THE STORYTELLING CLUB:
A Narrative Study of Children and Teachers
as Storytellers

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education,
Department of Curriculum, Teaching & Learning,
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a narrative inquiry into the process of how students in The Storytelling Club became storytellers. The phenomenon of The Storytelling Club, where students and teachers worked together telling stories, listening to stories, and discussing and connecting to story, is the focus. The study was set within a suburban elementary school. Weekly participation in The Storytelling Club by both students (from grades three to six) and teachers was voluntary. To begin each year teacher/leaders told stories (primarily folk and fairy tales), providing a model of storytelling. The inquiry explores students' participation as they gradually became immersed in story language, story discussions, and storytelling themselves.

This thesis is a journey of discovery. The very act of writing about The Storytelling Club concretized the experience for the researcher so that her intuitive responses in working with the students were made more explicit. This was emergent research in which the outgrowths of participating in The Storytelling Club emerged from within the data. The central question asked was what were the outcomes that emerged from
participating in The Storytelling Club. As a narrative inquiry, both the spoken narratives of the students and teacher/leader participants as well as the written responses and journals of the researcher and another teacher/leader were used to explore the subject.

Aspects of community were highlighted as students and teachers experienced the bond of shared stories. Together, teachers and students built a supportive, caring environment within which to work and learn. Themes that emerged from the study were: community, language play, personal connections, modelling of narrative connections, imagery, story sense, awareness of structure, heightened listening, collaborative meaning-making, self-confidence, ways of remembering, students taking on the role of storytelling and finding their voice, connecting to the audience, and finding an oasis.

This research celebrates the work of students and teachers as they worked to discover together how story mattered to each of them.
To Paul.
who has always been there for me.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a beginning teacher, I was fortunate to board with Mrs. Flossie Davis during the two years that I taught in Grand Valley. From her I heard many stories of rural Ontario in the early 1900s. Many an evening, she would work on quiltmaking. When the quilting frame was up, it filled the floor space of her bedroom that was directly opposite mine. In the evenings, I often abandoned my schoolwork to wander across the hall and watch her piece together strips of fabric using her foot-pedalled sewing machine, or meticulously hand stitch the quilt pattern. From Mrs. Davis I gained, amongst other things, my fascination with quilts. In the following years, when I ritualistically dropped back to see her in August before the start of each school year, I often brought small pieces of hand work and small quilt projects for her comments and suggestions.

From Mrs. Davis came a strong example of community. While she spent many solitary hours cutting, piecing, and quilting, a community was also supporting her. They shared patterns, quilted together, laughed, and worried together, as well as celebrated and valued each other’s work and company. Even then, I was absorbing an understanding of how community connected past, present, and possible futures.
I have been fortunate in my thesis work to have had guidance, support, mentorship, conversations, and discussions with many people in several intersecting communities. To all of these I offer my thanks and appreciation. Each in her/his own way contributed to this work. As the research went forward, various people added to the depth of the design or the intricacy of the pattern. Some gave a holistic view while others helped me to focus on the details. Without all of these people, the research would not have been as rich.

My thanks begin with the students who opened their hearts and minds to storytelling. They generously shared stories from their lives and from their grandparents with myself and with my storytelling partner Marion. It was a joy to work with and learn from them.

Thanks to Marion who has been my partner in The Storytelling Club for five years. She brought fresh insights and thoughtful responses to our work with the students. I greatly appreciate her written responses to field notes that were frantically written on days when the students' insights had seemed incredible and the tape recorder had not operated. Her wisdom and warmth echoed throughout her work.

Robert and Karun also contributed as leaders in our work with the students. Their input was valued by both students and teachers alike.
My thanks to the Peel District Board of Education for allowing me time for a leave of absence so that I could work on my research. Particular thanks to Paul Shaw for using his persuasive skills in helping me to gain my leave.

I appreciated the support of The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario for awarding me a doctoral scholarship that was both encouragement and financial support. I have been proud to be associated with the FWTAO/FAEO (Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario) and now ETFO. The support and encouragement of my teaching peers has been invaluable.

It was my good friend Anne Kowal who recognized the storyteller in me and prompted me to take my first storytelling course. This introduced me to another community to whom I am grateful – the storytelling community in Toronto (and hence beyond). Through them I have been immersed in stories for almost twenty years – celebrating the wonder and the value of stories. The fine storytellers in this community welcomed me and introduced me to an art that I still aspire to grow in. My first teachers – Dan Yashinsky, Bob Barton and Carol McGirr – showed me that there were many styles of storytelling. They inspired me to find who I could be as a storyteller.
I would particularly mention Anne Smythe who shared her love and joy of storytelling and whose many conversations deepened my understanding and connections to story. Anne is woven into my memory through story.

Thanks to Lynda Howes who has been with me all the way on this journey. Thanks Lynda, for your encouragement, for fine discussions, and for your careful reading and thoughtful comments on my work.

I have been fortunate in belonging to two Tellers’ Circles, which have enriched my life and supported and encouraged my work with students. Thanks to Joan Bailey, Marylyn Peringer, Jo-Ann Ras, and Gwen Stubbs, as well as Lynda Howes, Celia Lottridge, and Anne Smythe.

OISE/UToronto, of course, played a key role in this work. It is through OISE that I was given the time, structure, and high expectations that were needed to accomplish the research. To Howard Russell, my first professor, thanks for creating the atmosphere for the having of wonderful conversations. Thanks to (C. T.) Patrick Diamond for valuing narrative writing. Thanks to Mary Beattie. Mary, your thesis resonated deeply with me and was inspiration to me in narrative research and writing. You introduced me to Seamus Heaney whose work rang clearly for me – inspiring me to find my own sounds and signature.
I am forever indebted to David Booth, my thesis supervisor, who by his very example modelled excellence and encouraged the same from me. He supported me and motivated me to continue along the path to create the thesis that only I could create. Through the asking of wonderful questions, he helped me to weave together the pieces. Thanks, David – a wiser advisor for me could not have been found.

With David Booth’s encouragement, I was able to welcome (as much as jittery nerves allow) my oral examination. Thank you to my committee: David Booth, Michael Connelly, Patrick Diamond, Clare Kosnik and Meguido Zola, for your thoughtful comments and questions, which will promote further exploration and growth on my part.

Works in Progress – an informal group who met each second term to share, discuss, and encourage narrative inquiry became my community at OISE. I discovered the group through an email invitation and found a community and two willing facilitators Michael Connelly and Mary Kooy where I learned about narrative inquiry. Through the “works in progress” and subsequent discussions with post-graduate students my understanding of narrative inquiry evolved.

Last, but not least, my family has been supportive in this journey. My parents Dorothy and Ernest Miller have provided me with models of life-long learning. In particular, Dan Caulfield, my son, was the first to hear each new story for many a
year. Thanks Dan, for using your design skill in my diagram of the outgrowths from The Storytelling Club experience. Paul Caulfield, my husband and life's partner, has supported, encouraged, suggested, and edited my work. He was forever discovering one more elusive serial comma to be corrected! Thank you Paul, for your computer expertise in style and format that you so generously gave, for the advice, and for the hours of listening.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract p. ii  
Dedication p. iv  
Acknowledgements p. v  
Table of Contents p. xi  
List of Illustrations p. xvi  
Prologue – Lunch Hour p. 1  

## Chapter 1  The Journey: An Introduction

1.1 To Begin – A Story! p. 4  
1.2 The Challenge of Conveying Research on Oral Storytelling p. 6  
1.3 The Thesis Question and Research Process Emerges p. 9  
1.4 Illuminating Moments: A Key to Focus Data p. 10  
1.5 Immersion in Oral Story Language p. 12  
1.6 “Do You Memorize It?” p. 14  
1.7 Celebrating the Qualities of the Human Voice p. 15  
1.8 The Phenomenon of The Storytelling Club p. 16  
1.9 The Thesis Plan p. 19  

## Chapter 2  Why Story Matters: Reflecting on Those Who Have Written

2.1 Story Matters Across the World p. 21  
2.2 Perspectives on Narrative p. 21  
2.3 Connecting Research to My Lived Classroom Experience p. 23  
2.4 Story in Education p. 28  
2.5 Carol Fox: A Model of Bringing Research Together p. 29  
2.6 The Influence of Narrative p. 31  

## Chapter 3  In Search of “My House on Fire”: Methodology

3.1 Meander If You Want to Get to Town p. 34  
3.2 A First Step: Preliminary Research p. 36
Chapter 4 The Tellers and Their Tales: The Data and Analysis

4.1 Illuminating Moments p. 63
4.2 Modelling Ways of Connecting p. 63
    Personal Connections Shared p. 64
    Knowing How to Connect p. 65
    Stories Within Stories: A Narrative Teaching Mode p. 66
4.3 Language Play: p. 68
    Word Play: Exploration and Intellectual Discovery p. 70
    Making Choices about Stories p. 71
    Being a Receiver and a Creator p. 72
4.4 Personal Connections to Stories p. 76
    Private Meanings p. 77
    Interpersonal Connections: Stories Told by Grandmothers p. 79
4.5 Stories Elicit Vivid Images
   Imagery Forms the Story p. 80
   Imagery as a Tool p. 82
4.6 This Community of Storytellers
   Friendship: A Significant Part of the Bond of Community p. 85
   The Bond of Shared Stories p. 87
   Trust and Caring Build Community p. 88
4.7 Students Taking on the Role of Storyteller
   Telling Stories From the Heart p. 91
   Expectation and Engagement p. 92
4.8 Oasis: A Breathing Space
   A Different Time and Space for Students p. 95
   A Different Time and Space for Teachers p. 96
   Storytelling: A Breathing Space p. 97
4.9 Developing a Sense of Story
   Awareness of Story p. 100
4.10 Building Awareness of Structure
   Structure Can Empower Storytellers to Remember Stories p. 106
   Finding Concrete Metaphors for Structure: Concretizing Structure p. 107
   Story Structure Builds Cohesion p. 110
   Folk Tales and Fairy Tales: Beautiful Models of Story Structure p. 114
4.11 Listening as a New Dimension
   Heightened Listening p. 117
4.12 Building Self Confidence
   Trust and a Positive Atmosphere Support Confidence p. 123
4.13 Collaborative Meaning-Making
   Working Towards a Collaborative Telling p. 128
   Collaborative Meaning-Making as a Group p. 132
   Collaborative Meaning-Making for an ESL Student p. 133
4.14 Finding Ways of Remembering
   How Do You Remember That Story? p. 137
   Personal Connections: Triggers for Memory p. 140
   Story Structure Supports Memory of a Story p. 142
   Rhyme, Rhythm, and Repetition: Keys to Remembering p. 145

4.15 Connecting to the Audience as Listeners
   The Interaction Between Telling and Receiving Stories p. 148

4.16 Voice
   Exploring the Qualities of Voice p. 156
   Voice: Sounds and Signature of an Individual p. 159

4.17 Valuing Self and Other
   Thought, Society, and Self p. 162

4.18 Summary p. 171

4.19 Diagram: Individual and Collective Outgrowths From The Storytelling Club Experiences p. 174

Chapter 5 Story Matters: Implications and Reflections

5.1 Some Last Illuminating Moments p. 175

5.2 Story Knowledge: More Than Linguistic Structure p. 180

5.3 Limitations p. 183

5.4 Further Inquiry Possibilities p. 185

5.5 Illuminating My Learning p. 188

5.6 Is Storytelling a Part of Children’s Lives at School? p. 189

5.7 Where Will My Journey Lead Me Now? p. 192

Epilogue

Our Lives Are Interwoven Through Story p. 194
References

Bibliography  p. 196
Literature Cited  p. 205

Appendix A: Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club

The Questionnaire  p. 209
Questionnaire Summary  p. 210
Sample Responses  p. 215

Appendix B  Letters of Consent

Student/Parent Letters and Consent Forms  p. 223
Teacher/Leader Letter and Consent Form  p. 227

Appendix C  Annotated Bibliography of the Stories Referred to —
In Alphabetical Order by Title  p. 230

Appendix D  “The White Dove”: A Sample Transcript of Collaborative
Student Storytelling Work  p. 247
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>The Storytelling Club</td>
<td>p. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Sample of a student’s “story map”</td>
<td>p. 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Marie and Janet’s “story map”</td>
<td>p. 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Individual and Collective Outgrowths from The Storytelling Club</td>
<td>p. 174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Questionnaire Illustration: Storytelling Club</td>
<td>p. 215b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Questionnaire Illustration: The Devil</td>
<td>p. 221b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROLOGUE

Lunch Hour

It is 11:30. Lunch time. The kindergarten room is full of children ranging from grade three to grade six students. They are a mixed group. The kindergarten furniture is a challenge. Students are crouched around small tables, gathered around the short, squat table in the cloak room or clustered around a large wooden electrical spool with small chairs drawn up. There are over thirty of them. The air is filled with their talk. This is not their assigned lunch room. This disparate group is here because they have chosen to be here. Attendance is called over the hubbub with a voice barely heard.

Twenty minutes later, the same group is packed together - sardined into the space covered by a small rug. Now they are silent. They are gathered around a teacher who is telling a story. All eyes are focussed on her. As she speaks, the children make eye contact easily and comfortably. At times one of their heads will nod in agreement. They lean slightly forward - one moment smiling, the next moment opening their eyes wide with surprise or delight. Barely a whisper is heard from them. There is a chant in the middle of the story that will be repeated with variation throughout the rest of the story. The storyteller’s voice swings with the chant. The next time the chant is repeated in the story some of the students begin to join in:
Cow of mine, cow of mine,
Have you ever seen a maid of mine?
With a wig and a wag
And a long leather bag,
Stole all the money
I ever had!

adapted from Bob Barton, 1986, p. 21

At first only one or two of the students quietly repeat the chant. But each time the chant reoccurs in the story more and more join in until finally they are all merrily chanting and wigwagging their bodies to the rhythm of the words. What’s happening? The Storytelling Club!

Illustration #1: The Storytelling Club
This is the group of students that has inspired me to research and study outgrowths which occurred when they met regularly as members of The Storytelling Club. While there is a change in membership in the group from year to year, within each year there is a core of students who dedicate themselves to storytelling one lunch hour a week. It is a privilege to work with them and learn from them.
CHAPTER 1

THE JOURNEY: AN INTRODUCTION

1.1 To Begin – A story!

To begin – a story. This Russian story has been told for many years. When I tell it, the words shift. They are not the exact words that I first heard Toronto storyteller Chris Cavanagh use – nor were his words exactly the same as the translation from which he had gleaned the story. I recall the surprise he expressed when he went back to the source and discovered that he had changed some of the story. Yet, the essence of the story, I think, remains. I hope that you can allow yourself to “listen” as you read this story – as though you were hearing it being told to you.

There was once a lonely old woman. She'd had a good life, but was feeling alone and sorry for herself. One day she decided to go out into the market.

She wandered from stall to stall until she came to the pot-maker’s stall. Stopping to admire a beautiful pot, she inquired after the price. “Three kopecks.” “Oh, that's reasonable,” she said. Then she picked up another pot. Now, this was a plain pot with a dint in the side. It even looked used.

“Well, then,” she inquired, “how much is this one?” “Four kopecks,” came the reply. “That can't be right! Surely this one is worth much less than that beautiful pot.”
The shopkeeper merely leaned over and flicked the plain pot with his finger. 

A clear tone rang out. "We pot-makers don't judge a pot by its looks. We know which pots sing with a clear voice."

"I knew that," mused the woman. "I had just forgotten."

adapted from: Gregory Skovoroda, 1990

This story resonated strongly with me from the first time I heard it told by Chris Cavanagh. It serves as a key metaphor for me. Just as the old woman had knowledge, which she had not expressed and articulated, and which she was not even aware of at a surface level, so too listeners to stories bring their own personal practical knowledge (D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, 1996) to their listening. They gain from and connect to the stories in ways most often not spoken or defined. A fine story has many layers of understanding. A child may experience one layer of understanding, and experience the same story more deeply at another time. Later as an adult she or he might experience the story in an entirely new way as more personal knowledge and awareness are brought to the story. There were times too, in my research, when I seemed very much like the old woman – discovering, or rediscovering things that I had a sense of knowing, but had not yet articulated.

Stories resonate deeply with me – on levels that at times are not expressed, simply experienced. At times, it is connecting to a story told that allows me to make the leap to new and deeper understanding – a recognition of things known but illuminated and brought to the surface through the story.
This response is both intellectual and emotional. I know that there is great power in the language of well-told folk tales. I have seen in my classroom work that these stories contribute in many ways to my students' language and literacy skills. The interpersonal connections and bonds made through the telling and receiving of stories also has strong emotional depth (Bob Barton, and David Booth, 1990). Yet, as I pursued my post-graduate work, I was often perplexed by the response of my academic peers to my work on storytelling. The wisdom and value of the folk and fairy tales, honed and valued across generations, seemed so evident to me. The stories rang so clear a tone for me that their value in life, as well as in education, seemed inherently obvious. But many of my peers had little experience with oral storytelling – the human voice warming, savouring, and proclaiming a story was unfamiliar to them. These peers were as perplexed by my focus on storytelling as I was by their response to my research.

1.2 The Challenge of Conveying Research on Oral Storytelling

Several years ago, I made a presentation on an inquiry I had conducted based on a pair of students learning to tell a story (Judy Caulfield, 1996). I had tape recorded their conversations and their storytelling as they worked together over several days. Then I transcribed and compared their three tellings and their discussions of how they wanted to add to or change each telling in turn. I found that their language became more elaborate and their story structure more sophisticated with subsequent conversation.
about the story and each retelling of the story. I also discovered how the two students supported each other in bringing coherence to their story and maintaining it.

My journal entry demonstrates my struggle to understand the response of my academic peers to the presentation:

*Journal*  
*March, 1994.*

> When my presentation was over, Susan, who was clearly trying to understand what I had talked about, said, "So, you *read* them a story..." Her pause invited clarification.

> "No! *She tells* them a story," retorted Mary, in whose class I had worked using storytelling and drama with students.

> That small interchange clarifies it all! How can I tell them [my peers] about my students working on storytelling when they don't know what storytelling is?

> "*Do your students create their own stories?*" John asked. If my students had created and then told their own stories, then John and the others seemed to feel that they could have found something of value in the process of storytelling.

> This puzzles me. The value of using traditional stories in storytelling is inherently obvious for me. The stories sing clearly to me – of connections: in my life, to others, to the literature of folk tales, to the community of storytellers in which I am a member, and of language play and of discovery too.

> *I should have started by telling them a story! I cannot make the assumption that others know what I mean by storytelling.*

It is this incident that prompted me to begin this thesis with a story – even though the reader would not be able to *hear* the story told. It also led me to a clearer understanding of my own personal "burning issue" (Grace Feuerverger, Spring, 1996,
in a lecture to graduate students at OISE/UToronto). I decided that what I needed to learn to do was to clearly articulate both to classroom teachers and to the research and academic community the positive outcomes of storytelling in a classroom environment or extra-curricular environment.

My error was in assuming that my peers/colleagues had experienced the pleasure, the intellectual stimulus, the bonding, the sharing, and the building of story – all of which can be experienced in telling and listening to stories. Betty Rosen (1988), in writing about her London inner-city students’ experience with listening to, responding to, and telling stories, bemoaned the fact that the written word could not convey all of the nuances of voice, face, manner, and the moment of telling. How can I write about and explore my students’ oral experience in a print medium? While the reader can not hear the various nuances and varied tones of the voices of the speakers who have contributed to this thesis, I have tried to capture the essence of their talk by choosing to use the participants’ own words whenever possible. I have chosen to use bold face type whenever spoken words are quoted since I want oral language to stand out from my writing and from any written text of researchers and experts whom I have quoted. Perhaps using bold face type will be a cue to the reader – an invitation to seek the difference between print and talk – to draw to mind the human qualities of voice, even as she/he is reading the words of these students and teachers who have contributed to this thesis.
1.3 The Thesis Question and Research Process Emerges

My research is on the phenomenon of students in The Storytelling Club, which consisted of a group of students who met during lunch hour once a week to hear traditional folk and fairy tales and to learn to tell them. I was fortunate in being one of the teacher/leaders of this group.

My goal in this thesis is twofold. I chose to research and write about this group in order to become more aware myself of the techniques and strategies that I used as a teacher/leader when I worked with this group of students. David Hunt (1992) notes that research may lead to increased personal understanding. I am constantly aware of seeking to learn and understand more about the storytelling process—both my process and the students' process. As I tape recorded and focussed on this group of students in my research, I was consciously exploring what I had previously just noted in passing. Max van Manen further expands this concept of research as building personal understanding by explaining that in the writing phase of research, while writing abstracts our experience of the world, it also concretizes our understanding of the world (1989, p. 240). The very act of writing about my experiences with students as they explored storytelling concretized the experience so that my storytelling teaching partners and I could use our intuitive responses more consciously. Furthermore, as we discussed what I had written, we went one step more deeply into understanding this phenomenon of the students in The Storytelling Club and our work with the group. It was emergent research, in which the outcomes of participation in The Storytelling
Club emerged through the acts of exploring, writing, discussing, and revisiting the data. Mary Beattie identifies the process of inquiry through practice as: “one of listening in and of reaching out; of continuously centering and stretching and of the construction and reconstruction of more authentic meanings for our lives.” (1991, p. 279) This describes the process I was engaged in through research – a process that fostered emergence of understanding of the data.

My second goal is to articulate to both the academic community and to my teaching peers the outcomes that occurred when these students and teachers met to discuss storytelling through a storytelling club. As these goals became more clear, so too did my question:

What is the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club? What is the learning that develops from participation in the Storytelling Club?

1.4 Illuminating Moments: A Key to Focus Data

I used Judith Newman’s (1991) concept of “critical incidents” to identify events within my work with students, and within my personal work as a storyteller, that were signposts, turning points, or at other times revelations of the outcomes that emerged as we worked together. I have chosen to use “illuminating moments” as my key phrase. It captures for me the enlightenment that can come from examining these events and also the fleetingness of some of these events which, if not captured on tape or by memory, would pass by without notice. Some of these illuminating moments
were recorded in my journals. Other times this focus led me to write about and further explore events which I had found myself frequently relating to others, but which I had not yet, along the way in my journey, concretized in written form. When writing for teachers new to storytelling, I found myself reflecting upon my beginning work with storytelling in my classroom:

The first time I told a story to my kindergarten class, I put on a large red badge with three apples on it and told them the Armenian saying: "Three apples fell from heaven, one for the storyteller, one for the listener, and one for the one who heard." We talked about that saying a bit and then I launched into the story. About a week later, when I next put on the badge, they all moved up and crowded around. They were physically demonstrating their attraction to this oral story experience. Their anticipation and delight in storytelling was evident in their whole manner!

