Chapter One

Introduction

If you asked me what I came into this world to do, I will tell you: I came to live out loud.

-Emile Zola

I came to graduate school in search of myself, to try to understand "who I am",
and to dare to know myself as someone other than the ways others have defined me –
Terry and Irma's daughter, Jay's girlfriend, the youngest Mottley girl - and thus the ways
in which I began to define myself. While who I was in relationship to others was vital to
the context in which I constructed my identity, it could not solely account for my being. I
needed to be more than a player of roles and identifier of relationships. I needed to ask
"why," to build theories, to construct and to interpret who I am and have been called to
be.

I never planned to become a teacher. I had worked in schools and with children in
various capacities over the years but did not desire to become a teacher. However, when I
returned to school in the fall of 2001 to pursue a master's degree, I was awarded an
assistantship in the university's child development laboratory school. I was initially
assigned to be an assistant to the infant and toddler teachers. However, a few weeks into
the fall semester, the infant teacher resigned and I was assigned her position. Overnight, I
became a teacher of 12 infants and 5 undergraduate student interns. I would argue that I
was not a very "good" teacher that first year. But, regardless, I loved what happened
every day in that classroom between the hours of 9 and 11:30 a.m. The experience of

being in that classroom with these very young people and watching them discover and interpret their worlds piece by piece called to me. I remember watching a child in my classroom after he first discovered his hands. He held them out in front of him and turned them over and over. As I watched him I knew something profound was happening for both of us. So when people ask me why I became a teacher, I usually say because the director of the lab school made me one, or simply that I do not know. But the truth is I am *becoming* a teacher because of the intimacy with life that is touched in the moment a child discovers his or her hands.

Although I believed teaching was and is a deeply personal process, that not only reveals but also speaks to the authenticity of the soul, I was unaware of the ways in which this experience would challenge my very being, rub hard on old insecurities, and rattle the foundation on which I built my "truth." I grapple with even using the word truth, as I believe there is no one truth and at the same time many truths, even as there are many possibilities for being. All of this is part of the dichotomy in which I have found myself. This whole experience of living and discovering and teaching is the conundrum that is me.

As a first time teacher in the lab school at the beginning of last school year, I realized how difficult it was to separate my emotions from my work. Each time I was confronted in some way, either by a displeased parent, a frustrated student, or even my own dissatisfaction with my teaching or something in the classroom, it elicited an emotional response within me, one that often pained me in a personal way. Each time I encountered a situation that required me to articulate and justify my actions, I felt attacked, not as if I was defending my teaching but rather myself. I began to fear

feedback because each time it felt like a personal critique. I felt the effects of this in a very strange but very intense way after my parent-teacher conferences last semester. I began each one the same way I always do, asking parents if they had any questions or concerns about the classroom, things that worked or didn't work for them, suggestions or ideas. I always feel a little anxious when I ask this, like the moment before Pandora's box is unlatched. I smile and try not to reveal my angst about the possibilities of what may be lurking inside.

When I held parent conferences in the Fall semester of this, my second year, all the parents seemed pleased – no complaints about the classroom, activities, transitions, communication, or interactions; no suggestions or ideas for improvement. In some odd way this displeased me. Not that I enjoy criticism; even constructive criticism can sometimes be difficult for me to digest. However, something was not right. For a few days I was riddled with anxiety over the meetings. I talked with a few friends about it and prayed about it. Then suddenly I realized that I was not bothered by the fact that everyone seemed pleased and satisfied with the experience in the classroom but rather that I did not. At some point along this journey I had become complacent and for me complacency meant stagnation, and stagnation death (in the sense that growth ceases). I tried to pinpoint the moment when complacency settled inside me but there was no one moment but rather hundreds. Hundreds of times I surrendered to the multitude of roles I play on a daily basis and the demands, real and perceived, that accompanied them. I think at some point, I just got tired and stopped fighting it so much. Perhaps, I got tired because I did not know how to fight it, not the right way anyway – not with compassion, understanding, eloquence, assurance, and truth, all things I valued.

So this is where I found myself, a teacher and student of fourteen toddlers and their families. Fearless and frightened, no one and yet everyone, struggling like a tiny seed to burst through that top layer of soil, to go beyond the warm confines and comfort of lying still beneath the earth, protected from foot traffic and storms, to risk the elements in search of the warmth of the sun. To do this I knew I must risk the security that ritual and routine provided. To go beyond "being" in order to "become," I had to embrace the painful truths revealed in this dilemma.

The purpose of this study was to examine the dilemmas and tensions I encountered as a teacher at a university lab school. Specifically, I wanted to examine these tensions within the context of the seemingly contradictory and multiple role expectations that were required of me, a student who was also a teacher. In conducting this self-study, I sought not only to gain insights into my own teaching and develop a deeper understanding of self, but also to contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching within a university lab school setting.

This autobiographical form of self-study is based on the principles of action research, linking theory and practice through a cyclical process of action and reflection in order to "illuminate the values underlying seemingly technical teaching" (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). An underlying premise is that teaching is "more than action and reaction, it also involves reflection and speculation" (Stremmel, Fu, & Hill, 2002). Further, to study oneself systematically is more than being reflective, or to take a reflective approach. It is a means to exercise the right to question the authority of one's practice. In an effort to alter the image of teacher as primarily that of a technician whose role is to implement rather than conceptualize pedagogic practice, self–study as critical action research helps

4

teachers to "problematize" what has previously been taken for granted (Coles &

Knowles, 1996.)   In this study, therefore, the aim was to problematize the dialectical

tensions inherent in the social contexts in which I worked on a daily basis for two years

in an effort to understand and enhance my experiences through growth, change, and

awareness. Because we neither live nor teach in isolation, I recognized that to examine

my own practices as a teacher, I must do so in the context of the community of my

classroom and school.

Although research has examined the struggles and tensions that first year teachers

face in a public schools, less has been documented about the struggles and competing

demands of teachers in university laboratory school classrooms (e.g., McBride & Lee,

1995). Working in a lab school adds new dimensions to the complicated task of

beginning teaching. At the same time you are a student, you are also a teacher of

children and a teacher of teachers. Between the student teachers in the classroom and the

educated parents peering at you through the one-way mirror, your every mistake is noted

and watched, making teaching feel more like performing. There are many players with

many different agendas in the community of a lab school classroom. Thus, the task

becomes one of negotiating the life of the classroom in a way that is thoughtful of its

community and teacher, one that does not sacrifice the integrity of the teacher for the

contentment of others. Therefore, this study sought not only to understand the multiple

roles and demands I faced as a lab school teacher, but also the identity that is embedded

in my teaching. "Because we teach who we are", we cannot help but learn about

ourselves as we learn about our teaching (Stremmel, Fu, & Hill, 1996). It was my hope

that this research would not only help to illuminate this dilemma as it was played out in

5

my classroom and in my life, both personally and professionally, but also enlighten the experiences of other lab school teachers who must balance many different roles and expectations.

In this study I attempted to address the following questions: What does it mean for me to be a toddler teacher in a university-based lab school? In what ways do my own values and beliefs and perceptions of children, power, teaching and learning emerge through my experience as a teacher in a lab school? In addition, how does this experience challenge, influence, confirm, or alter my values, beliefs, and perceptions, as well as my understanding of self?

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this chapter, I will outline the use of self -study as a form of action research and how it can enhance teaching practices and classroom lives. In particular, I will discuss how this form of inquiry can enlighten teachers' self awareness in the context of their lives as teachers and give voice to the dialectical tensions they encounter. Inherent to my experience as a teacher is the belief that teaching is not what you do but rather who you are. Therefore, the implications of self-study extend far beyond the possibilities of my professional growth and tap into the personal issues that are embedded in my teaching. Because I was a teacher in a university–based lab school, and teaching is a situated practice, I will discuss and analyze the unique and complex roles of university-based lab school teachers as described in the literature. In addition I will examine the literature on beginning teacher development as I was and am a beginning teacher. Because context was an essential and influential piece of my research, I will also describe the unique history of the school in which I worked. Finally, I will review the theory and methodology that informed my research and conclude with a review of my purpose for conducting a self- study, and the implications of such research.

