

How can I improve my Practice by Living my Values of Love,  
Trust and Authenticity more fully?

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## **Abstract**

The investigator in this action research study set out to improve her relationships with others by undertaking a three-part action research project. First, she employed a wellness approach to restoring balance in her life by improving her fitness and developing mindfulness. Second, she reflected on the impact of key incidents in her childhood – specifically childhood sexual abuse. Lastly, she employed a conflict-management strategy. Data was collected in the form of journals, video journals, personal communication and video recorded conversations with critical friends and a validation group. Through the process of action and reflection cycles and with the help of others, the investigator was able to identify her core values as love, trust and authenticity. Furthermore, she was able to gather evidence of her values in practice, her educational influence and record changes in her self-concept over the course of the project.

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## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

I have come to a point in my teaching career when I need to examine the story of the sexual abuse I suffered as a child in order to build a more positive professional identity. Although this is a story I have told and examined before, I have never investigated its impact on my role as an educator. “Telling narratives is a major way that individuals make sense of disruptive events in their lives.” (Riessman, as cited in Thomas & Hall, 2008, p. 149)

As a child I always knew I had been abused. I associate a few experiences with this time in my life but the timeline is fuzzy. I associate the abuse with a time when I was sick and missed a lot of school. I remember feeling reluctant to go back to school after being away. I also remember drawing figures with exaggerated sexual organs. It was, for a short period of time, an almost obsessive occupation and plea for help. When I was discovered, I was told this was inappropriate and through this and countless other overt or tacit societal messages I knew what had happened to me was also inappropriate. The message I internalized was that it was not something that should be talked about. I became a keeper of secrets.

Although affected by the abuse, I had the benefit of a stable and positive home background. I attribute much of my strength and resilience to my otherwise positive childhood. The following journal entry describes the way I compared myself to others growing up. All my journal entries, excerpts from previous M.Ed papers and personal correspondence are written in italic font in order to distinguish my historical voice from my present voice in the paper.

*I started doing research on happiness because it seems to me that the factors that make one happy are the factors that make one resilient in life. In The Happiness Project, Gretchen Ruben [2009] talks about how people are happier when they can compare themselves favourably with others. I think this has been one of my coping strategies or resiliencies. Growing up I was always near or at the top of my class, was above average height, was a star basketball player and track and field athlete. I also had very close friends throughout my life with whom I could compare notes. Although I did not disclose the abuse to any of my friends until I was in my late twenties, I felt that many of the anxieties I had were in the normal range. In some cases I felt that I had an easier life and had a more supportive home life.*

*Specifically related to the abuse I had more worries than some perhaps. I was very unsure about male/female relationships and did not know where appropriate boundaries lay. For example, I had a friend who asked me out repeatedly but I always refused because I was so unsure of what was expected, how I should behave or what people would think of me if I did go out with him. I didn't know how I would handle it if a boy wanted a more intimate relationship. The biggest problem was overcoming the brain freeze, the silence that overcame me when a relationship changed from friends to something more. This generally happens with me when faced with any conflict. I want to flee.*

*But although I felt at times overwhelmed and unfairly burdened by the experiences forced on me, I heard stories from my friends that showed me the ways they were unfairly burdened by their experiences. I heard that I was not the*

*only one struggling with defining roles and relationships. Although others may have had a better handle on romantic relationships, I had strong relationships with my family and I was grateful for their loving support, for the opportunity to have access to extras (swimming, music lessons, travel...,) my intelligence, my physical talents... It is not that I was any better off than they were in absolute terms but our own problems are the norm we live with, we are familiar with them and have built coping mechanisms. I gained solace from feeling parts of my life were under control and from feeling grateful for what was going right. (Griffin, personal journal, November 28, 2010, p. 3)*

Both my parents supported me wholeheartedly in my academic, athletic and musical endeavours and made sure my brother and I had many interesting experiences and opportunities growing up. My parents were, and remain close friends and role models.

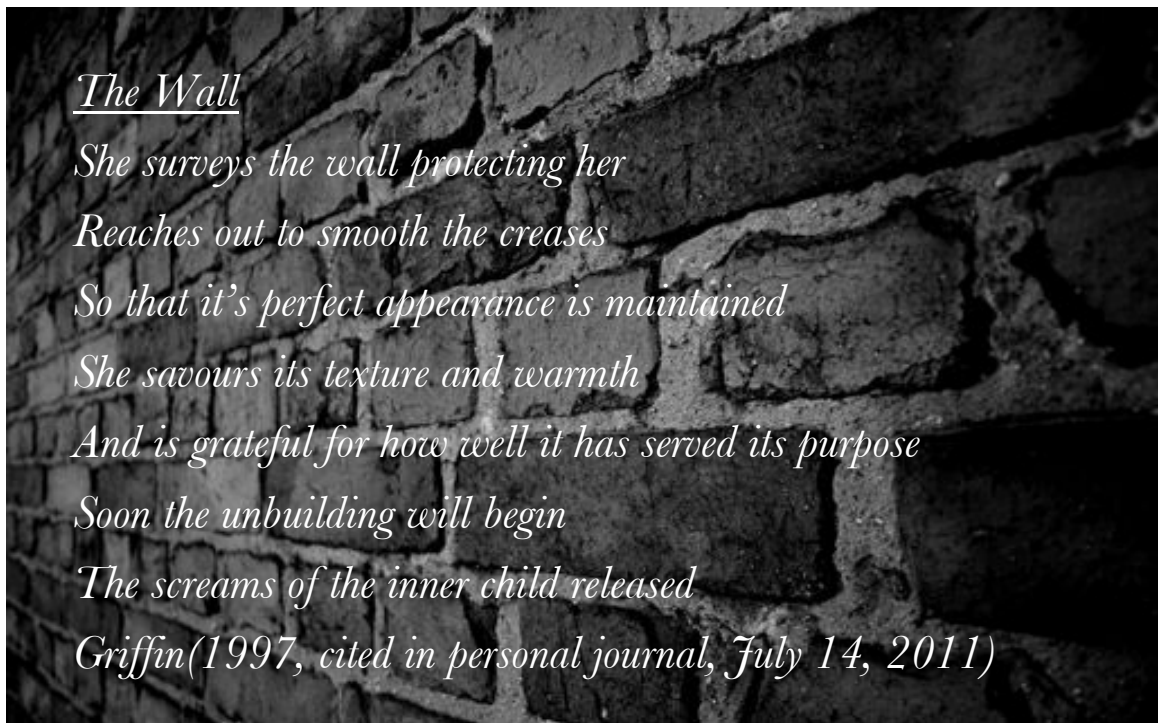
My mother constantly amazes me with her creativity, positive attitude and willingness to jump in and take on new projects. She was an accomplished physiotherapist; I was always fascinated by her ability to problem-solve to help patients recover. She inspires me with the way she is able to use problem solving equally well on a personal level. Mom has always been guided by passion in community involvement, letting her love of music take her from being a church choir director to community choir director to an organizer of local musical events. Although my dad was a teacher, I think my mother has had as much influence on the way I teach as my father. Creativity, a positive attitude, problem solving and the willingness to try new things have stood me in good stead as a teacher.

If asked about my father's influence, the images that immediately come to mind are my Dad patiently coaching me, my Dad patiently helping me with my school work, and my dad patiently bailing me out of a fix. There were times when my father's patience was tried, but when it comes to helping others, he is a paragon. I could not possibly count the number of hours dad shot baskets with me or thoughtfully corrected my throwing technique. When Mom and I were too alike for her to possibly help me with homework, Dad would step in and offer help with whatever I needed. I remember many times, late at night he would generously type up my last minute-assignments. In addition to his dependability, I also was affected by his insatiable curiosity, love of learning and ability to strike up a conversation with just about anybody when it came to finding out about something.

Although I would describe my childhood in general as positive and nurturing, I did grow up in a family and general social context in which some things were not talked about. I will elaborate on this context in Chapter Three.

My tendency towards silence and not sharing my own feelings has had negative consequences in my life. I hardly talked at all in my very first serious relationship, as I was scared to say anything that he might not like. I stayed in my second serious relationship beyond the point at which I thought the relationship was healthy because I did not know how to tell him my feelings and let his wishes to continue the relationship take precedence. I ended up fleeing in secret, leaving him only a note behind.

After this experience I realized that my tendency towards silence was a problem and that I really needed to deal with my childhood experiences. I worked with a therapist and made plans to confront my abuser. I realized that if I was ever to have a healthy adult relationship, I was going to have to figure out what I really wanted in a partner and to learn how to be assertive on my own behalf. From my poem entitled *The Wall*, which was written during the time of my counselling, it is evident that I felt the silence as an oppressive wall that I had erected to protect myself while I was a vulnerable child. At that time the tension between my inner and outer life was almost unbearable.



*Photograph 1. The Wall*

Griffin (2011)

Mixed Media (text and found image, URL: [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Concrete\\_wall.jpg](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Concrete_wall.jpg))

I heard validation of how I felt when I wrote this poem in the writing of my friend and member of my Masters of Education (M.Ed.) group, Liz Campbell:

As I write this now, tears are rolling down my cheeks and I feel sick inside; I feel like a frightened little girl. I don't know that little girl and I am thinking it is time I got to know her. I need to find her and tell her everything is going to be okay—in fact, everything is okay. I never felt this way at the time and this certainly needs some reflection, but I will save that for later, when I don't feel so nauseous. I need to let it resonate for a while and then I will deconstruct it as the numbness dissipates. (personal correspondence, January 9, 2011)

Counselling and learning to communicate to a few trusted friends greatly eased the tension between my inner and outer self and the intensity of my pain and anger. The resulting, and continued, change in my self-concept will emerge throughout this paper.

I sought counselling again while in my third serious relationship in order to ensure I really knew what I wanted. That relationship had been very close to right: my boyfriend was a wonderful, kind, interesting man with whom I had a lot in common. I was proud, however, that I trusted the niggling feeling inside right away that told me something was not right, that I didn't bury it and that ultimately I was not willing to settle for anything less than true happiness.

As part of the counselling, my therapist asked if I wanted to join a group therapy session and I gave it a go. I only went to one session, however, because I was at a different spot in my healing than the group. The members of the group were in a lot of pain and very angry. The sessions were a much-needed opportunity for them to share and have these feelings validated. I had already had this opportunity and wanted to look for new ways of relating to people in positive, healthy ways.

After ending that third relationship I was on a real high. Both my refusal to accept a good, but not good enough, relationship and the realization that I was thriving in comparison to a lot survivors made me feel I had finally come into my own and was capable of making decisions free of influence from the abuse. During my next vacation, I planned and took two solo hikes on the South Island of New Zealand. One of the hikes was four days long, spent nearly entirely on my own with only brief contact with anyone. I decided during this hike that I was happy and complete on my own and could easily spend the rest of my life single.

As fate would have it, as soon as I decided to spend my life on my own, I met the love of my life and knew immediately this was the man I would marry and with whom I would spend the rest of my life. From this point, my life became gradually more full with my husband and then children and I had less time for self-reflection. I considered myself a thriving survivor of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) who had moved past her difficulties to have a fulfilled life. However, I was not healed as deeply I had thought.

According to several dictionaries I consulted, the definition of thriving is to “do well.” Specifically writing for female survivors of CSA, Bass & Davis (2008) explain, “Thriving means enjoying a feeling of wholeheartedness, satisfaction in your life and work, genuine love and trust in your relationship, pleasure in your body.” (p. xxiv). Two years ago I felt I had a history of thriving. I had a wonderful husband and two amazing sons, I was in good health, I had a rewarding career, good relationships with my parents, supportive friends, was intellectually challenged and I considered myself happy. I was doing well. The effects of the abuse on my life had become a subtext that I knew existed and affected my behaviour but that I rarely acknowledged or chose to examine until I hit



a crisis in my professional life that coincided with the first year of my M.Ed. course. That was when I realized I was not thriving in the second, wholehearted sense.

### **The Crisis and My Concerns**

The following is a personal reflection paper I wrote for Dr. Hillary Brown during the Masters of Education course entitled *Foundations In Educational Theory*, in the first winter of the program when I experienced a crisis. It outlines the nature of the crisis that prompted this inquiry:

The self is not something ready-made,  
but something in continuous formation  
through choice of action.

John Dewey (n.d.)

*As Dewey's quote attests, we, as human beings, are always on a journey of learning and change. As educators, our role is to facilitate this journey for our students, and to encourage them to become thoughtful, critical and active citizens of the world. To do this, we need to be able to encourage students to challenge their beliefs, examine their values and change their actions... to transform. And yet how many of us, as educators, have done the same as adults? How often do we resist change and hold on to our values because challenging our beliefs would mean admitting that our past actions were not for the best? I believe that in order to lead our students on a transformative journey we need to be familiar with the journey ourselves so that we can fully appreciate its barriers and the strategies for surmounting those barriers.*

*The Foundations of Education course has been a learning journey for me.*

*Not only has it fleshed out my own teaching philosophy and grounded my beliefs in research, but it has also deepened my understanding of what I believe through concrete examples of what these beliefs should look like in the classroom, from both research and my peers. As enlightening as this process has been, it has also had challenging consequences for me personally. I have espoused my beliefs for years and yet not understood them as fully as I do now. Nor have I modeled or delivered these beliefs in the classroom and in my own life as effectively as I now feel that I should. This disconnect between my long-term espoused beliefs, my new-found understanding of these beliefs and my actions, has resulted in considerable cognitive dissonance. Coupled with a difficult year in the classroom and compounded by the extra workload of the M.Ed. course, this cognitive dissonance has resulted in emotional turmoil, severe enough to force me to doubt my path and evaluate my career as a teacher. The experience has highlighted my weaknesses in both my professional and personal life...*

*Based on my past experience and performance reviews, I started this school year [the year of crisis] feeling I was a capable, imaginative teacher with a wide range of skills and abilities and with a solid philosophy of education. Having gained insight into the foundations of my philosophy and a deeper understanding of what these beliefs should look like in the classroom, I have been left with the feeling that I am failing my class and doing a poor job as a teacher... I want to move forward with the knowledge I have gained about my weaknesses as a teacher that have come to the*

*forefront more than ever before and actively work to strengthen them.*

(Griffin, 2010a, p. 12)

I made efforts to move forward with the knowledge I had gained. I attempted to implement changes to my teaching. These efforts included working with a colleague to implement community circles in our two classrooms in order to manage conflict and foster stronger relationships in the class. I also sought advice from a behavioural consultant and support staff within my school. Although things improved slightly and I gained extra help from an educational assistant, I was left at the end of the year feeling as though it had been my worst year of teaching ever. What happened? Why was it such a bad year? Why was I left questioning my future as a teacher? It took me time to be able to face examining this year:

*Today, a month after the school year has ended, my year of teaching is remote enough that I can see it as a past event and not the present. It now has equal weight to every other year so I can see it more objectively and the negative is not so oppressive.* (Griffin, personal journal, July 29, 2010, p. 1)

I have the distance now to go back and look at what really happened that year in the context of not only the school year but in the broader context of my teaching career and my life as a whole. From my present vantage point I can see that I was overwhelmed that year by my circumstances even before I started with my first class in September. When moved to my current board of education in 2005, I had taught in a different school each year until at the beginning of the crisis year I was finally high enough on the seniority list to be awarded a .7 job. In looking back at my email correspondence I found

I was very stressed physically and emotionally by a summer of applying and interviewing for three different jobs in the attempt to get a fulltime position before the start of school.

*[My new principal] just asked me how things were going and I managed to sound like everything is under control. However, I am starting to freak out a little about the prospect of teaching two curricula that are new to me. As long as I focus on the first month it is OK... Four schools and four grades in four years are not fun! [Friends] came over to the cottage on the weekend and I managed to sound very negative about teaching - wonder why? ARRGGHH! And the weather is beautiful! I decided there wasn't much point in going into the school until I finished looking at what I actually have to teach. So I have been reviewing the curriculum, reading text books and reading the junior level Guides to Effective Instruction - they, at least, are inspiring! I know it will be fine but I had a much-interrupted night last night – [My children] both woke up repeatedly so I am tired again. I had been sleeping well the past few days being back at the cottage. (personal correspondence, August 25, 2009)*

I found an earlier email that described how I was grinding my teeth when I did finally manage to get to sleep, not a normal occurrence for me. I began teaching in September in a new school, with a new split grade tired, stressed and overwhelmed. A month into that teaching assignment, I was made part-time and chose to transfer to another school to maintain a full time job. Once transferred, I was given a day to move my teaching materials, set up my new classroom and prepare for teaching. Fortunately, the move was to a grade I had taught and a school I had taught in before so I did know where to access resources and had planning ideas ready.

What was my year like? Well, I felt like I was playing catch up for the first term because of starting over a month into the school year. I attempted to set up classroom routines and a class culture with students from three different classrooms that had covered different material and had different workbooks while feeling the pressure to collect data for report cards. My classroom routines and culture suffered. The class itself had an unusually high number of individuals who had difficulty dealing with conflict, working cooperatively and working independently. My usual method of dealing with such issues through creative and energetic teaching worked sporadically, but I was tired to start with and did not have the energy to sustain this all the time. I found myself unusually short of patience and not connecting to my students as well as I had in the past.

Many of the conflicts within the class had to do with fairness. I had a number of students who would go to great lengths to receive praise, win or gain power. Some would cheat or bully and then, in defending themselves, would attack me professionally and personally on issues of fairness. I had great difficulty dealing with the hypocrisy of this situation and in viewing the situation objectively in order to react professionally rather than defensively.

I related one of my *stories of ruin* (MacLure, 1996) from this class to a colleague and asked her to tell me what values she felt were important to me based on the story. She said she could see I value fairness, respect, honesty and accountability. She wisely gave me this advice, "You have to distinguish between learning from your mistakes and replaying incidents and punishing yourself again and again. Are you going to repeat this mistake? If not, then let it go." (Griffin, personal journal, July 20, p.9)

My concern is, however, is that although I intend not to repeat the mistake and to learn from it I have an ingrained pattern of behaviour of reacting personally and defensively in emotionally charged circumstances, especially when I am tired, stressed or feel overwhelmed. There were many times that year when I responded to students emotionally, more forcefully than usual and even on occasion sarcastically. I have noticed that when in situations when I feel I am in a subordinate position, am not confident in my abilities or have little control over the outcome of a situation, my reaction can be more serious than it was in the classroom. My response is silence, and sometimes even paralysis, and the cessation of logical thinking, rather than retaliation. It seems the difficulty I had communicating as a young adult had not been totally fixed. At times in the classroom that year I felt cornered, bullied, harried, unprofessional and out of control. That is not normal for me. I need to understand my response fully and determine how to avoid another year like that.

More disturbing than my own reaction to conflict this year was the fact that my students had a deep need for help, more help than I felt I was able to give. As I said, I sought support from resource staff, my principal, their parents, and made myself available to them as much as I could. I initiated a community circle where we could share experiences, problems and discuss solutions. This helped some students but I didn't feel I really made a difference in the more difficult cases. I felt I was so busy defending myself from attacks from the neediest students that I was not able to lay a foundation of trust and peace. I had little time to just talk to the kids in class and was too exhausted to make as much time as was needed outside of class.

In addition, some of my colleagues knew much more about my students' personal lives than I did. I felt I wasn't asking the right questions to get this information but at the same time didn't feel I could. I did get to know my students and had conversations with them, of course. But my questions about their home life were restricted to events that happened or questions about topics they had initiated.

For example, I learned from another source that a student of mine had a change in living arrangements. Rather than ask him directly how he felt about the change or how things were going, I made sure that I had more opportunities to talk to him on a personal level and that I demonstrated care through active listening and interest in what he said. I would ask about his weekend or how he was doing and give him the opportunity to tell me about anything he chose to. I was very pleased that he felt our community circle was a safe place to discuss his move and some of the difficulties he was experiencing. His classmates gave support through telling similar stories, which validated his experience and offered possible ways forward. But perhaps more importantly, he received invitations to play and join others at recess and after school.

Positive outcomes such as this one have shown me that the changes I made this year did make a difference to the lives of some of my students. Despite these efforts, I have felt inadequate as a teacher. I am very concerned about students at risk and feel my reluctance to initiate personal conversations is a barrier to me connecting to them in a deep way.

Part of the difference in my approach to students (from that of my colleagues) could be attributed to the rural context of my school. The majority of my teaching experience to this point had been in city schools where I did not live in the same

neighbourhood as my students, did not know their families and rarely encountered them outside of school hours. In stark contrast, many of the teachers in my current school board grew up in the same or neighbouring communities. It is common for teachers to have gone to school with parents of students, to have taught other family members of students, or to have relatives of their own in their school. Although I grew up in a community near by, my parents came to this area “from away.” So I do not have the vast network of connections that many other teachers do.

This cultural difference, plus a general family tendency to not discuss personal issues could contribute to my feeling of distance from my students. However, once noted, I began to observe more closely my behaviour and discovered I fall short of wholehearted relationships elsewhere in my life and work. Wholehearted, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (Wholehearted, 2011) means “marked by complete earnest commitment: free from all reserve or hesitation.” I am keenly aware of a reserve and hesitation in the way I relate to others. There is a disconnect sometimes between how I feel I should act and how I do act. Sometimes I am just confused by my own thoughts and feelings. To me, and for the purpose of this paper, wholeheartedness and authenticity are synonymous. Branson (2009) describes authenticity as follows:

The cornerstone of such authenticity is in being able to always present yourself as having consistency between your words and your deeds – to show a natural and sincere congruence between the values you express and in words and those you display in your leadership actions. In other words, authenticity begins in knowing yourself, in knowing your actual values, and in having self-knowledge. This means that an authentic leader must willingly be committed to regular self-



reflection and self-inquiry but not of a superficial kind... such deep self-reflection and self-inquiry enables leaders to fully understand how their mind and body are reacting to the immediate experience so that any unhelpful thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and values can be overcome in order to liberate all of the necessary helpful cognitive and consciousness thoughts that will enable them to act in the most authentic and appropriate way. This is about achieving the inner victory. (p. 32)

I yearned for a time when I would understand myself better and could articulate my values and behaviour. In examining closely the difficulties I had in my year of crisis, I discovered that some of the coping mechanisms that allowed me the strength to thrive after the abuse were now barriers to wholehearted relationships. “Healing requires that you differentiate between the ways your coping mechanisms are beneficial and the ways they may be hurting you. Then you can celebrate your strengths while you start to change the patterns that no longer serve you.” (Bass & Davis, 2008, p. 13).

### **My Living Contradiction**

I am deeply concerned for the wellbeing of all my students but particularly those at risk and know that a connection to me as their teacher is one way to build their resilience, their ability to cope with any difficulties they encounter in life. Barr and Parrett (2008) confirm that “the most important factor affecting students’ learning is the teacher” (p. 77). I strive to be creative, patient, energetic and inspiring. My goal is to nurture my students’ love of learning and to be a partner or facilitator on their learning journey.

### Oath of Allegiance To The Teaching Profession

I am the decisive element in the classroom.

It is my personal approach that creates the climate.

It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

As a teacher, I possess 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, humour, hurt 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.

- (Ginott, 1972, p. 15, 16)

As Ginott's oath illustrates, teachers have a huge responsibility to their students and I desperately want to make sure my influence is positive.

In summary, my concerns boil down to a *living contradiction* (Whitehead, 1989) in which two barriers - conflict and time and energy - keep me from living my *educational theory* (Whitehead, 2009).

### **Barrier 1: Conflict**

First, I do not handle conflict well. In the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (Conflict, 2011) conflict has many definitions including; "competitive or opposing action of incompatibles : antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons)", or "mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demand". The last psychological definition best describes the conflict I experience. On the whole, I lead a peaceful life and deal with friends, colleagues and family with calm, positive and open manner. Rarely do I find myself in

discordant disagreements with others as I am able to accept that there are many ways people perceive the world and my view may not be the only or best one.

However, there are times when I seem to flip into fight-or-flight mode. When it seems my core values are impinged upon, I react emotionally to a situation in silence or retaliation depending on the power balance. In this state, my mind becomes muddled and I have difficulty thinking or remembering events clearly. When I reflect on these moments of psychological conflict, I can identify, most clearly with the help of critical friends, the incompatible wishes, drives and core values that cause the emotional turmoil.

This living contradiction holds true in my personal life as well. My difficulty dealing with personal conflict affects my relationships with family and friends. Although I have made progress over the years, I still too often resort to silence. I hold back asking personal questions or saying what I really think or feel, and the result varies from a feeling of lack of connection to misunderstandings to internalized anger, hurt or frustration on my part.

## **Barrier 2: Time and Energy**

The second barrier to me living according to my values is a life too full! I need time, space and energy to teach from a position of power with passion, creativity and professionalism in order to connect to students through the curriculum. Time, space and energy are difficult to find with small children at home, a career and a M.Ed. program underway. My critical friends, including Professor Jackie Delong, questioned my choice of the word *power* in this statement. Due to negative connotations, the word suggests I desire control over my students. It is not control over my students I seek, however, but control over conflict. I equate thriving to tight control over my inner turmoil.

## **The Way forward**

I made the decision to once again forge ahead on the journey to thriving. On this journey I must find room in my full life to build up my strength and energy. At the same time I must embark on self-reflection to understand the triggers to and the nature of my inner turmoil. I believe that my difficulties stem from behavioural patterns set in childhood. I need to re-examine the events that have shaped my values and beliefs so I can become more whole as a person and then as a teacher.