Later, I had another confirmation of the importance and power of story for the listener when I told "The Three Little Pigs." We discussed the story, drew pictures, enacted it, and played it in the home centre. A few days later, I showed a filmstrip of the story as a contrast to the version I had told. One child was adamant: "The filmstrip is wrong. That wolf was brown and our wolf was black." [Bold face has been added to indicate oral language.] Indeed, I had not given the wolf a colour in the telling of the story. What a strong image she had created for herself. I knew then that I had to keep telling stories. I knew that I wanted my students to experience their own images and not just the images of the TV screen or of book illustrators.

Judy Caulfield, 1994, sections from pages 71, 72

My students' intense responses to storytelling gave me the impetus to explore this art form further in my teaching. In order to push myself into building a repertoire of stories that I could tell without the support of books, I set the goal of telling one new story each week. That proved to be a challenge. I discovered that repetition was a useful tool in helping me to remember new stories, and was also a key to inviting my
students to chime in and tell the story along with me. Their enthusiasm, and the interpersonal exchanges we had through story, all propelled me into further exploration of storytelling with students.

1.5 Immersion in Oral Story Language

Storytelling has been a part of my life as a teacher, as a parent, and as a performer at public events. As I continued to explore storytelling myself, I was constantly reflecting back on how this art affected my students:

Journal: Revelations at Goderich’s Celtic Roots Festival


It is a warm summer evening. I sit outside on a lawn-chair beside a fellow storyteller in front of the main stage. We are surrounded by Celtic music. Jigs and reels burst forth from a wide variety of instruments: penny whistles, fiddles, concertinas, piano, borrins, and even a harp. The music sets toes tapping, begging the body to move and respond.

There is a low, wooden stage to the left of the main stage. Built for the afternoon displays of Irish dancing, it is seldom empty at any time. Groups of adults spontaneously get up to dance, trying out steps learned during workshops and drawing children into the dances with them.

It is the children who capture my attention and fascinate me. Most of them have spent the day at this festival with the music in the air swirling around them. They too gravitate to the low, wooden platform. Perhaps it is the joy of hearing their steps on the hollow platform. They are in constant movement. They dance. They run. Even their running steps are in time to the music. The music is embedded in every move. From the youngest to the oldest, we are all responding.

Later in the evening, I reach out for Erin, who is not yet a year old. I bounce her, joggle her, play with her to the music. This is when I realize the connection. This is what I want for my storytelling students – that the sounds, rhythms, and pulse of stories be so much a part of them that it
unconsciously and unselfconsciously becomes a part of their life. It is this physical embedding of the sound, rhythm, and the joy of language that fascinates me.

Storytelling for the teachers and students involved in The Storytelling Club was not a one-stop, one-event experience. It was a process over time. As we gathered each Tuesday during lunch hour, we were immersing ourselves in storytelling language, just as the children at the Celtic Festival were immersed in music.

In years gone by, being immersed in story language would not have been unusual. People often gathered in the evenings to tell the story of their days and to share riddles, common folk tales, and stories of their heritage. With the advent of television, electronic games, and computers, families often, after cursory greetings, disperse to their separate cells. There they sit, isolated at their computers, video games, and personal television sets. Most likely they go to bed with the frenetic rhythm of electronic sounds in their heads – a fast-paced, modified version of human voices with images created for them and flashed across a screen at them. If my students were going to be immersed in the rhythm of the spoken word and story language, The Storytelling Club might be one of the few places where this could happen.
1.6 "Do You Memorize It?"

Journal: Revelation #2 at Goderich's Celtic Roots Festival:

Trust the Listeners August, 1998

This year, at the Celtic Roots Festival, I became more acutely aware of how important the listeners were to the teller. Now, this may seem to be an obvious statement. After all, without someone to tell to, one would be telling to the air and suspect of illusions. However, there were several times when it was the intense concentration and focus of the listeners, which centred me in the story.

Saturday, I had just barely begun telling a story when the level of music around me increased. Fortunately, the listeners were focussed. One woman especially seemed to have become intensely involved with the stories. It was as though every fibre in her body was hanging on the thread of the story being told. Her face was expressive, revealing surprise, delight, and puzzlement as the stories progressed. It was these listeners who gave to me the gift of listening and attention. They were centred in the story. By connecting with their intense concentration, I was able to refocus on the story and it became my centre once more.

After the set was over, the young woman spoke to me. She was awed by storytelling. "How do you do that? How do you remember? Do you memorize it?" This is a crucial point for me and as we talked, I heard myself saying, "I don't memorize every word. I learn the story."

There is an essential difference for me between memorizing and learning the story. As I consider how I go about storytelling and how I want to work with my students with storytelling, I realize I want them to "learn" the story. Learning a story, for me, means coming to recognize patterns, both the basic chants and repetitions, and the grand patterns that connect stories with other stories and themes. Coming to know the story also means having personally explored what the story means. When a teller continues to work with a story and tell the story, there is a constant revelation of new themes
and connections as the layers of the story unfold for her or him. What we avoided with the students in The Storytelling Club was rote memorization of the words of a story. We wanted to help the students to develop their own natural flow of story language and to express their story in their own signature phrases (Seamus Heaney, 1984).

1.7 Celebrating the Qualities of the Human Voice

The human voice, with its varied intonation that can transmit meaning and intent, is not often celebrated at school. Research reports that it is teachers who do the greatest amount of speaking in the classroom – and the speaking is generally in directive statements (Sarah Michaels, 1991, S. Savignon, 1983). Students don’t often get a chance, nor are they given the specific opportunity, to explore and celebrate the qualities of their own spoken voice.

I was driving home from university one night when I realized the impact that the very tones of the spoken word can have and wrote this letter to Toronto storyteller Dan Yashinsky:

March 10, 1998.

Dear Dan:

Tonight on the way home, I heard a story on the radio. I knew it was you the moment the story began. Curious isn’t it, the quality of an individual’s voice? There is a warmth and distinct tone to your voice that immediately informs me ... And because I knew that it was you, I was quickly enveloped in the context that I have shared with you –
Hodja stories, riddles, and concerts. There is an instant recognition of
the shared community when one hears the voice of a friend. There
should be a lot written about voice, for by itself it can transmit so
much. The voice can spin an invisible thread making a physical
connection with the teller.

You ended with a thought-provoking quote from Joe Neil:

"What the ear does not hear
will not move the heart."

Joe Neil MacNeil, Tales Until Dawn: The World of a
Cape Breton Gaelic Story-Teller, 1987

This event spoke volumes to me of the power of the human voice to move, to inform,
and by its warmth, to connect in a deeply personal way. In The Storytelling Club, we
sought to create a space where students could explore the power of words – and
perhaps just as importantly, the power of their own voice. Is Joe Neil MacNeil right?
Are we only moved when we hear things? Perhaps not. Many are equally moved by
the beauty of a painting, the eloquence of a novel, or the grace of dance. Yet, I
believe that maintaining connection with the essence of humanity – the quality of the
human voice and its ability to communicate on many levels – is of crucial importance
to our continued communication with others.

1.8 The Phenomenon of The Storytelling Club

My research into the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club was focussed on a group
of students who met as members of The Storytelling Club during lunch hour once a
week. Throughout the research, I was aware of my need to reflect the narrative nature
of this group’s work. The phenomenon of this disparate group of children who came
together to become storytellers, was a story itself. Embedded within this frame were many individual’s stories. Each week, when the students returned to the group, they shared with enthusiasm anecdotes of who they had shared stories with over the past week. The teachers/leaders continued to be learners themselves as they discussed events within the group and questioned how to most effectively assist students in becoming storytellers. The research goal was to show the learning – and the joy – that students found in stories and in their ability to tell stories. Underlying all of the work on listening to stories and telling stories was the forging of a community of learners – students and adults alike who came together to talk about, to puzzle over, and to tell stories.

The group’s process in their exploration of storytelling is in fact a story. When this story is missing, the data collected is dry and out of context. It is just a number of people on a certain number of occasions who had a specific interest. The data is their story. Or is it that their story is the data? The story adds the life, the vitality, and the connections to the analysis. Mary Beattie’s thesis, *The Making of Relations: A Narrative Study of the Construction and Reconstruction of a Teacher’s Personal Practical Knowledge*, was a model for me. Her words express what I was seeking to discover:

I found it was possible to imagine a study where literary forms and expressive language could be used to illuminate aspects of teaching and learning.

Mary Beattie, 1991, p. 94
Mary Beattie showed me one way that narrative could be embedded as an integral part of the research and of the writing process. It was a powerful lesson and gave me a concrete view of narrative research.

As a teacher/researcher, I was both a member of this group, initiating and sharing in the leadership of it, as well as a researcher who was observing, recording, and delving into this group as a phenomenon. I was not acting as a disinterested observer, but instead as a participant in a shared narrative unity (Michael Connelly & Jean Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). P. Hogan, highlights equality, a caring situation, and feelings of connectedness, as important issues in building an ethical research situation (1990, p. 4). The Storytelling Club offered a unique opportunity to enter into the field in a collaborative manner in which the research relationship could emulate the qualities P. Hogan supports. I operated as a member of this group, which was constantly working towards building community. My fellow teachers and the students involved were active participants in the research. Their voice was an integral part of the research as they collaborated in the research and enthusiastically discussed what was important to them about The Storytelling Club.

The work I have done with the students in The Storytelling Club is but one of many ways that storytellers and teachers have worked with students with story. Drama, puppetry, storytelling with props, and creative writing are all art forms using story in various ways. Jack Zipes (1995) worked with young people to deconstruct traditional
fairy tales in order for them to develop their own critical faculties. My partners and I have consciously chosen to work with traditional tales and to teach students storytelling as an oral art.

1.9 The Thesis Plan

This thesis explores the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club – how it works and what the outcomes are for students and teachers. Chapter One reviews my journey as I became more involved with storytelling – as a teacher and as a performer – and as I became more aware of illuminating moments in the students’ and my own storytelling experiences. Chapter Two examines why story matters. Of course, an entire book could be written about the power of narrative (and many have been). Chapter Two gives a brief overview of what some experts have written about narrative research and identifies salient literature in connection with the importance of story in education and with my research on students and storytelling. Writers who have been significant for me in this thesis journey are included. Chapter Three chronicles my search for a methodology. The choices made within the framework of narrative research are explored. The cast of characters is established. In Chapter Four, the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club unfolds. The data includes tapes of The Storytelling Club’s meetings, conversations with and between participants, and written responses from teacher participants. All are considered under the umbrella of illuminating moments, which helped to reveal and analyse the outcomes which occurred as students and teachers explored story and storytelling. Chapter Five explores the implications of this
work, its limitations, how this study relates to education, and the next steps in my journey.
CHAPTER 2

WHY STORY MATTERS: REFLECTING ON THOSE WHO HAVE WRITTEN

2.1 Story Matters Across the World

Story matters. It is an essential component in many cultures around the world. Folk and fairy tales, which have been honed through many generations of retelling, are a testament to the enduring nature of story. Story can create a common bond that binds us together (Bob Barton & David Booth, 1990). Story is the principal way we as humans have of making sense of our world. Barbara Hardy (1978) calls it “a primary act of mind.” We retell events from our lives in stories to try to decode them and to share them. We imagine future possibilities in stories. When we hear the stories of others, we may begin to build bridges of understanding. Perhaps one of the few hopes for the future is if we can truly hear each other’s stories and build a new shared vision (Dan Yashinsky, 1993). Story matters in such essential ways that it has long been the subject of researchers who have focussed on the many aspects of narrative.

2.2 Perspectives on Narrative

In the beginning of my studies, I strove to learn about the breadth of research on narrative. I read to find the background that has laid the groundwork for today’s studies in order to see where and how my work would fit in the context of this body of
research. Harold Rosen’s work, in particular *Stories and Meanings* (1985), has been significant in my own development. He helped me to see the possible lenses through which narrative research could be viewed. And, of course, he critiqued them – with meaning-making at the heart of his work. Carol Fox, in her book *At the Very Edge of the Forest: The Influence of Literature on Storytelling by Children* (1993), provided a fine overview on narrative research from the perspective of how it enriched an understanding of children and storytelling. Both of these authors gave me direction.

Research on narrative has had a variety of focuses. Researchers have developed story grammars that reveal the underlying structure of narrative or the meaning underlying narrative structure (Gerard Genette, 1972, translated 1980; Judith Hudson & Lauren Shapiro, 1991; C. Levi-Strauss, 1916, 1955; V. Propp, 1928, translated 1958; T. Todorov, 1971, translated 1977). Narrative has been viewed as a communication device (W. Labov, 1972, 1982; Gordon Wells, 1985, 1986). The process of developing narrative skills and how this is affected by needs or by interaction with others has been studied (Allyssa McCabe & Carole Peterson, 1991). Narrative has been researched as a culturally embedded form (Sarah Michaels, 1985). Personal stories and the power of narrative as metaphor have been another focus of researchers (Carol Fox, 1993; J. Lacan, 1977). Narrative too is being seen as a valid research method, and also a valid form within which a thesis can be written (Tom Barone & Elliot Eisner, 1997; Mary Beattie, 1991; Michael Connelly & Jean Clandinin, 1990; C. T. Patrick Diamond & Carol A. Mullen, 1999). Narrative has been acknowledged

2.3 Connecting Research to My Lived Classroom Experience

Barbara Hardy (1978) made a significant contribution to the way narrative has been understood when she called narrative “a primary act of mind.” She had broken through a “glass wall” (Zerubavel, 1979) – the everyday lived experience that had not yet been explicitly stated. Narrative is the fundamental way we make meaning. Many writers have since used this as a strong thread interwoven through their work. Amongst them are: Mary Beattie (1991), David Booth (1987), Harold Rosen (1988), and Gordon Wells (1986). This recognition of the essential element of story as meaning-making has become a crucial part of my work. As I worked on my field text, my students were to show me time after time how elemental meaning-making was to their understanding of story.

Other researchers were significant in exemplifying research methodology. Allyssa McCabe and Carole Peterson (1991) used a Vygotskian (social interactionist) approach to understanding narrative development of young children. Central to their approach is the belief that children acquire new cognitive structures as a result of social exchanges. They emphasized the importance of parental interaction with
children for narrative development, concluding that children develop personal narratives in anticipation of parental interaction that had been experienced during the telling of previous narratives. Seeing narrative as an interactive force rather than as isolated incidents was important in my work with students. Understanding the early development of narrative is a precursor to build upon as I observe how students’ interactions interweave in relation to story, as well as the interweaving of story connections with others and to Self.

For W. Labov, (1972, 1982) it was the reportability of the stories that was a generating centre of narrative structure. If a story failed to have a powerful effect on a listener, he deemed it to be incompetent. Thus, he was acknowledging the part of the listener in the narrative. In my work with students, listening and responding to stories was a crucial part of the students’ experience. Gerard Genette wrote, “... the real author of the narrative, is not only he who tells it, but also, at times even more he who hears it ...” (Gerard Genette, 1980, in Harold Rosen, 1985, p. 7). The reception of the story brings it to life each time anew.

Another aspect of research on narrative was Judith Hudson and Lauren Shapiro’s (1991) work to develop a story grammar to assess children’s narrative. The advantage to having research on narrative structures (specifically story grammars) is that researchers and professionals are given a structure from which to study narrative, and a vocabulary with which to discuss it. Sarah Michaels’ (1985) research on story
grammar is important since it clearly shows cultural variation in story grammars. Hence, the possible flaw in discourse analysis may be that a child's narratives could be analyzed and then labelled as inadequate based on a concept of story grammar that does not match the child's cultural expectations and experiences of story grammar. In my own work, (Judy Caulfield, 1996) reference to the literature on discourse analysis was crucial in helping me to assess students' use of elaboration as they retold a story several times in the process of learning it. While this indication of language development and growth might have helped me to legitimize storytelling to my colleagues, I found this to be only one aspect of understanding the process of students becoming storytellers. It was isolated from the context of *telling* stories and *experiencing* them within the culture of the community of The Storytelling Club.

Josie Levine (1984) demonstrated another cultural aspect of discourse – an indicator that social practice is embedded in vocabulary. When she, as an English-as-a-Second-Language teacher, asked her students to record their birthdate on a form, pandemonium broke out amongst her students from India. From these students' point of view it seemed as though she, as the teacher, was deliberately not understanding the truth as they knew it to be. Finally, a student explained to her that in India a child's birth is related to events, not to a calendar date. It was cultural practice embedded in language that was the impediment to communication. Donald Polkinghorne emphasized this interconnectiveness between language and culture when he stated that "Language is both the product and the possession of a community" (1988, p. 23). My
research will seek to explore the community of storytellers who are The Storytelling Club and how they negotiate language and meaning as a community.

When linguist Klaus Wedekind (1990) studied Gedeo, a Highland East Cushitic language in Ethiopia, he developed a semantic frames roster consisting of sequenced lists of predicate frames in order to determine what linguistic knowledge a speaker was employing. He introduced his work with the questions: “When a story-teller ‘knows how to tell a story,’ what linguistic knowledge is he or she employing to tell it? And when a story-teller ‘knows a story’, what exactly is it he or she knows?” (Klaus Wedekind. 1990, p. 1). While Klaus Wedekind was able to predict sentences and structure through his semantic frames roster, this seems to be an incomplete answer to the question of how the storyteller knows how to tell the story. Year after year, I find my students puzzling about how a person knows how to tell a story: “How could you remember that whole story?” Biff once asked. Another student phrased it this way: “How do you tell a story so that the audience doesn’t get bored?” Klaus Wedekind’s questions brought me to ask this question in a different way so that I could relate them to my work with students as storytellers in The Storytelling Club. When my students were telling stories, and learning stories, what did they “know” about the stories?

Madan Sarup (1989) referred to narrative knowledge as threefold: know-how, knowing how to hear, and knowing how to speak. This view of narrative knowledge
was a beginning way for me to ask what my students knew about stories – as they were in the process of learning stories. While Klaus Wedekind referred to “knowing a story”, there seemed to be much more to this than the mere repetition of words within a specific structure. What are the parameters of “knowing” a story? Story grammar leaves out acknowledgement of the interplay between teller, story, and listener as a story is being told and being received – it may leave out the very nature of storytelling – the social communication. This research will seek to further explore students in the process of becoming storytellers as a social learning experience.

My own thoughts about narrative (and oral storytelling to be specific) have centred on narrative as providing a form and a context through which to express ideas and to communicate with Self and others. David Booth (1994) has written about story and drama giving form to thought, and wrote: “Storytelling is a meaning-making process.” (1994, p. 96)

At the roots of these theories are the world views and the philosophical underpinnings that are brought to the research. As each perspective is explored, our understanding of narrative – this vital part of our being – is expanded. As I considered the various world views of narrative, I sought to clarify the perspective which would best illuminate the research that I was about to undertake on students as they become storytellers. The interwoven connections between listening, connecting and internalizing, learning, and telling stories was an important aspect of this work.
2.4 Story in Education

How have the experts and researchers viewed narrative and storytelling in education? Kieran Egan (1987) sees the techniques of oracy as being conducive to the formation of imagination. He further went on to explore an alternative approach to curriculum through teaching as storytelling (1988). Barry Sanders (1995) sees oracy as a key in education with the manipulation of language being crucial to the social and emotional development of young people.

Many years ago, Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) demonstrated the power of personal stories to connect her Maori students to print and hence to literacy. More recently, from England, we have Carol Fox (1993), Alan Howe and John Johnson (1992), Betty Rosen (1988), Harold Rosen (1985), and Gordon Wells (1985, 1986), amongst many others, tell us how crucial stories are to the lives of children from pre-schoolers to high school students. From the United States, Vivian Gussin Paley (1990) shows how stories are embedded in her young students’ lives and how they enrich the lives of others and give a window into the children’s lives. Arthur Applebee (1978) explored the child’s concept of story from the ages of two to seventeen. Jack Zipes (1995) works with students to help them gain power and autonomy through deconstruction of fairy tales. In Canada, Orbit magazine’s special issue “Story Matters: The Role of Story in School” (1999 a, David Booth, Editor), proclaimed the role of story in school. By making story the focus of the issue, the magazine served notice that story was an integral part of education – from the kinds of exciting literature available, to
responses to literature, to teacher development through teachers' stories, and to the
art of storytelling. Bob Barton and David Booth affirm the power of story in school:

When children listen to stories, they develop the sense of narrative that will
be the core of their thinking and languaging processes.
   Bob Barton and David Booth, 1990, p. 15

These writers have guided me and inspired me. How then will this study further their
work? By focussing on oral storytelling, this research will explore the elements that
promote this sense of narrative and languaging process. The research focusses on a
particular group of grade three to six students, which moves beyond Carol Fox’s study
of the effects of stories on pre-schoolers to contribute to an understanding of
elementary students and oracy.

2.5 Carol Fox: A Model of Bringing Research Together

How does the modern researcher choose a model to use in forming questions, setting
up research and discussing the results? An example for me was Carol Fox (1993) who
analyzed the influence of literature on the storytelling of pre-school children. She
described her search for a way to analyze the children’s stories and her dissatisfaction
with existing systems to completely fulfill her needs. She wanted to acknowledge the
cognitive, the social, and the affective in ways that included storytelling. She drew
from many sources to analyze her research. She drew from Dell Hymes’ (1973)
theory of communicative competence; from Labov’s (1972, 1982) categories of
evaluation using a basis of major emotions; from Elliot Mishler’s (1986) notion of the
social meaning of courses of actions and reactions; and from Lacan’s (1977) model to
explore metaphoric dimension of language. Carol Fox’s work was refreshing and exciting. She refused to see narrative in a narrow, unimodal way, instead seeing that narrative had many aspects, many purposes, and many connections.