Self Study

The process of teaching is a deeply personal process, one that charges teachers with the question of "Who am I" (Stremmel, Fu, & Hill, 2002). Through teaching, which involves reflection and speculation as part of one's everyday practice, one may gain a deeper understanding of self and, thus, of the processes of living (Dewey, 1916; Stremmel et al., 2002). Because who we are and how we teach cannot be disentangled,

thoughtful teaching provides us with transformative possibilities for self (Ayers, 1993; Palmer, 1993; Stremmel et. al., 2002).

Beginning teaching is particularly complicated and may require teachers to sacrifice ideals for institutional conformity in order to gain acceptance (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). For me, personally, this negotiation has been difficult and at times painful because of what is revealed through my actions and reactions. However, each revelation offers possibilities for personal and professional growth. Bullough and Gitlin (1995) believe if teachers are to direct the process of role negotiation, they must become acutely aware of it. Therefore, they argue that teachers must become students of their own development. Zehm (1999) cites the need for a self-development perspective for both inservice and preservice teachers. He believes that reflective practices have implications for self-development in terms of enhancing self-understanding and thus allowing teachers to become more intentional in their practices. One way in which teachers can accomplish this is through self- study.

To study one's self systematically, however, is more than presuming a reflective approach to teaching; it is a means to critically examine one's practice in a systematic way, to question the authority of past practice, and to problematize aspects of one's teaching that may have been previously been taken for granted (Coles & Knowles, 1996). Although a reflective approach to teaching runs the risk of not being taken seriously, of addressing trivial questions, and offering no radical challenge to what we think we know about teaching, the critical action research approach, on the other hand, can generate self-confidence, understanding, awareness, and insight that are critical foundations for long-term personal-professional development (Coles & Knowles, 1996.) Self-study is a form

of critical action research that gives voices to the intellectual contradictions and dialectical tensions teachers face in their classrooms lives (Stremmel, 2002). It is intended to offer practical outcomes through systematic examination (Stringer, 1996). Thus, the goal of self-study is to elicit changes within teachers and in practices that improve classroom life. Particular to critical action research is the desire is to challenge preconceived ideas regarding teaching and learning in order to achieve social change in the communities of classrooms and schools (Stremmel, 2002; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Self-study is important because it puts practitioners, people who live the experience of teaching on a daily basis, at the center of research and acknowledges the specific context of individual teachers. Therefore, the link between theory and practice is direct. Teachers not only craft their own theories, ones that are specific and sensitive to their lived experiences, they test them in the classrooms in which the theories were generated. In addition, the knowledge that teachers generate about their classrooms and practice makes for more intentional and purposeful teaching (Zehm, 1995). Teaching happens in relationship to our students within a given classroom, but in a larger sense, teaching happens in a particular location shaped by a unique set of personal, institutional, and social characteristics (Dinkelman, 2003). To understand my teaching fully, I knew I must consider the context in which I taught, and how the examination and understanding of my teaching extends outward to inform others in this setting, including possibilities for creating change in this setting.

The Context of Teaching and Working in a University-Based Lab School

My teaching was situated in a university-based lab school. University-based child development laboratory schools first began to appear in the 1920s and have contributed a great deal to the knowledge base in the field of child development and early child development teacher education (McBride & Lee, 1995; Osborn, 1991). However, little research exists about these schools and the roles of those who teach within them (McBride & Lee, 1995). Lab Schools are distinctive in their functions; they are schools for young children, training sites for preservice teachers, and research settings for various departments within the university. In addition, they are expected to serve as models for the early childhood community. Just as these schools serve multiple functions, purposes, and clientele, so do their teachers. For example, lab school teachers are expected to teach young children, supervise and help prepare students to be teachers, develop partnerships with parents, and facilitate and conduct research, all toward the aim of fulfilling the three-fold mission of research, teaching, and service. In addition, they must adhere to developmentally appropriate practices and be knowledgeable in current trends and research in the field. Therefore, the experience of teachers working in child development laboratory schools is unique in its complexity and multiple demands.

Although the various roles required of these teachers, as a result of their school's mission, have been acknowledged by many researchers (see Horm-Wingerd & Cohen, 1991; Keyes & Schwartz, 1991; McBride, 1994; Townley & Zeece, 1991), little is known about the experiences of these teachers. For example, what are the struggles, tensions, and challenges confronted on a daily basis by lab school teachers; and, more importantly, how do these teachers deal with these struggles? How do lab school teachers perceive

the multiple demands and expectations of lab school teaching and how do these perceptions inform and influence what they believe about teaching and learning, about curriculum, and about self? The answers to such questions are important and must be made explicit and visible if we are to better understand the experiences of lab school teachers, as well as how beliefs and personal theories frame what we see and how we interpret these experiences.

As a part of a larger data set on how child development laboratory schools function, McBride and Lee (1995) interviewed two child development lab school teachers over an 18-month period of time. In particular, McBride and Lee were interested in the interconnectedness between the tri-part missions of child development lab schools and these teachers' experiences of their diverse roles. The interviews took the form of a semi-structured format with both teachers receiving the same basic questions regarding their roles. Each teacher later participated in follow-up interviews that had been individually tailored based on their responses in the initial interview. The interviews were then transcribed and major sources of stress and tension, resulting from the demands of their multiple roles, were highlighted.

McBride and Lee found that one major source of stress for these teachers was the pressure they felt to be models in all aspects of their jobs. They felt enormous responsibility in this respect because of their roles as teacher educators. This pressure was magnified by their perceptions that parents had higher expectations of the set-ups, classroom environment, and teacher-child interactions because the school was university-related. Another tension these teachers experienced was a result of the competing needs of their multiple clientele groups (i.e. children, parents, student interns, researchers,

administrators). The needs of each group were varied and often conflicted with those of another group; this often resulted in an ethical dilemma for the teachers. Thus, teachers were burdened with the overwhelming task of deciding where and how sacrifices must be made in order to cause the least harm. For example, when researchers are pressuring them to make a child participate in their study, the teachers must decide between the pressure the researchers exhort and what they believe is best for the child.

McBride and Lee's study has been one of the few to explore the experiences and struggles of teachers working in the context of a lab school. These authors discuss implications of their study that call on lab school directors to be cognizant of the tensions teachers experience when guiding their programs and to create initiatives to better meet the needs of teachers working in these schools. These are externally derived strategies designed to provide teachers with effective coping strategies and resources to manage their multiple roles and demands. Although helpful, these strategies do not to lead to deeper understandings of the struggles facing teachers, nor do they provide insights into teachers' own knowledge and understanding of the problem. If good teaching involves understanding who one is and what one brings to teaching, then the questions of "What works?" and "How do I teach?" are secondary to helping teachers explore the primary questions of *who they are* and *how they are.*

Self study not only helps to shed some understanding on how to approach problems in a specific context, as a formalized form of reflection, it makes teachers more self aware and thoughtful in their teaching. Further, it may help other teachers in similar settings to develop insights that can lead to change in their settings. I addressed these

issues in my own research through the use of journaling, self-observation, and reflection (e.g. reflective conversations with my students and advisors), and autobiography.

Zehm (1995) cites personal journals, narratives, self- assessments, picturing, and metaphors as useful to the process of self-study. DeLongis, Hemphill, and Lehman (1992) also find personal journals or diaries well suited for the study of everyday events such as teaching because of the convenience diaries afford the user due to their small size (easy to carry around) and their simplicity in self-administering. Journals are significant in the study of self, because they assist teachers in not only identifying but also in describing significant events in their classroom lives (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). At the same time Bullough & Gitlin acknowledge the usefulness of journals, they also recognize their limitations. They believe that, if journals are to be useful, they must be focused and take into consideration the relationship of each entry with another.

Autobiographical narratives are becoming increasingly popular as a means of self-study because they invite the voices of teachers, previously absent, into the research on teaching (Herzog, 1998). Self- narratives tell the stories of teacher's experiences and dilemmas in a way that links their stories with the story of others. The power of autobiography thus lies in its ability to connect the reader and the writer with deeper understandings of self and others (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). However for self-narratives to be a legitimate means of self-study, they must identify "nodal moments" (Graham, 1989). Graham defines "nodal moments" as those central to teaching and learning to teach.

