



Learning to Attend to Children's Familial Curriculum-Making Worlds¹

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ABSTRACT

Using autobiographical narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), I inquire into my experiences as a teacher, beginning with an inquiry into my early experiences on home and school landscapes. I explore my teacher stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and inquire into how my stories have shifted and changed, over time and place. As I explore the bumping places and tensions I experience as teacher, my purpose is to show the ways I learned to attend to children's familial curriculum-making worlds (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). In doing so I offer a possible counter narrative of curriculum making in schools, which honors and validates children's stories of experiences lived and told in homes and communities.

Bringing School Curriculum Making Home: Beginning a Teacher Story to Live By

I began to compose my stories to live by² as a teacher when I entered grade two and met my teacher, Ms. Z. She was different from my grade one teacher; she was warm, friendly, and caring. She spoke in soft tones and was gentle in her teaching manner. I admired her because of how she treated me, often allowing me to visit the classroom prize box, which contained pencils, erasers, smelly stickers, and extra photocopied worksheets. I always took the worksheets home. It was at the same time that I began creating my own classroom space at home when my dad bought two wooden student desks, the ones with a drawer just beneath the seat. He placed them in the basement and I began to play out stories of teacher, using worksheets as my

main teaching tool. I began to compose myself through “imaginative play” (Steeves, 2006) of teacher by becoming teacher. Steeves (2006) shares stories of “imaginative play” as she played with her sister where they were “authoring or co-authoring our ‘stories to live by,’ keeping our lives moving through trying out diverse ways of being in response to the landscapes we were living on” (p. 107). Through play and imagination I became teacher by mimicking the school landscape I was living in and creating, for myself, a place of belonging. In this school curriculum-making world that I was trying to re-create at home in the basement, I was beginning to compose stories I would later live as teacher. Being with Ms. Z in her classroom, that is, the school curriculum-making world, and becoming like her outside of it, that is, in the familial curriculum-making world I was creating in the basement, allowed me to create a stronger sense of belonging. Ms. Z created this sense of belonging in the classroom as she built a relationship with me and lived what Noddings (1986) refers to as “an ethic of caring” and “fidelity to persons” (p. 497).

As I reflect now, I believe I was creating a classroom in my basement where I could become somebody else, the teacher, and begin to compose a story of teacher while creating a place of belonging for myself. It was in this space I began to develop my personal practical knowledge, as teacher, by being a teacher through my imaginative play. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe personal practical knowledge as, “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (p. 7). In other words, personal practical knowledge is the stories teachers’ “live and tell of who they are and what they know” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7).

Now, years later as I inquire into my experiences, I wonder how I adapted to the school and classroom environments, and how this has shaped me as teacher, and how I shape the children I now teach. Paley (1986) reminds me “real change comes about only through the painful recognition of one’s own vulnerability” (p. 123). In this paper, I share my personal practical knowledge, my experiences on my professional knowledge landscapes, and my “stories to live by,” allowing myself to become vulnerable as I return to my earlier experiences of curriculum making in an effort to imagine new possibilities.

Not the teacher I imagined.

During my Advanced Practicum, I taught in a grade six classroom in a newly created urban school, where approximately 95% of students were Aboriginal.³ The school was designed for Aboriginal learners from years four to nine with the story⁴ of having innovative teaching practices, a balance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, and teacher professional development, that was specifically designed for Aboriginal

learners. Children in years four through six travelled by yellow school buses from various neighborhoods, while children in years seven through nine took public transportation, with few from nearby communities. The school was storied as an inner-city school and a "bad place," full of academically challenged children with behavior problems. The school was well known as a challenging place: staff turnover was high with teachers leaving their assignments during the school year; student assaults on teachers and leaders occurred with few consequences for children; leadership changed frequently and, alongside that, came new expectations and directives from the district on ways to improve the academic achievements of Aboriginal children. I, too, hoped to find new ways to improve the educational experiences of Aboriginal children as I prepared and delivered the curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1993), the "planned curriculum" (Clandinin et al, 2006), or the mandated curriculum. I also held the hope of creating places of belonging in my classroom, yet there did not seem to be any space for this within the mandated curriculum.