What were the ramifications for my work as a teacher/researcher in the area of storytelling in education? From discourse analysis, I have begun to have a better sense of the components of language and of significant use of it. However, this study will not focus on storytellers’ development through story grammar. Work on story grammars has been offered by many different theorists. Sarah Michaels (1991), in her challenge to story grammar, has challenged me to question rather than to accept theories, as well as to challenge my own assumptions about narrative structure. Harold Rosen (1985) has given me more questions to ask about what the narrator is learning in the art – or I might ask, “in the act” of storytelling. By documenting her understanding of narrative theories and her search for clarification, Carol Fox has exquisitely modelled the process of selecting theoretical background for research. She reinforced for me that one perspective would not be sufficient to explore the intricacies of narrative meaning-making within a community of learners. There was also, in a real sense, a freedom to seek out the match for the research that I would do instead of trying to fit my data to a static story grammar.
2.6 The Influence of Narrative

Part of this review must reflect my indebtedness to writers and teachers who have inspired me to write narratively. Sylvia Ashton-Warner’s books *Teacher* (1963) was a powerful introduction to child-based learning and a passionate acknowledgement and valuing of the culture of her students. She didn’t say that you should value your students’ culture and who they were – she showed it through her powerful narratives of the experiences that she and her students shared.

I have always understood most clearly and been moved more deeply by narrative. It has always fleshed out the details for me – helped me to see the practical application of the theories – or should I say the theory in practice. So it was that when I began studying at OISE, I was fortunate in having Howard Russell as my first professor. He proudly announced that he was a “maths man”, yet taught us through anecdotes that illustrated his points. He also introduced me to listening to the stories of experience of the other graduate learners. Later I was to find the vocabulary to describe his teaching as valuing, and acknowledging teacher’s personal practical knowledge (Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, 1990). He was demonstrating his Dewian philosophy of valuing and working from experience.

Patrick Diamond was also influential in encouraging writing that valued and brought forth further learning from teacher narratives. David Booth’s writing has been significant in my journey. *Drama Words* (1987) and *Story Drama: Reading, writing*
and roleplaying across the curriculum (1994) have shown me drama theory and practice through the children's words and through their learning experiences. When I was writing my thesis, I was sharing with my second grade students his book, *Till All the Stars Have Fallen* (1989) which is a wonderful collection of poetry. I was inspired and guided by the titles of the sections: "When Your Ears Sing", "In Silent Snow", "Voices on the Wind", etcetera. Unlike many books of poetry whose table of contents is filled with nouns such as: Weather, or Animals, or Holidays, David Booth chose titles which capture the essence of the poetry and which entice the readers to engage in an entirely different kind of dialogue with the poetry than is often the case. With this in mind, I too tried to capture the essence of my journey as I invited my reader through the chapter titles to get a sense of the story of my thesis.

As I drew closer to writing about my research I was fortunate to read Mary Beattie's thesis: *The Making of Relations: A Narrative Study of the Construction and Reconstruction of a Teacher's Personal Practical Knowledge* (1991). Her writing was a powerful interweaving of narrative and academic writing. She showed me that different forms of narrative could effectively be used in a thesis. Perhaps what inspired me the most was her inclusion of Seamus Heaney's writing and her reflection on his influence on her. The quotes resonated with me — like the potmaker in the story in Chapter One, Mary Beattie was sounding a clear tone for me to hear. It was a tone that would resonate and encourage me to find the narratives that sang most clearly to me.
My data is about real children. I can close my eyes and see them clearly as they told stories and as they interacted within the culture of The Storytelling Club. Any understanding of narrative within my research on The Storytelling Club must be holistic (John P. Miller, 1988, 1981) and include the individual children as they interacted within this community of storytellers.
CHAPTER 3

IN SEARCH OF “MY HOUSE ON FIRE”: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Meander If You Want to Get to Town

... “Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human.” Meander if you want to get to town.

Ondaatje, Michael, 1987, p. 146

Michael Ondaatje’s quote gave me encouragement to continue my research even when progress seemed to be anything but linear. “Meander if you want to get to town” crystallizes the process of my research. Storytelling has been a strong commitment in my life as a teacher, a parent, and a professional. But, while I knew that storytelling was the important topic for me, the route to explore this topic had many possibilities. I needed to find a research methodology that would complement the study of students as storytellers. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln’s description of a qualitative researcher who would “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (1994, p. 2) was key in describing the most appropriate path for my research of storytelling. It affirmed for me the possibility of studying students in the context of The Storytelling Club rather than isolating their work or their words as storytellers.
It is within qualitative research that story has taken its valued place. Narrative research emerged in the 1970s as a part of the genre of qualitative research.

The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world.

F. Michael Connelly & D. Jean Clandinin, 1990, p. 2

By the mid 1990s a body of work using narrative research was emerging (Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner, 1997; Mary Beattie, 1995, 1991; Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, 1996, 1994, 1988; Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, 1990, 1988; Norman Denzin, and Yvonna Lincoln, 1994; Patrick Diamond, 1991; to name but a few). Patrick Diamond and Carol Mullen (1999) further encouraged the postmodern researcher to present research in an artistic manner, citing a myriad of ways in which the research can be conveyed to the reader. My goal of using narrative to write about my research on the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club was supported by their documentation of narrative’s place in research.

Narrative research that seeks out and honours the stories of the participants and of the researchers embodies the atmosphere of mutual respect and of collaboration between participants and researcher that I was seeking. Renate Schulz identifies clearly the contribution story can make to research: “Telling stories is an activity that orders meaning, and in this way, narrative discourse contributes to knowing.” (1997, p. 1)

Mary Beattie’s thesis (1991) concretely models narrative research and writing. It was
still some time before I was able to identify how I would find the stories that would contribute to my research on storytelling.

Even when I had chosen narrative research as my methodological route to town, the specific destination that I wanted to focus on was not clear as I set out on my doctoral research journey. There were many possible aspects of storytelling to consider. Grace Feuerverger (Spring, 1996, in a lecture to graduate students at OISE/UToronto) helped to give visual form to my search as she encouraged graduate students preparing for research to “find your house on fire.” This image helped to capture the necessary intensity of commitment and involvement with the specific question – an intensity that had to be all encompassing in order to pursue and maintain the research focus over time with sufficient rigour. Through conversations with my peers and with my advisor, David Booth, I was able to clarify the issue that was important to me. My interest in the students I worked with in The Storytelling Club and how they became storytellers themselves arose as the predominant focus when I talked about storytelling. Still, there seemed to be “meandering” as I pursued this research. At times, it seemed as though the journey was exploring the countryside without getting any closer to the town.

3.2 A First Step: Preliminary Research

I began my research on students as storytellers with a preliminary research project in which I observed and recorded the process of a pair of students as they worked on
learning a story together (Judy Caulfield, 1996). I found that their language became more complex and more elaborative as they honed their skill with the story. This research also led me to a deeper understanding of how two students could work together to collaborate in the learning and telling of a story. Through this research, I gained a greater understanding of what I had first labelled as "false starts". Earlier, when students corrected themselves or repeated a phrase, that had seemed to me to be simply a lack of fluency. However, I came to understand these occurrences as placeholders (S. Savignon, 1983), and points of clarification, which were strategies students used to maintain and to build the coherence of the story. The students were working to become more concise in their storytelling through these strategies.

Yet, even while I learned more about how these two students were working together to learn stories, and even though I felt that I was better able to use this information to show my colleagues the students' language development through storytelling, I felt the work was too narrow and didn't reflect storytelling as an ongoing, social, learning experience. My preliminary research had been focussed on one frozen moment in time through the exploration of one fragment of the experience of storytelling. It did not acknowledge and include the social dynamics between group members that takes place over time or other aspects that were critical elements in understanding how these students became storytellers. Much more was needed to see the pattern beyond one situation. The connections with students' lives, with other students, with other stories, and with previous experiences were crucial and were missing in the preliminary study.
My research progress was not linear. The preliminary research seemed to have been a false start for me, yet instead it gave me a more informed journey as I proceeded along my path. This experience laid the groundwork for thinking about storytelling as a phenomenon which was larger than one incident and which included the community of people – students and teacher/leaders – who met regularly and formed a bond through story and storytelling (Bob Barton & David Booth, 1990).

Learning and personal growth are social in nature. John Dewey has acknowledged this as a foundation for learning:

> The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process.
> John Dewey, 1972, p. 58

My work with the group of students in The Storytelling Club encouraged me to think further about storytelling in a holistic way (J. P. Miller, 1988) that would acknowledge the interactions, the relationships, and the various domains of knowledge involved in this learning situation. This initial research, then, encouraged me to seek new means of exploring the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club and the outcomes that occurred when teacher/leaders and students worked together on storytelling. I resisted focussing on just a couple of students in The Storytelling Club. Selecting a few students would have neglected the valued input of others in the group and would not have acknowledged the importance of the social impact of the group as learners. By listening to tape recordings of the weekly meetings of the group, and through
conversations with my co-teachers/leaders in the group, I began to glean a larger picture of the group as a phenomenon.

3.3 Illuminating Moments: Exploring the Phenomenon

Judith Newman's work with teachers and her advice to them to seek out "critical incidents" became a key which I used to help me focus my research. She explained critical incidents as:

... moments which have forced me to stand back and examine my beliefs and my teaching critically.
   Judith Newman, 1991, p. 246

For my purposes, I shall use the term "illuminating moments" which embodies the concept of enlightenment without seeming to allude to a crisis. This approach led me to identify narrative episodes that would serve as key markers in the path of my research. As I listened to the tapes, I began to seek out episodes that puzzled, surprised, or excited me. Describing these moments and giving them narrative form has been an essential part in concretizing the episodes in order to clarify for myself, and in order to communicate to others, the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club. What began to emerge were the outcomes of our work with students as we explored story and storytelling together.

3.4 The Multiple "I"s: My Roles

I experienced the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club as a participant. I was an experienced storyteller, yet I was still aware of being in the process of learning
about storytelling from others. Conversations with students and fellow teachers who were engaged in learning about storytelling were both fascinating and enlightening. I was also acting as one of the leaders of the group with the role of planning and co-ordinating storytelling activities. As a teacher, I was aware of teaching techniques and applications that my partners and I used as we worked with the students. On top of these existing roles, I was also a researcher who observed the group and who had the opportunity to study tapes of the group meetings at a later time in this role of researcher. This merely identifies some of the surface “multiple ‘I’s” (D. Jean Clandinin & F. Michael Connelly, 1994) that I brought to the research. These varied roles had the potential of bringing a richer experience to my perspective as a researcher.

There are voices of warning in regards to qualitative research when the researcher sees her/himself as a participant in the community. As a member of a community, a researcher may be so accustomed to the events and interactions that things pass unnoticed like “invisible glass walls,” writes Zerubavel (1979). To avoid myopic vision, a variety of data was used to create triangulation (Robert Stake, 1994). This helped to clarify meaning by showing the different ways in which the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club was being viewed. In this way, interviews with the student participants, discussions with students and other leaders, written responses by other leaders, tape recordings of the group meetings, and data from a questionnaire were used to clarify and contrast the data gathered.
3.5 The Questionnaire: A False Start?

In order to gather a quantity of data on students' responses to The Storytelling Club, I gave students a questionnaire during the third term of the first year of the research. (see Appendix A) Students were given some time during a group meeting to fill out the questionnaire, and then encouraged to complete it at home. But, taking the questionnaire home to complete seemed to have been too much like a homework assignment and few students finished it. At the meeting of The Storytelling Club the next week, as we gave students more time to fill out the questionnaire, I experienced a conflict between myself as a leader of the group and myself as the researcher. On the one hand, as one of the leaders of the group, I was committed to our purpose to spend time with students focusing on oral storytelling and giving students opportunities to hear, discuss, and tell stories. On the other hand, as the researcher, I knew that using the questionnaire for a reflective tool required time, structure, and expectation (Joellen Killion and Guy Todnem, 1991). Since this was the first time that we had used a written form as a reflective device, students would have benefited from modelling reflective responses and from further time to give the questionnaire in-depth responses. I was concerned that modelling reflective responses would taint the data from my perspective as one of the leaders, and might not reflect the students' perspectives. Furthermore, I soon recognized that I had chosen a medium totally different from the oral mode in which this group was used to operating. Several of the students were in a small class in order to meet their unique educational needs. The task of writing answers to a group of questions was difficult for them and stilted their
usually fluent oral manner. While I provided myself as a scribe for several students, it
seemed that I was actually gathering a small amount of information for the amount of
time given. I recognized that the students’ purpose for being there as members of The
Storytelling Club was being interfered with by the need to give adequate time to the
questionnaire. I chose in favour of myself as the teacher rather than myself as the
researcher and limited the time spent on the questionnaire, thus honouring our purpose
of gathering together for storytelling. No further time was given to the questionnaire
after that day.

Feedback, from data that had been gathered in the questionnaire, was shared with
students. The answers most frequently given for why the students were coming to
The Storytelling Club focussed on liking to listen to stories, liking to tell stories, and
wanting to be with their friends (see Appendix A for a summary and samples of
student responses).

Like the extended pauses or repetition of phrases which occurred in students’ oral
work when they were working on learning to tell a story (Judy Caulfield, 1996), the
questionnaire had seemed like a “false start”. But, just as I recognized these “false
starts” as being elements of clarification or components that promoted cohesiveness,
so too the questionnaire served as clarification for me of suitable methodology for this
research. This “side track” in the journey of my research work was not without value.
I recalled the time spent with Lorraine, a former storytelling student, tape recording a
discussion with her about her three-year involvement with a storytelling club (Judy Caulfield, 1996). This conversation with Lorraine had been beneficial in giving me further insight into her perspective of how storytelling was a part of her life. I decided that some interviews with individuals in the current storytelling group would be fruitful.

3.6 Interviews: A Narrative Data Source

During the two years in which the data was gathered on The Storytelling Club, I tape recorded as several students sat and chatted with me over lunch to further explore their connections with The Storytelling Club. In one particular case, two boys, Mosie and Draco, decided to do a joint interview rather than to meet with me individually. "We come as a package. Two for the price of one," they proudly explained. The discussion with them added to my understanding of the social learning aspects of The Storytelling Club. I also used an interview format several times to revisit stories which individual students had told to the group. In two separate cases, those of Markus and Silverwing, there was opportunity for further clarification of their stories and exploration of how each one had learned their story from a grandmother.

Working as a teacher within the school where The Storytelling Club was held was a benefit to me as a researcher since I was able to have informal discussions with the other adult participants. Ongoing discussions were possible over lunch, and before or after school. Thus the other teachers/leaders were involved in providing valuable
insight into the experiences with the group. On several occasions, (Ms.) Marion, a co-
leader, read transcripts of field notes and responded with written reflective comments
on the “illuminated moments”. In this way we developed a relationship as partners
within the research. Her interest in how the brain functions and how that might be
reflected in the students’ learning was always an interesting addition to my
perspective.

3.7 Tape Recordings: A Narrative Data Source
Tape recording the sessions of The Storytelling Club as students listened to stories,
responded to stories, worked on stories, and told stories was the main source of data.
The students learned how to set up the tape recorder and lavalier microphone, and
became aware of using appropriate volume so that their voices could be recorded
clearly during discussions. The tape recorder as a tool did not seem to be problematic
for the students. It had been used regularly with this group previously in order for
students to listen to their own storytelling. However, on one occasion, when Laila
was working in a small group preparing a story to tell to another class, she had asked,
“Can you [turn] off the tape?” Another student in the group suggested that she
think of the tape recorder as just another listener. That perspective seemed to put
Laila at ease and she began to tell her part of the story without further apparent
concern.
As a researcher/participant, I found the tape recorder invaluable. During meetings of The Storytelling Club I was able to focus on my role as a leader/participant without worrying about taking field notes. I was able to have the experience of learning stories from and for the students as a participant and later was able, through the tape recordings, to take on the distancing role of observer. The tape recordings also provided me with the ability to use the students’ exact words as I wrote about their participation, giving it the living vitality and validity of their signature (Seamus Heaney, 1984). On a few occasions when the tape recorder didn’t work, I felt panicky – could I remember everything? Would I be able to capture the essence of their voice in the discussions? At those times, (Ms.) Marion would read my field notes, and comment on her recollections of the discussions, adding another dimension to the reflective process. A second perspective on the tapes themselves might also have proven valuable, but was also more time-consuming a task than it would have seemed fair to ask of anyone other than the researcher.

3.8 Ethical Issues Encountered in the Gathering of the Data

The participants in the study included students from grades three to six and the teacher/leaders of the group. The research project was discussed with the adult participants at the beginning of the project and throughout the research. They were enthusiastic about the project (see Appendix B for their letter of consent). The informed consent of students and parents was a two-part process (see Appendix B for their letter of consent). I explained my research to the students, and that my purpose
was to understand how they became storytellers and how The Storytellers Club worked. I answered any questions that they had. Most students were aware of my university studies since it had been an occasional topic of conversation to build an awareness of adults as learners. A letter (see Appendix B), with an attached consent form, was sent home to the parents explaining the research project. A student was included in the study only if both student and parent signed the consent form. In keeping with the welcoming, community aspect of The Storytelling Club, the letter stressed, as did I when discussing the research with the students, that all students continued to be welcome as members of the group whether or not they chose to be included in the research data. The letter also clearly indicated that participants could withdraw from the study at any time and still be members of the group.

Over a two-year period in which two letters of consent were given to student participants, there was only one family who declined to be involved in the research and data collection. This family had two children who were members of The Storytelling Club. Both of the children continued to be regular members of the group. While not appearing to be comfortable with the concept of involving her children in a research project, the mother had several conversations with me about storytelling, attended both end-of-the year storytelling cabarets, and shared a family experience of attending a wedding which had included storytelling. No reason was given by the parents for declining to have their children involved. It is unfortunate, but necessary, to have to leave out the contributions of these two students to The Storytelling Club. Jean
Clandinin and Michael Connelly (1988) demonstrated how important it is to establish and maintain trust and collaboration in the narrative research situation. This also includes respecting the wishes of some who chose not to be involved.

Providing the participants with anonymity in the data is essential to safeguard them. Anonymity, as well as ways of fictionalizing the research texts, can be important aspects in the caring relationship that the researcher creates (Jean Clandinin & Michael Connelly, 1994). Michael Connelly clarified this during a discussion on the pros and cons of using pseudonyms for participants: “None of us really knows the impact of our research,” (in conversation with a discussion group of graduate students at OISE/UToronto, March, 1998). I needed to be sensitive to the impact that the research might have on the participants as well as on the intended audience. A survey of some of the research, which used quotes from participants, offered a variety of choices for providing anonymity. One technique was to number the responses such as: student #1, student #2, etcetera. This seemed to be an impersonal view of the participants, which seemed in direct conflict with celebrating the unique personal contributions that they made to the group. Even just using student’s initials when I first began to transcribe The Storytelling Club’s meetings seemed too impersonal – a contradiction to the community building and the personal interaction that was so much a part of The Storytelling Club.
Elaine Bandermann (1997), in her research on engagement with text through social interaction, involved her student/participants in choosing their own pseudonyms. Each student chose the name of his or her favourite book character. This offered me an example of how I could involve my student/participants in the process, and I subsequently invited them to choose their own pseudonyms. Students engaged in the process of choosing a pseudonym seriously. Some chose a favoured aunt’s name. One chose a grandmother’s name. Others selected their middle name and others were indecisive for several weeks – it became important to them to choose a name that they connected to in some way. One student came to me saying that it was hard to choose a pseudonym. I encouraged her to think about a name that sounded right to her and reflected her culture. This student finally chose “Laila” as her pseudonym. One student, Silverwing, chose a favourite book character as her pseudonym. While switching to their chosen names in the data was a memory challenge at times, both students and researcher felt satisfied that the choices made reflected them as individuals. (Teacher/leaders were also invited to choose their own pseudonyms, and are also referred to in this research by their pseudonyms.)

It is important to note here that when I did my preliminary research project (Judy Caulfield, 1996), I asked the two student participants whether they wanted me to use their own name or a pseudonym when I reported the research. Both girls opted for their own name – they were pleased to be involved in the research project. Being early in the research, I had not yet explored the ramifications of anonymity as fully.
There are some quotes from students where they were referred to just as “student” or as “student #1”. These occurred when I was not able to discern from the tape recording who had spoken due to several students speaking at once or muffled voices.

This decision to acknowledge the contributions of others as persons, not merely as numerical data, guided my choice of how to make references in this thesis. I chose to refer to published writers by first and last name — a continued acknowledgement of the person behind the written and spoken text.

Adult participants in The Storytelling Club were both my peers and group leaders. To reflect their dual relationship as my peers, and as teacher/leaders with the students, I added to their pseudonym (Mr.), (Mrs.), or (Ms.) so that the reader would be informed of the adult voice/perspective that they added to the dialogue. I would also note that when I am a part of the transcripts, I am referred to as: (Mrs.) Judy.

### 3.9 The Cast of Characters: Profiles

**The School**

This is a kindergarten-to-grade-six school of approximately five hundred students in a suburban area in Ontario. The school’s population is of lower-to-middle class students. While there are a variety of cultures represented in the school, it is composed mainly of children of European descent. English is the first language of most students, although there is a small and growing group of students for whom
English is their second language. A high proportion of the population of students stay for lunch, which is when The Storytelling Club was held.

**The Storytelling Club**

The Storytelling Club met every Tuesday lunch hour from the second week of school to early June. Regular attendance was a prerequisite for belonging – reflecting the leaders’ belief that students were building story connections and storytelling skills across time. The students involved were from grade three to grade six. The students ate lunch together and then gathered as a group for listening to storytelling and storytelling activities. The focus was on traditional folk and fairy tales. The purpose was to involve students in storytelling – both listening to stories and telling stories. By the second or third term, students looked forward to telling stories to classes in the school and to inviting a few friends and family members to a storytelling cabaret at year’s end.

A typical meeting started after students had eaten their lunch together and as they gathered together on the carpet. They would share stories about their own storytelling in the past week – who they had told to, and how the stories had been received. Then they would listen to a story told by one of the leaders. Sometimes it would be a new story, sometimes it would be a story repeated with a goal to listen for specific details, patterns, or connections. The stories were not as short as the story that opened Chapter One. Instead, stories ranged in length from five, to ten, to fifteen minutes.
Students gradually moved into the pattern of spontaneously responding to the story told. As the year progressed, they would often connect a story to a previously shared story, and their responses moved from “I liked it!” to more specific responses to the story and the storyteller. They might discuss personal responses, things that puzzled them about the story, or comment on the storytelling style of the storyteller. For example, here’s how Crystal responded to a story after she had been a part of The Storytelling Club for almost a year:

I like the part when he was at the sweet store and he ate all of the sweets 'cause you explained it so well I felt like I was in the story myself!