Other popular ways to study self are different forms of self-assessments, including self-observations and self- portraits. This may involve video- and/or audio-taping one's

teaching, writing reflections, and engaging in reflective discussions with mentors or colleagues (Zehm, 1995).

In my study, I used a combination of methods that include keeping a reflective journaland engaging in reflective and critical discussions with my advisors, peers, and student interns, in order to better understand myself in the context of my role as a teacher and the dilemmas I encounter. Autobiography or self-narrative will be used to illuminate "nodal moments," thereby enabling insight and interpretation of my experiences (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Before elaborating on the use of these methods in Chapter Three, I will review the literature on beginning teacher development. I will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the philosophical and theoretical influences that inform my teaching and further elucidate this study.

Teacher Development

The history of research on teacher development spans over four decades. However little is known regarding how teachers evolve in their practices (Kagan, 1992; Richardson, 1990). During the 1960s and 1970s, the research on teacher change was generally empirical in nature and focused on large samples of teachers over short periods of time; few studies addressed the long-term effects of training programs for teachers' professional development (Kagan, 1992; Richardson, 1990). Fuller (1969) and Berliner (1988) both created developmental models for understanding teacher development Fuller's (1969) model focused specifically on teacher concerns, while Berliner (1988) identified a five-stage model for teacher development based on studies of novice and expert teachers' cognitions regarding their practices. Qualitative studies using smaller sample sizes began to emerge in the 1980s. The literature produced by these studies

became know as learning-to-teach literature (Kagan, 1992). The learning-to-teach

literature differed from the literature on teacher change by shifting the focus from teacher

behaviors to the values, beliefs, and mental processes that underlie teacher behavior

(Kagan, 1992). In the1990s researchers identified common themes from reviewing the

body of literature and proposed implications for teacher development (Borko, 1989;

Kagan, 1992; Sprinthall, Reiman, & Sprinthall, 1996).

When Kagan (1992) reviewed over 40 studies from the learning- to- teach

literature, she extracted several themes that appeared consistently across studies on

beginning teacher development. First, she found first –year teachers commonly

reconstructed their image of self as teacher as they grew in their knowledge of their

students and classrooms. Secondly, teacher education programs were not adequately

preparing new teachers in pedagogic practice and content knowledge. Thus, many

teachers relied heavily on textbooks and their personal experiences as students to inform

their teaching. Novice teachers also depended on their students for coming to understand

the culture of students through social interactions. In addition these teachers struggled to

make the connection between the abstract theories taught in their university coursework

and their actual experiences in the classroom. Many novice teachers enter the field

unprepared for the realities of the life of a teacher and thus draw upon their personal

experiences to inform their teaching. It is not surprising therefore that the literature

reviewed by Kagan (1992) suggested a link between novice teachers' practices and their

personal biographies. Their image of the teacher and image of the child were influenced

by their personal histories as students. These findings are congruent with the literature on

self-development and further implicate the need for teachers to carefully examine their practice in the context of their lives.

Philosophical and Theoretical Influences

Prior to 1995, the lab school was not guided by a particular philosophy. The curriculum was play-based with minimal teacher engagement (Stremmel, Hill, & Fu, in press). However after a new director was appointed in 1995 efforts were made to "revitalize" the program. In the summer of 1996 the director and several of his colleagues began an in-depth analysis of the program. They sought to find way so to better integrate the missions of the lab school while creating a model program. A curriculum coordinator, Lynn, was hired to initiate the change. Lynn was an experienced student of the schools of Reggio Emilia and helped to translate the philosophy of Reggio Emilia into the American culture of the lab school. This meant orientating towards social constructivist thought and towards the idea of school as community. It is important to note that while the lab school became well known and valued within the community of lab schools, there were echoes of resentment and anger within the department.

As a teacher, who has been teaching in a Reggio-inspired university lab school for two years, I have tried to adhere to the philosophy of social constructivism. Social constructivism is a view that suggests that knowledge and understanding are constructed in social, historical, and cultural context. Simply put, development happens through social interactions and relationships. Vygotsky (1978), a social constructivist theorist, suggests that teaching and learning are processes that occur through discovery, experimentation, and relationships. Vygotsky recognizes environment and the people who inhabit it as influential and central to the ways in which learners interpret and

16

understand their worlds. Social constructivism is not only a philosophy I have tried to adhere to in my classroom, it is also a framework that influenced my research. In particular, social constructivism recognizes the influence of context in how I understand, interpret, and construct myself as a teacher and how I negotiate this understanding within the experiences I deemed to be dilemmas.

Consistent with my view of teacher as both a student and researcher, I feel strongly that teaching is for change and that change is a direct result of thoughtful and reflective practices. This desire has been nurtured by the philosophy of Reggio-Emilia that has inspired the school in which I work and my own teaching.

Reggio-Emilia is a small town situated in the north-central part of Italy. After World War II, Loris Malaguzzi directed parents and teachers in establishing a city-run educational system for young children. The schools drew from social constructivism and theorists like Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget (Gandini, 1997). Central to their teaching is the image of the child as competent, capable, curious, and social. They believe that children learn and develop in relationship to their environment. In addition, there is view of schools as a system of relationships. Therefore, children's learning is not an isolated event; it occurs through and is nurtured by relationships with parents, friends, environment, and the larger community. In addition, the schools are designed to be welcoming to whoever enters as well as aesthetically pleasing; careful attention is paid to the situating of objects and artifacts (Gandini, 1997). While our lab school has not tried to imitate the schools of Reggio-Emilia, it has adopted it as a philosophy for informing pedagogic practices. However, this itself poses a challenge to my teaching in that it also challenges many American assumptions of the teacher, the child, and the school.

Challenging assumptions and preconceived ideas was at the basis of my desire to conduct this study. I wanted to know myself in ways that acknowledge who I am beyond being Jay's girlfriend and the youngest Mottley girl. I wanted to know what drove me and sustained me and how this was entangled in my teaching. I believe this is what I have been charged to do and must do in order to grow as a person and a professional. I had to ask the difficult questions and not be frightened by what was revealed. Although many times it would have seemed easier to turn away, to let things be.

Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the dilemmas and tensions I encountered as a teacher at a university lab school. Specifically, I wanted to examine these tensions within the context of the seemingly contradictory and multiple role expectations that were required of me, a student who is also a teacher. In conducting this self-study, I sought not only to gain insights into my own teaching and develop a deeper understanding of self, but also to contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of teaching within a university lab school setting. I attempted to address the following questions: "What does it mean for me to be a toddler teacher in a university child development laboratory school?" and "In what ways do my own values, beliefs, and perceptions of children, power, teaching and learning emerge through my experience as a teacher in a lab school?" In addition, "How does this experience challenge, influence, confirm, or alter my values, beliefs, and perceptions, as well as my understanding of self?

Participant

I have been the head teacher in the infant- toddler room at a university-based child development laboratory school for two years. My position in the lab school was a result of being awarded a graduate teaching assistantship. I was initially assigned as the assistant to the infant and toddlers teachers. However, when the infant teacher resigned early into my first year at the lab school, I was assigned her position. I was working towards receiving my masters in human development with a concentration in child development. A year prior to being admitted to graduate school, I graduated from the same university with a BS in Family and Child Development. I remained in Blacksburg

19

following graduation to work at a parent-teacher cooperative school where I had interned my senior year of college. I spent the year, the one between undergraduate and graduate school, trying to find myself. Although this may seem insignificant in that it is probably the story of many people and somewhat cliché, I would argue that is exactly why it is significant. While no two lives are the same, I cannot help but believe that all of our lives intersect in our desires to understand who we are and what are capacities are for becoming, to ask the difficult question of "who am I."

I feel my experience as a lab school teacher lends itself to this question because of the multiple demands and complexity of the roles required of me. These pose constant challenges to who I am and how I have come to know. At the same time I am a graduate student and teacher of young children, I am also required to be a teacher of teachers. In my classroom, I supervise student interns that are practicing to become teachers. I serve as their model, classroom advisor, consultant, and supervisor. In addition to our time together in the classroom, we meet once a week for "Teacher Talks." This is a time when we discuss issues in the classroom; the conversations range from curriculum planning to questions about children's development to basic classroom management. In addition, I am responsible for assigning weekly reflection topics to the student interns, with the purpose of helping them become more reflective practitioners. My other duties are innate to the lives of teachers (i.e. parent-teacher communication, staff meetings, parent conferences) but nonetheless require a great deal of time and energy. This juggling of roles has been difficult for me and the struggle with how to manage all of this and still have a personal life has eludes me.

