certain way and I had my education in a certain way. That will always affect the way I am. Other people have very different experiences in their past which will always affect the way they are. I think that I came to realize that other people had different priorities, that that's O.K..*

*Josh's response:*

*I didn't feel like people were talking down to others. It was 'why did you come to this kind of conclusion, have you*

*thought of this, and that kind of thing'. Its not that the course was always easy. When I made my presentations, I'd do it with a certain amount of trepidation. On the other side, I found it invigorating to be able to say the things that I had hardly even been able to say to myself up to that point, and knowing that people weren't going to attack me, just because of something I was saying...*

*The collaborative aspect falls apart when you have people who aren't going to be involved in that. The group I was with, we were sink or swim together!*

*As I talked with Dave in his chemistry lab, I found his attitude to the collaborative aspect rather indifferent:*

*I remember having to write autobiography things but I don't remember what the topics were about. I remember writing it and discussing it at great length with everyone in the class, and I don't remember what the outcome of it was...talking about myself doesn't have a big impact on me...To me to sit around and talk about what I did, I'm not sure how profitable that is. To me, its like do it, if you don't like it fix it. If you like it, keep doing it.*

*I probably would have gotten more out of the course if I had been a full time grad student...by ten o'clock at night, I just want to get my marking done, cause I've got to get up at 6:30 the next morning.*

Jen claimed to have had an *unsettled feeling* about the collaborative process:

*...a whole semester, it was just too long, and the size of the class...basically the whole thing was presentation, that was it, Richard said very little. It was just presentation of people's lives, and uh, tears, and they were upset. After a point in time, its too much already I think. Like 14 life stories to go through.*

*I do remember walking out of there embarrassed because I said too much...you think, jeeze, I probably sounded really stupid or I wonder what they thought of that and worry about people's perceptions, and I wish I hadn't said that! I realized later in a group therapy course that that's a danger thing therapists watch out for...so they're trained in knowing how to keep people safe. Participants may not realize that they're probably not ready to share that yet.*

*The rule about don't be judgmental made it difficult...we could never say anything with the slightest hint of negativity in it...you couldn't really be authentic or inspired.*

In looking at the ecosystem of our collaborative garden, we saw that six out of eight of our participants viewed the collaborative aspect of the course--speaking, listening, responding--as a positive, enriching context. Ken valued the expertise of the circle. Elaine viewed the collaborative

process as a gradual journey of self-discovery, with people opting in and out as they desire. Ashley loved the ground of stories. Definition of self grows out of this ground. Ashley also recognized the telling of real, authentic stories is a gradual process. Stuart keyed in on a sense of belonging, which roots out weeds of insecurity, and isolation. Bev saw life through others eyes as a result of sharing stories. She understood why each plant grows and develops, bending this way and that, according to contextual factors. Finally, Josh found that horizontal relationship between colleagues and teacher invigorating. He recognized that if all participants don't speak, listen and respond; there is the danger that the collaborative process may fall apart. No matter how many healthy plants I have, my garden can be destroyed if predators, such as deer, invade it. Further, even a few small pigweed can grow in a short space of time, spreading their seeds around, and choking out the young plants growing close to them.

Two out of eight participants did not view the collaborative process as a desirable, necessary component of the environment suited for our collaborative garden. Dave preferred to grow on his own, without the input of other people. Dave took the course when it was compulsory. Dave was also a part-time student, and being pragmatic, was primarily concerned with getting his papers marked for the

next Chemistry class, and getting up the next morning at 6:30. Jen was unsettled about the various plants around her. Was she in danger of being suffocated from the 14 other plants in close proximity to her? Jen was uneasy. Listening to 14 life histories was just too overwhelming for her. She was unsure of herself--not knowing what or what not to share, embarrassed about sharing too much. She had lost a child, suffered through an emotionally abusive marriage, and at present wanted to separate her private life from her career.

In terms of suspending judgment when she responded to others stories, she felt she could not make authentic comments in response to others' stories because she had to refrain from making any critical (negative) comments. Jen took the course since it has become an option. The questions arises as to why she took it?

I asked Richard: What about the issue of suspending judgment in responding to other teacher's stories? What about sacrificing our authenticity?

Richard: *By listening to each others stories without judgment-- and this is the whole point of the class to try and do that--you then begin to understand the other person's thoughts and actions through their perspective, and can understand, perhaps for the first time, why they do what they*

do that you may have disagreed with.

The question to ask is: 'What is it most desirable to be in interpersonal relations?' Is it most desirable to be critical and judgmental, or is it most desirable to suspend judgment and be non-judgmental? ...Had I had more than one course with you guys, we would have moved through a sequence from being empathetic and non-judgmental and suspending judgment, to inviting people to be critical friends where we could be invited to be critical...

Here Richard makes it succinctly clear that one objective of walking through the collaborative autobiographical process is to cultivate interpersonal relations, specifically by first of all being able to listen to others in a non-judgmental way.

Behind every successful garden is a conscientious, caring gardener. Early and continuous weeding to rid the small, tender plants of dandelions, pigweed, thistles, quack grass, and volunteer wheat is essential. Indeed, if I am not sensitive to my garden, weeding, watering, hoeing, fertilizing, coaxing when needed; my plants in the end will suffer, become overstressed and stunted in their growth.

Richard Butt. Facilitator. Gardener. A most significant factor in couching the context of the collaborative garden.

Sitting in Josh's kitchen over a cup of coffee, Josh seemed very excited about Richard's leadership:

*I developed a friendship with Richard because of his course...and I think that's a testimony of his understanding of people...Richard had an easy-going, laid back personality, which is what I needed--I identified with him. I found Richard to be a fascinating teacher.*

*Richard was open with what he was saying--he gave us a sketch of his background and how he came to be the way he was from his perception...that really encouraged the rest of us to do the same thing...the other thing I found encouraging was we seemed to be on the same level. It wasn't that Richard was up on a pedestal and the rest of us persons were down here.*

*Richard developed a rapport with a wide variety of students. He was very diplomatic too.*

When chatting with Elaine in her university office, she stated:

*I just found Richard very encouraging and validating...he also had a great deal of sensitivity for each of us...*

I found Stuart to be very open in his discussion of Richard's influence on the class:

*It was a wonderful course. I also remember the closeness of the class, that is, how close we got as we started sharing some of our stories. I think Richard did a remarkable job in setting that up, and typically if you get into a classroom of 16 people or students, you don't bind as quickly as we did.*

*Richard is a very open person, and he likes to share his stories, and he not afraid to do that.*

*I developed a friendship with Richard as well, because of this course and because of my first meeting with him, and I think that's a testimony of his sensitivity and understanding of people...Richard is a mother up there, playing a mothering role, and providing safety nets and all those things.*

Sitting in the grad grotto, I listened to Ashley pour out her feelings about teaching and the TLSTD course. Out of the blue, she stated, *I really didn't get a sense of Richard at all in the course.*

"What do you mean that you didn't get a sense of what Richard is about?", I queried.

*I felt he was being real honest in the whole course. What I mean is, a lecture course where a professor has done a lot of talking or direct teaching, lecturing, you have a sense of that professor. What he wants, what his expectations are, that sort of experience. I did not walk away from this course thinking it was Richard Butt's course...this is what he wanted me to do, and this is what he wanted me to say...I had more of a feeling that it (the course) belonged to the group, that it was our group's course rather than Richard's course.*

*I had more of a sense that it was our course, and we determined what was discussed and what issues were brought up, and that kind of thing, more than he did.*

Bev, a very relaxed individual, responded contemplatively about Richard's role as facilitator:

*I had Richard in my undergrad degree as well, so I knew him. I know that in our group of 12, there were some who got a little offended with Richard I think. I don't know if that's the word I should use. He would tell his story, and it seemed to get very repetitive, he'd always to back to the same story. We heard it the first time, and maybe it brought a tear to the eye, and then the next week we'd hear it again, and the next week we'd hear it again. I don't know if he was forgetting he had told it to us, or maybe it was just something he was working through and therefore needed to bare*

*his soul.*

*But I found, I guess what he would do, instead of allowing other people to discuss, a person would present, and instead of the rest of us discussing, Richard would talk about it and then go on to the next person and so other people wouldn't really feel that they could discuss it.*

*Again, I think we had a different kind of class. A friend of mine thought, this is just ridiculous. If I want psycho-therapy, I'll go to psycho-therapy. And I think that changes the tone of the class. I'm not sure we had the best class to go by.*

"Do you feel that people weren't willing to talk that much, so that's why he talked?", I asked?

*Well, that's what I'm wondering. Maybe he just thought, oh, I don't want the negative things coming out here, so therefore I'll fill that gap, and we'll continue. As an instructor you have to make those decisions. Who am I to say he made the right decision, or the wrong decision.*

My friend Dave, whose interview was by far the most difficult, simply made the following statement:

*I remember the class, I remember Richard taught it. I remember writing my autobiography, that's all I remember. I don't remember anything else about it.*

Jen was never at a loss for words, it seems she was glad to have a hour just to sit down and talk with a colleague. Jen felt that Richard needed to provide more structure:

*That was the very first course I took therefore I remember it quite well...I didn't know what to expect of a Master's course...I guess it was a surprise, because it wasn't structured, or concrete you know. It was hard to know exactly what to do, you didn't get a lot of direction. When its your first course, its so important because you don't know what is expected of you. And when its openended like that, you don't know if you are doing enough, or if you are going the right direction.*

Touching on another issue, Jen commented:

*I think it should also be held in conjunction with someone who is trained in some kind of guidance or something, because you know issues come up, and those are serious, potentially dangerous issues. People can't be going home upset because of what they've brought up.*

*...And I think before people sign up, they have to understand really what they're getting into, and that course outline I don't think reflects the um--you know--maybe do a synopsis of past classes, have included--um--talks of personal experiences of schizophrenia. If people are worried about bringing those old things back up, they won't take the*

course then, and they shouldn't take the course then, if they're not ready...

The things that came up...hmmm...for example the suicide thing, that is scary stuff, and that's being brought up again without a trained therapist or someone to have that person leave with the thing OK again, or you know, those are dangerous topics even for trained therapists.

I continued to probe Jen's thoughts. Now Richard mentioned to us that he was going to be a co-learner with us in that class. He wasn't really regarding himself as the 'teacher' in the traditional sense. Do you think he achieved that or not?