Students were given the opportunity to explore stories in a variety of ways. After hearing a story told, they might sit in a large circle and retell the story. The story stick became a symbol of the storyteller. (The story stick was a piece of wood carved with the figures of people and animals that might inhabit one of the folk and fairy tales that we shared.) As the story stick was passed to each one in the circle in turn, it symbolized their role as a storyteller contributing a small piece to the telling of the particular tale. Other activities involved retelling stories in partners or small groups, mapping the stories, or visualizing the stories.

Gradually students gained confidence, and in the second term, they would often begin to express interest in telling stories that they had heard from home, or stories that they
had made up. (Although the leaders' main focus was traditional stories, we welcomed students bringing stories to The Storytelling Club – including stories heard, or in one case seen on television, and stories created by themselves.) Before they went into classes in the school to tell stories, several weeks would be spent with partners refining the images in the story, and their telling techniques. In order to provide a supportive climate, they usually told these stories with a partner.

The students in The Storytelling Club came from a wide range of academic abilities. At first glance, some of the students might not appear to the academic community to be able to be successful in a language-based activity. One grade six student, for example, spelled at an early level, and needed support to write because the encoding process was so difficult for her. She received additional service from the in-school-support staff in core areas of the curriculum. Yet, in The Storytelling Club she was seen by both adults and students alike as being accomplished. Thus, The Storytelling Club offered her an opportunity to see herself succeeding and to be valued for her oral skills by her peers. Other students in The Storytelling Club have ranged from high academic achievers to those for whom school is a struggle. While girls outnumbered the boys significantly, there was always a small group of boys participating. If you were to survey the group at any time, you'd find many of them involved in a variety of extracurricular activities: in the choir, playing soccer, or as office helpers.
Typically, when new students were invited to join The Storytelling Club in September, as many as thirty-five students (including new students and returning experienced students) would crowd into the room to find out about the club. Eventually, the number of students attending regularly would decrease to about twenty students. Participants varied from year to year, according to which students chose to make a year-long commitment. It was found that there was a small core of students who, once they became involved, continued to be a part of the group for the remainder of their years at the school.

Students who joined The Storytelling Club reflected the cultural make-up of the school. There were students whose family had been in Canada for several generations as well as students who were recent immigrants. At a cabaret at the end of one school year, after hearing an Anansi story (a story with origins in the West Indies), a parent took time to discuss her own family heritage of Anansi stories. She and her husband left comparing Anansi stories they had heard told in their childhood. It is affirming to both students and parents that through folk tales, many cultures are welcomed and acknowledged.

(Ms.) Marion

(Ms.) Marion was a kindergarten teacher during the time of the research project. She said that she had heard stories all of her life. Her father had told her stories and played stories with her throughout her childhood. When asked what one of her favourite
stories was, she answered, “The Golden Arm” – a traditional English folk tale. (Ms.) Marion brought a broad background of stories and storying to the group. As a teacher, (Ms.) Marion has been adventuresome. She has seldom stayed with a grade level more than two years in a row. At the time of the research project, she was teaching half time so that she could spend time with her pre-schooler the other half of the day. Never-the-less, she was interested in The Storytelling Club and was willing to give up one entire lunch hour a week to work with the group. At home, she often shared with her two children the stories she told to the storytelling group and the stories she had heard others tell.

When asked why she came to storytelling, this is what (Ms.) Marion wrote:

I was turned on to storytelling for teaching while I was a student at the faculty [of education]. Our children’s literature instructor invited Dan Yashinsky to tell stories. Well, he told stories I was familiar with! My father had told the scary ones when I was young.

Besides loving stories, this art form provides me with a voice that is lacking in other areas – specifically music. Teachers who sing can hold the rapt attention of their students. The same is true for storytelling. I found this skill to be especially helpful while providing coverage for teachers. I told a few Hallowe’en stories to a grade four class and they actually settled right down. The same was true for a grade one class. It’s important to have something worthwhile in a pinch.

I come to storytelling so I can share and learn new stories. It takes effort to learn new stories for telling and this weekly schedule disciplines me. Also, The Storytelling Club helps me to remain connected to the older students. I also like the discussions we have!

Regards!
(Mr.) Robert

(Mr.) Robert had taught in a wide variety of situations from grade three, to grade eight, including work with special needs students. While being an active contributing staff member in many areas of school life, he had also worked for several years in the evenings and summers to get his principal’s certification. Even with these demands on his time, he decided to spend an entire lunch hour once a week with The Storytelling Club because he liked stories. He said that he recognized storytelling’s value in terms of diversity and language development. Initially, he came as a listener and to support the other leaders. Immediately, he became an active participant in this storytelling community, partnering with students to work on stories together, adding thoughtful comments, and asking reflective questions. Halfway through the year, he took the plunge, learned a story to share with the group, and became a contributing storyteller.

(Mr.) Robert developed the habit of going back to his grade three classroom after lunch on Tuesdays and telling his students the story that he had just heard. If he missed telling a story, they would remind him. So, he brought his work with The Storytelling Club into his classroom practice. Several of the students who were in his class that year joined The Storytelling Club the next year. (Mr.) Robert would also share with the other leaders his son’s interest in the stories that he was learning.
(Mr.) Robert was part of the research project during the first year. He was promoted to Vice-Principal at another school and was not able to be a participant in the second year.

**Lorraine**

I was fortunate in knowing Lorraine as a student in my junior classroom from grade four to six, and also as a member of The Storytelling Club. This gave me the unique opportunity to know her in many areas of school life.

When I interviewed her, Lorraine was a grade six student who had been a member of The Storytelling Club during her three years as a junior student at our school. A student of Jamaican heritage, who was born in Canada, Lorraine was immersed in story on many levels. There were family stories that included stories told mainly by her mother about growing up in Jamaica and about school life there. There were stories of her own life – like the time when her brother lost the tip of his finger by poking it into a spinning bicycle wheel – “I had to look for it. I had to pick it up – It was my brother’s finger!” Lorraine saw these stories as a source for writing at school and for sharing orally. She had also incorporated storytelling into her family life. According to the tradition in her family, she, as the oldest daughter, was responsible for the care and supervision of her two younger siblings. Lorraine reported how she used story as a reward for her brothers when they had finished their
chores. Lorraine said that at times when she was learning a story, she imagined her brothers as the main characters.

Within the classroom, the curriculum was difficult for Lorraine. But when it came to oral skills, Lorraine was respected in the classroom and in The Storytelling Club for her empathetic, insightful comments on stories, situations, and relationships. When she told a story in class, she leaned forward and her eyes lit up. We all became her willing, captive audience.

Lorraine's artwork demonstrated her warm, encompassing, inclusive perspective. There were usually children of all ages included, and babies and toddlers were frequently held in the arms of an older person. The feeling of warmth and protectiveness exuded from her pictures. (It is Lorraine’s art work that illustrates the Prologue.) Lorraine was an embodiment of “finding a voice” (Seamus Heaney, 1982). Her home and school life were entwined in her oral, written, and visual self-expressions.

**Marium**

Marium was a grade six student who was involved with The Storytelling Club for two and a half years. A recent immigrant from Kuwait, she was born in Kuwait, but the rest of her family were born in Palestine, which she considered her home. Her first language was Arabic. Though she had been taught English twice a week, she spoke
Little English when she arrived at the school. She made a connection with a student who also spoke Arabic and came to The Storytelling Club to accompany her newfound friend. When she first joined the group, it was hard to ascertain how much Marium understood of what was being said. She came one week as a guest, and just continued coming! A quiet observer during the last part of the year when she joined us, she gradually became more vocal during the next year to the point that she volunteered to tell a story of her own to the group.

Marium talked quietly on a one-to-one basis of her grandmother who had often told her stories. When she volunteered to tell a story to the group, she promised to tell us one of her grandmother's stories, but instead retold a folk tale she’d seen on TV. She thought that we’d like it better. The leaders continued to express an interest in hearing the stories from her family heritage and she did finally tell the group one of these. Marium had to rely only on her memory since her grandmother was in her home country.

**Laila**

Laila was a grade five student who was born in Lebanon. Her first language was Lebanese. She arrived in Canada during her grade four year. When she entered our school she joined The Storytelling Club right away. While English was not her first language, she had some experience with English before she had arrived at this school and could communicate well enough to be understood. She was an outgoing
participant in The Storytelling Club who frequently added comments after hearing stories told by other students or teachers. A student with an inquiring mind, she could be very assertive about her opinions and she didn’t let her less-than-fluent English inhibit her from expressing them.

**Draco and Mosie**

The profiles of Mosie and Draco are best presented together. As the boys said:

"We’ve always come in a package." “Yup – two for the price of one!” They had a close friendship. Even in years when they were not in the same classroom, they maintained their connection – keeping together like a “package”. When working on a story within the group, these two routinely chose to work together. The boys were members of The Storytelling Club for three years. They joined in grade four, having been in (Mr.) Robert’s class and listening to his stories the year before.

Mosie was a second generation Canadian. His cultural connections spanned Ireland, Scotland, France, Macedonia, and Newfoundland. He was an only child who reported retelling stories he had heard at The Storytelling Club to his mother or to visiting relatives. Mosie was articulate in expressing his views. When asked why he came to The Storytelling Club, Mosie was quite specific:

I keep coming back because it’s a good experience to learn new stories.

If you learn a story from a foreign country, you can pass it from
generation to generation in your family. And we get to express our feelings in front of people.

Mosie returned to this theme of expressing his feelings several times during our interview.

Instead of reading a story out of a book like the other schools, we can use our sense of imagination and express our feelings. We can say like how we feel about someone.

He tied his imagination and his self-expression together very strongly. This was a key element for him. Mosie was an active student who enjoyed being involved in a variety of school activities including choir, plays, some sports, and as an office helper. With all of these other opportunities his advice to a new student was:

"Come!" I would say. "Come and enjoy yourself. It is a way to express your feelings. You can come have fun. It's on a Tuesday so it won't interfere with choir, or games club, or any other club."

Mosie was in (Mr.) Robert's class and recalls hearing the stories that (Mr.) Robert told to his class in (Mr.) Robert's first year with The Storytelling Club. The next year, Mosie joined.

Draco described himself as: "all Canadian with a lot of different backgrounds."

These included Irish, Scottish, and English. Draco expressed his ideas clearly in conversation as well as in storytelling. Draco frequently mentioned the end of the year Storytelling Cabaret as an important part of The Storytelling Club. When he
elaborated on this idea, a key aspect was how he *associated* through and with storytelling:

And like the cabaret. Because we’re telling stories, and we’re telling the people what we like to associate with — storytelling. How we might tell the stories we like…. We get to associate with a lot of different people.

For Draco “associate” was a key word. It indicated to him the power of being in a community with like goals. For Draco “associate” had two meanings. One was the active component of being with other people – as *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* would put it: “in companionship” (Katherine Barber, p. 76). He certainly was a social individual who talked easily and exchanged personal stories during lunch time with his peers and with teachers. “Associate” also meant an identity for Draco. He was declaring to people that he wanted to be seen as being connected with stories.

### 3.10 Why Include Profiles?

Profiles of the other leaders and a selection of some of the students involved in The Storytelling Club are included to give the reader a sense of who some of the students are. Brian Cambourne (1988) models for us the importance of profiles as he analyses why he included profiles in his book on the acquisition of literacy. He asserts, that the profiles have significance. Just as in narrative, the context – in this case who the participants were – is important and adds to the whole of the meaning. The participants are neither faceless nor just numbers. They bring their own experiences
(Dewey, 1972) to their learning. Knowing who they are, and understanding their landscapes enriches the understanding of the research.
CHAPTER 4
THE TELLERS AND THEIR TALES: THE DATA AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Illuminating Moments
This chapter holds the stories of the stories. By encapsulating illuminating moments in narrative form (based on the concept of “critical incidents” as described by Judith Newman, 1991), I have sought to give the reader a clearer view of the phenomenon of The Storytelling Club. These narratives became part of the process of discovery of the outgrowths that occurred as students and teachers worked together to celebrate, discuss, and tell stories to each other. The narratives of these illuminating moments were analyzed using the wisdom of those who have researched and have written about language and about storytelling. It is my hope that these illuminating moments “will shed light, invite understanding, and offer new knowledge” (Betty C. Eng, personal written communication in response to a presentation of mine at OISE/UToronto, March, 2000).

4.2 Modelling Ways of Connecting
The students gathered around (Mr.) Robert, a teacher/leader, to listen to a story. Before he told the story, however, he had a personal connection to relate. He had found the book The Fat Cat by Jack Kent (see Appendix C) several years ago at a sale
and had brought it home to share with his son. It had been a favourite family book ever since. When he pulled the book off the shelf at home to revisit it before telling to the Storyteller’s Club, (Mr.) Robert was surprised to discover that this simple, unassuming story had a long history. It was a Danish folk tale. He told us how pleased he was to discover that he too had become a part of the life history of this story. Indeed, as he began to tell the story, he was sharing a story within a story.

**Personal Connections Shared**

(Mr.) Robert’s pleasure in telling the story was apparent. His eyes sparkled as he told the story to the students. Embedded in his telling of the story was his positive personal experience of sharing this story over several years with his son. It obviously had strong personal family connections for him.

(Mr.) Robert’s discovery that the story was a part of the folk tale tradition validated the story as complementary to the body of traditional folk tales and fairy tales that we were choosing to tell to The Storytelling Club. By sharing the story with his son, and then his students, he had joined the generations of people who had heard and passed on this story. He had, in this postmodern age, been connected with previous generations through this story and had reproduced the sharing and the close bond that comes from the telling and retelling of a story. In a way, this had raised the value he placed on the book – from a book casually purchased at a garage sale to a treasured folk tale. Now the book fit into the larger context of folk tales – a story form that was
valued by this particular storytelling group at school. This brought the response full circle for (Mr.) Robert, who had connected his values of family time together and the sharing of stories, to what he was working to teach these students: valuing stories and time together to share those stories. It was as though his beliefs were being reflected in his teaching and he had, in a brief glimpse, shared that revelation with us. It could be said that he was thinking of his teaching experience as a “text to interpret” (Patrick Diamond, 1991, p. 116).

Knowing How to Connect

Madan Sarup (1989) proposes the threefold competence of narrative to be: know how, knowing how to listen, and knowing how to speak. Madan Sarup does not further define these terms. It may be useful here to consider that developing skills in listening which encompass noticing the patterns, structure, and sequence of stories connect to his term “knowing how to listen”, and that learning oral expressive skills may connect to his term “knowing how to speak.” The concept of “know-how” seems less easy to define. For our purposes, let us assume it means the cultural information that is embedded in stories. This may include people’s roles, values, expectations, and assumptions. I would propose a fourth narrative competence to be: “knowing how to connect.” “Knowing how to connect” would encompass an awareness of Self in relationship to stories and others, as well as awareness of similarities, differences, and connections between stories. When he related his own experiences with the story, (Mr.) Robert modelled for students “how to connect.” He shared specific family
connections with the story: who was involved, how they were involved, and the pleasure and fun experienced as the story was shared. He demonstrated for students in a concrete way how storytelling could be part of personal lives. John Dewey (1972) states that education and growth must be embedded in personal experience. (Mr.) Robert demonstrated that this was true for himself and his family, and he modelled this for students.

Dewey Chambers (1977) says that storytelling is oral literature. (Mr.) Robert demonstrated this. In his family, this story had become familiar and was part of their family oral literature, which could be referred to as a common shared reference. Several months after the story had been told to The Storytelling Club, students were still referring to the story. Thus it became part of their shared oral literature. When (Mr.) Robert’s copy of the book went astray, and we had only our memories, then the story had truly reached oral status in the group.

**Stories Within Stories: A Narrative Teaching Mode**

As the tapes of the meetings of The Storytelling Club accumulated, and the data emerged, it became apparent that the teachers in The Storytelling Club – (Ms.) Marion, (Mr.) Robert, and myself – frequently shared our personal connections with a story before we began to tell it. This modelling of how story was a part of our lives and how we made connections with story and storytelling was an essential part of the teacher-student interaction within this group. John Dewey says that education is
essentially a "social process" (1972, p. 59), where the teacher no longer has the position of external boss but takes on the role of leader. The modelling for students of how story affected our lives, rather than lecturing on the importance of story in our lives, informed the kind of role that the leaders of this group had. Brian Cambourne (1988) considers demonstration to be an essential element in literacy development. In The Storytelling Club, teachers embedded in the fabric of their work stories of the stories. They were building a narrative mode of working with these students and were achieving unity between their philosophy of teaching, their lives, and their teaching practice. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly would call this "narrative unity" (1988).

When (Ms.) Marion told the story “The Cat that Walked by Himself” (Rudyard Kipling, 1964, see Appendix C), she related that she had first heard the story told in a casual group setting as friends sat around chatting.

I have to tell you the story behind the story. A friend first told the story to me when we were all away for the weekend sitting around with our legs up having discussions. And we got into the traditional argument: Cats rule, dogs drool! Well, somebody said, “No dogs rule, cats drool.”

Then my friend Jeanie said, “No, no, no! I’ve got the story to tell you about cats and dogs and why we like cats, and why we like dogs.”

Later in the summer, when her daughter purchased the Rudyard Kipling book Just So Stories (1964), (Ms.) Marion found herself reading the story “The Cat that Walked by
Himself” to her daughter. She went on to explain her husband’s response to hearing her read the story to her daughter:

After the story my husband said, “What was that story you were telling Annie?” I said, “Just a book she was reading.” He said, “Well, what book?” And he kept asking these questions. Sensing that he wasn’t openly declaring his interest in the story, I said, “Jack, did you like that story?” And he said, “Yah, I really liked it.” He was embarrassed!

(Ms.) Marion shared her personal connections with the students – she modelled for them a place for stories outside of school in a casual circumstance (with her friends), but she also modelled parenting with stories as a family focus. By modelling, I mean to say that (Ms.) Marion didn’t say that stories should be shared by families, instead, she showed how this happened within her family. Just as stories, through narrative form give context, details, and examples, so (Ms.) Marion was working through narrative form to demonstrate how stories were important to her family. Both (Ms.) Marion and (Mr.) Robert had vividly modelled for students how stories were often framed within the stories of their lives. It helped students to see the multiple levels of story, and how public and private stories can be linked.

4.3 Language Play

When (Mr.) Robert told the story The Fat Cat (Jack Kent, 1971, see Appendix C), the students’ responses were very active. This wasn’t a story that they sat quietly through. Their reaction was a dramatic contrast to the hushed silence that sometimes
accompanied their listening. There were little aside-comments as the story was being told. Short phrases from the story were repeated underbreath – as though students could not resist running them over their tongues. The names of two of the characters were tongue twisters and students softly whispered them in amusement each time they were included in the chant within the story. They were being drawn into this cumulative tale as they repeated aloud the growing list of people and things that the little cat was swallowing whole.

I was immediately struck by the language play within this story. The students were mimicking, mouthing, and physically twisting and turning in response to the words. They were physically immersed in this story, concretely demonstrating for me a powerful physical response to language play, which echoed what I had observed at the Celtic Roots Festival – children's active, physical response to music.

(Mr.) Robert “hooked” students’ interest in the story when he related his personal connection to the story. As he began telling the story, the students responded strongly to the word play within the story. The two characters’ names “Skohottentot” and “Skolinenlot” were fascinating to the students. You could see some silently mouthing the names and hear others trying to master the words along with (Mr.) Robert during his rapid-fire telling of the story. The name Skohottentot uses short syllables which emphasize the explosive “k” and “t” making the word “Skohottentot” leap out of the mouth in a rapid and staccato rhythm. When the next character
“Skolinkenlot” was introduced, the word play continued. This name, too, had short syllables with an explosive “k” as the word erupted. The variation of “k” and “l” in the second name provided contrast with the first. Students were attracted to the words as a rhyming pair. They listened carefully, challenged by the variation between the two names. When the little cat in the story next repeated the list of things and people that he had eaten, a tongue twister had emerged:

I ate the gruel,  
and the pot  
and the old woman too.  
and Skohottentot  
and Skolinkenlot.
And now I’m going  
to also eat YOU.

Jack Kent, 1971, p. 17

Storytelling offers many ways for students to experience the pleasure of language. In their book Stories in the Classroom: Storytelling, Reading Aloud and Roleplaying with Children, Bob Barton and David Booth note the wonderful language opportunities in stories: “melodies and rhythms that tune the ear to the power of words.” (1990, p.37) These children were opening up to the exploration of the sounds of language with light-hearted fun.

Word Play: Exploration and Intellectual Discovery

Margaret Meek sees word play as intellectual discovery and exploration:

I have already suggested that phonological word-play is delight in utterance; that verbal invention is part of the intellectual surprise of a here-and-now discovery; that the boundaries of sense and nonsense are a linguistic
playground where children explore the real and the imaginary – the way things are and the topsey turveys of language and the world.
Margaret Meek, 1985, p. 48

Sometimes school takes such a serious view of language and learning that language play is not recognized as intellectually stimulating, explorative, and an important factor in discovering what Margaret Meek called the pleasure of the awareness of what is nonsense (1985, p. 48).

Making Choices About Stories

At this point, I would be remiss if I did not relate a strong response that a fellow storyteller had to this tale when I discussed with her the students’ responses. Lynda Howes, a respected, Toronto storyteller, queried the use of the name “Skohottentot” and felt that it was very close to “Hottentot”. She referred me to a book that she had recently read on South Africa, * Somehow Tenderness Survives: Stories of Southern Africa* (Hazel Rochman, 1988). The book’s glossary defines Hottentot as follows: “derogatory name for the Khoi-Khoi Cape aboriginals; sometimes a derogatory term for people of mixed race.” (1988, p. 180) *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Katherine Barber, 1998, p. 684) confirms the “often offensive” nature of the word and adds that it is of Dutch origin. However, it is also interesting to note that an Internet search of “Hottentot” reveals many references to Hottentots as a tribe and to their customs, stories, their relationship with bushmen, and the name they call themselves as being “Khoi-Khoi” meaning “men of men”. I had not been familiar with Hottentot as a pejorative term.
How does this all relate to this particular Danish folk tale? When the story was introduced, neither the teller, nor the listeners appeared to have made any connection between “Skohottentot” and “Hottentot” as a derogatory term. They seemed to have been engaged in pure exploration of the sound combinations. Whether there was any derogatory intention in the original Danish telling of the story is difficult to assess.

