

Teaching With Care: An Auto-ethnography About Teaching, Blogging and Caring

A Thesis

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Abstract

Using the art of living inquiry, through the form of auto-ethnographic narrative, this research explores the question: in what ways has auto-ethnographical blogging made me more aware of the need for an ethic of care in my teaching practice? The research I have conducted is concerned with lived experience as archived on my blog, *The Pursuit of a Joyful Life*, a space where I often write reflectively as a teacher. Throughout my inquiry, I look at several blog entries written in order to uncover the ways in which blogging has strengthened my commitment to the ideals of the profession, as well as studied in order to discover what influence my choice, to engage in an on-line reflective blogging format focused on ethic of care, has had on my thinking. I nurture the ideas I have come to embrace about the ethic of care and reflect on my learning about pedagogies of love. In chronicling my writing, I am coming to find my true calling, both in the blogosphere as well as in the educational profession.

Keywords: ethic of care, teaching, blogging

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Auto-ethnography is, whatever else it may or may not be, about things that matter a great deal to the autoethnographer” (Delamont, 2009, p. 57).

The role of compassionate care in education can be complex. Certainly as teachers, we acknowledge caring interactions with our students as important and necessary to teaching and learning, but that same care is often given little room to influence teaching decisions when placed alongside weighty academic concerns. The importance of care, as expressed by teachers for students, is often diminished when trying to find the elusive balance between intellectual learning and the less cerebral/more heart-full role of compassion, understanding and empathy. In this test-driven era of schooling, where school boards and departments increasingly seek to entrench specific core curriculum content into classroom teaching, scholars such as Ernst & Valleck (2014) argue that care is often asked to play second fiddle to academic concerns.

By way of a challenge to this emphasis on intellectual pursuits, for the past several years I have been writing and thinking about the importance of care in education. About four years ago, I began writing a personal blog, a venue which became less an outlet for soul-searching about life in general, and more of a platform for professional reflection. I write publicly accessible journals or weblogs called blogs as a means of engaging in knowledge building and identity work. In my blog I chronicle my thoughts and ruminations about the challenges I face as a teacher.

A year ago, I had the satisfying experience of watching one of my blog posts concerned with caring in education go viral. This post has now been read in dozens of countries around the

world. That experience caused me to think even more about the role of caring in teaching. My blog continues to be a place where I can express myself freely and reflecting on this venue forms the bulk of this thesis.

While not focusing on blogs per se, critical theorists like hooks (1994) contend that various forms of dialogue, including reflective writing and teacher research, can be a means for teachers to challenge a system in which they often feel powerless. Freire (1970) can be seen as one of the key theorists who laid the foundations for critical dialogue. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire asserts that “it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it...Dialogue is thus an existential necessity” (Freire, 1970, p. 88). I have often felt the inner urge to create a space where I could dialogue on issues that speak to the heart. For the past few years, the place where I do this is my blog.

My experience has been that blogging has given me insight and perspective; I am hopeful that this form of reflective writing can also assist other educators in sharing their learning publicly and expanding their understanding through dialogue in a professional on-line community. Similarly, I have found that the community formed around my blog has served to strengthen my private commitment to care and compassion in education.

This research study explores the question: In what ways has auto-ethnographical blogging influenced my commitment to an ethic of care? Through a careful look at my blog articles, I investigate the ways in which introspective, reflective blogging has served both personal and professional purposes. As I am a teacher from a small rural area on the periphery of a larger educational center, this research also has relevance to educators working on the margins— away from traditional places of influence. Through a review of my blog entries while

writing this thesis, I have come to realize that small voices can still be heard amidst the noise of the larger throng.

This thesis can be read as three parts of a whole. The first part, chapters 2 through 9, focuses on my personal method of writing and reflection, using illustrations from my blogs to help the reader understand my thinking about care in education. The second part, chapters 10-12, reviews scholarly work on issues of auto-ethnography as well as research on teacher blogging. The third part focuses on my conclusions or findings drawn after engaging in the process of writing and reflecting to create this thesis.

Chapter 2: A Story (by way of a method)

“Writing as a method of inquiry honors and encourages the trying, recognizing it as embryonic to the full-fledged attention to the significance of language” —Richardson, 2000

I would like to begin by offering a story— a story that includes the methods I have employed to conduct this research. This research that I now carefully submit has been fuelled by a desire to find out what there is to know about me as a teacher, as a blogger, and as a person who believes in the potential of care to act as an instrument for change. Richardson (2000) suggests an alternative to the traditional methods section of one’s thesis paper, an alternative related to auto-ethnography, called ‘writing-stories’. As she asserts, when writers as researchers employ this narrative strategy to explore methods, they are given the opportunity to explore the context in which their writing takes place and is eventually produced (Richardson, 2000, p. 932). Writing-stories “situate the author’s writing in other parts of the author’s life,” such as offering a detailed background history of the writing piece under investigation (Richardson, p. 931). Richardson (2000) asserts that writing-stories offer “critical reflexivity about the writing-self” as that self undergoes experiences in different contexts (p. 931). Writing stories can also provide a valuable creative analytic tool, and a means of evoking new questions about the self and the area of interest (Richardson, 2000, pp. 931-932). With Richardson’s suggestions in mind, the writing-story I wish to include in this section is one that chronicles the process I underwent to start my blog, as well as the process I employed in selecting blog pieces to include in my study.

I begin this writing-story with my lap top computer set on our kitchen table, my make-shift desk this evening. As fingers hover over keys, I am remembering days already gone by and recalling decisions previously made. It must be said from the outset that I blog purely because I

am compelled to write. I write for pleasure and for joy, thus the name for my blog, *The Pursuit of a Joyful Life*. This pastime is a relatively new habit of mine begun in the summer of 2011. Prior to that summer, the personal stories I wrote were still inside my head, mingling with such other obstacles and abstracts as knowledge, beliefs, ideas and emotions. These were my stories. For quite some time prior to blogging, I had the practice of brainstorming ideas for a narrative about my life, and in this way, I always fancied myself a writer. But I never wanted to write down on paper— virtual or otherwise, anything that was not held up to, and found to surpass, my high standards. I am a perfectionist— a quality I have struggled with and felt about, at times, a great degree of shame throughout my life (this shame induced by the perceptions I believed others held of me for my inadequacies). I decided early on that if the stories were not exactly as I would have them be (aesthetically, creatively, and artistically-speaking), I then would refrain from writing them down.

Until 2011, I did not value my work aesthetically, believing that to be a writer a person should be a polished professional, producing work that was appealing to and available for public consumption. In addition, I felt that writing was only purposeful if there was a response (or readership) for that writing. Keeping a journal has never been appealing for me because journals are private and secretive, not open for public comment. As I have only ever wanted to compose in order to make connection, keeping a diary has never been an attractive option. Without an outlet for creating publicly accessible writing, I felt very little reason to put pen to paper.

However, four years ago I decided to write in spite of my hang-ups and concerns. I also determined that writing as a practice was important as it was a useful exercise in examining my life. At that point, I committed to writing almost every day because at the time, I was experiencing a fair amount of stress due to relationships and personal sickness; I also felt a

general lack of joy in my life, and I was feeling discontented. I found the writing I was doing (during stolen time-slots taken throughout the busy days and evenings) gave me pause for reflection regarding those circumstances and the events that brought me angst. As I wrote, I felt a weight being lifted, and I would aver that I experienced healing— emotional, if not physical. Writing in this way was therapeutic, beneficial as a process of helping restore my body, mind and soul to a healthy constitution. As such, writing has been one of the most significant ways I have maintained and provided self-care for my weary soul.

Due to a sense of renewed joy, I found the desire to continue the writing and introspective reflection. As I wrote, I began to share the stories and prose I was creating with those closest to me: my husband, children and immediate family members. Buoyed to carry on, by way of their response to my writing, I decided to start a blog in the fall of 2011 that I have been writing ever since. I chose the name “*Pursuit of a Joyful Life*” based on my desire for more joy in my life.

Even as fingers tap out these very words, I find myself bouncing back and forth from the WordPress Administration home page where my blog stats are kept, to the open and blank page before me here on Microsoft Word. This is an almost nightly routine I have been keeping for nearly four years. It is right here in my word processing program that I initially compile my posts, laboring over words, carving out phrases, ruminating over my narratives. This is where I compose and craft my words into phrases, and my phrases into thoughts. It is here, really, where the true work is done. I have already cut, edited, revised, eliminated and rejected much before the words are copied and pasted to the fresh and waiting pages of my blog’s ‘New Post’ page.

To date, I have 527 posts published on my personal blog, with one afore-mentioned blog piece receiving notable public acclamation. In November of 2013, I wrote a letter to an anonymous teacher, a letter which I published on my personal blog. Shortly after that (in December), I decided to publish this blog article on the *Huffington Post's* (Canadian Edition) on-line newspaper, to which I am a regular contributor. Initially, the letter did not receive any interest, garnering few reads on both my blog and the Huffington Post's online news feed. I soon forgot about this particular piece and continued writing about other topics and areas of interest. However, at the end of January 2014, something peculiar happened. I noticed one day that my blog article, as featured on the *Huffington Post*, had a couple hundred views on it. Surprised, I called my husband over to have a look at this peculiar phenomenon, as every minute the stat figures would change to reflect new readers. This was a complete shock and surprise to see, as almost six weeks had transpired since the original piece had gone to press. Little would I have known then that those couple hundred views would quickly grow to thousands, then to hundreds of thousands, and eventually to well over two and a half million readers and counting, a little under two years later. Daily, there are readers visiting my blog to read this one particular piece.

The fact that this blog piece went viral has given me pause for reflection over the past months; reflection on my writing, the topics of my writing, the focus of my blog and the purpose behind the messages I share. I have found myself asking: why do I write? Who am I writing for? What message do I want to convey? How often should I write? What will my blog look like in one year's time? What will it look like in five year's time? And what is my long-term plan in terms of my blog writing? Taking time to ponder each of these questions has helped me make decisions about my blogging site, as it stands currently, all while looking ahead to where I

would like my journey in blogging to lead me. The fact that I am writing an auto-ethnography on my auto-ethnographic blogging practice is just one more milestone I have reached along the way. Each time my blog is given priority in terms of time and interest, I see it developing into what I want it to be: a publicly accessible, reflective on-line journal and forum concerned with ‘caring in teaching’ and ‘caring in life in general’. It is a space created for those interested in learning, growth and development, both personally and academically.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert that to study narrative is to study the ways in which humans live their lives (p. 2). They add to this that “people by nature live storied lives and tell stories of those lives”; when this re-telling concerns inquiry, the position of the researcher is to “describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2.) Connelly and Clandinin (1990) put forward the notion that stories function as arguments in which we learn something about what it is to be human from understanding an actual life as it has been lived (p. 8). They hold that “narrative and life go together”, so the main reason narrative as a method is used by the researcher is to convey life experiences in relevant and meaningful ways (p. 10). They further maintain that the researcher conducting a narrative-based inquiry will present these understandings in the written account through narrative. Although my research is positioned as an auto-ethnography, the method I choose to deliver this auto-ethnographic inquiry is a narrative-based one, writing a storied account of my experience in being human and living my life, part of which includes being a teacher in a small rural elementary school. As with Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) work in narrative inquiry, I hope to also use my research to describe my work as a teacher, to collect and tell stories of my work and practice, as well as to write narratives of my experience chronicling both the shining moments, along with those not quite so stellar.

Leggo (2005), writing about his ongoing research into autobiographical remembering and writing, says that he is “convinced that by writing about our experiences, we can become more effective teachers, as well as teachers motivated by more joy and hope” (Leggo, 2005, p. 441). Leggo (2005) talks much about ‘living poetically’, which is really to say that we must live aware of all that is within us and around us. What Leggo (2005) suggests is that teachers “should learn to know themselves as poets in order to foster living creatively in the pedagogic contexts of classrooms and the larger pedagogic contexts outside classrooms” (Leggo, 2005, p. 442). This has been my quest, even though I never defined it as such in the initial years of my writing; in my heart, I knew I was writing heart-fully, artfully, mindfully: living aware. For even then, I knew that I was aware of the possibility for wonder and mystery, aware of the possibility of being open to learning. I knew that I was aware of the need for hope, aware that joy underlies sorrow, aware that there is beauty even in the mundane. I knew that I was conscious: eyes, ears, heart and mind wide open.

So it was that I began to see the necessity of writing poetically, even as I was seeking to live more poetically in the day to day. As I sought more poetic ways of perceiving the world around me, I began to find that I was changing as an individual and changing as a teacher. This thesis is the culmination of that experience, as I have used this inquiry into my blogging and writing about care to discover who I am and who I am becoming. My story is woven throughout each and every blog article I have written. In deciding on a topic for my research, I felt that studying the blog articles I have written on my WordPress blog site would be a valuable endeavour, as these pieces are a comprehensive source of data about my life. In terms of blog selection for the purposes of this auto-ethnographic study, I decided that I would primarily use writing pieces that concerned my teaching practice. Other blog articles about care as a practice

in my parenting and relationships were not chosen for the purpose of this study because I wanted the focus of this research to be on my identity as a teacher.

Due to the success of my teaching blog post on the topic of what students remember most about teachers, I felt that further establishing myself as a teacher-blogger was a good fit for me, as there seemed to be a niche for bloggers in this genre. Evidence for such a niche (meaning readers were very interested in talking about educational issues, and in particular, talking about caring relations in education) was found by way of the comments I read, as well as garnered through correspondence I had with readers who primarily indicated their interest in reading about issues that have an impact on students and teachers within the school system. The statistics page for my blog indicates referrals to my blog as well as search terms that are used; in many cases, when I would follow a lead from either of these two indicators, it would point back to the educational community, thus showing me that most of my readers identified as people interested in the larger education system.

In her seminal book addressing the challenge to care in schools, Noddings (2005) asks (among other questions) the following: “what does it mean to care?” and “can teachers make caring the center of their educational efforts?”(p. 14). These are questions I ask myself. Recently these queries have become: what does care mean to me as a teacher, and why do I care so much about establishing an ethic of care in my teaching? How can I show care in my day-to-day interactions? I have taken on being a caring educator, as well as writing about the importance of care in the classroom in my blog pieces, as daily, personal challenges.

In order to select blog posts to review for this thesis I began to look for posts that focused on caring and education. Starting with the blog post that went viral, I conducted a search of all

my blog posts that would fit this criterion, leading to the most current blogs that I am writing to date. As well as having the criteria of care in education as a component for content, I was also interested in re-reading my blogs that were concerned with the ethic of care in my own teaching practice. Combining the two concepts, that of blog articles focused on educational issues concerned with care along with blog articles about my own teaching infused with an ethic of care, these two criteria became the basis for my selection process in finding articles to study.

In order to determine more specific reasons for selection, I turned to an overview of the research supporting an ethic of care conducted by Owens and Ennis (2005). In reading this literature review, I found Tarlow's (1996) study into care-giving processes and concepts that she had conducted. The results of her research indicated the importance of caring to the human experience and argued that there were eight concepts that were consistent with caring: time spent in caring relations and being there for the ones cared-for, as well as time allowed for talking with those being cared-for, sensitivity toward those being cared-for, acting in the best interest of the other, caring as feeling with regards to people, caring as doing, and caring reciprocally (p. 57).

Believing that Tarlow's (1996) eight characteristics would be evident in caring teacher-student relations, I searched my blog to find articles that would illustrate and give evidence of these same characteristics. Here I re-discovered personal beliefs and ideas about these concepts through blog articles I had written on the ethic of care in general. I found within a year and a half time frame several blog articles to illustrate my own interpretation of Tarlow's (1996) eight caring concepts. In particular I found pieces concerned with the concept of time spent in caring, being there for students and talking with them. Several blog articles surfaced that reflected the importance of these concepts, including "A Message to Kids Who Are Being Bullied", "What Students Remember Most About Teachers" and "When Teachers Choose Love". Other blog

articles that were also read for context were: “Love them more”, “Inclusive education isn’t what I thought it was: it’s something better”, “Lessons learned (during playground duty)”, “Interrupting the flow” and “When we care for one another”. Each one of these blog articles illustrates my thinking based on experiences I had with my students.

While there appears to be a plethora of blog writing about caring relations, particularly as it concerns the private sphere (parenting), there is not as much evidence of such writing in blogs concerned with teaching practice. Certainly, there is little research on blogging as a platform for teachers as leaders, or teachers as heart-full and poetic influences, engaged in personal growth. In writing my blog, I feel new ground is being turned over; I blog because I yearn to come to deeper insight and understanding about my life and experiences; I blog so as to ‘know’, purely because of the love I have for life and the power of the written word. By examining my blog, I have begun to uncover what it might tell me about myself as a teacher-practitioner.

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the story of my coming to be a writer and blogger, I have reviewed research connected to care and I have described my method for choosing blog articles to review for this thesis. I now turn my attention to a more general guiding question: “Why do I care?” and I use one of my blog entries to help answer this question.

Chapter 3: Why I Care

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.” – Aesop (circa 620-560 B.C.)

I start by offering a confession. For a long time I have had doubts about my ability to be truly caring (which is to say, I was not gifted with a compassionate temperament by right of birth— not born kind and sweet, endowed with an innate tenderness and gracious manner from my nativity). In fact, I was quite the opposite. I was rather self-absorbed, a bit of a handful (as adults sometimes say about kids like me). Headstrong, willful, argumentative, volatile and mouthy, and all this while tempering these more dominant qualities with the better-serving merits of passion and loyalty. I confess this fault so as to confirm that I never considered myself to be a prime candidate for ‘child of the year’ awards, if there ever were such prizes to be handed out.

As a young girl, I remember associating caring with niceness, with all things polite and sweet and good. One particular day, when I was still yet inexperienced and naive, someone mentioned how sweet they perceived me to be (I cannot remember who, but perhaps this happened to be a person who did not know me very well). Upon sharing this flattering comment later on with my childhood best friend, she confided to me, “Lori, you are a lot of things, but sweet isn’t one of them!” From that day on, I worried about this obvious lack of innate sweetness— fretted over this niceness that appeared to be missing from my life. I believed myself to be a person who might be less capable of contributing care to the wider world, than would be others. When those I admired responded to frustration with patience, I responded with impatience. When others I wished to emulate responded to difficulty with gentleness, I was prone to be more abrasive. In short, I sensed I was not, and have at times still considered myself

not to be, a person noted for her natural bounty of kindness. Furthermore, I would never have thought myself to be the most likely candidate to one day conduct research for a thesis on care. That is, I never would have dreamed that I would one day be sharing thoughts about caring concern and compassion with anyone else, let alone be writing about them.

Little did I know then. Thankfully, life allows for growth and learning.

I am learning, and I am coming to understand, that care is more than a virtue one either possesses or lacks. It is something entirely more mysterious. I believe that care is fundamental and necessary within human relations, for care is relational, and as such is a foundational building block on which healthy relationships must be developed and fostered. When care is missing from relationships, individuals suffer the loss, both personally and interpersonally. I can attest to this truth in my own life as care has not always been evident in interactions I have shared with people in both private and public milieus.

In this chapter, I review two blog entries that I wrote which will help tell the background story of why I believe in the power of care. I then move on to write in more detail about the role that invested care plays in relationships and what this means to me as a teacher. As the chapter unfolds, I will discuss the responses I had to these two entries as well as look at how writing these pieces and reading the responses have driven me to think even more deeply about care, community and the power of the written word. In my blog article titled “Why I Care” (Gard, 2014a), I tell my story as a child growing up inside a school that exhibited a lack of care. The following excerpt from that blog explains my background, in terms of why I care deeply about the presence of an ethic of care, particularly within the school system.

“Why I care”

I grew up in the heart of the Annapolis Valley, a small rural farming community known for its potatoes and apple orchards. My community was aptly named Melvern Square, a squared-off corridor that was also firmly tethered by four anchors: farming, family, community and faith. My father was one of many pastors called to minister in this area, ensuring that I lived my life firmly fixed within the public’s eye, on first name basis with most everyone I’d meet. This reality served to both enable and impede my personal growth and development by times, as anyone who has had parents as visible figureheads in the community can attest to.

It was an idyllic life in many ways. We were often strapped financially, but we got by. I remember trips to the country store— a one room building with wide wooden clapboards filling in the floor space, glass candy jars containing five-cent goodies lining the back wall. When the front door was cracked even so much as an inch, an old-fashioned bell signalled both your appearance and your exit, ensuring you would never peruse the ice cream freezer or chip rack anonymously. Our house was sandwiched between the community center on the right and my father’s little brown country church on the left. Behind our property was the community pond for skating on in the winter and avoiding in the summer, as we all speculated that alligators or other forms of creepy-crawlies might live in there. Across the street was the consolidated school housing grades 1-6: a school which I never had the privilege of attending.

The school I attended was a private institution located in a neighboring community. When I started school in primary, I quickly realized that my life was not what it had seemed to be. I immediately became the “other”: teased for my different religious affiliation, tortured for my family connection, belittled for my appearance. Separated for my difference. I was

disconnected from the other children in many ways, and I soon came to understand the term “white trash” and its unflattering connotations, as that is what I began to feel I was while in this school. Like a piece of rubbish— unloved and undesirable.

My schooling experience was thus one in which oppression was very obvious. This same private school I attended later came to be exposed regarding “issues” of a very serious, abusive nature. These privately held secrets of the school leaders and administration came to be ‘outed’ in a very visible way via news media when I was in high school. When I now see images of residential schools, it brings to mind sordid mental pictures of what that time of life was like for both me and my classmates. That experience has forever changed the way I look at education.

So then, as long as I have been a student, I have been interested in ethics of care in classrooms. As I did not have the privilege of being exposed to ethics of care in most of my formative years of schooling, I now spend my life advocating for these pedagogies of love and care along with the foundational rights that I believe all people— young and old, are worthy of receiving and deserve to experience as a basic human right. We all deserve this kind of love and attentive care by virtue of our humanity.

One of the specific memories I have as a student took place when I was in Grade 7, attending this same school mentioned above. A young man in Grade 10, who had been having a particularly difficult time in his life, went around one day after school saying good-bye to everyone he could see in the hallway. It struck me as strange that he would seek me out, as I was quite a bit younger than him and outside his social circle. That night, as I would come to discover, he drove his car into a wooded area and shot himself in the head. This was my first exposure to suicide.

Rather than taking time to counsel us in our grief and confusion, the teachers at this school used this opportunity to tell us how this boy, and thus his classmates, had been and were heading down the wrong path and needed to get things in their life straightened out. It was one of the most poignant memories of my schooling. I can still hear the judgemental voice of the female teacher who told me and my classmates that Donnie(not his real name) had obviously been the one in the wrong. It was presented as primarily his fault that this had happened.*

I will never forget that mental picture of him the day before he died, his face resolute: epitomized by soft spoken words and a calm demeanor. Although there are many layers to this story that I could pursue at length, my experiences as a student living through a deficit of care in my schooling, along with the many, many others of my classmates who echo this sentiment even today in online forums via social media, have convinced me that care is, or should be, the absolute number one priority of educators in any classroom. We are educating students for academic learning, yes. But we are first and foremost developing caring, compassionate human beings in the form of both students and teachers who will live empathically in an interconnected, interdependent world. As an educator, this is fundamental to my practice. (Gard, 2014a)

I wrote that particular blog entry in the summer of 2014, as I felt the need to describe for myself and for my readers, the roots of my personal teaching philosophy. Looking back, I can see that through those tumultuous early years into the even more turbulent upper-teen years, my life continued to be marked by trial and error. My own understanding of care evolved into a truer ideal, one based on the kindness and empathy that can be expressed in relationship. A turning point happened for me in the fall of my Grade 12 year, and in the winter of 2014, I chose to write (and then one year later publish on my blog) a story about this particular experience.

The following blog entry was thus written as a means of investigating part of the process of how I became the person I am today, a person committed to care. It was in my Grade 12 year of high school that I moved from my childhood home in Nova Scotia to the province where I now reside, Prince Edward Island.

