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Warming the souls of children: quilting as pedagogical (patch)work

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WARMING THE SOULS OF CHILDREN:
QUILTING AS PEDAGOGICAL (PATCH)WORK

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B.Ed., University of Lethbridge, 1978

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I dedicate this work to

my family.

“Our family is like a patchwork quilt
With kindness gently sewn...
Each piece is an original
With beauty of its own...
With threads of warmth and happiness
It’s tightly stitched together
To last in love throughout the years...

Our Family Is Forever”

Linda Coleman (1989)
Abstract

There is a current movement in education and in the business world to bring spirituality and a sense of community back into the schools and workplace. Spirituality in the context of this paper refers to a sensitivity or attachment, not to any one religion but to common values. Soul in this document refers to the spiritual principles embodied in human beings. This project provides evidence of how quilts, the act of quilting, and the stories of the quilt, tie past to present, serve to bond individuals, and arouse emotions and sentiments, demonstrating how, through both the product and the process, quilts and quilting contributes to the moral fibre of human beings. This project outlines the importance of establishing communities for our children that will nurture their souls and serve as a place to which their souls may come home. It further examines the social institution of quilting as an exemplary model of a learning community. Quilting in this project was examined from a historical perspective, through a reflective writing process, and by actually working through the quilting process, to create a finished quilt of community and children, for community and children.
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Introduction

The beginning is the most important part of the work.

Plato, The Republic

My project title is *Warming the Souls of Children: Quilting As Pedagogical (Patch)Work*, pedagogy being the art of teaching children and patchwork being a work composed of various figures or colors sewed together; anything formed of ill-assorted parts. This project involved working through the process of actually making a quilt in parallel to writing as a reflective practitioner. The concept of making a quilt appealed to me for a number of reasons. It fulfilled my desire for an activity of interest that would involve manual dexterity and produce visible results, one that would provide balance to my lifestyle, filling a gap that many professionals experience in today’s world. The product of much of what we do nowadays can be stored in a tiny portion of a magnetic array on a disk. I wanted to create more than that. I wanted to create something that would provide visual and tactile gratification. I wanted a project that would involve social interaction. Quilting met all of these criteria as well as serving my writing metaphorically.

Laurel Richardson (1994) wrote of the metaphor as a literary device, serving as a spine. “It bears the weight, permits movement, is buried beneath the surface, and links the parts together as a functional, coherent whole (p. 519).” The essence of the metaphor is to understand one thing in terms of another. “Metaphors external to the particular piece of research prefigure the analysis with a ‘truth-value’ code belonging to another domain (p. 519).” My quilt has served as the metaphor around which my writing has come together.
It represents the stitching together of parts, those parts being the disjointed issues surrounding a classroom teacher.

So much of what we do as teachers is intangible, cannot be measured. W. Edward Demmings quoted by Senge (2003), a purist when it comes to statistics, stated that he believed that only three percent of what really matters in education can be measured statistically. What comprises the other 97 percent? Because the majority of learning that occurs in dynamic classrooms cannot be measured statistically we are seeing a rise in qualitative research regarding schools. Systematically, we need to measure what we are doing. As educators we leave behind a legacy. We need to be continually reflective practitioners to ensure that the perspective from which we are operating embodies our core values. We are deeply accountable. All we do shapes individuals and further shapes society. We need to seek out a deeper sense of what we are doing and why we are doing it. Too often we expend our energies searching externally for the “silver bullet” while the answer lies within. Reflective writing jars moral consciousness; it challenges one to question one’s own assumptions. The quilting and writing experiences provided me with opportunity for reflection. They provided a method of discovery and analysis. I had the opportunity to stand back from my daily practice and look at the big picture and then to zoom in on the details. As professionals we tend to become so immersed in the small picture that we forget to surface to look at the big picture and vice-versa. This quilting/writing project provided me with the opportunity to zoom in and out and to look at things in terms of other things.
Both the quilting and writing have provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my practice, my beliefs, and my values and to ponder their origin. Kahil Gibran, (1987, p. 54) wrote:

And a man said, Speak to us of Self-Knowledge.
And he answered, saying:
Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the day and nights.
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge.
You would know in your words that which you have always known in thought.
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.

And it is well you should.
The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;
And the treasure of your infinite depths would reveal to your eyes.
But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;
And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.
For self is a sea boundless and measureless.

Say not, “I have found the truth,” but rather, “I have found a truth.”
Say not, “I have found the path of the soul.”
Say rather, “I have met the soul walking unto my path.”
For the soul walks upon all paths.
The soul walks not upon a line; neither does it grow like a reed.
The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless pebbles.

As the bits of fabric came together to create a pattern so did my thoughts and writing come together to take shape and provide meaning. My writing/quilting was the piecing together of my lived experiences as the eldest of five sisters, as a mother of six ranging in age from six to 28, as a seasoned teacher with 24 years of experience, as a mentor of students and intern teachers, as a passionate child advocate, and as a child blessed with cherished childhood memories. My quilt speaks to all who share my vested interests in children. The voice of my quilt is my voice coming into chorus with so many
other voices, all of us reverberating the need to bring the soul back into the schools, the work place, and the home.

To explore the human soul requires that we look at social organizations. It is through the social organizations of community, family, work place, social groups, and school, that our souls are shaped and textured. My quilt speaks to how stories written and unwritten nourish and link our souls. My quilt speaks of the role of community to plant those seeds and of the role of community as a place for the heart to come home to in times of adversity. My quilt speaks to “currere.” Experience and thought are interwoven throughout my text, stitching together “the individual’s lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience” Aoki, 1988, p. 416).
Quilts: Their Stories/Our Stories

A civilization flourishes when people plant trees under whose shade they will never sit.

Greek Proverb

Long before women had the right to voice their opinions much less host an opinion, quilting provided opportunity for them to tell their story. It was through the medium of fabric and thread that women symbolically pieced together, their narratives. (McClun and Knowles (1997) wrote that

a quilt is more than fabric, batting and stitches. It is a rare and wonderful creation of the soul which expresses our personal statements, our likes and our dislikes, feelings thoughts, and loves. It links us with those who’ve stitched before and those who will follow, and it gives a wordless but meaningful description of who we are and what we feel. (p. 13)

Quilts are representative of the rigor of daily life and of significant historical events. Quilts served to relate myths, legends, personal accounts, biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, commemoratives, and personal accounts. Gonsalves (1976) wrote that “to learn about quilting is to become aware of the past through other quilters’ eyes” (p. 33). She points out how “even the names of patchwork patterns tell volumes about a bygone way of life.” (p. 33) The quilt patterns Whig Rose, Clay’s Choice, White House Steps, Lincoln’s Platform, and Old Tippecanoe recall important political figures and events. The Mexican Cross Pattern, from the 1840s, is a haunting reminder of an almost forgotten war. The daily life of early America are echoed in patterns like Indian Trail, Bear’s Paw, Log Cabin, Prairie Queen, Old Maid’s Puzzle, Churn Dash, The Reel,
Melon Patch, and Rocky Road to Kansas. From the westward movement of the settlers came Cactus Flower, Cowboy's Star, and Roads to California.

Perhaps one of the most profound quilt stories are those of the slaves who used colors, patterns, and knots in quilt designs, which were hung in plain view to communicate to one another. Messages in the quilts served as maps, showing them the way to freedom.