Having done this research on the word “Hottentot” and its possible connections to the story “The Fat Cat”, would I use the story again? This is a good question. Storytellers choose their stories carefully and must therefore consider their stories’ purpose and effect. To purposefully introduce to students a term which may be considered derogatory would be wrong. Is the term derogatory when given a suffix and used innocently? Perhaps it still is. Rather than deprive my students of the pleasure of word play through sounds or of the pleasure of a comical cumulative tale, I could opt to make a small change in the name “Skohottentot”. Using instead the name “Skomottentot” would still allow for the play with sounds without interjecting a possibly pejorative term. This I, think, would maintain the tenor of the story. If I had felt the need to change an integral section of the story, then it would have been time to seek out a different tale to tell.

**Being a Receiver and a Creator**

Language play has two complementary aspects. When students were exposed to language play through listening to a storyteller, they could have an opportunity to
appreciate and to participate in language play. Exposure to language play through The Storytelling Club might also have offered students the freedom (almost like giving permission) to explore their own topsy-turvy sense of the world through nonsense ideas and alliterations. In effect, they could experience being both a receiver and a creator of language play.

One day, (Ms.) Marion introduced the students to a middle-eastern character who is known by many names – Hodja, Nassredin, and occasionally Hoca. The Hodja is usually described as a wise fool. After she had listened to (Ms.) Marion tell the Hodja story “The Hoca [sic] and The Candle” (Barbara Walker, 1967, see Appendix C), in which the Hodja accepts a dare to stay outside all night long with nothing to keep him warm, Sharon noted with evident pleasure a playful element of repetition in the story:

Sharon: I like the part where he [the Hodja] said:

Not with a coat.

Not with a blanket.

NOT a problem!

Sharon had noted the wordplay with the repetition of the word “not”. She also seemed to be aware of the slight change of meaning from the first two usages of “not” with a list of objects: a coat, a blanket, to the third repetition of “not” tied to the concept word “problem”. It was also evident that she found pleasure in repeating this segment, and emphasizing “NOT” the third time. Sharon was a good example of a
student who was listening closely and appreciating the language play used by the narrator.

The following is an excerpt from the story, “The Blueberry Fairy” (see Appendix C), created by Rachelle, a grade four student. This is a story that she shared with The Storytelling Club and with other friends. In her story, the young boy Justin wondered who put the blue in blueberries. Justin went from person to person presenting the question:

He asked his principal. The principal is never wrong – right? He said, “Principal, who puts the blue in the blueberries?”

The principal said, “Well, didn’t your friend, your mother, your father, OR your older sister ever tell you that the Blueberry Fairy puts the blue in the blueberries fairly?”

And he said, “Well, yes they did, but I still don’t believe.”

The juxtaposition of using “fairy” and “fairly” within the same sentence, as well as choosing to repeat the letter “b” in “blue in the blueberries” demonstrated her facility in manipulating sounds for effect. She also positioned the opposites “wrong” and “right” back-to-back surprising the listener into considering whether this statement was wrong or right. Is the principal never wrong? Rachelle had created a very playful piece, which was quite a tongue twister when spoken in her style of rapid delivery. Yet, the story also had another layer of meaning for her. Rachelle’s character Justin
pursued the question in her story even to God who replied, "Well, didn't you know Justin, I put the blue in the blueberries."

As Betty Rosen notes, there is much lost in a transcription of an oral experience:

The printed text of any talk wipes out all speech rhythms, tone, pitch, variation of pace, all eye-contact, actions, gestures, mannerisms, physical jerks, quirks, twitches, fleeting grins, frowns, gleams, flares. Indeed, it strikes out completely that entire enigmatic, dynamic container of infinite mysteries – the visible human form.
Betty Rosen, 1988, p.70

Lost for you the reader, is the speed at which the tongue twister came tripping off Rachelle's tongue: "How does the Blueberry Fairy put the blue in the blueberries fairly?" Lost also is her confidence, her smile, and her body leaning forward as she made eye contact with her audience. Missing too is her laugh in response to our amazement at the tongue twister that she had created!

Barry Sanders sees learning to manipulate language as crucial in the social and emotional development of young people. He believes that with the manipulation of language comes the power to "conjure" their own world.

... without the joy of playing with language – youngsters quite literally self-destruct... without the formative power of language, the inner life never fills out and takes shape.
Barry Sanders, 1995, p. 34

These are strong and powerful words. They serve to put us on notice that it is important to give children the opportunity to "play" with language so that they can see their own potential for manipulating language and so that they can express themselves
vibrantly. In this way, they will have an equal say by being able to express their perceptions of the world and communicate effectively through language.

4.4 Personal Connections to Stories

When Karen, a grade five student, told the story “The Rainbow Crow: A Lenape Tale” (Nancy Van Laan, 1989, see Appendix C), students commented that they liked the story and the way Karen had told it. They wanted to know when she had heard the story. Her answer: “Grade one” amazed us all. That had been four years ago.

(Mrs.) Judy: So, have you remembered it since grade one, or did you just reread it?

Karen: I remembered.

This was surprising. Students are exposed to a wide variety of books ranging from read-alouds in the classroom and library, to shared reading with parents, to their own personal reading. This doesn’t even begin to count the multitude of stories they are exposed to on TV. Why had Karen remembered this specific story out of all of the others, and how had she remembered it all of that time?

(Ms.) Marion: Why did you want to tell that story?

Karen: My last name is Crowe and I like that story.

(Mrs.) Judy: It must make connections for you.

Karen: It is hard to know why I like that story. I tell it to myself a lot.
Private Meanings

Karen was remembering one particular story amongst all of the other stories to which she had been exposed. She didn’t announce her connection to the story right away. Perhaps she thought that it was inherently obvious. After all, her last name was Crowe and the story was about a crow. In the story, the crow flew all the way to the sun with a stick in his mouth to bring fire back for the animals. This was a brave, dangerous deed which none of the other animals had been able to accomplish. Karen might have related to these fine qualities of courage and accomplishment and seen them as connected to herself through her name association.

In 1996, I reported how a student of Jamaican descent explained her personal connection to an Anansi story. (Anansi is a trickster character featured in many stories which were brought to the West Indies by the West-African slaves. The character is found in many tales in Africa, the West Indies and the United States.) Lorraine, when quizzed about how she saw the setting of the story in her mind, was quite specific. She felt that since I, as her teacher, had told her about my husband’s recent visit to St. Vincent, I might be visualizing St. Vincent, but she clearly saw Jamaica:

Lorraine: And sometimes I picture it in my own mind. I picture the Caribbean – homeland – sun. Well, I see it as Jamaica because I have the feeling of the heat.

Judy Caulfield, 1996, p. 59
Lorraine's personal connection to Jamaica was intense. Both of her parents were born in Jamaica. Although she was born in Canada, her visits to Jamaica had left a strong impression on her as had her parents' stories about growing up in Jamaica. Her key word "homeland" clearly demonstrated her ties to Jamaica.

Bob Barton and David Booth talk about how stories can evoke "private meanings" (1990, p. 37) for each individual. Both of these students have illustrated the compelling nature of personal connections for building private meanings for students. John Dewey (1972) states that education and growth must be grounded in personal experience. These students demonstrated that personal experience can have deep significance for building educational foundations.

Karen started with a powerful personal connection to the story, but how did she go beyond this to remembering the details of the story? Karen reported: "I tell it to myself a lot." So, instinctively, without prodding from adults, Karen kept the story alive by retelling it to herself - it was important to her. However, she did more than just repeat the story to herself:

I think about the rainbow and how it [the crow] has such a bad voice now and how it might have had such a really good voice. You know?

Karen went deeper into the story, speculating about what crow might have been like today with a beautiful voice, if he had not made the supreme sacrifice of ruining his voice and his beautiful feathers in order to bring back the fire for the others.
As leaders of The Storytelling Club, we know that if students want to remember a story they will need to work with it. Dorothy Heathcote (1978) reminds us that good teaching lies in being able to slow down time enough for inquiry to happen, making the inquiry interesting enough for loitering but also rigorous enough to bring new thought processes into understanding. Karen has shown how personal connections can make delving further into a story more meaningful. Reflecting about interesting details can give a student reason to linger on a story.

**Interpersonal Connections: Stories Told by Grandmothers**

While Karen demonstrated personal connection to a story through association with her name, other students showed us that inter-generational stories were a strong source of personal connection to story. After Silverwing told the story “Trading the Goat” as told to her by her grandmother (see Appendix C), students questioned her:

Yasmin: Why did you choose the story?

Silverwing: Well, I chose that story because my Grandmother told me that story and I thought I would tell it.

Another student, Marium, frequently referred to stories that her grandmother had told her, however, when she sat down to tell us a story, she told us one that she’d heard on TV. Apparently, she thought that we’d like that one better. It was a while before I began to understand Marium’s connection to her grandmother. She frequently referred to stories told to her by her grandmother. It was some time before I
discovered that her grandmother was still in Palestine. The stories Marium had heard had been told several years before. When she first started telling stories, was she able to trust us to share such special memories? Did she think we would value TV stories over stories told by her grandmother? Did she trust herself to remember them well? These are personal issues that she didn't explore with us.

What I can say, is that this grandmother had imbued in Marium the importance of stories. Even before she had mastered rudimentary English, Marium was coming with a friend to The Storytelling Club. It was Marium who first brought out the issue of morals in stories. "My grandmother's stories always had morals in them," she said.

In her second year of being a member of The Storytelling Club, Marium did begin to tell stories told to her by her grandmother. Other students at that time were also sharing stories told to them by grandparents. Perhaps this helped to validate and acknowledge our interest in these shared stories. Certainly Marium's English was advancing in leaps and bounds and she was more able to give full expression to the stories in English.

4.5 Stories Elicit Vivid Images

Yasmin, a grade three student, chose to retell "The Guinniwolf" (Wilhelmina Harper, 1967, see Appendix C), a story she’d heard me tell when she was a student in my
grade one class. In this story, the mother leaves to go to the market and cautions her daughter not to go into the woods because “the Gunniwolf might get you.” However, the little girl ignores her mother and is innocently drawn into the woods following a trail of flowers as she gathers a bouquet. First a patch of white flowers, then yellow flowers, and then red flowers lead her deeper and deeper into the woods. She does meet the Gunniwolf but she escapes using a lullaby to put him to sleep.

When students queried Yasmin about when she’d heard “The Gunniwolf”, and how she’d remembered it, flowers emerged as the singular strong image for her:

Yasmin: I remember I was told it in grade one. I remember it was about flowers.

student #1: How did you remember about the story?

Yasmin: Well, because I was thinking of flowers. I was thinking of flowers today and then I thought back in grade one. And I knew there was a good story to tell.

student #2: Why did you want to tell that story today?

Yasmin: Because I was in a flowery mood. And that was the only story I thought of that was about flowers.

In Yasmin’s version of the story, each time the girl stops singing the wolf wakes up and takes the girl back to the flower patch. It is as though she is being drawn back to the flowers instead of getting closer and closer to the edge of the forest and to an escape. Her vision of this story is clearly focussed on flowers.
Imagery Forms the Story

Yasmin’s telling had her own distinct focus and imagery. The mother’s cautionary note in the story was absent in Yasmin’s telling. Even when the mother returned and discussed with her daughter the day’s events, Yasmin’s version had the daughter say, “I was picking flowers.” Her intonation held no hints that the child was trying to cover up a transgression. Rather than a cautionary tale, Yasmin’s initial perception of the story was revealed by her focus on flowers throughout the story:

While she was looking around she saw a WHOLE bunch of flowers.

Beautiful ones that were coloured like a rainbow.

Yasmin expanded the story through her own strong imagery. She did not imagine a trail of flowers leading deeper and deeper into the woods but a “whole bunch” of flowers. It was as though she was overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of beautiful flowers in “rainbow” colours that she envisioned.

Imagery as a Tool

Imagery can be a powerful tool in making personal connections. David Hunt (1992) uses personal imagery extensively in his work for renewal of personal energy. Imagery is also being used in a wide variety of applications. It is used in sports to envision the “perfect” dive; for visualizing fighting illness like cancer; and in creating metaphors for understanding the workplace (Gareth Morgan, 1986).
When students are able to allow images of the story to form clearly in their mind, they can feel immersed in the story. This is what Crystal was describing when she listened to Silverwing tell the story of “Trading the Goat” (Silverwing, 1998, see Appendix C). In the story, when the candy story owner accepted a trade of the goat for candy, the father immediately began gobbling up candy. Here is how Crystal responded after she heard the story:

I like the part when he was at the sweet store and he ate all of the sweets 'cause you explained it so well I felt like I was in the story myself!

Storytelling offers the students the unique opportunity to envision the story for themselves without relying on the pictures of an illustrator. This was demonstrated by Lorraine, a grade six student, when retelling in her own words the beginning of the story “Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock” (Eric Kimmell, 1988, see Appendix C).

Anansi was walking down the hot, steamy road. All you see is the heat waves on the road. Anansi was very hot. It was very humid. He walks along and he decides to walk in the cool forest.

Lorraine’s personal experiences in Jamaica informed her images clearly. When questioned further about how her images of the story would be perhaps different from mine, Lorraine described the details of her images: “... palm trees, bumpy road, um, coconut trees – yah!”
It is not only junior students who demonstrated strong visual imagery when told a story. When I told the story “The Three Little Pigs” (Margot Zemach, 1988, see Appendix C) to a kindergarten class, we discussed the story, enacted it and played with it in the home centre, and painted and drew it. Then I showed a filmstrip of the story as a contrast to the version I had told. One child was very adamant: “The filmstrip is wrong. That wolf was brown and our wolf was black.” (Judy Caulfield, 1994, p. 71) Indeed, I had not described the wolf’s colour when I told the story. What a strong image she had created for herself! I knew then that I had to keep telling stories. I knew that I wanted my students to experience their own images and not just the images of the TV screen.

Without the illustrations from a picture book, students have the freedom to populate the story with people of the same skin tone or to experience the setting as a place familiar to themselves. In fact, it opens the listener up to using her/his personal visual images. Howard Gardner (1983) has identified several basic intelligences, one of which is “visual-spatial intelligence” which relies on the ability to visualize and includes the ability to create mental images. Storytelling can help students experience their strength in this area of intelligence which is often left untapped since education frequently focusses on verbal-linguistic and on logical-mathematical intelligences. By expanding the ways in which students can connect with the curriculum and with school, more students can have their strengths validated thereby building self-esteem.
The Ontario Arts Council (1997) recognizes the strength of the arts when teaching students:

Students taught through the arts also tend to be more motivated and have a more positive attitude toward learning.

The Ontario Arts Council, 1997, p. 14

4.6 This Community of Storytellers

“I can’t live without story!” – Marie was being effusive and using her dramatic flair to advantage as she entered the room for the first session of The Storytelling Club in the new school year. Her exaggerated comment demonstrated her heartfelt response to returning to this group, which was a part of her life as she experienced it at school.

As we sat together, eating and renewing acquaintances, topics jumped from students’ new and improved lunch containers, to contents of lunches, to summer holiday happenings, to returning to The Storytelling Club.

Janet: I’ve been thinking of a story all summer long. I can’t wait to tell it!

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary’s definition of community includes “fellowship of interests” and a “body of nations unified by common interests” (Katherine Barber, 1998, p. 288). Jean Vanier, in his exploration of community, stressed that there is “mutual trust at the heart of community” (1979, p.12). Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wellis, focussed on a learning community and stated that:
a different mode of interaction is necessary where experts and learners see themselves as equal members and where each participant can make a significant contribution to the emerging understanding.

Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells, 1992, p. 96

Bob Barton and David Booth (1990) observed that storytelling creates a bond. The key words that emerge from these views of community are: fellowship, participation, unified interest, and bond, to which I would also add caring, and trust (P. Hogan in Michael Connelly & Jean Clandinin 1990, Peter Elbow, 1986). For the purpose of this paper, I consider The Storytelling Club to be a micro-community within this school. This micro-community includes the students and leaders who meet regularly once a week to share and tell stories.

Judith Newman (1991) reports on the importance of personal storytelling within a group for building common experiences and establishing trust. As these students sat and ate lunch together, and shared personal stories, they were weaving their stories together – stories of play, family, and work (school). Their informally shared stories built the bonds that would support them as group members when they became involved in the risky work of putting themselves on the spot to try to tell a story. They were building rapport with each other and with the leaders.

Further bonds were built when folk and fairy tales were shared and discussed. This was the thread that stitched them together. They discovered that opinions were
welcomed and honoured. They assisted each other and built a learning, narrative community where they viewed each other as fellow members working towards a goal.

Friendship: A Significant Part of the Bond of Community

Marie reminisced about the first time she came to The Storytelling Club two years ago:

Marie: I didn’t want to come. She [Janet] dragged me here!

Janet: I knew you’d like it. “Just try it!” I said.

Marie: I was changing my mind all the time. Will I go? Won’t I go?

She finally dragged me here! I haven’t missed a week since!

Marie and Janet were demonstrating the power of friendship within this community. Classroom teachers often physically split up friends due to the familiarity and the giggles that sometimes ensue when they sit together. These two girls demonstrated the power of friendship for positive action. I have observed during the four years of working with students at this school, that many students come with a buddy from their classroom. These students tended to be more regular in their attendance. Certainly having a friend who shared this story interest seemed supportive to them. Others, who did not appear to have a close friendship in other areas of school life, seemed to feel welcomed into the storytelling fold. It was a group where they belonged that they might not have had otherwise. Draco and Mosie acknowledged the importance of friendship in their experience with The Storytelling Club:

Draco: We’ve always come in a package.
(Mrs.) Judy: You two *do* seem to be a package deal!

Mosie: Yup. Two for the price of one. Now it is four for the price of one. Karl and Biff [have joined].

(Mrs.) Judy: And you’ve got another friend there too.

Mosie: Yup. *He’s Michael. He’s new.*

Both Draco and Mosie (now grade six students) had been members of The Storytelling Club since grade four. No doubt it was their interest and enthusiasm that drew three other friends to join also. Draco stated that he would tell new students to come because “*We get to associate with a lot of different people.*” For Draco, a very social boy, the opportunity to associate with friends in a club which he found stimulating, was a rewarding experience.

**The Bond of Shared Stories**

Along with the collegial atmosphere that was developing between participants in this club, was the special bond that comes from shared stories. These stories provided a reference point for discussions. Students shared their personal connections with the stories and built shared experiences. Bob Barton and David Booth describe this unique bond:

> The oral tradition – stories told aloud – goes right back to the tribe and its communal life. When children become a community of listeners, they lay aside their own egocentricity, and become a tribe.

Bob Barton and David Booth, 1990, p. 31
Janet expressed her connections to this “tribe” when she explained to us that all summer long she had been holding in her mind a particular story and anticipating sharing it with this group:

As soon as I heard it, I felt like I should share it to storytelling. I’ve been thinking of the story all summer long.

Marie told us the story of how she’d encountered a new story to share:

I went over to my friend’s house and my friend told me this story. And I thought it was really cool. And I was thinking maybe if they had storytelling this year, that I’d come and tell the story. I was practising it to my parents, to all my friends ...

Both of the girls demonstrated the inclusiveness that they felt within The Storytelling Club. Each one, in her own way, couldn’t wait to add her story to the story repertoire of the group. It was a safe place for them to tell and share and have their storytelling affirmed. It is interesting to note that both girls framed the story that they brought to share with The Storytelling Club, with a story that demonstrated their personal connection to it. The teachers had “demonstrated” (Brian Cambourne, 1988) their connections to story and how it was woven into the fabric of their lives and these students were doing likewise. The fact that these experienced student storytellers were also demonstrating their connections to story was good modelling for new students and helped to foster the development of a sense of community around story.
Trust and Caring Build Community

Trust and caring are crucial elements in building community. This has been documented in regard to developing an equitable, respectful research association between researcher and participant (Michael Connelly & Jean Clandinin, 1990; Peter Elbow, 1986; P. Hogan, 1988; Nel Noddings, 1986). These same elements were evident in the positive feedback students were able to give to each other on a story that they were planning to tell co-operatively. They were working towards improving their telling of the story “Just in Time for the King’s Birthday” (E. B. Chance, 1973, see Appendix C).

Laila: I really like how – he [the third storyteller] said “and then the farmer felt the ground shake.” Because the cats are like – “M-M-M!” [The cats were so excited that they were rushing to eat the cheese, saying “m, m, m.”]

(Mrs.) Judy: I like that idea too. What else do you like about the way that he told it?

Laila: [He said] “Not even a sniff”

Marium: Ya. I forgot [to say] that [in my part].

In this “collaborative talk” (Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells, 1992), positive feedback supported the tellers in planning to make their work the best that they could. It helped them to be able to trust their peers to give useful comments. Students became the experts as they assessed the positive aspect of a fellow student’s
storytelling, while the storyteller received feedback, which could promote understanding of what she/he had done well.

When he was asked whether he’d recommend The Storytelling Club to a new student, Draco summed it up as follows:

I would say, “Well it’s up to you. Listen to what I am going to say.” I would say, “You have fun because we get to listen to different stories from around the world. Everyone gets to enjoy themselves and express everything that they want to say, and we get to associate with a lot of different people.”

Draco listed many of the attributes of this storytelling community. It was a community focused on stories which was friendly, open to opinions, and offered an opportunity to associate with many different people. Jean Vanier would say that Draco had described the “sense of belonging” (1979, p. x) that is key in community.

4.7 Students Taking on the Role of Storyteller

The last meeting of the reading buddies was planned as a celebration of their accomplishments. The grade fours had read to and supported the grade ones in their reading throughout the year. Our agenda included watermelon for a culinary treat and riddles for their active minds. As students headed for a shady spot on the side of a hill, Marie, a member of The Storytelling Club for two years, approached and asked me if
she could tell a story to the group. “Do you have one in mind? Are you ready?” I wanted her to be successful. “Yes,” she replied with certainty.

Marie was confident as she told the story of a husband and wife’s role reversal called “The Cow on the Roof” (Atelia Clarkson and Gilbert B. Cross, 1980, see Appendix C). She made eye contact with the students who sat comfortably in clusters in a semi-circle around her. Students were soon caught up in the story. I looked around, impressed. Marie was retelling a story she’d learned in The Storytelling Club, but what we were hearing was pure Marie. In her telling, her characters’ speech emerged from the natural language and rhythms of Marie’s own language. The humour in the story was infectious.

Marie saw herself as a storyteller. She had become aware of her own strength as a storyteller. No longer did she need the structure of The Storytelling Club for a safe forum for the telling of stories. She had recognized that for this celebratory occasion, students would enjoy hearing a story, and she claimed for herself the role of the storyteller.