Setting

The Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory is a university-based preschool that has the three-fold mission of research, teaching, and service to the local and national Early Childhood Education communities. Its philosophy is inspired by social constructivism and the schools of Reggio Emilia (described in Chapter 2). My classroom is actually divided into two age groups in one room. One side of the room is "designated" the Infant Room or Blue Room and the other side is the Toddler Room or Green Room. While there is no physical divider between the two sides, each class has a different door for entering the classroom. One- way glass mirrors line the front wall of the classroom. There are headsets linked to microphones inside the classroom. This is designed to be an observation booth for parents, teachers, students, and researchers. Both the infant and toddler classes have different head teachers, student interns, curriculum, and activity schedules. In my second year there were six undergraduate student interns that worked in my classroom. Five of the interns were in their third year of a five- year program in Early Childhood Education. The students in this program will receive their masters' degree as well as their state certification to teach. The other student intern that I supervised in the Green Room was a field study student who was getting her BS in Human Services. In my first year I supervised four student interns enrolled in the five-year program in Early Childhood Education. The student interns' assignments in the lab school lasted two semesters. The head teachers in all the classrooms were graduate students in Child Development who received funding for their work. Last school year I was assigned to be the head teacher in the Blue Room. Because the lab school in which I worked supported looping, I moved to the Green Room after my first year. So for many of the children and

families in my class, this was our second year together. There were fourteen children that were divided into two classes of seven. One class met on Mondays and Wednesdays and the other one met on Tuesdays and Thursdays; both classes met from 9 –11:30 a.m. The children's ages ranged from 3 to 11 months when I began teaching at the Lab School. At the end of my second year, the children's ages ranged from 26 to 39 months. Ten of the children were in my class last year, while four of the children were new to the program.

Design

The systematic collection of data for this study occurred over a five-week period of time. Because the experience of teaching is contextual and cannot be limited to a designated period of time, reflections and artifacts from the previous year contributed to the data. Thus, because I was a teacher for nearly two years in the same classroom, I believed my experiences would likely prove to be significant to this is study as it is an essential piece of my context.

The data for this study were collected using journaling and reflective conversations with peers, student teachers, and my advisor. Following each class, I used my journal to reflect on my thoughts, feelings, questions, and experiences of the day. Because my experience as a teacher could not be limited to my life inside the classroom, I also used the journal at other undesignated times that I considered critical to this research. For example, I had agreed to participate in a committee to examine our school's discipline policy. I left many meetings enraged and exhausted. My journal provided me with a space to make meaning of these emotions in relationship to my teaching.

Research (reflective) Journal. I used a daily journal to describe my experiences in the classroom, especially those I believed to be significant to my questions. Journals

serve as written accounts of classroom life and provide teachers with a space to "record observation, analyze their experiences, and reflect on and interpret their practices over time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, p.26)." Therefore, this type of written description can be a powerful means of engaging in reflective thinking about personal experiences with children, students, and parents in the classroom. In addition journals document the feelings and attitudes associated with the process of decision-making that can underlie daily interactions. Journal entries are significant in action research because they describe actual teaching events, problems, and conflicts in teachers' lives. The descriptions can later be analyzed and shared with colleagues. Journals also provide a safe place to question and confront one's practice. Specifically, journaling lends itself to the often difficult or painful questions of "Why do I do what I do and what does it mean?" Therefore, description is not an end in itself, but a precursor to uncovering meaning - the "why" behind what one does. Understanding *why* can move one toward concrete action for change, as is the goal with action research and more specifically with self-study (Stremmel, 2002; Stringer 1996). As one becomes more engaged in exploring the "whats" and the "whys" of their practice, he or she becomes better prepared to contemplate possibilities for change. Change is difficult because it requires challenging assumptions and preconceived notions about teaching. However, change is necessary for reconstructing images of teaching that are found in the realities and specifics of what one does, as opposed to portrayals of teaching that others who are removed from these day-to-day realities often perpetuate. Therefore, journals provide spaces for meaningful and reflective descriptions of teaching that lead to change not only in how one practices teaching but also in how one thinks about the roles of teachers and teaching.

Reflective Conversations with Linda and Student Interns. Once a week, I met with the infant teacher, Linda, to critically reflect together on my teaching. Our conversations ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes. Because we shared the same classroom, she witnessed the life of my classroom on a daily basis. The sessions were informal and guided by questions or dilemmas that appeared in my journal or that she identified as an observer of my classroom.

I also met with my student teachers once a week on Tuesdays from, 3-4pm. This time was designated as "Teacher Talks"(as discussed above), an opportunity to engage in informal discussion guided first by the students' questions, comments, and/or insights regarding any and all aspects of the classroom. I believed the conversations, in and of themselves, were significant in what they revealed about how I articulate teaching and classroom life to these pre-service teachers.

Dialogues with Linda and my student interns allowed me a safe place to reflect on the complexities of teaching and dilemmas I encountered. The safety came in that we already established ourselves as a reflective community of co-learners and teachers. Our aim was to support one another as we came to understand our teaching and ourselves. Together we shared information, insights, asked and considered questions, and further reflected on the problems I confronted. In addition, we shared and developed stories that offered opportunities for self- reflection on feelings, assumptions, and definitions of what constitutes teaching/learning, and shared events and experiences that were meaningful and significant to my study.

Reflective Dialogues With Advisor. My reflections with my advisor functioned in much the same way as my peers and student interns. Together we discussed and analyzed

my journals and dialogues with Linda and my student interns. This assisted me in identifying nodal moments, and thus allowed for further reflection. The strength of these dialogues came from my advisors own expertise of teacher inquiry and teacher development, as well as his experience with educating and training preservice teachers. Therefore, he functioned as a scaffold for how I thought about and understood myself in the context of my teaching.

Analysis

Using nodal moments as the primary unit of analysis, I constructed a narrative (autobiographical) account that clearly represented the lived reality of my daily experiences as a teacher in a lab school. Nodal moments are significant insights, perceptions, understandings, interpretations, which illuminate moments of crisis, struggle, and tension. In essence, nodal moments are turning-point experiences. Because this research was qualitative in nature, the collecting, analyzing, and interpretation of the data occurred simultaneously (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Thus critical reflection was essential not only to the process of gathering data but also in its' interpretation and analysis. While the implications of this research are direct for me personally and professionally, it is my hope that others will be able to recognize themselves in my narratives and thus come to deeper understanding of the role of self and context in teaching. When the reader and writer connect through shared experiences, the research becomes meaningful to the literature on teaching (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Thus, I chose to interpret and present my findings autobiographically as a means of organizing and framing my insights and interpretations on what I discovered or uncovered about what it means to teach in this context, and who I am and want to be as a teacher.

Chapter Four

Peeling Back the Layers

This desire, this need to know who I am and to understand my capacity for living

and teaching in congruence with my most authentic self (as I understood it) became

visible on my first day of orientation at the Lab School. Our Curriculum Director, Lynn,

asked us to craft a representation of ourselves, our hopes, and our dreams. She provided

us with small rectangular box lids for our creations. While others fastened rocks, pieces

of shiny metal, beads, pipe cleaners, and shells inside their boxes, I left my empty except

for a thin layer of blue and white clouds drawn with chalk. Using multicolored wire, I

tied a bow around my box and was done.