On behalf of the National Museum of the American Indian-Smithsonian Institution, Terman, (1997) outlined how Native American history also leaps boldly off colorful quilts in patchwork designs and patterns. Native quilters incorporate both traditional and contemporary designs on their quilts. Some tell their stories using figures and drawings of their ancestors. Others are inspired to use traditional designs in a more contemporary format. To Native Americans on the plains, the Morning Star announces a new day-a new dawn. It represents fresh beginnings and serves as a reminder to give thanks. Reservation life brought dramatic changes to the lives of Native Americans, cultural traditions survived through perseverance and adaptability. One example of this is the replacement of buffalo robes with Morning Star quilts. The Smithsonian Institute further examined how quilts and quilting activities strengthen and unite Native communities. People got together to make quilts and the quilts were then used in traditional, sacred honor ceremonies, naming ceremonies, and giveaway ceremonies. The act of giving is a vital part of Native culture. A traditional giveaway ceremony embraces many aspects of Native culture. In a giveaway ceremony an individual or family honors others or celebrates a special family occasion by actually giving them possessions. Quilts
are often given as gifts to honor. Traditional ceremonies and celebrations reinforce an individual’s place in his or her community.

Gonsalves (1976) notes that because the Bible was often the only book in early American homes women often gave their quilt patterns names such as Jacob’s Ladder, Star Of Bethlehem, Joseph’s Coat and King David’s Crown.

“A multitude of hidden meanings and old wives’ tales are woven into the lore of quilters everywhere...quilters credited these superstitions with the power to predict future husbands and other twisted fates” attests Aldrich, (2000, p. 33). Some of the more commonly repeated superstitions include the belief that stitching a spiders’ web into a crazy quilt will bring good luck, that you should never begin a quilt on Friday and that you should never quilt at all on Sunday. If an unmarried girl puts the last stitch on a quilt, she will become an old maid; yet if an unmarried girl takes the first stitch in a new quilt, she will be the next to marry. These superstitions had an influence on the mechanics of quilting as well as the design itself. Extra care had to be taken in stitching quilts because of an English superstition that twisted or broken threads foretold disaster. While this belief dictated perfection, the Amish belief that flawless work was an affront to God, demanded imperfection and consequently, quilts appeared with intentional imperfections.

“Patterns as venerable as the Tree of Life are used on quilts” and as Gonsalves (1976) points out,

the language of flowers was the same on a quilt as in a nosegay...red roses for love, lilies for purity, and daisies for innocence. A very ancient symbol, the swastika, meant fertility and good fortune. Pineapples were lucky and brought friends closer together. Doves could be used as signs of peace, love, or innocence. (p. 33)
Like folksongs, quilt names evolved from place to place and from generation to generation. Wiles (1995) tells of how an ancient motif found in early Roman mosaics and Renaissance architecture, a simple star and one of the oldest patchwork patterns known, was brought to America by English quilters. As pioneers settled along the Ohio River it took on the name Ohio Star to honor their new home. Stitches that bind times, places, and mankind. The art of quilt making is rich with symbolism, the afore noted are but a few examples. Gonsalves (1997) wrote that

in order to have their work recognized early quilters would pile their very best quilts on a guest bed so their visitors would be sure to notice them all. There would be quilts for changing seasons, friendships, celebrating marriage, and quilts representative of their traditions. Many stories are told about quilts as a group, but each individual quilt has its own thing to say about history, economics, religion, and about its own creator. (p. 33)

Patchwork was originally a child of necessity in the world of quilt making. According to Gordon (1999)

the techniques of making quilted bedcovers began to vanish under the emancipation of women who flocked to the workplace after the two world wars of the twentieth century and the advent of easily available and reasonably priced substitutes. By the 1970s people - among them textile artists and historians - had discovered the beauty - as opposed to the utility - of quilts and began to reintroduce the patterns and skills of the quilter to a wider public. (p. 22)
Quiltmaking has won a position of permanence and great respect over the years. Abrahams (1995) points out that “quilt making draws on the traditions and techniques of many cultures and traditions” (p. 2). She says,

most designs appearing in today’s quilts are based on ancient tribal, folk and applied art patterns that appear throughout the globe. Similar recurring geometric patterns are to be found in all ancient civilizations and form part of the shared heritage of mankind. (p. 2)

Last year I went to the Spring Point Community Hall. The hall is nestled in the Foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Southern Alberta. It is the hub of the community, a place for people to come together to share good times and to support one another in times of strife. On this particular occasion the ladies came together to work on a quilt for a friend from the community who had recently been diagnosed with lung cancer. The prognosis was not good. Our ladies’ club had decided that the most precious gift we could give her would be a quilt, hand stitched by us so that she could wrap herself in it and be comforted by a sense of our love and support. While we were quilting I recalled a superstition I had read which said: “If one of your hairs becomes worked into the quilt you are making, you will be connected to the recipient of the quilt forever.” What a warm and wonderful thought! Porter and Fons (1994) wrote that “quilt makers have always used the work of their hands to express feelings...quilts carry messages, speaking as eloquently as words” (p. 2).

We presented the quilt to our friend with a note of dedication that read, “When life seems to overwhelm, snuggle under the comfort of each loving stitch. The flower
garden surrounds the stars that shine for you. The small stars within pour love and compassion your way, feeding your garden of hope.”

Memories of the first quilt in my life are those of a dark, heavy, utilitarian blanket constructed of odd sized bits of non-descript fabrics pieced together in no particular pattern. The quilt was heavy, so heavy and it was only as I grew older and heard the stories my grandmother and others told of the Great Depression that I came to realize fully the weight of that quilt. My grandmother had spoken of having to put patches over patches on my grandfather’s jeans. I was told of “FHB” a family code used by one family when company arrived unexpectedly at mealtime. It meant, Family Hold Back so that there would be enough food to go around. My grandmother told me that although times were tough they were happy, they worked together, and they got by. She explained that pretty much everyone was under the same duress and that they just all worked hard to do the best they could. Their sense of pride came from doing a good day’s work, not from material wealth. She informed me that the Reach and Company store in Fort Macleod had carried the ranch through the depression, permitting them to purchase groceries on credit. As a show of appreciation and loyalty, my family purchased their groceries and much of their dry goods from the Reach and Company store up until the little hometown store shut its doors decades later. As the quilt got older and more worn I noticed that it too had patches over patches, and that what began to show through were gray wool blankets. My grandmother explained that they did not have access to the puffy quilt batts we use today so they would use layers of blankets which were too worn to provide much warmth on their own, to fill quilts. The quilt went from being a bedcovering to becoming a picnic spread upon which many more stories were woven. This quilt, comprised of bits of fabric
from old garments and old blankets was a true patchwork. It weighed heavy of hard times yet lived to see many happy times. My grandmother’s stories and the stories of the quilt are empowering for me. They represent the epitome of resiliency. In adverse times I go back to them and know that I too can endure.

My grandma’s button jar was yet another source of memories. It held so many stories untold. It possessed all that remained when the threads were too bare to be used for patches. I loved my grandmother’s button jar. It had buttons of every shape and size and an occasional cardboard slip to which my grandmother had carefully stitched four or five matching buttons. Some of the buttons were larger, one even had a rhinestone in the center. Few had a mate. I used to day-dream about times in my grandparents’ lives that weren’t so tough. I would picture my grandmother in designer garments such as I had seen on one of the few pictures of her in her younger years, in flapper girl regalia. Yes, the button jar had stories to tell just as a quilter’s patch bag does!

A few years ago my sister made a quilt in memory of my mother. It was made from garments my mother had worn. On the ranch, my mother wore a lot of denims and thus the quilt is made of denims, each piece carefully cut, coordinated into a pattern, and stitched in an effort to piece together what remained materially of my mother. The quilt is practical, durable, of darks and lights, just as my mother was practical, durable, and very much a person of black and white. She had a very strong sense of what she valued and the principles she stood for were clearly articulated in her every word and action. Her strong sense of right and wrong left little room for the gray areas. The quilt my sister made is dark and heavy just as the old patchwork was and speaks to years of hard work on the ranch. By the age of nineteen my mother had three children. We lived in a little log
house with no running water, no plumbing and no electricity. In spite of the hardships my mother’s commitment to her family was unfaltering. She went on to have two more children. The durability of my sister’s quilt speaks to my mom’s incredible strength and resiliency and its monochromatic makeup speaks of my mother’s unfaltering commitment to all that she believed in, to my father, to her family, and to the ranch.
Notes From the Sewing/So…ing Room

Chaos

"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known."