“The life and calling of a teacher”

It was the fall of my Grade 12 year, the year I remember as ‘The Move’. My father—having been relocated in his job as the pastor to a small country church, packed up alongside his wife our meagre family possessions, and then moved all that, along with four children (minus me) over the course of a weekend. It sometimes takes a weekend to unravel a family. At other times, it just takes a moment.

I alone remained behind in our community, determined that I wouldn’t be trading in all I had known and loved for something new and less desirable. Sixteen is a brazen age. It is old enough to know that you can’t leave behind thirteen years worth of childhood memories, leave behind home, leave behind life; and it’s old enough to physically stay behind, watching the rest go. Yet it is not quite old enough to know exactly how to pull it all off. My parents in their wisdom allowed me the choice to remain back, so long as I chose to live with a family friend, staying with someone they trusted. But I was on my own when it came to paying rent and looking after essentials. I agreed to their terms and so it was decided—I would stay. But the day they pulled out from the driveway of our first family home, moving van loaded up with my childhood toys, my bed and dresser, van full to the brim with my four younger siblings and weeping mother: that is a day that will forever be imprinted on my memory.

I lasted until the following Monday evening when I finally caved, coming to my senses as well as to the bittersweet realization that at sixteen, I still needed to be with my family. I needed to go 'home', whatever that meant now. And so, there was a scramble—a gathering of my own small assemblage of life possessions followed by a drive from one province to another. Which is to say, I found a way to reunite with my family a few days later (as bittersweet as that reunion might have felt in those earliest of moments).

The move crushed me—left me feeling as if the bottom had fallen out from my world. And it left me to cope with the difficult task of 'starting over', starting fresh at a time in life when one should be celebrating the finish line.

I found myself in a brand new high school, a strange place to find yourself when you are young, 'in love' and at what you think is the pinnacle of your school career. Starting over was humbling. Perhaps it was what I needed, although I wouldn't have said so then. I went from knowing everyone to knowing no one. I went from being part of a crowd, to feeling outside the crowd. I went from having a presence to feeling invisible. At the time, I would have readily admitted it was my worst sixteen year-old nightmare come true, but somehow I managed to pull things together enough to make it work. I made a few friends, did well in my classes and tried to keep up on the news from my former school and friendship circle—places and people I identified in my heart as representing my real home.

But it was still hard, incredibly so.

There were a few classes in the new school that I did enjoy, especially one subject taught by Mr. D. A funny, earnest man, he infused life into the classroom with his stories, his wealth of knowledge and his love of all things chemistry. I can't remember at what point in the semester

he called me down to his classroom for a chat, but I will never forget the care and concern in his voice. Somehow, he had seen me there in the back row of his classroom, hiding underneath a veil of resentment, shadowed by fear and insecurity; not the least of which, feeling angry that my life had been interrupted. In spite of it all, he made a point of looking past the image so as to connect with me as a person, letting me know that I had potential and possibility, showing me that he saw the best in me at a time in my life when I couldn't see the best in my circumstances.

Mr. D. was unforgettable. Was it the chemistry lessons he delivered? The curriculum outcomes he covered? Was it his vast knowledge and seemingly infinite understanding that I remember? What was it, exactly, that forever etched his impression on my memory? What I remember now—now that I am a teacher myself, was his care: his smile, his laughter, his enthusiasm. And I remember that when I was in his class, I wasn't invisible any longer.

And all because he saw me.

There are times in our service as teachers when we set aside the act of doing, for the sacred work of being. When lessons and lectures, activities and testing are momentarily shelved, taking a back seat to the art of caring, taking a secondary role to the art of listening. These are moments when caring is the curriculum, and life is the lesson. These are times when we see that our noble profession is more than mere passing on of knowledge, a routine work of filling empty vessels. Yes, these are the times when we see through new eyes, see our students for who they truly are: seeing them as people, seeing them as possibility. Seeing them for the potential they truly have. These times remind us that it is the care which we infuse into our work that makes the difference.

Such is the life and calling of a teacher (Gard, 2015a).

That girl of seventeen, who vowed she would never be an Islander at heart? Well, she grew up to become one anyway, carrying out her calling as an educator in rural Island schools very much like the one in which she came to the realization that life is about choices. In time, that girl—me, learned that one must never say *never*. I remember the year I was in Grade 4 telling my friends I would never become a teacher— I had much loftier ambitions in mind. Life has a funny way of surprising us, pointing us in directions we said we would never travel. Here I am now, both an Islander and a teacher, two identities I thought I would never adopt. For is it not the case that life presents us continually with challenges that lead to uncharted pathways, some we initially said we would never travel, but on which we find ourselves anyway? When we eventually step out, we find ourselves facing exciting new opportunities. On every path, we will come to forks, those places where we must make hard choices about the direction we will go. One road may lead us toward realizing our best selves, and the other quite possibly leads away from that goal.

It was during my first full year at university preparing for my eventual career as an educator, that I made one of many such choices, learning a lesson about the importance of caring, compassionate relations the hard way. Even now in my memory, I certainly recall that year as being a long, hard one. I was trying to carry out the transition from blissful, carefree freshman to serious, settled-in sophomore, a difficult task at the best of times. Added to this endeavor was a long-distance relationship I was involved in, cultivated and carried out over snail-mail and landline telephone calls (no email or texting back then), which added strain to my personal life. To help meet my bills that year, I was working part-time as a cashier at the in-residence store.

One night, probably a weekend night, was particularly ‘crazy busy’. I am sure I was a little annoyed that I was working while everyone else around me was having fun, not to mention the fact that my boyfriend was hundreds of miles away doing something equally as fun as the others around me, only without me there to share the experience. But this was no excuse for what was about to transpire.

I worked the evening shift, counted my cash and then headed off for my residence room, oblivious to anything brewing below the surface. The next day, I got a telephone call from my manager. As I walked from my room down toward the store, I was still unaware that anything was awry, naive in my ignorance regarding anything of which he was about to say. Upon arriving and seeing the serious look on his face, I realized this was to be more than a flattering ‘thank-you for everything you do’ type conversation. What he divulged to me instead was feedback on my workplace performance in terms of customer satisfaction; in particular, he focused on the previous night before, when I had worked that busy evening shift. What he said to me was that I reportedly had come across as rude; which is to say, I had not smiled at the customers enough, nor offered them a friendly courteous greeting as I waited on them. In short, he basically told me that the customers seemed to believe I did not care about them.

I was truly nothing short of flabbergasted, not to mention extremely embarrassed. Hot tears formed quickly and began to squeeze from my eyes as I listened to my boss tell me some hard truths about myself. In my mind, I had a choice to make: I could get offended and angry at this accusation and walk away, or I could surmise that I needed to stay and start to show that I cared; I knew that my future in this job was on the line, not to mention my reputation. In the end, I chose the latter as I certainly did not want to lose face, lose relationships with people nor lose this source of income. In spite of my obvious reasons for embracing this situation with a

proper dose of acceptance and humility, I also realized from that very moment— a defining one for me—that I would never again intentionally let those words be said of me: that I was rude and uncaring. Nor would I deliberately treat the people I was working to serve in a dismissive manner. If I was to be known for anything at all, I wanted to be known as caring in my everyday interactions with those people in my circles of influence. It was the least I could offer the wider world: my attentive care and a sense of compassion and empathy.

Chapter 4: Showing I Care

“Be kind—for everyone you meet is fighting a harder battle.” –Plato (circa 427-347 B.C.)

Those times in my life, chronicled from childhood through to university, have now come and gone. Who I was then and what happened to me in the past cannot be altered or changed, and I am at peace with this. What I do have is the present, these current moments I have been allotted for today. Accordingly, I have purposed to use the time that I have been given to make a small difference and impact on others’ lives, particularly in my varied roles as a parent, coach, volunteer and teacher. The question posed by Mary Oliver (1992) in her poem titled “The Summer Day” is this: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” By way of an answer, I will share a belief: our lives are nothing, if not viewed in part as both fragile and fleeting. My purpose now as an adult is a resolutely offered commitment to care; for what I intend to do in part with my one wild and precious life, in the fleeting moments I have been given, is to show *care* to the people I cross paths with, each and every day. Echoing spiritual teacher Ram Dass’ (2015) continued commitment to practicing care, I, too, put forth that “I would like my life to be a statement of love and compassion, and where it isn’t, that’s where my work lies” (n.p.). For me, life is about caring, and that work of caring includes the labour of love I commit myself to, both in the private sphere as well as my public work and calling.

In the next section, I use an excerpt from a blog article I wrote in the winter of 2014, doing so in order to illustrate how I choose to establish caring relationships with my students, in spite of my inherent bent to act, at times, in impatience and frustration. As a teacher, what care is becoming to mean to me is an opportunity to really listen to the hearts of my students, as well

as an opportunity for me to be a support to them for both the small and big moments in their lives. When I make time to be present in the everyday moments, attending to the issues that really matter, I show my students that they count, even as I give them the care and compassion they need to flourish and grow. Putting aside my own concerns, I am motivationally displaced from my own situation and fully immersed in the needs of another. In the story that follows, I share how I was challenged to ‘be there’ for one of my students, facilitating the caring process through dialogue as I cared for my young student K. while he embraced his own challenge in learning how to be more independent.

“When teachers choose love”

It’s almost recess. I am urging the children to put away their snacks so as to ready themselves for the recess bell. The students start slowly stowing their lunch boxes inside their backpacks and heading for the door. All except for one, that is—the same one who, day after day after day, has persisted in waiting until the last possible minute to head out the door, the same one who made us all late for our school-wide outside activities, and the same one who has been persistently and consistently slow to dress for outdoor recess the whole year. He either cannot get his boots on or he cannot zipper up his coat. Or he cannot find his mittens. And occasionally he still insists that he does not know how to do the button on his pants.

His inability to do these things has not been for lack of trying to help him on my part. I have investigated this situation extensively. From the very first day of the school year, I knew that this student would be special. No, there is no diagnosis for this exceptionality. There is no underlying medical or psychological reason to offer as explanation. This student is otherwise happy and carefree. But in the aspect of self-care skills and independence, he has exhibited an

obvious lagging behind his kindergarten classmates. It is something on which I have worked with him continuously throughout the year thus far, all while I have tried to understand through ongoing conversations with his family what we could do as a team to support him in his personal growth.

Today, we are no farther ahead than we have ever been.

Right now, the bell has rung and it is recess. It goes without saying that I have umpteen dozen things to do, the first of which is use the bathroom. I want this little guy to “hurry up” and get himself out the door to join all the other children in the school for a refreshing run around the snow-covered playground. Goodness knows, after weeks of indoor recess, we all need some fresh air and room to move. In my head, I know there is no reason why he can’t get ready as quickly as all the other children.

“C’mon, K.” I urge. “Everyone else is out there. You need to get moving. The bell has rung.”

K. is not moving. In fact, he is sprawled out on the floor, his clothing and footwear spread out in disarray. I feel the irritation welling up inside me. I really want to say, “Look Buddy, it is March. Every other one of your classmates can dress themselves without much assistance or urging— why can’t you? And don’t you know— I have better things to do than stand here walking you through each step of your dressing process? Besides, it’s my break-time too, and I have to go the bathroom!” But I know in my head that speaking any one of these sentences would be pointless and would get me nowhere. K. has other worries and concerns at the forefront of his mind, and my personal comfort and convenience are not among them.

As it turns out, K. finally gets the last piece of clothing on just a minute or two before the bell rings to call everyone back in. I tell K. that he will be staying in with me for lunch as a consequence for having wasted the entire recess. We'll have a chat together then, but first—I need the cushion time to bring my irritation levels down. It's a good thing we have an hour and a half between recess and lunch.

The lunch bell eventually rings, and I send K. to the gathering rug with every last article of his clothing, including his boots, while I supervise the others. These same others are, by the way, quickly out the door with only minimal help from me, but for a few zippers and mittens. I take a deep breath and start to wonder, "What am I going to do/say to K. that will make a lasting impression?" My first instinct is to lecture about all the reasons why dressing independently and quickly is something he should be interested in: certainly all his other little friends are doing things on their own, and he is missing a great deal of his recess time each and every day because of this lagging skill; furthermore, doesn't he care that his teacher can't get to the bathroom? But I remember again that none of these reasons really matter a great deal to K.

I am going to have to get a little more creative.

At some point, between the door and joining K. on the rug, I realize something. I realize something is missing in the way I am dealing with K. in this particular situation. It is a kind of a lagging skill of my own, to be truthful. For I realize that I am not showing K. the utmost of concern, the kindness and love that I know I have within me to give. I am not choosing to care. Not choosing to exhibit love. I am instead finding him inconvenient to my own wants and desires. In short, a tremendous frustration. At some point between the door and the rug, I make a choice: I choose love over irritation. I choose kindness over frustration. I choose to CARE.

When love is the choice we make, everybody wins. Every single time.

However, even as I made this choice I knew I still had some teaching to do with K. before I could send him flying out the door to join the others. I still had some fences to mend. And I still had a few words of my own to say. Here's what happened next.

I slowly walked over to K., thinking fast as I made it the twenty steps to my little chair positioned at the front of the blue gathering rug. I didn't want to waste this opportunity because I knew K. was listening to me for perhaps the first time that morning.

"K., how old are you now?" I asked.

"Six," he said quietly.

"Six!" I said with awe and wonder. "Wow, K.! You are so big. You are growing so fast! Tell me, what are some things you can do, now that you've turned six?" I asked, looking expectantly at him, supporting him with my tone of voice and my constant eye contact. I leaned my body over towards his.

"Um, I can get dressed on my own..." he mumbles, still not sure where this conversation is going, but he thinks he might be on the right track.

"Yes," I say, "but what ELSE can you do; you must be able to do so many things, now that you are six! What kinds of things can six year-olds do?" I inquire again, looking more curious this second time I pose the question.

He thinks for a moment and then brightens. Then, he starts to make a list. I look at him encouragingly, nodding my head to show him that I think this list is absolutely amazing. After he finishes, I hold his eye contact for a moment. And I tell him I am impressed with his prowess at so many six-year-old accomplishments. Then I ask, still supporting him with my choice of tone and body language, using as kind a voice as I have within me: “Do you think now that you are six you might be able to get dressed all by yourself?”

At this point in the conversation, he realizes this is not going to be a detention conversation any longer; this is a real conversation now. He no longer feels any pressure. No shame weighs him down. He looks up at me and eagerly nods his head in agreement.

“Well,” I say with a wide smile, “I wonder— could you ever show me how fast you can get dressed? I bet you are super-quick now that you are six!” He looks excited for the challenge. With the vigor of an Olympic athlete, he starts tearing into the pile of clothing. Then he comes over to me for help with a button; a request to which I show him how the two ends fit together, and he promptly does it himself. Two minutes later, he is completely dressed.

I smile at him proudly.

“Look at you!” I marvel. “You are all dressed— and you did it yourself! Go on outside and have fun!” K. turns on his heels and is out the door in two seconds flat.

And I am left sitting on a little green chair in an empty kindergarten classroom with the hopeful realization that care, much like love, is a choice. When we as teachers choose to care for our students, we all win. Because caring supports. Caring lifts. And caring for others lets us both fly: the caregiver and the cared-for... with the wings of an eagle (Gard, 2014b).

For me, I care about *care* so very much because I have felt both the presence as well as the absence of care. In knowing care as experienced through a child's embrace, a mother's love— through a friend's loyalty, through a teacher's support, a husband's touch: I am now better equipped to sense the absence of such when I find it missing from my life. There have certainly been days in which I have felt isolated, uncared-for, and unloved. Those were days in which I searched for care and found that it eluded me. Seeking what I could not find brought me eventually to a place of willingness to be the change I so desperately needed in my own life. While I have come to believe that care is our innate right as human beings, sometimes we must choose to be the care-giver at the on-set, so as to experience the benefits of care as might be felt within our own hearts and souls in the process. To care, that is, to be cared for and to care for one another, these processes of human interaction primarily are what define our purpose towards each other, individual living with individual. Hand to hand, heart to heart.

Chapter 5: The Work of Care

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” – Dr. Suess (1971)

As a teacher, I feel a tug at my heart-strings to care for my students; which is to say that my own work as a teacher is above all to show compassion for my students, as well as to care for the numerous other colleagues and friends with whom I have contact in my day-to-day work as an educator. The story about my student K. leads to another important blog article that has certainly become for me the one piece of writing about which I am most connected. I refer again to the blog article that went viral in January, 2014, after being published on the Huffington Post online blog. As well, this piece was re-published on my own personal blog site and continues to be shared widely every day from this site found on wordpress.com. The piece, inspired by a shared conversation, was written primarily because of the care I felt toward a colleague who was experiencing some difficulty in her assignment as teacher.

When I first wrote the letter, I was not intending to publish it with any fanfare, as it was a reflective piece based on a personal interchange between me and this colleague. I had hoped to quietly slip it up on my blog page and then forget about it. I was not even planning on giving it to the person of which I wrote it about. As I was worried about attracting readers from our school staff and thus drawing attention to this teacher with whom I had the exchange, I just wanted to write and quietly publish the piece and then move forward with more of my own writing, recording my daily reflections on my teaching practice (as I typically would post). Above all, I certainly did not want to break any confidences with this teacher in the process of my writing and publishing. But after careful thought, I decided that the heart of the letter was

really meant for more than an audience of one. The words of my letter were applicable to more than just a specific teacher or situation, so I decided to go public with my open letter.

The letter that was eventually read by hundreds of thousands—even millions, was primarily published because I wanted somehow to encourage individual teachers in the very same ways I sometimes need encouragement myself— directly, honestly and lovingly. More than anything, I wanted that letter to be a means for caring for the people I was interacting with as colleagues, so as to remind them that I believed in them as teachers; I wanted to somehow show these individuals that I knew they were doing a much better job than they were giving themselves credit for. If the care I showed to that one teacher transferred to others, then I certainly felt the risk of offending, that I was taking in publishing the letter, was worth it.

Tarlow (1996)'s research indicates that care-giving connotes the need for presence and intentional help given so as to benefit the person being cared for (p. 61). Caring for people of all ages means that we are fully in the moment, not allowing ourselves to be distracted from the task at hand. This type of attentive caring is an admirable quality for teachers to strive for, and it has given me something personally to aim for in my growth and development as a caregiver. While the letter was written as a means of encouragement to a colleague, within the letter I share my beliefs about caring for students. Caring for people of all ages means that we are fully in the moment, not allowing ourselves to be distracted from the task at hand. The letter that has now been shared in more countries than I have kept track illustrates that presence of mind, heart and body is what caring is all about—the world over.

“What Students Remember Most About Teachers”

Dear Young Teacher Down the Hall,

I saw you as you rushed past me in the lunch room. Urgent. In a hurry to catch a bite before the final bell would ring calling all the students back inside. I noticed that your eyes showed tension. There were faint creases in your forehead. And I asked you how your day was going and you sighed.

“Oh, fine,” you replied.

But I knew it was anything but fine. I noticed that the stress was getting to you. I could tell that the pressure was rising. And I looked at you and made an intentional decision to stop you right then and there. To ask you how things were really going. Was it that I saw in you a glimpse of myself that made me take the moment?

*You told me how busy you were, how much there was to **do**. How little time there was to get it all done. I listened. And then I told you this:*

I told you to remember that at the end of the day, it’s not about the lesson plan. It’s not about the fancy stuff we teachers make — the crafts we do, the stories we read, the papers we laminate.

No, that’s not really it. That’s not what matters most.

And as I looked at you there wearing all that worry under all that strain, I said it’s about being there for your kids. Because at the end of the day, most students won’t remember what amazing lesson plans you’ve created. They won’t remember how organized your bulletin boards are.

How straight and neat are the desk rows.

No, they'll not remember that amazing decor you've designed.

*But they will remember **you**.*

Your kindness. Your empathy. Your care and concern. They'll remember that you took the time to listen. That you stopped to ask them how they were, how they really were. They'll remember the personal stories you tell about your life: your home, your pets, your kids. They'll remember your laugh. They'll remember that you sat and talked with them while they ate their lunch.

Because at the end of the day, what really matters is YOU. What matters to those kids that sit before you in those little chairs, legs pressed up tight under tables oft too small— what matters to them is you.

You are that difference in their lives.

And when I looked at you then with tears in your eyes, emotions rising to the surface and I told you gently to stop trying so hard— I also reminded you that your own expectations were partly where the stress stemmed. For we who truly care are often far harder on ourselves than our students are willing to be. Because we who truly care are often our own worst enemy. We mentally beat ourselves up for trivial failures. We tell ourselves we're not enough. We compare ourselves to others. We work ourselves to the bone in the hopes of achieving the perfect lesson plan. The most dynamic activities. The most engaging lecture. The brightest, fanciest furnishings.

Because we want our students to think we're the very best at what we do and we believe that this status of excellence is achieved merely by doing. But we forget- and often. Excellence is more readily attained by being.

Being available.

Being kind.

Being compassionate.

Being transparent.

Being real.

Being thoughtful.

Being ourselves.

*And of all the students I know who have lauded teachers with the laurels of the highest acclaim, those students have said of those teachers that they **cared**.*

You see, kids can see through to the truth of the matter. And while the flashy stuff can entertain them for a while, it's the steady constant of empathy that keeps them connected to us. It's the relationships we build with them. It's the time we invest. It's all the little ways we stop and show concern. It's the love we share with them: of learning. Of life. And most importantly, of people.

And while we continually strive for excellence in our profession as these days of fiscal restraint and heavy top-down demands keep coming at us—relentless and quick, we need to stay the course. For ourselves and for our students. Because it's the human connection that really matters.

It's you, their teacher, who really matters.

So go back to your class and really take a look. See past the behaviors, the issues and the concerns, pressing as they might be. Look beyond the stack of papers on your desk, the line of emails in your queue. Look further than the classrooms of seasoned teachers down the hall. Look. And you will see that it's there- right inside you. The ability to make an impact. The chance of a lifetime to make a difference in a child's life. And you can do this now.

Right where you are, just as you are.

Because all you are right now is all you ever need to be for them today. And who you are tomorrow will depend much on who and what you decide to be today.

It's in you. I know it is.

Fondly,

That Other Teacher Down the Hall (Gard, 2014c)

The rest of the story 'behind' the letter continues as follows. The teacher whom I wrote this letter to did in fact accept and read the letter. She was very receptive to my words, and we have since formed a special bond because of the original conversation that was struck up between us in the lunch room that November afternoon. Ever since that day, I have sought ways to reach out to her, as a mentor as well as a friend, and I have been encouraged by her willingness to listen to me and openly share with me her thoughts about teaching and caring for her students while yet in this early stage of her career. We have had many conversations around our students and how to best care for them within our role as teachers. It has been my absolute

privilege to watch this young teacher grow and develop into a caring, compassionate educator, along with becoming my gracious friend along the way.

As evidenced in this letter and story, practicing care in my relationships has therefore allowed me to re-envision the interactions I share with people around me. In forming these caring relations, I realize I have never actually been an isolated island unto myself in this profession, and I am aware of the connections I share with other people. I see the opportunity I have to care and I reach for it, grasping with wholeheartedness the moments I have been given to attend and affect. In April 2015, after reflecting about my purpose as a teacher, I wrote the following blog entry:

“Finding purpose” (blog excerpt)

We must all find our purpose in this life and that purpose must compel us to move forward, doing what we can and what we are able so as to live out our calling. Someone recently told me that they didn't know what their purpose was. It is hard, challenging work, figuring out our purpose. It is stretching, complicated work, and it always leaves us changed, different than we were before.

I think part of my purpose is to care about people. It is why I am here. And I find that the more I care, the more I am able to care. The more able I am to care, the better I get at it. The better I get at it, the more I feel challenged by it. The more challenged I am by this whole endeavor, the more soul-searching I must do to re-confirm that where I am right now is where I need to be (Gard, 2015b).

In reflecting on this purpose to care that I am embracing, I must emphasize that I am coming to see care in relationship as both an act of compassion as well as an act of empathy. By this I mean, that the caregiver must be able to exhibit a well-rounded approach to caring that encompasses understanding, concern, kindness and consideration of the other's need for care. One aspect of empathy alludes to envisioning that you have placed yourself in another's unique situation so as to feel/experience what it might be like. This kind of developed empathic response must be self-initiated, as it takes experience and foresight to place your own feelings and interests aside and reflectively take on another person's identity, however limited that projection might be. When we can empathize, it opens the door for compassion to walk through, but what is required first is the desire to show empathy.