Lynn had also asked us to write a short paragraph explaining the meaning or symbolism

contained within our individual pieces. We then went around the room and shared our

boxes and words with each other. This is what I wrote:

I wrapped a ribbon around my box to make it look like a package, to represent my

body, the vessel for my soul. The clouds in the center of the box represent the

wide space and endless possibilities of who I am or might be. I am here because

who I thought I was is actually only a reflection of other people. However it is my

hope and my dream that I may come to know myself. (August, 2001)

This activity was especially meaningful for me. It had not yet been two whole weeks

since I had broken up with my boyfriend of six years and I was still feeling emotionally

charged. The break from Jay was not only significant because of the more obvious

reasons but also due to the newness of my identity as an individual. I was no longer Jay

and Mindy. I was Mindy. However, I was not sure exactly who that was or could be, but I

knew I would never know if I did not dare to disentangle myself from the people who had

begun to represent how others defined me and how I too had begun to define myself. This

need to separate from old ways of knowing and being known by myself and others felt

urgent if not imperative for me if I wanted live my life with any kind of integrity. While

this was empowering and exciting, it was also frightening and left me feeling vulnerable

and exposed. The protection and comfort that came with accepting things as they were or

how I understood them to be escaped me when I entered graduate school and began

teaching at the lab school.

Over the next two years I would find that the lab school was to be the landscape

for my journey. I had unconsciously been moving towards teaching for many years. I

kept telling other people and myself that I did not want to be a teacher, yet I continually

found myself working with children and in schools. It was not until my second year of

graduate school that I realized I was being called to teaching. Perhaps this is because of the dichotomous nature of who I am and who teachers are by the nature of their jobs.

When I began the more systematic collection of data for this study in the Spring semester of my second year, I was unsure as to what truths might be revealed, and to what degree the actions of my personal life might be echoed in my teaching. In my first research meeting with my advisor, Andy, I had little to say. I thought realizing that certain actions or attitudes made me angry, surprised, or relieved was enough. It was not that these recognitions were not important, they were. However, they were just the surface layer of underlying issues, ideas, and beliefs. They were not enough tell the story. To help me become more critical and thoughtful in my reflections Andy asked me to think about reflecting like peeling back the layers of an onion, to acknowledge the complexity in each situation and the depths of underlying realities. "Peeling back the layers" was difficult and often painful. After this conversation, I tried something new when writing in my journal. I would write until I felt I had written everything that I had to say. When I thought I was done, I would go back and read what I had written. Then I would ask myself "why." It is the "why" that enabled me to identify particular moments as nodal.

I was able to be very honest with Andy and Linda in our conversations because of our established relationships. Many of my more nodal moments arose out some very private situations. I had decided that I would try to describe the events of these moments in a very indirect way, a way that would tell my story without telling on me. This made a process that was already difficult for me, even more challenging. When I discussed this with a friend over dinner she was outraged. " I can't believe you would even consider not

telling the whole story! This is your whole point and now you're going to lie?" I tried to explain that I was not lying. I was trying to protect myself and the other people in my life who might be hurt by some of my actions and revelations. This was unacceptable to her. "This is who you are. This is the whole point. Now stop lying about it." I told her I would think about it but I could not promise I would change my mind. I was not sure if I could. But I thought about it and I am tired of hiding. This is me and my story. It's about a real girl.

In my classroom, we had one rule. The children and teachers were not allowed to hurt themselves, each other, or our environment. I liked to think about my classroom as a place where children and teachers could explore freely and not have to worry about rules, where painting our bodies and climbing on furniture were regular practice. Someone once challenged me on whether I thought allowing the children to climb on the furniture was appropriate or even safe. I had learned from my first year of teaching that I would be held accountable for every action in my classroom and that to survive I would have to be able to articulate the potential for learning in everything that I allowed to occur. Besides not being able to give the children a good reason why they should not climb on the furniture, I thought it was freeing. I wanted my children to learn through their own experiences. So in my classroom, children climbed on the furniture. Sometimes they fell and sometimes it hurt a little. Depending on the child the lesson was different. Some children decided not to do it anymore because they didn't like how it felt to fall; others climbed up again and found new ways to negotiate their movements and the furniture. Either way I thought it was an important experience. I thought it was about freedom, freedom to make your own rules based on personal experiences. Freedom was especially important to me as a

teacher. This was surprising to many of my friends because outside my classroom, I was very concerned about rules, the spoken and unspoken ones. I wanted to be pleasing and associated it with being obedient. This was not something new for me. It had been my nature as a child and now as an adult. In the first grade I had a teacher who told us not to interrupt her when she was speaking unless it was an emergency. At six I was unsure what constituted an emergency and rather than chance being mistaken and upsetting my teacher, I put my head down on my desk and peed in my pants. I have many stories about how I let fear and rules dictate my life inside and outside of school. This is one of those stories.

A few months after entering graduate school, Jay and I reconciled. A few months later we were engaged. Although our break did not last long, it did allow me to start graduate school feeling more like an individual than I had in years. Living far apart allowed me to create a life of my own here, a life that was not crafted around anyone else. As I approached my last semester of school I started to panic. Graduation was approaching. Soon I would be moving, leaving a life I had finally begun to own. I would be moving back to my hometown of Suffolk, where Jay and I had met and both our families lived. Where rules pressed especially heavy on my spirit. My life at home and at work felt out of my control.

I felt like I was watching my life happen, like I was an observer rather than an active participant. As a teacher I was beginning to the feel the effects of sharing a classroom with the student teachers. In the Spring semester the student teachers take turns assuming the role of head teacher. However, as the "official" head teacher, I was required to be responsible for the children and the classroom, but I was not in charge. This was

especially hard for me. I felt a sense of ownership to my classroom and to hand it over midyear felt like a loss. I was frustrated by the dichotomy of my position; I was responsible but not in charge. Although I believe that in good teaching, constructivist teaching, teachers are not "in charge" but rather in partnership with children and share in the responsibility of learning, this has been difficult for me to internalize. I grew up in schools where teachers acted as the disseminators of knowledge; they were "in charge" of the classroom and our learning. For me, school had never been a shared experience, the hierarchy of knowledge and power that separated teacher from student was explicit. Graduate school was the first time I was expected to be an active participant in my own learning. This was frustrating for me. I wanted my professors to tell me what I needed to know and how they wanted me to demonstrate my knowledge. I wanted to be a constructivist teacher but not a constructivist learner. However, I am finding I cannot be one and not the other. As I reflect on the issues of power and control in the classroom, I am finding that I am not actually the constructivist teacher I hoped I was. I am not yet able to relinquish some of my ways of knowing the teacher and the student in terms of power and control. Perhaps a more accurate description of my theoretical orientation would be to say I am an old school teacher with new school or constructivist tendencies.

This became a nodal experience for me in my teaching. As I began to express my frustrations to Linda, I began to communicate some of my beliefs about teaching, learning to teach, and freedom.

 L: I was just going to ask you why are you responsible? Why are you making yourself responsible for all of those things?

MM: Because I ultimately am. It ultimately falls on me, what happens in this

class. And I care. I care what happens to these children. And I'm struggling right

now with who my first priority is. I believe it's to the children but I also believe

I have a huge responsibility to the student teachers. And I'm trying to find

a way that I can help them learn and discover through experience without

interfering with that process for them, allowing it to happen naturally. But

sometimes I don't feel like it's happening fast enough and I feel like the children

may be not getting the optimal experience that they could here. Things like the

snack not coming on time. To me that's a big deal. It's not a big deal for me if I

don't get my snack on time. It's a big deal for the children to depend on that

transition, to depend on knowing when this happens, then this happens. Not that

they can't be flexible but I also feel like I owe it to them to . . .. You know

they're trying to learn to negotiate this environment and this world and if they

have an idea bout how things work and I can make it easier for them by being

thoughtful and intentional about that, I feel like I should. If getting snack here five

minutes early or right on time makes the day less stressful for them, makes the

transition easier, makes them feel less frustrated, I feel like it should be

happening. I feel like it is a big deal. Because I feel like these children, at the

same time they are completely free, they have so little control over their lives and

I feel like if they tell me they are hungry at this time, I feel like I have to listen to

them.

When I read this excerpt from our transcribed conversations, I heard many things.

First, I heard the conflicts that arise out of serving multiple clients. Although the missions

of lab school are clearly stated as to who they serve, it is not clearly stated how the

differing needs of these populations are to be negotiated. For me this felt very much like an ethical dilemma. Because I believe that we learn through our experiences and in relationship to and with others, I did feel like perhaps I should not say anything when the acting head teachers forgot about snack or lost track of time. I thought it would be more meaningful for them to recognize how something as simple as snack can disrupt the children's day by experiencing it. However, at the same time I felt an obligation to the children to listen to their cues and respect the immediacy of their needs by responding to them. Our daily routine provided the children a sense of security that I feared they might loose if our schedule became unpredictable.