Matthew 10:26

My initial reaction to the writing/quilting process may best be described as chaotic. I discovered that issues and concerns that had long held me ransom were many, as many as the bits of fabric spread out on my sewing room cutting table. I wrote on numerous issues and I pieced together a multitude of quilt squares representative of issues I was passionate about, puzzled, frustrated, or with which I was uncomfortable. Many of the squares I pieced never made it to the finished quilt. The reflective process I undertook brought issues and concerns I have regarding the shortcomings of education to the surface. I identified only a few of these issues in this written document but I consciously chose not to present the negatives on my quilt.

While my quilt could best be described as a euphoric depiction of community stitched in the first person omniscient, there is “an other side to everything, a silent archeology within every speech, a secret which inspires every saying, indeed an absence which is always present” (Smith, 1999, p. 134).
As a mother and as a professional my life is impacted daily with issues such as youth violence, drug and alcohol abuse, biases regarding the use of Ritalin and other such drugs for Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, cutbacks in education, and nutrition and health care issues to name but a few.

I bantered with whether or not to include some of these negatives on my quilt. At one point I pondered a two-sided quilt with the positive on the front and the negative on the back. In the end, I chose to leave the negative out. A number of factors came in to play. The concept of the quilt itself as a comforting bed cover urged me to focus on the building of community and the nurturing of the soul, those things which bind rather than focusing on those things which tear apart.

My decision was also influenced by peers. Just as our voices are often silenced because we do not want to appear as a flaw in the common threads, my patchwork was influenced by the tendency of schools and teachers to hide their weaknesses or shortcomings. It is only when we expose those weaknesses that we can deal with them. When we show our vulnerability, we gain credibility. We cannot be insular in education. Education is happening in a political and societal context and cannot be viewed as a separate entity. Hasebe-Ludt, Duff, and Leggo (1999) wrote,

In the word community is found the word unity,” and because unity is generally perceived as an ideal goal which fires the hearts and the imaginations of people, community has often been equated with unity, or at least community has been understood as founded on principles of hopes of unity. But the equation of community and unity frustrates more than fulfills because the equation is more
accurately an inequation. There is a grave danger in erasing the differences among people when community and unity are equated. (p. 67)

I believe that just as the tension of the threads is critical to the stitching process, tension is an essential element in community. Without a degree of tension certainty and despondency may become toxic to the culture. Thus, the absence of negatives in my quilt is not based on a denial of the existence of a dark side but rather on the pretext that "in the presence lives an absence" (Smith, 1999, p. 133), an absence that could one day be the focus of its own project/quilt.
Fabric Selection

*Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to try it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.*

Plato

One of my first decisions around the making of the quilt involved what fabrics to use. I chose to use only cotton. It was the practical choice in terms of washability, shrinkage, and being colourfast. Only an illusion of texture was created through the use of varied patterns. I considered this choice to be appropriate as it reflected my view on traditional education: practical, one system, one curriculum, providing only the illusion of differentiated instruction to meet individual needs.

Child-centered advocates have argued since the mid 1800s that the child should be the center of curriculum and that curriculum developers should build on the child’s instinctive learning capability. In spite of such progressive works as John Dewey’s “pedagogic creed” (1929) traditionalism has prevailed. Just as I know that the use of a wide variety of fabrics, providing true texture would best serve to represent the uniqueness of the little people in my quilt, I believe that traditional education does not best meet the needs of our children. Throughout my teaching career I have sought and implemented a multitude of strategies to embellish the curriculum, to address the different learning styles, the varied abilities, and the cultural differences in my classroom in an effort to make the lessons as meaningful as possible, all the while feeling that it is somewhat of a façade. I have observed children come forward from a state of disillusionment to demonstrate unprecedented enthusiasm and accomplishment when the theme connects, touches a heartstring, reaches home. Those moments should be the rule, not the exception. There is a great deal of change occurring in education to address the
diverse needs and interests of students. Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences are being recognized.

The doors are being opened to the use of unique and alternative strategies to teach and to multi-dimensional assessment systems. It is inclusive and promising. Students who may not have thrived in a traditional setting and whose needs may not have been adequately addressed previously may be provided with the means to maximize their potentials. Many school divisions throughout the province of Alberta are undertaking initiatives to promote differentiated instruction with the intent of providing veritable texture to the educational system.

I also looked carefully at the selection of colours for the quilt. While a monochromatic approach would have provided a greater sense of unity I chose to use a multitude of colours. If someone were to ask me what colour my teaching was, I would like to think of it as a kaleidoscope of colours which addresses my diverse class. The fusion of heterogeneous colours in my quilt represents a community where diversity defines and delights rather than divides.
The Children

*Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with mankind.*

*Rabindranath Tagore*

The book *Whoever You Are* by author Mem Fox (1997), particularly the lines,

Joys are the same and love is the same, Pain is the same and blood is the same,
Smiles are the same and the hearts are the same- Wherever they are, wherever you
are, wherever we are, all over the world, (pp. 36-43)

are what inspired me to create a border of little ones from the same basic pattern, circling
my quilt hand in hand. The messages of diversity, mutual respect and that our stories are
their stories radiate from Mem Fox’s book and are present in the quilt.

Creating these little people became a labor of love. The more I created, the more
ideas I had for yet another. Each block brought to mind children whose lives I have
touched and whose lives have touched mine. The process was like scrapbooking a
memory album. Many of the fabrics I used were from my scrap bag, ones I had sewn into
garments for my children and thus I have stitched many treasured memories into my
quilt. Sewing the blocks to represent the children renewed my awareness of the
uniqueness of each and every child and of their freshness with God. I was reminded of
troubled times in my own life when their wings carried me. I was reminded of their
stories, stories that made me laugh, cry, worry, feel an incredible sense of pride, or look
deeper.

I was also reminded of their receptiveness and the power that extrinsic influence
have upon them. I remembered being 19 and bringing my newborn daughter home from
the hospital, being alone with her for the first time, holding her like a piece of fine china
and thinking, "all I say, all I do, all that I am will become a part of you." That same feeling overcame me the Monday morning I stood before my first class of students. The messages we send to the children through our stories and our actions impact the future. Our lives go over into their lives.
Nowhere to Rest the Eye

*At work, you think of the children you’ve left at home. At home you think of the work you’ve left unfinished. Such a struggle is unleashed within yourself; your heart is rent.*

Golda Meir

The next realization I came to with my quilt was that in an attempt to include so much in my quilt, I had left no place for the eye to rest. A colleague with whom I have shared much of the narrative of my quilt felt that I should leave it as such, with the clutter. She felt that the busyness of the quilt was yet another representation of what I was depicting in my quilt, particularly through the inclusion of the Wild Goose Chase blocks.

Our lifestyles are hectic. We juggle commitments and struggle to maintain a sense of balance in our lives. How many of us are guilty of such things as nodding and pretending to listen while still working through an event that is coming up or has just happened at work? How many of us have forgotten how to listen, really listen? We are living our lives on the surface, frantically treading water to stay abreast. How many of us are guilty of making up excuses for why we are too busy to do something with our children, our families? How many are guilty of passing up some of the most potentially significant moments in our lives and in theirs? According to Heracles, we cannot step into the same river twice. In the flow of life an opportunity lost is lost forever.
I have had my own wake-up calls. One afternoon when I was working on a draft for a university paper, my little girl, who was three at the time, came into the office and clambered up onto my knee, cupped my face in her hands and turned it to attain my eye contact, then proceeded with what she wanted to tell me. Another time I was working away at the kitchen sink, deep in my own thoughts, a bite in the leg abruptly brought me back to the here and now. My young son who had been trying to get my attention for some time had resorted to biting me to get it. I realized that I was overlooking my highest priorities! In an attempt to do so much and be so much to so many, my life is so cluttered that little time remains for those things dearest to me.