I felt tension between the dominant curriculum and the lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993) or the curriculum of lives (Clandinin et al., 2006) as I was preparing the children to write the Provincial Achievement Tests⁵ (PATs). During my practicum, children shared aspects of their lives and were curious about mine, yet these reciprocal wonderings occurred mainly in out-of-classroom places such as the schoolyard, playground, or hallways. In the classroom I felt as though I needed to be someone who "gave" knowledge to children as I hoped to improve their academic lives, preparing them for the *real* world, as though the world we were living inside the school was somehow irrelevant in their preparation in who they were becoming outside of it. While I wanted to share more about myself and learn more about the children, I was uncertain and uneasy whenever we moved away from the mandated curriculum or when children were "off task." On the last day of my practicum, I raced home to retrieve my dog, bringing her back to show the children. I realize now this was one my earliest attempts to share with the children a bit of my life from outside of school, free of the mandated curriculum, and the expectations of the co-operating teacher and university facilitator. My co-operating teacher recommended me for one of many positions for the upcoming year. I was offered, and accepted a probationary position⁶ in a combined grade 4/5 classroom.

Broken Dreams: Living a story of "good" teacher.

I remember returning home after the second day of my first teaching position, questioning and wondering whether I wanted to continue teaching. Something did not feel right. I cried that night and for most of the weekend trying to convince myself things would get better. Things did not get better, instead I just adapted to the environment over time. (Narrative Inquiry course, written response, May 12, 2011)

I was now the teacher in my classroom. Most of what I had imagined about creating a classroom that included the lives of all children and myself were put aside. School stories of effective classroom management took precedence; older teachers encouraged me *not to smile until Christmas*.⁷ I had few relevant teaching resources. I photocopied anything I could use, hoping it would be engaging, creative and, most importantly, directly link to the mandated curriculum. I needed to keep the children on task and the only way I knew how was to have them learn what was required. I now recognize that I was silencing the voices of children, as I was determined to follow the mandated curriculum where children completed curricular learning that I thought they needed to know in order to be successful. There was no time for interruption in the classroom; there were curricular objectives to be met, especially since I was on a probationary contract and being evaluated by my principal. Researchers (Clandinin et al., 2012) found early teachers would “do anything in order to obtain contracts and teaching assignments” and “frequently took on extra responsibilities at the expense of personal well-being and familial needs in order to try to receive contracts and continuing assignments” (p. 6). I, too, was silent about the struggles and challenges I faced in the classroom and school landscape.

I usually returned home around 8 p.m., ate dinner, and then retreated into my office to plan the next day’s lessons, making sure to link my planned curriculum to mandated curricular objectives. Saturdays and Sundays were often spent at the school, marking, changing bulletin boards, searching for resources, creating resources, and photocopying student booklets. Immediately, tensions between my imagined stories to live by as teacher and school stories as teacher began to surface. I did not speak of them anywhere. I received my continuous contract and was told I was doing a great job as teacher. Whispered words among the staff were that once you received your continuous contract, it was important to stay one year and then move to a more desirable school. I began to feel the dis/ease with the stories I was living inside and outside of the classroom and school as teacher, and my body began to make these lived tensions visible. I developed severe eczema on my hands. Along with deteriorating health, personal and familial relationships were suffering. I was exhausted physically and mentally, and felt drained emotionally and spiritually. I was merely surviving. My earlier imagined story of teaching as “creating a classroom environment of belonging for everyone” seemed far out of reach. There were no places of belonging in the school landscape among staff or in my classroom. Other teachers seemed just as exhausted; teacher talk focused on teachers’ lives rather than on children’s lives. Was this the life I had dreamed of as a little girl in my basement as I imagined myself as a teacher who created a place of belonging as teacher? One story remained: worksheets seemed to dominate the classroom environment, becoming both my tool of reliance and survival.

Learning to Attend to Children's Familial Curriculum-Making Worlds

The following year I stayed with the same children in a combined grade 5/6 classroom. I continued living the same pattern from the previous year, personally and professionally. I began searching for relevant teaching materials for the new grade, which was a PAT year. I also began intensive teacher training in a district-wide language arts program. I lived at the school, spending most evenings and weekends preparing myself with mandated curriculum-related work for the children.

Because I had stronger relationships with the returning children, I began to see glimpsers of the teacher I had imagined, as my relationships with the children grew stronger. They began sharing more of their lives inside their homes and communities with me. Even though there were common threads among the stories children told, these stories were often told to me privately, inside and outside of the classroom during supervision. However, my confidence as a teacher grew less, as I was encouraged to focus on preparing the children for the standardized tests.