Jen's reply:

I don't know if that was what we were looking for at that time. I didn't really want a partner or co-learner. There was 14 of us. I had 13 other co-learners and partners.

How do we make sense out of all these comments? On the whole, participants saw Richard as facilitator, overseer, 'gardener', in a positive light. Josh painted a picture of a friend, open with his own story, encouraging, relating on a horizontal level, and diplomatic in relationships. Elaine pictured Richard as a sensitive person who encouraged, as well as validated, individuals. Stuart considered Richard to be a friend as well as a facilitator who was able to

cultivate the ground, so to speak, in a way which effectively developed a bond and sense of closeness between participants. Richard as 'mother'. Stuart used a powerful metaphor here to show the care, sensitivity, bonding, sense of concern and protectiveness that Richard conveyed in short, the nurturing qualities. Ashley realized Richard helped to couch a context which encouraged freedom and liberation to determine the direction and content of TLSTD, that is, to claim ownership of the course. Ashley did not get a sense in this process of a structural layout of expectations. Bev chose the course largely because she knew Richard from the undergrad program. Bev felt Richard sometimes did too much talking about his own life story, but acknowledged 'we had a different kind of class', and recognizes that Richard may have made a conscious decision to 'fill in the gap'.

Dave was indifferent about Richard's role as gardener,--displaying neither positive not negative feelings.

In contrast, Jen was adamant that Richard needed the assistance of other gardeners--a trained counsellor or therapist, in order to deal adequately with volatile forces that invade the well-being of the garden's eco-system. Whereas Josh welcomed Richard as a co-learner, and an individual he could relate to on the 'same level'; Jen shied away totally from the idea of being Richard's co-learner,

actually preferring the traditional hierarchial structure between teacher and student. Unlike Ashley, who welcomed a ground where participants could largely define context, Jen appears to thrive under more defined structures.

Again, as in the environment of a flower garden, for example, different plants thrive in varying conditions, due to their individual natures. We know that marigolds, tulips and pansies, for example, can bloom and thrive in most soils, with little care from the gardener, and endure sun and wind fairly well; whereas roses thrive only under the nurture of the gardener, a fertile soil, sheltered conditions, constant pruning and application of various pesticides for insects when needed.

Back to last July 1996--I am sitting with Richard at the University of Lethbridge, having a most engrossing conversation. We are talking about levels of disclosure within a collaborative autobiographical setting. In this case, we are discussing oral levels of disclosure.

I posed the question to Richard:

*Have you ever felt that a student has disclosed something you felt you really needed to be dealt with but it was kind of like, OK, now you're done your story and we'll have to get on to the next one. Have you ever felt that has*

*been a problem in this process?*

*I have sometimes felt that, Richard replied. But I felt that the class was not the place to carry on that type of discussion, therefore, it was left. If I felt strongly about it, I would talk to the person concerned and suggest that they might think a little further about this issue or concern. And I have done that. Not very often. Indeed, I might write back to them when I write in response to their assignment --wondering about questions about some of the topics they raised. Not behaving as a therapist and saying hey, you've got a problem here, and you should do this. I would just ask a bunch of questions and ask them how they felt about it, and what they might want to do about it. But if this is in response to the larger and more difficult class that you were in, I think we had a lot more people than usual in that class who were functioning in very stressful lives. A number of them had been laid off work and all that sort of stuff. That made the class character quite different and much more challenging, in order to manage the sorts of issues you're talking about. But generally, I haven't encountered this as a regular, ongoing, continuing worry. If it had been, I would have done something about it. With your class I learned a lot, and would handle it differently if I encountered another group like it.*

In this discussion, Richard lays out various strategies for approaching participants with serious concerns. He talks to them privately, outside of class; as well he writes comments and questions on their papers. I remember when I participated in the TLSTD class, after completing each paper, we had a private discussion with Richard over the paper. In this way he could reinforce his comments, (or interpret them), and the understanding between facilitator and participant is greatly enhanced. I also think these 'meetings' increased the depth of understanding of individuals for their personal and professional lives.

Richard has outlined ten themes which describe how he views his work as facilitator/co-learner in the process of collaborative autobiography (Butt, 1990, p.261). Richard strives for a pedagogical relationship which is as horizontal and collegial as possible. He risks himself by engaging in the same activities as the students. He regards pedagogical theory, which is relational, as something that he must live, as well as think. His prime interest is liberation and emancipation through individual and collective action.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SELF-DISCOVERY**  
**THROUGH COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Outcomes. Gardens. Different contexts, yet common problems, common keys to producing different crops.

Mary, a friend of mine, has a green thumb with gardens, in particular, flowers. Her garden is prolific with roses of all shapes, sizes, colors, and fragrances. I asked her what her secret was. The secret behind her beautiful roses was--garlic and marigolds, she said! Garlic and marigolds. The main enemy of the roses is the butterflies which deposit eggs on the roses. Large marigolds, two feet tall, have an offensive odor. Planted near the roses, the marigolds begin to stink and the butterflies leave. With the marigolds, Mary never has to spray her roses. One year she tried pulling up the marigolds, and the butterflies all came back in abundance to lay eggs. The garlic also gives off an offensive odor. If the patch of garlic is disturbed on a regular basis, the butterflies definitely don't like that!

Another strategy Mary has is that she refrains from planting the cabbage family--broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower--as these plants also attract butterflies and breed lots of insects. Radishes are another plants that attract butterflies. Thus each plant in Mary's garden grows individually, and yet works in harmony with other plants to produce certain effects.

Mary lives in town, so has some problems with clay deposits in her garden. By experimentation, she has found that grass clipping, distributed on the clay areas, aerate the soil. With some fertile soil mixed in as well, carrots grow much better. Varying problems within the garden plot. Trying new things each year. Taking risks.

In my study of collaborative autobiography, there were eight different gardens, or contexts; eight vastly different dynamics--participants representing varying personality types and work ethics, and stages in their personal and professional life. As I have studied the ground in each of these, come with me now to reflect upon the 'produce', the outcomes. From this study, I will pull together common factors which ultimately develop a sense of being or consciousness.

One question basic to determining outcomes from collaborative autobiography is the following:

How did the sharing of teachers' life stories, in a collaborative setting, impact on your teaching practise?

Ken began by referring to his frustration at being caught up in all the different curriculum that gets "pushed down our throats by Alberta Ed". Ken explained he gets frustrated by covering things in class and yet feeling he hasn't "really done anything well". Ken continued:

*..and so, the whole notion of teaching kids, and not subjects...I think I've been successful with a lot of integration--killing two birds, or three or four or five birds with one stone type thing...*

*In terms of unit plans, a lot of language arts, social studies, science things together. So I'm teaching science concepts within a language learning context. So when we're writing letters with social studies concepts in mind, taking action and you know writing letters to the editor and that sort of thing, so before we discussed this and we might do some writing in social studies but we would also have a separate unit in language learning. And now I'm bringing those together. We had a science fair unit this year where kids developed science fair projects, but we also used*

language learning time because there's a lot of organizational writing skills--higher thinking skills involved in that. And so integration was a big thing.

...just talking to colleagues and finding ways to get kids involved in the process, as opposed to just me doing everything, uh, getting them to evaluate themselves. Peer evaluation. Things like that allowed me to have more time to conference with individual students, as opposed to me with my nose in a pile of papers to mark...

...not too long ago, our school undertook this writing process you know, where kids would conference with each other, they brainstormed for ideas, all the rest, they started webbing and they do a lot of collaboration...your program has to revolve around your philosophies. That affects your evaluation and if you are teaching that way, you have to think of alternate ways to evaluate, whether its individual portfolios or whatever...

Over in the grad grotto, I suggest to Ashley that we talk about the specifics of her teaching practise.

Is there anything you do specifically now as a result of being in the course that you didn't do before? I inquired.

Ashley replied:

No, not a thing. My attitude during the course and immediately after the course, was quite negative towards what

I did, because I realized--oh my gosh, what am I doing this for, this is glorified babysitting. Sometimes. Sometimes I'm doing really good hard teaching and sometimes I'm just killing time. I really thought about that. So I had an attitude adjustment for the negative for the first while. And then after that I figured, hey, I probably do this better than most people. So, (laughing), what am I so worried about? And I relaxed a little more, and just enjoyed the kids more.

Speaking with Stuart from behind his principal's desk, Stuart made the following comment:

I think Richard would argue this point, but it really validated some of the things I'm doing in the classroom as a teacher. So it made me a stronger person, as a teacher, that is. I'm doing things I believe are right, and I started understanding why I was doing those things, why I'm doing the things that I do in the classroom.

Could you be a little more specific? I queried.

Stuart replied:

One thing, I was a strong believer in rote memory skills...through all the years I was teaching I was using that as my main strategy. But I failed to recognize that other students have different learning styles, and because

they have different learning styles, I was including certain segments of the classroom, but not all the classroom. So I started adding a lot of other different stations; I started looking at individuals. I started looking at oral views, and hands on type of things, so I really tried to make the normal environment for everyone, for all students. So that's what I did, and I wasn't afraid of moving away from the rote memory strategy.

...and another thing that happened to me which was interesting--I hated public speaking. And when I presented with Richard there it was quite the worst presentation that I had made...I was so nervous and uptight...I was an assistant principal at the time and I needed to improve my public speaking, or speaking out in public. So I started working on that, and I'm a lot more comfortable now than I've ever been in my entire life. And I would have to say it's because of that course. Often in other grad courses, you need not present in class; you need not talk in public. In Richard's class you need to do that, it is part of the course. At first I was fearful of what might happen; I was a little uneasy about it. But as I spoke after that it became easier and easier. But again, in a larger and more formal situation, I was really uptight.

I asked Jen whether she had made any specific changes in her teaching as a result of the course. Jen, in a reflective

way, explained:

No, I probably just stayed on what I was doing, but I felt better about what I was doing. You know, I worried, well gee, I'm not really quite like the other teachers I know. I knew I wasn't a teacher who liked to send home things that involved the parents, like have your parent read to you 15 minutes a night. I knew from my life experience I don't have 15 minutes, and to most teachers that sounds petty, and what kind of parent are you? I felt well, maybe I was wrong, and the same with a lot of my--I tend to be more relaxed in expectations than others. I start to think, well gee, maybe I'm the odd ball. I think I realized those are good traits. And I think those are traits that help me definitely with special education, like you said in the kitchen, isn't that overwhelming or frustrating or something? I think for me it's not, because I just do what I can and I can let it go, and I can also accept what my students can do, and let it go if they can't do more. And I accept what parents can do and then let it go. I don't get frustrated because everyone's doing the best they can. It might not be the best I want to see them do, but that's the best they can at that moment in the time of their life. I don't push anyone to do things they can't do at this time...Maybe every child needs to have that kind of teacher as well as the other kind of teacher.