Greatness in teaching, (too), requires a serious encounter with autobiography:

Who are you? How did you come to take on your views and outlooks? What forces helped to shape you? What was it like for you to be ten? What have you made of yourself? Where are you heading? An encounter with these kinds of questions is critical to outstanding teaching because teachers, whatever else they teach, teach themselves. Of all the knowledge teachers need to draw on, self-knowledge is most important (and least attended to). (Ayers, 2001, p. 124)

Finally, I must take action to implement change in the way I deal with internal conflict.

In Chapter Two I will outline the methodology and methods I will use to examine the effect of childhood events and steps I will take to improve my relationships with others. In Chapter Three I will present the struggle I had in finding my way through the literature about the effects of childhood sexual abuse and ways for adult survivors to heal, mitigate or cope with these effects. In Chapter Four I will present the results of my self-study. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will summarize my findings, discuss my way forward and outline the limitations to my study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODS**

I feel the need to pause and explain the structure of my journey before returning to my narrative. An understanding of my project, why and how I am doing it will help the reader make their way through the struggle I had with the literature as explained in Chapter Three. I think it is important to share that I could not write this project until I had lived it and I have tried to recreate a sense of how the journey unfolded in my writing. Although I had an action plan to start with, I did not fully understand where I was going and where I would arrive until I got there. Dadds and Hart (2001) stress the importance of this methodological inventiveness:

Perhaps the most important insight for both of us [the authors, Dadds & Hart] has been awareness that, for some practitioner researchers, creating their own way through their research may be as important as their self-chosen research focus. We had understood for many years that substantive choice was fundamental to the motivation and effectiveness of practitioner research (Dadds, 1995); that what practitioners chose to research was important to their sense of engagement and purpose. But we had understood far less well that how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes. (p. 166, 2001)

However uncertain the journey was for me, I wish to offer my hindsight in this chapter to afford the reader some of the insight I have from my present vantage point– how I explored my sense of identity through the course of this project.

I chose to address the concerns I have about myself and my teaching through

narrative self-study. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) state:

The narrative inquirer, privileges individual lived experiences as a source of insight useful not only to the person himself or herself but also to the wider field of social science scholarship generally.... [This approach] is grounded in a pragmatic relational ontology. It takes the immediacy of lived experiences, especially its narrative qualities, as a fundamental reality to be examined and acted on. (p. 1)

In order to explain the nature and details of my project, I will start by restating my question and the purpose of this study, which includes a discussion of my worldview. This leads on to my description of my chosen methodology— namely qualitative research, reflective practice, and the living educational theory model of action research (Whitehead, 2005). Finally, I will describe the methods for my study in regard to established research methodologies. Throughout this chapter I will explain briefly why I made the choices I did and how my approach changed. I will imbed quotes from leaders in the varying fields to justify my choices.

### **The Question and Purpose**

As explained in Chapter One, I believe that I had behavioural patterns set in childhood that affect how I relate to others. Because my actions are grounded in my personal values, my study focuses on the question: How can I improve my practice by living my values of Trust, Love and Authenticity more fully? I agree wholeheartedly with Palmer (1998) that, “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p.10). I need to understand fully my identity, including my values, in order to teach with more integrity.

My purpose in undertaking this project is ultimately to improve how I relate to others and to forge stronger relationships. In this action, I am adopting a “social constructivist worldview” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 8) which is my “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, as cited in Cresswell, 2007, p. 6). I interact with my students in order to facilitate their creation of meaning for themselves. Together we construct a learning community through which I learn with them and we continually discuss and debate our thoughts and ideas. As a learner myself, I help create my own culture of inquiry (Earl & Katz, 2006) in which I invite others to be “critical friends” who “bring a high degree of positive regard, are forgiving and tolerant of failings” to engage in a discussion (p.21). I must communicate to them the importance or urgency of my study, and make time to meet, reflect and meet again (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 21). Through this process I attempt to bring sensitivity to different contexts, cultures and perspectives. My values matter in this process because as they are central to the motivations and actions that guide my interactions; they are what I teach and they are what I am.

In summary, in adopting a “social constructivist worldview” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 8) I am committed, firstly, to learning through engagement with others. Second, I give thoughtful consideration to context, perspective and culture through my research. Finally, I look for patterns in my own reflections, narratives and interactions with others. These are three assumptions in discussing social constructivism outlined by Crotty (as cited in Cresswell, 2007, p. 8-9).

### **Methodology**

My research is of a qualitative nature; “it relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting of words and images from participants;

describes and analyzes these words and images for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner” (Creswell, 2008, p. 46). Within my inquiry, I engaged in reflective practice myself. I recruited a group of peers to form a *validation group* (Whitehead, 2009) and to help me with my reflection. I also asked for direct feedback from my peers, my *critical friends* (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21) who observed my attempts to implement my action plan. Throughout the process I analyzed my data for themes and patterns starting with the identification of my core values.

My own reflective practice began with the context of this study in Chapter One. I examined aspects of my own life history, the values these stories represent and how they affect my standards of practice. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) explain:

Engaging in the process of reflection is about admitting that practice can always be improved in some way. Reflection on practice refuses to let experience become a liability. It can provide teachers with the courage and intellectual capacity to turn insight into improved action. (p. 3)

This description resonates with me, as I do not want my past to impede my life and teaching. I have taken up the challenge of Lather (as cited in MacLure, 1996, p. 5) to risk making public my stories of ruin in the hopes of breaking out of the cycle of certainty found in victory narratives which she has noted to be more common in educational research. In telling a purely smooth story I would compromise the authenticity of my transformation.

Within this qualitative framework, I use the *living educational theory* methodology accepting its five “distinguishing qualities” as described by Whitehead (2009). Firstly, central to my inquiry is “I” as a living contradiction” (Whitehead, 2009,



p. 182) which I explained in detail in Chapter One. Secondly, in order to resolve this contradiction I took action, reflected on my action, reevaluated my next step and continued to use action-reflection cycles (Whitehead, 2009, p. 182). These cycles are broken down into specific procedures in the methods section. Thirdly, I used “procedures of personal and social validation” (Whitehead, 2009, p. 182) which take the form of a validation group, critical friends and casual or incidental communication. This validation forms the culture of inquiry described as part of my social constructivist worldview. Ghaye & Ghaye (1998, p. 21, p. 51) relate Pendlebury’s explanation of the three roles of the dialogical other as a critical friend aiding self-revelation as follows. The critical friend helps the teacher to reflect on action and subsequently create an action plan. Then the dialogical other challenges the planned course of action. Next, the dialogical other helps develop a new course of action, as required.

Fourthly, I believe that *life-affirming energy* (Whitehead, 2009) is evident when I live my values, when something resonates fully with what I believe to be right and good. Influenced by Husserl, Whitehead (2002) explains that, “**in what I am doing** there is an infinitude of knowledge previous to all deduction. This knowledge is embodied in practice and is in what you can see me doing” (p.3)

It’s not that my embodied knowledge is always right. In fact, in the case of the intrinsic beliefs I hold because of the abuse, I know that it is not. But when this embodied knowledge resonates soundly with my values I know it to be right and good and there is an intensity and energy in my voice and actions that is visible to others observing me in person or on video. Kessler (2000) describes soul in a similar way. She says when soul (I read life-affirming energy) is present, the quality of attention shifts and:

we listen with great care not only to what people say but to the message between the words – tones, gestures, the flicker of feeling across the face. And then we concentrate on what has heart and meaning. The yearning, wonder, wisdom, fear, and confusion of [people] become central. (p. x)

However, when in the midst of a living contradiction I act contrary to my values and this is evident as well in my own “physical and cognitive reactions to [my] experiences, [I am] prone to self-deception and impulsiveness and a lack of self control” (Branson, 2009, p. 52). This cognitive and physical dissonance can be perceived by others and felt by me. There is a lack of authenticity in my words and actions accompanied by feelings of self-doubt and unworthiness.

If I make changes to my thought patterns and in my actions so that they are aligned with my values, the pure tone of my soul can be heard and it resonates with others authentically.

When we talk about doing something with passion, often it is a sign that we are in tune with our true self. In this instance, the use of passion emphasises the uncontrollable “tingling” of joy and excitement that consumes the body at this time. The body is “telling” the person that their consciousness, their inner freedom, has put them on the right path towards their true self. (Branson, 2009, p. 68)

Whitehead (2009) states that this detectable and recordable evidence of people living according to their own values, with passion and soul can be used to show progress towards resolving a living contradiction and living one’s values more fully. This life-affirming energy will also be detectable in those individuals on whom I have an

educational influence. Whitehead (2008) claims “the forms of representation that dominate printed text-based media cannot express adequately, in the standards of judgment and explanatory principles of academic texts, the embodied values we use to give meaning and purpose to our lives in education ”(p.113). Thus, I have chosen to use video to capture and show evidence of life-affirming energy, as explained in the methods section. When others demonstrate an *empathetic resonance* (Delong & Whitehead, 2011, p.3), their own life-affirming energy, in reaction to what I am saying or doing, that will be evidence of my educational influence. By educational I mean concerning “improving the social order and explaining the nature of your educational influence in the learning of yourself, the learning of others and the learning of social formations” (Delong & Whitehead, 2011, p.3). In this way I may use my values as *living standards of judgment* (Whitehead, 2009).

I first read Branson’s work in the fall of 2010 during a course with Michael Manley-Casimir called *Educational Leadership*. Branson explains the necessity of leaders to live authentically according to one’s values and provides a model of self-reflection to use in pursuing this goal. Branson’s work gave me hope that I could start to rectify my living contradiction and train myself to identify my inner moral core more often. I felt I needed to work to become more authentic, to be able to trust my values, myself in order to teach in a loving way. However, it took a lot of reflecting, discussion and writing before I could pinpoint these three values: authenticity, trust and love. Branson (2009) explains that:

Until leaders are capable of deeply and honestly exploring their own physical and cognitive reactions to their experiences, they will still be prone to self-deception,

impulsiveness, and a lack of self-control... The key to wisdom-led leadership is to improve the moral integrity of leaders by developing their inner freedom... Self-reflection illuminates the habitual ways of thinking that naturally restrict their inner freedom. p. 52

### **Methods**

As stated above, I followed an action reflection cycle of self-study using a living educational theory methodology. I have broken my methodology into its component methods below. Table 1 on the following page summarizes my methods of data collection, my time line and methods of storing the data.

#### **Action - Phase One**

I certainly felt I acted more impulsively and with less self-control last year than ever before. So, the first part of my action plan involved self-reflection. Chapter Three will describe in detail my struggle to discover my values through telling my stories, reflecting upon them, finding people I could trust to share them with and finding a way to relate to the literature. In fact, it was only with the help of my validation group and professors that I was able to start the process and I used Branson's (2009) Inside-Out model as a guide and a way of recoding the results of my self-reflection (p. 79). I started processing my experience to "isolate and examine [the] key influential personal image held in [my] self-concept" and then "sequentially trace the impact of this image through [my] self-esteem, motives, values, beliefs, and behaviours" (Branson, 2009, p.80).

My self-reflection often took the form of journal writing in response to events happening in my life. In most of the courses I took during the two years of the masters program it was a requirement that I keep a journal of my responses to reading and

Table 1

*Summary of my data collection methods*

Self –Study data	Recording method, storage method and time line
Journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course journals, self-reflections, reflections on teaching, writing exercises based on self-help manuals. Also incidental conversations or comments made by validation group, critical friends, other friends, family, parents, students, or others</li> <li>• Stored in dated digital files on my password-protected computer, then printed as part of a hard copy journal with numbered pages</li> <li>• Written on a daily basis as needed, reviewed for themes on a regular basis with final analysis at the end of the project</li> </ul>
Correspondence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email correspondence with validation group, critical friends and other contacts on themes relating to my research.</li> <li>• Stored in sorted folders in my password protected school or home email account then printed with dates as part of a hard copy journal with numbered pages.</li> <li>• Written/received as they happened naturally or as I needed feedback or validation. Reviewed for themes on a regular basis with final analysis at the end of the project</li> </ul>
Planned discussions - videotaped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Videotaped conversations with validation group, critical friends and team teachers on themes relating to my research as they arose.</li> <li>• Stored on hard drive of my password-protected computer, or on the hard disc of my video camera until transferred in a locked filing cabinet in my office. As analysis happened, relevant clips were sorted in the theme-based movie projects on my computer.</li> <li>• Validation group met on a regular basis, informal conversations with my teaching colleagues happened during the last month of school and other conversations were taped as they happen naturally or as I needed feedback or validation. Reviewed for themes on a regular basis with final analysis at the end of the project</li> </ul>

discussions. Most important in guiding my reflection on the topic of the abuse, were the writing activities suggested in *The Courage To Heal* (Bass & Davis, 2008). I kept my journals electronically in dated Word documents and eventually printed them out to be kept chronologically in a binder. To this binder I added copies of communication (conversations, emails) that occurred between myself and my professors, critical friends and validation group as well as an incidental communication that related to my studies.

### **Data Analysis: Layers of Reflection**

I employed the following methods of reflecting for each of the action reflection cycles. My reflection on my journal writing occurred on a regular basis as I used them to help write papers for courses and as I checked my progress. I looked for themes emerging and patterns in my behaviour, including improvement or backsliding. Eventually I was confident enough in what I was seeing that I used colour-coding to highlight the different themes and track them throughout not only my journals but also my correspondence with others. Validation group discussions aided me to reflect on themes and patterns that emerged. Each member of my group was attempting to define their own values at the same time so the discussion was quite lively.

You may have heard my values of love, trust and authenticity explicitly or tacitly mentioned in Chapter One and you will hear them again through Chapter Three but it took a long time for me to pinpoint the exact words and definitions as I struggled through the internal conflict and coping mechanisms set up early in my life. I have summarized the results of my Inside-Out reflection (Branson, 2009) in Table 2 on the next two pages.

What is obvious to me looking at this chart is that I had many values that did not interfere with my life or teaching – no doubt results of an otherwise healthy upbringing

Table 2

*My Inside –Out Self-reflection*

LIFE EXPERIENCE	<p><i>Briefly describe a particular significant personal life experience:</i></p> <p>As a child I was sexually abused by an individual close to my family and me. I grew up in a nurturing and stimulating environment and developed excellent coping strategies but always felt something was wrong. I knew that the abuse was wrong and not to be talked about. This message was reinforced through social, media and personal messages, both tacit and explicit.</p> <p><i>The image I have recorded in my self-concept as a result of this life experience can be described in the following way:</i></p> <p>Hide your internal feelings and put on a brave and confident front. Do not speak if you are conflicted.</p>
IMPACT ON SELF ESTEEM	<p><i>As a result of this life experience I have –</i></p> <p><b>LOW-SELF ESTEEM</b></p> <p><i>In situations in which...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am not confident</li> <li>• Intimacy and moral judgment are combined</li> <li>• My honesty, fairness, integrity are challenged</li> <li>• I feel emotional conflict internally</li> </ul> <p><b>HIGH SELF-ESTEEM</b></p> <p><i>In situations in which...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My exterior strong façade is reinforced (sports, music, academics)</li> <li>• I am in control</li> <li>• I feel emotionally stable</li> <li>• I am confident</li> <li>• My honesty, fairness, integrity are affirmed</li> </ul>
RESULTANT MOTIVES	<p><i>This experience mainly affected my Core Needs as follows:</i></p> <p>Decreased Sense of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-worth</li> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Trust of my emotions, decisions in intimate relationships</li> </ul> <p><i>As a consequence, I created the following motives (rules for life) to guide my life whenever I came across similar situations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignore inner conflict</li> <li>• Don't talk about personal issues</li> <li>• Avoid conflict</li> <li>• Be in control</li> <li>• Avoid failure</li> </ul>

PREFERRED VALUES	<i>From these Motives, I have a preference for the following Values:</i>				
	<u>Courage</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Empathy</u>	<b>Harmony</b>	<b>Control</b>
	<u>Love of others</u>	<u>Love of Nature</u>	<u>Flow</u>	<b>Solitude</b>	
	<u>Honesty</u>	<u>Fairness</u>	<u>Integrity</u>	<b>Personal Safety</b>	
	Now <u>underline</u> the values that would always be helpful to you in your leadership and <b>bold</b> those values that have the potential to be unhelpful in guiding your leadership in certain situations.				
	<b>Missing!!!</b> • <b>Self-love</b> • <b>Trust</b> • <b>Vulnerability</b>				
BELIEFS FORMED	<i>Motives and Values I have created the following Beliefs:</i>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People are not always what they seem; good people can do bad things</li> <li>• People's perceptions of you matter; they like you more when you are strong and capable</li> <li>• I am a strong, capable survivor</li> <li>• I am unworthy inside</li> </ul>				
	<i>As a consequence of this life experience and its effect on my self-concept, self-esteem, motives, values and beliefs, I have adopted the following leadership and management behaviours:</i>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I avoid conflict through silence or leaving the room.</li> <li>• I avoid tasks that undermine my sense of self-worth.</li> <li>• I sometimes try to emulate others instead of trusting my instincts (moral masquerading, lack of authenticity)</li> <li>• I freeze, forget events when emotionally upset</li> </ul>				
BEHAVIOUR ENACTED	<i>Note. Modified from Branson (2009, p. 82)</i>				



and the coping mechanisms I developed. I identified courage, strength, empathy, love of others, love of nature, flow, solitude, honesty, fairness, vulnerability and integrity as positive values that would always be helpful to my teaching. These were values that I was able to live without contradiction. I think it was partly because I had so many positive values I cherished that I could not see the values at the core of my living contradiction – self-love and self-trust. Failure to live these values fully resulted in my living contradiction and a lack of authenticity. I will define each value and explain the action I took to resolve my living contradiction and live these values more fully.

### **Action – Phase Two**

“Love is the will to extend oneself for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth” (Peck, 1978, p.81). Hooks (2001) explains that by spiritual Peck means “that dimension of our core reality where mind, body, and spirit are one... an animating principal in the self - a life force (some of us call it soul) that when nurtured enhances our capacity to be more fully self-actualized and able to engage in communion with the world around us” (p.13). I found in this definition of love, a word that encapsulated all that I valued in my approach to others and teaching. What I didn’t realize until well on into my project was the importance nurturing of one’s own spiritual growth. I did realize I needed to recharge my batteries, to build my resilience for the next year of teaching and that I should take steps to increase my connection to my students. Below are the actions I took, retroactively written in ‘love-speak.’

Self-Love: I set out to nurture my own spiritual growth by taking time daily for solitude, exercise and time in nature. This was my time to unwind, think and find my own balance.

Love: In my class, I implemented various strategies designed to extend myself for the spiritual growth of my students including: (a) savouring life (weekly tea and read aloud), (b) actively engaging students and myself in learning experiences that involve a higher purpose (e.g., butterfly protection and gardening), (c) and just generally trying to make deeper personal connections with my students (e.g., taking the time to greet each student in the morning, turning my entire focus to the speaker).

### **Action – Phase Three**

Self-trust is a solid reliance on the integrity, ability, or my character.

I knew from the start of this project that I had difficulty talking about my internal conflict but I did not know that lack of self-trust was at the heart of my living contradiction. I chose to latch on to one part of Purkey, Schmidt and Novak's (2010) approach to conflict management as a strategy I could employ. One strategy they propose is the 3\*\*\**wish*? formula (Purkey, Schmidt & Novak, 2010, p. 51). This formula offers a simple three steps for communicating your own feelings and what you need in order to feel better. Firstly, explain what you value about the person in question, you give them "Three positive signals that you come in peace" (Purkey, Schmidt & Novak, 2010). Secondly, describe your wish – you state the issue you have without using words that would negate the positives you have just stated (e.g., but, however) and explain what you need the person to do in order for the issue to be resolved from your perspective. Finally, you ask them if they can do that for you. Ending with the question forces the person to evaluate

and respond to your request. I found this a simple and effective strategy that I could employ immediately while pursuing the rest of my plan.

I eventually recognized that developing mindfulness was a way of calming and understanding the internal conflict more fully. As a result I have worked to recognize, or become more mindful of the physical symptoms of internal conflict, thinking about what is causing internal conflict, and talking about the experience (a full explanation of mindfulness can be found in Chapter Three).

#### **Action – Phase Four**

Further on in the action reflection cycle, with the help of my husband, I pinpointed the importance of self-trust. I then worked to build my trust in my own abilities and myself. I am my own worst critic and often feel that my faults are very visible to others. To combat my own insecurities, I attempted to follow this plan: (a) talk about my insecurities, admit my mistakes and generally be open about being vulnerable because naming the beast reduces its power (b) focus on teaching to my strengths, celebrate my successes, and enjoy the journey and my relationships with my students and colleagues.

Presented with my action plan, my M.Ed. group questioned whether I had taken on too much in this project. However, the plans build on each other and I feel I cannot achieve them separately. I could conceivably focus on one for the purposes of this research project but I feel that it would be disingenuous to present an incomplete view of my path to healing. Improved conflict management is my ultimate goal. But I cannot get there unless I truly understand how I have been affected by CSA and what for me creates a sense of conflict. I cannot physically endure the journey without a physical

outlet for stress. Although my original intent with mindfulness training was to relax and get more sleep in order to endure the journey, I discovered in learning about conflict management that I must be mindful of my physical responses in order to effectively manage conflict. My wise counsellor said, “You will never learn to be comfortable with conflict. That is part of who you are. You can learn to recognize when you are uncomfortable and work through it.” She likens this to watching clouds pass beneath you. You feel and identify the emotions and let them pass on by (personal communication, February 3, 2011).

### **Video Data Collection and Analysis**

Although evidence of the transformation from living contradiction to living my values more fully can be found in my journals and correspondence, the most compelling evidence is to be found in the video I have collected throughout this process. The written word cannot adequately capture the *life affirming energy* (Whitehead, 2002) and *energy flowing values* (Whitehead, 2002) of my practice the way video can. Video also allows me to validate my claim that my actions will allow me to live my values more fully.

I recorded sessions with my validation group at least once per month since March 2011. The conversations with my critical friends at school focused on my practice and my educational influence with critical friends at my school in June 2011, at the end of my school year. I have also recorded videoconferences with members of my validation group and some of my critical friends on a daily basis as I entered the final reflection phase of my project in July 2011. All taping was recorded according to the Research Ethics Board guidelines for both Brock University (see ethics approval certificate Appendix A) and the school board, and all participant gave their informed consent (see

sample letter Appendix B). In the few cases when people outside my group of validators or critical friends were mentioned in the recordings I have made sure the name is inaudible in order to protect their confidentiality.

Video allowed me to capture and watch myself in conversation with these groups. I then analyzed my own reactions and energy levels while speaking and checked with my validation group and critical friends to see if my interpretations were authentic. This check-and-balance system has been essential for me. Coping mechanisms and inner conflict often masked my understanding of my values and my physical and cognitive reactions were not always obvious to me.

### **My End Product: Authenticity**

A useful way to think about action research is that it is a strategy to help you live in a way that you feel is a good way. It helps you live out the things you believe in, and it enables you to give good reasons every step of the way. (McNiff, 2002, p.5)

I undertook this inquiry to improve my practice. I wanted to feel I was teaching and relating to others in a way that is good. Specifically, I wanted to overcome barriers I have (outlined in Chapter One) to forging relationships with others.

My product is this narrative of a thriving survivor of childhood sexual abuse understanding and living in a more loving, trusting and authentic way. It has the potential to act as a model of disclosure and self-reflection, a way forward for others with similar experiences. Emily, a research subject in a qualitative research project describes the symbiotic reasons for continuing:

Well, I didn't realize that my initial reason for doing it was to help people...I didn't realize that in the midst of all this, that the very thing I thought I was doing for everyone else saved me. The more I talked about it, the more...empowered I got, and the more...hope I had. And the more feeling of purpose I had. (Massey, Cameron, Ouellette, & Fine, 1998, p. 347)

### **Introduction to My Validation Group**

According to Whitehead (2009), the validation process within living educational theory can take this form:

I submit my explanations of educational influence to a validation group of peers with a request that they help me to strengthen the comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity of the explanation. Within comprehensibility I include the logic of the explanation "as a mode of thought that is appropriate for comprehending the real as rational" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 105). Within truthfulness I include the evidence for justifying the assertions I make in my claims to knowledge. Within rightness I include an awareness of the normative assumptions I am making in the values that inform my claims to knowledge. Within authenticity, I include the evidence of interaction over time that I am truly committed to living the values I explicitly espouse. (p. 184)

My validation group (photograph 1, next page) was made up of insiders. By this I mean they were chosen from within my Masters of Education Program and were familiar with the methods and methodologies I employ. Our meetings were a chance to review each others' work with the purpose of improving our comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity. Each of the group was also a critical friend in that they were positive,

forgiving and tolerant of failure (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21). All critical friends and validators have signed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B, p. 163) that gives permission for their words and images, both still and video, to be included. Each has had a chance to review (and edit) their words and images in context, as per this agreement, and each has asked that their real name be used in my writing rather than a pseudonym.