I accepted a teaching assignment in another public school designated as an Aboriginal elementary school the next year. I taught grade two in the morning and in a grades 3-6 special needs classroom in the afternoon. The special needs classroom was filled with children labeled behavior disordered and/or academically challenged. I was offered this position because I was storied as a teacher who had *effective classroom management* and was told *I would be able to handle it*, even though I had no specific training in special education. I was a "good" teacher. I continued in this assignment for two years, until a new administrator accepted my request to teach in a grade two classroom. Very little seemed to have changed in my stories of teaching. I imposed the mandated curriculum on the children and continued to feel discouraged that I had chosen to become a teacher. I wrote the following reflection about a time I began not liking who I had become as teacher, and as I awakened to knowing I could no longer live the same stories.

Staring out my classroom window, while the children worked silently, I thought to myself, "what the hell am I doing here?" I was trying to imagine a different life, a different way to be. I had become completely disengaged from learning and teaching and I had hit a low point in my career. I was still spending countless hours in the classroom. Personal relationships were ending, I was physically exhausted, and I was unable to see teaching getting better. This was not the dream I had imagined or planned. I knew I wanted to work alongside Aboriginal children, but not in this way...not in the way I was taught (except in grade two). Efforts to change my methods of teaching were met with criticism from those I relied on to give me support in the school. I felt an enormous weight of guilt and shame that I wasn't being true to myself in how I imagined teaching and I wasn't

being fair to these young children. Why was my classroom so quiet? Where were the lives in the classroom...where was the joy? I felt as though I was repeating a traditional form of teaching. There were glimmers and times where I was able to become that imagined teacher, having conversations with children, baking birthday cakes for every child, creating a belonging place in the classroom. However, these were fleeting moments, unable to sustain me. I returned to a way of teaching that was supported by the school landscape by having a quiet, compliant, well-run classroom. (Life in Elementary Classrooms course, written response, November 2010)

I knew the story of school very well and the markers that defined good and bad teachers. Good teachers were seen as having quiet working classrooms. Children were expected to be silent as we walked about the school. The expectation was that children would meet specific academic goals, produce good grades and results “*better than the year before.*” Improved standardized test scores were the markers of success. Teachers who had loud, busy classrooms were seen as ineffective, unable to manage children and, most likely, would not last. I remember using a strategy I had once seen other teachers use to keep children quiet as we moved about the school. It fell into the school plotline of good teacher and good children. At one time, I remember instructing my young grade two children to place their fingers on their mouths as they walked in line formation down the school halls. This was to remind them, and others, that talking was not permitted in the school hallways. I comfortably accepted praise from others, teachers and administration, about how quiet and *good* my class was and the children would each receive an entry slip for the weekly Friday school-wide draw.⁸ Two slips would be entered if they received a compliment. In actuality, I received the compliment for being a *good* teacher.

Beginning to retell and relive earlier stories to live by.

Year after year, children in my grade two classroom shared their desires about becoming a teacher. Instantly, I was caught up in the nostalgia of my grade two experiences of practicing being a teacher at home. I enjoyed hearing these stories, reminding me of my stories of Ms. Z, confirming the wonderful job I was doing as teacher. However, over time, I began to feel tensions as children continued telling me of their dreams to become a teacher. I wondered how the children were coming to know they wanted to become a teacher. What part was I playing in their dreams of becoming? I wondered if they, too, imagined a story of belonging in the classroom? I began to question: Would they, like me, follow the same traditional path of becoming a good teacher laid out by the “grand narrative” (Bateson, 1989) of schooling? I secretly wished they would imagine becoming something different.