Relaxing in Bev's living room, Bev chatted freely about the effect of the course on her teaching practises:

*I have taught more in a whole language way. When I moved over to the other school, I was informed that I had to buy these new reading text books, and I said but I wouldn't use them...But I still had to buy them, because I couldn't argue that one away. So I bought the text books and they sat on the shelf and I didn't use them (laughing). It wasn't long before the other grade one teachers came to me and said, well, what are you going to use then, if you're not using these texts? So I ended up sharing ideas and things...they ended up doing a lot more of the things I was doing.*

*Another thing I did with another teacher--in another Masters course--I walked into class one day and I overheard another teacher say, all I want to do is teach art and no one will let me, so I said well, come teach my art then. So we set up a time, and she ended up coming into my classroom and she taught me how to teach pottery which I had never taught before. It was really neat because I was enthused about it.*

Sitting at Josh's kitchen table, I discussed his teaching with him at great length. Leaning back in a chair, Josh commented:

*...I think what I've done over the past few years is to create a more varied type of assignments...previously I had a lot of just writing like essays, response things, and this*

kind of thing. A lot of writing. Now I've done more in terms of dramatic types of reproductions, more artsy types of things. Things that are going to allow a variety of responses...these kinds of things that I didn't do before.

Picture the science lab, and Dave, seated on his high stool, with his arms crossed.

What did the course do for you as a person? Did it have any impact on you? I queried.

I wasn't aware. If it is, it's been internalized. None that I'm aware of.

So that makes it really difficult for me to ask you how the course (TLSTD) has affected your teaching practises or your teaching beliefs, I offered.

Yea, Dave agreed, I'm not saying it didn't, I'm just saying, anything that may have occurred would have been internalized in the last nine years. I don't remember things from nine years ago. I'll be real rude here. The only two grad courses I remember the details of are one I did on nuclear chemistry and one I did in bio physics. But that is because I use the detail of those courses every day in my work so I refer to those, I refer to the texts, I refer to

*the work books.*

In contrast, Elaine was a research participant who did a lot of internalizing and reflecting, both during the course and afterwards. In terms of being an administrator, Elaine explained:

*One of the things that came out of the course was that I established by priorities based first on people, and then programs, and then paper. And certainly in one of my stories, I talked about my desk being piled high with things that had to be done. As I reread that a few years ago, I thought, yea, because I've always dealt with people. The kids come first, the programs are second to the kids' needs, and then reports get done on time mostly.*

In reflection on the foregoing comments by research participants on the their teaching practise, we can observe the following. Five participants strongly felt that sharing teachers' life stories in a collaborative setting impacted directly on their teaching practises. Discussions with Ken, Stuart, Josh and Bev and Elaine revealed significant changes in their teaching practises. Ken and Bev referred to a move to active, child-centered teaching, teaching 'kids', not 'subjects'. This embraced a move away from text books to hands on activities such as science fair projects, collaborative writing projects, and pottery making.

Similarly, Stuart described a deliberate move away from his early *forte* as a teacher--rote memory skills--to a more varied learning style, including learning stations with hands on projects. Josh related that he was more creative and risk-taking in giving assignments, launching out into more artsy and dramatic types of things. Elaine, in her role as part-time administrator, placed the kids before programs and papers.

On the other hand, three participants, Ashley, Jen, and Dave; did not see a significant change in their practises as a result of sharing in the collaborative autobiographical process. Ashley reported no new teaching practises. Jen agreed, saying she did nothing different, but perhaps felt better about what she was doing. Dave, the pragmatist, text-oriented participant, also reported no changes to his teaching practise as a result of participating in this course. It is interesting to note that all of these people were part-time students.

The second basic question. How did the sharing of teachers' life stories in a collaborative setting impact on your teaching beliefs and philosophies?

Ken stated:

*Well, I think what it did is that it got my mind set changed, and encouraged me to really take time for reflection, and to think about why I do the things that I do...everything I do as a teacher or as a person revolves around my philosophies about things. Its very interesting to take time and say O.K. why do I actually believe that...and I think that was one thing that made a really big impression on me...*

*I see that beliefs come first and then the pedagogy, although that doesn't mean that you beliefs can't change. You may talk to a colleague or whatever, or do some reflection on your practise and say, 'well now, I'm not very happy with this and I want to try something different...And that's the kind of neat thing about being a teacher is that you have that freedom to do that, sure, you have certain things to teach, but how you teach them, is really up to you...I think that good teachers are constantly searching for a better way....*

*I think this course epitomizes process...I think that if anyone walks away from this course it won't be because they learned a particular thing, it will be because they learned the process of sharing and reflecting and all that kind of thing. So its content versus process, the two opposing ends, we struggle with that in the classroom today....*

*The other thing that impressed me is the whole idea of*

themes. Richard is very big on themes. And I must say especially in my role as an administrator, I find myself using that technique a lot, where I gather information and then all of a sudden I'm thinking along the lines of themes.

Elaine explained:

It helped me to understand who I was as an educator. It really empowered me. I was teaching English as a second language and there was no provincial curriculum. I had done post-graduate work at Carleton University...the post-graduate work in linguistics didn't translate into practise so I was really working to identify who ESL learners were, how they learned, and what my role was as a teacher...this course clarified that process and validated that process...

My beliefs and practises were really compatible...I think I was able to articulate them as a result of that course...I think I changed in terms of being very confident.

In dialoguing with Ashley, it was evident to me that she had done a lot of thinking during and in this course.

One of the things that came out of the course was that I felt a lot more confident about my voice as an individual teacher, and that I could differ, or view, or say anything that I felt and saw that weren't necessarily reflection of teachers around me, or the school board, or principals, or superintendent...trying to be the good teacher you spend so

*much time saying back to people what they want you to hear...you are afraid to voice some of your concerns, your strategy, your personality...After this course I felt a lot more confident about talking about what I really did, and not what I was supposed to do...*

*The course made me analyze why people, why I teach there, things that I've had to do to be a successful teacher there, it made me question why I do them...*

*Stuart was eager to share his philosophies as a teacher and an administrator with me.*

*...we all became risk takers, and many of us were probably not risk takers prior to that...*

*...it validated some of the things I'm doing in the classroom as a teacher. So it made me a stronger person, as a teacher, that is. I'm doing things I believe are right. I started understanding why I was doing those things in the classroom...*

*Because of the self-esteem building, the self-confidence and risk taking, I was able to take that giant leap to teacher change...*

*I also believe that everyone has a past, past experience to be specific, and that we bring that to where we are at the time. When I deal with students I'm not looking at just the student--I try to find out where they are coming from, and why they are the way they are, and if they need to have*

*special support, or they need to be talked to in a different way, or a different manner, I'll do that. So I treat people as individuals because I know that they all have a life story...they're not all like sheep, looking the same and saying things, they're so different. If I can't treat them with that kind of respect then I'll never be able to communicate with them. Likewise the staff. I deal with the staff the same way--they're all different.*

*I really believe in ownership, so when ever someone comes up with an idea, and it becomes a public thing, I make sure they get credit for it...The other thing is that the administrative side is very collaborative in nature and I think its partly from the course and understanding this whole notion of people...you have to respect people because they have a lot of strengths, again, they're individuals, and they have something to offer...*

*There's another thing about this course that I should mention, I was never visionary enough...you do develop lesson plans and your time lines and stuff like that, but I never took stock of my life and said, where would I like to be in so many years?*

The positive effect of the course on Jen's teaching beliefs could be summed up by one simple quote:

*I learned one thing, that you are your curriculum. And it made me sit back and take stock, and think, and see why I*

*do things differently, or have different expectations of kids and parents than others might have. Its different with every person, that comes from your background, and your own experience.*

Bev expressed her feelings about changes in attitudes and beliefs the following way:

*I think I've always been kind of a leader. I think I had more of an idea what direction I wanted to be headed after I had taken the course, because I was forced to sit down and think about it. When you're forced to sit down and think about it, put something in writing, then you really have to believe that. You can't truthfully present that to a group if you can't truthfully write that...*

*It made me realize that everyone is coming from a different place. I grew up in a certain way and I had my education in a certain way, that will always affect the way I am. Other people have different experiences in their past which will always affect the way they are. I think that I came to realize that other people had different priorities, and thats o.k...*

*Just an appreciation of the other people that I worked with that I learned things from. You know, just the fact that I have certain strengths, but I can't respond in every way. Therefore you have to link up with others, so you have others' strength to help out.*

Josh could not say enough about the positive, and mind stretching experience he had had in this course:

*I think it's my perspective on students that has sort of changed...I started to look at them more like individuals. They're also in a stage of life just like I was...Hopefully, I'll be able to have a positive influence on them in some way. I also know that, okay, it's just one little slice of their life.*

*...I think I started to have more fun! Before I looked at it as okay, there's all this content. Later on, I realized, maybe content is not as important as process--relational development that takes place. So I started looking at students more as people, than as learners...*

*It allowed me to accept myself as a person, so it gave me self-confidence. So know when we discuss things as colleagues, it's not necessarily that okay, if we disagree, uh, that doesn't make me any less of a person. It doesn't make me question myself.*

*...in that course I took risks that I don't normally take. Its changed my teaching, as I've been taking greater risks...I've never produced dramas before...so, a couple of years ago I did "Fiddler on the Roof" in school. And this last year I did the "Wizard of Oz".*

*I figure you have a couple of options. I mean, either it goes or it succeeds, if you've failed, you learn something*

*from it. If you succeed, hopefully you learn something from it too. I changed...oh--we need somebody to teach Shop. Well I've never taught Shop --oh, I'll do that! You know, taking risks and knowing that okay, if it doesn't work, fine.*

Speaking with Dave in his lab, I got the following reply about the impact of this course on his beliefs:

*...talking about myself doesn't have a big impact on me. I'm far more impacted by other people's ideas, and dealing with them. My own ideas are relatively pedestrian.*

In analyzing the research participants' discussion of their teaching beliefs, we can observe the following. Seven out of eight of the participants saw a direct, positive correlation between their participation in collaborative autobiography and the shaping and change in teacher beliefs.