In my years of teaching grade two I would often become disillusioned with parents. Children would come to me first thing in the morning in need of a band-aide for an injury from the evening before that had gone untended. There was always a handful that came without having had breakfast, many from affluent homes. Joseph W. Newman (1990) stated:
Some families come from families in which human capital is lacking - their parents may be poorly educated and unemployed. Yet some families that lack human capital may have an abundance of social capital, which exists in the relations between persons. Families with social capital are close...some families of course lack both human capital and social capital while others have both. Still other families have human capital but lack social capital. The parents may be well educated for example but spend no time with their children. (p. 623)

I am confident that if I were to ask these parents what things mattered most in their lives, their children would be at the top of the list. Yet, my observations of the shortcomings of parents and that the role of the school has evolved to include so many of the nurturing aspects that were traditionally provided in the home were not unrealistic. I do not believe that parents love their children any less. They are just not slowing down long enough to hear their cries. I am reminded of a quote by Gabriela Mistral, “Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are being formed; his blood is being made; his mind is being developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow. His name is today.”

When Mother Theresa was receiving one of her many awards a person in the crowd asked, “What can we do as individuals to help world peace?” Mother Theresa’s response was, “Go home and be with your children.”

I saw a guardian angel figurine in a store that read, “May you not travel faster than your guardian angel can fly.” I thought, “Yes, and what of all the children whose guardian angels are flying so fast that they do not have time for them?”
At one point in my sewing room notes I wrote, “I have just sewn two arm pieces where two leg pieces should go...thinking of something else...and so it is with raising children...how effective is our parenting when our minds are elsewhere?” Time to refocus! While working on my quilt I had to set the throttle of my sewing machine at low to maintain a slow, in-control speed. I would catch myself still pressing my foot control to the floor. At one point I stopped to jot in my sewing room notes, “If only we had a throttle to control the pace of life.”

My heart goes out to working mothers who struggle to find a balance in their lives. They are constantly juggling their time between work and home; needing to effectively compete in the workforce, wanting to be the devoted wife and mother with the multitude of roles that that entails, maintaining a home, and all to the standards of their mothers before them, many of whom were stay at home moms. They carry a heavy load and, sadder yet, a whole lot of guilt for every time they come up short in their day whether the shortcoming falls at work or at home. Guilty when they have to miss a child’s recital because of an important meeting at work. Guilty when they buy cookies at the store rather than providing home baked and guilty when the home isn’t picture perfect like mom used to keep it. Guilty when they don’t volunteer to sit on that committee. I am a working mother. I “run” in their shoes. I recognize that often working moms are working not because they want to be but because circumstances require them to do so. I also realize that women have a great deal to offer in the work force and I respect their choices. In fact I marvel at how the modern day working moms so effectively juggle their multiple roles.
On the other hand, my hat goes off to all of the stay-at-home moms, who make material sacrifices and career sacrifices so that they can remain at home with their children in their formative years. I believe that they hold a very honorable role in our society. In fact, last year, I was in the middle of a social studies lesson with my grade two students. Students were to identify the jobs their parent had and then determine whether that job provided our community with goods or a service. One student reluctantly informed us that her mother did nothing. She told us that her Mom just stayed at home and took care of her little brothers and sisters. I seized that teachable moment to respond with a lengthy explanation that her mother was in fact providing both goods and services. I informed the class that children are in fact our nation’s greatest natural resource and that the services of a mother are among the most honored services one can contribute to society.

I have found many of Stephen Covey’s books to be valuable resources with common sense strategies for getting oneself back on track in terms of life’s priorities. It is essential that we stop now and then to prioritize our lives. While there are many lessons to be learned from the gurus of self-help and inspirational works, the most profound lessons are those of the lived curriculum.

In May of 1999 my mom was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The MRI indicated that she had approximately three months left to live and that she should look into palliative care immediately. As she left the doctor’s office with my father and sisters she turned to them and asked, “What do I do now?” My four sisters and I researched every source of hope we could find, other doctors, alternate medicine, teas, clinical studies, and possible surgeries. She underwent extensive surgery only to be told that they were not
able to remove all of the cancer. As for the clinical studies, she didn’t qualify for one because of her type of cancer and yet another was a random draw and her name didn’t get drawn. It was then that we turned to a doctor who was a close family friend and asked, “What now?” He told my sisters and I to let her be. He said that the terminally ill have an amazing way of dealing with the short time they have left and of getting the very best out of it. And so it was...my mother, in very short order, sorted out and prioritized her life, eliminated all those things that didn’t really matter and spent her final days focused on quality. At the same time as I grieved over the flesh and color fast fading from her body, I marveled at the inner strength and knowingness she radiated. I kept thinking that there was so much to be learned from my mother’s final lessons on true value. It’s such a busy world out there with so much to offer. It is so important that we take time now and then to take inventory, to weed out those things that don’t really matter so that we have time for what really matters.
Quilting: A Place for Reflection

Of a teacher who lives well, with a healthy remembrance...such a teacher also pays attention to that profound silence which often comes from children, and regards such silence not as voids to be filled with yet more facts, but as living spaces which are a sign that memory is in formation.”

David Geoffrey Smith

I have come to realize that a whole lot of good thoughts have come to me when I am quilting. It provides a time for quiet reflection. Hand stitching a quilt takes time but has decided advantages. Hand stitching binds me to the intended recipient. It also has the advantage that I can stitch and think and relate all at the same time. Relating means that I look for and discover differences and similarities in my life and the lives of those before me and further, that I grow as an individual by doing so. In relating to those of the past I am filled with gratitude for the comparative ease of my lifestyle. I have become keenly aware that a preoccupation with things is also easy. I am reminded however that the things of enduring value are those of the spirit...things of the heart...those that revolve around home and family, friends and neighbors, people whom I love.

As a child I was also blessed with a mother who sewed little dresses just for me and a Grandmother who knit me special sweaters. While the fabric served my body, the stitches of love served my soul. Porter and Fons (1995, p. 5) wrote, “The best quilts are stitched with love. The work of our hands celebrates the people in our hearts, the milestones of our lives, and the comfort of friends.” My mother and grandmother stitched stories of love and commitment.

Quilting and writing both possess a common link of past and present, of tradition and of possibilities. I am drawn to the deep yet essentially simple beauty of the quilt. It
speaks of memories of the heart, reflecting our personal tastes, life experiences, and feelings. In essence, through fabric, color, and design, I am creating my own message of life.

Susan Long-Behuniak (1994) wrote that quilting was "soothing work that invites mindful profound reflection." She noted that "some quilters claim that they find balance within the work. Quilting then is reclamation of time, of reflection, and of self" (p.166). Abrahams (1995) wrote:

The making of a quilt celebrates our existence as individuals. The mention of the word 'quilt' conjures up the image of a bed, awakening ritual memories of our passage through life. As societies defer to the power of technology, we increasingly turn to the arts and crafts to remind us of our humanity. The craft of patchwork and quilt making transcends political and cultural divisions. (p. 2)

It occurred to me that we need to provide children with unstructured time in their day to catch their breath, reflect on their day, internalize and make meaningful connections to what they have been taught. I thought about how education has evolved over the 25 years I have been teaching. When I first started teaching I would stop frequently throughout the day and have the students join me around the piano for a singsong or we would take time out of the day to color a picture. As the years progressed curriculum requirements dictated that I not take too much time out of the day for song and that coloring be curriculum related, that art work be attached to a General Learner Outcome and a Specific Learner Outcome or it would be deemed mindless busy work. Every moment of every day needed to be structured and carefully planned. I had to take a hard look at the value of each and every teachable moment and in retrospect I believe that
I missed so many valuable teachable moments for fear of getting off schedule. Even careful correlation of subjects to make the best use of every available moment left me pressed to cover grade requirements within the school year.
Blocks in Isolation

*It takes a village to raise a child.*  *African Proverb*

When at last all of the blocks were assembled and it was time to lay them out and view my quilt as a whole for the first time, you can’t even begin to know the disappointment I experienced. While I had created many wonderful and meaningful blocks they did not come together as I had assumed they would to create a balanced, aesthetically appealing finished piece of work. It occurred to me that the process I had undertaken was not unlike processes occurring all too often in educational reform. I had created each of the blocks in isolation, not giving enough consideration to how they would come together to form the big picture. Isn’t that what happens all too often in education? While we may have several wonderful initiatives underway for school improvement, too often the right hand is not telling the left hand what it is doing. The initiatives are being carried out in isolation of one another. Were we to look at each in the context of the other and at all as pieces of one big picture, the benefits would be multifold. Each would shed light on the other, overlap would be avoided, and the benefit for teachers would be that they would be able to see each initiative as a piece of the big picture, making application more apparent.