I tried to find a way to respect the needs of both groups. At Teacher Talks I tried pointing out the different ways the children communicate with us and how much they, as young children, are forced to depend on adults to get their needs met. I gave the example of snack. I thought this would be a clear and direct way to communicate with the student teachers without interfering with their teaching during class. However, I recognized that it is always easier to make suggestions for improvement when one is merely an observer. When I taught at the lab school I always had a million things swirling in my head at once and sometimes it was difficult for me to hear the children through what I heard or perceived the student teachers, parents, and administration to be telling me. I tried to remember how complex our classroom was because of the multiple populations it served. I decided maybe it was not that the student teachers were not listening to the children but perhaps they could not always hear them through all the other competing voices. Therefore, I decided that it was important to me to help the student teachers hear the children. Sometimes I would just ask them what time it was to remind them to watch the

time or point out that only 2 of our 7 children were listening to the story while the other five sat at the table waiting patiently for a snack. Remembering how difficult the position of teaching in the environment of lab helped me to become more compassionate towards my student teachers and to the conditions of the environment in which they were learning to teach.

It would not be fair to say that I always heard the children. In fact there are many times when I heard the children but ignored them because other voices were louder. In my first year at the lab school, I had a parent that I went round and round with on various aspects of the classroom. I eventually became complacent and would do whatever she asked just to get her leave me alone, even when I knew it was wrong. Her son, Michael, was more reserved. He was hesitant to enter the classroom and once inside would find a quiet place from which to observe the happenings of the classroom. After awhile when he was ready he would join the group or an activity. If a teacher approached him right away he would move or hide. I knew this because I had tried to approach him many times before he was ready. When his mother expressed to me that she felt we were ignoring Michael, I explained to her that ignoring her son was never my intention, that I was trying to respect his need to transition into the room and interactions slowly and on his own. She refused to believe this and approached me about his morning transition almost daily. I found her rants to be exhausting and humiliating when done in public. I finally gave up and did as she asked. When Michael would enter then room, I would immediately approach him and try to interest him in an activity. He hated it and I hated myself for doing it. But I don't teach because I'm selfless. Teaching can be a very selfish act and I can be a very selfish person. I regret that I chose to make my life easier by placating

Michael's mom, by doing something that I knew, as his teacher, was not right for Michael. However, I was too unsure of myself as a first year teacher to stand my ground with Susan and too inexperienced to articulate my actions in a manner that would carry any authority with her. I use to describe Susan as a freight train because of the way she came barreling at me. I did not realize at the time though that I was making it easier for her by lying down on the tracks.

This is just one example of the many dialectal tensions teachers must face, integrity verses complacency. Integrity can be hard won when you want to be pleasing or are ruled by fear. During my first year of teaching at the lab school I continually responded to the loudest voices because in my world they held the most power. Parents are very powerful in our school. This works both to the advantage and disadvantage of the teachers. Parents have been my biggest ally and most feared enemies. As allies, they raise money, build swing sets, share stories, play with the children, partner with teachers and children in learning, share talents and stories. The word enemy may seem strong but when I feel my teaching, my children, or our environment are threatened, it feels like war. The majority of the parents at the lab school are well-educated with middle or upper class incomes. They have many opinions and loud voices. They spend lots of time at the observation windows. This can be very intimidating. The thing that parents cannot understand, that they cannot hear or see from the window is the intersubjectivity that occurs between teacher and child. I think all of this centers around issues of trust. I believe the parents needed me to trust that they knew their child best and I needed them to trust that while I accepted this as true, I knew their child best in the environment of the classroom. That first year I needed Susan to trust that because I loved and cared for

Michael I was respecting his needs in terms of who he was in the environment of our classroom. My decision to leave Michael alone when he entered the room was not because I did not trust her authority as a parent or knowledge of her child but rather because I shared a different knowledge of my Michael, knowledge of the Michael who needed space and time when he entered the Green Room, the Michael who was first an observer and then a participant. I think Susan has finally come to trust me. Neither she nor I have to be loud to hear each other, we just have to surrender to trust.

Inside the classroom is not the only place I have also allowed the loudest voices to dictate my choices and actions. I attended a private college preparatory high school that averaged a 99.9% college attendance rate among its graduates. During my sophomore year, our college counselor started meeting with my parents and me to start thinking about planning for college. By junior year I was visiting colleges and practicing for the SATs. When I told my parents during my senior year that what I really wanted to do was to attend culinary school, I could tell they were disappointed. They told me outright that I could not go. I wanted them to be pleased. I also wanted them to continue to pay my bills. I did not want a fight and so I enrolled in a four-year college. I could have insisted on going to culinary school, insisted my desires be respected and trusted. I could have acted with integrity instead of complacency but I did not. In the short term, I have found complacency to be less stressful; less conflictual in the physical sense. However, the internal conflicts that have arisen when I have sacrificed my integrity in order to gain acceptance has damaging to my spirit. It has made finding and listening to my authentic voice an almost impossible task. Each time I silence myself, whether to please someone else or avoid conflict, I move a little further away from living as I really am.

However, I am beginning to realize that as a teacher and an individual it is not only my job but also my moral obligation to listen and to hear the children and myself, to trust the children and myself. I struggle to do this. It can be very difficult with the competing demands of the different populations within the school and within my life. However, I acknowledge it as part of my journey in becoming a teacher and in becoming myself.

The other thing I heard in my conversation with Linda was my feelings of being powerful yet powerless. To be responsible, but not always in charge, is a strange dynamic of this job. Beyond the issues of control in the classroom with students or with parents, there are affecting political issues. For example, because of the history our lab school (as described in Chapter 2) there are strong emotions regarding the school's philosophy within our department and among faculty. This adds to the complexity of being a teacher and a student. There were those in our department who sometimes felt like it was a division among those who work in the lab and those who do not. Although I loved working in the lab school and identified strongly with my role there, I often felt it was a stigma. I dreaded taking classes with professors who were not in supportive of the lab school's vision and philosophy. In the Fall semester of my second year, I took a class with a professor who made her feelings about the lab school known. She was resentful of the changes that had happened in the lab school and unsupportive of the work that occurred there. Class after class she would make degrading comments about the lab school. At first, a few of the other teachers and I tried to defend the lab school. After awhile we decided it would be in our best interest to keep quiet. Whether or not our grades would have been affected, I do not know for certain. However, I do know that I

was aware of the power she held as my professor and how uncomfortable I felt in the hours I spent in her class. My supervisors at the Lab were also my professors. Although I did not have a negative experience with my professors being my supervisors at work, the possibility was always there simply because of the ways roles and relationships become enmeshed when students are teachers and professors supervisors.

In the conversation with Linda, I also heard myself acknowledging for the first time that the children were not free, not free in the sense they had little power over their lives and in making decisions. Previous to our discussion, I did not realize how powerless the children were over their lives and it took my frustration over snack to realize I had known this all along. I had thought because the children were able to do many of the things I was not allowed to do (i.e. climb on furniture) that they experienced life completely free of responsibility and rules. I also thought since they were not adults their lives were free of any real or intense stress. I now know this not to be true or I would not have been so upset about how a disruption in schedule would effect them. It is true that the stress the children experienced in my class was very different than what I experience as adult, however it was probably not so different in how it felt. In many ways, both the children and I struggle to exert our freedom within the confines of our lives. Just like the children, I too can act impulsively and irrationally when I feel trapped or powerless.