Taking greater risks in life and in teaching was a strong theme. Ken, Stuart and Josh explained how they were willing to take more risks and implement changes in their teaching as a result of taking risks in the Richard's course. Ken referred to the freedom to try new things, pointing out that good teachers are constantly searching for a better way that is open to change. Stuart explained that Richard's course stimulated him to become more visionary, looking into the future. Because of gaining more self-esteem and self-confidence through the collaborative process, he was able to take risks and that "giant leap to teacher change".

Josh was super enthusiastic about the risks he took in the course that he would not normally take. As a result, his teaching was changed, in that he had confidence to try new things such as produce dramas and teach new courses. Josh believed that if he tried new things in his teaching, he would learn something whether it succeeded or not. An important idea for him to realize personally, was that if something did not work, it was alright!

Another major theme was that the process of analyzing, sharing, and reflecting in collaborative autobiography, both in a written and oral mode, was an invaluable experience. With the exception of Dave, all research participants described how, by taking time to say why do I actually believe this, they were able to examine, redefine, and finally articulate more clearly their teaching philosophies and beliefs. The participants described how this re-articulation of teaching beliefs had translated directly into change in their teaching practise, and in their relationships with their colleagues, and in some instances, their staff. Further, in some cases such as Ashley's, there was deep reflection on why I teach where I teach, and a change in teaching position was effected.

Some examples of reworking of teacher beliefs are as follows. Elaine worked to identify the who, and how of ESL

learners, and what her role was as teacher of the same. Stuart came to believe students have a past experience which is specific and unique to them, and will ultimately determine what type of instruction they should receive. Stuart came to the belief that whether from the point of view of administrator or teacher, people are not like sheep. Whether students or staff, they each need to be treated respectfully; understood and communicated with uniquely and differently. Josh also commented on the new perspective on students which he had gained as a result of Richard's course. Josh had begun to look at students as people, rather than as just learners. He later came to realize that the relational developments taking place in the process of teaching were more important now for him, than content. Josh commented that he had relaxed in his teaching, and was having more fun!

Bev explained that insight into her attitudes and beliefs as a teacher related to the fact that as colleagues, we are all different and have varying strengths. As we link up with others collaboratively, like links in a chain, we become stronger and more effective as teachers. Jen explained that the underlying "aha" that she had had in the course was that as teachers, we "are the curriculum", and again realized that uniqueness factor determined by varied background and life experiences. As a result, Jen realized why she has different expectations of parents and students

than other teachers.

A third major theme coming out was that of teacher voice. Most participants referred to this theme in indirect ways. For example, Elaine referred to being empowered as an educator. It was Ashley, however, who expressed teacher voice so succinctly. Ashley stated that she felt more confident in Richard's course than she ever had about her voice as an individual teacher. Because she was not required to work in partners in Richard's course, Ashley felt free to find her own voice in an individual sense. She gained confidence about voicing her concerns, strategies, and personality--about her authentic self--personal and professional. Ashley felt freed, for the first time, from expectations of school boards, principals, and superintendents.

David is a research participant who isolated himself to a large degree in Richard's course, partly because he as a part-time student and the reality of everyday work pressure of high school weighed heavily. Dave claimed to be a 'recluse' and did not seem to see much purpose in discussing his own ideas or life.

## **Personal versus professional life**

Since completing my research, I have mused over the question: Do the personal and professional lives of participants parallel each other? By professional, I am referring to the teaching careers of the participants, and their related teacher beliefs and practises, in their relationship to students and their colleagues. By personal, I am speaking of the nature of the participant and their personal beliefs, as well as their personal life, past and present.

Let's go back to Elaine in her university office. As we talked, Elaine made the following observation:

*As I was working through the project, Richard said to me: "You have dealt with your professional life, but what about your personal life? Until you deal with the personal part of your life you're not going to understand the professional part, it won't be significant". It was really interesting. I made maybe five statements of my personal life...what it showed me was my personal life very much paralleled my professional life. So when I got home to Lethbridge, I came back as a single parent trying to find my way, as a single parent, determined to be successful as a single parent.*

*At the same time, I had moved from a very traditional*

*life style, personal life, into becoming a single parent. Professionally I had been in a very traditional field. Home economics was very traditional. I married into traditional roles. My ex-husband was a career diplomat and roles for diplomatic wives are very prescribed. And so, that paralleled the professional in home economics.*

*All of a sudden, I became a single parent and moved into a teaching assignment that had no directions. So the processes, personal and professional paralleled each other, and you know, I really appreciated Richard saying in my project, "you've got to deal with the personal". That really empowered me. The connection was sort of "aha" at 3:00 am.*

*Returning to Stuart in his principal's office, he told me that the notion of family was very significant to him in his personal life. Stuart continued:*

*I did indeed operate and organize my classroom with a sense of family, a sense of community. People say we throw that term out quite loosely, but I was actually doing that. I was practising what I was preaching, and each member of the class was part of our family. They had rights, they could share, and it really made me feel good inside that I was accomplishing what I wanted to do and what I had set out to do. And another thing, it made me stronger in terms of staff development. I started to analyze some of the things I was doing and saying, 'I'm doing this because of this experience*

*I've had or because of this influence I had in life from a significant other'.*

Josh reiterated the same point several times:

*I looked into my background...I looked at the reasons why did I become a teacher, and why was I the way I was in high school? ... Through the course, I examined what are the stages, what happened in my life to turn me, a very stupid person, into being a teacher, teaching other people some things.*

*...I quite strongly believe that if I can assess how I learn, I'm sure others must learn in the same way. There are going to be differences, but I feel in certain situations, I'm sure others may have similar types of feelings. So then I can recognize this, that maybe some of these things need to be recognized.*

What about Bev? In her relaxed style, she continued very matter-of-factly:

*I didn't mind the course; I thought it was interesting. It really, really made me think about things to tell what I believe, and why I believe it. I realized that every one is coming from a different place. I grew up in a certain way and I had my education in a certain way. That will always affect the way I am. Other people have different experiences in their past which will always affect the way they are and*

*how they teach. I think I came to realize that different people had different priorities and that's OK!*

As we chatted in the grad grotto, Ashley continually reminded me that her working reality was quite different than that of other class participants. In explaining to me how she 'survived', Ashley said, with laughter,

*I probably realized that although my life is very stressful at work, it's very calm at home! I have a very solid sense of family, and a very solid sense of self, and I'm very comfortable there. And so, you know, I can have a very stressful job, and I can go home and vent and do whatever I have to do to get up the next morning and feel good about myself. That helps a lot. If you went home and had to deal with a lot of stress at home, I don't know if you could do it.*

Jen generally viewed the process of collaborative autobiography as an invasion of her privacy. As we chatted at her home, she told me:

*You want to keep your private life separate from your career...for some of us, the things that molded who we were, the homosexuality, and the schizophrenia, and all that kind of thing, we didn't really want to share because those things are still hurtful and they're also private.*

Back to the science Lab, Dave stated, rather emphatically:

*I have a whole other life outside the classroom. I really enjoy this part of my life, but when I go home, I'm busy with a whole bunch of other concerns and a bunch of other studying that is unclassroom related. I also think that's healthy.*

How do we weave the threads of these comments into a pattern? If we reflect on Elaine, Stuart, Josh and Bev; we can conclude that they journeyed far enough down the road of collaborative autobiography to understand that who they are as teachers certainly parallels who they are in their personal lives. Indeed, what, how, and why they teach parallel their personal lives-- present, past and future. For Elaine, changing from a traditional role in her home as wife and mother to that of single mother, parallels a change in teaching to a new area with more flexibility. Stuart saw his personal notion of family being played out in the structure and processes of his classroom. Josh believed his past, personal life directly relates to his development as a teacher. Josh also discovered a significant parallel between how he personally learns, and how his students learn.

In contrast, Ashley, Jen and Dave compartmentalized their personal and professional lives. Ashley contributed her survival in the constant trauma of her teaching reality

to the personal calmness and comfort of her family at home. I wonder if she has considered that the solid sense of self at home also transfers to her teaching reality, thus giving her that confidence to approach her work with boldness and creativity? Jen and Dave both totally believed in separation of private and public lives. Dave stated, that in fact, this separation is "healthy". We need to keep in mind that Dave took the TLSTD course when it was a required core course.

I am finding that even in a small research sample, there are conflicting opinions about what roles our personal and professional lives play, how the two should or do intertwine and connect with each other. For the purposes of this study, I am reflecting on my research according to the premise that there is a parallel between our personal and professional lives, that in some way, one will always reach out and touch the other.

## **Reflections**

Last week I was hiking in Waterton. I viewed the vast array of wild flowers waving at me in their friendliness and brilliance. The colors were all there: sunny yellow, fiery red, dazzling white, pure purple. These paintbrush colors were starkly bold against the canvas of long, waving grasses and other greenery, the multicolored rocks and the sweet smelling evergreen saplings. What a beautiful and

harmonious scene, a natural garden. Perhaps these were the personal and professional ahas of my research participants--natural, colorful, spontaneous, and breath taking in their perfect and untouched beauty.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EVALUATION

In terms of evaluation, I ask: how significant are teachers' stories, in the context of Richard's course, in terms of contributing to teachers' process of self-discovery, both personal and professional? My research revealed that six out of eight participants felt the course/process of collaborative autobiography had a tremendous impact upon their personal and professional development. On the other hand, two participants felt the course/process of collaborative autobiography did not impact positively on their teacher development.

In pondering over the interview with Jen, the same problematic issues keep resurfacing over and over again. In a recent telephone conversation, Jen reiterated that during Richard's course she had struggled with what she saw as lack of adequate class structure, lack of adequate teaching methodology, and an unsafe venue created by what she saw as 'over-disclosure' of some participants.

During the conversation, I asked Jen whether the package sent out to her prior to the course had not helped her to realize that there would be 'personal life stories' told

within the class (see Appendix B). Jen's reply to this was that "she had no problem with telling personal life stories, but she was not prepared for the depth of disclosure in the class, which was emotionally unhealthy for some participants". Jen goes on to say, "I do remember walking out of there and feeling embarrassed because I had said too much...I realized later, that that's a danger thing therapists watch out for...they're trained in how to keep this person safe".