In the bigger scheme of things, we find that a lack of communication and alignment of policies between the different government agencies involved in providing child services causes shortcomings.

Hillary Clinton (1996), used the term patchwork in the context of providing for children in her discussion of programs the United States provide for their children. She lamented that the low priority Americans have placed on child care as a nation has led to
a system that “looks more like a patchwork quilt than a security blanket” (p. 224). She saw this as a shortcoming on the part of the American people, unlike the French child care system she had observed in 1989 as part of a study group.

The term patchwork was also used in a negative context in the document *School-aged Children Across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies* (Mahon, 2001). The Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. undertook a research project to examine the public policy environment in place for school-aged children and their families across Canada. An inventory of public policies for school-aged children was compiled and analyzed by Family Network researcher Caroline Beauvais and the body of the paper was researched and written by Dr. Rianne Mahan, Professor in the School of Public Administration and Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carlton University.

Children’s opportunity for the safe and secure development of their full potential require more than a favorable school environment. Accordingly, the study examined developments in economic security, health policy, recreation and culture, child protection and justice. Dr. Mahan’s survey of policy trends unveiled a number of common themes across the provinces. The benefits of early intervention are easily lost if children do not get the support they need as they mature. Special measures work best when they are designed to supplement strong, broad-based programs. Two prominent themes that cut across policy fields and differences in provincial strategies were an increased focus on prevention; and an effort to integrate the planning and delivery of services for school-aged children. By “breaking down the silos” and encouraging cooperation across the disciplines and departmental mandates some provinces worked toward a strong, broad-based program. Dr. Mahan (2001) contends that the patchwork of policies has yet to form
a solid quilt. Thus far policies for school-aged children have only been stitched together piecemeal and cannot be said to provide children aged 6 to 15 the security they need to develop and grow to their full potential.

My quilt is yet another reference, a visual representation of a piecing together to meet the needs of the children. The squares of the home, the school, the church, and the community are representative of the networking required to best meet the needs of our children.

I believe that a close meshing of the social institutions would provide a safety net to ensure that fewer children fall through the cracks. As a classroom teacher I have often
been frustrated by the lack of communication between the different agencies and sadly, too often children are shuffled from department to department because no one feels that the child’s situation is the responsibility of their department, or fits within their job description. I am reminded of a story (author unknown) about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

I believe that one of the most noticeable changes over my teaching career has been the changing, growing role of the school in caring for the child. Schools are now required to oversee and provide a multitude of services in addition to the formal education of the child. One of the reasons for this is the increasing number of families where both parents work. Another factor that has come into play is government cutbacks to agencies. There are fewer people to carry out the same number of tasks so inevitably some of the tasks perceived as less important go by the wayside. Unfortunately, it is too often the children whose needs are not being adequately or appropriately met. My quilt speaks to the ambiguity over whose responsibility lies where in the raising of our children, and of the resulting gaps, which are permitting children to fall between the cracks. My quilt speaks of community as a place for the heart to come home to in times of adversity.
Interestingly enough, Hilary Clinton’s reference to patchwork in terms of childcare is in her book titled *It Takes a Village* (1996). Clinton chose this old African proverb as the title of her book, feeling that it offered a timeless reminder that children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough for them. Similarly, the “nest” metaphor developed in Canadian Policy Research Network’s *What is the Best Policy Mix for Canada’s Young Children* (2001), captures this well:

Children are “nested” in multiple environments: the child within the family, the family within the larger community of neighborhoods and working places. The community is defined by different geographic and political boundaries, the public institutions that provide community infrastructure, and the governments that provide the resources and enabling policies that allow each of these nests to function well. Taken together, these nested environments are also social nests in which children and, in turn, families, are nurtured. (p. 1)

Reflecting on my own life and the assembling of knowledge and understanding throughout my journey, I came to realize that no one institution can be credited or held responsible for the education of our youth. It is a marbleizing of all the events in one’s life that determines the end being.
A Blanket Warms the Body, A Quilt Warms the Soul

We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and among these invisible fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results.

Herman Melville

I found a saying in my sewing room that read, “A blanket warms the body, a quilt warms the soul.” That saying is what spurred me to use the quilt as my metaphor. As a conscientious teacher of 20 plus years, I have worked hard to be sure that I have covered the curriculum and to ensure that my students experience academic growth and successes. I want to ensure that I am providing more than a blanket for my students. I want to know that what I am providing for my students reaches to the soul. Kessler (2000) points out that “spiritually empty” classrooms exist by design, not by accident. In the forward of Kessler’s book The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School P. J. Palmer (2000) wrote:

The twentieth century for all its scientific and technological amazements, might be described as a century of thin soup, and not only because too many people went hungry. It was a century in which we watered down our humanity - turning wisdom into information, community into consumerism, politics into manipulation, destiny into DNA-making It is increasingly difficult to find nourishment for the heart.

There is a fine line between addressing soul in education and violation of separation of church and state, yet I do not feel that we can ignore soul. Nord (1995) wrote:

The modern day Americans have a spiritual problem. There is something fundamentally wrong with our culture. We who have succeeded so brilliantly in
matters of economics, science, and technology have been less than successful in matters of the heart and soul. This is evident in our manners and in our morale, in our entertainment and our politics; in our preoccupation with sex and violence; in the ways we do our jobs and in the failure of our relationships; in our boredom and unhappiness in this the richest of all societies. (p. 380)

Kessler (1997) points out that “only recently and particularly after the tragic epidemic of schoolyard massacres in the late 1990s are policymakers and social scientists beginning to recognize our neglect of the souls of young peoples and in our national life” (p. xi).”

At the heart of my quilt is the apple, the traditional Judeo-Christian symbol of knowledge and understanding. An educational system where the core is removed is hollow. Classrooms that do not address the souls of the children are likewise hollow. The core must be present so that the seeds can be planted through our stories, stories that touch the heart, stories that address those things society holds sacred, and stories that link past, present, and future.
The Dalai Lama (1999) wrote of “the disturbing prevalence among the populations of materially developed countries of anxiety, discontent, frustration, uncertainty, and depression. Moreover, this inner suffering is clearly connected with growing confusion as to what constitutes morality and what its foundations are (p. 6).” His observations are supported by the current efforts of our society to foster resiliency in our youth and to teach social responsibility. It is further supported by the ever-increasing demand for self-help books...so many people in our society are in search of happiness but fail to look within. The Dalai Lama believes that “the more we succeed in transforming our hearts and minds through cultivating spiritual qualities, the better able we will be to cope with adversity and the greater the likelihood that our actions will be ethically wholesome.” (p. 33).

Robin Sharma, the author of six books on personal growth and success, is an example of someone who through cultivating his inner life, found a renewed sense of self. Sharma (2000) wrote, “The saddest part of life lies not in the act of dying, but in failing to truly live while we are alive. Too many of us play small with our lives, never letting the fullness of our humanity see the light of day (p. 1).”

In a personal effort to address the soul of my students without violating their individual religious backgrounds I have, in the current school year, used stories, daily, positive inspirational quotes, and reflective journal writing to inspire and support my students to explore their inner feelings, values, and beliefs. I believe that stories such as those in the multitude of Chicken Soup for the Soul books are so well received because of the want for stories, common stories to which our hearts and souls can relate.