I remember one particular Friday afternoon when I had been on playground duty and had a difficult interaction with a little boy on the playground that gave me pause to consider what it must feel like to be a child that is experiencing misunderstanding and rejection. After having followed the student around in circles all over the playground, he finally stopped and took a risk by opening up to me about his feelings. It was a powerful moment. I went home and considered this notion, writing a blog entry called "*Dear Teacher*" that gave imagination to what it might be like to be in his shoes: a little afraid, a little angry and a little distrustful, as evidenced in his tone, facial expressions and words to me that day (Gard, 2014f). Seeing life from a different vantage point has allowed me opportunity at times to show appropriate levels of both empathy and sympathy for my students.

Of course there will always be ebbs and flows in my own empathic responses. To illustrate a case in point, I was also reminded of a day at school in which I found it difficult to care. This memory captures one of those 'less than stellar' moments in my teaching history.

Although I strive to cultivate empathic care and abiding compassion in my disposition towards my students, there are moments in which I fail to do so. On the particular day I have included here, I responded to a situation with frustration, impatience and intolerance. As a teacher who keeps reflections on her lived experience, I believe that these moments must be preserved, along with our finest, so as to show us where we have come from as well as to gently guide us back toward the chosen path which will take us where we plan to journey next.

“On being a learner”

It is our very last day of regular classes, and I am reviewing material from the past few months. As such, I am trying to use the last moments of kindergarten to the maximum of my ability, doing what ‘good teachers do’. We complete our morning routine, replete with an activity, a calendar review, our number chart, message, three poems and two books, and all this is accomplished before first snack of the day. After recess, I hone in on a math lesson. It’s going along terrifically, when from out of nowhere, I hear the fateful words: “I’m bored.” Words that effectively say: ‘This math lesson you are teaching me, Mrs.G., it is booooooring’.

*I shouldn’t be, but I am a little thrown off by this outburst. Jarred by this word, **boring**. And to be truthful, I really haven’t heard that word much this year, for we keep a pretty busy pace in kindergarten ‘all the live long day’. Truly, there is no time to be bored in Room 103, there is too much happening— thus why I rarely hear that word. But today, the word rings loud and clear.*

Booooooring.

“This is boring,” he says again, shrugging his shoulders meaningfully in my direction. I explain calmly that we are playing games— that this should be FUN. I feel the need to spell the words out in my head even as I am saying them: F.U.N. But my words have been spoken to no avail, falling on unlistening ears. He is not convinced, and he shows me with every fibre of his being: this is NOT fun.

So there.

Meanwhile, I focus my attention on another student who is struggling with these fun games I have planned. I patiently explain to her what I am looking for, but after several failed attempts at making myself crystal clear (or so I think), she is nearly in tears. Rather than feel empathy, sympathy or compassion of any sort, I feel instead frustration rising within me. This isn't working out as I planned it. Not working out as I thought it would. The lesson isn't flying, and the fun and games are now over.

Over for all of us.

I continue to hound away in spite of the cues I am receiving, determined that I will teach this lesson OR ELSE, even as my heart is telling me to let it rest. I drown out the small voice inside my head, the voice of better reasoning and discernment. A voice telling me to stop. But I cannot seem to stop, and because of this, I feel inside of me a critical spirit rising. I feel heated, even as my cheeks flush with color. Why can't these students just do what I am asking of them— this task is so simple?

But then again, is this really the important question to ask in the midst of the tension?

Sometimes, it is in humility that we learn our greatest lessons. It is when we are humbled to the point of being brought down low— taken down to a place where our ego can't get the credit any longer: it is there that we find what we've been looking for. Here is where we find answers to our bigger questions. Sometimes it takes time to become aware of this important realization; it takes going through the waters to eventually find a piece of dry land.

I wish I could say that I stopped the lesson immediately and switched gears. I didn't. I just kept plodding on. I continued thinking I had to achieve something before I finally rested my case. And I carried on until the dam finally broke, giving way to mixed feelings, comprised of initial anger which later led to tears and feelings of shame. Eventual sadness and remorse settled in after the slap of reality woke me up. There was a certain knowing, even as I wore the label as classroom leader, that I had failed to lead well that day. I had let not only them down, I had let myself down. It was not one of my prouder moments as a teacher.

I was so intent on my lesson and teaching— so intent on all that I felt I must do as a teacher— and so absorbed in the task of imparting all the knowledge I felt I must confer, that I forgot in that particular moment exactly how to be a caring teacher. I forgot exactly who I was and what my role was within the classroom. I began insisting that one student in particular provide an answer for a question. Surely she knew this—we were at the end of the year. I knew the pressures that awaited me were she to not perform. There would be year-end reports to hold me accountable, anxious parents wondering 'why' and her new teacher next year with whom to reckon. She had to know the answer to this question. She just HAD to. While still in my reverie, I happened to look down at her little face, and seeing her sweet, innocent eyes full of fear and anxiety, I felt immediate surprise. There were tears—tiny, little tears forming in her eyes and

gently spilling down her cheeks. Shocked, I snapped back into the moment. Had I done this? Had I pushed so hard that a student was now afraid of disappointing me? Was this truly me speaking and acting out here, had I really done this?

It was within that moment of brokenness that I realized again: I am not here to administer lessons, to create automatons, nor to make everything perfect. I am not here to help children master the curriculum at the expense of losing their confidence, to push them farther than they are ready to go; I am here to support them in their journey and walk beside them as they travel. I am here to learn from my students— learn again what it is to be a beginning learner. Remember what that feels like to be a five-year old learner; I am here to remember what it feels like to be tired, frustrated, hungry and sad; remember what it feels like to be bored. And then, I am here to figure out how those emotions affect the person each of my students bring with them to class each and every day. So that they can learn better and so that I can learn better too.

I am here, with all of them, so that I can learn to be a better listener, so that I can learn to be more empathic, and come to be a better caregiver. So that I can learn when to nudge and when to pull back. So that I can learn when I need to support and when I need to release. So that I can learn how to accept and let go the things I cannot change, but also to learn how to graciously and lovingly embrace the things I can make a difference in.

In the afternoon that day, I made a purposeful, intentional and deliberate decision to be mindful of my students. To attend to them as they talked and played. To allow them to be themselves. And I found that in focusing my energy on my own learning, I was a happier teacher

in that time frame then I had been before, when I was trying so hard to accomplish my goals and outcomes. I was more at peace. It felt right.

This isn't to say that we can't be focused and organized, doing what it is that needs to be done— but I offer a cautionary warning in this story. We must not let our individual agendas stand in the way of our all important learning to become who we were meant to be, learning which often happens when we are least expecting it to occur.

At least, that's the way it was for me that particular day. Unexpected nuggets of wisdom arise both from the painful moments, as well as from the moments shared with the littlest blessings in my life. All proof that I am still learning. I am not finished yet. (Gard, 2014d).

In re-reading this story, I am humbled. I realize that there is always a fine line between 'who I am prone to be' and 'who I desire to be'; that is, there is tension created from the push and pull between my natural self and my sought-after self, as it concerns the state of being found in my present self. I want to be a good teacher—a caring teacher. That goal is always forefront in my mind. As this kind of 'good' teacher, I believe I am doing my best to care when I allow time for understanding my students. And in thinking about the blog entry just shared, I was also reminded of how important dialogue is within caring relations. There must be time set aside for talking with children and students about school, learning and life, and this dialogue must be given priority in the classroom, even at the expense of the lesson plan and curriculum. Without hearing them and their concerns, we as teachers cannot truly know where they are emotionally, nor fully understand what frame of mind and thinking they are using to interact with their learning environments and the people in them.

Tarlow's (1996) research indicates that time spent in conversation and dialogue is a key aspect of caring relations. When teachers allow for time to talk, they are better able to connect, relate, understand and connect with their students, all important aspects of relationship building. I, too, have found this much to be true, and had I made time for more dialogue on this particular day of which I shared, perhaps things would have gone much differently between me and my students. Thankfully, there is always another tomorrow in which to live better and care more deeply. For that, I am most grateful.

Chapter 6: When Caring is Not Evident

“...the caring person has to be sensitive to the needs of the other, act in the best interest of the other, be emotionally invested, and, most important, do helpful things for the other. The person cared for must then respond in such a way as to perpetuate the process, which involves reciprocity” (Tarlow, 1996, p. 57).

It did not take me long to figure out that within the teaching profession there is a segment of our educational milieu that exhibits resistance to care and love. While not always an overt presence, nevertheless it is still felt and recognized as existing within our ranks. This is what I call push-back to care. The presence of a challenge to care in education might be due to a number of factors, not the least of which is the underlying commitment that schools make toward preparing students to one day make an entrance into the work force. When learning can be reduced to such a nominal function, the question might well be asked: ‘What then does ‘love’ have to do with school?’ (this, a real and plausible question within the traditional view to schooling). There is also the existent challenge for teachers of figuring out the ways in which to facilitate and incorporate care in their everyday relations (even when they do not always feel like it), leaving some educators to relegate care to a lesser priority—this again, another plausible reason for the resistance.

Of course, caring is not only physical, draining, exhaustive labour. It is hard mental work as well. Because we as educators have to *work* at care, put forth some energy and thought; there is labor involved. And because of this, sometimes care is just not considered to be within the job mandate; it is deemed not worth the time, all things considered. Care is an effort that requires making the time, having a vision, and exerting no small degree of energy. It requires placing

others above oneself at times, something we as humans are not always prone to do even within a caring profession such as teaching. As caring relations require that the caregiver make a genuine effort to connect and care with another individual, there are some who might hold to the view that the work care-giving requires is more than they can manage. It is more than they signed up for. One could even surmise that the sentiment “I wasn’t hired to care” could be the mantra for this particular mindset. The following blog article illustrates one of my first professional encounters with such a dilemma. A story written in February, 2015, it is based around the choice teachers make between choosing to show care and choosing to do otherwise.

“Because they are worth it”

I am walking down the hall, getting ready to head for home (having arrived at the end of yet another day substituting in the public school system). As a new teacher, I am young and eager—believing that I have the world by the tail; believing that I can really make a difference. I don’t know it quite yet, but I am about to come face-to-face with a stark reminder that this is not how everyone in this profession feels.

At least, this is not how all teachers feel all the time.

As I round the bend in the corridor, making my way towards the stairs, I can hear his angry voice even before I see him: a veteran teacher, yelling at a student. I wonder at all the commotion, but I soon find myself right in the midst of the upheaval as the pair (teacher and student) now are standing right in my line of vision. They are right in my path of travel.

I immediately feel uncomfortable. This is awkward, listening in on a rant. As I am the only one privy to the exchange, I quickly become aware that the teacher is railing on the student

for holding up the school buses. The student looks quietly at his shoes as he scuffles along, even slower now that this altercation has held him up. All the while, I try to pretend that I am invisible. And yet, the teacher will not let up, not stop the steady stream of verbal abuses that flow freely from his mouth as he expresses his disgust for this student's tardiness.

There is no mistaking the loathing in this teacher's voice. I can tell, from these briefest of moments as I awkwardly manoeuvre my way out of the unfolding scene and out of the school: this teacher is angry. He makes it very clear by way of his tone and body language that showing care for this boy is not on his end-of-day agenda. His voice and actions portray to me something near revulsion and absolute disgust— although I do admit, I am only the observer to this scene.

I can't help but wonder how the boy feels.

Over the years, I have thought about this young student, thought about this situation as a whole. And I have wondered what I, an inexperienced, young female teacher should have done in light of my position. I was at the time 'merely' a substitute— a guest in this school. This was not my comfort zone, and this teacher was even intimidating to me. But still, I have wondered through the years what I could have done in this situation. More than this, I have thought deeply about that boy, wondering whatever became of him.

I've been left wondering about a lot of things.

And even as I now ponder this story, certain questions come to the forefront. Questions arise about other students whom I have known and taught— students that are personified in the face of that boy. Questions that move me to ask:

Do we care enough to think about them? These students we teach?

How often do we pause to wonder about him? Stop to wonder about her? Take the time to think about that young boy (girl?) who put us as teachers in a tailspin each and every day? Do we ever stop to think about what makes him tick? Think about what she cares about? How often do we stop to contemplate his developing person, complete with those infuriating boyish ways? I really wonder. Do we take time to sensitively consider that girl who drives the teachers crazy, who makes their hair turn prematurely grey? I wonder if we ever stopped at all to think about who she really is underneath all the bad words, infuriating manners, cold stares. I wonder too, if we have ever stopped to really think about him either, seeing him as an individual. Lingered momentarily to see these children for the person they truly are, apart from all that childhood baggage that weighs them down (the developing emotions, the immaturity, the inattentiveness, the messiness)?

I wonder.

Do we know that he collects hockey cards by the dozen? That he loves to watch his Grampie fix stuff in the old back shop? Do we know that he has a subscription to Lego magazine? That he never uses a pattern, his mind too bright for that. Do we know these things about him? Do we know how very much he worries about being put on the spot? That he fears being asked questions? Fears being called out each and every day for things he knows he shouldn't do but can't help doing anyway? Do we know? Know that he goes home and thinks about his days too, wondering why life has to be so hard.

Do we REALLY know?

I remember sitting in the university lecture hall for my first class of the Bachelor of Education program, and I remember the professor that day talking to us about our reasons for becoming a teacher. Ideals about making a difference and leaving a legacy were certainly expounded and discussed, but I don't remember any talk about care and love ever being raised as important indicators of teaching excellence. My reasons for becoming a teacher— and for choosing the teaching profession, were also varied, but largely I became a teacher so as to make an impact on my students' lives. Little did I realize back then that I would one day see caring as the ultimate criterion for how I carried out my life's work and calling as an educator, as the best way to make a difference in the lives of my students.

For I believe more and more that the children and young people that come to us each morning, with such varied, interesting, colorful lives— complete with behaviour issues, medical concerns, mental and psychological complications, social and emotional concerns: these children are people who need care. They are people that deserve love and compassion. Yet, when they come to us in the school system, care is not always considered part of the job description. Somehow it was decided that teachers are off the hook when it comes to offering deeply-felt care for their students. Caring does not always play prominently in the educational preparation of upcoming teachers nor is it a requirement of teachers when evaluations are preformed. We as teachers either learn the art of caring along the way, or are born doing it naturally. Or if neither of these two options suffice, then we might forgo it all together.

Recently, a young teacher confided in me that they were surprised at how much caring was involved in being a teacher: "They don't teach you this stuff in the Education Program," she said pointedly to me in an after-school conversation.

And while that might be true, the reality is that most of our students do need to feel a sense of caring interest and concern from us as teachers so as to move to the next level of growth and development, their academic achievement. While some students might learn something from a teacher they don't think likes them, many will not. It's like anything in life: we are willing to give our best to the ones we believe see that best in us.

Caring does count.

Until we start to see people for who they are— unique, complicated, beautiful human beings, our world is just going to continue to play out the same old stories on the same old, worn-out stage. People who are unloved as children can become adults exhibiting unloving behaviours. It just happens. People who are uncared for as children can exhibit characteristics of the same manner as adults. People who experience a deficit of compassion, grace, kindness, and forgiveness as children, while some might overcome the obstacles, can likewise go on to exhibit opposing qualities to these exemplary ones as adults. We learn from those who model for us. When that example is a commendable one, the opportunity for success can be greater. But when it is not, there can be possibility of seeing history repeat itself.

It is time that we as teachers model for our students the responsive loving care we believe is so vital to development and growth so as to show our 'kids' what possibilities are available to them as human beings. It is also time we saw the possibility and potential for good that we as individuals inherently have within us, starting with the good that each and every student brings with them to school. The good that might lie fallow within can be channelled through positive, affirming reinforcement, such as is possible through care. This is especially so when it concerns our greatest resource, our children. What better way to teach children about kindness than

through modelling care for others in our interactions with them and with others. Caring for one another in the best ways we know how. Constant abiding care has a way of nurturing growth in even the most complex and problematical situations. We see fruit for our labour when the kindness is reciprocated, one student to another. Moment by moment, day by day.

We as teachers can use the opportunities we've been given to care for one another—in spite of the complexity, issues, problems, behaviors and less than savory actions attached to the individuals we encounter each and every day. People are people, and children will be children. But those same children who might drive teachers 'around the bend' on any given day still need to have the best possible care given to them by the teachers entrusted with their development, safety and protection. Students deserve teachers who empathically use the opportunities they've been given to show those children they work with and teach that they are worth it.

Because they most certainly are (Gard, 2015c).

Because caring can be (at times) such an arduous, demanding work of the heart, I believe that we as educators must then choose to encourage one another in our journey along the way. For without encouragement, many succumb to the pressures of the job, deciding it is not worth the effort or cost of sacrifice. When we do feel depleted, we must seek out the ones we believe to understand and identify with our given situation, enabling us to find hope in the struggle. Teachers can often feel unsupported in this work of caring. It is the work of the people in our lives—our support systems, colleagues and professional counterparts, to be there for us and for one another with care, encouragement, inspiration and hope for the long haul. These friends and colleagues are vital in opening up this world of understanding, for they are there in our lives partly for the purpose of supporting others too in their caring endeavors. Our support systems

are designed to assist us in finding our way when energy and resolve starts to fade. We have one another as witnesses and as allies. For in truth, not one of us who define ourselves as caring is perfect in this aspect of living with all our students all the time. We are all a work in progress. In our journey as teachers, it helps to know we are not alone. We all may stumble and lose sight of our goals, but it is comforting to know that we also have the opportunity to learn from those failed attempts and do better next time.

I close this chapter focusing on a blog entry that was written as an open letter— actually intended for a real teacher who had privately emailed me a note expressing her heartache, disillusionment and disappointment with her employment as a teacher. These were seemingly desperate feelings which nearly led her to write a letter of resignation to her employer. I wrote the following letter in response, posting it on my blog in the hopes that she would read my words and find encouragement. I have no way of knowing if this occurred, as this specific teacher and I have never before met face-to-face (she, having found me through my blog site).

“Dear You (For When You Need A Word of Praise)”

Encouragement is like a love letter to the heart. It instantly lifts. Immediately upholds the soul both in times of mundane living (when the senses have been dulled) as well as supports in times of acute need, where much more intervention is necessary. Encouragement is the Balm of Gilead— the universal cure for the heart’s pain and hurt. It heals, restores, enables, engages. Encouragement is both consolation as well as joy to the heart of the hearer. We crave these words of support as we strive to live and then press onward in our ordinary day-to-day living; indeed, we need these words even when life becomes complicated and hard to understand. What we really crave is something to persuade us to just keep going. We all need encouragement.

O! how we need those words of affirmation and confirmation.

I am standing there in the church kitchen wiping dishes, sorting cutlery into neat piles, forks, knives, spoons, serving utensils all finding a place. I find myself routinely wiping and sorting, wiping and sorting. As I am standing there, he comes along beside me— an older gentleman whom I am not ordinarily inclined to chat with. We station ourselves, for a moment, side by side, and then he turns to me and says something unexpected. I am actually caught off guard for a moment.

He tells me that he reads my blog articles, and that in the reading, my writing pieces have somehow meant something to him, enough so that he feels the need to share this sweet word of encouragement with me in this tender moment. He also shares that he reads my writing quite regularly, which is just so touching I cannot keep from smiling as he talks. I have not expected this at all; I was not really aware that my words would be relevant to his life and living. Nor did I realize how very much I needed this little bit of nudging and support so as to encourage me and spur me on.

After he leaves my side, I realize that this private exchange (between two acquaintances) might seem insignificant to anyone but me. I might have continued to think such, had I not opened my email account later on in the day only to find that I had received a message from someone I do not know at all. Someone I have never met. The writer, a correspondent who still remains a stranger to me, tells me that they weep even as they type this heartfelt letter; yet, this is an individual curiously willing to bear to me their soul. For in the midst of her hurt and pain, the correspondent expresses to me the discouragement she is feeling and how it has wounded her spirit, all but forcing her to make decisions that would change the course of her career path. It

is as if we know each other intimately, for the details of this story are so similar to mine that I could have written the words of this letter with my own pen.

My heart reaches outward. I just wish I knew what to say so as to help lift this individual from the hurt she feels.

In the moments in which I read the words, recalling back in time when I myself was needing encouragement, I start to wonder if what we all need in life is a maybe a cheerleader assigned individually to each and every one of us. An avid personal enthusiast who ‘likes us, loves us, and cares for us’— regardless what happens to act as a roadblock in our day-to-day living. Someone who is there behind us as we go through our lives, quietly supporting our work and living, even if from the sidelines. What we need is a devoted advocate who works tirelessly on our behalf. Someone who is willing to champion our cause, form our fan base, work up our support channels. I know I could certainly stand a fan or two such as I have just described.

For is this not what we need so as to be encouraged? An individual supporter or a group of followers to stand behind us as we walk this life’s road? Is this not the ideal?

Certainly, if you take in social media at all, this aspect of forming a fan base with a multitude of followers would appear to be the way to go; for everywhere you turn, there is the call to show support and public praise. Affirmation seems to be the sought-after prize these days. There are pages on Facebook asking for ‘likes’ or photos on Instagram asking for hearts. Twitter left looking for ‘faves’. We are a people in need of encouragement, driven to rack up our support systems so that it becomes almost a popularity contest. It seems we are willing to do anything to get votes, even to the point of outright begging for them.

*Is this what we all need? A fan base, based on **likes**, **hearts** or **favorites**? Do we really need the approval of the crowd so as to find encouragement and sustenance for our journey on life's rocky terrain? And if so, how would one go about getting the numbers so as to make any difference?*

If what we need is a fan base, or at the very minimum, a fan: how would one go about convincing another person to be a fan? Persuading another to selflessly act in ways in order to uplift and encourage on a regular basis, as the need arises? And who would we ask: a father or a mother? A best friend, spouse or partner? And what would happen in their absence? Would a sibling fill in? It seems a monumental task trying to derive a consistent base of support from which to draw from when life's trials and troubles get us down.

Perhaps rather what we really need, so as to lift us from the slump of life's 'ho-hum' doldrums as exhibited in everyday living, is not so much a fan or fan base, but to be ourselves the encourager. To be that one behind-the-scenes who follows and 'likes' the work of another. We need to make that choice to be the supporter of another person who needs a quiet word of encouragement or a humble nudge of approval— so that the work that person is found to be doing can then be acknowledged in some way. So that the life that person is living can be recognized and known. What we all need as discouraged people is to be the 'followers' of those significant others in our lives, so that the ones we are quietly supporting from the sidelines are shown that they are truly valued. So that the people in our lives are shown that they are worth our time and effort.

When we offer praise, isn't it interesting how the focus of our emotions becomes less about us and more and more about the valued others in our lives? It seems that much of our own

discouragement is dissolved just by our decision to be an encouragement to others. What we truly need so as to be encouraged ourselves is to BE an encouragement to others. It seems that this is one of the key solutions for lifting the cloud of discouragement that can so easily block our view to the light. Being an encouragement to others can actually offset despair.

Life can get people down. It's a tough world out there and a hard place to navigate sometimes. Without people in life able to truly see the significant others in their life (their valued people) for what they are worth, it is possible to then forget the intrinsic value inherent in being and living. For this is the job of those who are gifted with seeing: to remind others of their worth. Without people gifted in seeing the best, and then in turn gifted in caring and holding out for the best, others less inclined to view the world this way are more easily enabled to give up. That's the work of an encourager: to support and uplift. Without a supportive network of caregivers to offer comfort and solace and cheer when hardships seemingly overpower and overwhelm, people can forget sometimes that there are solutions for the predicament that life's trouble and pain pose. The encouragers work is to offer that word of hope.

If we truly want to know how best to bring ourselves out of the weariness and discouragement we so often feel as people, the best way to do to this is to be ourselves an encouragement and advocate for others. It's the antidote to discouragement.