Jen was a member of the large class with people who had been laid off, and many people stressed. Also, she was an exception to the 'rule' on disclosure--both Butt and Abbs agree people will only disclose what they are ready to disclose.

Jen also pointed out that there is a significant difference between Richard retelling his life story, which he has done numerous times and has obviously dealt with the pain; in comparison to graduate students in the class who may be sharing their stories for the first time and find this an emotionally traumatic experience with a high degree of risk.

What about Richard's story? How does he feel about 'telling his story'? Does Richard, in fact, perceive that he himself is taking personal risks in his classes? Several

excerpts from my dialogue with him certainly shed light on these questions.

*I do risk myself in that class, and I have told my story a number of times. Its not that I haven't told it before, so that is different, you know, I'm accustomed to it...so in that sense I'm not taking the same risks. However, the degree to which I examine my own life, professionally and personally, I go a lot further in order to get to the point of personal risk. ...And in every class that I've worked with, there's always been something new that I've disclosed, new that I've discovered. You know, you keep on interpreting and re-interpreting your story constantly, so I feel that I am constantly pushing back the edges of my stories, and penetrating the layers of the onion that happen to be my life. I've reached a place that's quite scary, actually...*

*I feel I have to risk myself in a new way in every class in some degree or other, on one of the questions or the other. It might be in discussing a really tough personal, professional relationship that just occurred in my working reality. It might be that I've just discovered something about my teaching for the first time that isn't nice, or that is very nice. Or it might be that I've got to another layer in my personal history, going back to my childhood.....I believe in this process, and if I keep practicing this process, it can only make me a better person.*

Another totally unrelated issue, but an issue that also held a negative impact for Jen was that as part of her professional development plan for her school she had included for the year her Masters of Education, specifically Richard's course. To this her principal had responded that he would not accept this as personal or professional development.

Dave was the second teacher finding no particular personal or professional benefit from the course. As told throughout, Dave represents the classic 'recluse' who holds to the puritan work ethic, and prefers to go for a quick fix professional development workshop where he can gain knowledge or skills. Dave was a part time student, so from the pragmatic standpoint, he *"never got into the university mileu"*.

Josh, as extreme enthusiast, believed people *"have to know themselves...and feel good about who they are"* before they can be teachers. Symbolism played into Josh's self-discovery. He explained how basketball was important, not just the sport, but that through it he gained *"identity and acceptance with other people"*. He went on to explain how he discovered that things in our life are more significant than they appear on the surface and we need to look for these meanings. For Josh the collaborative context was a safe setting to explore his personal and professional beliefs; a

setting in which he took risks which later rubbed off on his teaching and led to curriculum changes, and changes in his teaching practise. Richard's course also helped his look ahead more at the goals of his teaching.

Ashley evaluated the course positively in respect to teacher voice. Ashley saw the course as a forum where, for the first time, she heard and experienced authentic teacher stories. Ashley found that the opportunity to express herself individually, yet collaboratively, in this course was a unique feature.

Consider expertise around the circle. For Ken, the physical structure of teachers sitting in a circle and telling stories told him we were talking and communicating a lot, and allowed him to break out of isolation. Indeed, Ken evaluated the collaborative aspect of this course highly, because with the collaborative context he knows that implementation of changes in teacher practise are more likely to happen down the road. Ken also enjoyed the spirit of collegiality in the context of grad students telling teachers' stories. Ken was fascinated with the themes drawn from the process of collaborative autobiography--he now uses themes in his administrative work. Telling teachers' stories allowed Ken to examine his beliefs and eventually see the significance of process in teaching. Reflection. In

Richard's course, Ken found he was encouraged to go deeper beyond the everyday realities of just teaching. Why? The class itself provided him time. He also spent time preparing for class.

Significant in Ken's evaluation, was the fact that he believes all teachers are researchers and are looking for ways to change; looking for better ways to do things. For Ken, Richard's course also became a venue for research.

Stuart's thought Richard's course should be a core course, claiming that it was the best course he had taken at University. Telling teachers' stories helped him develop the insight that teachers are our greatest possible resource. Stuart's evaluation was positive in that he saw everyone had ownership of the course, which leads to ownership of ideas and the ability of individual teachers to develop their strengths.

Stuart, however, did not see the process of collaborative autobiography as an easy process. In his words: *"It was a very difficult course in terms of writing because you do a lot of soul searching...I would sit at my computer and have mental blocks...yet I found it refreshing"*.

Stuart appreciated the closeness of the class, including

Richard, whom he viewed as a 'friend' or 'mother' providing safety nets for the students. Other highlights resulting from Richard's course that Stuart mentioned were: breaking from isolation by discovering other teachers have similar stories; developing personal strength and self-esteem; developing changes in his personal teacher practises; and the sharing of visions and dreams for teachers and students.

In an administrative context, Stuart has, with Richard's assistance, adapted a modified model of collaborative autobiography with five secondary principals who sat through the process. He described the sharing of teacher stories in that context to be helpful.

Bev saw both personal and professional benefits from Richard's course. Personally, she was able to look at where she came from, and where she was going. Professionally, Bev said that because she had to do written assignments, she was able to better formulate and articulate her teacher beliefs and the reasons for these beliefs. Telling of teacher stories gave her an appreciation of "other spaces" people were in, and gave her the idea of linking up with another teacher who was strong where she was weak.

Elaine felt the process helped her with the rest of her grad studies, because it urged her to look for 'personal

meaning' in all her courses. For Elaine, walking through the process of collaborative autobiography was "one of the most significant professional development activities I ever took". Elaine found Richard's course validating and empowering.

Jalengo, et al., (1995), confirm that teachers stories contribute to the process of self-discovery and growth in five significant ways:

1. Teachers stories invite reflective practise.
2. Teachers' stories chronicle growth and change, new revelations of meaning occur.
3. Teachers' stories promote the ethic of caring.
4. Teachers' stories help teachers to find their voice--uses the singing voice metaphor--helps teachers to feel they are members of the choir.
5. Teachers' stories can enhance cross-cultural relationships.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Collective recommendations**

The following collective recommendations to maximize teacher development in the course, Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development, were taken from comments made by my research participants.

1. The most significant recurring theme was that classes should be smaller, no more than ten people. One suggestion was to divide a group of 12 into two groups of six. This would require another facilitator which is difficult. However, smaller groups are less threatening. After everyone presents for the first time, Richard may have an idea of their style or interest and be able to group them. This way people who may "know each other too well" could be separated. In a three hour class, have a 45 minute focus on something (maybe an article), then break into these small groups. Another person suggested that Richard build in some activities in class to work in a team of four. It was felt that this structure would

enhance real trust and foster relationships.

2. Teachers' Stories could be scheduled in Spring, with a Practicum following in April, May and June. Goals have been identified; the Practicum is the plan of action. This would give a follow through, with support, to achieve effective practises of professional development. This Practicum could be linked together in the timetable as Teachers' Stories I and Teacher Stories' II. Another suggestion for a second course was as follows. Part of it could be doing a further, in-depth analysis of the teacher's life with Richard. The teacher could go over the story with him and search for further meanings.
  
3. Several people thought more course structure is needed. One person believed a plan of action in the section on the future would be beneficial. This plan of action would ultimately be implemented in some practical way, for example, in a Practicum. Each participant could outline goals, strategies to achieve goals, and who would work with them, (colleague, administrator, spouse), to achieve these goals. A timeline could be set in order to monitor progress. This plan would work as a

transition between the course and reality. In general, more use should be made of the collaborative 'circle of expertise' in the class. Have the group of participants brainstorm suggestions and ideas about possibilities for each individual. Another person felt more structure could be provided in terms of required reading, (articles or texts), to show why collaborative autobiography is effective in teacher development. (Given that Richard does hand out articles at various points throughout class, I found this to be a perplexing comment). This person felt that these articles should be discussed formally in class, which was perhaps more to the point of what was really being said.

4. Several people were concerned over the issue of safety. One person believed there was an inadequate support system in place for people undergoing emotional trauma in their personal or professional life, and that Richard should be working in conjunction with a guidance counsellor. Other problems were cited which worked against the development of a spirit of trust, such as the fact that because Lethbridge is a small city, 'news travels fast', and participants know each other too

well. To interject here--I would suggest to the person undergoing trauma that it is the responsibility of a person undergoing severe trauma and/or counselling to ask themselves seriously whether or not it is in their best interests to participate in a class such as Teachers' Stories.

5. Two people said Richard could be somewhat less repetitive with his story, and that the class itself should have more time for discussion. On the other hand, most participants saw Richard as an effective role model, a friend, a 'mother' providing guidance when needed.

**Personal reflections on recommendations.**

I am now looking at these recommendations through my own personal lens, having been a participant myself in the largest class ever with 16 people.

I would endorse the recommendation that classes be smaller, ten or less, and if the class is larger than ten, that there be formation of smaller groups. Smaller circles would lend themselves to a more effective climate of trust, and give more time and flexibility in allowing participants to share stories with each other. I personally found

listening to fifteen other stories too 'heavy'. Our class was not only exceptionally large, but was working through many emotional traumas such as crisis on the job, job loss, and personal problems. With smaller classes or groups, each participant would have less issues to process. There would be more time for discussion. Each presenter would benefit to a greater extent from the 'circle of expertise' in the collaborative setting. More importantly, each person would have more practise at exercising non-judgmental thinking, and be better able to develop strong interpersonal relationships with their colleagues. The idea of coming together as a whole class for 45 minutes in a three hour class is a good one. Here, one important thing would be to share themes from the teachers' working reality. In this way, all participants can feel the impact of experiencing, collectively and individually, that they share common problems, concerns, and crisis in their professional lives. Also, Richard could possibly use this forum for dividing the class into smaller circles because he would then become aware of individuals with similar interests and concerns.