**Telling Stories From the Heart**

It was obvious that Marie was comfortable enough in her storytelling skills that she could bring forth her own personality through the story. Hence, the story included expressions that were uniquely her own. Margaret Meek would say that according to
Seamus Heaney, Marie was “finding her voice” since she was investing her own feelings into the story and her words had the “feel” of her about them (Seamus Heaney in Margaret Meek, 1985). This can occur when a student moves beyond merely repeating a story and using the words of the teller from whom the child has heard the story. Merely retelling a story might be referred to as learning the story “by memory” with all the concerns of having each word exactly as someone else has spoken them. When the essence and core of the story are retained while students bring their awareness of their own connections to the story and their emotional understanding and response to the story, then I would say that the students are telling the story “from the heart”. Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells say that learning that is concerned with understanding involves the cumulative construction of knowledge over many encounters (1992, p. 41). This awareness of cumulative construction of knowledge over time is why the leaders of The Storytelling Club offered students the opportunity to be involved in storytelling activities throughout the year.

**Expectation and Engagement**

Brian Cambourne (1988) states that one of the criteria necessary for literacy learning to occur is “expectation”. When students see that significant others have high expectations for them, then they too hold high expectations for themselves. In the case of The Storytelling Club, the “significant others” could have been either the leaders, or the senior students who had demonstrated their storytelling skills in previous years in various classrooms. Both the leaders and the experienced student
storytellers modelled storytelling to the new students, and demonstrated that this skill of storytelling was attainable. It was a skill that they, the students, could learn.

Students in this group moved quickly into “engagement”, which Brian Cambourne identifies as a learning condition. They worked in an encouraging group of peers where storytelling activities were supported in small and large group activities. Throughout the year, students were given the opportunity to move from being active listeners to being storytellers. They retold stories in pairs, or threes. They told stories to their families and friends. They listened to each other telling stories within this group. Storytelling was happening on a continuum from students working together in a highly supportive and informal setting as partners, to students telling stories to familiar and trusted friends and relatives. In this way, new students to the group saw older students modelling that students could be storytellers. The continuum of storying experiences provided for students the opportunity to work in their “zone of proximal development” (Lev Vygotsky, 1977). While Lev Vygotsky was referring to the adult/child relationship where adults provided the support for learning at the level where the child could do the task with support, it is possible to consider peer assistance to be supportive in the same manner.

Janet was another example of this emergent image of being a storyteller. Janet, at the first meeting of the storytellers in September, announced her awareness of storytelling during the previous summer: “I’ve been thinking of a story all summer long. I
can’t wait to tell it.” When Janet heard a story that appealed to her, she could see how it would fit into her image as a storyteller. She saw the opportunity and knew how to best use it. Both of these students demonstrated situations where storytelling became a part of their lives in The Storytelling Club and beyond it in other areas of their lives.

While Marie and Janet had demonstrated their confidence in their own strengths as storytellers, other students were demonstrating confidence in Self in different ways. Lorna and Jean, for example, decided that they liked a story that Lorna had read in a fairy tale book. They worked on it together – meeting at Lorna’s home or talking on their way to school. When they announced that they were ready to tell the story to The Storytelling Club, it was demonstrating their initiative as storytellers (see Appendix D for the transcript of them telling “The White Dove”).

4.8 Oasis: A Breathing Space

As each new school year began, students were invited to join The Storytelling Club. Those returning from the previous year were welcomed. We called them “the seniors” to acknowledge their status as experienced student storytellers. They created a core of students who could model and mentor storytelling for the new members. The first meeting included a story as well as discussion about what The Storytelling Club was all about. A commitment to regular participation was encouraged. Students were told that other students would be counting on them as partners to work on stories together.
Those returning shared their impressions from previous years. We began by soliciting from experienced students what the new members needed to know about joining a storytelling group.

Several people, both students and teachers, in their input indicated that The Storytelling Club provided for them a place different from other school activities.

Silverwing: Storytelling is fun and I think you are going to have a really good year because the stories that they tell are good – really good actually.

student #1: I like storytelling.

Silverwing: I like to just sit and relax and listen to stories.

(Mrs.) Judy: It is a calm part of the day.

student #2: [I’m here – ] Because I don’t want to go out for lunch recess.

(Mrs.) Judy: It is okay to be here because you don’t want to be outside at recess – just as long as you want to be involved with stories.

(Mr.) Robert: I like telling the stories. I’m just like Biff here, I like listening to storytelling. And I also find it a different time and space during the week.

A Different Time and Space for Students

What was different about The Storytelling Club for students? The Storytelling Club was an activity that students chose to become involved in. In Brian Cambourne’s
Mode 1 of Learning (1988) as it applies to literacy learning, he states that taking responsibility for making their own decisions for when, how, and what to learn is crucial for students’ success. Students chose to join this group and continued to come because they found association with this group rewarding. There was no testing and no hierarchy of students according to who achieved a certain mark in this chosen learning.

Unfortunately, one student who came to a meeting for new members approached me to say: “I have to leave. I’m not a good reader.” No amount of assurance that in this group he could listen and tell stories without worrying about reading (or writing) would assuage the fears of this academically challenged student. He would not, or could not, take the risk of failing in this new endeavour in either his eyes or in the eyes of others. Perhaps another year, after he had heard more student storytellers, he might give it a try again. But his response was a reminder of the fear of failing that some students bring to school and to events within the school.

A Different Time and Space for Teachers

It was interesting that both teachers and students noted that The Storytelling Club provided a place which was different from other school activities. (Mr.) Robert’s comment expressed this difference:

I also find it a different time and space during the week. Really for me anyway – very calming.
(Mr.) Robert, as a teacher, had a full workload at school. He had also taken on added responsibilities and was working towards a promotion to Vice Principal. Even so, he willingly spent a full lunch hour once a week to be with The Storytelling Club. He was demonstrating his commitment.

How was this a different time and space for a teacher? The Storytelling Club offered an opportunity for the teachers and students attending to develop a relationship that was unique within the school culture. Teachers presented themselves to the students as learners; they were there to learn new stories and to learn more about storytelling themselves. This promoted learning as a “social process” (John Dewey, 1972). With students and teachers being learners, there was a collegial element to the time together. In this atmosphere, both teachers and students were in a position to be involved in relational learning, which is described by Griffin as “learning with and from others” (Griffin, 1987, p. 215, as quoted in Jennifer McIntyre, 1998, p. 8). When students who returned to the group were referred to as “seniors”, this acknowledged to them and to others that they had valued experience to pass on. Students saw other students as sources of learning as well as. Teacher/leaders also acknowledged that they learned from students who brought new stories from their families and who also offered different perspectives on stories. Rupertia Minott-Bent (1999) notes that co-operative learning strategies change the role of the teacher to one of sharing responsibility for learning with students. In this situation, the knowledge of each person added to the knowledge of the whole group, enriching the learning of all.
Classroom situations with a list of facts to be mastered or with a lecture format may not offer this opportunity for relational learning.

As the teachers sat and joined the students for lunch, low-key conversations and personal stories ebbed and flowed. Whereas teachers usually ate separately from students—providing teachers with personal time and time to prepare for the afternoon—here they were part of the give and take of lunchtime conversations about lunches, sports, siblings, stories, etcetera. This sharing of personal stories helped to create for students and teachers a common experience, building trust (Judith Newman, 1991) and connections to shape further relationships.

Within The Storytelling Club, the teachers' role was different from their role within the classroom. Teachers could come to The Storytelling Club knowing that there was no marking, nor was there pressure to move students to perform to standards set by outsiders.

(Mr.) Robert was not the only staff member who saw The Storytelling Club as a calming place to be. In the third term of the last year of this study, (Mrs.) Karun joined the group. As a volunteer and then a supply teacher in the school, she had become interested in The Storytelling Club and was invited to a meeting. After she had attended one meeting, she did not miss another day. She often reported with enthusiasm how she had used storytelling in the classes she went into. One day, she
reported that The Storytelling Club had been particularly meaningful in the midst of a
day filled with changes and unexpected demands upon her as a supply teacher. Instead
of going to the staff room for a break at lunch, she had come to The Storytelling Club
where she had been rejuvenated and regained her calm.

This is not to say that there were no expectations for goals to be accomplished by the
group. Much of the talk by the experienced student storytellers and by the teachers of
how The Storytelling Club operated elaborated the role of teacher and student
participants as listening, learning, and telling stories. The teachers clearly had the
"expectation" (Brian Cambourne, 1988) that the students would take on the
storytelling role rather than the teachers being seen as the only sources for storytelling.
The teachers set up situations where the students could be active listeners and active
participants in the process of becoming storytellers. Experienced student storytellers
were welcomed back so that students could see that teachers were not the only ones
who had the power to become fine storytellers.

(Mr.) Robert also reminded students that we had expectations for responsible
behaviour, such as taking care of the room we were invited to use.

Could I just add another thing here – just about the housekeeping. We
are guests here of (Ms.) Marion [in her kindergarten room], so we'd like
to leave the room in good shape.
When students talked about their expectations, they clearly stated that they too had expectations for behaviour which would provide a positive atmosphere:

Silverwing: Well, you listen when they are telling a story. And you shouldn't be rude.

**Storytelling: A Breathing Space**

Silverwing's comment: "I like to just sit and relax and listen to stories" was significant. She was indicating her awareness of a different pace that existed in The Storytelling Club. When students and teachers ate together and shared stories together over these lunch hours, outside pressures seemed to melt away. Often in school, there seemed so little time between busy timetables and bells indicating the start of classes, recess, lunch, and finally the end of classes. Patrick Diamond recognizes that teachers may suffer from the "paralysis of being hurried and harried" (1991, p. 1). This may also be true for students. There is little time for relaxing, listening, telling, sharing, and reflection. The Storytelling Club, with its collegial atmosphere, and its focus on stories and learning for all, offered students the time, the structure, and the expectation which Joellen Killion and Guy Todnem state is an essential key in reflection (1991). Time was offered, since we didn't hurry the process of learning stories - we were prepared to meet regularly across the year. Structure was provided by the leaders telling stories and organizing activities that promoted opportunities for students to explore stories in many ways. Expectation was evident in the teacher/leaders expectation that students could become storytellers. For
Silverwing, The Storytelling Club offered an oasis where she can relax and receive stories – a breathing space in a busy week.

### 4.9 Developing A Sense of Story

**Journal: Yasmin**  
**November, 1999.**

Yasmin is leaving soon – moving with her family to beautiful Connecticut. This year she has joined our group as a temporary member until her departure sometime late Fall. For the past three weeks, she has been telling me about a story that she wants to share with The Storytelling Club. She’s not quite ready, but is giving tidbits of details – sparking our interest. The story will be a parting gift to us from her.

I’ve watched Yasmin grow from an awkward, hesitant grade one student (in my grade one class) to a confident, animated, grade five student. She’s been a member of The Storytelling Club since grade three. This year I’ve noticed that when the story stick is passed around, and we each take a turn to tell a small piece of the story, it is Yasmin who is one of the experienced ones. It is Yasmin who so ably connects her part of the story to the part spoken by the previous teller. She uses “story language” that connects, encourages the flow, joins, bonds, and weaves the story together. She has developed a sense of story! She knows how to use vivid language and structure to draw the listeners into the story.

**Awareness of Story**

Yasmin’s transition from a hesitant speaker to a confident storyteller occurred over several years. There was no one event that seemed to have affected this change. As a member of The Storytelling Club, she had been exposed to hearing many stories and had been involved in many story discussions. She’d identified and shared personal connections to stories (see sections: 4.5 Stories Elicit Vivid Images, and 4.14 Remembering: How Do You Remember That Story?) She’d had many opportunities to experience telling stories with partners. In this, her last year with the group, she
displayed her awareness of story – both in the informal setting when we each take a turn to tell a small piece of a story, and in formally telling a story to us.

Just before she was about to move to another country, Yasmin laid claim to her role as a storyteller within the group, demonstrating to new members of the group the skills of storytelling that “senior” members could have. The story she told us, as a parting gift, was long and complex. It was based on a fairy tale that Yasmin had read. Telling the story in her own words, Yasmin tied the parts of the story together with bridging phrases: “No sooner had she gone out of the woods ...” or “As for the younger daughter, she slept right there under the tree and in the morning ...” In this manner, she drew her audience through the story successfully intertwining the various parts of the story.

What is a sense or an awareness of story? The term “sense of story” has been used by several writers including Sally Nathenson-Mejia (1994), Nola Kortner Aix (1988), Nadine T. Ruiz (1991), as well as N. Stein and T. Nezworski (1978). The very generality of the term “sense” denotes an overall ability to be conscious of the properties of story. Both Nadine Ruiz and Sally Nathenson-Mejia expand briefly by connecting a sense of story to narrative schema of story including beginnings, endings, conflicts, and resolutions.
Eleanor Farjeon's poem "Poetry" inspired me with its strong images:

... What is Poetry? Who knows? Not the rose, but the scent of the rose; Not the sky, but the light of the sky;...

Eleanor Farjeon, in David Booth and Bill Moore, 1988

This poem inspired me to think of story in the same way - to seek out the intangible things that encompassed a "sense of story". What is the sense of story that helped my students to become more aware of story as they listened and discussed stories, or that helped them to become more capable of weaving their own versions of story together? How did they build understanding of the essence of story? Sean Kane relates a discussion with his aunt, Alice Kane, a well-respected elder in the Toronto storytelling community, who was surprised upon listening to several tapes of her telling of the same story. Alice Kane had always felt that she was faithfully retelling the story exactly the same way, but she found that her telling varied each time. Sean Kane writes:

"I always felt it was exact," Miss Kane declared - and her version was: it was true to the spirit of the story, to a pattern of meaning and delight that had kept the story alive for generations and generations.

Sean Kane, 1995, p. 170

In this explanation, Sean Kane has given us a further glimpse of the sense of story that reflects the "spirit" of the pattern and meaning of the story. Bob Barton, himself notes that "story patterns offer children opportunities to play with language and story structure and help them to see the possibilities language offers to them" (1986, p. 25). I would add that one of the possibilities that exploration of story offers children is the
building of a store of story language – rich vivid descriptions, classic openings, and bridges between events – often serving to strengthen the retelling of a story.

When Draco told us the story “The Riddles” that he himself had created (Draco, 1999, see Appendix C), he clearly demonstrated his ability to modify the story pattern from the familiar story “Clever Manka” (Rosemary Minard, 1975, see Appendix C). In his story, a man who had worked in stables for an owner called The Riddler could not receive his pay unless he could answer three riddles. It was Sharon who noted that the story reminded her of “Clever Manka” and Mosie who noted the familiar pattern (similar to the pattern in “Clever Manka”) of the man being given a riddle, going back for help, and then returning to answer the riddle with newly gained insight. All of these students are demonstrating their strengthened sense of story: Draco, by being able to employ one pattern successfully in a new situation of his making; Sharon, in making the connections to another story, and Mosie in being able to articulate the general pattern upon which the similarity hung.

Story
What is
a sense of story?
Not the pattern, but the whole cloth.
Not the words, but their meaning.
Not the voice, but the intent
Not the teller, but the tale.
Not the tale, but the connections.
The very essence of narrative
–
a sense of story.
Judy Caulfield, 2000
Barry Sanders discusses the basic tenants of literacy as: “relationships and structures, a dynamic system that one internalizes and maps back onto experience” (1995, p. xii). This offers possible insight into how a sense of story might develop. While recognizing the importance of structure, Barry Sanders also notes the power of relationships in internalizing and deepening insight which can then be mapped back into experience. As she listened to many stories across the years, Yasmin fused her own experiential connections to her developing understanding of story structure and brought out of this a more developed sense of how story is connected to make a whole.

In the next section of Chapter Four, I shall focus on story structure which (Ms.) Marion and myself sought to explore and clarify with our students in order that they would have further opportunity to develop their own “sense of story”.

### 4.10 Building Awareness of Structure

Marion had just finished telling the story “Four Hairs from the Beard of the Devil”, a folk tale from Haiti (Diane Wolkstein, 1980, see Appendix C). One of the first responses from the students was the question: “How did you memorize all of that?” Another student spoke up: “I bet she wrote it down!” This illustrated the lack of understanding that many students had of how story framework could enable a storyteller to remember and tell stories. (Ms.) Marion’s response explained how the
Structure of the story empowered her to remember it. She drew a “map” of the story on a chart as she talked about how she had found and unearthed the pattern:

This is a story with a pattern to it and pattern stories are the easiest stories to remember. Sometimes with a story like this I think of it in terms of a map. So I know that there is a boy, and he is going to the devil. Here’s the boy at home. He’s going to the devil. But he meets three people along the way with three problems. [Each of the people that the boy meets has a problem to be solved.] So I map it out. The first [with a] problem is King John. The second is the King of Spain. The third is the guard. Then he [the boy] has to get the answer to each of those problems. So the story comes back. It is a good technique just to figure out where your story is going. This is a story that goes somewhere and it comes back. All you really have to do is remember the journey there and you already have it made when you are coming back.

**Structure Can Empower Storytellers to Remember Stories**

(Ms.) Marion’s clarification emphasized the sequence of events in the story. She explained that number was a significant element in the sequence of the story events since there were *three* people, and so there were *three* problems to solve and the boy had to return and explain *three* different solutions when he found out the answers. (Ms.) Marion also pointed out that since the boy retraced his journey to return home,
the sequence of events was merely reversed, with few new details to remember in the story.

As we worked with students in the group throughout the year, we were conscious of building techniques that would help students to recognize the structural elements of story. One genre of traditional story that we often started the year with was a story with a strong pattern or with a repeated chorus in it. As students worked together to learn these stories, they were supported by the framework of the stories. Many of them were very surprised to discover that using this knowledge, they could remember how a story went.

Trying to communicate to our students precisely what we meant by structure was challenging. *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* lists as its second definition of the noun “structure”: “a set of interconnecting parts of any complex thing; a framework.” It also defines the verb “structure” as: “organize; frame” (Katherine Barber, 1998, p. 1440). These definitions highlight the qualities of organization, frameworks, and complexity. While structure can refer to many aspects of language, for our purposes, we were referring to structural elements which gave a frame to and helped to organize the story as a whole. Story, through the use of folk tales and fairy tales, was at the heart of our work. E. M. Forster’s definition of story as “a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence” (Forster, 1990, p. 87) further enhanced this perspective on structure for our purposes. Our objective was to help students build an
awareness of the overall organization of stories and of the elements that helped to make the narrative coherent and cohesive. These included the time-sequence that Forster referred to, as well as patterns and elements of repetition.

After listening to the story “The Gold in the Chimley [sic]” (Bob Barton, 1986, see Appendix C) the students were challenged to explain how the story itself assisted me in remembering it. The students were quick to point out many facets of pattern and repetition within the story. They noted that: both sisters went to work for the same witch; both sisters found a bag of gold and ran away with it; and both sisters, when they were trying to escape, met the same three animals who asked for help. This story also emphasized the element of repeated chants as a pattern within the story. Once the first sister had gone on a journey with the gold, had met each animal, and refused them help, students had been able to predict that when the second sister ran away with the gold, she would be asked to help each animal in some way. Similarly, the witch, when she went to retrieve the stolen bag of gold, met each of the same animals – in the same order that the girls had met them. She asked each animal a question using a similar chant:

Cow of mine, cow of mine,  
Have you ever seen a maid of mine,  
With a wig and a wag and a long leather bag,  
Stole all the money I ever had?  
adapted from: Bob Barton, 1986, p. 25

It is interesting to note that the chant itself is very rhythmic and can be spoken with a strong beat in an almost sing-song manner. I find it impossible to tell the chant within
this story without tapping my foot to the beat. The natural rhythm of the chant assists
in the flow of the language.

Finding Concrete Metaphors for Structure: Concretizing Structure

As we sought to explore structure with the students, it became apparent that we were
dealing with an abstract idea. Some of these students were just emerging into
developing concepts of abstractness. Indeed, Robert F. Biehler (1986) would confirm
this view using Jean Piaget's theory of stages of cognitive development which state
that children move into the final stages of cognitive development around age twelve.
When students were asked about the meaning of structure they immediately thought of
concrete things – buildings. "The CN Tower," said one student. For these students,
who lived near Toronto, the CN Tower was a structure that dominated the Toronto
landscape. The teachers sought to use the student's metaphor and expanded it by
comparing the elements of story structure to building materials. As (Ms.) Marion said,
stories with common structures "are built with the same materials." That is, similar
patterns can be identified as building blocks for the story. The CN Tower was
frequently used in the ensuing weeks as a touchstone for structure. We used this
visual metaphor of The CN Tower to assist students in thinking about how stories
were organized.

(Ms.) Marion: Being aware of structure in story also helps you as a
storyteller to remember the story. So stories often follow
common structures. They're built with the same materials.
That way if you can say, "Ah! I recognize that structure!" you can go back and remember that story more readily.

We used the metaphor of building to connect with the less transparent understanding of story structure. (Ms.) Marion also introduced students to the idea of drawing a "map" of the story on paper.

*Illustration #2: Sample of a student’s “story map”.*

Her language became expressive as she used imagery of maps and journeys to convey the sequence of events that helped to structure or organize the story:
(Ms.) Marion: This map is going to take us on the journey of your story.

Keep this in mind. It’s to help you build the structure of the story so that you understand the story very well — you can visualize it in your head.

We were seeking to find concrete ways for students to relate to structure. (Ms.) Marion had an exchange with one student about where the map of the story “Gold in the Chimley” [sic] should begin — at the sister’s house or at the witch’s house. Here (Ms.) Marion acknowledged individual responses to stories by stressing that for her the witch’s house was the starting point since it was the first key point in the story, but that the student should choose a point which the student wanted to remember. (Ms.) Marion reinforced the visual aspect of drawing a map that would connect with personal visualization of the story. Her phrase “the journey of your story” was repeated by her, emphasizing a kinaesthetic response to the language experience.

Some students might have been connecting through imagery, while the metaphor of a journey with its inherent movement might have been the key to other students’ connections (David Hunt, 1992).

David Hunt (1992) uses the Kolb Experiential Cycle in a variety of ways to emphasize the various learning styles that it reflects: feeling (concrete experience), perceiving (reflective observation), thinking (abstract conceptualization), and acting (active experimentation). By offering students several different ways of thinking about
structure – a concrete object representation, a drawing, or the movement of a journey – students had more paths through which they could make connections with their own learning style (Howard Gardner, 1983). Students were encouraged to be aware of their own personal learning style.