*Photograph 2. The Beloved Validators*

From left to right: Cathy Griffin, Shannon Harnack, Megan Jones, Liz Campbell

### **Liz**

Liz is an experienced secondary school teacher who at the time of this research was seconded by the Board of Education and working in the program department. During the summer of our second year, as our M.Ed. cohort was narrowing down our research topics, we were all encouraged to begin collecting data in the form of journals, correspondence or by finding critical friends with whom we could have and record discussions. Liz and I recognized the similarity of our journeys and began email communication. We discussed themes that emerged in our personal journals and assignments. When our final project writing began we naturally joined each other in a validation group. To our group she brought humble wisdom, passion and an ability to trust in the process allowing her creativity free reign in her approach to writing and research.

### **Shannon**

Shannon was the newest to teaching of our group and at the time of writing was a learning resource teacher in a behavioural class. Shannon never failed to inspire us with her ability to creatively inspire and empower her students. She also modeled how to inject humour into writing. Her frank and inviting style of communication was greatly valued.

### **Megan**

Megan, at the time of this writing, was a junior teacher with a contact teacher role within the school. As contact teacher, Megan acted as liaison between the board and her staff in communicating new professional development directions and supporting staff in implementing them when she could. An artist, Megan continually inspired the group with her creative analysis or synthesis of our work.

### **Introduction to My Critical Friends**

Many people acted as critical friends during the course of this project. I will introduce here the ones whose input I included as data in Chapter Four. One notable omission is my husband whose support and feedback were invaluable. Four of my critical friends were colleagues at my school. The fifth was a formal principal. All have asked that their real names be used rather than a pseudonym.

### **Lisa**

Lisa (photograph 2) is an experienced, confident and knowledgeable primary teacher who, like myself, had recently changed boards and as a result has experienced a lot of change in the past few years. She



*Photograph 3. Lisa*



taught in the room across from me. Lisa and I had many things in common, including teaching grades with provincial standardized testing, having young families and struggling to maintain balance in our lives. As carpooling partners, we had time to talk on a regular basis and discuss our personal lives, professional reading and our attempts to improve our teaching. She was often my first sounding board for new reading or ideas. Lisa made an excellent critical friend because she spoke her mind but was very kind and supportive. Her life experiences have been different enough from mine that she could offer me a fresh perspective.

### **Nicole**

Nicole (photograph 3) and I have been friends since kindergarten. We kept in touch sporadically through university but lost each other shortly after. As chance would have it, Nicole was transferred to my school in Brampton in 2005 and we took up where we



*Photograph 4. Nicole*

left off. Ironically, we both ended up moving back to the board we grew up in. She is the reason I chose to transfer to my current school. Nicole is an extremely intelligent woman who keeps abreast of current literature in theory and in her own practice. She makes an ideal critical friend because she is very honest but with a loving and loyal nature. Nicole tries very hard to see all sides of an issue before making a decision. As junior teachers, we met with Brad for teacher moderation, professional learning community work and division planning.

**Brad**

Brad (photograph 4) taught in the room next to mine. Over the course of the year, our relationship developed from being strangers to solid friends. Brad inspired me with his deep and trusting relationship with his students. I came to realize that what I admired in



*Photograph 5. Brad*

Brad was the ability to be a strong, authoritative role model while displaying an incredible emotional vulnerability. He is truly a wholehearted man - a type of male role model that is desperately needed in education.

**Melissa**

As a member of the intermediate teaching team, Melissa (photograph 5) and I had little opportunity for collaboration until I asked her to help me with my project. I respected Melissa for her professional attitude and warm and positive manner with students and staff alike.



*Photograph 6. Melissa*

Because of her approachability and her role as contact teacher at my school, she was the ideal choice to come in and observe my class and give me feedback afterward. This sort of activity fit within her mandate as contact teacher.

**Dulcie**

As a critical friend, Dulcie (photograph 6) was able to stay positive, keep me on track with my fitness routine, challenge me with beseeching looks when I was off track, yet unfailingly approached me in a loving and playful way.



*Photograph 7. Dulcie*

### **Looking Forward**

With this glimpse of where I was ultimately headed in my project, you may find it easier to see the uncovering of my values of love, trust and authenticity as I engaged with the literature. Chapter Three is the story of the second year of my Masters course.

Woven into this narrative are voices from my past and the literature to support what I already knew and what I came to know.

### **CHAPTER THREE: FINDING RESONANCE, FINDING MY VALUES**

Throughout my journey I have rejoiced at points when my knowing became feeling. When something I had previously known cognitively became a reality I had experienced for myself, it became embodied knowledge. Gabriel Marcel describes these two ways of knowing as “spectator” vs. “living” truths. Burke explains Marcel’s terms in the following quote:

Existentialists such as Gabriel Marcel (cf. Keen, 1966) distinguish between "spectator" truth and "living" truth. The former is generated by disciplines (e.g., experimental science, psychology, sociology), which rationalise reality and impose on it a framework which helps them to understand it but at the expense of oversimplifying it. Such general explanations can be achieved only by standing back from and "spectating" the human condition from a distance, as it were, and by concentrating on generalities and ignoring particularities which do not fit the picture. Whilst such a process is very valuable, it is also very limited because it is one step removed from reality. The "living" "authentic" truth of a situation can be fully understood only from within the situation though the picture that emerges will never be as clear-cut as that provided by "spectator" truth." (Burke, cited in Whitehead, 2002 p. 1-2)

My story is not a spectator account. It is very much an account of my lived experiences. As I recount my journey through literature and self-reflection, I will make explicit my intrinsic beliefs, my self-concept and my values as I began, the new or resonating ideas I encountered, and some of the living truths I gained along the way. The literature is important but what is more important to me is that I make explicit the journey

I took to move from knowing something cognitively or in theory from the literature to having lived it so that I feel it, believe it and act accordingly. I wish for others to witness the struggle of this journey - the struggle I had in accepting this research topic, the struggle I had finding literature and resources that worked for me, and to consider the struggle I had in choosing the way to communicate this journey. I know that to struggle is not unique. Childhood sexual abuse, and abuse in general are unfortunately not unique nor are other sorts of trauma and crisis of conscious. And yet it is easy to assume that others have a smooth road to healing or transformation.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) cite Foucault's rationale for self-study: "if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question" (p.14). I feel I have come to Foucault's statement backward from involvement in a very personal struggle to the realization that my struggle has meaning in a broader context. It has political meaning, utility and effectiveness. I know there is great benefit to be gained from hearing stories of struggle. Evidence for this will be given along the way.

I have come to a point in this master of education program when I trust my embodied knowledge. I have always had very strong beliefs and reactions but now I understand them more completely and I trust my instincts and myself more every day. I must honour this very significant development. My search for literature to support or inform my ideas has been a difficult one. Due to coping mechanisms I developed to deal with my abuse, it was imperative that I find literature that resonated with my core values and my embodied knowledge in order to forge ahead. I will honour my trust in my

embodied knowledge by putting it before the literature and offering the literature second as validation that affirmed my own voice as well as offering me new perspectives and suggesting new directions: “Here is an example of an affirming experience which encouraged me to give credit to my own voice.” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 3). I will also describe my coping mechanisms and what happened when the literature did not resonate with me and how I got back on course.

### **Tuning the Engine – A Wellness Approach**

Fortunately analysis is not the only way to resolve inner conflicts. Life itself still remains a very effective therapist. – Karen Horney (n.d.)

From a young age, my parents participated and involved my brother and I in wonderful activities and encouraged us to grow and develop a variety of interests and skills. In high school a male friend remarked in reference to his tumultuous relationships with girlfriends, “How is it you stay so even-keeled all the time?” It was then that I realized that having a variety of deep interests in which I could totally immerse myself kept me for the most part, happy! (That and my reluctance to enter potentially tumultuous relationships). I was very interested in school work and did well at it, loved music and played in a high school and community orchestra, I played on most of the sports teams and I had a beautiful dog, Amber, who loved spending hours outside roaming the nearby woods with me. What’s more I had a wonderful set of friends, all of whom shared some of my interests. I made the connection that when one of these anchors in my life was insecure, I had others to rely on. After a bad throwing practice, my dog Amber would love me no less and would submit to the hardship of having her fur lovingly brushed or would eagerly join me for a quiet walk to the river. If I had an

argument with my brother, a rare occurrence of course, I could lose myself in the meditative practice of pounding out scales on the piano until I calmed down and could enjoy the beauty of one of my pieces.

Although I was aware of internal conflict from time to time, I felt I was thriving, I felt that my life was, as the Karen Horney quote above attests, “a very effective therapist”. In *The Soul of Education*, Kessler (2000) states that, “Young people who thrive have felt deep connection. They feel they belong – that people know them. Suffering and violence trail the lives of those who are without such connections” (p. 19). She goes on to describe seven “gateways” through which students can find these deep connections; the yearning for deep connection to others; longing for silence and solitude; the search for meaning and purpose; the hunger for joy and delight; the creative drive; the urge for transcendence and the need for initiation (Kessler, 2000, p.17).

I had an intuitive awareness of my personal gateways and was fascinated by the mind-body connection, the neural and psychological basis for flow. This fascination grew from an experience I had as a horn player:

*I walked into the small, book-filled office of my horn instructor at the University of Toronto and sat down behind the music stand he had put out for me. Light filtered in through trees outside the window filling the room with a dappled evening glow. Before I had a chance to open my horn case, the professor showed me a dark little paperback book with a tennis ball on the cover - The Inner Game of Tennis. “The Inner Game of Music is not out in paperback yet,” he said, “so get a copy of this and read it. Besides, you are an athlete you will make the connections.” (personal recollection)*

In his book, Gallwey (1974), stresses, “the importance of quieting the mind by letting go of mental self-instructions and trusting the body to do what comes most naturally,” (Pg 69). I was enthralled by this concept of flow, the state one is striving for in this process of mental training:

Flow is the mental state of operation in which a person in an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. Proposed by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, the positive psychology concept has been widely referenced across a variety of fields.[1] According to Csíkszentmihályi, flow is completely focused motivation. It is a single-minded immersion and represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of performing and learning. In flow the emotions are not just contained and channeled, but positive, energized, and aligned with the task at hand. To be caught in the ennui of depression or the agitation of anxiety is to be barred from flow. The hallmark of flow is a feeling of spontaneous joy, even rapture, while performing a task.[2] (Flow [psychology], 2011)

From Gallwey, my horn teacher, and subsequent coaches I learned to practice achieving this state of flow in the specific context of sport and music. I learned to “program with images,” to let go of engrained habits with “childlike disregard for imagined difficulties” (Gallwey, 1974, p. 90) and to develop a concentrated mind that “does not admit such distractions, externally or internally; it is totally engrossed in the object of concentration” (Gallwey, 1974, p. 105). The following recollection describes the event that I consider the peak of my mind-body connection as an athlete at the Legend of the Plains, an annual Canadian track and field meet for throwers:



I was focused and relaxed. I was ready for the competition and so was the weather. We had the perfect conditions for a discus competition – a strong wind was blowing up the field towards the throwing circle. I could feel the energy in my body and yet had a clear mental picture of the perfect throw in my mind. I had only to close my eyes and I could feel it. I stepped into the circle for my first throw and without hesitation, unleashed the energy guided only by the mental image of the trajectory I needed to make the best use of the wind, and the physical memory I had rehearsed in my mind. There was no forcing of movement, only a letting go. I had four personal bests that day. The furthest remains seventh on the list of all-time best discus throws by women in Canada. (personal recollection, Winnipeg, June 12 1993)

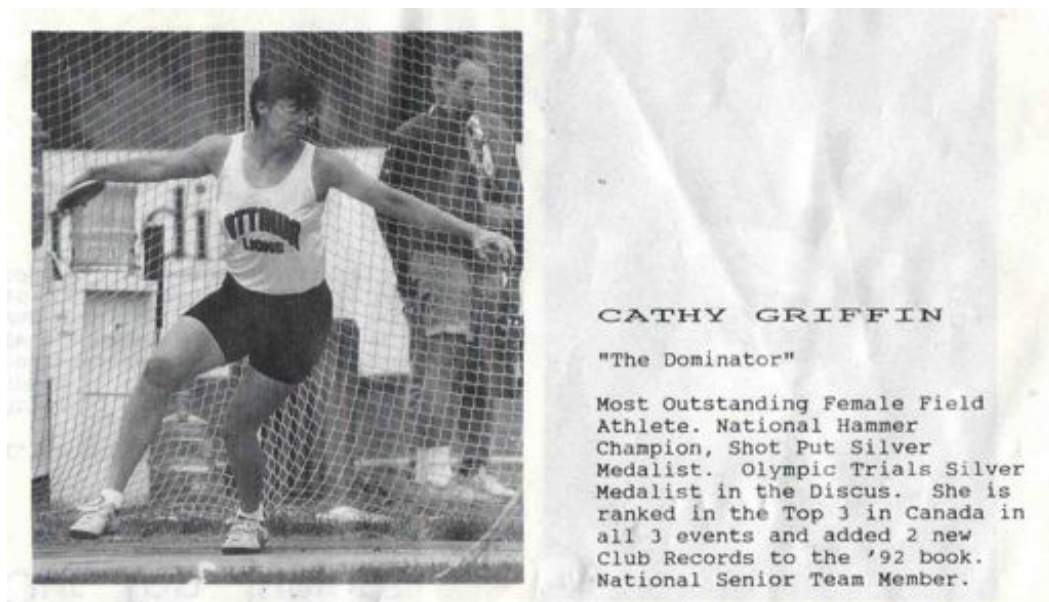
I asked my university coach, Allen Bashian, for his feedback on my ability to achieve a state of flow and he replied:

OK, so what you want are anecdotes about yourself as relates to "flow." Sure, the number of times that you were in that state are legion. We could, of course, point to the Penn Relays and Heptagonal Championships [Heps] senior year. But I would sooner focus on outdoor Heps junior year at Princeton. That is the one that most readily comes to mind in this regard. And the operative phrase from this guy's book would be "feedback relevant." You may recall the shot competition in this meet. Your first two trial throws were fouls. You were in deep trouble. Nothing was going right; you looked AWFUL. As you know, I have always held firm that during the meet is not the time to work on technique. Lesser athletes - and I've had a belly full of them - always look for a technical explanation for poor

meet performance. The simple truth is that they're choking! In your case, you never were a choker, so I could justify breaking my no-coaching rule once in a while. And because you were so focused and had such a good mind-body relationship, if I gave you some technical cue, you could implement it, which is exactly what I did on this occasion. On your last trial throw, you squeaked one out over 12m and just made it into the finals, where you threw 42-9 for third place. Nicole won at 48'. So this was rare shitty day for you, but the point is that an element of feedback was provided to you and you used it to pull yourself out of a DEEP hole. Maybe one in a 100 of the athletes I've coached could do that.

(personal correspondence, July 6, 2011)

The desire to understand this mind-body connection led me to choose a major in university focused on the connection between developmental neurology and psychology. I put the cognitive knowledge I gained into practice an athlete. As a member and



*Photograph 8. The Dominator*

Photographer: Sean Burgess

Reprinted with permission from The Ottawa Lions and Sean Burgess

co-captain of the Harvard Track and Field team and for seven years part of the Canadian national track and field team, I practiced up to five hours per day, six days per week. Evidence of the focus and flow I experienced can be seen in the photo on the previous page (Photograph 7) and inferred from the accompanying description of my accomplishments that year, reprinted with permission from the Ottawa Lions Track and Field Team (1992) and the photographer, Sean Burgess.

You can see from the wrinkles that this is a clipping that has moved around a lot. I have used it in various portfolios and projects to represent my drive, commitment and achievement in athletics. Throughout my life I have continued to rely on the stabilizing effect of finding flow in my various anchor activities - personal relationships, athletics, music, nature, pets and academics.

The idea of staying well through balance is not unique to me, nor new. In their 2008 evidence base review for wellness counselling, Myers and Sweeney point to Aristotle as perhaps the first to “offer a scientific explanation for health and illness and to define a model of good health in which one seeks for ‘nothing in excess’” (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p.482). The authors describe the wellness approach as a preventative or developmental approach that aims to help people make decisions wisely (Myers & Sweeney, 2008, p.482).

Myers and Sweeney (as cited in Hodges & Myers, 2010) developed a model for wellness with the self at the centre of a circle containing five different aspects of life:

Consistent with Adlerian theory (Sweeney, 2009) this self is indivisible, and all parts are interactive and have a reciprocal influence. Changes in any one area of

wellness affect all other areas, and such changes can be in positive as well as negative directions. For example, a client who, with the help of a wellness intervention, begins and sustains an exercise program can learn that she actually has control over an important aspect of her physical self. Through mental health counselling, the client learns that she can also exert control over other aspects of her life... (Hodges & Myers, 2010, p.144)

Maintaining my balance was much easier in the cocoon of university, where my time was scheduled, I belonged to organized groups, facilities were available and part of the package, and I had less serious romantic relationships. Once out in the real world, and entering a more serious relationship, I soon realized that life itself was not going to be an effective enough analyst. There were deep issues preventing me from forming healthy intimate relationships and I had to deal with them. I was aware that my “balance” involved avoidance behaviour. I was using areas of strength to compensate rather than confronting issues that arose. My customary silence in the face of conflict was the prime example.

At that point, I made my first visit to a counsellor and made significant steps towards healing. I started the process of listening to myself, and my negative feelings, rather than practicing avoidance behaviour. Flying high in a renewed sense of optimism and state of health, I headed to New Zealand for one year of teaching, which turned into four and brought me back home with a wonderful husband. My time in New Zealand was very balanced. In fact, I had a whale of a time hiking and kayaking all over the country with newfound friends. My teaching placement was ideal for me. I was in a vibrant school with an innovative principal and staff who continually challenged me to

learn and try new ways of teaching. Unfortunately, 10 years after returning to Canada I was again in a state of unbalance.

Throughout my crisis year of teaching, I recognized that there were many things that needed to change in my life. My first urge was to regain some balance through strengthening those anchors. I was aware that getting more exercise and better sleep would help me feel better and cope with the difficult year at school, the M.Ed. workload and the amount of energy required to lovingly raise two little boys and connect with my husband. It seemed the perfect place to start. But it is one thing to recognize the problem and quite another to make changes, especially in the midst of a crisis.

To cope with difficulty sleeping because of stress, I got into the habit of listening to audiobooks at night to unwind and keep my mind from circling endlessly and self-critically. I usually fell asleep listening and turned it back on if I woke up in the night with anxious or persistent thoughts. I found that the just having the iPod there right beside my pillow reduced my stress. Even if I couldn't sleep, I could take my mind off what was bothering me. I didn't have to disturb my husband by turning on a light to read and I could set a timer on the iPod so it shut off after a set amount of time.

The primary negative consequence of using the iPod, however, was not actually dealing with the issues that were bothering me. I was aware that the negative cycle of thought processes I was experiencing was not healthy. While maintaining a brave façade, I tried to address my problems by taking action in the classroom to make activities more engaging and talking to staff at school and my husband. But none of that seemed to help. My mind constantly focused on my faults, my mistakes and I repeated negative

conversations or conversations I perceived as negative over and over again. It was a loop I could not seem to escape.

Another negative consequence was that I continued to lose precious sleep time when I got hooked on an interesting book rather than getting right back to sleep. I found I was sometimes so caught up in an exciting story that I was staying up half the night. I shared my difficulty with a friend and she told me she had sought help from the Employee Assistance Program and had received excellent advice on how to improve her sleep hygiene. I also remembered back to a time in my athletic training when I had studied meditation. That would be another avenue to quiet the storm in my brain. But my first experience with meditation had not gone so well and I was hesitant to go that route again.

Fifteen years earlier, while still competing on the national team as a thrower, I started taking meditation classes on the recommendation of my coach as another way to build my mind/body connection and improve my focus. My guide was experienced, kind and taught me a variety of ways to work on calming or exciting energy in order to prepare for competition. He also taught me transcendental meditation (TM) and I gradually learned to focus on my breathing, to let my thoughts drift by when they surfaced and to move into a deep sense of calm. I practiced the meditation daily at home and found myself to be generally more calm and focused. I also fell to sleep more easily at night. This was just before I ended my last relationship of silence and sought help to confront my abuser. In retrospect, the experience I am about to describe made me realize what I was doing, that I had erected a façade to hide my inner conflict but that the façade was in danger of crumbling.

*During the time I was in this relationship I began to learn TM for my athletic training. I really enjoyed the sessions and things were going very well until the day I had my first really deep meditation. I can't remember the exact details but one moment I was in a deep calm and then without warning, a mental door flew open. A door that I did not want opened. A door that I had worked hard to ignore. A door that was not safe to open. Not with this relative stranger. I remember the welling up of anguish and despair. And what an unsafe place it was for that to come up. Here I was with a man whom I did not know particularly well when my innermost guarded and torn self was exposed. I cried and cried – really deep, loud sobs. I remember him getting me a pile of handkerchiefs and I felt embarrassed at what to do with them afterward. I suppose this must happen a lot with TM. But that certainly wasn't a comfort. He asked me if I could talk about it. And the only thing I felt safe telling him was that I missed my university friends. How could I say I was in a relationship that I had no idea how to get out of, that a power I didn't understand was keeping me there. I remember being painfully aware of that closet door with my abuse inside. I was NOT going to open this door in an unsafe place. (Griffin, personal journal, January 24, 2011, p.18)*

From this experience I learned that opening up was not always safe. The resulting emotional outpouring could be embarrassing or inconvenient. Although I knew in my present situation of crisis, seeking help from a counsellor at the Employee Assistance Program or beginning meditation could potentially help, I also feared opening that door again in the middle of the school year. I consciously chose to wait. I chose to slap on a

band aide, to use my iPod and to limp along as best I could until the summer with its promise of time to regroup and come up with a game plan so I could open that door again safely - until I could trust myself to open up that door again.

### **Mindfulness**

That summer brought my introduction to invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 2008) with Professor John Novak. My synthesis of this approach to education is paraphrased from John's teaching (personal communication, July 2010) and the text, *Fundamentals of Invitational Education* (Purkey & Novak, 2008):

*Invitational education is an intentional journey with others in which everyone has a right to feel good about themselves through savouring experiences and understanding more of the world while bettering our own and other people's experiences. It is an energetic opening to positive possibilities so that better things have a chance of happening. Traveling this journey requires resourcefulness, persistence and courage - or hope! Education needs to give the world what it is lacking through these imaginative acts of hope. Invitational educators have a moral obligation to lead interesting lives to fuel their own sense of imagination and hope.*

*You cannot change someone but you can invite them to change. The best thing we can teach our students is that they can change – they can learn!* (Griffin, 2010b p.1)

Purkey and Novak (2008) discuss the importance of maintaining balance but describe it in way that was new to me, in the form of being inviting. Their four anchors, called the “four corners” of one life, help educators enrich their lives include being personally



inviting with others, being personally inviting with oneself, being professionally inviting with others and being professionally inviting with oneself (Purkey & Novak, 2008, p.31). “Like a symphony orchestra with its strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion sections, each corner of the Four Corner Press can be orchestrated to construct a fulfilling, more enriching life, personally and professionally” (Purkey & Novak, 2008, p.31).

I recognized the similarity to my own beliefs and made the following connections in my paper to my own experience and to how I might incorporate their ideas into my own:

*A master of education program requires much thought and reflection. At one point in the course, I lost the phone number of a good friend. When I finally tracked her down, I explained that my vision was so introspective at the moment I had no idea even where to begin looking for my phone book. At times, self-reflection begins to feel like narcissism. The reminder given by invitational education that educators must be inviting to themselves, must savour life and its experiences and are obligated to lead interesting lives is both timely and imperative. We must develop our passions not only so that we can “propel the subject, not the teacher, into the centre of the learning circle” as Parker (1998, p.120) says, but so that we are nurtured ourselves, know our selves, can build from our strengths and are authentic. So we need to act, not just think. And we need to act in a variety of interesting ways, try new things, savour the process.*

(Griffin, 2010b, p.1)

In this writing I was trying to convey that I felt spending the time reflecting was narcissistic. I felt guilty taking the time to savour life, to nurture myself. John was

inviting me to change my thinking, to confront my own knowledge that balance was important but not from a perspective of self-preservation, which is what it had been for me. What I realize now is that balance for me had been a way of keeping that door shut, of staying mentally and physically healthy enough to cope or compensate for the effects of the abuse. In the conclusion of my paper you can hear my acknowledgement that my life was out of balance and that I appreciated his invitation to be more inviting to myself.

*In class John Novak (personal communication, July, 2010) compared moving forward in difficult situations to sailing. He said that sometimes moving forward was like tacking and that humour could aid this process. I have always imagined my life as having anchors, or strengths, that I take advantage of to achieve balance. I have areas of strength which I pursue and give me pleasure, allow me to grow and sometimes make a living. For example, through university and beyond I participated in sports, academics/education, music, socializing and just tried new things. Generally life was hectic but interesting and went smoothly. If I had difficulty in one area I could concentrate on, or savour, another until problems got ironed out. Having a different outlet served to maintain or build my confidence and gave me a positive space to take a mental and physical break. I was able to maintain balance as described by "The Four Court Press."*

*In recent years, as a mother of young children, my pursuit of personal passions and interests, other than my children, has been limited and, as a result, my balance has not been easy to maintain. As my children gain more independence I feel the balance restoring itself. They are able to participate in*

*some of my passions and we are able to pursue new ones together without as much burden of care. It is an exciting time.*

*Through my personal learning project in this course, I have found it a tremendous relief to revisit meditation as a way to savour more fully the experiences I have. It allows me to find the stillness of mind and body I need to be able to savour my life...*

*This course has been very rich and rewarding. I know I will continue to process my learning and make good use of the principals of invitational education.*

*Thank you, John. (Griffin, 2010b p. 2)*

The part of this philosophy that struck me the most was the need to be inviting to myself. As part of the course, as alluded to in the quote, John invited me, and each student, to take on a personal learning project. At first I designed a project to be professionally inviting to myself. I was going to talk to an aboriginal advisor about resources in preparation for my next year's teaching assignment. Thankfully, he was not available in the time frame given. Although that would have been a very helpful project and I have spoken to him since, my *personally* inviting project started me down a productive healing path. John created a learning environment safe enough for me to try meditation again.