Being that word of encouragement ourselves that others so desperately need is the way to refocus our eyes on what really matters, lifting our hearts in the process.

So to that One Who Is Struggling right now,

Be encouraged. Know that someone out there cares.

Be confident. Know that someone believes in you.

Be inspired. Know that someone stands behind you.

Be hopeful. Know that your life was created for a purpose.

Believe.

And know with all your heart that I'll be standing by as your number one supporter

(Gard, 2015d).

Caring is certainly not an easy choice for teachers. Those teachers who do choose care as the framework for their calling make a deliberate, intentional decision to do so. This choice is not a simple, straightforward option, but to be sure, it is a life-enhancing one. Caring is indeed vital, but we must oft be reminded: caring is also a deliberate, intentional decision.

Chapter 7: The Choice to Care

“If we decide that the capacity to care is as much a mark of personhood as reason or rationality, then we will want to find ways to increase this capacity.” – Nel Noddings (2005)

As I attempt to navigate the difficult terrain we as teachers traverse, finding ways in which to balance the usage of time (according to the terms of my employment), material resources and energy (according to my own personal stamina), alongside what my heart is calling me to do as a caregiver: I am realizing more and more the need to acknowledge the choices I make within my profession. As teachers and educators, we make important decisions every day about how we use our valuable time, limited energy, money and material resources. We live with limitations in all these aspects of life, but we do have choice with regards to how we use what we are given. In a system that seems to be militantly run on timely order and precision, teachers who stop the clock and caringly choose to make time to listen, love and live, free of stopwatches and the like— seemingly these are the ones enabled to make a difference in their students’ lives. And yet, how much time is required to make that difference varies for each teacher and each situation.

Likewise, teachers give energy to their calling each and every time they step inside their classrooms or areas of influence; but the expenditure of energy and the investment of such so as to make an impact will differ for any given situation. The same application can also be made in terms of how money and material resources are utilized. Who can truly fix a dollar amount to the value of authentic care?

I have thought long and hard about the significance of choice when used to exhibit caring—weighing in my own mind the decisions I make concerning how much I invest in caring. Does it matter how much time is given or how time is used? Or, is the quality of the time invested more important? Perhaps the issue at hand is more about the choices I make? These are the challenges I am faced with in making choices each and every day.

Likewise, I am challenged in my thinking about the energy spent by teachers within the workday and school calendar. As teachers, there are certainly undertones of resentment expressed for those colleagues who do not choose to invest energy in after-hours, extra-curricular events. Approval can be withheld from those who do not willingly serve on committees or put in the hours on after school lesson preparation or coaching activities. Colleagues notice who volunteers and who does not; they notice who is there until 4:00 p.m. (and beyond) and who is not.

Even more interesting, I am also keenly aware of the emphasis placed on how much money and material resources are donated towards classroom upkeep and student welfare, as comparisons and evaluations are sometimes made of teachers' commitment and passion to their job based on these kinds of investments as well. Comparisons can be made in real-life situations face-to-face, but more and more teachers are feeling the pressure to 'keep up' with the proliferation of social media sharing in the form of websites like Pinterest, open spaces that promote sharing and browsing. But is this labour of clocking time and weighing energy, of evaluating how money is spent and how many resources are contributed, really the heart of caring? Or is it rather more about making the choice to give time and energy, along with the contribution other resources to our calling, in order to benefit the students inside our classrooms

and outside of them? Furthermore, can we really ever measure time and energy? Can we really quantify it? Can we, in like manner, qualify or objectively evaluate how these resources are used within a given school day and calendar year? These are questions I ponder as I consider the choices teachers make when engaging in care relations.

To illustrate my thinking about the choices that teachers make (when investing time, energy, money or resources within care relations), I will share a blog entry from January, 2014. In this blog, I wrote a message to a student who had been bullied. This student heard the message (which also appears now on my blog site as an article) when the letter was read out loud by her regular classroom teacher, read both to her as well as to the entire class. I was able to follow up on the letter by coming into this student's classroom, talking with her and her classmates informally via class discussion, a discussion which was then followed up by the reading-aloud of a mentor text about inclusion to illustrate my feelings as a means of sharing my own anti-bullying message).

When examining the article I wrote as a message to this student about bullying, I was initially interested in narrowing specifically on the aspect of time invested that one potentially could spend within relationship, such as can be found between coaches and athletes. I wanted to explore this idea of time in terms of how quantity and quality of time might have an impact on coaching or other mentoring-type relationship. In my case, I was not just the coach for my students when we were in the gymnasium; I continued to be their coach when I met them in the hallway, when I saw them at other sporting events or when I visited them in their classrooms. But as I thought about things more deeply, I realized this aspect of caring is not so much about time as a resource as it is about time as a choice. I choose to spend time caring—and caring

requires both time and energy investment (and sometimes even other resources) so as to be carried out. How much time and how much energy I invest is a choice I make. There are no right or wrongs, no criteria or roadmaps to follow. But there is a choice to make: caring is both a commitment and a decision that individual teachers must make for themselves.

The day I wrote the blog article featured in this chapter, I had held a lunch-time practice before later popping my head into this gymnast's classroom to see both her and her classmates. When the episode of which I wrote occurred, I was visiting her classroom for a brief moment (before heading downstairs to my own classroom of waiting students). While this visit was underway, an incident occurred that changed the tone of the classroom's happy lunch-time buzz. Here is what happened:

"A message to kids who are being bullied" (blog excerpt)

You were having lunch; I was checking out the outrageous costumes your classmates were wearing. I had a laugh with one of your friends as he showed off in front of the chalkboard. Ah, I must say it: I love you kids. I really do. It is such an honor that you all let me drop in from time to time— to shoot the breeze. Chat it up.

I know I'm not your classroom teacher, but I care for you like I am.

Just as I was about to leave the room to go back to my own classroom for the afternoon, you looked at me excitedly and said, "Mrs. Gard, I can't wait to show you my back walk-over next practice." I swear your face was beaming.

But right at that moment someone else was talking to me, too. Not wanting to interrupt the flow of that prior conversation, I let him continue while you were left looking at me

expectantly. It might have seemed like forever, but it was just a moment. A brief hesitation. But in that one instant, before I had time to process what was coming next— before I had time to respond: someone else leaned over towards you in front of all your friends. And that someone else looked you in the eye and said, in as disgusted a tone as can be mustered:

“She doesn’t care about your stupid back walkover.”

I don’t know if your face fell; I don’t know if inside you crumbled into tiny little pieces. I don’t know if you’ve heard those words before— don’t know if you even believed them to be true. But I got the feeling that this might not have been the first time someone said something so cruel.

In the instant it took to process what just had happened, a million memories flashed through my mind. A thousand words came tearing back into my memory. Voices from the past and present were screaming in my head, words sounding much like those said to you:

You don’t matter.

Who cares.

You’re worthless.

No one cares about your stupid life.

In that instant it took for me to register your face with those emotions of mine—in the instant it took— I made a conscious decision: if it was the last thing I ever did on this earth, to look you in the eye and tell you, I’d still do it. I would tell you that someone cares for you. And that someone is me. (Gard, 2014e)

This story is about a group of Grade 6 students and a kindergarten teacher who chose to care for them. (It is also a story about in-school bullying and how to find ways to draw awareness to this devastating issue so prevalent within our school systems, but this will not be the focus of my examination). The story also highlights the aspect of choice within care-giving, choices made about time and energy investment. As a care-giver, I chose to make time and invest my energy on this particular day so as to highlight the importance of care and its influence. As a teacher, I think one takeaway lesson for me is that in choosing to care— and in spending both time and energy doing so, I am realizing more and more how worthwhile this decision is for the benefit of the one ‘cared-for’.

Time and energy matter most when we recognize these qualities for what they are worth, when we choose to give them freely as an expression of our truest selves. Not deciding to give our time and energy because we have to, but lavishing care on others because we choose to. Doing so because we want to, because we believe it makes a difference, and because we believe that difference serves a specific purpose. I enjoyed being able to give my time and energy to this young gymnast. The day I witnessed the verbal attack, I realized that this was an opportunity for me, as a coach, to make a difference in ways I might never be able to on the gym floor. I further began to realize that I have within any present moment I am living out, a decision to make: I can perceive the resources I have been given as expendable expressions of care. Or I can view them as solely mine. That brief moment in time of which I wrote was an opportunity given to me so that I might impact and influence the significant others in my life; I chose to see that moment not as just a random, forgettable incident among many, but as a significant opportunity to care for people. The former decision placed on me a responsibility, while the latter option would have removed from me that sense of ethical care.

What I chose to do that day, in the time I had been given, was to use the opportunity to show this young girl how very much she mattered to me. Even more than this, I wanted to use my choice to care so as to let the rest of the class know that I also cared for them, reinforcing the message that how we treat people is important enough an issue to talk about.

To indicate my strong feelings about why the choice to care mattered to me in the moment of this experience, I wrote the following as part of the above blog piece:

“...I did tell you. I stopped everything else I was saying— stopped directly in front of the class. Because at that moment in time, there was no other conversation as important to me as this one. There was nothing else that mattered more to me than you. And I looked at you with all the care and all the love and all the concern and all the emotion I could muster, feeling like I was you—for I once was.

Maybe I still am.

And as I experienced that wave of emotions wash over me, something happened. I saw you. I really saw you. Even now tears fall freely as I write. I told you with my heart that I do care about the absolutely amazing stuff you do. I told you I care about that back walker-over. And I told you that I can't wait to see you do it for me at our very next practice. It's going to be amazing. I just know it.

Listen. If I could go back in time again— do this all over again, I would tell you this: I would say in front of your whole class how proud I am of you, of all of you. Proud of my kids. Would say how proud I am of athletes who give things a chance, who take risks, who make

mistakes and get back up again to do it once more. Even when they fall. Even when they find themselves faced with overwhelming odds.

I am proud of kids who are willing to try. Kids who are not afraid to be themselves.

And you know, a coach can learn a lot about life on the gym floor, can learn a lot from watching kids. You might find this out someday. You might become a coach yourself. It's possible.

You know, Girl: the sky is the limit. (Gard, 2014e)

In reflecting on this blog entry, I am coming to see that as each teacher differs from another, so does the ability to commit time and invest energy, money and resources. In relation to how I choose to spend time caring, I know that I am a work in process: to forget this truth would be to cheat myself of significant learning opportunities that have the potential to grow me both as a teacher and as a human being. Vanier (2008) has so beautifully articulated this struggle that we as reflective practitioners often undergo, within his important work, *Becoming Human*. While acknowledging that humans are in continual evolution, Vanier avows that the process of 'becoming' who we were meant to be involves cultivating our gifts, as well as opening our eyes with a heart to love the others whom cross our path (Vanier, 2008, p.3). He says that this means we must become people with both insight and wisdom for loving others. Vanier (2008) speaks of the care shown through love by way of revelation, stating that "to reveal someone's beauty is to reveal their value by giving them time, attention, and tenderness" (Vanier, 2008, p. 22). In considering Vanier's (2008) sentiments, I am coming to appreciate more and more all the time, the value of offering my own students care and attention through the choices I make.

Within research on care ethics, time has been considered a factor in fostering relationships built on care— particularly as it pertains to teaching. Tarlow (1996) supports the role continuity plays in impacting caring relations, surmising that as long as students get “enough time dedicated to caring relationships, they could flourish” (p. 61). But here is where I must challenge Tarlow in asking the question: in this context, what does the word ‘enough’ mean? This particular word places emphasis on the variable of measurement. Since teachers cannot truly measure time invested in terms of the impact it will have on caring, how will we ever know we have given enough? Perhaps the emphasis could be placed on stability within the flow of time. Certainly, continuity of time invested is reinforced each and every time we share a caring encounter, and perhaps this is what really matters: the investment. For when speaking of time, caregivers can maintain caring relations with others in spite of the fact that time is often at a premium. It is perhaps not necessarily the quantity of time that matters, but rather the investment of limited time— followed up by continuity of the relationship for those caring encounters that are prolonged. The same could be said for energy invested in caring relations. For in terms of measuring “enough”, since care-giving can occur spontaneously and instantaneously, energy invested cannot be quantified. Who has not been touched by the smile of a stranger, the endearment of a cashier or the heartfelt words of an inspirational speaker? None of these caregivers are obligated to invest vast amounts of energy, nor prolong the care-giving relationship, and yet the care is still felt. The choice to care was made and the impact of such was experienced. Measuring what might be ‘enough’ time (or energy) then seems to be a very difficult task for anyone concerned with determining allotment in care-giving. Again, it is the choice to invest that matters most, from investing in the briefest of moments to those which become more prolonged encounters in caring.

I would be remiss not to mention that the choice I make to spend time and energy (even money and resources) in caring relations has the added benefit of enhancing my own life as caregiver, for the choice to engage in care offers benefits that run two ways. Because I have chosen to invest in others, I have learned a great deal about care and its influence on my own life. I have learned more why it matters. I am a kinder, more compassionate, more relational teacher, coach and mentor than I would be without the added choice to invest care in my relations with students and colleagues. The choice to invest time and energy in learning the craft of care has certainly made a great deal of difference on the impact I have had over the years in the lives of my students, as well as has opened my eyes to the value of care. I ponder again Ram Dass' (2015) words by way of a challenge to myself: "I would like my life to be a statement of love and compassion, and where it isn't, that's where my work lies."

So then, it is up to me to decide, up to me to choose the statement that defines my day-to-day living. And how will I choose? Will I choose to see with eyes of understanding? Will I choose each day to be available, kind, compassionate, transparent, real and thoughtful? Choose to make that investment in my students' hearts and minds? To these questions I resoundingly say yes. May it always be so.

Chapter 8: An Epilogue

“J’aurais dû être plus gentille—I should have been more kind. That is something a person will never regret. You will never say to yourself when you are old, Ah, I wish I was not good to that person. You will never think that.”—Khaled Hosseini (2013)

We are standing together even as the long line stretches out the door, snaking around one corner and into the spacious funeral home chapel. We are standing, my sister-in-law and me. Our feet ache from our high-heeled shoes, but we are both so intent on seeing each and every person that places their warm hand into ours so as to offer comfort. These traditions are a beautiful way to honor a life, and we are so touched by the heartfelt words we have just been privy to hearing. So moved by the many, many words of comfort, words of concern and words of joy at the ways in which lives have been touched by our own dear Loved One.

He was a dear husband, a beloved father and grandfather. A brother, uncle, friend. Boss for some and co-worker for others; a friendly, helpful neighbor always, among other more diverse roles. But for today, he is just Loved. Our own dear Loved One.

Each person that comes through the receiving line shares a different memory, with the theme woven throughout every sentiment being the kindness he displayed as he lived out his life. Even the funny stories bring about a torrent of tears; we are bound together by our humanity, even in our baser moments. These words—they heal us. Words mean so much.

As I stand there absorbing the impact of all the heart-warming words just spoken, she leans toward my ear and whispers these additional profoundly moving words proffered about her

father: "It doesn't matter what you did for work, what line of employment you were in; it matters how you lived your life."

It matters indeed how we live.

And yet within our human connectedness, this which matters most is something so simple it can almost be overlooked. Something so ordinary in its application that its intense impact can be disregarded. It is simple, but not easy. Unpretentious, yet so difficult to maintain. That is the thing about kindness—it seems basic, yet its impact is astronomical; and the ways in which our interactions are affected by its absence are profound. In this life, amongst all our human relationships both intimate and otherwise, what matters beyond all else is that we are authentically kind to one another.

Someday, someone will recall back to the time you offered them a caring shoulder to lean on, will recall that you saw the best in them when no one else could find the strength. They will recall that instead of acting in anger, you acted in love; will recall that you were tender, were compassionate and merciful. They will remember you for your genuine concern about their welfare. They will remember you for your caring.

Someday, someone will recall back to your connection with them, and they will recall that you reached out to them in their time of need. They will remember that you offered them hope when they were desolate, remember too that you extended them a warm welcome when they felt estranged. They will remember that you placed them first above their own needs. Because someday: someone will recall you. And they will either remember you for your

kindness— your caring, your love, your understanding, your compassion, your mercy. Or they will not.

It is as simple as that.

I have come to the startling realization at forty-one years of age— with two degrees and a third nearly gained, with a full-time job and many professional recommendations, with a beautiful house and acreage and the toys and trinkets to boot— I have come to believe that none of this really matters. Because it does not matter a hill of beans how high you have climbed the ladder in the corporate world or how much you have acquired. Nor does it matter how simple your expectations might be in this life. And it does not matter what successes you have seen or what failures you have been prone to. Because at the end of your life, when you lie on your own deathbed and your loved ones are gathered round, what really matters is how you have lived your life. That is it. And if you have lived life compassionately, with caring and kindness, you have done life well.

Everyone can be kind. It is something we all can choose to do as we live this life. We all have that available option at our disposal: the choice to show kindness. To be kind with every part of our being. Radiating love to the people we meet. For at the end of the day, after the work day has finished, the technology powered down for yet another day, and the lights extinguished to welcome the cover of night, it is the simple acts of kindness that people will remember most. And might we ponder as well that it is our kindness that people will bear in mind most about us when our own internal flame is darkened. It is what people will remember long after we ourselves are gone.

I will close with one final story, and it is a tender one for me to tell. It is a story about my grandmother and her selfless life of service. Her gift of caring for others is the legacy she leaves to me, her granddaughter. She was once a student herself: I picture her now in my mind as a young scholar sitting in a one-room schoolhouse. Perhaps there was a teacher at some point in her life who was the guiding light leading her forward. Whether this is the situation or not (I cannot ask, she has already passed), she has been for me a beacon of hope. She has lived out her faith based on the biblical principle of placing the concerns and needs of others above one's own. That which follows is her story.

Born on October 3, 1920, in Cody's New Brunswick, she was one of fourteen children. Rather than fade into the background, becoming a face amidst the throng, she made a name for herself as being a favorite sister. A confidant, friend and caregiver. A kind soul. That care-giving would come in handy later on as she went on to be a nanny, most famously for the movie star Donald Sutherland. This experience (along with a photograph of her famous client) was her sole claim to fame. But certainly her most meaningful care-giving was saved for her own three children, one of whom—a son, was born with Down Syndrome. Little did she realize, her widespread commitment to care-giving had only just begun with tiny Eldon Berry's birth in 1956.

For on a cold December day, thirty-six years into her vibrant life, my eight-months pregnant Aunt Jeannie— my grandmother's oldest daughter, was driving home from her day job as a civil servant with the Government of Canada where she worked with Indian Affairs. It was a clear evening, but snow lay on the ground. She had a little economy car and visibility was quite possibly low. The doctor said later, if she had have moved her head an inch to the right she

would have avoided that truck's plow which smashed through her windshield, slicing cleanly through her skull and brain. That inch—it was not meant to be. Neither for her, nor for her baby, Jesse. And from that moment thirty two and a half years ago, (a time when Jeannie was just about the age I am now), until she finally left this life, my aunt lived the life of an invalid. Unmoving, unspeaking, unable. She was robbed of everything save the compassionate care she would live to receive throughout the remaining days of her life.

Jeannie's primary caregiver, my grandmother, gave her life in service to my aunt's care. She spent thirty-one years daily making trips to the various establishments (hospitals, manors, long-term care facilities) where my aunt was located over the duration of her illness and life. My grandmother spent thirty-one years holding her daughter's hand, stroking her hair, wiping the crumbs from her face. Spent thirty-one years advocating for her—both within the various medical establishments and beyond. Spent thirty-one years acting as her accountant, conducting her financial business up until the age of eighty-nine years old. She spent thirty-one years of her life solely dedicated to her daughter's well-being. And because of this, my aunt received the best care of anyone in the province of New Brunswick, I am sure of it (and there are several experts to vouch for this fact). After thirty-one years of living her life shut up inside a fragile façade—living out a life confined in both body and spirit, my aunt released her soul and let it sail away home. Less than one year later, my grandmother said her own farewells to this life and flew away to join her.

My grandmother is an inspiration to me. She is one of many, but she is certainly among those I consider most influential. I watched her carry out her life's work and calling from the time I was eight years old. We spent many a day as her grandchildren walking the sterile halls of

silent manors, the reverie broken by a moan or a cry from one of the residents. We spent many hours bedside, watching our grandmother hover and fuss. And in watching this unfaltering champion of her own beloved child—an unsung hero during her time here on earth, I was given an example, from one of the best, after which to model my own life and practice. The life of my grandmother is as shining example of Vanier's (2008) 'becoming human' as there ever was, certainly with regards to being a care-giver. I am honored to be called her granddaughter.

It is in paying tribute to those who have gone on before that we are reminded anew of why we must continue to carry the torch onwards, until at last we ourselves reach the fading light of day. We care, so as to carry on the legacy. We care, because the future depends on this decision. This is part of what it means to become human: to care. Both for ourselves as well as for the world and its inhabitants therein.

Chapter 9: Conveying Significance to our Students

"I didn't want to be ordinary," I mumbled. My mother looked up. "What ordinary, Charley?"
"You know. Someone you forget." From the other room came the squeals of children. Miss
Thelma turned her chin to the sound. She smiled, "That's what keeps me from being forgotten."

—*Mitch Albom (2006)*

My blog writing, based on personal, storied accounts of my experiences, takes the form of what Bochner calls 'evocative narrative' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and what Leggo (2005) deems poetry. This type of narrative prose is introspective, a self-exploratory way of 'finding out', as it is writing centered on my teaching and life experience. As I write, I find my awareness about the need for a universal sense of love deepens. The significance of my focus on loving kindness and care is that it has an impact on me, on my students and on all those I come in contact with. I believe that an all-encompassing love founded in an ethic of care has the potential to vastly increase our ability to be responsive one to another, thus improving our daily interactions and experiences.

One way to enhance understanding about love is through dialogue. In sharing my own life story, there is that potential to enable others in my community of readers to find commonality with the experiences I have been through, experiences that connect to care and its role in our lives. When people feel connected in experience, there is opportunity for reflection and growth through the shared response. Not every story is easy to share. One personal story based on a less than pleasant memory I have from childhood can illustrate this point.

In this memory, I am driving in the old Chevrolet with my Daddy behind the wheel, going to pick up some kids for Sunday School. I am about 8 or 9 years old. And while my

father had great compassion for the family we were connecting with, I remember that I did not. For some reason, I did not care much for the little girl belonging to this particular family. I did not think she smelled right, nor did she wear the right clothes. I did not even like the look of her, and you can be sure I did not want to go to her house and pick her up for church. There was something about her that just rubbed me the wrong way, and I quickly got my 'ire up' when the scheduled weekend jaunts we took to her house rolled around. I decided she was not someone I needed to be kind to. In my mind, she was not significant for any other reason than the fact that I did not like her.

So I wasn't kind. At least not to her.

Throughout the years, I have never forgotten that girl. Never forgotten the uncalled for dismissal of her in my mind. Perhaps partly because of her, I now (as an adult) have decided to be more deliberate and intentional in my choice to show kindness. I share this story now because it represents learning and growth in my development as a person. It is not always easy to be kind, particularly when doing so challenges our tolerance and ability to be open-minded. For some individuals just seem to set something off inside of us and trigger those emotions which push our buttons. Encounters can serve to try our patience. Maybe it is that the ones we cannot extend care to also do not really care all that much for us either, creating a tension all its own. Perhaps it is something longstanding that has come between two people— an issue that has been left unresolved. Or maybe it is just one little hurt after another that has built up a wall of disappointment and fear. There are myriad reasons for why people do not get along and in turn, do not like one another. It can sometimes be something so little as a personal preference that divides.

The choice to give significance to other human beings through care must be compassionately thought out and or it will be difficult to universally apply that care to those we meet, regardless of how we personally feel about them. As teachers, there will be students whom we will not particularly like that we must show care for. There will be parents and colleagues and others we will encounter about whom we will have to make a choice: will I act in kindness or will my response be indifference, anger or any other another plausible response grounded in disfavour? The choice is ours to make. By showing care to those around us in spite of our feelings and preferences, we find evidence of our growth. We can choose to be caring even when our first impulse is to be uncaring, when our first response would most certainly be to turn away.