I began to reexamine freedom. I had previously associated freedom with an act. For me freedom is not an act. Certain actions can be freeing just as others can be enslaving. But just because something is freeing does not make me free. Freedom is more complex than that. I now understand freedom to be a way of living. I believe I am only free when I listen to my most authentic self and live accordingly. I cannot describe to you

who this most authentic self is. I have only seen and heard small pieces of her. I know her most often as the small voice of resistance inside me. To listen to the children I feel I must first listen to her. This is a paradox of what I believed freedom to be. I thought freedom meant to make choices without responsibility. Certainly listening carefully to myself is an enormous responsibility. Perhaps Maxine Greene (1988) was right, that there is no freedom without responsibility. I am starting to understand that the responsibility of listening thoughtfully and carefully to myself, and thus the children is perhaps the most radical act of freedom I can demonstrate as a teacher. I would never have believed living freely could be such a daunting task. It is an everyday battle. Some days I am a better listener than others. As for the children in my class, I am not sure exactly how this understanding will translate into our interactions or my philosophy of teaching. I am still trying to understand that. However, I am more empathetic to the ways in which they find power or control in the classroom. And I feel less frustrated by certain actions of the children. I also feel like I hear them better in their verbal and nonverbal ways they communicate; I believe in many ways we are speaking the same language in our actions, telling the same stories. Instead of being frustrated with a child because he or she refuses let any other children in the loft, I try to understand why. Do children need some control in an environment where they have very little? What is driving the child's actions and is there anything I can do to help the child feel empowered in his or her environment? Can I help him or her find other ways to be in control? I am still trying to figure out how best I can do this. Sometimes I don't want to be understanding, sometimes I just want the children to stop arguing over a toy or just do as I asked. I don't want to listen. However, I am reminded by how similar our lives are and how we both need others to be

compassionate and forgiving as we learn to negotiate our worlds by becoming better listeners.

The other insight or moment that was nodal for me as a result of my relationship with Daveis a little more painful. I wince as I even write this because it is part of the darker side of me, the part that is harder to understand and to forgive. The second and last time I saw him, we got into a discussion about the roles we wanted to play in each other's lives. We were trying to figure out how we could get away with being friends. Something we both knew could never work. I was engaged. This did not stop us. As we were talking, I started asking Dave about his ex-girlfriend, Lori. She was traveling in Europe at the time. He described their relationship as "on" when they were together and "off" when they were not. Although I was in a relationship with Jay and although Dave and I had agreed to be friends, I felt threatened by Lori and he could tell. "I just don't understand why you care about my relationship with Lori. You're acting like you should get to be first for me. Why should *you* get to be first for me? I won't ever be first for you." The words stung. I would be lying if I did not admit that I love to be first, I need to be first. I don't like to admit this but it is true. I want to be a priority to other people. I want to be the best student, the best friend, the favorite teacher, the most pleasing. I wanted to be first to be so many other people and in so many aspects of my life, but I rarely was able to make any of those people or things first for me. This is what hurt. It made me feel like a fraud.

I had fairly low self-esteem as student in graduate school because I did not stand out to my professors like I did in undergraduate. Again, I thought if I did not stand out, if I was not first, I was displeasing. However, I was also not as committed as a graduate

student to school as I was as an undergraduate. Part of this has to do with personality and my ability or inability to negotiate multiple tasks. The other part has to do with being a student and a teacher. Teaching in the lab school made it impossible for me to fully commit to being a student or a teacher or a supervisor or a friend in the way I felt was warranted. The negotiation was either to do one or two of these things well and forget about the rest or do all of them mediocre and maintain. I maintained. For someone like me who desperately needs to be recognized for what I do and how well I do it, maintaining wore at my insecurities and my sense of self. I loved my job and learned more in the hours I spent in the lab school than any class I have ever taken or taught. However I feel the commitment of time and high expectations that were required of me as a teacher in the lab school set me up for failure on multiple levels. No matter where I chose to focus my time and my energy, something always suffered. Sometimes it was my schoolwork, sometimes my classroom, sometimes my relationship, always myself. Being a lab school teacher meant making choices, deciding where I would succeed and where I would maintain. For me it meant I could rarely be first and rarely make others first. It meant being no one and everyone.

I had not taken into account what effect this job would have on me or how leaving the same group of children after two years of working, learning, and growing together might feel for me. For the majority of the two years I had worked at the lab school I had given little consideration to the ephemeral nature of the job. I knew when I came to graduate school that my funding, and thus my position at the lab school, could not exceed two years. Yet somehow it took until two months before the close of school for me to recognize that my job and time at the lab school was coming to a close and I had no

control over it. It felt almost surreal to have to leave a job, not because you had been fired or your positioned had been cut, but simply because it was time. One day I was a teacher, the next I was not. It ended as abruptly as it had begun.

I was not ready to be out on my own, to leave the comforts of this school. I had been with many of the same children since they were infants and they with me since the infancy of my teaching. Together we had explored our environment and negotiated our first steps. We were in this together.

However about midway through the spring semester of my second year something happened that changed everything, something that reminded of the impermanence of this job and of my place in the lives of the children with whom I shared a classroom for nearly two years. In a staff meeting, we discussed the need to better care for our school; it was becoming cluttered and uninviting. Prior to this year the Curriculum Director had quietly cared for the aesthetics and general maintenance of our school. She had done so with great attention to detail and the placement of artifacts. This year though was a transition year, and we were doing our best just to maintain. So we divided the school into sections and assigned different groups of teachers to oversee particular areas. While I knew this was necessary, I was saddened that the love and care of our environment had to be divided among us like chores. It was hard for me to believe it had come to this. Nevertheless, Linda and I were assigned to the documentation room. The documentation room was our main work area and where teachers tended to congregate at school when we were not in our classrooms. It housed the majority of our computers, books, office supplies, portfolio materials, and other odd and ends that had no other place to be stored.

Linda had asked me to help her straighten things over the weekend but I was busy with company and promised to help her during the week.

When I came into school the next Monday I hardly recognized the documentation room. Linda and the other first year teachers had worked all day Saturday and late into the evening transforming our workroom into something I hardly recognized. Old documentation had been thrown out, furniture rearranged, shelves built, pictures hung, and fresh flowers were placed around the room. It looked wonderful. And I hated it. I just stood in the doorway speechless for several minutes, speechless and a little wild-eyed. When Sarah, the other second year teacher, came in she stood beside me in the doorway, mouth agape. "It looks great," she said. "I know," I said, "I hate it." "Me too," she replied. Then we put our stuff away and headed for our classrooms.

This was the beginning of my end. Being a second year teacher at our school afforded me some seniority. I knew how things and people in the school worked and we had become a source of knowledge for others, particularly new teachers. I felt a sense of ownership for the school. The cleaning of the workroom symbolized the passing of that ownership to the other teachers. Whether I was ready did not matter, the other teachers were. I watched on as the first year teachers began to make plans for next year. I tried not to be resentful but I was. Staff meetings began to apply less and less to Sarah and me. Even the attention of our supervisors seemed to focus solely on the first year teachers. Perhaps this was an unconscious act but it was painful nonetheless. I felt like because I was approaching graduation and would not be returning in the Fall that my voice became less important, that what I had to offer was lessened. I felt pushed out and rejected. My feelings of being powerless and of lacking control were magnified by this experience. In

turn I began to reject the Lab and all I associated with it. I avoided the other teachers and spent less time at the Lab. In my classroom, I became more impatient and less tolerant of the children, student teachers, and parents. I wanted to dislike everyone and everything. I thought this would make leaving easier. It has not. I have entered my classroom as a teacher here for the last time. For the majority of my children this was also their time in this classroom. Next year they will move across the hall to preschool. I would like to believe that it is my children who are not ready for me to go, that they need me to stay. But I am the one who needs them. I am the one who is not quite ready. I am the one who is afraid, who is uncertain about what awaits outside these walls.

Chapter Five

Lessons from the Children

Self as Seedling and Big Ideas

I came to graduate school feeling very frightened. I had been resting quietly inside myself for so long that I was unsure as to whether I would be able to break through the layers of life that had held me so securely in one place, one way of being, one way of knowing. I wanted to burst through the earth, to blossom and to bloom. However, I feared the elements, the storms and the traffic. I was not sure if it was safe.

In my first year at the lab school, I began to sprout a little. But the traffic of parents and storms of emotions left me weathered and battered at the end of that first year. And although I got a little crushed, a little trampled, I did not wither away. I had fourteen teachers who loved me. Our everyday interactions nourished my spirit and gave me the courage to show up day after day. Although our lives looked very different from a distance, when examined closely we were essentially living the same stories of power, control, and identity /image. Pam Oken-Wright and Marty Gravett (2002) write about the phenomena of "Big Ideas," the repetition of major themes or topics that are translated across time, geography, and even culture. For me I found power, control, and image to be the big ideas that I saw the children living in the classroom and that I too lived in my life inside and outside of our school. Differences in age, education, and experience left no one exempt. This story was not just about a teacher or a girl, it is the story of the fourteen children of the Green Room. It is probably in some ways your story too.