Hammerschlag (1994) wrote:
Once upon a time, before technology and endless years of formal education had made us so smart, and before we became preoccupied with material wealth, we learned what matters most in our lives by living in communities, intertwined with the people around us. They told us stories; we told them ours. All the stories were unique, yet ultimately they were all the same. They still are the same. They’re about hope and fear, pain and deliverance. They help us make sense of our lives, give us hope...heal our souls. (p. 14)

It is challenging for parents to raise children in such a toxic world. Have you slowed down long enough recently to reflect on the stories our children are being told through the media? Are they the stories you would like your children to base their future decisions on? Are they stories that build moral character? Fanning’s article, Expanding the Definition of Technological Literacy in Schools (1994) outlines that in this information-age, it is not enough to filter as best we can what reaches the children. The skills and dispositions needed for independent and socially responsible use of information must be taught, practiced, and mastered.

I recently went to the funeral of a retired teacher who taught both my father and me. She was a friend and mentor. She inspired me to become a teacher. The minister Noel Wygiera (2003) shared:

I’m certainly not what you would call a hardcore fan of the Survivor TV series but I have watched on occasion. Let me tell you a little bit about why this show intrigues me. The show is a microcosm of what we call the “dog eat dog world” and is based solely on the premise that the “last one standing wins.” Speculation and manipulation are more prevalent than rational thought. Cooperation is a
necessary evil for stepping on others while one scrambles to the top of the pile. It is void of love, void of kindness, void of human decency. The only thing that matters is the one million dollars prize at the end. So what is it that intrigues me about all of this? It is the notion that somebody has the nerve to refer to this stuff as "reality television!" In my reality, survivors teach us about the value and preciousness of life, and usually it is things like faith and persistence that see them through the trials. In my reality, the survivor is not the person who wins to the exclusion of all others, but rather the one who by overcoming draws as many as they can into the winner’s circle with them. In my reality, people like Helen Walker are the survivors that the rest of us need to be watching.

Helen Walker drew me into her winner’s circle. Teaching is in fact about drawing others into the winning circle! She was a kindling force and a revealing power in my life.

Coles (1989) relates how “the moral contradictions and inconsistencies of our personal lives more than resonate with those in our social order, our nation’s politics, our culture (p. 203).” Coles, also points out, “nor have universities been all that successful in figuring out what their obligations are in respect to the moral questions that so many people put to themselves (p. 203).” Coles quoted one student saying, “I’ve tried to take courses in moral philosophy. I read the books. I became smarter in the analysis I do. But I leave the lecture hall and I can see myself as the same - the way I’ll think of certain people, the way I’ll behave (p. 203).” There is a change of intellect but no direct behavior modification. Coles (1989) wrote of a history tutor who said that:

‘Harvard used to be a place where they worried as much about the students’ morality, their character, as they did about how well they memorized books and
wrote exams. That was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not now: we’re way beyond that here. It’s each person to himself on a lot of these moral issues, so long as you don’t break any laws or rules. One day that’s fine with me, but the next I wonder whether that kind of attitude will be enough for me when I get married and have a family.” (p. 203)

Dewey (1929) believed as I believe:

All education proceeds by the participation of the individuals in the societal consciousness of the race. This process begins unconsciously at birth, and is continually shaping the individuals powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas, and rousing his feelings and emotions. Through this unconscious education the individual gradually comes to share the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together. He becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilization. The most formal and technical education in the world cannot safely depart from the general process. It can only organize it or differentiate it in some particular directions. (p. 17)

Robert Coles (1989) quotes one of his students as saying,

“When I have a really big moral issue, some question to tackle, I think I try to remember what my folks said, or imagine them in my situation.” He wrote of others he knew well and said, “those folks, they’re people for me. They really speak to me - there is a lot of me in them or vice versa. They’re voices and they help me make choices. I hope when I make the big ones, they’ll be there pitching.” (p. 203)
My Patchwork of Stories

The vision of community I have created in my quilt is a reflection of life in an idyllic family community such as the one in which I was raised. I grew up on a ranch in the Foothills of the Rocky Mountains. In my early years I was surrounded by not only my parents and grandparents, but my great grandfather. My extended community included all of the ranch families in the area. My family also had close ties to families of the Peigan Reservation as our land bordered the reserve.

Families in the hills came together for regular gatherings at the Spring Point Community Hall. The hall was and still is located at the hub of all the ranches. It was a place for celebrations, election polls, work bees, quilting circles, dances, an annual Christmas concert and turkey supper, occasional non-denominational prayer meetings, and when the big fire swept through our community in December of 1997, it served as a disaster service center. When I started school, our community also had its own country school-house less than a mile up the road from my home. Native and non-native children from grades one to nine attended this one-room country school. Our lives in the hills were very much interwoven. My family community and its extensions provided me with a deep sense of belonging.

As a child I was blessed with a patchwork of stories. My grandparents lived on the ranch, just a few hundred yards up the road from us. Their home was just around a little bend in the road or one could take the path through the garden, along the creek to get there. I would go there often when I needed someone to listen or needed a question answered. My grandparents' responses were never hurried. That is one of the best things about grandparents. While parents are always telling children to hurry, grandparents
remind them to slow down. My grandparents did not just offer an opinion or an answer. They offered stories, shared experiences, and then left me to draw my own conclusions. Sharma (2000, p. 83) points out how “throughout civilizations, all families have revered their elders and sat at their feet to learn life’s most important lessons.” So it was for me. My grandparents were a constant source of comfort, knowledge, and love. Just as their stories nurtured my soul, the silent times we spent together, consumed with one another’s presence, provided me with an inner sense of strength. I marvelled at their wisdom. They always seemed to know what to say and when to say nothing. I believe that the value of the presence of grandparents in the lives of children goes beyond saying. The stories and times shared with my grandparents have transcended the boundaries of their mortal existences. They remain a sanctuary for me to go home to in troubled times. My grandparents’ patchwork of stories, all patiently woven, created a quilt of many colours for me.

My parents on the other hand assumed the role of administering tough love. They held firm to what they believed to be morally and ethically correct. Dr. William Glasser points out the importance of firmly holding children to the responsible course. He says that through doing this we are teaching children a lesson that will help them throughout their lives. My parents had never read Glasser but fortunately they cared enough not to give in to the path of least resistance. It is important that parents and educators make every effort to firmly but lovingly hold children to the responsible course. Furthermore, before one can hold children to the responsible course, expectations must be clearly defined. My youngest son reminded me of this a few years ago. It was shortly after he started kindergarten. One afternoon I found him in the hallway of the school, making his
way to my classroom, all the while sobbing uncontrollably. The only thing that I could make out through the sobs was, “You didn’t give me the rule and now I did it.” I took him to my room and attempted to calm him down then went downstairs to find out what he had done. Another staff member informed me that she had found him out in the schoolyard taking a wiz. My son was right. I had not given him that rule. In fact, his father had coached him to do that very thing out on the ranch many times.

I believe that all children by virtue of nature want to be good and want to become valued citizens, but the mixed messages that are being transmitted through many of today’s stories confuse and even alter children. There are many gray areas that society itself cannot agree upon. Our legal and political systems have created situations where what we have a right to do is no longer necessarily the right thing to do. It is the responsibility of society to build a community worthy of our children. Not to do so is to allow for the erosion of our moral and ethical fiber. The stories my mother and father told created a patchwork in black and white with the borders clearly defined. The expectations they held for us were clearly articulated.