Care is something that can be developed and nurtured through deliberate, intentional decision-making, that which hooks (2000) says cultivates awareness. hooks (2000) claims that “embracing a love ethic means we utilize all the dimensions of love—“care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge”—in our everyday lives (p. 94). hooks adds that when we are aware of our need for love, we can then be critical in examining our actions, thoughtful of the ways in which we show care, responsible and respectful toward others and willing to learn. Hearts wide open. When we determine that we are going to be caring, through awareness and understanding, the follow-through of care-giving becomes a more probable possibility. There is hope for all of us to be caring, whether we were born that way or not.

In this chapter, I explore individual significance in its relationship to care. As teachers, we need to consider the ways in which we attribute significance, or perhaps deny it, as it concerns our students. There is certainly a need for validation within the field of education. Schools built on principles of care have need of teachers who are champions of their students.

I wrote the following blog article on the importance of students feeling significant, after having a conversation with the very teacher about whom this next article is written. The experience of my colleague's acknowledgment of her students' innate need to be seen and appreciated—to be valued, profoundly moved her to both tell me the story, as well as also write about the story herself for her own records. While I recount the details of her story in this blog entry, I do so emphasizing significance in its connection to care within teaching. This is my personal belief, the linchpin upon which I do the work of a teacher. I care so as to affirm the inherent value of each child I teach, expressing my belief in the person's significance and story even as it interacts with my own.

“Insignificance”

Recently, a classroom full of nine, ten and eleven year-old children waiting for transition between classes was doing what ‘a classroom full of children’ does naturally during down-time: they were goofing around and making general mayhem. The noise level was fast approaching the limit of what would be acceptable to the regular teacher. Thinking fast on her feet, my colleague—the educational assistant to two of the students, picked up a whiteboard marker and put a word on the board, hoping to grab the remainder of the students’ attention:

INSIGNIFICANT.

She put down the marker, turned and faced the students and then intently asked: “Who feels this?” The classroom immediately became silent so that you could hear a pin drop. The numerous faces immediately turned serious and all goofing stopped. One by one, the students took in the weight of that word, took in the meaning. And silently, almost every single one of

*them raised their hands in affirmation. Almost every one of the kids in that classroom acknowledged that they had felt, at one time or another, **insignificant**.*

This grouping includes: the disruptive ones, the quiet ones, the loud ones, the disenfranchised ones, the privileged ones, the smart ones, the academically challenged, the financially stable, the economically disadvantaged ones, the impoverished.

All of them.

Includes the ones in name-brand clothing, as well as the ones in someone else's hand-me-downs. Includes the smart-alecks and the serious, the class clowns and the introverts. This list includes every single one of them. Because all who raised their hands indicated that they had felt at one point in time in their young lives, insignificant.

*The teacher then erased two little letters found in front of the word. She took away 'in' and left the letters **S-I-G-N-I-F-I-C-A-N-T**. She then turned and faced the classroom of children who were at this moment a captive audience. And she asked them: "Who makes you feel significant?"*

Which is to say: who is that person that sees your heart? Sees your soul? Who loves you? Who gets you? Who understands? Who sees past your hoodie, sees past your Reeboks, your faded jeans? Sees past your greasy hair? Past your amateur attempts at eye-shadow and lip-gloss? Who knows what goes on inside that head of yours? Who knows what you're all about? Who digs you?

WHO KNOWS YOU ARE NOT INVISIBLE?

Hands went up slowly to share their stories. Hands of kids I know, hands of kids I care about. And I know this, because one of those kids in the classroom that day was my very own child. Hands went up all over the place. But not all the hands— not all them went up. Because not everybody acknowledged they felt significant. Not all stated they felt visible. Significant.

I ask myself: how can this be, that not all our students feel significant? For we believe, do we not, that every student needs to know they are significant? As teachers, this is the question that should daily weigh on our minds. And yet, we as teachers understand through experience that a daily tug-of-war is being played out. We are being asked and expected to increasingly go above and beyond the call. This requirement pertaining to every aspect of our job: as it relates to curriculum delivery, progress monitoring, assessment, reporting, evaluation, lesson planning and development, and testing. The list of academically related expectations could certainly go on. Add to these demands, the pull on our heartstrings to act as advocates interceding on behalf of our least advantaged kids. More than ever before, we teachers are acting in parental ways for the children that seemingly need our demonstrative care the most: feeding them, clothing them, looking after hygiene, interceding on their behalf to obtain supports offered by both inside and outside agencies to the system— holding their hearts and hands gently and empathically when they need a physical sign of nurturing love.

We are being asked to do a lot.

And I believe that we are doing better with the children who desperately need our care, better than ever before—so we should be. But we must notice ALL of our students, from the quiet and studious, to the quiet and disengaged. From the ones that demand attention to the ones who don't. We must notice and acknowledge the worth of even those students we have trouble

relating to. Those students whom we don't particularly like or care for. Teaching is primarily a caring profession, first and foremost. It is time to fully face the fact that teachers are more than educators with an academic mandate. We are equal parts care-givers, nurturing guides, empathic listeners and compassionate educators as well. While we might say we have done a very good job of teaching to the academic requirements of our job, along with reaching out to the population of students in our classrooms that have great behavioral and physical needs, we are still not ensuring that every one of our students leaves our classrooms knowing their full significance. This might not be our mandate, but I sincerely hope it is our calling. We must see and value ALL our students as worthy of knowing their incredible consequence and place in this world, despite our own personal preferences and biases.

Each one is significant. Each one must be seen. Each one has value.

This is our mission, in part—to convey significance. That is, to care. If nothing else, it is a mandate of the heart. (Gard, 2014g)

In thinking about this blog entry, I am reminded again of the role that my perceptions and beliefs play in my choice to care. When I see individuals as valued and worthwhile, as deserving—I am more likely then to invest care in those same people. Of course, this is challenging to do. Often the most difficult people to give value to are the ones that slight or offend us—the ones who have harmed us (intentionally or not). We can find many reasons for why people are undeserving of both our thought, as well as of our attention. When we see through the layers of each individual's story—see through to the heart, we then come to discover that people are very much alike when stripped of the emotional baggage they must carry. People beneath the outer façade are inside very similar at heart. We all desire love; we all need to be

cared for. And within us all, we have the capacity to exhibit kindness and love and care to others. How much we are able to nurture this capacity depends on many factors, of which individual circumstance and personal fortitude are no small players. But the choice is always ours to make.

While I can always find reason to support a decision not to care, I am reminded again and again that the decision to care is always a worthwhile investment. When the tables are turned, I know that care and understanding are what I desire from others in my life. I want others to regard me as significant and worth the time and effort it takes to invest care; I want them to see the value in caring for me in my times of need. For me, it helps to be reminded of what I want—and of who I am, so that what I ask from others is what I in turn ask directly of myself.

Chapter 10: Literature Review— Blogging and Teaching

This auto-ethnographic study is informed by two bodies of research: research on teacher blogging and research on the ethic of care in education. There would initially appear to be very little connection between these two areas of research without a little context provided at the forefront. A short explanation is therefore in order.

I began thinking about starting a blog before I had actually formulated my ideas about the ethic of care. This is not to say that I was not practicing care within the classroom, as I certainly aspired to be a caring, kind teacher. Yet, I had not begun to formally theorize why I felt so strongly about being that ‘caring presence’ inside my classroom. After having formed my blog (primarily as a means of self-care, to revitalize my joy), I began readings through my Master of Education program on teaching with a mind to social justice, on contemplative teaching, on reflective writing, as well as on teachings about care and love within education. Through these readings, I was able to come to a fuller understanding of my personal beliefs about my role in education, or rather, solidify what those beliefs had already been all along. As I was quite passionate about this newfound identity as a caregiver/teacher, I strongly felt that my blog would be an ideal place to start sharing my ideas. This is where my blogging and my passion for care have connected. I now blog so as to share ideas, beliefs and thoughts about caring concepts, those views to caring ideals which I hold fast to both within education, as well as in my everyday life. With this as a premise, I begin the review of the literature investigating research conducted on teacher blogging and its significance within the field of education as a means of encouraging professional development, along with inquiry into what this type of blogging entails.

Following are five sections that comprise this part of the literature review: a section covering the general purposes of blogs, a section on how teachers have used blogs for the

purpose of in-service teaching, a section covering the instructional use of blogs with pre-service teachers, a section concerned with teachers who blog for professional identity, reflection and for other professional development, along with a final section on blogs used for the purpose of research, such as can be found in my own study.

General purposes of blogs

The web-log, or blog, is a frequently up-dated, on-line journal arranged in reverse-chronological order used to chronicle and record information, thoughts, opinions and perceptions about experience. For instance, mine is a narrative account concerned with thoughts and beliefs about my private life and public teaching practice, writing which I update two to three times a week. A blog is often also used as a site for potentially creating, collaborating and sharing new knowledge with a greater community interested in similar topics of discussion (Haung & Lot, 2012; Luehmann, 2008; Nackerud & Scaletta, 2008). Although there are many personal and professional bloggers utilizing blogging technology, until recently, researchers have known little about why or how bloggers are doing this work (Luehmann, 2008). As part of a new wave of Internet technologies, blogs are now being incorporated into many professional milieus, one of which is the field of education, and this is largely being done because of the potential these blogs have as a social teaching and learning tool (Top, Yukselturk, & Inan, 2010). Top, Yukselturk & Inan (2010) assert that blogs have the potential to improve social and learning communities and thus provide a platform for collaborative learning.

Blogs have certainly been used the past number of years by teachers for many purposes, the main function being to assist teaching practice in a variety of ways (Lai & Chen, 2011). But as argued by Boyd, Gorham, Justice and Anderson, (2013), Luehmann (2008) and Luehmann and Tinelli, (2008), blogs can also be used for teachers' individual benefit. Blogs can foster

personal and professional growth and identity development through reflection and interaction with peers around issues pertaining to critical pedagogy. Blogs can also offer new avenues for professional learning by offering unique learning forums for professional and personal development.

Blogs Applied For In-Service Teaching Purposes

Numerous studies have been conducted about teacher blogs maintained for teaching purposes. For example, Lai and Chen (2011), studying what motivates secondary school teachers to adopt teaching blogs, found that some of the primary factors influencing teachers' decisions to create blogs were the teacher's enjoyment in doing such, the ease in which the teacher was able to create and maintain a blog, as well as the teacher's desire to help others through the blog platform (p. 958). Similarly, Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) in their research on blogging in post-secondary settings looked at why students and their instructors are blogging, what they are blogging about and who is reading these blogs. They propose that teacher blogging is useful as a teacher-driven administrative tool, and is beneficial when used as a device for communication. In a related study, Huang and Lot (2012) examined what enticed bloggers to engage in the act of blogging, ranking self-expression high on the list of reasons for why blogging is an attractive option for students and teachers (p. 219). Huang and Lot (2012) also found that blogs which encourage learners' self expression build the social interaction required to make a blog a success.

Hou, Chang, & Sung (2009) researched teachers' application of blogs to facilitate knowledge construction and interaction. They found through analysis of the interactive behavioral patterns of teacher blogs that, while blogs allow for sharing of information and experience, blogs without interactive strategies for collaboration in place were limited in terms of

educational construction of knowledge (Hou, Chang, & Sung, 2009, p. 335). Rather than using blogs to share and construct knowledge, teachers used them mainly for simple sharing and information comparisons, along with the lesser role of exploring education theories and principles. According to this study, knowledge construction scenarios, such as proposing different opinions and concepts, along with in-depth comparisons, were rarely seen. Hou, Chang, & Sung (2009) suggest that tools designed for teacher blogs, to specifically assist in facilitating teacher growth and development, could be integrated into blogs dedicated to those teaching communities they serve, the effect of which would be to enhance the impact of such blogs (Hou, Chang, & Sung, 2009, 335-336). One such tool they suggest to promote knowledge construction is an interactive module that allows teachers to upload lesson plans, whereby they can browse one another's work using a peer-assessment strategy (Hou, Chang, & Sung, 2009, 336)

In spite of these studies, there is little in-depth research to be found exploring in-service teachers who blog outside of prescribed school contexts about topics in education. There is also seemingly little research about why teacher-bloggers do what they do, although the notion of teachers keeping journals and diaries for professional growth has been researched. In particular, research investigating pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs and reflections via their diaries has been explored by Güven, Sülün, Çam (2014) as well as by Çam (2015). The purpose of diaries in the latter study was for enhancement of the pre-service teachers' awareness of the objective of the course, along with application of knowledge, language and skills in relation to the course topic and everyday life.

In terms of in-service teacher reflection, Inglese (2011) engaged in action research by means of reflective practice. As a first-year EFL teacher, Inglese (2011) implemented a

personally designed curriculum and recorded his observations and feelings about this experience in a reflective journal, doing so as an effort to “engage in professional development by means of reflective practice” (p. 3) While entries submitted in Inglese’s diary format were brief and descriptive (focused on the specific lessons within his newly designed curriculum), I did not find them to be highly introspective and deeply contemplative in nature, neither were they used to challenge and critique the educational system as a whole. Thus, in terms of in-service teachers, there is limited research to date on critical teacher blogging, or blogs initiated so as to reform and challenge status quo, designed in such a way so as to question traditional practices; that is, there is very limited research on transformative teacher blogging initiated so as to create awareness about changes needed within the system. I have also not been able to find any research on blogging specifically carried out so as to foster care and compassion in the profession, although there is limited research to be found on reform-minded teacher-blogging which would hopefully include care and compassion as a secondary feature of the blog (Luehmann, 2008).

Pre-Service Teacher Blogging

Of the research obtained on teacher blogging, much has focused on the instructional use of blogs with pre-service teachers. With regards to professional development, Yang (2009) found that for student teachers in the training processes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), blogs were beneficial for fostering critical reflection and thinking, as well as useful for determining the influence that blogging might have on professional growth.

Reupert and Dalgarno (2011) also studied the use of blogs to facilitate reflection on in-class behavior management strategies, finding that blogs were somewhat useful for pre-service teachers; some pre-service teachers in this study noted that the time it took to blog as well as the feedback received from peers was not always desired or helpful, thus detracting from the

usefulness of this type of reflection. Other studies on pre-service teacher blogging show varying levels of support for the usefulness of blogs as concerned with promotion of reflection on practice (Hourigan & Murray, 2010; Hsu, 2009.) Top, Yukselturk, & Inan (2010) in a study involving fifty pre-service teachers found that most students used the blog format for information sharing rather than as a forum for discussion and reflection via an on-line learning community, although participants in this study did note that the interactive nature of the blog was desirable. Findings in this study indicate that integrating blogs into a course do not establish the grounds for an effective learning community, suggesting that blogging motivated and influenced solely by extrinsic factors can reduce the impact that blogging plays in learning and growth (Top, Yukselturk, & Inan, 2010).

With reference to research on blogging as a voluntary individual reflective practice in pre-service education, little supportive research could be found. Most research studies are concerned with blogging as a mandatory academic prerequisite; for example, blogging is at times a course-mandated expectation of pre-service teachers. Rather than an act of deliberate intent, blogging in this sense was initiated as a course requirement for these pre-service teachers, carried out so as to support critical thinking and reflection within the educational community wherein they were student-members (Kileavy and Moloney, 2010; Boyd, Gorham, Justice & Anderson, 2013; Justice, Anderson, Nichols, Gorham, Wall, Boyd & Altheiser, 2013).

To give a specific example, Boyd, Gorham, Justice & Anderson (2013) studied pre-service teachers in an elementary education program to observe how they, in thinking about their own schooling experiences in relation to teaching practice, could then use this information to support their emerging professional growth and development. In reflecting on their own experience, the act of blogging enabled them to begin developing a professional identity, and it

assisted them in mediating their ideas and opinions alongside course readings and practice-teaching inside the classroom (Boyd, Gorham, Justice & Anderson, 2013, p.27, 45). Although not all the pre-service teachers observed in this study were found to have embraced blogging as a tool for professional development, for those who did, blogging was observed to be beneficial—potentially affording occasions of disruption in thinking through interaction with other peers, as well as providing an opportunity for reflection (p. 45).

Kim (2008) found that students with a shared blog were less motivated to become engaged in the blogging process as compared to student with a personal blog (Kim, 2008, p. 1349). It was proposed in this study that if students were given the option of personalized blogging as opposed to shared blogging formats, the online communication activities of educational bloggers might then be enhanced.

Blogging For Professional Development

In reviewing the research, it appears there has been limited research on in-service teacher blogging and blogging aimed at developing professional identity. One exception is Luehmann (2008) who studied the single case of one teacher-blogger's experience, that of an urban middle-school science teacher. Luehmann (2008) found that this format was able to support the teacher-blogger's identity development as a teacher, as well as enable her "to bid for other people's (her readers') recognition of herself as a certain kind of teacher" (Luehmann, 2008, p. 330). The development of a teacher identity is a process by which an educator recognizes the teaching done as a being a certain type or kind of teaching (Luehmann, 2008), a subset wherein one could find themselves on one end of the spectrum as more traditionally situated and at the other, as very reform-minded. Luehmann (2008) contends that it is through the interpretations and recognitions of our participation in professional discourses that identities are formed. She

suggests that in telling a story in narrative fashion, “the author makes meaning, defines values with respect to this meaning, and integrates beliefs into the becoming of a certain kind of person” (Luehmann, 2008a, p. 177). More specifically, Luehmann found that through blogging, the teacher-blogger who participated in her study was able to reflect on studying her practice “from a distance”, able to engage in critical thinking about issues stemming from her practice, enabled to seek community-based interaction, as well as able to integrate expert voices in the context of both her previous practice as well as in relation to her personal education autobiography (Luehmann, 2008, p. 330). Blogging enabled this teacher-blogger to not only reflect on her teaching with the goal of improving her practice, but also allowed for the generalizing of these experiences so that she could wrestle with important issues and articulate new insights and resolutions. Luehmann (2008) found that the disadvantage of blogging for this teacher was that blogging was not a conducive vehicle for her to learn about and use specific new tools to support her practice (Luehmann, 2008, p. 330)

In a similar way, Sfard and Prusak (2005) assert that the identities teachers form are stories that, even though they are individually told, are products of collective storytelling (p. 1). Examining identity is important in Sfard and Prusak (2005)’s view for the purpose of generalizing. Individuals often act differently within the same situations, and yet they can exhibit a distinct ‘family resemblance’ when their actions are compared; these family resemblances, or similarities, help form larger categories for those wishing to generalize their identity work. When teachers blog for identity, individual stories are told that can be applied to a wider community.

Other research which has been conducted shows that blogging can influence teachers’ thinking as well as increase reflectivity on practice when done in a manner so as develop critical

thinking and deepen understandings through the writing process. Makri and Kynigos (2007) studied the role of blogs in the professional development of mathematics teachers, studying the discourse and social practices of these educators. They found that teacher-bloggers could be profiled in three main ways: as enthusiasts, as frequent bloggers, and as skeptics. All three of these profiles shed light on the ways on-line writing behaviors are able to shape new social roles for the teachers (Makri and Kynigos , 2007, p. 81). In line with this thinking, blogging can play a significant social role in developing an ethic of care for those teacher-practitioners pursuing such, which has been the situation in my own case.

In a similar vein, Hanuscin, Cheng, Rebello, Sinha and Muslu (2014) examined the affordances of blogging as a practice to support ninth-grade science teachers' identity development as leaders. They found through evidence from their analyses, supported by teacher testimonials, that in-service teachers who integrated blogging into their practice were able to develop their identity as leaders by way of carrying out “purposeful and meaningful interactions” with colleagues who read and responded to the blog entries, as well as through their participation in pedagogical transactions, social interactions and intellectual deliberations, all which aided them in developing their role as teachers leaders in the classroom (Hanuscin, Cheng, Rebello, Sinha and Muslu, 2014, p. 217).

Likewise, Kirkup (2010) studied academic blogging as a means of forming identity in professional academic practice in higher education. She investigated why some academics produce blogs to supplement their academic writing and found that while blogging is still emerging within academia as a practice, it could (given time) contribute to a higher profile academic identity for twenty-first century public intellectuals (Kirkup, 2010, p. 82-83). Kirkup (2010) contends that blogging (in its novelty) has been less than enthusiastically endorsed as a

suitable publishing option for scholars and researchers, but this could possibly be connected to the restrictions involved in gaining tenure as well as to the expectation placed on academics to publish in reputable journals. Prestridge (2014) studied the effect that written reflection (such as can be found in blogs) might have as part of professional development to support pedagogical change. She discovered that when teachers participating in professional development understood how to reflect authentically, there was potential for change in pedagogical beliefs and practices; she asserts that reflective writing allowed teachers time to think critically, reason with and examine what happens in their classrooms “enabling change and future action” (Prestridge, 2014, p. 84).

Kileavy and Moloney (2010), considering how blogging can support reflective practice for beginning teachers, recommended further exploration into how the maintenance of a blog could be used to promote more effective reflective thinking on practice. They did, however, find that blogs could be useful for creating communities for sharing, particularly for teachers in schools found in rural areas (presumably, this would be of benefit for both pre-service and in-service teachers). One suggestion they make is the development of a shared purpose “as it affects levels of participation, commitment to the group, and peer support within the group” (Kileavy and Moloney, 2010, p. 1075). While the further suggestion of an on-line community support site is purported to be potentially useful (particularly for those teachers found in rural areas), Kileavy and Moloney (2010) add that further exploration into support for teachers using blogs in this way is needed. They give further comment on the idea of teachers developing their reflection within practice, recommending that “the use of alternative models such as narratives or dialogues for teachers to document, share and reflect on their practice” be areas deemed important for future research. They additionally put forward that further exploration be

conducted around the usage of blogs to support such deep reflection, as well as the same with regards to the development and maintenance of communities of practice, supported by communications networks (Kileavy and Moloney, 2010, p. 1075).

To date, I have found few studies (past Leuhmann's (2008) seminal research) to be concerned with reflexive, in-service teacher blogging related to professional identity development— that is, blogging in which the writing is carried out voluntarily to promote critical thinking and awareness such as is found in reform-minded teaching practice. This type of blogging of which I refer involves blog-style writing conducted with the specific intention to use this platform so as to inwardly reflect, outwardly transform, transgress and change, and thus publicly inspire others within the professional milieu. Certainly, there are teachers doing these very things, to some degree, by way of the medium of blogging (Vicki Davis who blogs at The Cool Cat Teacher found at <http://www.coolcatteacher.com/> and Lisa Nielsen who blogs at The Innovative Educator found at <http://theinnovativeeducator.blogspot.ca/> are two recognized bloggers who could be mentioned); but there is little research existent examining the blogging practice of such in-service teachers. The shortage could again be connected with the novelty of the medium of blogging rather than connected to the viability of such as a means for scholarly discourse. Luehmann (2008a), in examining the blogging practice of the single reform-minded, urban science teacher selected for her study, showed that a blog could be a place to “reason ‘out loud’, in a way that brings rationale, feelings and practices to the fore for both individual consideration as well as community support (Luehmann, 2008a, p. 176).

In spite of this breakthrough in the research on blogging, Luehmann's (2008a) research focuses on the blogging practices of an urban teacher, leaving another deficit in the literature that omits the experience of rural teachers who blog and why they do so. One could argue that the

very same reasons that an urban teacher would choose to blog (for critical reflection, for understanding about critical issues, for integrating an expert voice, for interacting with a professional community, for making connections with one's autobiography— as well to contribute to one's development of their vision and dispositions) would also be justifiable grounds for a rural teacher to choose blogging as a medium for communicating and forming identity as well (Luehmann, 2008a).

Blogs Used For the Purpose of Research

In reviewing research on blogging in education, one study stood out for its contributions to research. Suzuki (2004) gave support for the usefulness of teacher blogs in education when used as a tool within qualitative research. She found that blogs utilized for research purposes had a three-fold strength: teachers felt at ease with the technology as a research method, thus the blogs facilitated the approach to research; blogs combine the research process and publishing aspect into one, opening “the data collection method up to public scrutiny and comment”; and blogs link teacher educators to other teacher educators in virtual communities across the globe (Suzuki, 2004, n.p.). The limitation of using blogs as a research tool is their “subjective stance”, but Suzuki maintains that blogs “might provide a more honest perspective on the messy truth than do numerical research findings (Suzuki, 2004, n.p.). She adds that the researcher's own “philosophical perspectives on notions of truth” and “belief in the nature of knowledge” are what determine whether a stance will be objective or subjective in approach (Suzuki, 2004, n.p.).