Their stories of becoming teachers provided a bumping place, an interruption, for me to begin to imagine otherwise, imagining a new way of being teacher. I awakened (Greene, 1995) to how I was teaching young children who adored me and wanted to become like me even as I was growing bored and detached from teaching...and from the children. I knew, if they were grounding their dreams of becoming a teacher on their stories of me, it would come at a cost⁹ of broken relationships, declining health, and growing tensions between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived or "living" curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Aoki, 1993). Change, however, came slowly as Bateson (1989) reminds me of the powerful hold of continuity and the fear of change when she writes,

We hold on to the continuity we have, however profoundly it is flawed. If change were less frightening, if the risks did not seem so great, far more could be lived. One of the striking facts of most lives is the recurrence of threads of continuity, the re-echoing of earlier themes, even across deep rifts of change, but when you watch people damaged by their dependence on continuity, you wonder about the nature of commitment, about the need for a new and more fluid way to imagine the future. (Bateson, 1989, p. 8)

I continued to hold tightly to continuity for several years before I returned part-time to graduate school in 2009, hoping to change the teacher stories I was living. One story I told others of why I returned to graduate school was that I needed a challenge. The other story that I kept silent was I had grown bored with the mandated curriculum and with the quiet, predictable, planned rhythm in my classroom. Every year of teaching I was reminded, in some small way, that the mandated curriculum I was delivering was silencing the voices of children. I knew the way I was being teacher was not the ways I imagined. Carr (1986) reminded me that,

Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of the self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. (p. 97)

Things in my life and in my teaching no longer made sense. I had grown tired of not being able to live the story of teacher I had long ago imagined. I needed to find new ways to be alongside children. I desperately wanted to remember why I had become a teacher in the first place, not as a marker of success or becoming *somebody*, but as a way

of living alongside children and creating a place of belonging. I was seeking coherence in my stories to live by as I tried to make sense of what I was living in the school and classroom landscape that contradicted what I had so long ago imagined as belonging places. I realized I was not alone in following the grand narrative of teaching and I recognized myself in Paley (1986) when she wrote,

In my haste to supply the children with my own bits and pieces of neatly labeled reality, the appearance of a correct answer gave me the surest feeling that I was teaching. Curriculum guides replaced the lists of questions, but I still wanted most of all to keep things moving with a minimum of distraction. It did not occur to me that the distractions might be the sounds of children thinking. (p. 122)

Looking for answers: Struggling for narrative coherence.

I entered the masters program at the University of Alberta, Department of Elementary Education in the Technology Integration in Elementary Education program in 2009. I chose this program because I had found success with school curriculum making and the products children were producing for me, using technology as a teaching and learning tool. However, after my second course I realized the program was not helping alleviate tensions between the way I imagined teaching and the way I was living alongside children. This path in the masters program was not helping my search to make sense of teaching and learning in the classroom. I needed to remember why I wanted to become a teacher, working alongside Aboriginal children. It was my hope that by undertaking my graduate degree someone would tell me how to be a better teacher to Aboriginal children. I was looking for the “magic teaching method” that would make me a better teacher and desperately wished someone would tell me what that was.

Slowing putting the story pieces back together.

In fall of 2010, I began a course titled, *Life in Elementary Classrooms*, in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development¹⁰ (CRTED), alongside Dr. D. Jean Clandinin and others, and began revisiting my stories to live by. I began to inquire narratively into my stories of experience as granddaughter, student, and teacher, becoming aware my stories to live by are always *in the midst*, always in the making, and not fixed. I began to think narratively when I was asked to write a story of my early school experiences. I was surprised someone was genuinely curious to hear my stories of experience lived in both school and home places. The course became a belonging place for me, a place missing for me inside the schools and classrooms where I had lived. It became a place I wanted to create in my classroom. In this course I found I was not alone. There were other teachers feeling as I was. I remembered the sense of belonging I lived in, and created, as a little girl who

imagined *teacher* and *learner*, in both school and home places. Like Paley (1990), I began to recognize that, "in my early teaching years I was in the wrong forest. I paid scant attention to the play and did not hear the stories, though once upon a time I must have imagined such wondrous events" (p. 5). Through telling and listening to stories of experience with others, I began to imagine wondrous events and imagine a counter narrative or counterstory¹¹ (Lindeman Nelson, 1995) to what I lived as deliverer of curriculum. I began "shaking up my addiction to harmony" (Greene, 1990, p. 69).

Listening with the heart.