The idea of having two Teachers' Stories courses could be effective, especially if the Practicum would allow the teacher to put an identified goal or vision into practise, either as an individual or in a collaborative setting. Personally, I was able to follow the Teachers' Life Histories

course with Ed. 5500, Understanding Teaching and Teacher Development, also taught by Richard Butt. Since the first part of this course was taught in a manner similar to Teachers' Stories, I was able to further examine patterns and issues in my professional life as they related to my teaching practise. I was also able to try my preferred ideas at a new teaching style, a dialogical and more collaborative style, with a piano student in my private piano studio. I tried a totally new approach during the second semester with Erin. I was able to examine some new ways of thinking and tinkered with new ideas and materials in approaching my piano teaching. To me this was, in a sense, a Practicum. I would recommend a Practicum as an experience which would sharpen and further shape the process of collaborative autobiography.

Concerning the issues of safety and inadequate support for those undergoing emotional trauma, I will deal with these in more detail in my epilogue. As I have previously pointed out, each Teachers' Stories class presents different contexts and challenges for Richard. In approaching these challenges, Richard may employ a somewhat different teaching style from time to time. For example, in our class, Richard did more talking for various reasons: one, to model non-judgmental thinking; and two, to step into the gap when intense emotional issues arose. I would agree with my research participants who see Richard as a sensitive, caring person. However, he is not a therapist. There may be some argument

for Richard limiting discussion of personal life histories only in so far as they impact on professional issues and concerns. But who will make that judgment call and set boundaries? To limit discussion of personal trauma and/or anger would be judgmental thinking which is in opposition to the free inquiry of collaborative autobiography. So in the final end, it is not desirable in this process to limit disclosure which individuals feel they are, of necessity, ready to make. There is, in fact, no completely safe remedy or recipe for the process of collaborative autobiography.

One argument here may be that we should more seriously take up the recommendation of having a trained counsellor in class, or available to the class. Unfortunately, however, this approach moves the ordinary personal or professional dilemma to the realm of the abnormal. A counsellor or therapist is not desirable in that we, as participants, are striving towards quality interpersonal relations which are part of normal personal and professional life. Integral to collaborative autobiography is a working towards an ability to converse in personal and frank ways in order to stimulate collegiality.

Given that the Teachers' Stories course is now optional in the M. Ed. Program, clearly, the Daves will not have to take it! Hopefully, the Jens will take a more careful look at the course outline which is sent out three or four weeks

prior to the first class (see Appendix B), and consider more seriously as to whether or not this is the type of work they wish to take up or not

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EPILOGUE

Memoirs from the TLSTD course

The lens I am looking through now is my autobiographical lens. These comments include my personal comments on the process of collaborative autobiography, and things as I see them.

I came to graduate school with a profound sense of isolation, both personally and professionally. In TLSTD, I painted the changing metaphor of the waves which form the ocean of image, sounds, and happenings...all intermingling to form the text of my life.

In my first presentation on our working reality, I wrote about my professional life as a substitute teacher. I explained that I felt like I was in an artificial calm in the eye of the hurricane. I was isolated from everything; including the storm going on in the conflicts, tension and frustrations on the educational scene. I exposed my sense of isolation from colleagues, including administration; and in student-teacher relationships. My prevailing mood throughout

was blue. Surprisingly, at the end of my oral presentation in class, I brushed over the fact that being isolated from the storm brought a certain sense of pleasant comfort and nostalgia.

During the discussion with my colleagues in class, one person said--"I detect that even though you are experiencing a profound isolation, you are also in a sense enjoying the fact that you are isolated from the rigours, tensions and stresses of the daily grind".

I remember in the next class, we put common themes on the board which flowed from our discussion of our working realities. One major meta-theme that emerged was that of isolation in the professional context. I was simply amazed that so many of my colleagues felt the same as I in a class of 16, especially as none of them were substitute teaching! In terms of loss, Richard asked us how we could make the transition from separation and alienation to that of relationships? Survival and coping mechanisms surfaced. It was suggested, among other things, that we have a sense of humor and learn to live lightly.

Both the statement by my colleague and this discussion

made a tremendous impact on my personal outlook. Add to that two other factors: first, Richard's role model in that he had maintained quite a sense of humor as he guided us through the process of sharing our teaching reality; second, the support of my colleagues in the class and the validation that it's alright to feel isolated as a teacher, and a lot of the rest of us do as well. This resulted in my second piece of autobiographical work on teaching practises being in a tone totally contrasting from the first. The tone was lighter, and I was able to couch my stories of teaching in a wonderfully humorous way. Also, through the process of writing and speaking, I was able to identify positive qualities I possessed as a substitute teacher such as: increased tolerance for students, spontaneity, creativity, perceptiveness, flexibility, resiliency, and intuitiveness. This was an "aha" time for me, as I thought "wow!", I really do have some positive things here in the art and craft of my teaching.

The next section which included a look at our personal life history, as it relates to teacher development, was a re-discovery for me, sometimes painful, sometimes healing. As I looked at my childhood, as well as my undergraduate years, I found it difficult to glean a lot of memories.

However, a particularly traumatic time for me was my early adolescence, and the nervous breakdown of my brother, who is a chronic schizophrenic. I found myself switching into the third person in my writing in order to deal with the pain of the incident, whereas the rest of my writings were all done in first person. In my life history section, I wrote mainly about three crisis times in my life: when someone you love has schizophrenia, the death of the family farm and our farm crisis, and the death of my father. In this section, particularly, there were disclosures I made to myself, which never got down on paper. I put these aside mentally, for future autobiographical work. Some of these memories were too personal to share with the class. For the oral presentation, I chose vignettes from the farm crisis. I knew I was ready to disclose this publicly. And I wanted the rural to touch upon the urban.

I found the last section of autobiography which projected into future vision most difficult. There are reasons for this: the context of my particular personal life, and the gap I find in my career from being a mostly full-time mom for a number of years.

The oral.

I believe in the oral tradition as it relates to the process of collaborative autobiography. The oral tradition is personal and feeling, and involves relaying one's own experiences. My experience is valid in and of itself. I offer my stories to my colleagues for whatever they can use, or not use. Telling my stories always involves recognizing and declaring my own individual reality. Naming my experience is part of my self-empowerment. As I speak my life, I become more aware of the patterns which connect us to ourselves and each other. There are clues in our stories. Gifts. Borne from the depths of our lives. Offered in the spirit that my journey might light a candle in the life of another person. To share my story is not easy. Wounds, old or new, hold pain. My decision to touch them is not taken lightly. Fear comes up. But telling my story brings healing. It empowers me to get beyond that experience, look to the future, and start to go on with my life--one step at a time.

Emotional and ethical issues flowing from life history stories.

I acknowledge that there are ethical and emotional issues that may flow out of the process of collaborative autobiography. As you have read my research, you have seen

that one research participant saw the process as being highly emotional and traumatic. This person claims issues such as suicide and schizophrenia were brought out in the class context, and were not dealt with adequately. It was also suggested that other issues, such as homosexuality, lurked beneath the surface.

In our class, suicide was a recurring topic. In one class, a colleague who was a vice-principal in a native school up north, had experienced the suicides and lived through the wakes of several students. It was very traumatic for him to re-live this pain, and present this to the class even though his personality is light, well-rounded and he has a unique sense of humor. We were both full-time students so I was able to give him some support in this. Obviously, he chose to present this aspect of his professional life, and therefore felt he needed to. I thought he was able to present the suicide issues in such a way that certainly did not offend or disturb me. Richard also played a key role in keeping the class focused.

At a later date class, however, another participant chose to discuss the suicide issue in relation to a schizophrenic brother. Richard was absent. I chose not to go to the class because of who was presenting, and because I knew our instructor would not be there. So I cannot report

on this class, except to say that I heard there were many tears. I do know that earlier in his teaching, there was another time Richard had missed a class, and he believed his absence had been good for the group. After that, Richard practised not being in class at an appointed time.

The ethical and emotional issues arising in the process of collaborative autobiography pose a complex question which I can not adequately deal with in this one-credit project. I agree with Richard and Abbs that individuals will only disclose what they feel prepared to disclose, and what they are comfortable with. On the other side of the coin, those who are listening, may not be in the proper 'space' to absorb the emotional shock of some traumatic issues.

Because I am an empathetic person, I found the emotional climate of our class 'heavy' at times. Several of my colleagues had lost jobs; several were going through personal trauma as divorce. Indeed, there was a great sense of loss in our group. Some were dealing with difficult working realities. How did I cope with this? I talked to Richard privately several times. I found Richard very approachable, ready and willing to listen whenever I went to his office. He suggested I try to find another class participant to confide in, which I did. Because we were both full-time students, my colleague and I met on a daily basis in classes

or over coffee. The light hearted approach of this person tended to balance off the tension I found in the class, and together we were able to process a lot of stuff. I believe all class participants took the confidentiality issue seriously. I know I did. So I can understand for a part-time student who taught all day, and only came to the University in the evening for class (such as Jen, my research participant); dealing with the emotional issues from the class could be problematic. I know that several times our group met together socially after class or at Richard's place, which was also a super idea for developing cohesiveness; and stimulating further discussion, collegiality, and healing.

I believe that telling life history stories is absolutely essential to teacher development. For myself, it was essential to re-count and re-live stories of personal pain and loss, and stories of professional isolation, before I could re-form my attitudes and beliefs as a teacher; before I could say to myself, "I believe I can be an effective teacher". In order to be an effective teacher, I need to understand how I became to be that teacher, and what the nature of my teaching craft really is. Sometimes, in order to develop as a teacher, our stories may go off on a tangent in order to get our focus back on track.

The individual and the collective.

Each individual takes the journey of collaborative autobiography as part of the group, but also as an individual. Each of us embarks on that journey with unique personalities, capabilities, and varying loads of personal and professional baggage. This is a fact, and differences can only be smoothed out lightly by the tutor, in our case, Richard.

The vertical versus the horizontal.

Richard shares his stories with the class, and takes some personal and professional risks in doing so. Richard does his utmost to obliterate the traditional vertical relationship between teacher and student, and bend the line to the horizontal. The degree to which this happens is really up to us as students/participants. Further, the degree to which we can put aside personal agendas and quirks and learn to listen and respond in a non-judgmental way is up to us. For myself, learning to think and respond in a non-judgmental way was a terrific challenge, and an invaluable mental exercise.

On listening.

Dialogue requires not only mutual participation, but active listening. I cannot listen to the word another is speaking if I am occupied with my appearance, impressing the other, or am trying to decide what to say when the other stops talking, am debating whether what is being said is true, relevant or agreeable. Listening is a private act by which a person gives themselves to another's word, making them accessible or vulnerable to that word.