Coming to the defence of subjectivity in story-telling as a methodological strategy within qualitative fields of research, such as is utilized within auto-ethnography writing, Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) asserts that texts which function as agents “of self-discovery or self-creation,

for the author as well as for those who read and engage the text” should be included under the broad umbrella of social inquiry (p. 746). Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) contends:

Why should caring and empathy be secondary to controlling and knowing? Why must academics be conditioned to believe that a text is important only to the extent it moves beyond the merely personal? We need to question our assumptions, the metarules that govern the institutional workings of social science—arguments over feelings, theories over stories, abstractions over concrete events, sophisticated jargon over accessible prose. Why should we be ashamed if our work has therapeutic or personal value? Besides, haven’t our personal stories always been embedded in our research monographs? The question is whether we should express our vulnerability and subjectivity openly in the text or hide them behind “social analysis” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746).

Both Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and Suzuki (2004) support tools like blogs—when used for the purpose of research, as being useful, effective, inclusionary, accessible and valid research tools, serving to enhance the inquiry while “opening up the research process to public scrutiny” (Suzuki, 2004, n.p.).

In reflecting on my initial choice to blog and then conduct research on my blogging, I believe that I wanted to do so for a multiplicity of reasons, many of which have been highlighted already in my literature review of research about blogging. I blog for critical reflection about my role as an educator, for understanding about critical issues within the field of education, so as to develop an expert teacher voice about issues of care and love, as well as blog to interact with a community of readers who wish to read my ideas about cherished ideals within the profession—and I also blog for the opportunity to connect with my own life-story, as well as to develop my

vision and beliefs as an educator. I am researching my blogging for all of the very same reasons, and in particular because I believe it allows me the opportunity to tell my story openly and authentically. Along with the latter purposes, I am also researching my blogging practice so as ‘to know’, for in writing I have come to better understand myself, as well as better understand my beliefs and ideas about care and teaching. I chose the focus of care to be the center of my research into blogging because the longer I am an educator, the more I am convinced that this is the primary purpose of teachers. I teach so as to extend care to my students, so that they in turn can care about the world around them. In turn, I blog so as to convey this importance to my virtual community of fellow educators. I am researching this practice of blogging because, along with Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), I believe that “personal narrative matters”, as do small voices—voices which demand to be heard and represented in the larger scheme of social science (p. 743).

Chapter 11: Literature Review— Ethic of Care

The second body of research I delve into concerns ethics of care (Miller, 2010; Noddings, 2005), and this exploration was accompanied by inquiry serving to expand my understanding about pedagogies of love (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2000; Leggo, 2011). This chapter will review the literature that has influenced my thinking about care ethics, with an initial section covering what an ethic of care entails, followed by four sections highlighting influential thinkers in the field who have contributed much to developing care ethics and pedagogies of love: Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Carl Leggo and Nel Noddings.

An Overview: Ethic of Care

An ethic of care involves a high level of interest, commitment, care and empathy for students. Noddings (2005) asserts that the desire to be cared for is a universal human characteristic, in that generally everyone wants to be received and responded to. Both Noddings (2005) and Miller (2010) cite research by Comer (1988) who revealed that “the single greatest complaint of students is that teachers do not care” (Miller, 2010, p. 98). Miller (2010) contends that “in as much as is possible, we (as teachers) should be present in the classroom. When students come to us and ask a question, they sense whether we are ‘there’, present in the moment and intent on taking in our surroundings. Miller (2010) asserts strongly that students want our full, authentic presence, and in attending to this concept of ‘being present’, the teacher can then connect with the students (Miller, 2010, p. 97). He emphasizes that one way to demonstrate presence is through exhibiting care. “In caring, the needs of others become prominent in our consciousness” (Miller, 2010, p. 98).

Complementing this compassionate concern is a deeply needed focus on the ethic of care as a compelling standard way for living, for learning and for growth within the school system. Ginott (1972) says it is up to the teacher to make the final decision about how care is implemented and utilized within the classroom. He states:

“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized” (p. 15-16)

In talking about the soul, that creative spark or inner life of a child, and how their spirit might be nourished through ethics of care and love, Miller asserts that “...perhaps the most powerful force is the loving presence of the teacher” (Miller, 2010, p.8-9). He notes that both Gandhi and Martin Luther King understood that love was at the centre of the universe, and likewise it should be at the heart of teaching. Therefore, teachers who are viewed as present are then seen as being *there* for their students, causing the students to feel that attentiveness and care (Miller, 2010). Hatt (2005), writing about pedagogical love in the transactional curriculum, relayed a story of his former classmate’s questioning of love in the classroom. The classmate asked the professor whether the teacher must be a parent to every child in their classroom. The professor’s answer: “In much as you are humanly capable” (Hatt, 2005, p. 671).

Miller (2010), when referring to this care ethic, contends it should be central to our way of life in schools, replacing the current ethos of individual competition and achievement that our

emphasis on standardized testing has created in the education system. He is echoed in sentiment by curriculum theorist Schubert (2009) who states: “In love, I am convinced, resides our last hope for survival. In love lies possibility for overcoming the deepest abyss of our competitive ethos” (p.17). Schubert (2011) calls for teachers to cultivate love, justice and the educational experience that follows rather than adhering to a quest for acquisitiveness— a quest that runs counter to the very questions of worth that Schubert deems as essential in guiding us.

One way love is evidenced in classrooms is through passion. Schubert (2009) has spent much of his career posing questions with regard to the passion teachers can have about the curriculum of studies they are pursuing with students, questions that address what is worth knowing, needing, experiencing, doing, being, becoming, sharing, contributing and wondering (Schubert, 2009, p. 23). Schubert asserts that when he writes about working with students of any age, “I advocate taking the curriculum question of worth into their lives and encouraging them proactively to be engaged as their own best pedagogue in the continual process of composing their lives in the world” (Schubert, 2009, p.25). Schubert (2009) extends his thoughts on worth in education to include what he believes to be worthwhile in terms of spending our precious time on earth as we live life, from second to second, from minute to minute, day to day, year to year. We only have this one opportunity at life: what is worthwhile doing and being while we are at this job of living our lives? Or as teachers, what is worth doing? We only ever have the day we are in right at that moment with our students: we are only ever guaranteed that one day in which we are living. It is really about spending that time cultivating an ethic of care.

In support of these compelling sentiments, Owens and Ennis (2005) submit that the need exists to better prepare future teachers and assist current teachers in understanding the ethic of

care, for they contend that “too often, that ability to care is assumed rather than nurtured or taught” (Owens and Ennis, 2005, p. 392). While they agree that care must be an innate part of the educational process, Owens and Ennis (2005) add that current teacher education programs and professional development programs often fail to engage the ethic of care and the influence it plays on student learning and development. More thought into how to integrate teacher preparation within a mindset to care ethics would seemingly go hand-in-hand with these suggestions.

The Influence of Paulo Freire

The writing of Paulo Freire, with his interest in dialogue (naming the world), along with the emphasis he placed on love (that being his commitment to emancipate the oppressed), adds much to the conversation about the importance of cultivating an ethic of care. Freire (1970) asserted that the “human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world” (Freire, 2012, p. 88). Freire’s true word is defined as being derived from praxis— that is, a process of “action-reflection” that comes about by bringing the action and reflection aspects of true, authentic practitioners together in a transformative way (Freire, 1970). By this, I take Freire to mean that authenticity is established when the two elements of action and reflection come together within our teaching profession, through a marriage between lived experience and contemplation. Taking Freire’s (1970) challenge to “name the world” through dialogue, I was able to use my writing on the blog as a form of praxis, combining my reflective introspections written as blog entries with my day-to-day work inside the classroom. Over the years, I have been able to engage the ethic of care within the work I do as a teacher as well as within my blogging; I have

come to see that my calling is more about transforming and inspiring than merely preparing students academically for the proceeding grade level.

Freire's (1970) theory about revolutionizing education has come to be associated with critical pedagogy— that is, teaching intent on equity and justice. In my particular case, the system most oppressive and disenfranchising for me personally *was* the school system of my early elementary and middle school years. This is not to say that the current school system is without flaw, but it is to note that it was the experiences of my early years that led me to want to disrupt the current patterns and systems in schools that hinder caring relations. My online blogging has partly been undertaken as a means of examining my experiences within the school system, both as a former student as well as in relation to my current role as teacher-learner. Rather than using this opportunity for praxis so as to expose and undermine the people and places that contributed to the pain and hurt of my past, I have sought to combat my personal pain with Freire's (1970) theory of "profound love"— using my work as a teacher and writing as a blogger to offer caring compassion to the current classrooms and educational world of which I am now member and contributor. We can choose to act in anger or we can choose to respond with love. Freire (1970) contends that "dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people;" so then, my life work and calling have been based on this premise as well (p. 89). A premise that, as Freire (1970) has so beautifully put it, maintains the following— a firm belief that "love is commitment to others" (Freire, 1970, p. 89). I want to be above all else a caring teacher committed to her students' well-being, body, soul and mind. This is what matters most to me.

The Influence of bell hooks

bell hooks, writing about re-visioning love within culture and academics, has further strengthened my commitment to prioritize the pedagogy of love within the classroom. hooks (1994) writing on love asserts that well-learned distinctions between public and private would have us believe that love has no place in the classroom, but she says love can flourish in spite of this conviction (hooks, 1994, p. 198). hooks (2000) writes openly about living by a love ethic, assuming that “the underlying values of a culture and its ethics shape and inform the way we speak and act” (hooks, 2000, p. 87). hooks (2000) affirms that a commitment to a love ethic incorporates all aspects and dimensions of love, including “care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge” (hooks, 2000, p. 94).

As teachers, these principles should be significant. According to hooks (2000), “a love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well” which I would take further and expand to include that everyone (including the students in our educational system) must have the right to freely care for others, along with, being attentively cared for by others (p.87). hooks (2000) states that a “commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by;” commitment to an ethic of care would also do the same (p. 88). Within the school system, while testing and academic achievement are important components of a school culture (as careers and money are important agendas within the work world), they must “never take precedence over valuing and nurturing human life and well-being” (hooks, 2000, p. 88). People and their values regarding honesty, openness and integrity must remain the priority.

According to hooks (2000), living ethically ensures that relationships are nurturing experiences, ones that enable growth and opportunity. hooks (2000) asserts that our souls experience a drought when we act in ways that are unethical, when we act in ways which diminish our spirits and dehumanize those around us. But hooks (2000) astutely recognizes: there is a gap between the values we claim to hold and our “willingness to do the work of connecting thought and action, theory and practice” (p.90). We can see this dilemma posed to teachers every day, teachers with idealistic views to the ways in which care should be enabled to flourish inside classrooms, who are trapped inside the reality of what they see actually transpiring due to mandates and top-down expectations. Ideals are often what draw teachers into the profession. Most of us came to be teachers because of the desire to make a positive difference. Somewhere along the line, demands and expectations placed on us by the ‘powers that be’ have stripped from many the belief that this ideal of caring, compassionate nurturing environments might ever become a possibility. When teachers are pushed to test rather than teach, drill rather than inspire, and label rather than accept, there is seemingly no other escape but to conform or get out. This “classroom reality” is where much of the unreported teacher burnout finds its fuel.

hooks (2000) asserts that it is both our inability to take action, along with our innate fear of change that holds us back from radical transformation and realized ideals. She contends that our own “refusal to stand up for what (we) believe in” is what weakens both individual morality and ethics as well as diminishes the collective morality of a culture (hooks, 2000, p. 91). She adds that it is “fear of radical changes (which) leads many citizens...to betray their minds and hearts” (hooks, 2000, p. 91). hooks (2000) combats these latter two challenges with the rally cry to recognize that we are a people capable of embracing the unknown— “we are all capable of

confronting fears of radical change” (hooks, 2000, p. 91). She urges teachers as human beings to embrace a love ethic in the face of opposition— even if that means opposing our own strongly held beliefs, traditions and habits. hooks (2000) contends that without a recognition of fear— even when that fear is concerned with embracing profound love, along with a willingness to change our mindset, we will not be equipped to inspire and encourage others to live out this love ethic to the fullest of its possibility. Her plea to a thoughtful people concerned with a society resistant to radical change is to choose love. “When we choose to love we choose to move against fear— against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect— to find ourselves in the other” (hooks, 2000, p. 93). This is a love formed out of commitment.

The Influence of Carl Leggo

Leggo (2011) writing a confessional about being a fearful teacher, asks questions of himself concerning his connection to the world and the people within it, doing this so as to make sense of his identity and purpose. He states that when he becomes overwhelmed by his fears, he then actively returns to contemplative writing, as well as he returns to the reflective consideration of others’ writing, doing this in order to better understand his own experience with fearfulness. It is perhaps because of my introduction to and continuing pursuit of Leggo’s work that I have at long last been given the wings to fly. I too have found through careful and consistent cultivation of my writing, along with immersing myself in the writing of other transformative thinkers, that I have been enabled to discover who I am.

Leggo (2011) reflects on the possibility as well as the danger of writing in such an open, honest way, ways that leave him vulnerable to criticism. This is a risk worth taking. He avers that he is “constantly challenged by the ways that writing opens up possibilities for hope”, even

while he grows “more aware of the dangers of writing, the ways that writing seductively weaves hopeful possibilities while always remaining wild and uncontrollable” (Leggo, 2011, p. 116).

The written word is only part of the possibility— the other part is the action that must follow through. I am always aware of my words and how they can be used to influence, but I am constantly challenged to make my words match the life I live so as to be consistent. This is a challenge that will follow me to the end of my days.

Leggo (2011) writes that he is primarily concerned with love and hope in education, but he states that he wonders if this is so, largely due to his own innate fear of wanting the elusive (p. 117). By this I take him to mean that love is not easy to come by; it requires intention and forethought. In the same vein, we are at a time in history when the world can sometimes seem doomed to certain demise; it requires great stamina and resolve to see anything in a hopeful light. Within education, I have tried to make care and love a focus of my calling as well as a priority in my writing, as I see that these are often not given precedence. Intellect within academics is allotted far more space over heart-felt care within the educational curriculum. Like Leggo, this concern I have with matters of the heart can sometimes be reduced to a secondary priority when faced with pressing academic mandates from our school board. It requires intention to stay the course and remain true to my heart.

Leggo (2011) reminds that there is always something deeper driving us to search for more, even if that something deeper is a fear of being that which is the antithesis of what we believe. We need to resist feeling shame when exploring our faults, as it is the growth we experience through such exploration that enables us to achieve our potential. Leggo (2011) asserts that the antidote to fear is love. He suggests that education must begin with a curriculum of love (Leggo, 2011, p. 135), and he offers that this love must be characterized by commitment

and practice, through daily devotion. The kind of love which Leggo encourages is transformative. He emphasizes that love calls out the gifts of others, even as it seeks to empower (p. 139). Leggo (2011) contends that “classrooms need to be places for celebration, for laughter” and not characterized as places of competition and contest, as are often the norm in this era of standardized testing (p. 138). For this to occur, what Leggo (2011) ascribes to are practical acts of living love that offer to others a service. But it is not merely in the service of love that this curriculum will be developed, for one must also practice self-love for this kind of education to have an impact. Leggo shows that it is in loving ourselves and learning to acknowledge and embrace our fears and struggles that we can then choose to live lovingly.

Leggo (2011) cites Christian philosopher Jean Vanier’s (1998) commitment to love as practice in *Becoming Human*, where Vanier (1998) proposes seven aspects of love for educators that will transform the heart. This kind of love spoken of is an antidote for fear (those fears expressed by both teachers and students), fears that are often found inside classrooms. Leggo (2011) echoes Vanier’s (1998) call for love, emphasizing that educators need to address and understand these aspects of love so that they might in turn transform their classrooms from the inside out. He thus supports a curriculum founded on love, acknowledging that a code of belief must play a role as the guiding hand of direction. Vanier’s (1998) tenets are revelation, understanding, communication, celebration, empowerment, communion and forgiveness. Vanier (2015) reaffirms this belief in curriculum founded on love in a communiqué posted to his website that states simply, “we are all children who need to be loved, to be a source of joy, to live relationships full of joy, through communion and mutual presence” (Vanier, 2015). Leggo (2004) maintains, weaving together ideas along this same line of thought, that what we need in schools is a commitment to investigate seriously and sincerely what it means to be a human

being, along with a better understanding of how we are all in the process of becoming human, how we are learning to acknowledge one another as humans and how we are coming to understand better our ecological interconnectedness (Leggo, 2004, p. 30). Leggo's (2004) call is for educators to promote and practice a curriculum of 'becoming' everything that it means to be wholly human—a curriculum founded on learning through practice, reflection, conversation, collaboration, courage and strong commitment to the goal of becoming more of who we were meant to be as humans (Leggo, 2004, p. 30).

The Influence of Nel Noddings

A leader in the field of care ethics within education, Nel Noddings (2005) has done extensive work in exploring the theory supporting the ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; 1996; 2002). Her belief about care (the development of character, promotion of critical thinking and investment in caring relations), along with her advancement of the learning of such ideals as being the foundation of a genuine education, are cushioned within an understanding of the preeminent importance of a relational, responsiveness in educators exhibited towards the people and systems they work within. Noddings' (2005) philosophy of education that the "living other is more important than any theory" places all theory, even that based within an ethic of care, in subordination to the caring relationship (p. xviii). The goal of educators then becomes the encouragement of growth towards competency in caring and love.

Nodding's (2005) view to caring then insists that the person, that is, the individual, must be honoured over the ideas formulated about what best constitutes caring, so that each person be then given individual attention as it concerns the needs he or she exhibits within the caring relation. What this prevents then is an imposition of one's own view to what is best, as it

concerns the relationship the caregiver has with the cared-for. Rather than imposing one's individual will, caring relations insist that the caregiver involved in a caring encounter be respectful, sensitive and considerate towards the cared-for, always seeking to listen and respond according to the cared-for's area of greatest need. Noddings (2005) affirms that it is "responsiveness (that) is at the heart of caring and also at the heart of teaching themes of care" (p. xxv). Noddings (2005) put forth the following ideas about her theory to care:

When we care for others, we attend and respond as nearly as we can to expressed needs. When we have to refuse a request— because we lack the necessary resources, find the request unwise, or even evaluate it as morally wrong— we still try to support a caring relation. It can be very difficult, but our purpose is to connect with the other, to make both our lives ethically better— not to overcome, defeat, ostracize, or eliminate him (Noddings, 2005, p. xxv)

In her groundbreaking book on caring in schools, Noddings (2005) also attributes German philosopher Martin Heidegger' (1962) book titled *Being and Time* with having set into motion her own ideas about care. Noddings (2005) says that Heidegger (1962) describes care as "the very Being of human life" (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). With this criterion established, it is easy to see why Noddings claims that care be foundational to the schooling experience as well. The innate need to be cared for, according to Noddings, "is almost certainly a universal human characteristic" (Noddings, 2005, p. 17). It would go without saying that if this is true, students also desire care within their school experience as well.

Noddings (2005) maintains that we can learn to teach more humanely, more lovingly through learning how to care. Noddings (2005) addressing the ethic of care within the school

system has stated that if schooling has one “goal that guides the establishment and priority of all others, it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people” (Noddings, 2005, p. 10). Noddings (2005) asserts that while intellectual development is necessary within the school system, “it cannot be the first priority of schools” (Noddings, 2005, p. 10). Noddings (2005) adds to this sentiment that classrooms should be places where “wonder and curiosity are alive”, places where teachers and students learn together (Noddings, 2005, p. 12). She states:

I, too, believe that a dedication to full human growth— and we will have to define this— will not stunt or impede intellectual achievement, but even if it might, I would take the risk if I could produce people who would live non-violently with each other, sensitively and in harmony with the natural environment, reflectively and serenely with themselves (Noddings, 2005, p. 12).

While culture might wax poetic about children being the future and the world’s most precious resource, Noddings (2005) suggests that educators (among others) too often value children solely for their academic achievement. She boldly states that rather than being viewed as resources valued for their academic prowess, we must value children for their intrinsic worth, must value them on the basis of their humanity. Noddings (2005) claims that the school must then take “public responsibility for raising healthy, competent, and happy children” which is a goal that she asserts should supersede all others— including the goal to forge ahead unleashed with academic pursuits in mind (p. 14).

Noddings (2005) ascribes to an understanding of care that moves it beyond being merely a virtue one can possess if s/he is so blessed to have been born with it, and rather places care into

another category altogether— a category that is more accessible to the average person. Care, according to Noddings (2005), is a relation, connection or encounter between two or more persons, with one person acting in the role of caregiver and the other (s) acting as the receivers of that care (p. 15). For this type of connection to be characterized as a caring one, the caregiver must be received by the cared-for; if this does not occur, the encounter cannot truly be called a caring relation.

Noddings (2005) premise to the theory she has developed around the ethic of care is that “learning to care,” a process that “requires significant knowledge,” is what defines a genuine education— that is, an education based both on academic learning as well as on the development of democratic character, themes of care including empathy and compassion, along with critical thinking skills (p.xiii). Noddings’ progressive view of education, centered on the view to a practice of care ethics, stands in sharp contrast to certain traditional models of educating students focused on rigor within the academic disciplines. As students are unique individuals, Noddings (2005) contends that there is an innate desire within each child/young person to be seen by someone significant in their life, seen for their distinctiveness. She emphasizes that children “don’t want to be treated ‘like numbers’, by recipe— no matter how sweet the recipe may be for some consumers” (Noddings, 2005, p. 17). Thus, one might surmise from this statement that students would desire care and a degree of understanding, compassion and even love from their teachers within the school system. Certainly this is what Noddings projects within her research findings.

Noddings places great emphasis on caring as a relationship between the one-caring and the one cared-for, steering clear of definitions of caring that confine it to being a virtue. During caring encounters, Noddings (2005) describes the state of consciousness of the one-caring as

characterized by attentive receptivity and a desire to respond in a way that furthers the cared-for's purpose or requirement at hand. The cared-for's consciousness is then characterized by reception, recognition and response. "The cared-for receives the caring and shows that it has been received" (Noddings, 2005, p. 16). Thus, the recognition that the one-caring gets in return from the one being cared-for is what completes the caring encounter, providing a completion of the encounter. In terms of student-teacher caring relations, Noddings (2005) says there is a need for caring relations between the two parties, with teachers leading by example, as well as a necessity for the teacher to help students learn to be carers as well. In this way, students learn to care in many different capacities: relationally, personally, intellectually, interpersonally, interactively, ecologically and the list goes on. There are no limits on the ways in which students can learn to care. Finding ways to evoke in students a desire to care is Noddings (2005) challenge for schools today, particularly in light of current schooling structures that emphasize data collection and statistics.

In reading Noddings (2005), I have come to appreciate her belief that there is a social responsibility for raising children. Within this belief, she promotes the concept that "the school must play a major role in this task...providing caring and continuity for students" (Noddings, 2005, p. 14). Noddings (2012) establishes three criteria for caring that she suggests are essential to establishing an ethic of care. These include the quality of attentiveness, the ability to be motivationally displaced and the act of responsiveness, which she has highlighted as key to creating an environment of care. With regards to attentiveness, she contends that carers should be intent and receptive listeners, ready to "hear and understand the needs expressed" (Noddings, 2012, p. 772). In terms of motivational displacement, Noddings (2012) asserts that the carer must put aside his or her own needs so as to attend to the needs and concerns of another. This

will involve thinking (cognitive domain) as well as feeling (affective domain) for the other by way of empathy, sympathy and even compassion for the expressed needs of the other. Finally, in speaking of responsiveness, the carer's action upon listening and reflecting is to respond in some way so as to show the cared-for that he or she places importance on maintaining the caring relation between the two individuals. Often, the response is an empathic one, a response which seeks to "read and respond appropriately to the feelings of others" so as to better understand what the other is feeling (Noddings, 2012, p. 777).