A Cree Elder stands up in class and asks, "Are you being truthful? Are you being honest?" He is talking to the participants in the course about our learning and teaching selves. He continues, "There needs to be a holistic approach to learning, you have to have balance with the body, mind, and spirit. Wake up that spirit of knowledge, it does not only exist in the mind, but in the heart as well. The hardest journey one can take is traveling from the mind to the heart." (Indigenous philosophy and curriculum course, May 12, 2011)

His words pierced and lingered, as though he was speaking directly to me. I scribbled his words down fast and wondered silently, *had I been truthful and honest with myself and with the children I taught, as well as with those I was currently teaching?* I thought of the tensions I felt since entering the classrooms 11 years ago, as I was trying to live alongside the children and their families, with the mandated curriculum firmly in hand. I began to wonder, where were the voices of the parents? Where were the voices of the children? Was I really "listening" to the experiences children and their families were telling me in my efforts to be "good" teacher? Through the years these tensions were unidentifiable, I just knew they had been present from the beginning of my teaching career. I now knew, like Paley (1986), that "the rules of teaching had changed; I now wanted to hear the answers I could not myself invent" (p. 125).

I now understood I needed to create a space of belonging where children could share their lived experiences. By inquiring into children's stories to live by alongside my stories to live by in our curriculum making, I awakened to my stories of experience, both in the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world. I wanted to focus on the children's stories of experiences and the familial curriculum-making world they were creating at home and in their communities. I wondered what we could learn about one another as we listened to each others' stories of becoming, while allowing ourselves to imagine new possibilities as we co-composed our school curriculum-making world together.

Creating Spaces: Imagining and living out a counter narrative

I arrived early on the first day of school to prepare the area for our first peace candle gathering.¹² I carefully laid out the Pendleton wool blanket in the centre of the room with an unlit candle, a basket of rocks and smudge¹³ material resting in the middle. I wanted to start our circle in a good way and an Elder was joining us to speak about coming together in a circle and about protocol. With the lights dimmed, Kokum¹⁴ and I sat visiting around the blanket and waited for the children to trickle in. As they arrived, I could tell some children were unfamiliar with entering a room this way and were unsure of what was about to happen. I asked the children to join us around the blanket once they hung up their heavy, overstuffed backpacks on the coat hook. Other children quickly made their way over to the circle, with backpacks still strapped on, and were told by other children to put their backpacks away. Some children sat quietly waiting for us to begin, some gave small waves to friends they recognized from grade one. Some were whispering about the smudge, telling us they too smudged at home with their families. Kokum shared lessons about respect for one another when coming together in a circle, and the importance of listening to what one another is saying, without interrupting. I introduced students to the basket of rocks and to the smooth wooden stick I had lying in the centre of the blanket. The items served two different methods of sharing. With the passing of the basket of rocks, each child would choose a rock and hold it until they were ready to share by placing their rock in the centre of the blanket, back into the basket. The other method was the use of a stick. The stick moved in a clockwise direction around the circle and whoever held the stick was the only one talking. Students were unsure and not used to sharing their ideas in a group setting and many struggled at the beginning. My goal was to create a comfortable space where children could share their stories of experiences.

It was in this space, in our classroom, that I began to create a safe place of belonging where we would be able to share daily stories of experiences and a place where students were in control of their learning. Paley (1986) calls me to think about the importance of having curiosity in creating a space for the stories children tell when she writes:

The key is curiosity, and it is curiosity, not answers, that we model. As we seek to learn more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected. (p. 127)

Most of all, I wanted to stop silencing children and to awaken them, and me, to what they were really telling me about themselves and who they were becoming in both worlds, the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world.

I wanted to “be there to listen, respond, and add a dab of glue to the important words that burst forth...[where] children who know others are listening may begin to listen to themselves” (Paley, 1986, p. 127).

In the beginning, some children resisted coming together in this way by “passing” their turn. Others cautiously spoke about their experiences, saying one or two sentences, and others struggled to find their words. Some welcomed the experience and began to share about their lives. In the beginning, circle often lasted only 15-20 minutes. I began to wonder, were these children afraid to tell stories of themselves, alongside others in the class? Were they afraid of how I, or others, would respond to their stories? Did they even see themselves as having valuable knowledge worth sharing? Perhaps they didn't want to speak because they knew very little about me. I shared more about who I was, and the many roles I played in my own familial stories as granddaughter, daughter, auntie, as well as a graduate student, and teacher. I wondered about the ways children saw themselves in the classroom, and I asked if any of them saw themselves as teacher. Very few had. The conversation began with the traditional narrative of teacher and moved into new possibilities where the children began to recognize themselves as teachers. They shared their experiences of teaching younger siblings, cousins, friends, and older adults in their families. Looking back, I wonder if this practice of sharing experiences in a safe place was unfamiliar to them in their earlier experiences in classroom spaces? As I was trying to disrupt the stories of teacher I had been living so long, I also sensed the dis/ease in the children's adherence to the restrictive practices of the dominant school narratives.