For my project, I learned how to download meditation podcasts onto my iPod. My search for relaxation scripts ended when I discovered the UK Mental Health Foundation website (Mental Health Foundation, 2011). I like their selection of very short body scan, relaxation, meditation and visualization scripts, they lasted only five to 15

minutes. The voice of Dr. David Peters is calm and professional, not saccharine like some of the other scripts available online. I started using them at least once during the day and at again at night. By the end of the week I was able to fall asleep within a minute or two of hearing his voice. Unfortunately, the sign off at the end thanking me for listening would usually wake me up again but I was sufficiently relaxed that I could just put the iPod aside and slip back into sleep.

Upon reflection, I think there were three things that made this foray into meditation successful for me. Firstly, I was in a safe community, a safe *culture of inquiry* (Earl & Katz, 2006). John's course came at a time when my master's cohort, a group of 19 students, all teachers from within board of education, had been together for a year. Taking all courses together, we had developed the indicators Earl and Katz identify as necessary for "challenging existing beliefs and practices" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 20). John was an exemplary facilitator who mentored us through the process of "investigating [our] tacit knowledge to refine or even transform it as it [was] converted into explicit knowledge for use" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21). He also brought a sense of excitement and kindled in us a sense of "'urgency' as a way of unleashing the energy associated with embarking on a course of action that makes sense in fulfilling the moral purpose" of schooling (Earl & Lee, as cited in Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21).

Although time is at a premium when completing a M.Ed. degree, John did not overburden us with assignments. He made the time for us "to think about the important issues, to decide what data are relevant and make sure they have it, to consider the data and try and make sense of it, to argue and challenge and reflect again, to formulate and reformulate action plans, to prepare thoughtful and accessible ways to share their learning

with the community, and to stand back to consider what they have learned” (Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21). By this point in the courses, we, as students, had developed our relationships and I trusted my cohort members as critical friends. I trusted they would “bring a high degree of positive regard, [would be] forgiving, and [would be] tolerant of failings” (Earl & Katz, 2006 p.21) and I knew they would “offer both support and critique in an open, honest appraisal “ (Macbeath, as cited in Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21).

Secondly, I was in a stable and loving relationship. Yes, I was experiencing a crisis in my teaching, but I had an excellent relationship with my husband and he was available to help me should I need it when practicing using the meditation scripts in the comfort and safety of my home.

Lastly, in my initial search for podcasts I discovered there was a difference between my first experience with meditation and what are called mindfulness techniques as part of many therapeutic approaches including *mindfulness cognitive behavioural therapy* (Prince of Wales international Centre, 2011). Quoting from the official Transcendental Meditation program website (2010), they explain that mindfulness techniques:

keep the mind engaged in some way, for example, by focusing on an object or on something like your breath. Others keep us aware of thoughts, or images. These practices keep the mind active in some way on the surface thinking level. TM [Transcendental Meditation] allows the mind to simply, naturally and effortlessly transcend thinking and to experience a deep state of restfully alert consciousness.

I needed the safety of my mind being engaged, or being led by a script through a series of activities rather than plunging on my own into a transcendent state. The exercises I

started with focused on progressively relaxing my body and quieting my mind in preparation for sleep. I gradually branched out to other mindfulness scripts (Brach, 2003; Forsyth & Eifert, 2007). Some guided me through the practice of recognizing feelings and thoughts I had, acknowledge their presence and let them go, “like clouds in the sky that you can stand back from a little bit and watch as they come and go” (Williams, as cited in Heaversedge, 2010). Others worked on staying with negative emotions, really feeling them and pondering where they came from, embracing them and consciously making room for them rather than suppressing them or running away from them.

Williams (cited in Heaversedge, 2010) explains the effect of mindfulness on the brain, “There are certain neural signatures, certain patterns the brain settles into when people are either approaching things or avoiding them. Now it turns out that mindfulness training encourages the brain into that welcoming pattern even for things we might have found aversive.” He goes on to explain that the negative, or self-critical thought patterns we can get into are a neural default, a loop that we can fall into out of habit or when stimulated by thinking about ourselves. People who are depressive get caught in the loop more often and for longer periods of time.

Well, when people have learned to meditate, they’re able to activate this part of the brain that focuses on the body without all this other stuff coming online. And you can see an uncoupling of these two parts of the brain. And it turns out that the part of the brain that is activated when you focus on the body in this way is the same part of the brain that is activated when people are showing empathy... mindfulness not only cultivates a way of attending to body and mind, but a way of cultivating compassion. Those people who get the most benefit in preventing

depression, from mindfulness cognitive therapy, have the greatest change in their self-compassion. (Heaversedge, 2010)

My Employee Assistance Program therapist explained that mindfulness training is practice for life. If you can practice, most successfully on a daily basis, the skills of accepting all your thoughts and feelings and either letting them pass by you or embracing them and just being with them, you will gradually be able to apply the techniques in real time (personal communication, March 17, 2011). I understood this to mean that you will be able to dually process an event – you will experience and analyze simultaneously.

### **Fitness as Mindfulness**

I started using the podcasts regularly and soon found I was entering a mindful state during my new exercise routine. The same summer after my crisis year, I made some attempts to increase my physical activity because I knew this was an anchor that needed to be strengthened to ensure I had a positive new year. But I was so busy with course work and taking care of my children that I did not make much headway on my own. In September of my new teaching year, I enlisted the help of a personal trainer to guide me in designing and evaluating a fitness program. It turned out that going to the gym regularly was not a routine I could maintain and this failure became a source of guilt for me. I felt I should not have a problem with exercising; after all I had been on the national track and field team for seven years... what was the big deal? Frustrated and disappointed in myself, I changed gears and focused on expanding what I was already doing on a daily basis – walking my beautiful black Labrador, Dulcie.

Every morning I got up before the rest of the household for a long morning walk. I gradually increased the distance and effort of the walk. Through the winter I made a

circuit around a nearby field, tramping through deep snow. As the snow disappeared I started to walk a larger route on a nearby rail bed. My goal at first was to increase my fitness. When I realized, however, that I was naturally practicing mindfulness, my walk became something completely different. I began to savour the time with my dog (who is an excellent mentor in embracing the moment), the quiet, early morning in nature. I recognized that this was my time for solitude and reflection.

During this quest for balance, I made journal entries, talked to my validation group, spoke to friends about what I was doing and reflected on the process. What became clear to me was the enormity of the guilt I felt in not being able to maintain a balanced lifestyle. These feelings of guilt translated into a long list of *should*. I should be more fit. I should be more mindful. I should learn to control my emotions better.

At the same time, I was getting feedback on my writing based on this project from my validation group and talking about my progress with my husband. Liz picked up on the fact that I was using the word *should* when I was speaking about all sorts of things including my fitness routine. “Consider the use of the word *should*... it is inhibiting language. Is that really what you want to say?” asked Liz. “This master’s program is great but it brings out your worst quality – self-criticism,” commented my husband. “Trust in the process,” said Liz. “Trust your embodied knowledge,” encouraged Jackie. It finally came together, with much prompting, guidance and encouragement. I did not trust myself to know what I wanted or needed. I did not trust I could be able to act to achieve it either. I had been operating without firm reliance on my own character and values. Without opening myself up to deep self-reflection I was going to be stuck with my long list of *should* instead a list of authentic *want* and *have to*. I was feeling the



positive effects of the meditation and my fitness routine. I now needed to find out what was essential for me to operate according to my values and what I wanted in order to be happy. The need for me to value self-love and self-trust were starting to emerge.

### **Breaking the Wall of Silence**

Michael Manley-Casimir, in his course, Educational Leadership, introduced me to Branson's (2009) book, *Leadership for an Age of Wisdom*, in which Branson promotes self-reflection focusing on key incidents in our lives as a way of developing authentic leadership. Branson says:

Until leaders are capable of deeply and honestly exploring their own physical and cognitive reactions to their experiences, they will still be prone to self-deception, impulsiveness, and a lack of self-control... The key to wisdom-led leadership is to improve the moral integrity of leaders by developing their inner freedom... Self-reflection illuminates the habitual ways of thinking that naturally restrict their inner freedom. (p. 52)

I was painfully aware of the difficulties I was having in my classroom during the time we studied this book although the following journal entry just skims the surface of my concern:

*We talked in our group of the effects of moral masquerading, that there are physical manifestations when there is a mismatch between one's true beliefs and espoused beliefs. These signs including body language are easily read by others and come across as insincerity and do not inspire trust in "followers" or colleagues. The wise leader needs to know herself and be true to herself through actions (including acknowledging when there is a conflict).*

*I feel I am constantly questioning my integrity and am very hard on myself. There are many times and reasons why I act in a way contrary to my own beliefs. Simple examples, which come up often, include when I teach a lesson or give an assignment that does not match my educational philosophy. It could be due to time or planning constraints, external pressure or in order to meet a higher goal such as collaboration. I can justify why I have done it, but it bothers me and students may sense my lack of commitment. I admire people who appear more forthright in their opinions or seem to me to be acting on their beliefs with more integrity than I feel I have. (Griffin, Personal Journal March 2010 p. 1)*

I recognized I needed to probe deeper, to examine the critical incidents of my childhood – to engage in transformational learning. Mezirow (1991) describes transformational learning as the process of removing the “chains of bias”, the process of challenging our perspectives and developing a better understanding of “how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world” (p. 167). The only problem was that I was reluctant to do so publicly as part on an assignment.

I could not even begin to tell my history as a survivor until I got support from Jackie DeLong, a caring female professor who I trusted. This story was actually part of an outstanding assignment for Michael, my previous professor who happened to be a very approachable, caring male. I just kept putting off its writing because I needed the right person to write it to – and because of my history I felt much more comfortable telling it to a female. The following is the history of my communication with Jackie:

*On Fri, Jul 23, 2010 at 12:19 PM, Cathy Griffin wrote:*

*I am writing my background piece (for Mike) and have a couple of delicate "trigger points," I will be describing which need to be written in a way to avoid identifying people. Would you mind reading them for me before I submit them?*

*On Fri, July 23, 2010 at 2:23 pm*

*Hi, Cathy. Sure. Send it to me. Smile!*

*Jackie*

*July 24, 2010 10:21 AM*

*Jackie,*

*Here is the story that I have needed the right place and time to tell. Thank you for being you. I don't know if I could have sent it to Mike first!*

*I struggle with finding the best form to communicate my message...*

*There are a few stories that I need to tell to explain the direction I am taking my research. However, they are very personal stories and I am experimenting with how to tell them in a way I am comfortable sharing. Below is the first story and my first go at unpacking it:*

*The meeting had been well choreographed... [see page 77]*

*I have had lots of support both professional and private in dealing with this issue.*

*This is the first time, however, I have looked at its impact on my professional life.*

*What I am looking for from you is first and foremost guidance in how to tell this story in the context of my project. I need to respect the community I come from...*

*I plan to include this story in my piece for Mike in the understanding that he keeps it confidential. If it does end up in my major research project, what power do I have to maintain its confidentiality? I am assuming you have heard similar stories*

*within the action research process. Is there any way for me to connect with others?*

*Thank you again!*

*Cathy*

*July 25, 2010 12:43 PM*

*Hi, Cathy. That is a powerful story. I told a similar story in my own work and I know there are others. It is actually therapeutic to tell the story. I am not a psychiatrist, just a good listener. You do have a right to tell your story, you know. You could tell it as a fictional account. Why don't you try it in Mike's paper and see how you feel about it. Your response might be quite significant. You might read Theresa McDougald's [2009] project on my website. She tells a powerful story as well. Let me know if I can be more helpful Take care.*

*Jackie*

In the exchange of emails you can hear my tentativeness and my desire for encouragement in telling my story. I was searching for evidence that it was safe for me to open up. The gentle and loving reception I got from Jackie can be heard in her replies. She reminded me to smile, acknowledged the power of my voice and offered me the option of trying the story without making a commitment to make it the subject of my major research project. Finally, she gave me hope that Mike's response might be significant, foretelling the encouragement that Mike did give me to pursue this very personal topic. With continued support and encouragement from Mike and Jackie, I made the decision to share my story with my masters' cohort, much to my own surprise. The following is my journal entry following the disclosure:

*I rehearsed the presentation of my research project many times last night and this morning. I didn't think I would or should share my personal story but somehow as the time approached for my presentation I got more and more nervous and I know I was going to have to do it. Why though? I guess I felt I couldn't stand up in front of this group and tell a half-truth. Another course member weeks ago said a big "ah-ha" for her was when she learned that the truth shows itself in our body language so you might as well tell the truth. I was so tired and emotionally involved in the writing (and reliving) of my story that I knew I was going to get upset anyway. So it was share the story and get upset or not share the story, get upset and leave the room. And then I would have had to face questions anyway. I did entertain the idea of backing down or leaving all together. I knew Jackie would know why. But I rejected those ideas strongly. Why? I had the same feeling of strong determination I had in seeking therapy the first time and in setting the ball rolling to confront my abuser. Where does this come from?*

*My emotional response to today has been a rollercoaster.*

*First: I felt relieved and drained, maybe a bit numb. I was grateful and felt proud and pleased at the numerous comments that I had been brave and courageous. I was grateful for the support and feedback Jackie gave me.*

*Then: Self-doubt reared its ugly head. I started thinking, "Why did I do that? Now they all have these horrible thoughts about me? Maybe they think I was inappropriate in bringing up such a personal story. Maybe they will think that this defines me. Maybe they will think I was being dramatic in telling the story.*

*Next: Another student helped pause these thoughts. Her comments made me see these fears were MY projections. But they still live in my heart and are going to take some time to dispel. Talking to my husband helped. Writing about them is helping. I think watching the video [of my presentation] might help especially if I can watch it as if I were someone else. I have such respect and care for others and I know that everyone has their own pain. Maybe I can apply this to myself.*

*Finally: Whom in this room have I affected by this story? I had a few disclosures. I guess in retrospect, predicting that might have helped propel me into speaking.*

*I can feel in my heart that my bullet train has left the station and will not stop until I have at least submitted this document as the Major Research Project for my thesis. (Griffin, Personal Journal, July 28, 2010, p.12)*

In this reflection on my experience I make clear my deep valuing of authenticity and my respect for the culture of inquiry with Jackie and my M.Ed. cohort. I wanted to tell them the truth. Evident also is the fear that I will be viewed as a victim, inappropriate, and dramatic. My cohort and husband tried to reassure me that they saw me as strong and resilient for sharing my story. Although I felt internal strength and determination to stay the course, my self-doubt, my lack of self-worth was at the forefront.

### **Cultural Context – A Barrier to Breaking the Silence**

It is important to step back for a moment to consider the cultural context in which I grew up in order to more fully understand where my reluctance to speak about the abuse was coming from. I grew up in a loving, nurturing home but there were cultural norms in

my home and in society in general which encouraged my silence. My parents were influenced by the norms of the '50s when "The issue of child abuse was shrouded by societal denial and the experience of children was ignored, denied, or minimized" (Orbach, cited in Hunter, 2010, p.177). Certainly I grew up with the feeling that certain topics were out of bounds and not only due to my own heightened sensitivity. During the course of this self-study, my father witnessed me practicing my new skills in voicing how I felt and what I needed from a friend with whom I was experiencing conflict. His comment was, "I did not develop these skills growing up. I remember being told in no uncertain terms, 'That is not a topic for conversation'. I am impressed at how well you are able to communicate what you are feeling." (personal communication, February 14, 2011).

The '60s and '70s brought challenges from "feminists and systems theorists who insisted that child sexual abuse be recognized as a crime and that the voices of the victims be heard" (Breckenridge, as cited in Hunter, 2010, p.177). Although a discourse began at this time and people were encouraged to "speak out about their abusive sexual experiences... it also led to victim-blaming since the typical victim was seen as female, trapped by powerlessness and passivity" (Dunn, as cited in Hunter, 2010, p.177).

Both Liz, a critical friend, and I feel the stigma of being thought of as a victim. In explaining her reluctance to write about her own experiences of abuse, Liz wrote, "I was reluctant because I was still afraid of not being good enough, of being discovered as an ungraduate, and as someone who doesn't have enough sense to avoid being assaulted and abused" (personal communication, July 12, 2011). The term victim has never sat comfortably with me either. Although in its most innocent definition it means one

harmed, I invariably equate the word with its connotation of weakness and vulnerability; someone destroyed, helpless or duped. Hunter (2010) quotes one of his subjects, Will, who says, "I've never considered myself a victim, never. I think that takes away from your humanity, if you are considered a victim." (p. 184)

Hunter (2010), in the article "Evolving narratives about childhood sexual abuse: challenging the dominance of the victim and survivor paradigm," describes the cultural shift from victim to survivor or heroic narratives that began in the '80s. He explains that:

In the last 20 years victim narratives have, to a large extent, been replaced by survivor narratives (Phillips & Daniluk, 2004; Warner & Feltey, 1999). The survivor narrative is now the preferred cultural narrative in the sense that it portrays a young person who has overcome childhood adversity and been transformed in the process into a better person... It can also be described as a heroic quest narrative... In many subtle ways our society our society supports this gendered discourse (Kaye, 2005), in part because it offers the survivor a sense of power that was missing from the victim discourse. (p. 186)

My personal narrative has changed over the years because of my own maturity but also because of these changes in society's view of childhood sexual abuse. I certainly saw myself as the keeper of secrets from a young age and still struggle with this image of myself now. Having received the message repeatedly from adults and the media that sex was a taboo subject, I did not discuss what had happened to me. As a young adult going through relationship problems, I broke my silence and talked to close friends and a therapist. I began to view myself as a victim in the sense that I was acknowledging I had been damaged by the experience and was very emotional and angry. Taking control of



my relationships and confronting my abuser gave me a sense of empowerment and I truly felt like a survivor, a thriving survivor.

Thomas and Hall (2008) describe this life trajectory as a heroic or a thriving cycle of meeting barriers but overcoming them and rising to the next challenge. Crises, such as my failed relationships, could have been my downfall, but for the thriving survivor I had become - the crisis become - in the words of Thomas and Hall (2008), a turning point followed by redemption. I learned from each relationship and felt I was improving in understanding myself and in advocating for myself.

By Hunter's (2010) definition, if I reject being labeled a victim or a survivor, if I reject the stereotyping that comes with those labels my narrative can be called one of transcendence.

Those participants telling the *narrative of transcendence* had rejected both the role as a victim or as a survivor as different types of stigmatizing identities (Phillips & Daniluk, 2004; Warner 2003). These participants recognized 'the matrix of domination' and dynamics of gender, race, culture and sexuality that were embedded in the survivor discourse (Naples, 2003: 1151). They may also have been reacting to the way in which both these narratives bound people to heteropatriarchy (Worrell, 2003), by viewing the women as the survivor and the male as the victimizer (Holmes, Offen, & Waller, 1997). They were defiant in their rejection of both narratives." (p. 186)

But I think there is more to transcendence than just rejecting a label. I reject the label victim and I am not comfortable enough with the label survivor that I will disclose my history to just anyone. Transcendence means going beyond the limits of those definitions

to a new definition. And that is what I must seek for myself. If I am not to be defined by the word victim, survivor or even thriving survivor what will define me? I cannot simply make the effects of the abuse disappear. They are still there. I still struggle with them. So what will define me? I have come to realize it is my values that define me.

### **The Emergence of the Bullet Train: A Metaphor for Self-Concept**

I was much more comfortable working to strengthen the anchors that kept me balanced than tackling the source of my inner conflict. In reflecting on the strength that propelled me forward with the investigation of the effects of CSA on my life and disclose this choice to my M.Ed. cohort I likened myself to a bullet train. Below, I probe the nature of my determination in remembering my first approaches to counselling:

*When I was ready for the confrontation with my abuser as an adult I first went to a psychiatrist who sat on the far side of the room behind a desk and waited ten seconds after every question I answered. It became a game for me to answer her questions as briefly as I could and count the seconds. It was cold, impersonal and I left. The second therapist I went to was great. She was a real mother figure, a no non-sense, warm woman who engaged in normal dialogue. Her office was comfortable and we sat around a table. I say I went through therapy but it was mainly self-directed. I went in, told my story, explained what side effects I felt I had and how I managed them, said what I wanted to do, was given some books to read on the subject and went back to create an action plan. That was it. Maybe my directness, this determination, perhaps even single mindedness is a defense mechanism, a way of shutting out other thoughts. Maybe it is just the way I am! Maybe in this direct approach I missed the opportunity for the deep self-reflection*

*and help I needed? Or maybe I did what I was ready for at the time. (Griffin, personal journal, July 28, 2010, p.12)*

It was during Professor Hillary Brown's survey course, *Foundations In Education*, in the midst of my difficult derailment year that I refocused my attention on connection to others and my difficulty handling conflict. At that time I read Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (1998) in which he suggested some self-reflection strategies, including the choice of a metaphor to represent one's teaching style (p. 148). The following is my reflection on the connection between the metaphor I chose and the strength and determination I was displaying;

*One of [the strategies] is to, without any mental censoring, say the first thing to complete the sentence, "When I am teaching at my best I am like a \_\_\_\_\_"* [Palmer, 1998. p. 148]. *When I did this activity a month ago my automatic response was I am like a bullet train! How bizarre, I thought. But I reflected on it anyway. On the positive side, when my teaching is good I am in a flow state, things are exciting, ideas are coming fast, students are energized, on board and on task and although they may have different destinations we are sharing a sense of purpose and are traveling together. On the negative side, I have to watch that I am not going too fast, that in my excitement and speed I have not left anyone behind. For example I know that I talk faster when I am excited. In light of my presentation I now see that this metaphor can also represent my focus and determination when I am set on a task such as confronting my abuser. In John's course I reflected on the negative side of this. Sometimes I am so set on my plans I forget to communicate effectively to my family. I think this happens less often in*

*a school setting when I am in a more collaborative mindset. I will have to pay attention and reflect further on this.* (Griffin, personal journal, July 28, 2010, p.12)

This vivid image of a bullet train has come to represent my self-concept, my soul on this journey. Marshall (1999) describes her use of imagery in living *life as inquiry*:

Images, phrases, concepts and questions around which I organise my sense of inquiring can arise from a variety of sources, but when they ‘appear’ they can have an intensity which makes me recognise them as powerful, or invest them with such power. They have an evocative quality for me, repeatedly catch my attention, and/or are rich phrases (often with ambiguous or multiple meanings) which echo in different areas of my life. They serve as organizing frames for my self-reflection and for taking issues further conceptually and in practice. Typically they have been repeated in more than one setting. Sometimes I will be encouraged because they have resonance for other people as well as me, but sometimes this is unimportant. (p.4)

The metamorphosis of my personal metaphor, described in Chapter 4, is the most significant evidence I have that my self-study has made a difference in my life as it illustrates my living truth.

### **Temporary Derailment: Departure From the Wellness Track**

During the time I was working on the literature review for my M.Ed. project, I was trying to find literature on the effects of CSA on adults, how victims of CSA heal and how people in general learn to deal with conflict. I was very resistant to even beginning to research the effects of CSA and found that once I did the process was

alternately like prodding a sore tooth and anesthetizing it. I either sought out every scale and questionnaire I could find to discover just how messed up I was. Or I flew through the research congratulating myself on how well I had survived the abuse. I was relating to the research but not in a way that was productive in moving me forward in my healing.

STOP! At this point in my writing, my bullet train had derailed before it even left the station. I realized that I was using my position in the engine room as a coping mechanism. I was reinforcing my mental metaphor as a strong, sure, confident engineer in control of her life, her healing (even in writing this now I am using the impersonal *her* instead of the personal *my*). While reading the research I was constantly reading in the third person, objectively comparing myself to others to get a fuller sense of how strong and well adjusted I was. I reflected on this in my journal:

*There is something in me that balks at the idea that I should thoroughly research the effects of childhood sexual abuse, make a list of symptoms I feel I have and then "fix" them one by one. (Griffin, personal journal, November 28, 2010)*

In addition, somehow throughout this research process I had attached a full load to my engine. I became convinced that I must totally *cure* myself by the time I was finished my research project. How ironic that the word *cure* has two meanings: (a) to heal, treat illness successfully or to resolve a problem and (b) to make stronger or harden. I certainly would become hardened if I continued in this manner. About the time that I was struggling through the literature I had begun an email conversation with fellow M.Ed. student, Liz Campbell. In this forum entitled The Dialogic Journey, we discussed themes that emerged in our personal journals. I found myself reflecting further to Liz about my struggle to find direction in the research:

*But Michael [Dr. Michael Manley-Casimir] spoke of the research that is out there on the effects of abuse on relationships. My reaction to hearing this is that I don't want to go there. I don't want to read a whole list of things that might be wrong with me and learn how my experience has screwed me up. If I manage to embody anything of what we have learned this year I want it to be that we can't forcefully change who we are through identifying a list of faults. But we can acknowledge how we are affected by our past and gently cradle our contradictions while we invite ourselves to try new ways of living. (personal correspondence, October 2, 2010)*

Also on my to read list were all the books my counsellor from the employee assistance program had recommended. And somehow I had convinced myself that my job over the next six months was to finish all the reading and heal myself. I felt overwhelmed. My counsellor never said that I had to read them all. My professors never said that I had to heal myself in six months.