As a child I came to know food as not only a means to sustain life but as a means to celebrate life. In the spring my entire family was involved in planting the garden. My grandma and grandpa gave precise instructions on how the seeds were to go in the ground. They instructed us on whether the seeds were to be planted in rows or hills, how deep and how far apart. Once the garden was up, little hands would pull weeds while the adults hoed or cultivated. The garden was situated half way between Granny and Grandpa’s house and ours. One would go through a little arched garden gate and over a little bridge that crossed the creek to get to the garden. It ran parallel to the road from our
house to Granny and Grandpa’s house and it was a sight to behold; a source of family pride. Yes, it was spectacular, right down to the row of Sweet Peas we always planted, just because. Harvesting, canning, and freezing were as much a family affair as planting. Everyone had their jobs to do and everyone pitched in, all the while talking, teasing, laughing, and racing one another to get our jobs done first.

Mealtime on the ranch was usually a long drawn out affair that brought us all together. It started with the meal preparation. Grandpa and Granny would come down from the garden with arms full of fresh vegetables. The entire family would sit around together in the shade on the front step or in my mom’s kitchen and visit while some of us would shell peas or nip the ends off the beans, another would peel potatoes and someone else would be in charge of making the pies or an alternate dessert, which in the men’s opinion was never a suitable substitute for a good old apple pie. Someone was usually sent scrounging back to the garden to fetch a forgotten onion or to the root cellar for a jar of pickles or relish from the shelves my mom and my grandma had lined with preserves. My mother and my grandmother were both excellent cooks. They had an endless repertoire of best recipes and shared them freely. There were Granny’s venison cutlets, Mom’s French cream pie and poppy seed chiffon cake. Oh yes, and not to forget Granny’s pecan tarts. The secret to their exceptional flavour being that they were laced with Mexican Kaluha, a minor detail that she usually overlooked when she gave out the recipe. This always left the new cook to wonder why her tarts never tasted quite like Granny’s. Everyone used to marvel at the mountain of meringue on her lemon pies. Little did they know that she always snuck in one or two more than the required egg whites to make them extra fluffy.
For most meals at the ranch we had three generations, on some occasions four, and in the latter years even five generations round the dinner table sharing food and thought. We not only celebrated birthdays and achievements from within the family with big family dinners but no day was complete without a family dinner. Whether an old friend, a relative, or a complete stranger pulled into the yard, it was reason for food and celebration. To top it all off, the spread they put out at branding time was a feast to behold.

Mealtime had its non-negotiables. We were not allowed to have the television or radio on during mealtime, not that it could have been heard over the zealous conversations anyway. Everyone was to eat what was put on their plate. Everyone was to come to the table wearing socks and shoes. In the early seventies as we hit our teens and burning the bras was the movement of the time, my father added yet another non-negotiable. He insisted we five girls were not to come to the table without wearing bras. Everyone’s presence at dinner was another non-negotiable. Even after my sisters and I married and began families of our own it was expected that we would come home with our children for family dinner each Sunday or have a good reason why not.

After the evening meal we would often gather around the enormous fireplace and join in stories and laughter. Now and then we would circle round the piano and sing old favorites.

I have come to appreciate the significance of meal times, of time spent working together to prepare the meal and the lingering hours gathered around the dinner table, between courses and at the meal’s end, discussing everything from politics to the weather. Yes, I have come to realize how those conversations shared by the entire family
shaped our lives. Hilary Clinton (1995) wrote about mealtimes together, facing one another at the table, having to mind manners, expressing opinions, sharing, reflecting, shaping the evolution of common values and goals. She also wrote about the togetherness engendered. Family discussions offer a means for children to develop and maintain a sense of self, a place for them to share their personal visions and their creative thoughts. Meal times can provide a non-threatening environment in which all family members can be self-expressive. So many family values are begotten from the dinner table.

Coles (1989, p. 198) presents the voice of one of his students saying, “I remember my father talking at the dinner table about character, telling my brother and me, when we were young, that ‘character’ is how you behave when no one is looking.”

Pretty much everything that took place on the ranch was a family affair, from berry picking to working cattle. Even taking lunch to the field or meeting up with riders trailing cattle to and from the reserve involved us all and were times to which we looked forward.

I treasure memories of times spent on horseback alongside my father, listening to his stories of the landscape and of the history of the area. Occasionally we would ride to the top of the highest hill looking over the ranch, just because, and inhale the panoramic view. He grew up in those same hills as did his parents and their parents before them and his passion for the hills has only grown with time. His respect for the land and his appreciation of all its bounties, from the first spring crocuses to the purest of spring water, have been transmitted to us through his stories and actions. The patchwork he created for us was one of landscapes.
My sisters and I would have to draw straws to determine whose turn it was to go for a drive through the cattle with my grandparents in the evenings. Again that was a time for stories or for just sitting together in silent appreciation of nature's wonders. My grandparents would point out the interesting social patterns of the critters or share narrative of the surrounding ranches.

My father's persistence enabled me to overcome many fears and to experience the exuberance that comes with moving beyond your fears. I remember being afraid of my first 4-H calf. Dad haltered the calf then left the calf and me alone in the barn to work it out, while he sauntered across the yard for coffee with my grandparents. I remember a time when my horse would not cross the creek and he came along to see what the problem was. I had been afraid to push the horse hard enough to make it do what I wanted. He broke a branch off a nearby bush and in one leap the horse and I were across. My father always warded on the side of safety but he also had a way of applying the pressure when necessary to get us over little hurdles in our lives.

Growing up with four sisters creates a patchwork of stories in itself. We shared many adventures rambling about the hills, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, wading in the creek in summer, building mud pies, skating up and down the creek in winter and tobogganing down the hills. We shared secrets and dreams. We grew up to be so alike and yet each unique. The threads of our lives, through our shared experiences, create a tightly woven patchwork.

My grandfather was raised strict Lutheran and my grandmother had been raised strict Catholic so...formal churchgoing religion was not a part of our upbringing. Yet, spirituality was ever present. Our sense of spirituality was based on the same golden rules
most Christian families live by but was rooted in the land and in nature. There was also a sense of connection to the Native peoples and their customs and beliefs. Their land borders the ranch and my family had many connections to their peoples so their legends and beliefs were also woven into our patchwork of stories.

When you grow up on a farm or ranch you learn at a very young age that so much of what you do is at the mercy of nature. You learn the importance of saving for a rainy day. You learn to accept life’s hardships and carry on. You learn that hard work and close attention to detail pays off, but that some things are out of our control and that you just have to accept. You learn the importance of working together and being there for one another, particularly in hard times. You learn the power of togetherness in work and in play.

These stories of sweet peas, apple pie, and fluffy meringues and so many others like them are the stories in which my character and sense of community are rooted. It was through those years on the ranch, working together as a family, all striving to do our very best for the good of the whole that I discovered the strength and sense of purpose that comes from working alongside others towards a common goal. I grew up with a strong sense that nothing came before family, and even now I snuggle in the security of the patchwork of my family stories. A sense of well-being and strength comes over me. There is a knowing that our stories were so carefully stitched that even in death the threads are not cut and our patchwork will not unravel.
The Quilting Circle/Community

The circle is a sacred symbol of life...Individual parts within the circle connect to every other; and what happens to one, or what one part does, affects all within the circle.

*Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve*

I have always had a fascination with quilts, their stories, the community bonding through quilting circles, the dedication of individuals who patiently pieced them together and the personal expression that goes into these family heirlooms, not to mention their inherent utility. Some of my earliest recollections take me back to quilting bees at the Spring Point Community Hall. The ladies of the hills meet at the hall to make baby quilts, quilts for newlyweds, quilts to raffle, and farewell quilts for people leaving the community. My sisters and I would play with the children from the community while my mom, my grandmother and the other ladies sat in a circle around the quilting frame and shared stories while their hands worked quickly. Over the years I have been the recipient of a wedding quilt and baby quilts they have made. They are now stored in my big cedar chest with my other most cherished possessions and yet, far more precious than the quilts themselves, is the circle of loved ones who worked together to create them: a circle that for me as a little girl held little distinction between family and friends.