On evaluation.

Originally 'empower' meant "to give power to". In Middle French, power meant "possibilite". To empower one, then, is to offer a gift of possibilities. An empowered teacher empowers others--allows others to open up to possibilities. This was my experience in TLSTD. The process of collaborative autobiography, facilitated by Richard, allowed me not only to design my own course, but to research the possibilities of my own teacher development.

Self-confidence increased. My professional worth was validated. I was encouraged to look for detours and sideroads, rather than view some aspects of my life as dead ends. I gained a deeper insight into my professional frustration. One example was the symbolism of the keys. I talked about my impatience at being unable to obtain keys for

my room in the morning when going into a school to substitute teach. Usually I find myself standing and waiting while the administrator attends to some other mundane chit chat or activity. Often, the keys are only on loan to me, and I go through the process again after noon hour. I understand now that the keys represent my lack of control over my teaching, and my frustration in being unable to take charge of my own agenda professionally.

The most significant changes occurred for me in my attitudes and beliefs as a teacher. Being empowered encouraged me to take new risks, and take steps towards changes in teaching practise. In my piano studio this year I am trying a new approach with use of CD's which provide unique accompaniments for students' pieces. The student plays their pieces with these accompaniments, which often include various percussion instruments. This is a totally new thing for me. It broadens the student's musical perspective--rhythm and ear. A vital part of this method is training the student to listen to various types of music, and challenging them to recognize unique qualities. Some improvisation and composition at an early age are also required. These are new approaches for me, which I find stimulating for myself and my students. I am becoming more of a facilitator in my teaching, and less of a feeder.

The collaborative aspect of the process led to a spirit of collegiality which I found stimulating. An opportunity to actively participate in collaborative research, coinciding with my work in collaborative autobiography, also helped me to translate this spirit of collegiality into action.

Teachers' Stories should be kept intact as a course in the M. Ed. program and should be offered on a regular basis. It was one of the most significant courses for me in the graduate program as it freed me from some mental road blocks in my journey in teacher development.

In walking through the process of collaborative autobiography, I discovered that research on teacher knowledge (practise and belief), can be carried on most effectively by examining the lives, stories, thoughts of teachers themselves. Teachers lives are the texts. The process strongly influenced my approach to research in this project. I have written my stories and experiences as part of my research, rather than only referring to 'the other'--other lives, other researchers, other books.

Conclusion

As educators we are autobiographers. We are the originator, creators, and constructors of our life stories, and of the thoughts, feeling and actions within them. Telling these stories helps to re-interpret beliefs, values and attitudes so as educators we can delve beneath the surface of business-as-usual teaching.

For me, the Master's Program has been like the waves of an ocean. Each new thought is a new wave which builds up in intensity, and eventually ebbs away into an ocean. Sometimes the ocean is calm, but sometimes the ocean is turbulent. My life is like the vast expanse of sand along the beach, with each wave making its own particular pattern or imprint as it washes over the shore. The ocean is a vast expanse of discovery, which is unending, its depths can never be conquered. But I see each wave as having real meaning. Although I can not conquer the ocean, each wave of my life holds particular meaning.

The challenge to me is how these waves impact upon the sands of pedagogy.

## CHAPTER NINE

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## APPENDIX A

1996 02 05

Dear

I will be conducting a research study into the impact of Dr. Richard Butt's course, Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development, on teacher development. This research will take place during May and June, 1996.

I am writing to invite you to participate in this research. You will be required to participate in one interview for approximately one hour.

If you agree to participate, your responses during the interviews will remain confidential to me. Dr. Butt will remain unaware of your identity. Your identity and that of your school will remain anonymous. The tapes and transcripts will be destroyed upon completion of the project. You have the right to withdraw from this project, without prejudice, at any time. If you wish to consult an external person about this project, you may call Dr. David Smith, a committee member (329-2186); or Dr. Peter Chow, in his capacity as the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Committee (329-2443) at

the University of Lethbridge.

I trust you can assist me in this project.

Sincerely,

Edith Enns

Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education

University of Lethbridge

4401 University Drive

T1K 3M4

Phone: 345-4277

(Please detach and forward the signed portion.)

.....

I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

NAME

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE

## APPENDIX B

### EDUCATION 5210

#### Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development Course Orientation Package

Richard L. Butt

*Learning is finding out what you already know.*

*doing is demonstrating that you know.*

*Teaching is reminding others that they know as well as you.*

*We are all learners, doers, and teachers. (R. Bach)*

*R. Bach. Illusions: Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah.  
N.Y.: Dell, 1977, p. 58.*

*Social learning necessarily implies relationship with others; not  
only as an object of knowledge but as companions on the road in  
the same process--to think with others; to decide with them; to*

*act in an organized way with them. It is a horizontal, pedagogical relationship in which all are considered capable to give and receive; therefore all are masters and disciples, parents and children. The group is the educator who leads the members along the road to permanent maturity. It is no longer a vertical relationship in which the teacher monopolizes knowledge and decisions. (Jamie Diaz, 1977)*

## ASSIGNMENTS AND COURSE PROCESSES

### **Introduction**

Much of the substance of this course will consist mostly of your personal professional stories; I will distribute readings from the literature, however, which utilize participant observer, case study, phenomenological, or other techniques that might further illuminate your understanding of professional knowledge and working reality. In sharing and discussing excerpts from our professional lives we gain further insights as to how we can describe and understand them. This creation of intersubjective meaning is a form of collective teachers' knowledge. It aims to build a description of pedagogical life that is understood by the whole group.

Besides being able to describe individually, and collectively, what our working realities are like, we need to move onto understanding why these realities are they way they are--what influences them to be that way in terms of the PRESENT and the PAST. As well, for continuing professional development and the improvement of our curricula-in-use we need to focus on the FUTURE.

This class is a non-traditional class. Besides the substance of your professional knowledge and development, this class enables you to learn a process of reflection which is meant to enable you to take charge of your own professional development throughout your career.

There is no formal text for the course: we and our professional life histories constitute the text. Furthermore, the instructor in this course is a co-participant and learner too. I will do all of the assignments along with you. I hope, through this and other means to create a "collegial" rather than vertical professional relationship.

### **Assignments**

There are four major assignments in this course in addition to one initial minor assignment. They are as follows:

#### **Minor Assignment #1**

A two-three page career profile that outlines significant aspects of your education, professional assignments and interests including such details as grade level/subject matter taught and the like. This will provide us with the series of contexts over time within which you have worked. The interactions of you, the person, with these contexts has served to shape your craft knowledge as a teacher. As well, your personal life history prior to, and during teaching, has served to shape your personal predispositions which, in turn, influence how you think and act as a teacher. This should be ready for Session 1 for perusal by your peers.

#### **Assignment Process**

#### **Overview**

Each major assignment (2-5) should be sketched out in rough ready for the class session(s) that deal with that topic. The further developed it is--the better. From your comprehensive

sketch you will select a brief excerpt that you think authentically characterizes your professional life and that will animate our understanding and discussion. Each of us will present this in class. Following the presentation and discussion of our personal vignettes for each assignment (see description of the suggested process that follows), each of us will modify, elaborate, and adapt our rough drafts into a final version which is handed in to me. I will provide written feedback. Sometimes you might be asked to elaborate further, certain sections of your writing.

### **Phases of Assignment Process for Assignments 2-5**

I suggest you start working on your assignments now to give time for reflection and for your ideas too mature. I suggest that you write daily.

**Phase One** You do exploratory writing (or tape recording) of a particular aspect of your professional life (e.g., constraints of working life) according to guidelines given later. You might use a stream of consciousness notes, literary forms, a "rational" approach, conversations with yourself, transcripts of lesson, vignettes, a day in the life of . . .  
Having left that for a while to distance yourself from it, you re-examine your rough notes or tape to try to find significant ideas, events, issues, a critical incident which might provide structure and focus for a second draft. Remember honesty, frankness, sincerity, truth!

**Phase Two** Bring this written piece to class. Share what you want and can share (in the time available) with the class.

### **Class Roles**

1. **Presenter**  
To choose, from a piece of autobiographical writing, those elements which are most important descriptions of one's professional life. Make notes of comments of peers that will aid in further elaboration of description and understanding.
2. **Participants**
  - (a) attempt to understand the perspective, feelings and reality of the presenter.
  - (b) To ask questions for clarification of the presenter.
  - (c) To ask questions that would deepen description and understanding of the presenter--use your own experiences to aid communication.
  - (d) To make notes on both presenters' and participants' comments that aid in the elaboration of your own autobiographical work.
3. **Professor**  
Is a participant and presenter, but also attempts to monitor the process so as to maximize the description and understanding that might ensue. In moving through

the process of collaborative autobiography, we suspend judgment on other people. When people are ready for advice, they will ask for it. It is important for all class participants to contribute to discussion, as this helps the participants to develop skills in inter and intra-personal communication.

Phase Three Having garnered ideas from collective discussion of presenters and participants you will elaborate, modify and redraft your autobiographical pieces to produce a polished version. Have a friend read them if you wish for final polishing and proofreading.

Phase Four Hand these in to me. I will provide written feedback for further redrafting if necessary.

### Conditions Essential to the Course

#### **Making "I" Statements**

Most of you will be used to writing papers that do not contain "I" statements. For this course it is important that your professional lives are described in a personal way. It is important that you make "I" statements.

#### **Identifying Feelings**

Feelings about certain incidents and practices colour how we think and act. They reveal key aspects of our pedagogy. It is important, then, for us to be able to identify and accurately describe feelings, and account for why we feel that way. It is just as important to identify, dig out and surface negative feelings, as it is those which are positive.

#### **Frankness and Honesty**

So that the knowledge we generate for ourselves and other is useful it must be accurate, honest, and frank. Posturing or saying what we think "is expected" or "is the correct thing to say" gives us a false knowledge base. It is important to say what we actually feel, think, and do.

#### **Non-Critical Acceptance of Others**

In order to feel free to be honest about who we are as people and teacher and what we do, it is important that in our interchanges we attempt to accept and understand what a colleague is disclosing without judgment or criticism. Our questions, therefore, are geared, as far as possible, to extending our understanding.

#### **Confidentiality**

Again in creating a climate of trust that will facilitate our discussions, it is essential that what is said in class is absolutely confidential to the class to enable frankness and honesty.