In terms of how the ethic of care is interpreted within schools, Noddings (2005) emphasizes that the teacher's job is two-fold in terms of utilizing an ethic of care within the school setting. Not only do teachers want to enter into caring relations with their students, relations in which the students believe that they are cared for by the teacher as caregiver, but teachers also have the task before them of teaching students how to become caregivers themselves, caring for the people and objects around them as well as for the world in general in which they live, along with caring for the ideas in the world that will aid those same students in forming a philosophy about what it means to be truly human. Noddings (2005) avers that the teacher's mandate is to nurture and cultivate caring relations with individuals within the school setting, facilitating the growth and development of people who will then use those caring attributes they have been shown to make the world a better place. Again, how teachers will come to interpret the ethic of care will differ, depending on the styles, personalities, philosophies and belief systems of the individual teacher.

Another idea Noddings (2005) puts forth in describing caring teachers is that they listen and respond differentially to their students' needs, meaning that teachers who care do their best to individualize programming to fit the needs of the students, do their best to differentiate

classroom settings, curriculum, expectations, assessments and evaluations, as well as do their utmost to ascertain the student's personality and character so as to get to know the person behind the name. Teachers who care exhibit that care in a multitude of ways throughout the school year, both during the school day and outside it as warranted.

Noddings (2010) also addresses moral values supporting the choice to care, examining in particular the work of empathy in care ethics. Noddings (2012) asserts that when empathy is used to place emphasis on the other and on receptivity to understanding, it can be then used to evoke a sympathetic response, one in which the carer “feels with’ the other even if the respondent knows that, in the same situation, he or she might not feel as the other does” (Noddings, 2010, p. 146). Noddings (2012) warns of the projective understanding of empathy, one that invites a “projection of our own attitudes or feelings into objects or animals” as she maintains that this can sometimes backfire. Noddings (2012) gives the example of a child who might say that what they have done to another could not possibly have been painful, based on their own pain tolerance and levels of coping and in this way, negate an empathic response. The empathic response would not be procured, defeating the purpose of eliciting an empathic response in the first place. Thus, when thinking of empathy, Noddings (2010) says “the use of empathy in moral education involves more than simple inductions in childhood” and rather requires “a growing understanding of how we are moved” and why we experience ebbs and flows in our empathic understandings and outputs to one another (p. 150).

Hedge and Mackenzie (2012) call for more focus aimed at the emotions directed toward caring, outlining these emotions by way of offering three illustrations of student types. They then use these examples to put forward what good care means in any given scenario. Hedge and Mackenzie (2012) assert that there is “a moral component to all emotions” stating that it is

important to take specific note of the “emotions implicated in morally appropriate care” (Hedge and Mackenzie, 2012, p. 196). In defining morality, Hedge and Mackenzie (2012) borrow Herman’s (2007) usage of the term, stating that it means the “avoidance of harm to others and the provision of help to those in need” (p. 196). Hedge and Mackenzie (2012) contend that all emotions involved in care should have a moral component because the care offered will then be more enduring, founded and cultivated within the carer as part of an ingrained disposition and deeply entrenched by way of a commitment to life engaged in care. When caring is founded within character as a quality that has been nurtured through experience, Hedge and Mackenzie (2012) would seem to say that it tends to be more consistent and abiding. They add that “to live a caring life will depend upon the cultivation of emotional sensibilities” like compassion, a character trait that can “be cultivated over time as a significant part of developing moral character” (Hedge and Mackenzie, 2012, p. 200).

Goldstein (1998) conducted research directly related to classroom teaching, providing specific examples of care-centered educational practices drawn from a study she conducted in 1997 in a primary-grade classroom. Using Noddings (1994) theoretical basis for caring as a foundation, Goldstein challenged definitions of caring that focused on feelings or attributes, stating that we need to “think about caring in new ways, ways that focus on its (caring’s) well-developed theoretical foundations” (Goldstein, 1998, p. 2). Goldstein (1998) states that though caring has long been part of the teaching profession, it has been given little credence as a legitimate scholarly perspective. “Caring and love were very nice, but they were not as impressive as scientific knowledge,” thus humanistic aspects of education were subordinate to scientific approaches to schooling (Goldstein, 1998, p. 17). Goldstein (1998) contends that this emphasis on scientific approaches has served in the past to eclipse the role of caring. She

contends that educators must take strides toward developing and communicating an understanding of caring that places emphasis on its active attributes which are deeply ethical, philosophical and experientially rooted (Goldstein, 1998, p.2). The findings of her study indicate that teachers who develop an ethic of care in their relations towards their students are able to then “respond to each child as an individual, which means really knowing them, which means investing in them emotionally” (Goldstein, 1998, p. 11). Goldstein’s (1998) portrayal of caring as interpreted through a feminist understanding offers an “alternative to the commonly held sense of caring as little more than those gentle smiles and warm hugs” (p. 18). Caring in this sense is an action rather than an attribute (Goldstein, 1998).

Tarlow (1996) puts forward that it was not until the second wave of the women’s movement (the 1960s and 70s) that caring became a focus of interest in social research. She reinforces the fact that caring has primarily been cushioned inside family life and thus been the women’s area of responsibility; as a result, this area of research has attracted few scholars and academic interests until the latter part of the 20th century. Noticing a gap in the literature and a deficit of research on caring as it is carried out in the public sphere, Tarlow (1996) set out to examine caring relations, studying “caring in its vigorous form” as a “productive approach to generating knowledge about a phenomenon” (p. 56). After conducting 84 interviews within private and public milieus, Tarlow (1996) concluded that for caring to occur:

“There must be people present, time to do the task of caring, and a vehicle for facilitating the process: talking. Next, the caring person has to be sensitive to the needs of the other, act in the best interest of the other, be emotionally invested, and, most important, do helpful things for the other. The person cared for must then respond in such a way as to perpetuate the process, which involves reciprocity” (p. 57).

With regards to care, there is certainly credence to the fact that all human beings require care of some sort or another. How that care is interpreted, required, received, elicited, and understood differs with each person and each situation that person finds themselves in. And lest I be remiss in omitting the fact that people are not the only ones requiring care, it should be noted that both living and non-living things require care. If this were not so, why do we take such pride in caring for our possessions and belongings? When we decide that care is fundamental to the human and non-human experience, it also goes to show that care must be an important criterion in a person's life with regards to activities they undertake. School is no anomaly to this principle. Students in school want to be cared for. While they do not all require the same type of care, they do require care that fits their needs and situation as an individual. With this in mind, we turn to the methodology used in this study, appreciating that auto-ethnography was chosen as a good fit for a study exploring the benefits of teacher-blogging when used for the purpose of nurturing an ethic of care within the classroom.

Chapter 12: Methodology

This study follows a method of inquiry derived from the qualitative tradition. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) outline seven moments of qualitative research history to explain the history behind qualitative research. A brief synopsis of this historical context will help to situate my own work within the field of auto-ethnography, and even more specifically, show how I have employed creative analytic practices within auto-ethnography (Richardson, 2000). This examination will be followed by a look at auto-ethnography as a research strategy, with a more focused look at the writing process used as a method of inquiry. I will then give space to the literature available on life-writing as a way for researchers to write about the process of living, giving example to a few researchers who are actively pursuing this genre. By way of a conclusion, I first will offer a challenge to auto-ethnography followed by a defence. My final section will include a few specific examples of auto-ethnographies already recognized within the field.

Historical Context

The first historical moment, described as being a traditional period beginning in the early 1900s and continuing until the Second World War, is characterized by a concern with objective interpretations in terms of field experiences and writing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In particular, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) report that ethnographers of this era were taken up with studying and writing about people using the “glorified language of science”, believing that these same peoples they were studying were strange and exotic, objects to be examined (p. 13). This first moment was quickly followed by a second known as the modernist phase, wherein “social realism, naturalism, and slice-of-life ethnographies (we)re still valued, continuing from the post-war

years until the 1970s” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 14). From about 1970 until the late 1980s, the blurred genres stage was in play, a time when qualitative researchers had many paradigms, methods and strategies at their disposal, as well as a time when researchers were interested in the politics and ethics of qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 15). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) make note that during this phase, naturalistic, post positivist and constructionist paradigms gained power and notoriety.

In the mid-1980s, a crisis of representation led to the fourth moment of qualitative research history (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 16). During this time of history, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) report that research and writing became more reflexive, calling into question issues of gender, class and race. Tedlock (2003) describes this era as a time of “democratization of knowledge” bringing a much-needed critical awareness to research (p. 183). The result of this crisis has been that “class, race, culture, and gender beliefs and behaviours of the inquirer be placed within the same historical moment, or critical plane, as those of the subjects of inquiry” (Tedlock, 2003, p. 183). To further this moment, new models of truth, method and representation were sought (Rosaldo, 1989, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 16), making it an era when critical, feminist and epistemologies of color were highlighted as important issues of interest. The crisis of this moment was that of a clash between empirical science and social criticism, resulting in the need to understand the role of writing and fieldwork in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 16). Field-workers at this time in history were realizing the tension between the two (writing and fieldwork) when such were founded in empirical science opposed to those born of social criticism. Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) refers to his own experience during this era as a traditional empiricist turned narrative researcher, saying that his “confidence in orthodox, social science methodology was shaken” and later transformed by

the critiques of future moments in qualitative research, including those founded in post-structuralism, postmodernism and feminist writing (p.743). In the process of all these changes, social scientists, ethnographers and other fieldworkers were discovering that writing was one method of inquiry to move qualitative research in new and critical directions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 17).

A triple crisis occurred following this fourth phase as qualitative researchers faced questions of representation, legitimation and praxis. The crisis involving these three problematic issues led ethnographers to seek answers for how they would capture lived experience through social texts, how they would evaluate and interpret qualitative research (in light of prevailing traditions which gave credence to validity, generalizability and reliability) along with concerns over how these same ethnographers would effect change in the world by way of mere text (as experience would now be created within the social text) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). The fifth moment to follow was then defined as the postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing, a period in time when researchers struggled to make sense of these challenges assaulting the ethnographer's authority in writing and fieldwork (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this phase as one that opened new ways of exploring ethnography with a focus on activist-oriented research and a move away from the researcher as an aloof observer (p. 17). Narrative inquiry, as a new method of research among other creative, analytical genres, was born of this crisis (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

The sixth moment is a post-experimental phase spanning the short time frame from 1995-2000 (Averett & Soper, 2011, p. 360), while the seventh is a future moment beginning in 2000 to the present and carrying on from there (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). While post-experimental researchers and writers "seek to connect their writings to the needs of a free and

democratic society,” a multitude of new writers are seeking to explore moral and sacred qualitative social science (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). Richardson (2000) indicates that styles in writing “reflect the historically shifting domination of particular schools or paradigms” thus making writing a socio-historical construction (p. 925). Historically, writing has been divided into literary and scientific, with the former of the two taking a backseat in importance to the latter (Richardson, 2000). Richardson (2000) points out that in the 20th century, the relationship between social scientific writing and literary writing has grown in complexity, particularly with the blurring of lines between what is fact and fiction, true and imaginary, between what is deemed science and art (p. 926). In the context of Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) seventh moment, qualitative researchers find themselves using writing as a means of interpreting experience rather than merely a tool for reporting the data (Richardson, 2000). These writers also seek to “navigate and resist the oppositional forces” that stand in the way of emancipation carried forward through social reform in research (Averett & Soper, 2011, p. 360).

Wright (2006) acknowledges the difficulty qualitative researchers are having in pinpointing precisely the moment presently upon us. He asserts that “the current period is simultaneously one of overt politicization, epistemological and paradigmatic proliferation, post-posts (post-postmoderism, post-post structuralism, post-experimentation) and a new post (post-colonialism), as well as a new or renewed paradigm war” (Wright, 2006, 793). Wright (2006) attests to the emergence of a new moment where methodologies are being contested, a moment that Wright insists will demand of the researcher a “complicity with or resistance to the government-sanctioned resurgence of the hegemony of positivism (Wright, 2006, p. 793).

It is at this juncture, where the sixth and seventh moments intersect, and perhaps where new moments are emerging by way of this overlap, that I situate my own research work and

writing. I would thus find my leanings to be somewhere between Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) developing sixth phase labelled post-experimental (where the boundaries of qualitative inquiry have been expanded to include those areas of research which include autobiographical ethnography) and within that of their seventh phase where new writers are exploring new avenues of research possibilities, studies that might prove to be evocative, moral, critical, and rooted in local understandings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Auto-ethnography as a Research Strategy

The particular research strategy then, that I have employed so as to accomplish the goals of this auto-ethnographic inquiry, is that of an interpretative, expansive design. A term adopted and explored by Carolyn Ellis in the late 1990s, auto-ethnography is further described as an approach to research that produces evocative stories examining the human experience of the inquirer (Ellis, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ellis (1999) suggests this tradition of inquiry done *heartfully* opens the researcher up to introspectively revealing him or herself as emotionally vulnerable while encouraging compassion and empathy in the research process. An approach specific to qualitative study, it compels the researcher to reflexively examine his or her own experience as known and understood within a particular cultural subset, understanding that the experience then connects with and offers insights into the wider culture being experienced (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Auto-ethnographic methods of research evolve from individual experiences such as might be recorded in a personal narrative using the researcher's own story as a launch pad to connect the personal to the cultural (Trahar, 2009; Ellis, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As both a method and a methodology, auto-ethnographical, narrative approaches to research place a strong emphasis on the researcher's personal experience which is then connected to wider cultural interpretations (Ellis, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Hamilton,

Smith and Worthington (2008) echo this sentiment stating that auto-ethnography situates the thinking of the self within a particular cultural milieu.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) assert researchers can study the representations of experience, but not the experience itself. Many auto-ethnographers start their research with themselves, gazing reflexively at first, looking through an ethnographic wide-angle lens focused outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, and then peering inward so as to expose vulnerability in relation to cultural interpretations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The researcher then becomes the focus of their own study, finding meaning and purpose for such research within the culture at large (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Auto-ethnography is thus an approach to research or a theory of research that focuses on the researcher's personal experience with a particular phenomenon, situating the research process within a wider cultural context. The focus on authenticity through vulnerability is crucial. One must be prepared to honestly reveal those interpretations and understandings of self in such a way that might expose and uncover (Trahar, 2009).

Since the late 1980s, fieldworkers have recognized this limitation within auto-ethnography: that lived experience cannot be directly captured, as experience is created in the social text written by the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In line with this understanding, Averett & Soper (2011), in setting the stage for their feminist auto-ethnographic study about one undergraduate student's (Soper) experience with fear as she sought to complete a course assignment for her faculty mentor (Averett), emphasize the role of the observed: that is, the participant's personal interpretation of encounters and stories as being integral to the development of this type of inquiry. Positioning their research as experimental in that it resists the oppositional forces to feminist thinking (as can be observed and experienced by way of

dominant patriarchal social controls), their stated goal “to be involved in and advancing the continuation of the seventh moment” makes use of a feminist first person voice in the writing process, includes a creative art element as part of the study and openly aspires to make gains for qualitative researchers and readers toward emancipation (Averett & Soper, 2011, p. 360). Their research provides a model for researchers who are seeking to “do” research in a different way.

Similarly, Clough (2009) follows a different path in his methodology. His auto-ethnographic research about his own crisis of faith and the uncertainties of such within the milieu of contemporary schooling led him to write up his final research findings, in part, as a radio play script. Clough (2009) writes openly about his discomfort with positioning his research methodologically, contending that even with the “increasing emphasis on the metrics of publication output and funding won, we work at the edges of methodological boundaries but continue to rehearse our defences” (Clough, 2009, p. 347). Clough states plainly that “it is not safe— in many places— to ‘bleed a little in the water’ for there are sharks about,” insinuating that his choice of using story-making as research and story-telling as a means of research methodology is not favored by critics of emergent research practices. He adds that there are “things which, ultimately, can only be revealed by art,” which is his legitimation for offering a radio script as part of his method for doing research into the existential issue of faith and its impact on contemporary schooling (Clough, 2009, p. 354). But Clough (2009) is still left to pose the question: is what he has done bonafide research? I would cast my ballot as yes, adding to my voting support that his choice of methodology is both fresh and insightful. It is my ambition then to follow the trail blazed by auto-ethnographers, like Averett and Soper (2011) and Clough (2009), researchers who are choosing innovative ways of doing research so as to continue making new paths and destination points for those researchers to come, of whom I am one.

Writing as a Method of Inquiry

The writing process that Averett and Soper (2011) refer to above is also one of many legitimate methods of inquiry that are emerging. Richardson (2000) writing in a similar vein, puts it this way: writing as a method is “a way of finding out about yourself and your topic” (p. 923). Rather than being a vehicle to transport the goods, writing can itself be ‘the goods’, the process, as well as the final product (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). Richardson (2000), in expanding the definition of writing as more than just a means of ‘telling’ about experience, claims that “writing is also a way of “knowing”— a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 923). Moreover, writing can also be a tool for connecting, relating, understanding, explaining, describing, creating, analyzing, and critiquing, among many other worthwhile activities. Richardson (2000) contends that if we as qualitative researchers are to make our research relevant, we must find ways in which to write about the physical, social and moral contexts wherein we find ourselves situated so that people are compelled to read about them. She adds that attention must be given to the words, reiterating this point by saying that qualitative work is understood in the entirety of its text, and that it goes without saying that it must be carefully read (not skimmed over) to be understood. In Richardson’s (2000) words, “its meaning is in the reading” signifying that qualitative writing done in evocative ways can pull the reader in and evoke change by virtue of the reading process itself (p. 924). Thus Richardson (2000) argues that writing, no longer a static method of delivery, can be freed to be the dynamic, creative process it was meant to be, a process that allows for deep investigations into how we construct our world.

In re-examining the history of how writing has been conceptualized in qualitative research, we can see that researchers’ understanding of the role of writing has changed

significantly. Current developments in qualitative research suggest a deepening interest in exploring how writing can facilitate understanding. In the past decade and a half, auto-ethnography, one aspect of which is life-writing, has developed as a form of research, one that combines an interest as writing as discovery and writing as representation. Writing has thus become less a form of truth-telling in today's research world and more a conveyer of experience. Researchers are finding themselves writing so as to understand, as opposed to merely relaying unambiguous observations. Richardson (2000) states it simply: "writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project" (p. 923). It is not just a vehicle for transporting the goods. Rather, it can be the life-blood of the research project.

Life-writing as a Method for Research

One way of interpreting auto-ethnography is as a means of telling, by way of the written word, a story about living. In short, it is a life story. Life-writing as a genre has been developed as a way for researchers and ethnographers, among other scholars, to write about the process of living life—from the minutiae of life to the large-scale impacts that social, political and cultural forces can have on people and habitats. According to the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing at Oxford University, England, life writing ranges in scope from the autobiographical to the anthropological, and it is relevant across the disciplines, from the literary to the scientific (<https://oxlifewriting.wordpress.com/about/what-is-life-writing/>). As a method for ethnographers, life-writing is also a method for research. According to the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, researchers can use life story as a primary source for the study of history and culture, such as would be typical for those conducting an auto-ethnographical research study (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhlwr/>). The University of Sussex Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research states that "life stories capture the relation between the individual and society,

the local and the national, the past and present and the public and private experience

(<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhlwr/>).

Many researchers are doing the work of life writing, but calling it by the more formal title of auto-ethnography, autobiography or other sub-genres of the same, having not yet adopted the more specific title of 'life-writing' in terms of their area of research. Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) includes personal writing related to evocative narrative, new journalism, creative nonfiction, literary memoir, autobiography and auto-pathography as examples of life writing genres, with auto-ethnography being yet another broader case in point (p. 744). Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) describes this life-writing genre of inquiry as intimate, self conscious and personal in approach, revealing the researcher's identity in the process.

Richardson (2000) has written at length about the expansion of the ethnographic genre to include what she has termed CAP ethnography: creative analytic practice within the field of ethnography (p. 929). Richardson (2000) says that the ethnographic genre has been expanded to encompass works of poetry, drama, conversations, reader's theatre, and I would submit now it includes on-line blog posts. As has been pointed out in the literature review of this paper, there is little research to date exploring blogging as a creative analytic practice of repute within academic research, let alone within qualitative research listed as ethnographical work. This is not to say it could not fall within Richardson's (2000) CAP ethnography subset as an expanded definition.

Examples of Life-Writing

Meyer (2010) offers an example of life writing by way of her inquiry into living focused on place, language, time, self and other. Throughout her inquiry, she articulates her “ongoing interest in such awareness of everyday living, seeing (her) world with a fresh eye” which led her to inquire qualitatively into being in the world along with belonging to the world (Meyer, 2010, p.86). Meyer (2010) writes that “the horizons of inquiry are our everydayness and our immediate participation in life,” indicating that inquiry into such ordinary experiences in life are worth pursuing as avenues for research; witnessed in her work, it is the ordinary of life that often epitomizes this genre the most succinctly (p. 86). She adds that “shared investigations of the narratives, histories, and realities into which we were born and now live and work” is fertile ground for study (Meyer, 2010, p. 86). With this in mind, Meyer’s (2010) method within the life-writing genre is to keep field notes that reflect on attentive experiences in everyday life, of which written texts, poems and music are all considered as expressions of individual inquiry (p. 87).

In a similar vein, Leggo’s (2004a; 2004 b; 2011) research and writing would follow this type of living inquiry/life-writing genre as he writes to uncover his experiences as an educator, writer, poet, husband, grandfather, son and husband, among other aspects of his being and becoming human (Leggo, 2004; 2011). Leggo (2011) writes that he is constantly asking questions: “Who am I? Who am I in relation to the world? How should I live? What are the responsibilities of a human being in the contemporary world?” (p. 115). In order to understand his experiences, he says he turns to writing, both his writing, and the writing of others. Weaving poetry and prose throughout his narrative inquiry into living, Leggo (2011) demonstrates that auto-ethnographic research can be done in novel ways. Leggo (1997) describes his life-writing

not so much as linear composition (with a beginning, middle and end) but “more like a living compost, a hodge-podge, a mess, a pile of scraps, always seeking to generate the fecund in the discarded” (p. 67). In order to begin to provide definitions for such, Leggo (1997) asks the question of life-writing: is it writing the living or living the writing? Consideration of this question gives insight into what life-writing entails. Whatever the form it takes, Leggo (1997) calls for life-writing to be explored in ways that are both art-full and heart-full (p. 78).

Many avenues of more personally-situated, intimate research, convening underneath the broader umbrella of auto-ethnographical research, have been advanced on a wide range of topics from professional to private areas of interest within the social sciences and beyond (Ellis, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Pertaining to the educational milieu, personal writing on teaching experiences, ideas about leadership and curriculum, along with explorations of teacher attitudes and feelings all have been researched within the auto-ethnographical tradition (Averett & Soper, 2011; Dyson, 2007; Long, 2008; McLaurin, 2003; Stinson, 2009)

Widely interpreted and sometimes viewed as a controversial genre in academic research, this type of auto-ethnography is coming to incorporate a broad range of definitions and descriptions. Some of these study types have been contested as being self-serving, subjective and less-than analytic in scope at times, particularly when found to focus solely on the individual researcher apart from their cultural subset (Delamont, 2009). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) assert that without an easily identifiable cultural component, a study cannot reasonably be termed an auto-ethnography. As the research I have undertaken positions me as a teacher-researcher within larger educational cultural communities (classroom, school, school board, provincial jurisdiction, blogging community) to which I belong and identify, there is then a solid foundation on which I can place the cultural component for my study.

Embodied, personally-situated writing within auto-ethnography, as an emergent approach to research, is becoming more commonly recognized with the renewal in interest in intimate styles of writing (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Additionally, these approaches to research are ideal choices for researchers wishing to exercise reflexivity. McIlveen, Beccaria, du Preez, and Patton (2010) presented the research process of performing an auto-ethnography in their study on consciousness of social class in vocational psychology, emphasizing that auto-ethnography supports the researcher committed to reflexivity because it allows the research to reflect through an insider's perspective. This is echoed in Dyson's (2007) research as he differentiates between the outside and insider perspectives.