As students listened to new stories, they continued to be fascinated with the process of learning a story:

Biff: How could you remember that whole story? ["The Cat that Walked by Himself" by Rudyard Kipling, see Appendix C]

(Ms.) Marion: You know it is a good question. That was a tricky story to remember because it is long and detailed. But there is a structure to the story. So to remember it, I had to first visualize the structure. And the structure for me was – the main character, the cat, made a trip back and forth to the cave with the three animals. It always happened in threes. The dog, the horse, the cow, went to the cave and then they stayed there. And I just built the structure from there in my head as to what would happen. I knew that the man and dog would come home [later]. I read the story a few times too. The story had also been told to me. The first time that I heard it told to me was by the friend I told you about earlier. [(Ms.) Marion was referring to the
anecdote that she shared before she told the story, which explained when she had first heard the story.]

(Ms.) Marion’s metaphor may serve as a useful image to depict the value of understanding structure. If one views structure as a map of where the story has gone and where it is going, students who have experience with these “story maps” may be able to predict and to follow the map in new stories as they recognize familiar territories and contours. Stories from various cultures use number – often the number three in stories of European origin – as a pattern element. This helps the listener to predict events. For example, the listener having heard that two tasks had been accomplished might expect there to be a third, and might indeed anticipate and await a third event within a sequence.

**Story Structure Builds Cohesion**

When students develop a strong sense of structural elements in a story, they apply this knowledge as they listen to new stories. Conversations about stories often focussed on a student’s comments or questions to clarify elements of the structure of a particular story. When (Ms.) Marion had finished telling the Haitian story “The Four Hairs from the Beard of the Devil” (Diane Wolkstein, 1980, see Appendix C), Kay asked for clarification of the use of number in the story. (Ms.) Marion had told the part of the story when the Devil’s wife had succeeded in pulling out four hairs from
the Devil's beard and in getting the answers the boy needed for the three questions, 
(Ms.) Marion had continued in the story:

Well, before dawn, the [Devil's] wife woke up and woke the boy up. 
She gave him the four hairs and the four answers to his problems. He scurried on his way.

Kay did not interrupt the story, but during discussion following the story, she brought forth a question about an element of the story that was puzzling her:

Kay: “How come you said that you know all four answers? Because, you know, there are only three answers.”

(Ms.) Marion: Right – four hairs – this is the inconsistency of the story!

You’re right. Maybe I mixed it up. There were only three answers, but there were four hairs from the beard.

Kay’s question came from her experience with many stories told during the year in The Storytelling Club. She had become aware of the use of pattern in traditional stories – in particular, numbers are used structurally to assist the teller and the listener in predicting sequence of events. Here was a story that Kay questioned because the numbers didn’t seem to match. The boy had met three people with problems and had been told three answers as solutions to their problems. The element of pulling out four hairs seemed to be out of sync with the number pattern established in the story. 

(Ms.) Marion, was surprised by Kay’s question. (Ms.) Marion responded as an equal community member (Gordon Wells, & Gen Lin Chang-Wells, 1992) rather than as an adult with superior knowledge. She considered the problem that Kay had raised and
came to the conclusion that Kay might be right. Henceforth, whenever this story was referred to by this group, it was always called, “Three Hairs from the Beard of the Devil” and was told including three hairs, not four. I too was convinced of this as a sensible conclusion. I was surprised when rereading the story to find that indeed, Diane Wolkstein had reported the story as “Four Hairs from the Beard of the Devil.” In the story, when the Devil’s wife pulled out the first hair from the Devil’s beard, he didn’t wake up. It was only when she pulled the subsequent hairs that he woke up and each time answered a riddle that she posed – three riddles in all. This variance from the expected story pattern can indeed surprise the listener and teller alike. Since the element of three was so well established in the story, we were surprised with the apparently unnecessary inclusion of the fourth hair. It is one of the delights of a pattern story when a twist changes what has been anticipated.

**Folk Tales and Fairy Tales: Beautiful Models of Story Structure**

Gordon Wells cites young children listening to stories being read, as an example of a situation where children are gaining experience of the “sustained meaning-building organization of written language and of its characteristic rhythms and structures” (1985 b, p. 134). His study refers to stories that are read to children. It would seem that the exposure to many stories provides a wide range of narrative for children to gain experience and to begin to make conclusions about structure. Since our students had joined the group with the focus on listening and telling stories, the awareness and
focus on oral stories and on the narrative form was ever present. They were “tuned-in” to the stories and their responses.

Perhaps Gordon Wells is focussing on stories as available only through “read aloud” – but, storytelling can also provide exposure and experience with narrative form, as well as offering an intense interpersonal experience without the book acting as a barrier between parent and child (Judy Caulfield, 1994) or between teacher and child. Oral storytelling may include formal fairy tales, the informal stories that parents tell of their lives or the child’s experience, or fabulous tales made up by the parent. All of these have the potential to build experience of the “sustained meaning-building organization” of language.

Why is it so important for students to develop and grow in the idea of story structure? David Booth connects Barbara Hardy’s phrase that narrative is “a primary act of mind” to his work with drama, and with storytelling in drama, by stating that “Fictional story-telling, like drama, encompasses and extends the possibilities of human experience, promoting thought” (1987, p. 55). While Gordon Wells agrees with Barbara Hardy, that narrative is a way in which the mind itself works and makes sense out of the world, he stresses that children begin a “conscious shaping” when they tell a story. To narrate a story, says Gordon Wells, “necessarily involves a selecting and ordering of the elements to be brought together” (1986, p. 197). Opportunities to think through, explore, and plan the structure of a story give students the skills and the
confidence to explore their own creations. Bob Barton (1986) notes the importance of story patterns in providing opportunities for playing with language and story structure which opens up for children the possibilities that language holds for them. We cannot assume that students chose to join The Storytelling Club because they had strong language skills and hence needed no further development. Our choice, as leaders of the group, to focus predominantly on folk tales and fairy tales was based on our belief in the value of these stories that had been retold and honed across the generations. Bob Barton states that the retelling of the folk tales and fairy tales has resulted in “a wonderful economy of words and beauty of structure” (1986, p. 24). We were providing for our students beautiful models of story – structures that were appealing to hear, to retell, and to embed in their own lexicon of story.

4.11 Listening as a New Dimension

When Silverwing told The Storytelling Club the story “Trading the Goat” that her grandmother had told her, student feedback was positive (Silverwing, 1998, see Appendix C). In particular, Crystal’s response was specific and vivid:

Crystal: I like the part when he was at the sweet store and he ate all of the sweets, because you explained it so well I felt like I was in the story myself.
Heigntened Listening

Crystal was demonstrating the heightened awareness that can occur when a student is intently focussed on listening to a story. She had placed herself into the story through her concentrated listening.

On another occasion, a guest storyteller told her own adaptation of a native legend. As she told the story, she played the harp to enhance the mood of the story. Once more, student response was positive. Whereas in the story “The Trading of the Goat”, general laughter had prevailed during the telling of the story, in this story, students responded to the more sombre mood of a native people going hungry during a drought. They listened silently and there was a significant, quiet pause before discussion of the story began. Marium, one of the grade six students, was the first to respond. Her maturity and her experience in being a part of The Storytelling Club for two years was evident in her thoughtful answer. First she gave positive comments on how the guest had told the story. Next she shared her personal response. Finally, she asked a question, which sparked further clarification from the guest and from other students.

Marium: I liked your playing and your story and mostly your description. I could actually imagine the whole story all the way. I was just thinking, was this a true story?

Guest Storyteller: What do you think?

student: No.
Guest Storyteller: Could it be?

Marium: It could.

Mosie: Indians used to offer stuff to the spirits.

Marium: [Who had just been in Canada for 2 1/2 years.] Is that where the Thanksgiving Day started?

These students demonstrated active intense listening – so intense, indeed, that they were transported into the story or could “imagine” the whole story without illustrations to assist them. Bob Barton reminds us of the opportunity storytelling offers for “sustained listening…. a skill that has been very much overlooked in the overall scheme of things lately” (1999, p. 42). It is interesting to note that the folk and fairy tales that these students were so intensely listening to were often not brief ones such as the story that opens Chapter One. Instead, the stories varied in length from five, to ten, to fifteen minutes. Students consistently listened intensely throughout the stories.

Madan Sarup defines narrative’s threefold competence as including “know-how, knowing how to speak, and knowing how to hear” (1989, p. 121). To these three, I would add “knowing how to connect.” These four aspects of narrative do not operate in isolation. Narrative encompasses them and is interwoven throughout them. I have addressed “knowing how to speak” in the “illuminating moments” outlined in the sections on Language Play (section 4.3), Voice (section 4.16), and The Role of the
Storyteller (section 4.7). "Know how" which seems less specific in its reference, I have taken to refer to cultural information which is embedded in narrative. The sections on Personal Connections (section 4.4), Modelling Ways of Connecting (section 4.2), and Valuing Self and Other (section 4.17) connect to this aspect of "Know how." "Knowing how to listen" is an interesting phrase. Like knowing how to speak, one might be tempted to ask whether, by the mere act of speaking and hearing, students already have these skills, yet Barry Sanders quite rightly identified listening as being heightened in oracy. He stated that in oracy the listener learned that "because words so quickly evaporate, he or she must listen intently" (1995, p. 13). For many students this was a new listening mode — one it took time to develop. We might consider here this heightened listening as a new dimension.

The students in The Storytelling Club, who had been listening to stories throughout the year, had been developing this skill of heightened listening. Without it being a conscious focus for the leaders, we had, nevertheless, been discussing regularly how to listen to stories. We had discussed the elements of story that helped us to remember. We'd noted the patterns and repeated chants, and listened for the "high" vocabulary which etched images in our mind's eye or brought clarity to the story. These same elements assisted the listener in following the story. They engaged the listener, providing a basis for predicting what would happen next. They provided common themes through which students could make connections between stories.
While this was a club for the *telling* of stories — when experienced students were talking to new members in September about what the group was all about, many of their comments focussed on talking about *listening* to the stories. This surprised me, and yet, perhaps it should not have. They were teaching *me* how important the reception of stories was. My students, who were new to the process, recognized the importance of knowing how to listen while I perhaps assumed it without explicitly recognizing it.

Gordon Wells, in research on written language, states that since writer and reader do not usually know each other, the text provides the only context from which the receiver (the reader or the person read to) can use to understand the meaning. He asserts that it requires conscientious attention “in order to build up the structure of the meaning” (1985 b, p. 134). Even when there are illustrations, Gordon Wells says that this is the case because of the lack of interpersonal context and shared meanings. Let us apply this to the students in this group listening to a storyteller. First of all, there *were* shared bonds (Bob Barton and David Booth, 1990) within this group of students who regularly met together to listen to stories and share stories. They were creating a shared story repertoire. To each story, students also brought a wealth of listening to previous stories and story patterns. When a new story was told, it added to the mosaic of stories in their repertoire, and resonated with connections. Since there were no illustrations, nor artifacts to add information, the listeners did have to listen very carefully indeed to grasp the structure of the meaning.
Through anecdotes, teacher/leaders often told their own narratives of listening to stories, thus modelling for their students the process of how they listened to other experienced storytellers. Rather than telling them that listening was crucial, the leaders showed students how listening was vital for them as storytellers. Brian Cambourne (1988) identifies demonstration (which I am referring to as modelling) as a critical aspect in literacy development. When I told my students about my experience of hearing a familiar Anansi story at the Toronto Festival of Storytelling, I was sharing with them how I listened to stories as a storyteller:

It is really neat for me to hear stories that I already know. Sometimes the storyteller is thinking about the story in a slightly different way. This storyteller from The West Indies, she had a different perspective on one of the characters and I liked that. It has made me want to tell the story again.

(Ms.) Marion often told the students about finding an interesting new tape of storytelling in the library. She explained that she liked to hear the storyteller when she was choosing a new story to tell. Both leaders and students demonstrated intense listening connected with storytelling – a new and exciting dimension that had rewards.

4.12 Building Self Confidence

(Mrs.) Judy: Is there anything else you want to say about storytelling?

You have stuck with it for three years. How come?
Lorraine: How come? I like it. It’s fun. In a way it gave me confidence. Like I never thought of standing in front of my parents telling a story - or my friends’ parents. All you have to do is get confidence in yourself and tell the story right there!

When Lorraine talked about “standing in front of my parents” she was referring to the Storytelling Cabaret that was held at the end of each year. The goal was to create a different atmosphere from the traditional venue of speeches which were often given in a chair-lined auditorium with the speakers on the stage and separated from the audience. The Storytelling Cabaret was held in the school library. Chairs were gathered in semi-circles for the listeners. Candles were lit. Colourful scarves were draped over shelves and small round tables at the front to create the warm and soft atmosphere that comes from textiles. Looking for a caring, receptive atmosphere, we limited our audience to a few family members or friends of the tellers.

Lorraine was expressing quite succinctly the transformation that could occur when students become involved in storytelling. Unlike presenting a memorized speech, students as storytellers were encouraged to go deeper into the material, to know it, to visualize it, and to make it their own with their own language. The whole message of storytelling is communication with other people. One student repeated the advice of his classroom teacher when presenting a speech: “Find a spot on the wall above their heads and say your speech to the spot.” He wondered whether this advice should also be followed when telling a story. Our students were encouraged to do just
the opposite. We urged them to make eye contact with their audience and tell the story to their audience — whether the audience was one listener or a gathering of listeners for a cabaret. Eye contact between storytellers and their listeners acknowledges that storytelling is interpersonal. The story is co-created by the storyteller and the listeners as they respond to each other while they are experiencing the story together. For new storytellers, this connection is easier when the listeners are a “trusted audience” (David Booth in conversation, December 1998), which could include their peers in The Storytelling Club or supportive family members. Their self-confidence grew with their success.

Alice Kane, a well-respected elder in the Toronto storytelling community, has reported the nurturing that she received from Lillian Smith, former head librarian of the Toronto library system. Lillian Smith put into place a model of workshops for her librarians to develop their storytelling skills (and many other skills as well). A shy, timid individual, who was first described by Lillian Smith as a “frightened rabbit”, Alice Kane found that she gained confidence through storytelling. As she said, “Storytelling taught me what it feels like to be a giant and I stopped feeling like a rabbit” (Stasia Evasuk, 1990).

**Trust and a Positive Atmosphere Support Confidence**

The structure of The Storytelling Club, in which situations were set up for students to work with partners and small groups, created a positive atmosphere for learning and
for building of confidence. When asked about partner work, Lorraine reflected on the Anansi story “A Story, A Story: An African Tale” (Gail Hailey, 1970, see Appendix C). “That’s a long story!” she exclaimed. Recognizing that it was a long story, her following comment reflects the process through which some students gain confidence to tell a story on their own:

**Probably I need a partner for that** [when she was first learning a story]
and then after a while I could tell it on my own. And then I could tell it as Anansi’s experience. [“Anansi’s experience” is how Lorraine referred to telling the story in the first person as though she were Anansi.]

When Lev Vygotsky introduced the concept of the “zone of proximal development” (1994, p. 187), he was noting the importance of adults in supporting children with tasks so that the children, with assistance, were able to accomplish a task which they would not have been able to do independently. Gordon Wells clarifies Lev Vygotsky’s view by explaining “what the child can do today in co-operation, tomorrow he will be able to do alone” (1985 a, p. 39). This kind of support of storytelling skills was present in The Storytelling Club in several ways. When the teachers told a story and then worked with students in a group retelling the story, the teacher and the whole group were there to assist the individual if she/he stumbled while telling a part of the story. The circle formation itself, offered a democratic approach to the task where none were at the “head” of the group and all took equal responsibility in telling a bit of
the story. Being supported by peers and the teacher, a student was more likely to try
telling a bit of a story.

Students were also supported in their zone of proximal development when they
worked with fellow students in pairs or trios retelling a story. Again, having someone
to help with the task gave the students the practice and confidence to take it on
themselves. Having experienced this, Lorraine could confidently see herself working
with a partner and then by herself to retell a “long story!”

When asked what happened for her when she told a story in the first person, Lorraine
replied:

Lorraine: It’s like you are telling the story, but the character has more

experience.

Teacher: It feels as though you are experiencing the story?

Lorraine: Well, it feels as though I am experiencing the person as well.

Judy Caulfield, 1996, p. 57

Confidence can be built through the power of story that can help the student, as
Lorraine would say, “experience” the character. This knowledge of the story and its
characters gives students confidence to tell the story with assurance.
4.13 Collaborative Meaning-Making

Each year, after The Storytelling Club had been meeting for almost half a year, the students planned to tell stories to classes in the school. They chose stories that they wanted to work on from amongst the repertoire of stories that had been told in The Storytelling Club throughout the current year. Most of them worked in pairs or threes. Working with a partner gave them support in remembering the story and someone to discuss details and variations with. For some it alleviated the concern of telling a story all by themselves outside of the safe and supportive atmosphere of The Storytelling Club. A partner offered them the moral and physical support of a sympathetic cohort.

One year, a pair of girls were preparing to tell together a version of the story “Four Hairs from the Beard of the Devil” (Diane Wolkstein, 1980, see Appendix C). Their initial task was to develop a map of the storyline on paper. Marie was away the week before when Janet had begun work on the map, so Janet started out by sharing with Marie what she had done already:

Janet: Marie, what we are doing is “The Three Hairs from the Devil’s Beard” [an interpretation of the Haitian folk tale “Four Hairs from the Beard of the Devil”] and right now she [the teacher] said that we could change some characters. I just drew the boy, [who had been sent by his mother to get three hairs from the devil’s beard] and
I made a dog. And instead of having the king and princess first,
I put them second.

Marie: Okay.

Illustration #3: Marie and Janet's "story map".

Janet: Now we're on the journey – he's already left the house and he
came to a dog and the dog said, "Can you help me? I'm afraid
of cats for some reason. Because, well, it's really hard to not be
afraid of cats."

Marie: Exactly.
Janet: And the king and the princess come second. And she [the teacher] said that we could add more than one character, but I'm going to use the king and princess. And then we could go to a boy in rags from the well. Then we can go to a guard, and then the devil.

Marie: Okay. So let me see if I get it. He's already come from the house. He came upon the dog and now he's going to see the king and princess. He's on his way to the king and princess.

Marie had shown herself to be a good listener. She had used appropriate conversational strategies to provide a collaborative atmosphere. Through use of words such as “okay” and “exactly” she acknowledged Janet’s statements and showed Janet that she was attentive without interfering with Janet’s flow or interjecting her own comments. After Janet had explained where she was in the process of mapping the story, Marie used the device of summation to clarify that she had understood Janet’s process. The phrase, “So let me see if I get it” indicated to Janet that Marie was willing to try a slightly different version and was building consensual understanding of the story.

Janet: Ya. So he's at the dog right now and he already said, “Yes.”

[The character has said, “Yes, I’ll ask the devil if he has the answer to your problem.”] And so he’s travelling along. And he’s walking over to the king. And then – and now – instead of having a horse like last time, we’re going to put them on foot ...
Marie: But that—they were on foot [in the version of the story that we heard] because the king said, “Can you help my daughter, her foot is hurting?”

Janet: Okay, we’ll say that they’re still on foot.

Both girls had shown their willingness for give and take in their building of a new version of the story. Marie had pointed out an inconsistency, and Janet, instead of arguing, had agreed, thus allowing Marie to contribute to the interpretation of the story. As they worked on their oral text, they reached a “shared understanding” which Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells (1992) emphasize is important for “joint action.”

This was the end of the work Janet had done on her own. From this point, both girls were building their version together. The following section of the transcript shows how the girls worked jointly to select appropriate vocabulary and descriptive language.

Marie: And he finally comes to a b – i – g ...

Janet: Huge cave.

Marie: Huge cave. In front of the cave is a B – I – G ...

Janet: Knocker.

Marie: Wooden door with a knocker on it.

Janet: And then just on top of the knocker is a little window and a huge eye—she’s [“she” refers to the devil’s wife] looking out.
Marie: So, the boy’s standing there waiting for someone to open the door for him so he can come in.

Janet: We forgot to make him carrying a bag. [They were drawing on their map as they figured out the story.]

Marie: So, he’s carrying a bag ...

Janet: He needs the bag to put the three hairs in.

**Working Towards a Collaborative Telling**

These students worked together collaboratively to shape their understanding of the story. In the beginning, when Janet was explaining to Marie what she had done on a joint story project during Marie’s absence the previous week, Marie clarified the details, and Janet folded Marie’s details into her understanding of how they’d tell the story.

As they continued to work together, Marie took over the narrative, and Janet supplied further details – suggesting “huge” rather than “big” cave, and “knocker” for the door – both of which enhanced the story. Both girls were in sync with each other and so were able to enfold new details and ideas into the story to complement their shared understanding of the story. As they worked together, they took turns taking the lead, and so each one “enabled” (Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells, 1992) the other to successfully expand and enhance the story to make it their own. This is one of the
key ways that collaborative partner work can support students. It can enable them to feel positive and to be successful as they work on storytelling.

**Collaborative Meaning-Making as a Group**

The following is a transcript of students’ responses after they had listened to the story “Anansi’s Old Riding Horse” (Philip Sherlock, 1966, see Appendix C). Anansi is a trickster character in African/West Indies folk tales who can be either a spider or a man. This particular story involves Anansi trying to trick Miss Celine, the woman he was dating, into thinking that tiger, who Miss Celine was also dating, was just “an old riding horse.” In order for this story to make sense, the literary convention of suspended disbelief is needed whereby students accept (at least in this story) the folk tale concept that animals and humans talked together, worked together, and married each other.

After the story, the students’ conversation indicated that they had many questions.

Together they pieced together a meaning of the story that made sense to them.

Yasmin: Why would a lady want to marry a horse anyway?

(Mrs.) Judy: Well, she didn’t want to marry “an old riding horse.” Did she?

Yasmin: Why would she marry an animal?

Vicky: Or flamingo?
(Mrs.) Judy: Good question. But these are the days a long time ago in stories. These are the days when things weren’t the same as they are now.

In this instance, I was giving my understanding of the story as an answer to students’ questions only to find that the students responded with more questions and weren’t satisfied with my version of how the story worked. Later reflection suggests that I was having difficulty understanding what the student’s problem was since the group had had many other stories with animals who talked and behaved in a “human” manner. Perhaps what was different about this story was that the animals and humans interacted together. In rereading the data, I think that this part of the puzzle was not answered, but students did move on to trying to build an understanding of the characters.

Janet: Anansi is a spider, right? And tiger is a tiger. And Miss Celine is a woman. So why would she be dating a tiger? Tigers don’t know how to talk.