As relationships grew over time, stories began to develop and in my efforts not to silence their stories of experiences, our peace candle gathering circle often lasted 90 minutes. Children began to see themselves as holding knowledge and being knowledgeable by sharing experiences of their familial curriculum-making worlds. They were eager to tell stories of communities they were from, who they lived with, and how, for some, this frequently shifted. Often children shared stories of having many home places and belonging to multiple communities. They spoke about those who were important and less important to them in their families and told stories of being alongside their siblings and/or pets. They spoke about the addition of new siblings, as well as the loss of loved ones. Others shared the tensions of traveling great distances and spending up to three hours a day on the bus to attend school.

The children quickly learned the daily routine of circle and were eager to start. Together, we began to welcome the start of a new day as we met in our peace candle circle gathering. Stories of experience were already being shared as I walked up to my

classroom portable, as children asked if we were having circle. Some children excitedly “bounced” their way to class, ready to share some new experience that happened the night before or on the weekend. Soon children began offering to help set up the space by grabbing the blanket, smudge, candle, and matches and laying them in a spot they reserved for me. The children began to preplan their seating space with those who were eager to share finding spaces on the left side of where I sat, knowing we sometimes moved in the clockwise direction with the stick. They began to see themselves as knowledge holders and began seeing our peace candle gathering space as a safe place to tell of their experiences in story form. Bruner (2012) writes, “we never have to explain to kids what a story is...you start one...and they understand it” (p. 30). Children were sharing stories, sometimes with a beginning, middle, and ending, and sometimes not. It did not matter in our circle and students were respectful to one another as they listened, often triggering their own stories in relation to the stories told by others. Most days I allowed circle to continue without concern for time, however there were times I began to feel tension around the length of time we spent in circle, even though we were creating our own lived curriculum alongside each other. It was a curriculum of lives in the making. It was during these times I began to worry and wondered if I would have enough time to “do” or “cover” the mandated curriculum. Tensions became more noticeable around reporting time and during the evaluation and writing of report cards, as I was reminded to check off the curricular objectives the children could or could not do. Around reporting time, I began limiting the time children were able to share, even sometimes canceling circle. It was during these times when I would cancel the circle that tensions grew, especially as the children expressed their disappointment. I struggled deeply with this tension, once again feeling as though I was silencing the children in my efforts to teach the mandated curriculum. As tensions developed, it became increasingly difficult to continue to privilege the mandated curriculum in the report cards, as there were no spaces to share the other ways I had come to learn alongside the children. There seemed to be little space in the reporting process to share how the children began to know themselves differently and where they began to envision themselves in newly imagined ways.

What matters most: Attending to children’s lives in familial and school curriculum-making worlds.

Greene (1993) speaks to the importance of giving children time and space to begin telling stories of “what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something [self] into being that is in between” (p. 218). The “in between” Greene (1993) speaks about is the meeting place that allows us to unfold who we are and who we are becoming, but do not yet know, alongside others in our interwoven “webs

of relationships" (Arendt, 1958; Chung, 2008). By creating the in-between spaces of belonging and honoring children's worlds of familial curriculum-making within school curriculum-making worlds, I have become open to the endless shaping possibilities, both as learner and teacher.

I have come to understand through creating a space for children and myself while paying attention to our own familial curriculum-making worlds that I now could see "otherwise" (Greene, 1995). I was able to imagine a new way of being alongside children, within our stories of experiences in the school and in the familial curriculum-making worlds. As we moved forward in this process of coming together and sharing our stories of who we are and who we were becoming, I noticed the children began to imagine and see themselves and others in new ways. Children began to see their knowledge and the familial curriculum making they were engaged in at home as belonging within the school curriculum-making world. While many classrooms today continue to privilege school curriculum making, as I had, it is my hope that by sharing my stories to live by through my experiences in our classroom peace candle gatherings, I offer a counter narrative or "counterstory" (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) to the dominant curriculum making. As children travel daily between both worlds, there needs to be safe conversational spaces in the school curriculum-making world where children are able to come together to imagine new possibilities. Greene (1993) attends to the importance of conversation and dialogue in classrooms:

There can only be – there ought to be – a wider and deeper sharing of beliefs, and enhanced capacity to articulate them, to justify them, to persuade others as the heteroglossic conversation moves on, never reaching a final conclusion, always incomplete, but richer and more densely woven, even as it moves through time. (p. 213)

The peace candle gathering circles provided opportunities for the children to envision new possibilities in their lives, alongside others, as they developed their own counter narrative. I imagine as these children move forward with confidence and strength, they will be able to recognize the value in the stories they live and tell. I hope they find safe spaces to continue to share their experiences as they move forward. Through this process of curriculum making alongside children, I too am able to envision a counter narrative as I have returned to live out my earlier imagined stories of teaching. Greene (1995) reminds me of the importance of creating spaces in the classroom for stories to be heard and shared, always in a state of incompleteness when she writes

Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. They

ought to resound with the voices of articulate young in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to a renewed consciousness of possibility. (p. 43)

In creating belonging spaces for the children and myself in the classroom, I return to my earlier stories of becoming teacher. Together, we co-composed curriculum as we listened to, honored, and validated the stories of experiences lived and told by each other, beginning with our familial worlds of curriculum making. I was reminded in this way of coming together, we are all in the process of becoming, who we are, not yet (Greene, 1995).

Notes

1. Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2011) outline two worlds of curriculum-making, the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world. Children live in both worlds on a daily basis.
2. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) developed the term “stories to live by” (p. 4) as a narrative conception of identity, shaped by the narrative telling and retelling of secret and cover stories in various contexts.
3. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act*, 1982, Section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.
4. As a way to describe teachers’ experiences and dilemmas faced in the professional knowledge landscape, as they move in and out of classroom places, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) developed the terms, “teacher stories – stories of teachers – school stories – stories of school” (p. 25).
5. In Alberta, children in grades 3, 6, and 9 are required to write a standardized Provincial achievement exam. In grade 3, children are required to write the Language Arts & Math exams. In grades 6 and 9, children are required to write the exams in the four core subjects known as Language Arts, Math, Social, and Science. According to Alberta Education (2013), the purpose of the Achievement Testing Program is to determine if children are learning what they are expected to learn, in order to report to Albertans how well children have achieved provincial standards at given points in their schooling, and assist schools, authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning (Alberta Education, 2013).

6. Within the Public School Board where I worked, teachers are granted various types of teaching contracts: supply, temporary, probationary, and continuous contracts.
7. The saying, "Don't smile until Christmas," is a term I heard a lot during my beginning years as teacher. The message behind this saying is that children will take the teacher more seriously if she/he never smiles. The message implies smiling and having fun with children will create disorder and noise in the classroom, preventing any learning from occurring.
8. A school-wide incentive program encourages children to collect as many entry forms as they can throughout the week and place them into their classroom draw bins, where one winner is chosen every Friday for a prize, to be collected from the school office. At one time it was a box of *Smarties*, now it is a dried fruit package, in response to the Apple school project. Children earn entry stubs of paper for showing "good" behavior and following school/classroom rules.
9. Thoreau (1854/2008) helps me to frame the use of the term cost when he wrote, "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it" (p. 20). Clandinin et al. (2012) also wonder of the cost of becoming a teacher when they write, "The cost of becoming a teacher is paid from the 'life' of the teacher, much of which takes place off the school landscape" (p. 72).
10. Since 1991, the mandate for the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development is to foster and produce high quality research for teacher education; to provide a scholarly community for graduate children and post graduate children and faculty; and to collaborate on teacher education with agencies, researchers at other universities in Canada and abroad.
11. Lindemann Nelson (1995) defines counterstory as "a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions" (p. 23).
12. Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2003) write of peace candle gatherings "as a way to move forward, to talk about how children were making sense of their experiences, a space for children to speak their stories, to listen to others' stories" (p. 344).
13. Smudge material includes a "smudge pan" (tiny cast-iron pan), smudge such as sweetgrass or sage. Smudging is an act of cleansing and prayer. The smoke that rises from the burning smudge is wafted over one's body to cleanse the body, mind, and spirit. As you smudge yourself, it is believed that the rising smoke carries your prayers to the Creator.
14. Kokum means "your" grandmother in Cree. Nokum means "my" grandmother.

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