Discussions with Jackie, my M.Ed. cohort and my counsellor helped me to realize that I did not have to attach multiple cars to my engine in this journey. The engine itself was enough – in fact, I did not even have to have an engine, I could walk on my own two feet. I did not have to cure myself in six months. I just needed to take steps in a new direction and see where they led.

### **Courageous Themes of Thriving**

So I stopped. I stopped reading endless journal articles listing symptoms and searched instead for narrative accounts of survivors. A bullet train in motion is strong, confident in its direction, moves with speed and is virtually unstoppable. This metaphor

was important to me. Although I was it was important to question my metaphor and perhaps forge a new one I felt at my very core that I did not want to be seen as weak, as a victim. I fervently identified myself as a thriving survivor of CSA. The discovery of the article “Life Trajectories of Female Child Abuse Survivors Thriving in Adulthood” by Thomas and Hall (2008), was a catalyst for me. The discovery that there are others who identify themselves as thriving survivors gave me courage to continue with this research project and to present my research topic to my MED cohort.

Thomas and Hall (2008) describe five themes of thriving when they discuss survivors of childhood cancer:

To date, it is unclear whether some elements of the ability to thrive after trauma are innate or learned. Based on a metainterpretation of qualitative studies, Finfgeld (1999) concluded that thriving was an outcome of being courageous. Illustrative of extant literature is a study of young adult survivors of childhood cancer ( $N = 50$ , mean age 22) by Parry and Chesler (2005) that identified five themes of thriving: (a) psychological maturity, (b) greater compassion and empathy, (c) new values and priorities, (d) new strengths, and (e) recognition of vulnerability and struggle and a deeper appreciation for life. Underscoring the themes was a metanarrative of psychospiritual growth. Cancer survivors substantially differ from CM [childhood molestation] survivors, however, because they receive abundant encouragement and support from families and health care providers during their childhood trauma. (p. 150)

In this article I could finally see myself and find validation of my strong metaphor as a reflection of my resilience, my ability to cope with CSA and ultimately thrive. Like the

cancer survivors, I did receive abundant encouragement and support from my family, even if it was not related to issues surrounding the abuse. I finally had found a structure to help me reflect upon and celebrate my strength. I started looking at my own stories, like this one that describes my confrontation with my abuser.

*The meeting had been well choreographed. She had all her own supporters waiting back at the house while she took the drive with her abuser for the confrontation. It shouldn't have been a surprise that everything went so well. In so many ways this man had played a positive role in her life. "Thank you for giving me back my life," he said to her later. For him, the confrontation was what finally released him to get the help he needed. What came as a surprise, however, was that she had had this conversation before, while she was in her teens. Until he told her, she didn't remember the first day she had confronted him and been met with stony silence, the back of his head. She was amazed at the strength of her teenage self who had acted with no supports in place. That she had felt so strong in her conviction that what he had done was wrong, that what had happened was in no way her fault and that he needed to be held accountable.*

(personal recollection)

The following are my reflections on this and other personal narratives describing how I exhibit the five courageous themes of thriving:

*Psychological Maturity and Strength: The above narrative validates my feeling that I have always been strong and psychologically mature. My abuse happened when I was young, perhaps between the ages of four and seven and so I can't separate who I was before from who I became after the abuse. I am who I have*



*always known myself to be. Although inherited factors including intelligence and above average height could explain my strength and psychological maturity, I know I always felt older than my years because of the secret I held.*

*Greater Compassion and Empathy: I have viewed my reluctance to engage in personal dialogue as evidence of a lack of care for others. But in telling the story of my abuse in third person and attempting to view myself as another might, I see great evidence of care. I cared enough about myself to ensure I had the support*

*I needed to confront my abuser. I cared enough about my abuser that I did some preliminary research on his behalf and had support in place for him. I cared deeply enough for the next generation that I overcame my fear of the confrontation and took action to prevent further abuse.*

*It is also clear to me why I value privacy so highly. There are many stories people have inside that are fragile and must be told at the right time, with the right support when the teller is ready. The flip side of this value is the fear of exposure, which many victims of abuse fear. Even when not explicitly told, I was aware that the behaviour of the abuser is wrong and that to tell would mean there would be serious repercussions for all concerned – the abuser, my family, myself. The value I place on the privacy of others and my reluctance to expose their guarded secrets demonstrates compassion and empathy but are not conducive to forming close relationships. I think I am hypersensitive to invasions of privacy. Perhaps this also makes me less approachable to others.*

*New Values and Priorities: I see the source of my deep valuing of honesty, fairness, respect and accountability. These are values I hold at my very core because they were violated at such a young age and so severely. When I perceive my rights or those of others are violated today, I feel the echo of that very profound violation. It is important that I recognize the source of this emotional trigger and in its recognition can set aside my own history to truly hear the stories of others.*

*Recognition of Vulnerability and Struggle: I remember as a child running out of the living room when the Lassie theme song started playing. I felt a deep sense of empathy for the innocent dog that I knew was going to be put in a dangerous situation beyond her control. Even though I knew all would turn out well, I could not stand being a witness to the struggle. Not only was I sensitive to the struggle of vulnerable victims, but I also developed a sense of the shades of grey in life. It seemed to me that no one was entirely evil or good. Good people do bad things and bad people do good things. I realized that life is complex and it is a struggle to be as good as you can.*

*Deep Appreciation for Life: From an early age I routinely experienced a state of flow through while at play, especially out of doors. As a teenager and young adult, my experience of flow occurred most vividly while engaged in physical training for various sports, especially track and field. When that outlet was no longer an option for me due to an injury, I once more sought experiences of flow in outdoor play – namely hiking, kayaking and skiing. (Griffin, personal journal, January 3, 2011)*

### **Coping Mechanisms: A Positive Approach to Understanding the Bullet Train**

After having focused the evidence that I had thrived courageously, that allowed me to enjoy life and thrive, I chose to continue working on the positive. I would move forward by focusing on one thing – working through *The Courage To Heal* (Bass & Davis, 2008), a manual for female survivors of CSA. Three things drew me to this resource. First, I was already familiar with the resource having used it when I first sought out support 15 years earlier. Second, the book was filled with narratives, authentic voices of other survivors that resonated with me. Third, in it I heard yet another voice encouraging me to focus on the positives, specifically to examine what coping mechanisms have helped me along the way.

I had written to Liz, “We can acknowledge how we are affected by our past and gently cradle our contradictions while we invite ourselves to try new ways of living.” Bass & Davis (2008) writes, “Healing requires that you differentiate between the ways your coping mechanisms are beneficial and the ways they may be hurting you. Then you can celebrate your strengths while you start to change the patterns that no longer serve you.” (pg. 13). This was the wellness approach to healing that I needed. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, as cited in McLoughlin & Kubick, 2004) use the term *positive psychology* to refer this kind of departure from what they call the *disease model*, which focuses on identifying a list of problems and working to fix them:

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined “positive psychology” as a science of *positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions*—three “pillars” on which psychologists can renew their mission to serve the well-being of their public. They lamented the exclusive focus on

pathology that has dominated the psychology literature and marginalized the positive features of the human condition. Positive psychology advocates that we change the focus from a disease model involving equal parts repair and remediation to one that emphasizes existing positive qualities and nurtures their growth. (as cited in McLoughlin & Kubick, 2004, p. 132)

I was intellectually and emotionally ready to acknowledge that I had to embrace who I was and move gently forward in a positive direction. But my bullet train was ready to bolt if I had to read another article as a spectator rather than a living participant. So I sat down with my pen and *The Courage to Heal* and started to write. I began the process of really understanding the meaning of my train metaphor, both the strength it afforded and the ways it masked the effects of the abuse. At the same time I continued with my positive or wellness activities – mindfulness practice and increasing my fitness.

I then reflected on my journal to analyze which strategies affect me the most in my personal and work relationships and came up with three main ways I coped with the abuse. These coping strategies overlap, presenting an integrated, protective barrier to my damaged self. And yet each is important for my understanding. Although my description of each strategy sounds negative, I approached them from the perspective that they were positive, protective parts of my train whose usefulness I was now ready to question in my present context. I use the present tense in describing my metaphor throughout the paper as a way of maintaining the vibrancy of the image.

**Presenting a façade to the world.** With my bullet train exterior I present the image of myself as a gleaming, strong, independent train. I feel that if people really knew me, if I said what I really thought, if I spoke of the abuse or its effects they would

not respect me, they would see me as weak. They would see the abuse but not me. And ultimately I feel there is not much to me. I feel the façade is the best part. Underneath is just pain and confusion not much use to anyone. Bass and Davis (2008) explain that survivors often find it difficult to recognize and express their feelings (p. 6) and I feel this is an integral part of my façade. I shut down emotionally when faced with conflict and if the conflict is severe enough I put on the façade to escape. Bass and Davis (2008) include many stories from survivors. The one that follows describes a very vivid example of how one survivor used a façade:

Many survivors continue this pattern into adulthood. On the inside you feel evil and bad and know that something is very wrong, but on the outside you present a different front. Laura remembers:

At twenty-one I was lying on my bed, unable to get up, watching the bugs march across my sheets, thinking I would either kill myself or go crazy. A half-hour later, I turned around and wrote my mother a cheery letter about how well I was doing. I was desperate to maintain the façade. (Bass & Davis, 2008, p.14)

The following journal entry of mine describes a similar moment of clarity when I recognized how I was using my facade to hide from conflict in my second serious relationship in my twenties:

*My second relationship was even worse in some ways. I had more in common with my boyfriend and I was better able to at least talk to him. But the man was 12 years my senior and quite adept at turning me around to his way of thinking. This was not his fault; I still felt that if I revealed myself too much he would not like me. What was worse was that I felt at the mercy of his desire to be in a*

*relationship. We broke up once. I can't quite remember all the details. I was very relieved but then we got back together. Shortly after our reunion, I discovered that he was still seeing someone he had met during our break up. My reaction? None really. I felt that I was not going to stay with him long term anyway so why did it matter. But then why stay at all? Because I felt no one else would want me? Not really. I think it was because I was so used to not having a say, to smoothing out any discomforting feeling and maintaining a brave front [emphasis added]. that it was just second nature to me to stay. Again, this relationship came to a point at which I was just so uncomfortable that I could not suppress my true feelings. I had a pervasive feeling of discomfort and unease that I could not keep from bothering me day in and day out. I remember calling my friend one night very distraught but she could not talk. When she called back the next night it was as if I had amnesia and did not remember the traumatic feelings from the day before [emphasis added]. After a lengthy calm, positive chat she finally asked me why I had been so upset the night before. I still remember the feeling of the hammer falling, the sudden and painful return of the feelings I had been working so hard to suppress [emphasis added]. The reason I had called – I had tried to break up with him and failed. I had allowed him to turn my ideas around and convince me that everything was OK. I don't mean that he had to manipulate me. I was easily swayed as I did not value my own feelings or ideas.*

(Griffin, personal journal, January 24, 2011, p.18)

Although I am better at speaking my mind and understanding my feelings today than I was during that relationship there are still too many times when I do not say what I feel. Or when I allow my feelings to shut down and I run away from the conflict.

**Maintaining control.** “Control is a theme that runs through the lives of many survivors” (Bass & Davis 2008, p.20). Central to my metaphor is that I am the driver, I control the train and move in a fast pace in a sure direction. By control I mean that I am in control of my emotions, of my inner conflict. If I am in control, then the closet with my deep emotions and confusion stays shut and I do not break down in front of people. If my train goes fast enough in a purposeful direction that I control, I can outrun the pain or at least run through it at a fast enough pace that it will not hurt for long. In my struggle to find a way forward in my research I wrote about the direction I felt my train was directing me:

*I am confused about the exact direction I am, and should be taking for my research project. My immediate tendency is to board that speed train, read through the books, write about my experiences and I will be done with it. I will understand myself and be healed. Like shame, vulnerability and empathy researcher, Brown [2010a] said, I feel it is a matter of using a meter stick to measure and beat the problem into submission. However, the bullet train does not work. When discussing how to move forward with their book on healing from CSA, Bass and Davis (2008) say:*

*If on the other hand, you breeze through these chapters, you may not yet feel safe enough to confront these issues. Or you may be coping with the book the same way you coped with the abuse – by separating your intellect from your*

*feelings. If that's the case, stop, take a break, talk to someone for support, and come back to it later... It's essential that you don't bear this book the way you bore the abuse: numb and alone. If you come to a part that feels overwhelming, the material in that section may be too difficult for you right now. Don't force yourself to read it. Try a different section instead."* (p.xxv)

*It is essential that I learn how to slow down this process and feel my way through it. My new metaphor is me, walking on my own holding and acknowledging the glowing ball that represents my emotions. I am walking, feeling the ground, aware of my feelings, my observations taking the time to be aware of how things affect me. I can take the time to adequately plan a way forward, visualize first, analyze after. (Griffin, personal journal January 23, 2011)*

In this entry I see clearly my struggle to maintain control and minimize the personal damage while choosing to embark upon a very painful journey. I demonstrate the awareness that I have to learn mindfulness strategies to identify my emotions, to feel them and somehow learn how to walk with them rather than keeping them locked away under my façade.

**Isolation.** The bullet train is a solitary image. Although people may be on board, traveling in the same direction, I maintain my distance as the driver and can choose which of my thoughts or feelings to share with the passengers – they are not allowed into my engine room. In my isolation I may attach too many cars to my engine to avoid sharing the load. I sometimes let my feelings of obligations get out of proportion and feel I have to do everything myself.



*I think I have been drawn to people I have felt need protection for a long time. I tend to think I can help, try to help by taking care of them and then get overwhelmed by the burden and feel resentful. In fact I do this a lot – it is part of my train metaphor. I mentally take on cars that don't need to be mine. Then I get resentful that I am carrying too much. Or I feel that I have to do things perfectly. For example, when preparing for parties or other events I just keep going through what needs to be done and adding to it as I see room for improvement. When I start feeling overwhelmed sometimes I talk to my husband, Diccon, and he sensibly asks why I need to do “x” or “y”. I have improved on this over the years and occasionally it is enough just to ask myself what he would say in order to put things into perspective. I find myself doing it more with teaching too. With more on my plate with family I am more aware of when it is just too much at work and I cut back or simplify. (Griffin, personal journal, March 2, 2011)*

The very fact that I had myself convinced that I needed to read all the books I had ordered, research every effect of CSA and cure myself in 6 months proves that this tendency to add more cars is still an issue. It is an issue compounded by my reluctance to talk to others, my desire to maintain a strong façade. I resist talking to other people especially when strong emotions are involved. I feel embarrassed; I feel that I am showing weakness or vulnerability. Bass and Davis (2008) say, “You have already suffered the abuse alone. You do not have to heal in the same lonely isolation.” (p.30). Talking to other people puts my perceptions and reality back into a better balance.

When I listened to others and heard what they were saying, I recognized that I had unconsciously adopted unrealistic expectations for my M.Ed. project. My professors kept

repeating that I needed to make sure my project was doable in the six-month period we had left. My M.Ed. cohort questioned whether I was making too many claims and whether I could collect all the data I had planned to collect during my first presentation.

### **Values Emerge: Moving Forward Again**

I found it helpful to return to Branson's (2009) Inside-Out model of self-reflection (See Table 2, p. 30). The process of uncovering and recognizing my values and beliefs took a long time as I struggled against my preferred values, resultant motives and intrinsic beliefs in order to achieve a clear view of myself. It is a process I could not have completed alone. My husband, my validation group and the video camera were essential as mirrors who could reflect back to me what they saw, heard and felt in my words and actions rather than what filtered through my coping mechanisms and warped self-concept. These cherished friends brought soul into my research:

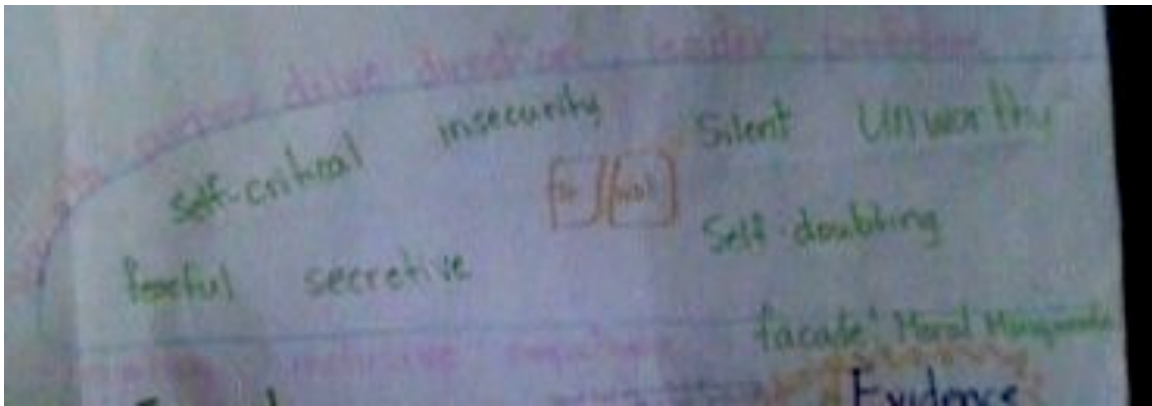
When soul is present in education, attention shifts. As the quality of attention shifts, we listen with great care not only to what people say but to the message between the words – tones, gestures, the flicker of feeling across the face. And then we concentrate on what has heart and meaning. The yearning, wonder, wisdom, fear, and confusion of students become central to the curriculum.

Questions become as important as answers.

When soul enters the classroom, masks drop away. Students dare to share the joy and talents they have feared would provoke jealousy in even their best friends. They risk exposing the pain and shame that peers might judge as weakness. Seeing deeply into the perspectives of others, accepting what has felt

unworthy in themselves, students discover compassion and begin to learn about forgiveness. (Kessler, 2000, p.x)

As I came to grips with the effects of the abuse the image of my bullet train developed. The diagram in Photograph 8 represents my understanding of myself as I completed this self-reflection process.



Photograph 9. The First Bullet Train

The outside, protective façade includes the words: strength, purpose, drive, leader, protective, inviting, inclusive and empathetic. Inside this was my “*innermost guarded and torn self*” (Griffin, personal journal, January 4, 2011, p. 18). The guarded self contains the words: self-doubting, unworthy, silent, insecurity, self-critical, fearful and secretive. At the centre, at the heart of my torn self is broken trust. My trust in a relationship was violated at an early age. Because I had a solid and stable upbringing I developed trust in others but because I was told overtly and tacitly that I was not to talk about the abuse, not allowed to process what had happened, and most importantly not protected from the experience, my trust in myself was damaged.

Self-esteem is a central issue for many survivors. When children are abused, they are harmed at a core level. And one of the areas hardest hit is their developing

sense of self-worth... Yet healing isn't only about pain. It's about learning to love yourself. As you move from feeling like a victim to being a proud survivor, you will have glimmers of hope, self-respect, and satisfaction. Those are natural by-products of healing.” (Bass & Davis, 2008, p. 212-213)

From discussion about this new image of my bullet train, three core values emerged:

Trust, Love and Authenticity. In Chapter 4 I will present the results of my attempts to live more fully my values of Love, Trust and Authenticity.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

Education comes from within; you get it by struggle and effort and thought.

- Napoleon Hill (n.d.)

In this chapter I will review my data collection methods, describe how I analyzed the data and present the results of my analysis. As described in Chapter Three, once I made the decision to forge ahead on the journey to thriving, my ride was not completely smooth. My trip had three purposes. First, I set out to find room in my full life to build up my fitness and energy. Second, I embarked on self-reflection to understand the triggers to, and nature of my inner turmoil. Finally, I planned to take action to implement change in the way I dealt with conflict. Along the way I struggled to accept my topic, to communicate it to others, to hear my voice resonate in the literature and to see myself clearly. I have emerged from the process changed far more and in different ways than I had imagined as I set out. I feel, rather than understand, Hill's sentiment that education, or transformation comes only through struggle, effort and thought. My challenge in this chapter is to explain and communicate my "living truths" (Burke, as cited in Whitehead, 2002, p. 1-2) in a way that resonates authentically with you, the reader.

### **Data Collection**

You will remember from Chapter Two, that I kept journals, collected relevant correspondence and recorded conversations about each members' work with my validation group as well as conversations with critical friends about my values in practice, my educational influence and my work. In that chapter, I gave an introduction to the people I worked with and the nature of our relationships.

## Data Analysis

To analyze my data, I went through my correspondence and journals and highlighted themes using different colours. Over time I could see changes in the way I wrote about my metaphor, handling conflict, my values etc. More striking than the written word was the evidence I found of transformation in the video clips. To analyze and edit the footage, I downloaded all of my validation group and critical friend conversations into iMovie (photograph 10). I had about fifteen hours of video total. In iMovie, I stored footage from different dates by name, e.g., Jackie, July 14, 2011.



Photograph 10. iMovie Project Editing

When I opened a file, that raw footage was visible in a window at the bottom. I then ran my cursor along the footage and in the larger viewing screen at the top right I could scan for energy flowing values (people talking passionately using gestures, moving their body closer or looking uncomfortable, arms crossed protectively) or life affirming energy (smiles, surprise, laughter in response to something said). When I found one of these clips I played it in real time so I could hear what was said. I was looking for the themes I had identified in my journals, or a new theme that was interesting. A video I made (video clip 1) to review what I was looking for can be seen at the following link:



*Video Clip 1. Video Analysis*

Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pvea2SfEovw>

I sorted the clips I found into new projects (movies) by copying and pasting them. I ended up with projects with the following titles; being heard, self-criticism, train metaphor, control and vulnerability, standardized testing, disclosure, control, values and being me, staff feedback, educational influence, guilt – should, mindfulness, development of trust, reflections on walking, the research process, values and wellness approach. Going through this process I could hear and see my transformation more clearly and started to visualize how I could fit clips together into three videos based on trust, self-

love and educational influence. Authenticity was a theme that ran throughout all of the videos.

I have been editing video for thirteen years in the classroom and at home to create educational and family videos. So the process of trimming clips, adding text, titles and transitions is second nature to me. Because You Tube has a limit of ten minutes per movie, this became the maximum length of each of my videos. For each theme I started with way more than ten minutes. I had about forty minutes of compelling conversation that fit my themes from the staff feedback footage alone. So I had to watch the footage again and again to make decisions on what I could cut and what was really important in telling my story of transformation. I knew from experience that there is a balance to be reached between giving enough of the context so your audience knows what is going on and limiting the amount of footage so that you don't lose the viewer's interest. Once I had edited the videos, I uploaded them to You Tube on a private setting to show to only the people involved in order to get their permission to use the clips in context. They had agreed to this procedure prior to, and again after filming. I also asked them to validate my claims – to check for “comprehensibility, truthfulness, rightness and authenticity” (Whitehead, 2009, p. 184). This validating process is visible in the Should - Have to – Want to video (see Video clip 2, p. 104). At the end of the video is part of a Skype call I recorded with Liz and Megan. I watched them watching my video (an interesting experience in itself as I could see their reactions) and then asked them for feedback. On their advice I deleted some repetitive footage and added titles a few explanatory titles.



One important piece of feedback came from more than one source. Several people mentioned that it was overwhelming to watch and listen to the discussions while trying to read my reflections in subtitles. I considered including a clean copy of each video to be watched first but decided that it would take a reader too long to interact with each video as well as read the accompanying text. The option is there, of course to watch each video once without reading the subtitles and then watch it a second time focusing on the reflections and interpretations I added.

### **My Original Claims**

When I decided to take action to change my practice I made the following predictions or claims.

#### **Claim 1**

Adopting a wellness approach of working on my strengths will keep me more balanced, especially through this process, but in life in general. Specifically, I believe that improving my fitness and mindfulness will help me to have a positive attitude, sleep better and have more energy. Mindfulness training will also help me to identify and release physical reaction to conflict. These effects should transfer into other aspects of my life, including my interactions with others.

#### **Claim 2**

Telling my stories, analyzing them to determine my core values, beliefs and motivations, seeing the patterns and consulting with a validation group about key incidents in my life (paired with mindfulness training) will allow me to understand what is causing my inner turmoil and what is happening physically and mentally when I experience conflict. This understanding will allow me to “arouse [my] inner freedom and

to take control of any actual personal motives, values, or beliefs that have previously been tacitly influencing [my] ... behaviour in ways that were contrary to what [I] wanted.” (Branson, 2009, p. 88).

### **Claim 3**

Practicing conflict management skills will help me take action on what I learn through self-reflection. I will learn to change my behaviour patterns when I feel inner turmoil and ultimately to forge deeper connections with others.

I know I have made progress in achieving these goals and as a result living more fully my values of Love, Trust and Authenticity. What I did not predict were the changes I would feel in my self-concept, how it would feel to align my values and actions and how the ability to not be controlled by my inner conflict would feel in real time. I will present my findings, my living truths, in three ways.