Terry & Irma's Daughter

I like to be pleasing. It makes me feel more acceptable to others, and thus to myself. I grew up in a fairly strict household where being pleasing meant sitting up straight, elbows off the table, and no sex before marriage. My parents made it clear to me what was and was not acceptable behavior. I can remember my father popping my elbows with a metal spoon when I forgot and rested them on the table during a meal. One time my dad made me eat in the garage with our pets because my manners were deemed too inappropriate to subject the rest of the family to them. Even now, at 25, my father reminds me to address grown- ups by their formal names. I wonder if my parents will ever stop making rules for me. I wonder if I will ever stop abiding by them. I remember in high school watching *Pretty Woman* with my mother and grandmother. During the scene where Richard Gere and Julia Roberts bathe together my mom looks at me and says, "You know, it's wrong to take a bath with a man before you're married." Rules, so many rules. I believe my parents are strict because they love me and think their rules and punishments will mold me into a well-behaved young woman. Behaving can be exhausting. Sometimes I can hardly decipher what I really want to do from what I have been taught I want.

My children taught me to listen to what I want, to make my own rules. They also taught me how unfair it was to make rules for them. Lilly was two and very attached to her "baba." She would go nowhere without the company of this dirty and tattered piece of cloth. One morning she asked me to get her baba out of her cubby for what felt like the fifteenth time that day. I looked at her and said, "*You* don't need your baba." I am grateful that Lilly is not a timid child, that she does not allow others to make rules for her

or decide what she does or does not need. She looked me in the eye and with great conviction and began to yell, "baba! BABA!" I realized instantly what I had done. I apologized as I gave her the blanket. "I'm sorry, Lilly. I wasn't listening to you. If you feel like you want or need your blanket, you must. Next time I will try to listen." I was not listening to Lilly because I was not listening to myself. Lilly's attachment to her baba did not bother me. In fact, I was glad that she could find comfort and security in a well-loved piece of cloth. I was hesitant to give her the blanket because I did not want her parents to see her with it. They bring it to school in case of emergencies but prefer she not have it. I was afraid if they saw her with it they might assume she was unhappy or bored, that I was not doing my job.

There are many rules that govern our lives and our spirits. People with the power in our lives often get to make the rules and thus control our actions. Just as my parents made rules for me, I tried to make rules for the children in my class, often ridiculous ones. Some consequences of breaking the rules are more explicit, others more subtle. With Michael's mom, Susan, I chose the latter of the two. I made the choice to betray my instinct and in the process Michael. I sacrificed my integrity to get her to stop yelling. The sacrifice of personal ideals in order to gain acceptance has been cited as common practice among beginning teachers (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). While these moments of deception have been embarrassing to admit, I find comfort knowing that I am not alone. I believe that watching Michael enter a classroom and observe from a distant or play alone was frightening for Susan. I think she was scared because Michael and I did not fit with her image of the child and of the teacher. We were breaking all her rules, disrupting her way of knowing. We were making our own rules. While rules often control our actions,

they cannot control what or how we think. Thus in our thought lies our most authentic voice and call to living freely.

Jay's Girlfriend

Jay came to me at a time in my life when I was very ill with depression. There is a history in my family of clinical depression and I had suffered silently with the disease for many years. During my junior year of high school, I broke down. I had been dating Luke for three months and when he ended our relationship I was crushed. I had invested my self-esteem in him and when he left so did my sense of self. I did not know who I was and without him I was even less sure. I loathed myself and my life. I wanted to die. Then Jay came along. It took over a year for him to convince me to date him. The thing I can say about Jay is that he loved me even when I could not love myself. It is an amazing gift for someone to love you when you are full of self-hatred and at your least lovable. Growing up in a religious home, I was taught to hand my troubles over to Jesus, to let Him carry the burden when it became too much to bare alone. But I was angry at Jesus for letting my life fall apart, for leaving me alone with myself. I did not trust Him to carry anything. Unconsciously I handed my load over to Jay. He carried my heaviest burdens when I could not; he loved me when I could not love myself and when I so desperately needed to be loved. Through his courage, he saved my life.

Jay was popular at school. He was the captain of the football and baseball team, and a starter on the basketball team. He was generous and kind. I was quiet and reserved, less friendly. My hours were spent behind the lens of a camera or pouring over books. I was rather unremarkable. I began to be known as "Jay's girlfriend." I found comfort in this. I was no longer alone. However after seven years, I wanted a name and an identity

that was not based on someone else. I wanted to be more remarkable than an identifier of relationships.

Because I spent my whole living under the confines of other people's rules and identity, I wanted a drastic change. I wanted freedom. I wanted to climb on the furniture and paint my body purple. However, I still did not believe freedom was within me. I believe this is why I looked to Dave and to the children, why I tried to transfer what I thought I saw in them into myself. I saw this happen with the children as well, the "I want what you have." And like me, when a child got the toy or costume or marker he thought he needed, disappointment often followed. *We* were disappointed because we did not listen to ourselves about what we wanted or needed but looked to others to show us an image of contentment, one that was unsatisfying because it was not our own.

Lab School Teacher: No One and Everyone

My experience as a teacher in the lab school has meant many things for me. It has meant learning to negotiate life and teaching and graduate work in a way that I can live with, even though I may not like it. It has meant accepting third or fourth or even last place in order to stay in the game. It has meant learning to teach by learning to be a student and learning to be a student by learning to participate. Being an inexperienced teacher and graduate students has further complicated the task of teaching and learning to teach. It has meant living and teaching in a public arena where my fans and my critics are invited to witness my successes and my failures. It has meant learning to speak the languages of parents, children, student teachers, and administrators. It has meant seeing myself in the children I teach and who teach me. It has meant taking responsibility for listening to my inner voice or what Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld (1994) calls the "ear inside

the heart" (p.28). It has meant finding freedom in responsibility and responsibility in living freely. It has meant being a teacher and a student, a supervisor and a mentor, a woman and a child. It has meant being no one and everyone.

The Hope of a Transient Teacher

I expressed to Andy my feelings of rejection, of being pushed out. I wanted him to know how powerless I felt in my position at the lab school. He reminded me that while I could not control having to leave, I could control *how* I left. This paper has been important for that reason. I hope it tells my story as well as the story of other lab school teachers. I hope researchers will see the implications to examine more closely the dynamics of teaching in a lab school and explore ways to better prepare and support students who are also teachers and whose jobs are impermanent. I also hope others can recognize how powerful self-study can be as a means of enhancing self-understanding and thus in becoming a more intentional practitioner (Zehm, 1999). I hope that personal narratives can come to be accepted by the wider research community as powerful tools for understanding self and teaching practices. I hope my story has been your story too.

The Authentic Self

I knew there was this person inside me waiting to get out. Although I love her, she frightens me. Her lack of concern for rules and control can be intimidating. She can be very disobedient. She eats with her elbows on the table and says words like fuck and pussy. When she comes to work she looks a little messy. She has wild hair and wrinkled clothes. She rarely matches. She looks like this not because she is lazy or does not care but because she has come to work, to dig in with both hands. She doesn't care how you think she looks. She cares that the children know she has come to play hard and learn

much. She is not afraid of mud or paint or messes. She hates graduate school and writing. She was not born for such detail work. She has only stayed because she loves her job. She laughs a lot. She does not cry often but when she does, she cries with passion. She cries the kind of tears that make eyes swell and snot run. It isn't pretty but it's real. She has a hard time listening. She wants to be a good listener but rarely is. She has a dark side. She can be cruel and jealous and vengeful. She's not perfect. She is real. She hides when she is afraid and she is afraid a lot. She fucks up everyday and she knows it. But she loves herself enough to be forgiving. This how she knows she is a good teacher. This is her one truth. No one can take that away from her. No one can take that away from me.

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