#### **Levels of Disclosure**

Obviously participating in the course requires some reasonable level of honest disclosure of how we think and act as teachers. Exactly what you choose to disclose is your choice. Usually, however, the collective, supportive, and mutually created climate of trust in the class makes one comfortable in being personal, which enriches our understanding of the teacher's perspective on

professional knowledge.

There are various "levels" of disclosure. There are issues that:

1. arise in our heads, during the course, that we deal with only within ourselves,
2. we might reveal and discuss only with a close friend in the class or me (I will always be available for such conversation),
3. we write in our assignments but do not reveal for class discussion.
4. we declare for class discussion but remain as stated before, confidential to our class.

It is your choice what you "discuss" in each of these solutions.

In deciding whether or not to disclose an issue in class there are two issues to consider. First are you ready to speak about it? Second, is the class ready to hear it?

## ASSIGNMENT TWO

### **This is the Working Reality I Experience (D)**

This is a "working" title--you may assign your own to your piece of work.

To give you an exact outline would be to "presuppose" and "steer" what you should write. You have to decide what the important aspects of your working reality are. I can offer a reservoir of words/ideas/sentences, stems/feelings from which you can pick and choose to unearth your working reality. They follow.

You might like to sit down and think about a particular day/incident. Jot down notes. Describe incidents/vignettes that illustrate aspects of your working life. In fact critical incidents or vignettes should be used whenever possible. These communicate better than just using abstract notions.

A particularly quick way of reaching into classroom realities is to ask yourself what makes me most mad, sad, happy . . . other emotions--then reach back for the situation, context, or event. Describe it. Reflect on it. Expand further. Especially address the question "why do I feel that way?"

Problems, constraints, favourite peeves, paradoxes, dilemmas, ideals, contradictions, sources of tension, fear. How do you cope with these problems and the feelings they create? Images, metaphors. Pressures. What are you preoccupied with? Sources of stress/stress reduction, conflict. Personal life/professional life interface. Are there patterns, common factors? What gives you satisfaction in your work? Describe events that characterize "satisfaction." Why does it make you feel that way?

For this piece of work please focus on finding and identifying important aspects of your working reality and its constraints; shape these aspects into some coherent portrait or description that will convey to yourself and us what you experience--where you are. This piece should include description and analysis.

The intent of this piece is to examine the context within which you work--not to describe your pedagogy or the past--that's for the next assignment.

Do not be afraid to identify and surface the very negative aspects of your job, as well as the sources of joy. They are both very important. This is one of the few opportunities, however, where you have the opportunity to be constructively negative, to surface issues and deal with them.

## ASSIGNMENT THREE

### My Pedagogy and Curriculum-In-Use

The aim of this assignment is to unearth and make explicit what you actually teach, and how you actually teach This is not (necessarily) the official curriculum, but the curriculum and pedagogy that you and your pupils' author and live within the classroom.

Describe and explain what you are committed to teach, and what you actually teach. What extras over and above the mandated curriculum do you teach? What specific things do you emphasize--or exclude? In each case explain why?

A particularly quick way of discerning your teaching style is to identify your favourite subject, topic, unit, piece of instructional material, teaching strategies, and vignettes or critical incidents. Reflect on why this is the case and how you think when you plan.

Are there different contexts which result in different pedagogies--classes of kids, different grade level curricula or subjects? What are the differences?

How do you use, adapt, modify, the Alberta Curriculum Guides? How do you use, adapt, modify, required texts or resource books? In each case why? How do you teach? What is your teaching style? What preferred strategies or ways of organizing, facilitating learning, do you have? Why? Do you have any particular routines, implicit or explicit rules, principles, metaphors or images that guide your instruction? Explain. How do you organize and manage your class? What types of interactions are typical?

Looking back on the above can you give an account of how you determine your curriculum and pedagogy? What appear to be the major factors that influence your thoughts and actions as a teacher? What concerns, paradoxes, or dilemmas affect your work? Are there patterns or images that guide your thoughts and actions?

If you choose you may use a particular vignette of, for example, a typical day, to convey your lived curriculum and pedagogy. A general descriptive account is fine too. Whatever appears to work for you is O.K. Other possibilities include:

1. documenting what you think about when you plan a number of specific real lessons--honestly--as you usually do;
2. describing one of your favourite sets of instructional resources--how you adapt it, use it, why it appeals to you. Another possibility is to take one or two favourite instructional resources, activities and describe how you use them, how you think and act with or about them, why are they preferred etc.?

## ASSIGNMENT FOUR

### How Did I Come to be the Way I am as a Teacher: The Influence of the Past?

There are two broad areas from which you can draw to understand your teaching; firstly your personal life history--all the way from childhood (your personal architecture of self, if you will); secondly your professional career and experience in different contexts, classes, and subjects.

If there are significant events or changes in context in your career that changed you as a teacher, please describe them, and give a before and after snapshot of your teaching.

What in your past personal or professional life has had a significant impact on you as a teacher? What events or episode were "educational" for you--moments of insight, moments that changed you, your outlook? Describe and explain these transformations. What gestalts, leaps forward, ways of resolving conflicts, paradoxes, or dilemmas in your teaching have occurred? Describe and explain. Identify crossroads, critical incidents, influence of significant persons, Are there positive or negative images that arise from the past that guide your thoughts and actions as a teacher? Describe and explain.

How did you respond to or initiate these events? How did you feel? What were your attitudes? How did you think and act as a teacher? How did they change--from before an "event" to after? Can you identify trends? What incidents or experiences brought coherence, helped the evolution, development, consolidation of your thoughts and actions as a teacher? What helped or caused changes in direction, ways of thinking and acting, discontinuities, perplexing problems? What helped solve dilemmas, paradoxes, problems?

Can you identify themes, patterns, trends, phases?

Select major incidents from the above so that your account reveals the personal and professional sources, influences, and processes which shaped the way you came to think and act the way you do as a teacher.

## ASSIGNMENT FIVE

### What do I want to Become as a Teacher?

#### The Future

Looking back on Assignments 2-4 take a critical and visionary stance towards your evolving personal/professional life.

What concerns, problems, sources of agitation can you identify that you wish to solve in your working life, your curriculum-in-use, or your pedagogy? How can you solve them? Alternatives? Change perspectives? Can you transcend paradoxes or dilemmas? How? What plan of action do you have for change?

Identify strengths and "growth trends" in your professional life. What new things do you want to engage to improve your classroom's curriculum and pedagogy? Why? How? What will revitalize or renew your professional life? How can you personalize your professional life (i.e. integrate your personal interests). Why? What short term alternatives, gradual pathways, transitional steps, can you identify that will move your realities towards your dream? What long term dreams, visions, do you have?

## GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS

The following criteria will be used for grading of assignments 2-5.

	Low					High
1. Quality of written expression	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Comprehensiveness of your account of the particular aspect of professional/personal life addressed by the assignment.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Appropriateness of the manner of presentation.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Clarity of organization.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Clarity and depth of description.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Clarity and depth of analysis.	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Appropriateness of vignettes, examples, description, patterns identified concepts, metaphors, images, critical incidents, persons, events, etc. appropriated to assist reader in understanding.	1	2	3	4	5	
8. Creativity.	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Coherence and internal consistency.	1	2	3	4	5	
10. Degree to which reader is able to understand your context and how you feel, think, act as a teacher/person with respect to the substance of the assignment and why.	1	2	3	4	5	

TOTAL: 100

A+	96 - 100		B+	87	89
A	93 - 95		B	84 -	86
A-	90 - 92		B-	81	83

**Please Note:**

I will not be assessing the quality of your thoughts, acts, or experiences as a teacher/person. Those are not subject to our judgments or evaluation in this course. They, whatever their quality, must be revealed as they really are--with frankness and honesty. The above rating scale will be used to evaluate the quality with which you are able to express and communicate about yourself as

a teacher, and the degree to which the reader can understand your personal/professional modus operandi. I also realize that this approach to evaluation is essentially one of subjective connoisseurship on my part. I have tried to make it explicit through using the above scale. Any problems should be talked over with me. Also, if I err in marking it usually is on the side of being overly generous.

November 13, 1996

Dear Student:

I understand that you have enrolled in Education 5210, "Teachers' Life Stories and Teacher Development," for Spring, 1997. I am writing to bid you welcome to the course. In preparation for the course I would like to suggest that you start a journal of reflections and recollections that relate to the questions in Assignments One through Five. May I suggest you spend a few minutes each day reflecting on these questions and make some unstructured notes, from which you might evolve rough drafts of these assignments. You could record aspects of your working reality--critical incidents--for Assignment Two. You might note special or troublesome aspects of your teaching, as they occur, for Assignment Three. This course requires you to engage in some significant reflection on your teaching and life history. I think it is essential, therefore, that you at least "rough out" your responses to the assignments--get a head start. We can use the class process to polish and elaborate them further.

This course is based on your professional experiences. Assignments will need to be adapted to suit your particular circumstance. For example those of you studying full-time will base Assignments Two and Three on your working context prior to this year of full-time study. Those of you who are not in the classroom at the moment for other reasons will base Assignments Two and Three on the last experience you had of teaching. Some of you may be part-time administrators--please base Assignments Two and Three on the teaching aspect of your job. Those of you teaching in other contexts, e.g., college and adult education should adapt the assignments and assignment questions accordingly. There may be students who are teaching little or not at all who might wish to base their assignments on whatever working reality, working style they are engaged in at the moment. Please call me if you need assistance with the adaptation of assignments to unique situations.

Session I will provide you with an overview and introduction to the course, Sessions 2-4 inclusive will address Assignment Two, Sessions 5-7 will explore Assignment Three, while Sessions 8-11 will examine Assignment Four, and Sessions 12 and 13 will speculate on Assignment Five.

Might I draw your attention to the first assignment which requests a quick career profile; please could you bring this with you to the first class? This minor assignment will not be graded. Please note that you should make two copies of each assignment, one to be handed in, the other to be kept for yourself. Finally, I wish you to note that if you choose to take this optional course, you will be involved in personal introspection and sharing of some aspects of your professional practice and related personal life experiences which illuminate how their professional practice has evolved.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Butt  
Professor

RLB/ji

Enclosures

P.S. There will be a materials fee for the course materials (maximum \$20) due the first class.