First, I will begin and end my presentation with an artistic representation and analysis of my metaphor in order to describe how my self-concept has changed over time. Second, I will present three videos that I created after reviewing all the footage of my conversations. These videos reveal the transformation I have undergone from the perspective of an observer – including myself as self-reflector. Finally, accompanying both will be a written explanation and further examples as evidence of change. I will make connections to my values throughout to make it clear how I am living more fully my values of Trust, Love and Authenticity.

### **Self-Concept Metaphor Transformation No. 1: Wall to Bullet Train**

From the very beginning of my project, themes emerged in my writing, my thinking, my communication – silence, strength, vulnerability, conflict, etc. Once I made the

connection between my project and my train metaphor, however, the themes became part of my metaphor effortlessly. My train transformed, seemingly independently, three times as my spectator truths became living truth. I didn't give much thought to why this happened until Liz prompted me. The following journal entry explains my thinking.

*I don't talk much about my experiences as an athlete. Liz has gently encouraged me to reflect on my silence and how my experiences as an athlete have shaped who I am. First, when she read about my history with flow and mind-body connection in Chapter Two, she inserted a comment right into my text. She wrote, "Aren't you grateful for having been introduced to this so early in life?" I took the comment at face value and immediately edited my document by adding a sentence on how grateful I was for having had the experience but didn't engage in deep reflection. I didn't recognize her gentle nudge as what it was until much later. Liz is the master at setting up little thought-provoking niggles that prime me to view my experiences from a different perspective. Sometimes it takes a long time before the niggles turn into questions and lead to answers. But she is very patient and trusts in the process.*

*It wasn't until I read in her major research project that she found videocassettes from a self-reflection exercise in her early teaching career that I realized I have a tonne of video footage of myself throwing. After a discussion of this footage and my history as an athlete, Liz commented that I am very modest about my accomplishments. I replied that it was a different part of my life that seems very remote. She didn't push. In fact she remained silent and gave me time to think and make the connection myself to her earlier comment about my mind-*

*body experience. I reflected on why I was keeping this important part of my life separate from my present. From the age of 18 to 27 I regularly watched myself on videotape to analyze my technique. I spent hours on a daily basis translating between physical sensations, mental images, verbal and visual feedback. As I established in Chapter Three, I have a very strong and reliable mental image of myself that I am able to influence and manipulate. All of a sudden I realized why my train metaphor was so strong and reliable and why it transformed as if by magic. Once introduced to the bullet train as a metaphor for myself, my brain took over the way it had been trained. It naturally filtered and sorted my feelings and the feedback received during my validation group sessions and adjusted my mental image, or metaphor accordingly. (Griffin, Personal Journal. July 20, 2011, p.30)*

## **The Wall**

Prior to adopting the train metaphor, I definitely had the mental image of a separate walled space within myself that I did not talk about and tried not to think about. Compartmentalizing is common coping mechanisms for children that can, as in my case, present itself as a façade (Bass & Davis, 2008, p.14). One woman in *The Courage To Heal* described it this way, “Underneath that false personality was a blankness, and underneath the blankness was a tremendous rage” (Bass & Davis, 2008, p.15). You hear that same image of emotions suppressed in my poem, *The Wall* in Figure 1 in Chapter One (p. 5). I don’t feel that “really painful level of telling” (Bass & Davis, 2008, p.110) now because I have come a long way since my first disclosure in 1997. The following personal correspondence to Liz describes my rediscovery of this poem after 15 years.

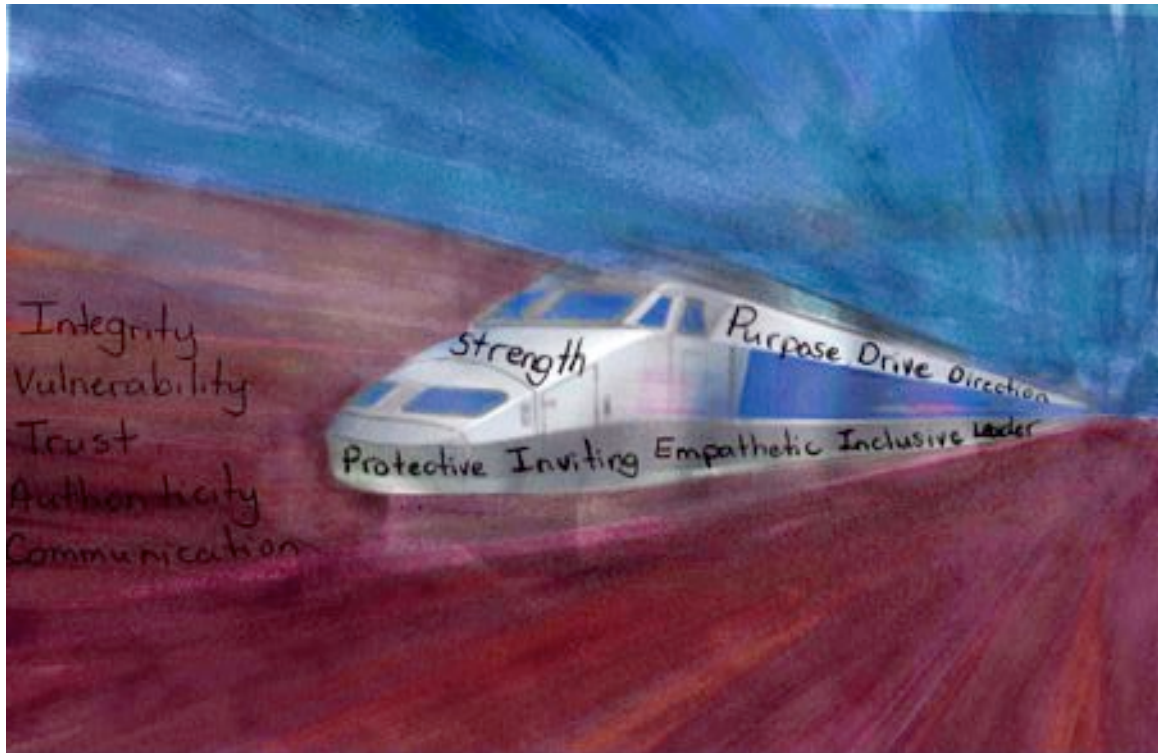
*Even my reluctance to write in first person [in *The Wall*] is my attempt to distance myself from the pain, a symbol of that façade, the smooth, strong exterior I present to the world. I have a few more poems that talk about the anger I felt towards my abuser. The force of the anger shocks me. But what really gripped me was the strength of the wall imagery protecting that shocking pain, the raw inner story. The strength that was required all those years to protect that story is incredible. (personal correspondence, March 14, 2011)*

Like Ella, a survivor whose story is included in *The Courage to Heal*,

I am not the same young survivor I was then. When I read about her terror, anguish, shame and pain, I can barely remember them. When I am reminded of her desperation and her despair, her feelings of alienation and isolation, her certainty that she was damaged beyond repair, I feel compassion for her, but I am not that same wounded woman anymore. (Davis & Bass, 2008 p. xxi)

Although I no longer felt raw emotion was hidden beneath the surface, as I started this project I was aware of having a façade on the outside and a protected inner self. On the next page is my bullet train self-concept dating from about midway through my M.Ed. program when my professor, Jackie Delong challenged me to come up with a metaphor for my project. My mixed media paintings (Photograph 10 and 11) represent a progression from *The Wall*. As a direct result of the first phase of my action-reflection cycle, the focus is no longer on just the protection of the inner self. Instead it is a fuller, more balanced picture of my strengths and the strength of my coping mechanisms. It shows I am headed in the right direction without downplaying how far I have to go and the barriers in my way.

## The Bullet Train



*Photograph 11. The Bullet Train*

Griffin (2011)

Mixed Media (water colour and found image, URL:

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/transport/engines-equipment/train5.htm>)

All that is visible is my exterior, my façade. On this sleek, shiny, exterior I proudly celebrate my labels: Strength, Purpose, Drive, Direction, Protective, Inviting, Empathetic, Inclusive and Leader. My goals are in front of me at this point and I am racing at top speed towards Integrity, Vulnerability, Trust, Authenticity and Communication. Despite the sure knowledge that I am on the right track and headed in the right direction, my goals are not as clear as my strengths; they are somewhat obscured by the threatening background of potential conflict and emotion. I doubt my ability to attain my goals. Behind me, attached to my engine are countless cars stretching into the distance. In the cars I carry all the things I feel I ‘should’ do and my guilt at not doing them. Protected within the engine room, hidden from view behind a closed door is my

“innermost guarded and torn self” (Griffin, personal journal, Jan 24, 2011, p. 18). I have entitled my artistic representation of this inner self, *Broken Trust* (Photograph 12).



*Photograph 12. Broken Trust*  
Griffin (2011)  
Mixed Media (water colour and ink on construction paper)

My soul is vibrant, brightly coloured and textured pieces of paper. Its beauty and vitality dominate the image. Front and center is the broken trust that will never heal. Circling around this fissure is the resulting cycle of negative thoughts causing me to be self-critical, insecure, unworthy, doubtful, fearful and silent. Hiding in the background are my tendency to be secretive and my fear of appearing vulnerable.

### **My Bullet Train and Broken Trust Summary**

- I recognize and celebrate my strengths, the coping mechanisms that allowed me to thrive.
- I recognize and name the inner conflict.
- I accept conflict as part of myself.
- I recognize the full significance of the thick walls of the train, of the speed designed for flight, the inner shame and guilt I carry.

- I recognize what is inside being protected is the broken trust, the negative thought patterns and the intrinsic beliefs perpetuated by my silence.

### **Self Love: Video Evidence of Living My Values More Fully**

I present this video (video clip 2, p. 104) as evidence of me living my value of Love more fully. I chose footage from conversations that revealed changes over time in my body language, my gestures, and my commitment to what I was saying and how others responded to me.

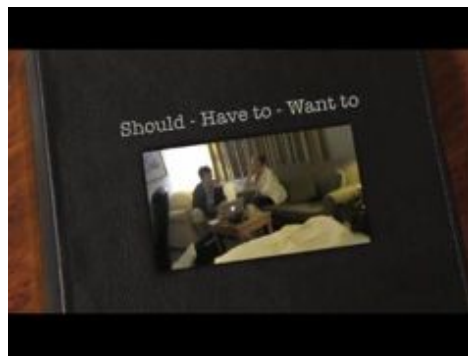
In order to fully explain the evidence I have used three techniques. Firstly, I have narrated the clips I chose using video of me explaining my plan for this video to Jackie the day before I finished editing. Secondly, embedded in the video are my reflections in the form of subtitles. These subtitles represent what I learned through the process of editing, watching myself and reflecting on myself in action. I have used my own language to explain the subtext implied and the significance of what I choose to include – I consider these to be evidence of my *energy-flowing values* (Whitehead, 2002). I also make note of validation I received from others overtly in speech or tacitly in the form of *empathetic resonance* (DeLong & Whitehead, 2011).

At the end of the videos are the responses of my validation group to the video. This is yet another layer of reflection that I included to demonstrate the cyclical and never-ending process of self-study. What follows in the body of my text is the transcript of the video. To improve the readability I have inserted titles in a different font (courier) whenever there is a clip change in order to identify individuals involved, other than me, and when the discussion took place. Titles that already appear in the video have been incorporated into the transcript titles.



Subtitles with my reflections or explanations of what is not visible are inserted in brackets within the text, e.g., laughter. I have modified, changed the position of, or omitted subtitles in the text to reflect my meaning and promote readability as necessary due to the nature of the different medium. These comments, my interpretation of the data, are evidence that support my claims to know I am living my values more fully.

You may choose which to interact with first – the script or the video. I end with a summary of the evidence.



*Video Clip 2. Should – Have To – Want To*

Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDCkj-sYo0g>

### **Transcript of Video: “Should – Have To – Want To”**

Meeting with Professor Jackie Delong, July 14, 2011.

Narration: My first video is a self-love video. So what I am trying to show in this video is that in my first reflection I am showing the fact that I doubted myself. I doubted the fact that I should value myself; I should love myself by making the time for the exercise. And I doubted that even if I valued it (my gestures reveal my felt living contradiction), that I could go ahead with, follow through with a plan to do this. I felt that I should do it. And I’ve got videotape footage of Liz questioning my use of the word should.

Validation group meeting March 24, 2011.

Liz: Then the use of the word *should*. I don't, I just personally don't like that word. But that's maybe my personal bias. It's a restrictive, inhibitive kind of language. Like 'normal' and 'abnormal'. (You can see and hear Liz's discomfort with the word *should*.) (My smile and mini nods are respectful but inauthentic – I don't get it – YET!)

Narration: I've reflected on that and said, "That word *should* represents my guilt and my not trusting in myself and my feeling that I am unworthy of having the things that are of value to me." Right? So here's what I've got and how I want to present this.

Video journal January 10, 2011. (I describe the values I feel in exercise.)

Cathy: So I went for this walk to night and the moon was out, ever so slightly in the fog, in the night. And it was quiet and the snow was soft. (eyes closed recapturing the feeling) It felt like walking through a cloud. And I had the two dogs with me, my parents' dog and mine. And they were happily doing their own thing and it just felt amazing (eyes closed again) walking through, having this wonderful sense of challenge. (I rhythmically rock, recapturing the feeling) I could feel my heart rate coming up, I could feel. You know, the different muscles and I just played with the sensation of different parts of my body while I was walking. I have felt that same kind of... flow (eyebrows raised in happy surprise, recognition of flow) – that's really what I would call it – of enjoying my workouts, of enjoying physical activity. And the majority of ones that come to mind are outside and I think that for me that connection between exercise and nature is very strong.

When I lived in Ottawa, and when I didn't get a supply teaching job, I would go out in the winter and cross country ski (big smile). And I'd often be the first one on these beautifully groomed trails that would just – it had snowed the night before and it was just pure and mine were the first pole marks going along and it was just smooth and I would get going at this pace that was challenging for me (emphasis on first and pure communicate my awe). And yet it felt so wonderful and just the feeling afterward of this, you know, tired calm over your whole body, it was just amazing. But even more, even better than that was just the drive, (rhythmic rocking and smile recapture my feeling of flow) pushing me forward and just feeling like I could go and go and go and yet it was challenging and it was wonderful.

I have all these experiences of being outside and pushing myself and physically feeling that flow, that right level of challenge when I was pushing myself and yet I could keep it going (forceful words indicate energy-flowing value of this experience, it makes me happy). And, you know, there must be some endorphin rush and all that sort of thing going on but just an amazingly strong and free feeling. And, yet, why does it take so much in order to make sure I get that time? (Subtext: Why don't I live according to my values more often?) I mean I know I have young kids and a husband and other obligations, but really, right now I can take that time. I can take in the morning and the evening. I have this great excuse in a dog. (Subtext: Why don't I live according to this value more often?) And she loves it and I love being with her out there. And, you know why not? Why not just keep this going? And usually after I've done that I

just feel so good and I have a better day teaching the next day and it just feeds into itself. So, I'm hoping that this is going to stick and that I'm going to enjoy it. (Self doubt! I know I should but am not sure I can.) I'm - we're certainly, this winter, spending time investing in our children enjoying some of the activities we like – like cross country skiing and teaching them how to do that. And hopefully, that will be something eventually that they get up to the – they're four and five – they get up to the skill level that we can have those experiences together.

(Doubtful look)

Meeting with Professor Jackie DeLong, July 14, 2011.

Narration: That's my should section and I could even put a title there, you know like *Should* as my title clip. The second clip would be *Have to*. And that was my decision to... that I have to do this and my recognition that I would have to make time for this in my practice.

Validation group March 25, 2011. Topic: fitness, journaling and conflict management as my three-prong wellness approach.

Megan: People were saying, you know, are you taking on too much. But I think that – you couldn't have gotten rid of those because that's really key to the statement that you just made about, "If I don't live that way I can't teach that way." If I don't change these things in my life, I'm not going to be able to change them in my teaching. (Validation that I have to follow the whole wellness approach– affirming nods that the group agrees.)

Cathy: And the change I may make is not that I'm not going to do the – like that fitness has been really important to me this year. (My emphasis in words

and body language affirms that I NEED to or have to do the fitness component)  
 And it's- it's – I need to do that for my own health. I just might not write very much about it. I may take that three pages and put a paragraph in saying, “This is very important but not the focus of my study.” (group nods and a chorus of yeahs validate my claim)

Liz: Exactly

Megan: I think that's OK, yeah!

Cathy: (My body language energetically emphasizes my words) Because I think if I wanted somebody that's a survivor or whatever to read this, I want them to know that you can't just focus on one thing, it needs to be...

Liz holistic (Liz demonstrates her understanding by providing me with the word)

Cathy... a holistic approach. Or else it will be more difficult. (group affirmation in nods and Liz and elaboration in next speech = empathetic resonance with my message)

Liz: Yeah, because you can just replace one obsession with another too, right? It may not be a healthy balance at all.

Megan: (Megan emphasizes the importance of a wellness approach through a non-example). Yes, it would have been a shame if you had actually dived into the personal trainer, exercising, you know, long distance – and it became about the running and not the journey of getting to know yourself (Megan mimics the extreme physical focus of a runner). Whereas, when you're just walking your dog (she mimics a mindful release of tension – affirming nods from

group), and just thinking about what's happening in your life, its all sort of connected.

Cathy: And that's - it's been that quiet time to reflect that been like – (I also gesture to communicate the calming effect)

Liz: I thought that was key when you said that, you know, that's the time.. And you know that hasn't gone by the wayside has it?

Cathy: No

Liz: No matter how busy you get or how tired...

Cathy: I do that. And it's good to have a living –

Shannon: ...to get you up out of bed.

Cathy: Dog that has to go the bathroom (general laughter). She'll bark if I don't get up. (Subtext: Dulcie the dog is a physical symbol of my have to. With laughter, the group shows empathetic resonance with this statement)

Meeting with Professor Jackie Delong, July 14, 2011.

Narration: And then the last section would be the *Want to*. And that would be clips of me – I've talked to two people about my wall. And I'll take a clip from there where I'm saying how I feel now. (The wall is a chart or visual representation of my values based on the work of Campbell 2011).

Critical friend discussion, Carolynn, July 12, 2011

I feel like I've gotten to this point. Like to get there I had to use have to. 'Cause I said, "I've had this awful year, I have to get in better shape so I can be more resilient. I have to start doing more of this stuff because I'll be more

resilient. Right? But now I'm to the point where I want to. (Confident, energetic delivery).

I share with Jackie a narrative as evidence of me living my value of Love (self-love)

Narration: There are a couple of examples. One of them I'm explaining that I had gone to the pool. This is just on Monday I think. I'd gone to the pool, gotten all the way there – it's only a seven or ten minute drive but realized I had forgotten my swimsuit. (Jackie recognizes and reacts with laughter to the frustrating situation. Encouraged, I enact my frustration, "Arrgh!", fists clenched). So I go all the way back, and I realized at that moment that if this had been a year ago I would have used that as an excuse. (I use pauses and slow down to emphasize the importance of my revelation).

Jackie: Excuse (same time) (Jackie predicts and affirms my word choice as my meaning resonates with her).

Cathy: not to go. And I recognized that immediately and thought, "I want to go swimming." So I went back, enjoyed the trip, got my swimsuit, went back again and I went swimming goddamn it! (My gestures, word choice and forcefulness demonstrate my defiance of 'should' and embodied determination to live my values. Jackie laughs.) Its like, you know... because I just felt like I wanted to have that feeling. It's really a meditative feeling for me to exercise and I have that mindfulness when I'm doing exercise like that that's rhythmic. It's just natural. (Subtext: What feels natural is that I am living my values. Jackie smiles!)

Validation group after watching this video -July 15,  
2011

Liz: I'm going to invite Megan over and we're going to watch it together.

Cathy: Ok, I'm going to videotape it so I'll have your reactions.

(After the video)

Cathy: From your reactions were there any parts that didn't resonate with you? Where my little things [subtitles] weren't accurate in your view. Or do you think what I was seeing - you basically thought you could see what I was seeing?

Liz: (nodding) yup

Megan: It felt very authentic.

Cathy: Good. That's the word I'm looking for.

Megan: Yeah, I was just wondering if care was one of the [my values] because something I noticed was that you, um, you're working towards believing that you deserve to do these things for yourself. That you have the right to do that. And then you're making comments that pretty soon your kids will be old enough that you can do it with them. Your job makes you do it. It seems like your care for others right now is the bridge between you allowing yourself to feel like you deserve this just for yourself, right? It's that first step to getting to that next step. (Megan offers insight into how I made the transition into self-love by using my care of others).

Cathy: I've been using my love or my desire to improve the spiritual development of others in order to bring myself along too, yeah, so... (I translate Megan's words into my own using the definition of love).

Megan: In order to allow yourself to go through that process.



Cathy: Yeah, yeah.

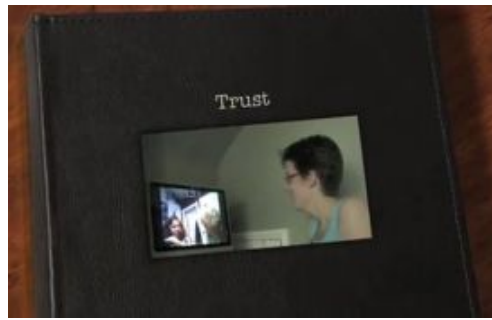
### **Summary: “Should – Have to – Want to” Video**

This video offers evidence that I live my value of Love more fully. In the video this energy-flowing value is seen again and again when I talk about how maintaining a fitness routine, which then became mindfulness time, affects me. I unconsciously enact the flow I feel and I talk passionately about its importance to me. Others react with empathetic resonance to my authentic communication. Over time, my doubts about whether I can or should take action to live this value are questioned, I practice living and communicating this value until, at the end I am wholeheartedly living the value. Megan made an interesting observation that I used care, or love of others as a way to validate my care of self. This is something to keep in mind when considering the third video about my educational influence.

### **Trust Video: Video Evidence of Living My Values More Fully**

I present this video (video clip 3) as evidence of me living my value of Trust more fully. Again, I chose footage from conversations that revealed changes over time in my body language, my gestures, and my commitment to what I was saying and how others responded to me. The major difference in this video is the focus on the importance of my validation group for this process.

A Skype discussion with my validation group acts as the narration for this piece at times. Otherwise I have inserted an explanation of why I chose the next section. Again, clips titles are in a different font (courier) as an indicator of a change in context.



*Video Clip 3. Living My Value of Trust*

Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekxv3KFLKYs>

**Transcript of Video: Living My Value of Trust**

Validation group, July 15, 2011.

Megan: Have you outlined like three values? Like you know Liz and I have...

Cathy: Yeah

Megan: What were the three values that you chose?

Cathy: One was Love and that was my Love video. I'm getting ready to do the Trust video.

Megan: Trust?

Cathy: I'm using the definition that trust has to do the assured reliance on the character or the values of somebody. So basically it had to do more with myself than anyone else. So... I first started saying, OK if I were thinking about the train there's the tuning the engine which is sort of that fitness thing, right? And then there's the second thing the move from the bullet train to the spirit train in terms of finding the trust in my own values? And that involves my trust in you guys. Because that community was necessary for me to get there. (Affirming nods from group throughout)

First validation group March 25, 2011. Discussing the set up of the video camera for our first ever validation meeting...

Cathy: I'm not too concerned. At least we can get...

Liz: ...our voices... Although...

(Cathy and Liz communicate through nods and gestures while the rest of the group looks on in puzzlement. This reflects the loving and trusting relationship we have built up already through sharing our writing. This was the first time I had shared my writing with the other two)

Liz: They... so... (laughter all around) We've been sharing a lot... we can finish each others' sentences. (inaudible recognition of a whole new level of communication and loud, life affirming laughter)

Liz: I was going to say, although from what we've seen from the use of video that we can capture...

Megan: Life affirming energy.

Liz: Exactly.

Cathy: Facial expressions

Liz: Energy flowing values

The evolution of trust as one of my values.

Liz acts as a mirror, holding me accountable to what I say. She reflects what I say and what I cannot hear so that I can self-monitor.

Liz: Trust yourself. Trust your own instincts.

Cathy: (my body language is protective, arms crossed, I am gripping my forearms tightly) Yeah, I mean I do. I very much trust (name omitted). You know. It's just...

Liz: (shaking head and leaning towards me) No, trust you!

Cathy: (nervous laughter and uneasy) OK, trust me. (unconvincing, playing it up)

Liz: If it's right then do it. If it's not then don't. It's really that simple (laughing lovingly).

Megan holds me accountable by encouraging me and helping me to consider and define my words.

Megan asks: What do you mean by control?

Megan: When I first heard 'taking control over your own healing' I wrote down...

Cathy: yes

Megan: ... is maintaining control really maintaining a façade or wall in order to protect ourselves?

Cathy: I think you really hit the nail in the head in that yes, the control is... yeah... you need more control... (I struggle and she helps me)

Megan: But you want to be comfortable with the vulnerability, I think? (she looks for agreement)

Cathy: (gives assent)

Megan: So...

Cathy: (subtext: To bring down the wall there has to be trust) And this has been a process of maybe trying to remove my control, my façade, my wall, so that in a way I have more control because I can be more authentic...

Megan: You can embrace the vulnerability.

Cathy: ... and embrace the vulnerability. It's a more wholehearted sense of control... yeah... just by being authentic.

Liz articulates her trust in my embodied knowledge. She encourages me to trust it as well.