I remember the pride of eventually becoming a part of the ladies quilting circle. Three generations of ladies stitching together. Precious stitches in time. What I experienced was a profound sense of belonging with strong roots in the past and feelings of obligation to extend them into the future. I feel challenged to perpetuate quilt making not only as a utilitarian activity but as a continuing legacy, tying past, present, and future together.
Two excellent examples of quilt projects that in a profound sense brought together people of all different ages and backgrounds are the Scrap of Pride Quilt, a quilt project that brought together diverse individuals in an effort to address racism, and the Names Quilt Project, a quilt project that brings together thousands of individuals and groups to create quilt blocks that commemorate loved ones that have died of AIDS. These projects affirm the use of quilting as an artistic process to foster community development.

Last year my grade two class made a quilt as a community project. The children voted on who should become the recipient of our class quilt. Nursing homes and the school sick room were named as possibilities but after some discussion our intern teacher from the University of Lethbridge was named the intended recipient. Their reasoning was that she would soon be done her internship with us and that she would be moving away and would be needing a blanket and that their quilt would remind her of them. Each child was asked to bring a patch of material. The pieces of material were then cut and placed to form a pattern. Students worked collaboratively to hand stitch the quilt. Hand stitching the top of the quilt is the most arduous task and the eye-hand coordination of seven-year-olds did not make it any easier. Before long children were pairing up. One would stand over the quilt frame and would stitch down while the other went under the frame and would stitch back up. It was entertaining and rewarding to observe them working so closely together, each communicating to the other as to where the needle point needed to go. As it turned out the lesson originally directed at being a community service project evolved into so much more. It also provided an effective lesson on communication and collaborative problem solving. At completion, each student wrote their name on the quilt.
and they presented it to our intern teacher. Months later our class received an e-mail from our intern stating that she had been doing some substitute teaching but that she did not have a class of her own yet and that when she felt sad and alone she would snuggle up in the quilt and feel comforted by the warmth of the quilt and the feeling of closeness to all of them.

Hilary Clinton (1995) provides examples of benefits to children and families that come from a village at work, be it an electronic village or a rural community, a family community, or a school community. I believe that a close meshing of community support networks is important to children and families and that these networks must be sustained.

I feel that there has been a movement of society from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft and that this has had an effect on society and on schools. Thomas Sergiovanni (1996) is one author who presents a powerful case for a movement back to Gemeinschaft and the positive effect this could have on school culture. Gemeinschaft translates to community and life as a sacred community with intrinsic meaning and significance of associations. It is community by relationship, community of place, community of mind, where ties among people are moral. Individuals are banded together in an oneness with a shared set of values and beliefs. It is a state in which we rely on norms, purpose, values, professional socialization, collegiality, and natural interdependence to ensure accountability, a place where responsibilities speak to us in a moral voice. There is a community connectedness through the commitments, obligations, and duties that people feel towards one another. This moral web of responsibility that holds all of the stakeholders responsible is the key feature of community. Values override rules. Celebrated customs and rituals are embodied as standards that govern. It is
community memory that sustains us when the going gets tough. It is community memory that connects us when we are not physically present. Community provides history for creating sense and meaning. Community is a place for the heart to go home to.

Gesellschaft on the other hand translates to society. In a Gesellschaft community values are replaced by contractual ones. It is a more secular society, based on private pursuit of happiness. Gesellschaft is a “dog eat dog” world where relationships are competitive, there is conditional acceptance, and extrinsic rewards are largely the motivating force, and it is largely based on bureaucratic, corporation values.

While many authors do not use the terms Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft there is a great deal of literature on developing a sense of community in the schools and in the workplace and there is also a great deal of literature on building school culture. While there is much literature on community building and creating culture, much of it is superficial and does not establish a true sense of community.

Townsend and Adams (2003) have identified and defined five types of learning communities, ranging from withdrawn to reactionary, benign, adaptive, and most ideally, generative. Based on my personal experiences with quilting communities and the identifiers of a generative learning community according to Townsend and Adams, I have found quilting communities to be exemplary models of the generative level of learning community. In terms of Townsend and Adam’s "learning identifiers," clearly, in a quilting community emphasis on learning permeates the organization, no one is left behind, all learn. All members of a quilting community are linked purposefully and collaboratively to common goals and vision. Their common desire to quilt is motivation and the end product provides a source of pride. There is a broad sharing of results,
formally through quilt shows and ongoing on an informal basis. Quilting communities have the full involvement of members. They are job embedded and focused on common goals. Quilting provides many opportunities for collegiality. Quilting becomes integrated into the work of the organization and the lives of the members.

As per Townsend and Adam's second dimension, leadership, I concluded that quilting communities are also generative in that leadership is based on mission/vision, principles and goals as well as merit and ability. Members are actively engaged in the work of the organization. Decisions about availability and visibility are made purposefully. Leaders are expected to be excellent teachers and life-long learners. All elements of organizational learning are characterized by innovation and risk-taking. Leaders model standards of ethical and professional conduct consistent with organizational mission/vision. Leaders excel in interpersonal relations. Mentorships flourish.

Culture is the third dimension of a learning community as outlined by Townsend and Adams. Identifiers at the generative level include very high levels of interaction, risk and trust. Mutual respect is evident as are high levels of engagement. Work on projects is highly collaborative. Engagement of all members is encouraged and rewarded. There are short term and long-term goals. There is a highly refined sense of belonging in a climate of caring which is inclusive of all stakeholders from the quilters themselves to the receivers of the finished product. Quilting involves extensive use of symbols, icons, images, and metaphors. Recognition and celebration are fully integrated into the mechanics of the organization on both a formal and informal basis. Celebration is frequent and varied.
The forth dimension according to Townsend and Adams is organization. In terms of organization, quilting communities are matches to the following generative descriptors. Communication is integral to the organization. Structures are highly interactive. There are very high levels of contribution by members, linked directly to mission/vision, goals and principles. It is energizing. Decision-making is continuous rather than episodic and is highly integrated within the communication structures. Work is done with enthusiasm, inspirationally, collaboratively. Synergy results. Quilting is constantly evolving. Evaluation is ongoing and fully integrated with practice. There are very high levels of member engagement in the evaluation process.

The process of actually making a quilt parallel to my writing for my final project provided an even deeper sense of purpose for me than the writing alone could have done for a number of reasons. In addition to satisfying my desire to carry on a legacy and serving my writing metaphorically, working through the actual process of making a quilt, manipulating the fabric into a story piece and piecing my writing together paralleled one another, each one adding to the dimensions of the other. The craft of quilting offered many intangible outcomes.

Nichols (1993) pointed out that while the generally accepted definition of patchwork emphasizes its tangible outcomes... the sewing together of small pieces of fabric to form a larger area of cloth, used originally as a quilt face, it is the tangible outcomes... the beautiful things that you can see and touch... that moves one into the doing of patchwork, it is only in the doing that we discover that there are intangible outcomes as well. Though we can neither see nor touch them, we know that the intangibles do exist,
because they touch us and others through us. All patchworkers will attest to the fact that the intangible benefits may equal or sometimes even surpass the tangibles as providers of personal joy for doers and viewer alike. (p. 11)

This project has been a journey of personal discovery and growth. The end products, the tangible outcomes are my quilted story and my written documentation of the intangible benefits that evolved through the quilting and the reflective process. Through the project I have developed a clearer sense of community. I have come to appreciate community as a place for the soul to grow and flourish and as a place for the soul to go home to in times of adversity. I have stressed the role of story in nurturing the souls of the children. Hasebe-Ludt, Duff and Leggo (1999) wrote, “Community is about communicating, about imparting and revealing and sharing gifts of language, about participating in the formation of identity in our storymaking. Community is constitutive. Our identities are formed by the multiple communities we belong to (p. 68).” It is the responsibility of communities to ensure that our stories reflect high standards of character, conviction, and civic virtue. Our stories are the legacy we leave behind. They are the seeds of the future.
References


Bibliography