Dyson (2007) states that while the ethnographer relates the story of whatever phenomenon in question is being studied through the lens of an outsider, the auto-ethnographer tells the story as an insider, all the while exploring the connections that might be made to the larger cultural context (Dyson, 2007, p. 5). He asserts that auto-ethnographic research and writing, in linking the personal to the cultural, is both a methodology and a way of writing in that it combines the method with the writing of the text. In other words, auto-ethnographers use the research process to then write in such a way that reveals the researcher's story, which is then shared as part of the larger cultural context in which the investigation takes place. In a similar vein, I have utilized the research process to write my own story, sharing that story as part of the larger educational context in which I live, teach and learn.

Dyson (2007) recognises that auto-ethnographic research in both methodology and writing are appropriate choices for his study because each allows him "to present, in a meaningful and mindful way, the cultural phenomena" that he was living and researching (p. 4). He adds to this that his own introspection and reporting of experiences and self-awareness,

deemed to be primary data sources, were legitimate in that, within this genre of research, the personal could shed light on the wider cultural context. Using his research to study a personal encounter that takes place within a certain educational and social setting, Dyson (2007) contends that he chose auto-ethnography because of a desire to reveal the struggle he was having in selecting a form of research that would reflect the authenticity of his project, and because he understood narrative as constructed through different sources of knowledge (p. 3). Dyson states simply that “the writing of transforming auto-ethnography, containing multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural and embracing the power of metaphor, has the potential to move both the author and the readers...” (Dyson, 2007, p. 12).

Challenge to Auto-Ethnography as a Research Approach

While many scholars embrace expansion in methods of inquiry, there are a few scholars who have cautioned researchers about the perils of reflexive, autobiographical life. It appears that differences are between ethnography of a more representational nature and evocative social science developing from the marriage between social scientific writing and literary writing. Delamont (2009), supporting the former, has raised questions about the qualities of true auto-ethnography and the limits of introspection. Auto-ethnography can be deemed by some researchers to be highly controversial and complicated to undertake (Delamont, 2009; Wall, 2006); whereas it is favoured by some for its subjectivity, it is deemed suspect by others, charged with being radically subjective and too personally situated to be considered a true research methodology. Delamont (2009) contends that ethnographic research is difficult to undertake, physically strenuous, intellectually taxing, demanding of high levels of engagement and susceptible to crises at every turn due to the nature of the research (p.61). Auto-ethnography, on the other hand, she deems ‘an intellectual cul-de sac’ characterized by self-obsession— a form of

reflective writing that intrudes too much into one's personal life and has no analytical mileage (p. 51, 58). She proposes that "retreat into auto-ethnography is an abrogation of the honourable trade of the scholar" (Delamont, 2009, p. 61).

Delamont (2009) argues that there is a need for debate as to whether the main focus of social science should be analysis of social settings and actors to whom the researcher has had access, as compared to the mere introspections of the researcher herself as the primary site of data (Delamont, 2009, p. 58). Her argument against auto-ethnography and personal, reflective writing is formed on the opinion that too much introspection into the emotional lives of the researcher strips ethnography of its ability to be analytical about "interesting social science questions" (Delamont, 2009, p. 58).

Wall (2006), writing critically about auto-ethnography, asserts that she has been thinking deeply about this form of inquiry in order to discover whether or not it is indeed true research, struggling to find a balance between her belief that respected research requires excellence, alongside the challenge for constant growth and learning that is so necessary in research practice to keep things cutting edge (Wall, 2006, p. 2). She states that her journey toward understanding auto-ethnography has been one characterized by questioning the dominant scientific paradigm and weighing the benefits of new forms of research that have the power to change the world. This latter research would include such forms of inquiry that allow for the "sharing of unique, subjective, evocative stories of experience that contribute to our understanding of the social world and allow us to reflect on what could be different because of what we have learned" as can be found in auto-ethnography (Wall, 2006, p. 3). Wall's conclusions about the ability of auto-ethnography to stand as reputable research are affirmative in that she acknowledges the role of self in research that explores personal connections to culture, but she cautions that researchers

must proceed carefully with an eye to critically adopting new approaches in order to make decisions that are disciplined (Wall, 2006, p. 11).

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) give answer to critics of auto-ethnographical research by arguing that in its methodology, auto-ethnographical research can be both rigorous and emotional in approach, analytical and personal in scope. They contend that auto-ethnographers take a different point of view in terms of social science research, an approach that leads them to disrupt the binary of art and science (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010, p. 11). Meyer (2010) adds to this her support of auto ethnography, as being indeed rigorous in method, as she contends it involves “inquiries (which) call critical attention to who we are as researchers in the academy, exposing our own biases and positions as researchers” (p.87). She adds that this kind of reflective study into the lives we live brings us closer to understanding our everyday mode of being as humans (p. 87).

Richardson (2000), challenging the belief that auto-ethnography is not true research, states that ethnographers have always been “humanly situated,” with their data having always been “filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings” (Richardson, 2000, p. 937). She calls for auto-ethnographical work to continue to be held to high and difficult standards, constructed through research practices that are concerned with enlarging understanding, and she recommends that criteria be put into place for evaluating auto-ethnographical work, elevating its status in contribution, merit and impact to rise above ‘mere novelty’ (Richardson, 2000, p. 937). Richardson (2000) adds that these practices that ethnographers and auto-ethnographers hold to, while different than those offered in science or quantitative research, are still reputable practices nonetheless (Richardson, 2000, p. 937).

Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), addressing criticism of narrative truth within research, asserts that the importance of telling stories is not so much for the ways in which these stories accurately depict the past, but rather for the ways in which the stories evoke meaning. “The crucial issues are what narratives do, what consequences they have, to what uses they can be put” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746). He adds support for the therapeutic, emotional consequences of story contending that “the question is whether we should express our vulnerability and subjectivity openly in the text or hide them behind ‘social analysis’ ” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 747). While there are differences between representational and evocative social science, Bochner (2000) submits that this difference does not place one at a higher vantage point than the other. This difference should not mean the sacrifice of goals and purposes of one form at the expense of the other, thus privileging facts and rigor over “meanings... and peace of mind” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 747).

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) add a final thought to this debate by stating that “unless we agree on a goal, we cannot agree on the terms by which we can judge how to achieve it (p.11). Since the aims of researchers are different, as well as their means to reach those ends, it becomes very difficult to find agreement; there are as many interpretations, as there are kinds of research within ethnographical and auto-ethnographical fields of research. To this end, auto-ethnographers will continue their important work in spite of the debate with regards to their differences in methodology compared to other ethnographic, auto-ethnographic and varied other kinds of social science research.

Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2010) contend that the very weaknesses that critics point out as flaws are what enable auto-ethnography to be what it is: evocative research grounded in personal experience.

Examples of Auto-ethnography

Some recent examples of auto-ethnographic accounts or storied accounts based on personal narrative include the work of such scholars as Ellis (2003), McLaurin (2003), Averett & Soper (2011), Stinson (2009) and Ernst & Valleck (2014) whose research span topics ranging from the emotional (death in the family, homophobia and fear) to the educational (curricular identities in construction and teaching in an assessment-driven era). All of their varying approaches support the theory behind this methodology of research design. Woven into Ellis' (2003) work are vividly descriptive passages highlighted by numerous detailed direct quotations, enabling the reader to visualize the events and people being described. Along with this, Ellis unpacks events in real-life situations, situations such as forming relationships between neighbours (Ellis, 2009) and chronic illness (Ellis, 1995), all researched in order to bring clarity and to draw connections between the personal and the cultural. For example, Ellis (2003) brings the reader into her world with her evocative narrative about her mother's ritual of grave-tending, a customary rite which was passed on to her as the daughter upon her mother's passing. McLaurin's (2003) personal account of her identification as a homophobe does not shy away from the controversial, choosing rather to brazenly gaze inward so as to expose her own journey toward greater acceptance and understanding. This deeply personal account indicates that auto-ethnographic research can be at times raw and honest, delving deeply into the researcher's cognitive processes and emotions so as to expose and lay bare (McLaurin, 2003).

Not only is auto-ethnography used as an approach to reflectively research, it can be used as a mechanism of personal and professional growth for teachers wishing to be reflective on their teaching practice. For me, it has been a useful approach for the type of research I have undertaken, as the goal of my writing has always been emotional growth and heightened

awareness of my role as a teacher. Long (2008), in writing about the role of narrative auto-ethnographic approaches to research and educational research, highlights the potential that narrative auto-ethnography can have in offering teachers a means of exploring their own spirituality and emotionality, as well as allowing for an expansion of the curriculum toward a greater spiritual dimension. She suggests that narrative auto-ethnography offers teachers a means of facilitating personal growth, an opportunity for generating professional change as well as an occasion to embrace and release emotions that, otherwise cloistered, might inhibit spiritual growth (Long, 2008, p.3).

Stinson (2009) uses a method of self-examination and identity construction in his dissertation to examine the use of reflective teaching as an agent of change. The theoretical framework for Stinson's research is identity theory as it relates to identity construction. Stinson (2009) uses his dissertation as a vehicle to tell the story of his journey in becoming a mathematics teacher, sharing experiences of an introspective nature while examining the change and professional growth that occurred. Stinson (2009) contends that in using an auto-ethnographic approach to research, he is able to "speak from the inside out" upon using this approach to better understand himself as a teacher working through a process of change (p. 3). He describes his research as introspective in that he uses the inquiry process as an opportunity to gaze inward at his understanding of what he was doing when he first started teaching and where he arrived at from there.

Ernst and Vallack (2014) set the stage by introducing their research as a story. Studying one rural educator's (Ernst) experience teaching in the Australian Outback during a drive for schools to meet the demands of a test-driven curriculum, Ernst and Vallack (2014) use auto-ethnography as an exposé of sorts, revealing a system that seeks to devour the students. Ernst,

writing about her choice to research auto-ethnographically, using a research methodology that allows for a first-person inquiry, says it enabled her to openly tell the story of her experience as she saw it. She confides that because she was not involving co-researchers, auto-ethnography gave her the opportunity to write her story, thoughts, and feelings while confronting change within an educational system of which she felt at odds with, by times (Ernst & Vallack, 2014, p. 1).

Auto-ethnography as an approach to research lends itself easily to exploring the influence that both my writing, as well as the writing of others, has had on my personal and professional experience within the educational milieu. Through my research, I have come to a better understanding of the ways in which revelatory writing, reflectivity and introspection of thinking can have an impact on my thinking and teaching. While auto-ethnography is becoming more widely used by researchers, no auto-ethnographies (to my knowledge) have focused on how a specific teacher's blogging practice could be used to address a more broadly felt teacher awareness about the importance of an ethic of care in teaching. I have conducted an auto-ethnographical research inquiry because I believe in the value of sharing personal experience. As auto-ethnography focuses on self, as found in auto-ethnographic blog writing, it is a good fit for a study like mine which explores the ways in which blogging influences thinking about the ethic of care when situated within the larger context of an educational milieu. Auto-ethnography has enabled me to examine my teaching practice and my place in the educational system. As well, I have found renewed energy for the quest to travel novel avenues for research, such as might be found in the broad field of auto-ethnographical research. This quest— an exciting opportunity that I could not resist.

Chapter 13: Significance and Conclusions

“Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.”—Margaret Mead (n.d.)

In conducting thesis research on the ethic of care and its relevancy to classroom experience and beyond, I am coming to realize more and more that care is of absolute primary concern to teachers. Teachers are largely in their classrooms because they care about what they are doing and the people they are doing it all for. We on the inside should ideally understand this goal and purpose. However, I am finding that the public perception of teachers on the outside—both in the United States and Canada (and perhaps beyond), is at times quite negative and will probably remain that way until change occurs both within and without education. Teachers are at times unaware of the negative representations circulating through social media in regards to their public image (images that run deep and hold fast in the public mindset). Perhaps it is time that we as teachers begin work to re-invent this negative image, presenting ourselves as the compassionate care-givers we know we are.

In the summer of 2015, I wrote an article (Gard, 2015e) for the Canadian Huffington Post about what teachers want, in terms of public support and appreciation. The issue of teachers’ wants and needs is a hot topic currently due to collective bargaining processes happening in various regions across Canada. In the comments section of this article, teachers and commentators used the opportunity to almost combatively ‘duke it out’, with teachers defensive about what they deserved and commentators confrontational about teachers’ already having enough of the proverbial pie. The overall impression I was left with, after reading the dozens of comments, was that teachers were seemingly unwilling to listen to outside views, while some in

the public were persistent in supporting their perception of teachers' professional work as being characterized by whininess, over-pay, indulgence, laziness, self-centeredness and servility.

In a recent rebuttal, published on the Huffington Post site, as well as on my blog, I had this to say:

“People, I need you to hear this” (blog excerpt)

*In writing about teaching as a profession (and in turn, in trying to debunk the myths that teachers are money-hungry, union slaves that think solely of how to raid public coffers), I am also realizing the need for teachers to present an alternative image to the world other than the one currently being upheld. I think what is needed in our profession is for teachers to show those that are unclear about what teachers really care about— that is, to show the public at large, **the truth of our identity**. As young people fresh out of high school, we were not drawn to the teaching profession because we could not wait to one day be part of a union that would help us get rich. Hardly. We were drawn to teach because we cared about the ideals of the profession and because we cared about connecting kids to those ideals. Then, as we became employed, we realized something even more important (if we hadn't come to the conclusion already): we realized how incredibly important the kids in our classrooms were to us.*

They, in fact, were everything.

As such, we started to care for them personally— and deeply care. Care about what they were eating both in school and without. Care about whom they were friends with, care about how much sleep they were getting on school nights. Care about what they were watching on television/social media. We also started to care about their personal history and their present

situations. We began to notice when they looked sad. We started to tune-in to their moods and feelings. We noticed when things began to change from their typical interactions and responses, started to notice so much more than even this.

*In short, we were not really expecting this part of our calling to occur: it was not exactly what we trained for in university. But somehow, in conjunction with the first day of our teaching contract, we realized that teaching content would sometimes take a backseat to caring for kids as people. Actually, we learned rather quickly this would happen **a lot** of the time. And this: all because our job as teachers was profoundly about the students—their concerns, feelings, beliefs and identities. Our calling was wrapped up in the whole student, not just involved with their brain. Our calling was wrapped up in the health and well-being of their body, heart and mind.*

When I am made aware of public perceptions of teachers like this one: “whine , whine, whine , move on and get a different job”; and this one: “what teachers want is more money”; and this one as well: “get back to work, public servant! If you don’t like your job, get another one. Got that, public servant?”, rather than feeling anger, I am left extremely saddened. Sad because of what the image of teachers has become. For what bothers me the most is that we as teachers have not been enabled to truly represent ourselves in the real world or in the media so that people outside the system can understand what we truly care about, long after collective bargaining time is over and done with.

Of utmost importance, the public must hear from us of the absolute and incredible gift we know it is to be a teacher all those other days of the year. They must hear directly from us, and often, about what exactly our job entails; they must be made aware of the highs as well as the lows of our work. We need to share with the public our well-founded concerns as well as our

ample 'gratitudes' and appreciation for our work. We need to tell what it is like to struggle with meeting the needs inside our classroom and what it is like to triumph in spite of the shortcomings. And we need to continuously share the importance that a teacher can make in the life of a child. One small moment at a time.

In my blogging, I have made this my goal: to raise awareness about teaching. To be a voice in the wilderness, if need be. To be the rally-cry for teachers urging them to unite and care about their profession enough to invest in it. To be a clear and concise storyteller so as to draw people into the world of education. For I want people to care about what we do and all because we are teaching the children that people care about. What we do inside classrooms is incredibly significant, particularly when it gets personal. And, I still hold fast to the following words:

"Until we, as people, are affected personally by this care-giving role that describes a true educator, we really will not understand how important it is. And what I mean by that is the following:

**** Until your child has been bullied, you don't realize what it means to have a teacher calling you to see what they can personally do to rectify the situation.***

**** Until your child has been without a lunch, you don't realize how much it means to have a teacher offer half of hers to your child.***

**** Until your child has been excluded, you don't realize how much it means to have a teacher notice your child and seek them out.***

**** Until your child has been owing money for an event, you don't realize what it means to have a teacher notice and make up the difference in the amount.***

**** Until your child has lost a loved one, you don't realize how much it means to have a teacher***

take the time to make a homemade card for your son or daughter.

** Until your child has been scared, anxious, worried, fearful, hurt, overwhelmed or endangered, you don't realize what it means to have a teacher in their corner- rooting for them, doing whatever it takes.*

Because... until it hits you personally, it is really hard sometimes to remember what a monumental role care-giving plays in the day-to-day life of a child" (Gard, 2015e).

Care-giving is the heart of teaching. And because of this, it is absolutely crucial that the outside world—the one not caught up in education— becomes aware exactly what this critical adage really means to us as teachers. The task is ours to passionately convey this message. (Gard, 2015f)

Past even this, teachers must work to ensure that their image in the public is a positive one— so that the wider world sees them no longer as lazy and self-indulgent, but as the professional and competent caregivers they have been called to be. Even more compelling a reason for such support (and perhaps even supporting an image reinvention) would be so that teachers see within themselves the imperative to care as their innate calling. In personal correspondence, a colleague and friend of mine had this to say:

Teachers, more than any other group, take to social media to praise themselves with posts about how much of our own money we spend, celebrating snow days, and reminding the world of our extended summer vacations. Now, do I think we post such things, in part, because of the constant barrage of negative comments aimed at us, some feeble effort to boost morale and rally the troops? I do, in part. The flip side is that we need to be

mindful of public perceptions when such things are posted. At the same time, I think the image presented to the public is one of “summers off, of ending the day at 3:00 p.m., of general laziness and entitlement”. That is where I feel our unions (and let's not forget who the unions are: us) need to do a MUCH better job in representing the realities of teaching (Buchanan, personal correspondence, July 25, 2015).

To these sentiments, I wholeheartedly agree. Educators must intentionally represent to the public the reality of what teachers do throughout the days, months and school year—all while maximizing their sense of self-awareness of the images they present to the world. The image we as teachers could choose to portray, as an alternative to the current negative one, is who we truly are at heart: caring individuals who have as their priority the students’ needs and best interest. For this overall image to be re-vamped, the individual image of each teacher must be carefully honed and cultivated. Of course, teachers must inherently believe that care is of absolute importance first before the public will ever be convinced. Professional and identity development are two avenues for this possibility to grow and prosper.

Because the human experience is richly varied, how we take on this tremendous task will differ for each teacher. Part of what makes us who we are is the distinctive situation in which we find ourselves with reference to the time, place and family into which we have been born, the set of circumstances surrounding our life, the personality and disposition we were born with, along with our perspectives, beliefs, opinions and understandings. We have been born human but we are also in process of becoming someone as well. Vanier (1998) talks of this concept of becoming human— a process of finding that thing in life that gives you purpose and meaning, which adds another dimension to the experience of living. For me, I have been a human being

all my life that needed care. What is enabling me to become human is the inner desire to offer deeply-felt and abiding care to others in the varied roles I have been given in life.

Vanier (1998) suggests another way, a path journeyed with consciousness, if you will. He maintains that we have freedom to orientate our lives in one direction or another. He states that “this freedom can lead us into anguish and a fear of becoming, or it can lead us into growth and new life” (Vanier, 1998, p. 3). For me, the new life Vanier speaks of has been a way of seeing differently: a way of understanding differently, of knowing differently and of experiencing differently. For in becoming human, and recognizing both my weaknesses as well as my strengths, I am coming to see that I am not the only one entitled to care. There are people with whom I share this human experience, for whom I must show care; further, these fellow beings I exist and grow alongside in this process of becoming are deserving of my care by virtue of their own humanness. Understanding this enables me to consciously see that this way of living is the only way for me in which to grow and become all I was meant to be. Vanier (1998) puts it another way, stating that becoming human implies that we must both “be someone, to have cultivated our gifts, and also (to) be open to others, to look at them not with a feeling of superiority but with eyes of respect” (p. 3). Becoming human, for Vanier (1998), is a process of becoming wise with love. I too desire this form of compassionate wisdom.

Personally, I have come to this juncture in my life with great difficulty, travelling paths both tenderly and (at times) abrasively cultivated by the many supports which lift and hold me. A steadfast faith in God, the good parents given to me, the support of my loving husband, dearly cherished family, those wise mentors who have nurtured me, good literature, steady, caring relationships, my professional work, an education founded in the liberal arts—all these have

been among the guiding lights in my life leading me forward on a path of understanding, pointing me to an understanding knowledge of why care is essential to the human experience. Include with this, the unique set of circumstances, preferences, traits and beliefs that make me uniquely who I am: this is why I care. I care because I am human. And I am coming to care more even as I become who I was humanly meant to be, a process realized through living out each of life's little and monumental moments. I now comprehend: becoming human is all I have ever wanted to be.

I am becoming human in my interactions with my own person-hood, making gains at understanding myself better and caring for myself in more intentional ways. I am becoming human in my interactions with my family, seeing the value in each person I have always loved, whom I love a little more deeply each day I am given breath and life to experience. I am coming to see the joy in sacrifice, the value in surrender. This is part of my calling, part of loving another human being. I am becoming human in my interactions with my students—seeing the meaning in instilling an ethic of care in both my classroom and places of influence. I am becoming human in the ways in which I perceive the world, in the ways in which I understand the human beings with whom I share this planet. I am becoming human in the ways in which I care about both the material and non-material world of which I inhabit. I am becoming human through my understanding and appreciation of difference, of ideas, of values, of morality, of spirituality. I am becoming human through cultivating an appreciation of all that contributes to my human experience.

I am becoming human—this aspiration what I believe I have always sought to reach; becoming a person who is living her life to the fullest. Becoming a person caring for those

around her with joy and passion, maintaining an inner peace and fulfillment from a life of service that defies finite understanding. A person at peace with who she was, who she is and who she eventually will be. A person anticipating her future becoming—even while she appreciates the person she is today. Vanier's (1998) words provide a closing thought: "peace will come through dialogue, through trust and respect for others who are different, through inner strength and a spirituality of love, patience, humility, and forgiveness" (p. 4). This kind of peace surrounds those who know what it is they desire to become in this life. It is the very air they breathe.

Noddings (2005) suggests that instruction focused on care could be used to assist elementary classrooms all the way through to secondary levels in studying more of the same. She argues that "the traditional organization of schooling is intellectually and morally inadequate for contemporary society", stating that what we need instead of traditional disciplines is rather an educational system that organizes itself around themes of care (Noddings, 2005, p. 173). She maintains that "all students should be engaged in a general education that guides them in caring for self, intimate others, global others, plants, animals, and the environment, the human-made world, and ideas" (Noddings, 2005, p. 173). The aim of education would then be a moral life, an aim which would seek to instill in students a belief in their own inherent worth and value as a human being. Like Noddings (2005), I believe we cannot afford to allow care to go unnoticed any longer if we are to see the world we live in— a world which we love and enjoy— remain a place that human beings can thrive and exist in harmoniously. We must learn to care: our existence depends on it. Change, while difficult, is still possible, beginning with building upon existing curriculum and expanding the standard curriculum to include care-based study. Re-vamping education is not an easy task but the prospect of reform in our elementary and secondary school curriculums is certainly achievable.

While the research in this paper has largely been about my vision of how attentive care could impact within the school system, in my awareness of care, I ascribe to a similar belief as Noddings. I believe care is fundamental to everything I do. Noddings (2005) quotes John Dewey (1902) as saying, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy” (p. 3). I would concur with these thoughts and ideals; for just as I care in my role as a mother, I do my utmost to care as a teacher— and I am further moved to care as a human being in all the capacities in which I serve.

In giving care, I receive back much more than I have ever expended. Truly, I am more than compensated for my efforts by the joy and satisfaction I gain in the process. I have conducted my research in such a manner as to give example to another innovative way of perceiving care as the foundation to living and learning. It is now my desire to live my life according to these principles—joyfully, honestly and carefully.

Heart and eyes wide open.

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