Liz: (Subtext: Trust in yourself. Trust your embodied knowledge). You know like Jackie tells us all the time, "You have the knowledge and the wisdom and the... you know you are looking for it elsewhere and I think it is in you. I think it is in you and sometimes I am hearing that maybe there's a tendency to be looking for other people to give you the answers. I know we need support and, you know, affirmation and validation or critical feedback but...

Cathy: (Respectful listening and nodding show that this is a 'spectator truth'. I don't feel it yet, I do not engage or show life-affirming energy in resonance with her passion.)

The group hears patterns and connections in my words. They help me define and focus on three main values including TRUST!

Validation group meeting, July 2, 2011

Cathy: And I can kind of make decisions sensibly about who I trust to talk to and who I don't. And the last part of it is that I'm trusting in my values. I'm more trusting of my values and my own instincts now. Like there's this friend I

was intending to talk to and to use her as a reader and that sort of thing but I realized, no, there is something holding me back. And I've now been able to reflect on why, and it's like I trust that now (I make an inviting gesture which represents the willingness to allow the feeling of conflict to enter so I can figure it out) and I'm not just walking away from the feeling (STOP gesture to represent the old habit of avoiding inner conflict) I understand where it is coming from now.

Liz: Cathy, I don't know if you know, but you said the word trust about fifty times.

(The group engages in energetic discussion and refinement of my values. Throughout there are affirming interjections)

Shannon: Mhmm, but you didn't have it in your list. I wrote it down with a question mark. Did I miss something?

Megan: The only thing I am thinking is that when she said vulnerability, maybe.

Liz: Yeah, that would partly be trust. And so are some other things but...

Megan: Trust seems to show up in all of the three themes I have for her... integrity and trusting my instincts, trust for yourself. But then trust also came up when you talked about honesty, fairness and vulnerability – trusting others. But trust also came up in the love and harmony because you don't have harmony and love without trust. You can't build on other peoples' ideas and nurture other peoples' growth without trust. So it's almost as though trust is the big one. It

seems to be... and as far as relationships and some of the other things that you've gone through in your life, it all comes down to trust.

Cathy & Liz: It makes a lot of sense.

Cathy: It does, it does. And I... (I am taking this all in as a spectator. There isn't wholehearted resonance and embracing of the idea because I am still processing the information. I appear uncertain, unconvinced.) I'll have to go and draw a new wall (I respond to letting go of an old mindset with humour. Empathetic resonance in laughter)

Liz: No, you just have to move it, or put another arrow up.

Cathy: Yeah... yeah... (I continue to process the change and stare into space, visualizing). That makes a lot of sense.

Liz: (Liz, sensing my discomfort) I don't know, it just seems...

Cathy: (I respond to Liz's retreat from the change with a firm acknowledgement that she is right) No, it keeps coming up.

Liz: yeah. (Long pause... I'm still staring into space). Like, you didn't even list it.

Shannon: I know (emphatically).

Cathy: I know, it's one of those things that's... implicitly implied.

Liz (overlapping) But I know what you mean about them overlapping, all of them. But maybe by going back and making that explicit for a while it will reveal some information or insights or whatever. (Subtext: Live with the value and see if it resonates)

Cathy: Basically, having that trust in community, hearing my voice repeated to me was really huge in getting that rust in myself because then it was almost like... there was one spot I would like to use of you Megan and you said something and my reaction was like getting punched in the gut, like not in a bad way but it was like (I mimic the feeling) a good, "Oh my god!" because for the first time I heard what I was feeling inside said by somebody I really respected and it was like I could trust what was inside because you said it.

Cathy: You start to believe that that façade is the only good part of you and that what is inside is just so chaotic and emotional and whatever and nobody wants that part and people don't want to hear about those things. And so its not valued.

Liz: And quite often that's true... and that's the reality.

Cathy: Yeah.

Megan: And what you're saying right now, that last paragraph. I would love to hear that in here, next to your metaphor about the train. Because the most poignant thing for me in this was that transition you made from having the train as a shield to the train as a driving force. You know, because when it was your shield, it was because you thought everything inside was worthless. But now that it's internal, you've just taken everything that you know is strong about yourself, that got you through this, and you've realized that that actually is the core that is very worthwhile.



Cathy: (I am very emotional hearing this. I share a loving and knowing look with Liz, acknowledging the power of Megan's words, her ability to synthesize information and emotions so artistically, passionately and lovingly)

Megan: So, you know, I think that would be a really nice...

Cathy: (I put up a hand to stop her, the other had over my heart to convey the depth of what I feel) You see, just hearing you say that back to me is very emotional.

Liz: That is the most powerful piece though. I shared a similar comment with you before.

Megan: Me sitting here with a mom who is a counsellor, I read that and I thought, "I have to go home and tell my mom about that part. She's going to love that quote. It's going to become one of the quotes that becomes part of our life now. Just like that carrying it gently. That's one of those moments that will just stick with me. So I like that.

Cathy: Thank you.

Megan: And I think that is a huge thing for people who do put up a façade. Is recognizing that that façade could be a driving force instead of a pulling force.

Cathy: (This is very strong validation that my story resonates with others. "Here is an example of an experience which encouraged me to

Megan: The more we all share our vulnerabilities the more we see the connection we have because of them and instead of becoming barriers, they

become something that connects us all. And it just makes us a much more empathetic and enriched group of people to sort of share with.

Cathy: It's amazing, when you were reading [my paper], and you handed me your notebook, somebody who had reflected on your work and it was all about inner and outer selves and it was like, this person could have been writing to me.

Liz: And that's why I shared it, right? The person was responding to me but they could have been responding to Cathy.

Megan: And the exact same thing happened in yours. I was reading a response, an email that was responding to you about something and thinking, you now, this could totally connect to something I am thinking about with my stuff right now too.

Liz: So that refers back to that quote about the universality of story, right. And that's why we need to tell our story. It's exciting.

Cathy: It is exciting. And its like a steam rolling effect with all of us. The more we share, the more confident we feel in stepping out to share more. It is very comforting.

(The energy in the room is charged and visible when we talk. Jackie sits back in this clip, obvious very pleased with the conversation).

Liz: From my perspective, watching you, you know, go through this journey. That, you know, when we shared books and quotes and things and it was so exciting and we saw that we were on similar journeys and everything else. But for me, anyway, books were great, but it was when I heard my voice in your story and when I saw myself in your struggle to explain your values. And then we

started videotaping and we look at those video tapes and then when I watched myself going through that process, all of a sudden Branson and Parker Palmer and John Miller and all those guys... and it's like yeah, that was good but – this – is – real! (I show empathetic resonance throughout her speech and then go on to read her the quote I found about spectator truth and living truth).

### **Summary: Trust Video**

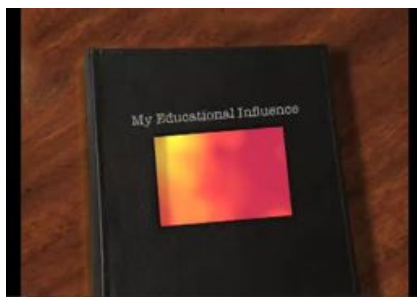
This video offers evidence that I live my value of Trust more fully. The video shows my progression from denial or unawareness of trust as an issue to my recognition of it as being at the heart of the values I had identified. I chose clips that reveal the crucial role my validation group played in helping me to reflect, in making me aware of what I was communicating unconsciously and, most importantly, by validating the worth of my inner self. The power of this universality of story, the recognition of one's own voice in the stories of others and the empathetic resonance or validation we were able to give each other is echoed by the whole group with conviction and excitement in the last section of the video. Jackie, our fearless and loving mentor and excellent listener who can be seen grinning during this discussion, led us through the development of our validation group, a group that will not dissolve after the end of the course. We are all grateful for this gift she has given us.

### **My Educational Influence: Video Evidence**

I present this video (video clip 4) as evidence of my educational influence. This video differs from the other two in that all of the footage was taken at the end of my project, in the last few weeks of the school year or in the first section of the summer holidays. I did not conduct formal interviews with my teaching colleagues (critical

friends) or ask the same questions of each because the way we had interacted throughout the year was different. In all of the videotaped discussions, however, I asked whether they saw evidence of me living my values. I also asked for evidence of my educational influence.

The format for this video uses the same fonts as the previous one. I have inserted an explanation to help the reader understand the context. Again clips titles are in a different font (courier) to indicate changes in context.



*Video Clip4. My Educational Influence*

Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRwtGLod1Fw>

### **Transcript of Video: My Educational Influence**

Discussions with lifelong friend and teaching colleague, Nicole. Do I have an educational influence on you? June 30, 2011.

Nicole: My entire life! (energetic and firm answer) 'Cause yes!

Cathy: (I see signs of my own nervousness. Nervous laughter. I am intently and seriously focused on Nicole but fiddling with my pen. I really value Nicole as a friend, parent and teacher. Her enthusiastic validation of my loving influence means a lot to me)

Nicole: Again, you have a nice way of influencing people without undue pressure or just exposing people to new ideas. I come into your room and I think,

“Damn! I’ve got to try that. Damn it she doing something even better again!”

But in a good way. (Nicole speaks very gently and authentically. But I am still nervous because we are so close and this is a new way of communicating for me.) I’ve seen other some other people in the building come in and say, “Wow. I never thought of that.” Its never, “you need to”, it was just sort of gently infusing these new ideas and providing some inspiration maybe.

Is there evidence of my values in my teaching? Have I connected deeply with my students? Critical Friend and former principal, Carolynn, July 12, 2011

Cathy: So there’s this teacher next door to me who has this wonderful rapport with his students and that was what I was feeling a lack of last year. I was reacting, I didn’t build a good culture in my classroom. So I was looking at him and thinking, “How does he do that?” Like, I can’t do what he does. (Subtext: I need to live according to my own values to create an authentic connection with students). He’s totally different. He’s got this really deep voice and he’s got this cuddly bear but with an authority and that’s not me. So I found myself looking to him but I thought, no I can’t... yeah, I can look to him and celebrate what he’s doing but that’s not how I’m going to get there.

Critical, cuddly bear friend Brad, June 30, 2011.

Cathy: Last year I felt I didn’t connect very well with my students. I had quite a few that would push my buttons every day. (Brad laughs in empathetic resonance. I trust Brad will understand because we have swapped ‘stories of ruin’ (MacLure, 1996)

Brad: Yeah, I know what that means. (laughing)

Cathy: There were enough of them that it was defeating.

Brad: Yes, I know. (His empathetic response encourages me to elaborate)

Cathy: You could keep them going and on to something for two weeks and then it would fall apart. So what I was looking for was feedback on how you felt I connected with my students this year. If you saw examples of, you know, us connecting. (I'm not looking at Brad because I know what I am about to say will be emotional for both of us. I feel vulnerable opening the topic but I trust him enough to go ahead). And the reason why I think I really want to ask you this is because I see that is one of your huge strengths, your connection to your students. You allow your students to see...

Brad: Don't make me cry! (big laugh)

Cathy: I know, but even when you do that in the assembly and you allow them to see that you are emotionally engaged with them, you do that all the time. And I've said this before, but you really make them feel like you're there for them and it's obvious that they're there for you. Because, you know, that comment, 'I've got your back' [a student comment to Brad]. (I think it is important to communicate to Brad the educational influence he has on me and others. I want him to know I value him. Opening up to Brad and asking for his feedback displays my willingness to be vulnerable in supporting another and myself = love)

Cathy: So you're someone I admire you for that so I'm hoping, you know, I felt I connected to my students but if you can point to any example that prove it to me.

Brad: Well part about it is, your student this year were my students last year. And as far as I'm concerned we had that connection. One thing that tells me that that connection got moved to you is that they rarely came to see me. Just that by itself tells me that you've got them. If they were... (The ice broken, our rapport is easier now, trusting)

Cathy: If they're not happy with their next teacher they come back.

Brad: They come back and I've had that happen... I think just the look of excitement on their face. The stuff that they are doing in here. It's like they're in their own little element and that's pretty cool (validation of student engagement). They're like this group that moves around together and its cool to watch that (Brad physically demonstrates the cohesion, or bond in my class). Like the stuff you are doing with the stepping-stones. And, (blocked name of student) showed me his last night on the way out. It was incredible. He was so happy. (Brad displays empathetic resonance with the joy and pride of my students in their work). And I see that all the... because they're always engaged in whatever they're doing. The Rafa Bafa thing (a role playing lesson I invited Brad's class to join) That was cool. That was great for me because - YES! It was awesome, I loved it! (Brad enthusiastically demonstrates his own value of and engagement in the activity). And the kids really got something out of it too. It doesn't matter how you have them but you do. (Sub text: you are living according to your own values. I think these clips show the quiet, warm and authentic way Brad makes people feel comfortable and connected. He is able to be vulnerable and strong at

the same time. Watching this for the umpteenth time I have finally put my finger on what drew me to him as a model of positive connection.)

Critical Friend Lisa, June 20, 2011.

Lisa: That should help you to realize you have had a positive impact on him because he's wanted, he's asked leadership to put you in a grade partnership with you still. (Validation of the educational influences Brad and I have on each other – and plan to continue).

Critical Friend Brad, June 30, 2011.

Brad: Knowing you had expressed an interest in the 6/7, I said, "Yes, I get to teach with Cathy again." (Another emotionally vulnerable moment.)

Meeting with Jackie Delong Discussing the Planning of this Video. July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Cathy: I was looking for evidence of my educational influence in my teaching. So I took a video clip that showed some things that I wanted to talk about with my validation group. (I use emphasis and gestures to express my frustration with the process of trying to use the video). But the actual act of sharing it, this narrow slice of my classroom, which goes all the way around here, a very narrow slice you see in the video. And without the context of who the kids are, what the building is like, even the daily routines. It was so difficult. And I found, so emotionally upsetting to show to my validation group because I didn't have the words to explain all that was going on (Jackie nods her recognition of my emotional reaction). So I switched from doing that to having a staff member who is a contact teacher (has time allotted to work with staff on this kind of project) come into my classroom during the tea ceremony that we did and see the



class from start to finish. And then we both had time afterward so we went and debriefed about it. (Evidence of trust in myself that I recognized the feeling of being too vulnerable and I found a way that felt safer and more comfortable.)

Critical friend Melissa, debrief after tea party June 2, 2011.

Melissa: I found it interesting watching the three students; you probably know how they are. How they were noisy and boisterous and couldn't get settled at the beginning. Where I would be very tempted, because I don't know them, and just coming in the class. Where I would be very tempted to be on them at the very beginning to say settle down, we're going to do this now. You get them go and they found their space on their own. The trust that they are going to settle in a few minutes, that kind of thing. (Evidence of trust in my students).

Melissa: Who was it that fell on the way up to the? (name blocked). Just checking whether she was OK and... just caring about them, it's just so nice. (Melissa shows empathetic resonance for my caring of students.)

Melissa: I love it when teachers admit that they don't know the answer and can anybody help me with that? I do that all the time. I say I'm not perfect and I don't know everything. I say no teacher, no adult knows everything. (Evidence of my trust in students – my ability to display my own vulnerability).

Melissa: When I asked them what it was all about and why you do this they said, they all said, "It's a nice break. It's a distraction. It's soothing. Its calming. Its relaxing." Somebody said, "It helps us focus when we get back to the regular class."

Cathy: That's good, OK. (Student voice validates my intent to offer a time to relax, savour new tastes and enjoy literature)

Melissa: So I think the whole purpose of it is working. They feel really good about it. As I'm watching I'm thinking, "Hmmm... I could do this. (Evidence of my educational influence – and Shanda's – the woman who introduced me to the tea idea).

Cathy: Yeah

Melissa: I could build a tea break into my read aloud as well, just instead of having the... yeah. Giving them the new experience so they can have the teas and the different flavours. I like the introduction you did at the beginning telling them what it is and what it is for. (Melissa is enthusiastic about the benefits and the purpose of the activity. She recognizes energy-flowing value of love in the activity – caring for students, making them feel welcome, exposing them to new tastes, savoring life).

After the debrief we discussed another learning idea ... an invitational learning project and fair...

Cathy: And then like if there are a bunch of us doing it, we can have an invitational learning fair at the end where they are going to present what they've learned or...

Melissa: Yes! I like that. I'm going to have to make notes. (This new idea sparks Melissa's imagination and enthusiasm).

Critical Friend Brad, June 30, 2011

Cathy: (Subtext – the best part about meeting with Melissa was the dynamic sharing of ideas we had afterward.) Yeah, she gave me feed back on was I, like this was why I was doing the tea party, did you see that? She said, “Yup, this is the evidence I saw” and that’s all good because I need to put that in my paper. But then our conversation went on to, “Oh, I’d like to try this” and invitational education and dadedadeda... It was just like, we found common ground because we decided to do this. And its...

Brad: I want to try the invitational stuff next year. It’ll be fun.

Critical Friend, Nicole. Do you see evidence of me handling conflict better in the classroom? June 30, 2011

Nicole: You always seem to have an infinite amount of patience for those kids. I’ve always thought that you did. (Evidence of the difference in how I perceive myself and how others do – self criticism). And I’ve always thought, “I wish I could react like that instead of the instant – ARRGGH – anger at them.” They’re nice kids but you had some busy kids who pushed people’s buttons this year. And you managed them quite well and in the school at large they seemed much more managed had they had been in previous years. (Validation of my belief that I did a better job of not letting my buttons get pushed).

Nicole: (Feedback about a student who tried to push my buttons). He’s an oppositional kind of guy to begin with and I have noticed big changes in him, him especially this year. He’s not as snarky and oppositional with others and I think it is because you have such a nice way of managing him and not getting into

that (fists together) head to head. You know, because, you know, its just not a kids its going to work with. (Evidence of my educational influence - Love)

Cathy: And that's been a real struggle. I have found myself head to head with him and I pull back and -No, ... (modeling deep calming breaths and letting the anger wash away)

Nicole: But we're human, right and we do rise to the bait from time to time and...

Cathy: But his comment that his mom wrote on that report card feedback, was you know just proved to me like... she wrote the biggest change has been that he's been wanting to come to school. And it's like, "Oh, my god!" (The feedback I am most proud of this year).

Nicole: (Nicole's amazed, empathetic response gives me further evidence that I have forged meaningful connections) You know what, if he didn't learn a single thing and that's all he got out of this year, that's enough for a kid like that. And that's such a positive, especially heading into the intermediate years where, you know, there's so much going on.

### **Summary: My Educational Influence**

There are two conclusions that I have come to after examining the data on my educational influence. First, I do teach to my values of love and trust and these values are evident in my practice. It was very positive for me to hear that a friend I have known since kindergarten, who I have taught with at two different schools and whose son I taught, has always seen this in my practice. This knowledge allows me to put my year of crisis into context and to realize that perhaps the culminating effect of many stressors and

circumstances was more responsible for my difficulties than my inner flaws. This does not negate the importance of my journey because there will always be stressors and circumstances which bring out our worst traits (or coping mechanisms).

Second, continued efforts this year to expose my vulnerability to staff, have allowed me to build strong professional relationships with a great sense of shared purpose and energy. There is plenty of validation for this claim within the videos. The actual context of the videos themselves is proof of my willingness to be vulnerable – asking colleagues for feedback. I have pointed out the signs of my nervousness in the clips as evidence that I do feel vulnerable asking these questions of my peers. When Nicole viewed the video she wrote me the following response, which I include as further validation of my claim:

I finally got a quiet chunk of time with computer access :) to watch the videos uninterrupted! I think they are fantastic! And further evidence of your vulnerability and willingness to put yourself out there to improve your practice, and let your values show...I knew you were nervous when we were videoing, I was too. It's admirable how you pointed it out with your text. And it's interesting that even after a lifetime of friendship we are still nervous in that context! Perhaps even more, because as you noted, we are close, we know each other so well, and value each other's opinions. It makes me emotional when I think about it and put it into words... (personal correspondence, July 18, 2011)

### **Self-Concept Metaphor Transformation No. 2: The Spirit Train**

I have grown so much as a result of my M.Ed. courses and this project. The experience itself has been an act of love. I have extended myself for the purpose of

experiencing spiritual growth. As I have said, it is difficult to put the full depth of the journey into words. With the videos I allowed others to speak, my living words and actions spoke for themselves and I offered my editing skills and reflections to present and explain the patterns I perceived. I wish to conclude this chapter by presenting how I have changed in the form of my final metaphor. Final, that is for the end of this project. I fully expect that as I continue to learn, grow and change my metaphor will too. But first, I will explain the background to the final metamorphosis.

### **Background to the Metamorphosis**

On January 25, 2011, I reflected on my intention to change from a bullet train metaphor to a walking metaphor. I felt that if I could slow down and let my feelings catch-up to me I could examine them and figure out what was going on inside. Little did I know that the train metaphor could not be replaced. Here is my journal entry from that winter's day;

*I was walking this morning thinking of my two metaphors – the old speed train heading in a certain direction, confident, in control and going fast enough to leave any turmoil, confusion or pain behind. And the new me walking, gently holding a ball of fire – the emotions. Throughout the course I have come across the notion of being able to hold ambiguity or two notions at the same time. It comes up in a Rilke quote about holding questions. It comes up in Branson. It comes up in the Data book. This is one of my strengths and I feel it at an emotional level. When Liz, Karen and I were in a group I modeled the holding of this ambiguity. And for me it is a gentle thing because I realize I am cradling the unexamined contradictions in my life and that I have to do this carefully so as not*

*to be drawn into the maelstrom. I am, in this metaphor cradling my child self tenderly. And when I explain this to others I mimic this tenderness unconsciously. But what I have to do is be able to hold the contradictions without detaching myself from them, without denying the emotions, without suppressing them but I also need to get to the point of being able to hold them inside of me, to be able to acknowledge their past impact, their presence without having my present behaviour controlled by them – or affected by their denial. I have to get rid of the layer of coping mechanisms because as an adult I can cope, I can make decisions on my own. I can allow that little girl some healing time. (Griffin, personal journal, January 25, 2011, p. 22)*

A month later, on February 20, 2011, I noted that I was focusing more on my students than on myself – an indication that my inner conflict was becoming less of an issue. In the next breath I explained the importance of naming and communicating my conflict. The connection implied (and I know because I wrote it) is that by identifying and naming the conflict I can focus more of my energy outward on others. By talking about it and giving it a life outside myself I can drain its energy in me.

*This year I have set out to do more to intentionally invite my students to learn and to feel welcome in my life and in the classroom. And for the first time I feel the intensity of my gaze making a major shifting from inward to outward. I think the most important thing I may gain from this M.Ed. project is that I can calm my inner dialogue by making more of real. By talking about it out loud to real people I can stop it from circling repeatedly around my brain. At the moment I am having very intelligent conversations with myself and the inner projections of my critical*

*friends. But the conversations never have an end point because I continually replay them and try them from a new angle. (Griffin, personal journal February 20, 2011, p.21)*

A week-and-a-half after that entry, on March 2, 2011, I had an epiphany, a transformation of my metaphor into its present form. The experience happened while I was reflecting on my success in talking about my inner conflict and sharing my stories:

*While preparing to write my second paper for the data course I was thinking about how I am starting to feel more in control of my emotions for two reasons. First, I realize that it is not such a big deal to show the emotions. I lost control it in front of my M.Ed. group while presenting my topic of research and I have cried in front of people with whom I was experiencing conflict and still clearly told them how I was feeling. I didn't burst into flames on the spot. No one chastised me or ostracized me. No one belittled me. In fact, quite the opposite happened, I had people affirming what I had said or responding honestly to my concerns. Second, I am developing the ability to recognize and name how I am feeling and what has triggered it. I finally understand what my counsellor was telling me about clouds. She says that being in a mindful state is like watching your emotions pass like clouds beneath you.*

*I thought of my bullet train metaphor. With sadness I realized that it is an important symbol of myself and that I would regret losing it. Suddenly, my mental image of the train moved on its own. It sank through my heart to fuse with my backbone. Wow. So the train is central to my character. I am not going to change that. I am not going to change my basic nature. But I can learn to*



*recognize my own reactions and tendencies and understand why they are there. This is something else my counsellor said. She said that I would never be comfortable with conflict. That is part of who I am. But I can learn to be mindful through conflict and learn to deal with it more effectively. Perhaps I can learn to use my bullet train more effectively. (Griffin, personal journal, March 2, 2011, p. 22)*

I wrote to my friend Liz after reflecting on the transformation:

*A couple of things have struck me since. I realize that this strong backbone, this train metaphor has helped me cope and thrive. I have also realized that I don't need it to be my exterior anymore. It can stay inside and be my core rather than my exterior facade. I can draw upon its strength and determination; yet continue to be aware of patterns that are not so helpful. (personal correspondence, March 17, 2011)*

I present the mixed media painting of this transformation on the next page (photograph 12). Creating and analyzing the pieces of art depicting my metaphor was a dynamic process. I had a definite image of my self-concept. And yet was better able to understand and articulate changes once I could stand back and view the images. Thus, I think it imperative that the art appears on the same page as the analysis of the transformation.



*Photograph 13. The Spirit Train*

Griffin (2011)

Mixed Media (oil pastel and found image, URL: [www.extravaganzi.com/mercury](http://www.extravaganzi.com/mercury))

I am now a spirit train that travels through a medium more like water than air. I am no longer compelled to choose a narrowly focused direction of flight but feel comfortable moving forward holding ambiguity, uncertainty, and questions, willing to follow the direction dictated by my values and change direction if my values are compromised. I recognize that my vision will not always be clear but I am willing to take the time to examine and re-examine my feelings, their source and how my actions align with my values. I accept that I may not be able to examine severe sources of conflict in real time, but may need to reflect in mindful solitude or with the help of my fellow travelers in order to discover the truth. My driving force is no longer fear of discovery pushing me away from others, the fear that my inner torn self, my shame, will be discovered. “Shame cannot hold on when we name it. Shame cannot survive empathy.” (Brown, 2010b). In naming and talking about the torn self with supportive listeners, I have purified it with my own awareness, vulnerability, and integrity. What remains are my driving values pulling me towards others – Love, Trust and Authenticity. These

values are not shut away in a closet but transparently visible from the exterior. The ripples I leave in my wake resonate with others as pure tones of authenticity, markers of my educational influence.

**Summary: The Spirit Train**

- I am aware of my driving values and able to use them as living standards of judgment.
- I am able to identify, accept, hold and analyze interior conflict (although not always accurately by myself, this is a process best done with feedback to check for authenticity, not necessarily in real time – and this is OK!)
- I am able to communicate my vulnerability authentically with others (although I reserve the right to decide who and when it is safe for me).
- I am more patient, loving and open with others and myself because of these changes. I am more authentic.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

When I sat down to plan and write this chapter I found the challenge of distilling two whole years of transformative personal discoveries into a few ‘things I have learned’ daunting. I reviewed my videos and looked through examples of other peoples’ work to find potential headings. After a day of less-than-inspired results I was frustrated and I could hear Liz saying, “Trust in the process.” But what was the process? Finally, I was asking myself a productive question. (No sooner had I congratulated myself than I realized that was one of the strategies that had worked for me through the M.Ed. – dialogue.)

Being all by myself, I pretended that I was a more experienced version of myself conducting an interview. (Aha, a second process – using my willingness to extend myself for others, or myself, to move me forward). I escorted myself over to my living wall, the chart on which I had summarized my project, and concentrated on what I had done and what I knew to be true. “OK, you keep talking about these ‘living truths’ you have discovered, so what do you know to be true looking at this wall?” I asked. (Hmm, I am reviewing my embodied knowledge). That question led to the following list:

1. Acceptance leads to change
2. Vulnerability is strength
3. There is power in a journey shared
4. Transformation does not come without a struggle
5. Authenticity brings great rewards

As soon as I had this list I got very excited. I realized that these were pretty big things I had learned and I could sense the connections between them forming into a picture in my

mind. I immediately felt the desire to talk out the ideas with someone other than myself. I enlisted the help of a friend I knew would be receptive and with whom I had not yet shared my project due to our hectic schedules. I thought in this case a pair of ‘fresh ears’ would be helpful because it would force me to condense my project orally before I got to the stage of explaining my discoveries.

While I was waiting for her arrival I collected pens and chart paper and worked on creating a visual representation of my five living truths (yet another strategy). I videotaped my explanation and our discussion so I could review what we said and pay special attention to sections with evidence of energy-flowing values (this, too, was a strategy). When we were finished I made a second call to Jackie to summarize my approach to Chapter Five, check that I had the requirements straight and receive her loving approval (yes, a strategy). With a plan securely in place I was ready to write and chose to begin with a narrative (you guessed it, a strategy).

In this chapter I will present my authenticity model as a summary of what I have learned from this project and as a way I will continue to move forward authentically. Next, I will describe the inquiry that will occupy me in the upcoming year, my next steps. Finally, I will address the limitations of my study.

### **My Authenticity Model**

At the centre of my mode, illustrated in Figure 2, is the goal – authenticity. In emails I sent to my critical friends explaining my values I wrote;

*This project came about as a direct result of the most challenging teaching year of my career in which I questioned whether I should be a teacher. I felt I*

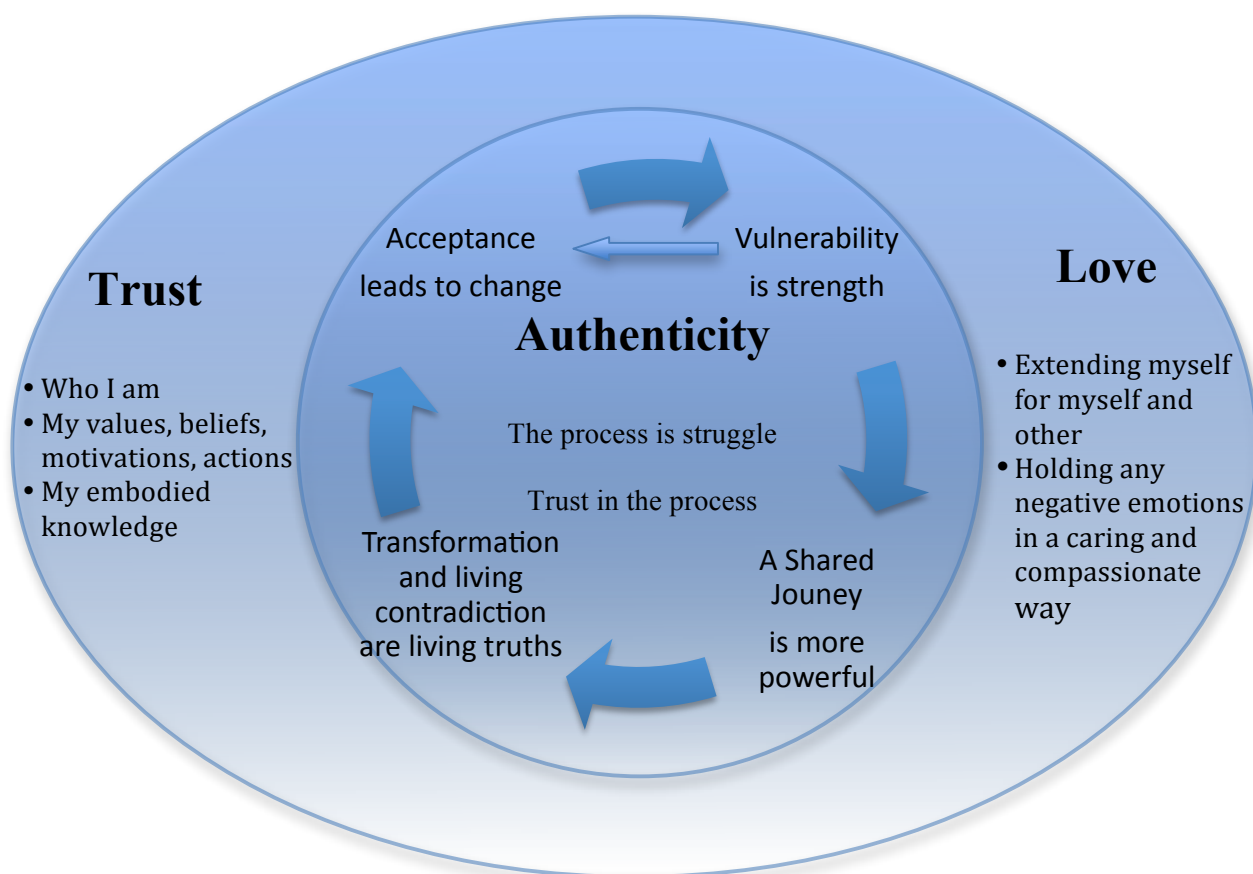


Figure 2. My Authenticity Model.

*continually acted, lived, taught in violation of my values.*

*Through my project I am attempting to live in greater adherence to my values, or to live and act with greater integrity. The end product of this will be my ability to live more whole-heartedly, or without reservation or hesitation, free of the guilt or internal conflict that comes without authenticity. (personal communication, June 26, 2011)*

I realize now that it is a struggle to live authentically and that this struggle is a process. It is a process that can be made more bearable and efficient if I use certain strategies. The first two strategies, living my values of trust and love, surround the rest of the model as the background that sets a positive tone for the struggle. They are interrelated and complement each other.

### **Trust – Know Thyself**

My first strategy is to know who I am - my values, beliefs, motivations, behavioural patterns and my embodied knowledge. I have to make informed decisions in order to live according to my values, to live authentically. A feeling of trust, a firm reliance in my values, offers me a sense of security in moving forward. I have a personal agenda and set of standards by which to judge my progress no matter the direction I am headed or how often I have to switch course.

### **Love**

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love." Rilke (n.d.)

I recognize, even in my darkest hour, that people who upset me ultimately want love, acceptance, and approval. This holds true of my students, of my own inner self, of everyone.

Jackie, my validation group and my critical friends provided me with a loving and compassionate environment, a culture of inquiry (Earl & Katz, 2006) in which to complete my research. They helped me by “facilitating, sponsoring, mentoring, and convincing me to [engage] in the data and think about it, even when it was hard work” (Fullan, as cited in Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21). They helped me to convert “tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge on an ongoing basis” (Fullan, as cited in Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21). These supportive friends brought “a high degree of positive regard, [were] forgiving, and [were] tolerant of failings” (Fullan, as cited in Earl & Katz, 2006, p.21).

With their example and guidance in the form of mindfulness scripts, I was able to offer this loving compassion to myself. Brach (2011), a psychologist and teacher of Buddhist meditation, explains the role of compassion in enveloping pain or suffering, allowing it to be recognized without becoming all-consuming:

When you face your fears with mindfulness and compassion, you begin to realize the loving and luminous awareness that, like the ocean, can hold the moving waves. This boundless presence is your true refuge—you are coming home to the vastness of your own awakened heart. (para. 34)

My second strategy, therefore, is to be mindful of my need for this loving compassion, to seek it out when I feel the need.



## Acceptance

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.

(Carl Rogers, as cited in Brach, 2003, p.24)

Acceptance flows directly from understanding, or trusting oneself and holding negative parts of that self (emotions, pain, living contradiction) in a caring and compassionate way. “Self-reflection illuminates the habitual ways of thinking that naturally restrict [my] inner freedom” (Branson, 2009, p. 52). This is the starting point of my journey to authenticity. As Rogers says, once acceptance is in place, change is possible. Brach (2003) explains the process;

By accepting absolutely everything, what I mean is that we are aware of what is happening within our body and mind in any given moment, without trying to control or judge or pull away. I do not mean that we are putting up with harmful behaviour – our own or another’s. *This is an inner process of accepting our actual, present-moment experience.* It means feeling sorrow and pain without resisting. It means feeling desire or dislike of someone or something without judging ourselves for the feeling or being driven to act upon it. (pp. 25-26)

Returning to “mindfulness not only cultivates a way of attending to body and mind, but a way of cultivating compassion” (Heaversedge, 2010), which I need to deal effectively with the emotions involved in the struggle of change. Regular practice of these techniques is my ‘rehearsal for life’ (personal conversation with Employee Assistance Program Counsellor, March 17, 2011).

## Vulnerability

To be vulnerable in this model means to be willing to extend myself and be open

to being wounded or attacked. Researching, for example, involves vulnerability because I am exposing my embodied knowledge, my beliefs and my values for comparison against the opinions and judgments of others. Not being vulnerable means being inflexible and unwilling to consider other perspectives or ideas. I equate vulnerability with the acts of beauty and courage described by Rilke above. The arrow pointing back to acceptance acknowledges that trust and acceptance of self and others allows us to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is reflection, confidence and strength rather than weakness.

### **A Shared Journey is a Powerful Journey**

When I reviewed my model with Jackie she reminded me that making one's inquiry public is a requirement of the *Living Educational Theory* methodology (Whitehead, 2009). Her reminder rankled me because I emotionally rejected the reduction of my living sense of my validation group and critical friends to a cognitive, "spectator truth" level (Burke, as cited in Whitehead, 2002, p. 1-2). Jackie, of course, has a fully living sense of what making one's inquiry public means and to her it represents the culture of inquiry I experienced with my groups. For me, making one's inquiry public makes me think of giving a presentation at a conference or being forced to stand in front of a group of professors I don't know in order to defend my project. I will try to amend this semantic issue by summarizing what I found powerful in making my inquiry public. Although the importance of a culture of inquiry has been addressed in Chapter Four and in the Love section above, I believe it bears re-examining because I would not have completed this project without my fellow travelers.

My validation group, and Jackie, listened beyond my words and questioned me when there were contradictions. They prodded me to communicate clearly and define my

terms. They gently pushed my understanding by offering me different perspectives and interpretations and prompting me to reflect in areas I had neglected. They showed me patterns and connections they perceived in my thinking. They explained what they valued in my writing so I could learn to value it too.

My critical friends helped me to see how my values were reflected in my practice. They extended themselves, put themselves in a vulnerable position on my behalf and again and again assured me they trusted my judgment. These friends helped create a culture of inquiry in our school that will have long lasting benefits in years to come.

There is universality in story, archetypal patterns that resonate with us all. I was inspired by the stories of my validators and mine inspired them. The real power of having made my inquiry public was learning that I was not alone in thinking or feeling what I did. A story cannot be authenticated unless it is shared. Authenticity or validation, by definition, must be achieved in public.

### **Transformation and Living Contradiction as Living Truths**

I have put transformation and *living contradiction* (Whitehead, 2002) in the same space to emphasize that I am in constant states of change and growth. In my professional and personal life I intend to continue living *life as inquiry* (Marshall 1999) and will continually seek to improve or to resolve living contradictions. Marshall describes the overlap of transformation and new inquiry as follows;

I find that *living life as inquiry* is a continuing unfolding process. As one theme becomes emptied of energy or develops more of a habitual format of inquiry... other waves emerge to take its place as fresh edges of questioning. Sometimes engaging with them precedes an appropriate labeling and it takes a while to

recognise what is at heart in the inquiry. (p. 13)

I know I will continue to live as inquiry. During a meeting with Jackie I asked in frustration, “When will I stop evaluating every comment or email as potential data?” Her reply was, “You won’t” (personal communication July 14, 2011). I feel the urgency, or energy of this specific inquiry draining as I succeed in my struggle to communicate what it is I have learned. Yet I feel other inquiries gaining energy and losing patience as they wait for my attention. Some of these inquiries are of a personal nature including further reflection on the effects of the abuse or curious by-products of watching myself on video. For example, I noticed that when I am confronted with new ideas I get very excited about fitting them into my own schema that I do not give them enough attention in the moment. I commented on this to a friend helping me to edit my work,

*I have also seen myself do that on video. With me I think it is more a quick processing of how what the other person has said fits into my experiences, how I can relate to it and I get caught up in the excitement of making connections rather than really listening to what the other person is saying and focusing on their meaning from their context. I need to listen more carefully and reflect more after they have spoken on what the differences in perception tell me, on what the other person is actually saying rather than what I think they are saying. (personal correspondence, July 24, 2011)*

I expected most of the immediate outcomes of this project to be personal as I conducted a very personal self study which appeared to be more about myself than about my students and school setting. In my deepest self-reflective moments I thought of what I was doing as narcissistic. At times I lamented the fact that I had not chosen a more

practically applicable project in which the results were more visible in my classroom.

However, my willingness to be vulnerable and invite others to share a part of my journey has been a catalyst for change in me and in my school. I am stunned at the magnitude of the project my critical friends and I are planning for next year. The energy and excitement of the staff I am working with is palpable in the video clips. What follows is a description of our project and how I plan to make use of my authenticity model through the implementation of this project in my school next year.

### **Implications for Practice: Student Motivation Inquiry**

I have always believed that students learn better when they are engaged and having fun. This embodied knowledge has been reinforced and influenced in new directions by a few key resources in the past couple of years - most notably by the work of Daniel Pink in his book *Drive* (2010). Although I have not yet read this book, I have been introduced to Pink's ideas in professional development sessions and through a stunning 10-minute animated whiteboard summary of his work (Pink, 2010). Pink claims there are three elements of motivation—autonomy, mastery, and purpose. When I heard my junior-level grade partners shared concerns about students' motivation I showed them this video and we used Pink's elements of motivation to map a way forward for next year. The group was eager to hear about the invitational learning projects my M.Ed. group had completed with John Novak (personal communication, July, 2010) and we decided it was a good fit for the elements we are trying to incorporate into our teaching. We will begin our own projects as staff and extend the invitation to our students.

Our living contradiction is that we value motivation as the key to student success. However, we recognize that our practice is limiting student motivation rather than

allowing it to flourish. Together we will create the questions to guide our inquiry as it will involve the search for our shared set of values.

The overarching purpose of our invitational learning projects will be to study our learning and to create a positive learning environment that honours different learning styles and diversity of interest and strengths. Autonomy is inherent in the plan because staff and students are invited to choose a project they can complete in the timeline given.

Although it is the process of learning that we are studying in class, we intend to celebrate a product of some sort in the form of a learning fair. This product may be a demonstration, a physical creation or a representation of what was learned (e.g., art, a video). This end goal of making the process or product public is included to intentionally promote mastery. Examples of projects my peers chose to complete included learning to make crème brûlée, figuring out how to print photos at a kiosk so family photos could be displayed, practicing singing and playing the guitar at the same time in order to perform in front of the group, and learning to download and use mindfulness podcasts (my project). Students will be invited to complete the projects at home but school time will be made available if necessary.

These projects are mini versions of this major research project. I, personally plan to structure my own approach to the projects as self-study action research projects with cycles of action and reflection. I hope the process will produce a staff and class set of shared values that can be used for the rest of the year as our own standards of judgment. I will use my model of authenticity with both the staff and the students as a way of positively approaching the struggle that is learning. For example, I will make explicit the intentional ways I support staff and students through my values of trust and love. I will

think aloud as I model the process of understanding what I/we know, what I/we value and who I/we are. I will explain the ways I extend myself to support their learning and model the process of acknowledging and accepting my fears and internal conflict.

To model the action reflection cycle and my journey through the authenticity model to students I plan to create a public display of my journey. I will invite other staff to join me. I am imagining a bulletin board with our photographs, descriptions of our projects and progress reports in the form of our journal entries, which could be hand written, typed, video recorded, annotated photographs or a comic strip. As our data accumulates, we will meet to discuss our projects and look for themes. I would like to make these validation groups public by presenting edited videos like the ones I included in Chapter Four or by holding validation groups in front of the students. We could recruit the help of students in identifying themes and recognizing energy-flowing values and life affirming energy. I am excited just thinking about the possibilities.

### **Implications for Further Research and Limitations**

Modeling the process first will give the staff time to see how the process works, to have the living understanding of the process so we can better guide the students on their personal journeys. I can see incredible spin-off project including re-examining our school motto at the end to see if it reflects our values, finding ways of continuing the action research process in other areas of the curriculum, and asking our students to mentor primary students once they have experienced the process. As a staff we can address questions such as how to best use data and assessment to promote rather than hinder motivation, how to communicate student learning to parents and the community, how to organize student-led conferences and how to best create a culture of inquiry

within our school at large.

As you have seen from my videos, the team I am working with is very excited about diving into this project. I can't be certain of the level of involvement in the research process or the willingness to publicly display the process, but I predict that the group will be on board. In an email to Megan this week regarding the end of this research project I wrote;

*This is the most I have EVER worked on an assignment and I am more motivated by this than I ever have been by anything in my life. I really **want** it to communicate what I have learned. I am doing very well at trusting the process for the amount I have yet to do in the short time I have left. I am not anxious or feeling overwhelmed. I just feel this drive, the sense of purpose and flow I have felt when engaged in athletic pursuits. With it comes an amazing feeling of accomplishment that I have succeeded in living more authentically. (personal communication July 23, 2011)*

This email represents the motivation, the autonomy, the sense of purpose, the mastery I wish to share with my colleagues and students, with anyone in my sphere of influence. Which brings me to a discussion of the limitations to my influence.

There are, therefore, boundary issues about how 'personal' to be as I articulate my perspective and paths of sense-making, taking these as significant aspects to be accounted in constructivist science (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These boundaries are not clear-cut; finding and articulating them is itself an aspect of inquiry (and perhaps any bounded notion of 'the personal' is a figment of academic imagination these days). I do not, however, want to tell 'confessional tales' to no



purpose (but they may sometimes be to valuable purposes) or to make myself or others vulnerable. This is an edge which needs awareness, and when we write from inquiry it requires appropriate signaling.” (Marshall, 1999, p.4)

I must signal that I offer this project as a story, as my story of how I achieved transformation, how I learned to live my values more fully. It is clear throughout my writing that the struggle is very personal. However, there are boundaries to what I chose to share in order to protect others and myself.

There is no complete answer, no blueprint to healing to be found in the writing of another. Each of us must find our own path to transformation. Having said that, it is my hope that in my story readers will find resonance, something that offers them validation or that inspires a way forward that had not been considered. I hope that my choice to make public a private struggle will give others the confidence that no internal struggle needs to remain hidden and wrapped in layers of shame. Both my confronted abuser and I found comfort, compassion and healing through seeking help and making public our inner torn selves.

After disclosing that I was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse to my M.Ed. cohort, one student said, “At least you have pinpointed the source of your pain” (personal communication, July 28, 2010). She was not in any way denying or demeaning my situation. Her comments were given and received in a loving way. She was expressing the truth that pain is universal and that finding the source of the pain is important for healing. She was admitting that she had farther to go in her own journey to healing. A few weeks later I received the following email:

Hi there,

I wanted to let you know that your courage has made a difference in my life. I have made some conscious steps to get support in dealing with my health issue including using the EAP [Employee Assistance Program]. Your courage was a catalyst for this.

:) (personal correspondence March 5, 2011)

It is clear from this email and my own story that everyone must proceed at their own pace when they are ready. I want to be very clear how important it was that I trusted myself, trusted my instincts and my own limits. The right audience perceives vulnerability in sharing struggle as strength; this is an audience that is a true culture of inquiry. As Liz pointed out, not everyone wants or is ready to hear about the struggle of others (personal communication March 25, 2011). I found it important to seek the safe support of a counsellor who was removed from my personal life. She was assured to be a compassionate and knowledgeable audience. I disclosed my story to a compassionate professor, Jackie before I felt safe, with her by my side, to disclose to my M.Ed. group. And now, as I have managed to record my story the way I want to tell it, I am ready to disclose in a more public way to an academic audience.

## Epilogue

My four year old son, Bashi, asked me today, “Mommy, could you tells us more about your soul book?” “Yeah,” agreed Jago aged six. I was puzzled. I didn’t think that I had talked to them about *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (Palmer, 1998) or *The Soul of Education* (Kessler, 2000). After a few clarifying questions I realized with a jolt of pleasure that they were asking about my book. This book. My boys saw me as an author. They were very curious about my wall charts and trains and wanted to know more about soul. I could not dream of a better outcome for this research project.

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## Appendix A

### Ethics Clearance Certificate



Brock University  
Research Ethics Board  
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035  
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

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#### Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

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DATE: 7/21/2011  
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DELONG, Jacqueline - Education (Adjunct Professor)  
FILE: 10-298 - DELONG  
TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project STUDENT: Catherine Griffin  
SUPERVISOR: Jacqueline DeLong  
TITLE: How can I improve my practice by understanding how critical incidents in my childhood affect my relationships with others?

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#### ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 7/31/2012

The Brock University Social Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 7/21/2011 to 7/31/2012.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 7/31/2012. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle R. McGinn", enclosed within a rectangular box.

Michelle McGinn, Vice-Chair  
Social Sciences Research Ethics Board

**Note:** Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.



**be used. You may decide if you wish your comments attributed to you. If you wish, a pseudonym or numbered identifier will be used in place of your name for the written document. Your name and/or comments will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study without your permission. Once the draft copy of the study is complete, you will be asked to read, edit and/or approve of the content pertaining to your or your observations and comments. Edits or deletions will be made according to your wishes. This editing process will occur in the month of July 2011.**

Data collected during this study may be stored in my office in my home office. Data will be kept for approximately one year after which time it will be shredded or, in the case of video or audio tape, destroyed. Access to this data will be restricted to me, the researcher, and my research advisor. In the event that this data is required for additional analyses or research beyond the scope of this research study, you will be contacted by email and your informed consent will be requested. Should you decide to opt out of additional study you have complete freedom to do so.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. **Your decision to participate or decline to participate will in no way affect your standing as a colleague or friend or my ability as a researcher to complete my degree.** Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

### **Publication of Results**

It is my intent to publish the results of this study as a Major Research Project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Education Degree through Brock University. In addition, results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available from the researcher at the completion of the study.

### **Contact Information and Ethics Clearance**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the student researcher, Catherine Griffin or the Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca). The file number for this study is 10-298 DELONG.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

**CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail:

\_\_\_\_\_

### **List of Possible Questions to be Asked of Participants**

Note: Not all participants will be asked all questions.

What values do you think I hold?  
 What things are most important to me?  
 What values do you see reflected in my professional practice?  
 Do I reflect my values in my actions?  
 Have you seen me do something or say something that did not reflect my values?  
 What should I do to improve my practice?

Am I honest?  
 Am I loving?  
 Do I demonstrate that I value honesty?  
 Do I demonstrate that I am caring?  
 Am I respectful?  
 Am I authentic?  
 Do I have integrity?  
 Am I intimidating?  
 Do I exercise my educational influence in a way that is for the good?  
 Will I leave the world a better place than I found it?  
 “Do I communicate life-affirming energy for the future sustainability of humanity?” (McNiff, 2006, p. 320).

For each of these questions I will need to ask people, “How do you know?” and “What evidence do you have of that?”