(Mrs.) Judy: What do you think?

Yasmin: Why did the spider [Anansi] tell that her she was going [to marry] a riding horse?

(Mrs.) Judy: This story is full of questions for us! Okay, let’s answer some of the questions. Who thinks they know why Anansi told Miss Celine that tiger is just an old riding horse? What do you think, Marie?
Asking students what they thought of the story gave them the opportunity to offer interpretation. When students can offer interpretation without fear of ridicule, the conditions for collaborative sense making (Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells, 1992) are present. Gordon Wells states that within the process of discussion, students may be able "to calibrate their interpretations with those of other members of the group, including those of the teacher" (Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Wells, 1992, p. 42). It takes time for such a group consensus on meaning to develop:

Marie: Because he wanted to marry her.

(Mrs.) Judy: Well – he wanted to marry her, but why did he say tiger was an old riding horse?

Silverwing: He knew if Miss Celine thought tiger was an old riding horse that she wouldn't want to marry him and she'd rather marry a peacock.

Vicky: Maybe the spider didn't want her just to get married to tiger.

He was jealous.

(Mrs.) Judy: Jealous is a good word for Anansi there.

Sousan: Because he's a trickster. He's a mean guy.

Janet: And he's a spider of course.

(Mrs.) Judy: What did he do that was making him a trickster?

Sousan: He was doing bad things and he tricked – whatever her name was [several students chime in: "Celine – Dion!] So he could have her all to himself.
Silverwing: He’s also a trickster because he said he was sick and he made him [tiger] lie on his four paws to be like a horse.

Collectively, the students built up their understanding of the characters and their actions within the story. Individual student’s contributions added to the whole group’s understanding. Together they constructed a picture of Anansi, a spider/man who played tricks, who was a “mean guy”, and who was “jealous”. They were beginning to create a more complex view of the dynamics of his character.

Collaborative meaning-making took place across a variety of situations as students worked together and supported each other in their goal to express their understanding of stories.

**Collaborative Meaning-Making for an ESL Student**

One day, Marium came to The Storytelling Club eager to talk about stories even before she sat down to eat her lunch. The week before she had volunteered to tell a story of her own to the group. Now she was anxious to talk about it. She’d taken her role of being the storyteller quite seriously and had been preparing to tell the story.

Since Marium had been in Canada for just a year, she may also have been feeling a bit insecure with her English. Her first language was Arabic, and she had had very little English when she arrived at the school. Silverwing, who spoke English and Arabic fluently, appears to have been Marium’s first friend at the school and so may have taken on a translating role at times for Marium. “Can Silverwing tell the story with
me too?” she asked. “She has been helping me with the words. She has helped me to say things with fewer words instead of going on and on.” Marium gives us a small window into the experience of the English-as-a-second language student. As a storyteller, she had wanted to express her ideas well, yet did not always have the vocabulary for the exact word or ideas she wished to express, so she had had to explain the idea rather than be precise with a specific word. Silverwing had acted as an expert to model for Marium appropriate vocabulary. This was a good example of one kind of collaborative talk which Gordon Wells and Gen Lin Chang-Well explain as “talk that enables one or more of the participants to achieve a goal as effectively as possible” (1992, p. 58). Together, Marium, with Silverwing’s help, told the story successfully.

4.14 Finding Ways of Remembering

How Do You Remember That Story?

This is a question that is often asked by both children and adults alike after they have listened to a story being told. To see someone purposefully remembering a long story in these days of electronic retrieval of information, may seem surprising or curious to many people. One day, both (Ms.) Marion and myself found ourselves wondering how much of a particular story our students had remembered. (Ms.) Marion had told the group the story “The Cat that Walked by Himself” (Rudyard Kipling, 1964, see Appendix C). After the story, we had done an activity in which the students visualized a scene in the story. I had encouraged students to privately explore in their “mind’s
thoughts about textures, colours, characters and their movement, scents, sounds, tastes, and emotions connected to a scene that they had chosen in the story. I was employing a model of "guided imagery" used by David Hunt (1992) in order to assist students in connecting with the story through a variety of senses. Students were encouraged to be aware if they had a stronger response to one sense, which might be a personal strength that they could use effectively to connect in a deeper, more personal manner to stories.

The next week, we decided to work with the story again in order to give students an opportunity to work with the structure of a story that they had already heard. We considered "The Cat that Walked by Himself" to be a difficult story because of its length. The patterns within the story were not as obvious or as bold as the patterns in some of the other stories that we had shared, nor was there a repeated chant or a short cycle of a repeated pattern in the story. However, rather than just retell the story to the students so that the story was refreshed in their minds, (Ms.) Marion began by asking what the students remembered of the story. As various students responded, we found that they had remembered the significant parts of the story—and in some detail too. In particular, we both expressed surprise at one student who was currently in a small class for students who need assistance due to their unique learning needs. It was he who contributed most frequently in talking about the story and he who contributed not just a single phrase but whole sections of specific detail about the story.

(Ms.) Marion: How did you remember that?
Moe: Well, I went home – and you told us to tell the story – so I went home and I wrote a story about the cat. [He went on in some detail about the story that he himself had made up about the cat.]

(Ms.) Marion: How did that relate to the story?

Moe: Well, I remembered the cat from the story – and I put in the woman who made magic also.

(Ms.) Marion: So you put the cat into your own story.

Moe: Yes!

Moe was attaching rich personal connections to his memory of the story. He utilized some characters and their attributes in a new situation, thereby exploring in further depth the characters’ qualities. Another student said that liking the story made a difference to which stories she was able to remember. Other students replied with different aspects of the story that triggered remembering the story for them:

Yasmin: I remembered the woman with the long hair because I have long hair. I could see her with long, black hair.

As Yasmin was talking, she was fingering her almost waist-length braided hair. She also stated that the title of the story summed it up for her. She knew the cat was going to do something. She connected remembering with focussed listening.

Silverwing: I listen really well.

(Mrs.) Judy: Could you explain what “listening” means to you?

Silverwing: I pay attention.
Barry Sanders, in considering “orality”, acknowledges the keen focus on listening. He says the oral person “learns also that, because words so quickly evaporate, he or she must listen intently” (1995, p. 13). As students and teachers, we seemed to have limited vocabulary for explaining the hidden processes of remembering. Key words used by students were: “listen” and “pay attention”. As teachers/leaders for this group, we began the year by assisting students in preparing for listening by noting positive models amongst their fellow students: those who are looking at the teller, those who were calm in their body movements, and those who are quiet in order to receive the story. This, however, only indicated some outward signs, which might have indicated listening.

**Personal Connections:** Triggers for Memory

Students also related personal connections to the story when they talked about how they had remembered the story. Previous data has been presented on the personal connections students make through connecting experiences and family associations with stories (Chapter 4.4: Personal Connections to Stories, Private Meanings, Interpersonal Connections: Stories Told by Grandmothers). Yasmin, with her long, black hair, imagined the woman in the story had black hair too. This was how Yasmin clearly imagined it, even though when (Ms.) Marion had told the story she had not stated that the woman’s hair was black. Yasmin also talked about the task of caring for – braiding – long hair. This was a significant connection since in the story the
woman had to quickly braid her hair and put it up so that a mouse would not run up her long hair.

Yasmin was making a kinetic/tactile connection to the story. John Dewey (1972) reminded us that experience is a powerful aspect in learning. Yasmin may well have remembered the woman in the story so clearly ("the woman with the long, black hair") because of her own personal connection with long hair. As she talked, Yasmin fingered her long, braided hair – the texture of her own braided hair may have brought forth memories and insight into the trials, tribulations, and joys of long hair. This might have evoked pleasant memories of her mother braiding her hair, or it might have reminded her of having a comb pulling through tangles. Whatever the connection, it had a real experiential basis for the path of memory for Yasmin.

Silverwing was interested in and attracted to the cat in the story, although she didn’t have one as a pet. Moe put the cat into a story of his own thereby exploring the cat and its personality as it would have behaved in his story. He also used the motif of a woman who could make magic in his story. Having considered and reflected upon the story’s significant elements for himself, he became more familiar with them by using them in novel ways.

Lorraine, when discussing what went on “inside” herself when she was thinking about storytelling, related her experience with the story “Anansi Finds a Fool” (Verna
Aardema, 1992, see Appendix C). She explained that sometimes she imagined her two brothers as the characters: "Sometimes I picture Dwayne as Anansi and Germane as the Fool. For some reason I do that." (Judy Caulfield, 1996, p. 59) In this way Lorraine invested the story characters with personalities which were real and present for her, filling out the characters and making them multi-dimensional. This helped Lorraine to imagine how the story would be experienced by the characters and made the story more real for her.

While these examples attest to the connections that students made to the story, they themselves were telling us that the connections were a part of what helped them to remember the story.

**Story Structure Supports Memory of a Story**

The previous section has focussed mainly upon our reflection about the story a week after the students had first heard the story. Returning to the tapes showed me that right after (Ms.) Marion had told the story, students themselves wondered about this same issue of recall:

**Biff:** How could you remember that whole story?

(Ms.) Marion: You know it is a good question. That was a tricky story to remember because it is long and detailed. But there is a structure to the story.
(Ms.) Marion’s comments on structure added a new element to the discussion. She continued on to explain specifically how the structure had helped her to remember the story. She elaborated on this theme later, in writing to me about the topic:

Predictability helps us to attend. Predictability is part of structure. I think that when students have exposure to stories they do the work of learning structures and they form a mental map of where the story might go. It is something like a groove. Once kids have a groove to operate in, the attention to detail, sequence, etc. becomes easier. They then start to ponder the needs of an audience.

(Ms.) Marion, in a written response to field notes, November 24, 1998

(Ms.) Marion’s metaphor may serve as a useful image to depict the value of understanding structure as an underpinning for learning a story. Maps have keys which help the map reader to decipher the map. Traditional stories have elements and patterns, which like keys, when recognized, can be aids to decoding the structure of the story and hence remembering it. For example, stories from European countries often use the number three as a pattern element. That is to say, events often occur in threes. (Ms.) Marion stated how the element of three was helpful to her in remembering the story “The Cat that Walked by Himself”: “He made a trip back and forth to the cave with the three animals. It always happened in threes.” In this situation, when the teller has told two events in the series, she/he knows that a third event is part of the structure and this assists in the smooth flow of the remembering and telling of the story.

With this knowledge of structure and pattern, the listener or the teller is alert to the pattern to expect. (Ms.) Marion’s likening of familiarity with the story map to a
“groove” emphasizes the usefulness of recognizing structure and using it to remember stories. The “groove” assists the teller (and the listener) to stay on track and not to go off in an unrelated direction.

Madan Sarup, in defining narrative’s threefold competence as including “know-how, knowing how to speak and knowing how to hear” (1989, p. 121), says that these three connect the community’s relationship to Self and to the environment. Certainly, these three are interwoven in the ability to remember a story. How stories connect to each other is built up through the “know-how” of understanding the culture within which the stories are set. “Knowing how to hear” recognizes that in orality, it is not just the speaking, but also the astute listening which contributes to narrative competence. Through the act of listening, the listener will be learning “how to speak” by building knowledge of the supportive structure of the stories and by having heard them told effectively. These three intertwine creating the environment whereby the storyteller, and the listener, will be able to remember the stories. The additional component that I suggest of “knowing how to connect” was clearly illustrated by these students as being a crucial element in remembering stories.

Remembering the stories is not a separate issue, but is interwoven into the narrative nature of stories – connecting listening and speaking, as well as seeing self and others in the stories.
Rhyme, Rhythm, and Repetition: Keys to Remembering

Perhaps most basic of all in remembering stories — and hence, so invisible (Zerubavel, 1979) — are the natural rhythms, rhymes, and repetition which are so frequently incorporated in story. Bob Barton (2000) acknowledged that it was these elements which contributed so fundamentally to his development as a storyteller:

As I look back forty years, I realize how effortlessly I had eased into storytelling. The oral tradition with its built-in tricks (rhyme, rhythm, repetition) had done for me what it had done for all human beings since the dawn of storytelling — helped me to remember.

Bob Barton, 2000, p. 17

The students demonstrated the power of language to assist them in remembering stories on many occasions. When they began chiming along with the repeated chant in “Gold in the Chimley [sic]”:

Cow of mine, cow of mine,
Have you ever seen a maid of mine?
With a wig and a wag
And a long leather bag,
Stole all the money
I ever had!

adapted from: Bob Barton, 1986, p. 21

they were being drawn by well-honed language into remembering sections of the story effortlessly. The short, clipped phrases provided a rhythm that I have yet to repeat without tapping my foot — they actually draw the teller along with them. The rhyme provided a memory key to the phrases. With variation, this chant is repeated eight times in the story — students recognized the element of repetition and were joining in
by the third occurrence of the chant. All three elements of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition were readily assisting the students in their telling.

Rachelle had been exposed to many stories with strong rhyme, rhythm, and repetition during the year. She then employed these fundamental elements to effect in her own story “The Blueberry Fairy” (Rachelle, 1988, see Appendix C). Her story used repetition of question and response in a cumulative story:

So he went to his older sister and he said, “Sister, I was wondering, who put the blue in the blueberries?”

And his sister said, “Well, didn’t Mom and Dad ever tell you that the Blueberry Fairy puts the blue in the blueberries fairly?”

And he said, “Well I guess so.” But he still didn’t believe.

And he decided to ask his friend. “Friend, who puts the blue in the blueberries?”

And his friend said, “Well, didn’t your Mom or your Dad or your older sister tell you that the Blueberry Fairy put the blue in the blueberries fairly?”

You don’t need the transcript of the reply to guess what Rachelle’s character responded. She had created a story using repetition, rhythm, and rhyme that promoted strong links for effectively remembering the story.
These are just two of the many examples of the embedding of the rhythms of language which helped students and teacher/leaders alike in remembering stories.

4.15 Connecting to the Audience as Listeners

“How do you tell a story so that the audience doesn’t get bored?” The student who asked this question identified, in her own words, a topic which we, as leaders, had wondered how to address. How could we talk to our students about their connection to the audience? As our students moved from hearing many stories from us, to telling stories to a small, “trusted audience” (David Booth, in conversation, December 1998), how could they take on the role of storyteller in communicating the story to their audience? Bob Barton and David Booth (1990) state that storytelling is an “audience-valuing situation” (1990, p. 45). Coming to value your audience and wanting to give them the “gift” of your story is a step in awareness progressing beyond making personal connections to a story and venturing into connecting to others through the story.

We turned the question back to the students. When they had listened to the story Why the Tides Ebb and Flow (Joan Chase Bowden, 1979, see Appendix C), how did they think that the storyteller had been able to tell the story so that they, the audience, had not been bored?

Sousan: You make your voice louder and softer sometimes.

Student #1: You use expression and tone.
(Mrs.) Judy: That's using your voice like a musical instrument.

student #2: Mrs. Caulfield used hand motions. She moved her hand around and around like the water moving around and around [and down into the bottomless pit in the sea].

Students were able to identify specific aspects of the storytelling which had positively affected their own response. They noted varied voice in loudness and tone and effective use of the body to communicate. There was no attempt to create a formula for communicating to an audience, rather, there was a chance to reflect on what had been effective for them.

The Interaction Between Telling and Receiving Stories

After reading field notes of the children's comments, (Ms.) Marion wrote:

This is such a good question. It's somewhat ironic. She wants to know how you “gave” so well and you want to know how it is that she “received” so well. Give well and your receivers will receive well, perhaps.

(Ms.) Marion in response to field notes, November, 1998

(Ms.) Marion had hit upon a key issue – the audience is not bored, perhaps in a fundamental way, because the teller is engaged. The storyteller brings her/his interest and vitality to the telling. One student commented that she didn't get bored when the topic (story) was an interesting one. In this comment, she was pointing out to us that the audience needed to be engaged. Both teller and listener are linked in the story experience when they are both actively engaged in the story.
During our group conversation, about the story, I told the students about my deliberations the day before, as I had planned how to tell the story to them. I had wondered how I would get the audience to see that the water was swirling down into the bottomless pit – slowly at first, then faster and faster. As I explained this to the students I was making explicit some of the considerations storytellers have as they plan how to tell effectively for an audience. This is another example of how the teacher/leaders modelled (Brian Cambourne, 1988) for the students the processes and decisions we made as storytellers when we considered effective means of communicating the stories.

The discussion topics with the students that day had ranged from listening, to telling to an audience, to personal responses. As Marion reflected upon students as listeners she pondered whether students needed to become good listeners before they could turn their attention to the “needs” of the audience.

I think that when students have exposure to stories they do the work of learning structures and they form a mental map of where the story might go. It is something like a groove. Once kids have a groove to operate in, the attention to detail, sequence, etcetera, becomes easier. They then start to ponder the needs of an audience.

(Ms.) Marion in response to field notes Nov., 1998

The interconnectedness of teller and audience becomes clear in these musings. When I read David Hunt’s (1992) book The Renewal of Personal Energy, I was struck by how much his cycle of images, energy, and action fit together in an analogy for storytelling. David Hunt sees the cycles occurring in the following three steps:
1. When we identify our personal images, we connect with our personal energy.

2. When we share our images, we release our energy.

3. When we apply our shared images, we transform our energy into action.
   David Hunt, 1992, p.23 [underlining has been added for my emphasis]

In storytelling, when students and teachers build on their “private meanings” (Bob Barton and David Booth, 1990), they connect with their personal energy. Having gained this energy through personal knowledge and connections with the story, they then release the energy as they tell the story. Their energy is evident in the expression and rich tones of their voice. This energy is released to their audience. I believe that when the audience also encounters a connection with the story through their own private meanings, the energy from both the storyteller and the listener transforms the event (the story) into a mutually powerful experience. David Hunt’s work on images and energy illuminates the essence of communicating with audience, whether it be with one trusted friend or with a small group.

Students often discussed who they had told the stories to that they had heard at The Storytelling Club. When Biff told us that he’d told his story to his mother and that she’d liked it, I asked, “Can you tell if a person likes a story when you are in the middle of telling it?” It was the experienced student storytellers in the group who had several observations to share:

   Draco: They laugh, or they smile, or they give a comment about a line.
Silverwing: Sometimes if they don’t really like the story, they’re not looking at you, or sitting like this. [She demonstrated a pose with a person turned away.]

Janet: If they are bored and stuff, they start to fiddle with their fingers or they roll their eyes and stuff like that. But if they are paying attention, they sit there staring at you!

These students were clearly indicating that they were paying attention to their audience and that they were noting their audience’s response to their stories. Furthermore, they went on to tell how they might change their story as they responded to their audience:

Marie: If I can tell that they don’t like it, I try to make it more interesting – like add different words. Instead of: “She said” [I might say.] “She said excitedly!” or “She yelled.”

Markus: I add different things sometimes. Like the story I told. [“How the Wiseman Tricked the Witches”, Markus, 1999, see Appendix C]

The time when they [the townspeople] get together and say about missing the moon – I added it!

Within The Storytelling Club, students had an opportunity to share with storytellers how they responded as an audience. As they communicated how the storyteller had been effective, they were becoming aware of effective story communication themselves. Both storytellers and listeners gained when responses to stories were shared. Once again, the link between the listener and the teller was important as
illustrated in these responses to the story *Why the Tides Ebb and Flow* (Joan Chase Bowden, 1979, see Appendix C):

Vicky: I saw the stone – many colours and beautiful!

Yasmin: I could really see the stew pot as she sailed across the sea.

Laila: What were the words when the water went down?

(Mrs.) Judy: “Mtia, mtoa, tlop.”

As students began practicing their skills of fluently telling stories, they needed a “trusted audience” (David Booth, in conversation, December 1998) and real opportunities to tell stories. This may not always be easy. We encouraged students to tell within the next week the story that they had heard during our session. Parents, siblings, friends, and relatives were all suggested when we discussed who students might share their stories with. One student surprised me at the end of a session by asking: “Mrs. Caulfield, do cats count?” “Do cats count?” I repeated, rather puzzled. The student explained, “About telling stories – because my mom and dad won’t listen to me.” In response, I explained that I often “told” my stories to my car as I was driving – just so that I could work on getting the rhythm and pace of the story out loud. Yes, I guess “cats count” in assisting students to become aware of and have confidence in their oral voice with its rhythms and timbre, and if it gives them a “safe” audience with which to practice. This also reminded me once again of the concept of “trusted audience.” Insisting that students tell stories to parents might not be productive if the parents aren’t supportive.
Moving beyond the immediate circle of friends, to telling stories to another class at the end of the year, provided the challenge for students to relate to a larger audience—and one that was not part of their storytelling community. In this situation, telling their story with a partner provided a support for them. Buffy talked about the experience with the larger audience:

Buffy: The second story, we were okay. The third story we were right on!

(Mrs.) Judy: How do you know when your story is “right on”?

Buffy: ’Cause you’re not like: “Ah ... ah ... ah.” You’re just like:

“And then he went here and here and here.” [spoken with fluency and speed.] And you use lots of expression. The first story that we told was kind of a little bit not ready.

(Ms.) Marion: A really good expression! I think I can tell when I feel like I know the story. It’s not like I have to construct it as I’m telling. It’s a story that’s right there. It’s personal and I know it and that’s what usually helps me to feel that it’s right on. And also when you make contact with your audience, and the eye contact that they return to you tells me when it is right on with your audience.

(Mrs.) Judy: If I’m telling a story and we’re all sort of leaning forward together and I’ve got eye contact with my audience and we’re all
excited about the story together – myself and them. I call it a
magic moment.

Yasmin: It’s the smooth flow of your story too.

(Ms.) Marion: I think you get used to the idea that the audiences don’t
bite. They don’t bite!

Communicating with an audience can be risky personally. I am reminded of the
student, who, when we encouraged students to look at all of us as their audience,
explained that perhaps it was just like giving an speech. His classroom teacher had
advised him, when giving a speech, to look at a spot on the wall above the heads of
the audience. That way he could ignore them. It may be tempting for a novice
speaking in public to ignore the audience, but it neglects the essence of telling a story
to listeners.

Markus, a grade six student who had just joined The Storytelling Club in September,
volunteered to tell a story in January. While his voice was a bit shaky, he told his story
with enthusiasm and it was well received. When I asked him whether he would tell a
story again, Markus replied that he had been “slightly nervous”, but:

Well – the audience’s reaction – I saw that they liked it! If they had
been rolling their eyes and booing, then I don’t think I would have
done it again. This kind of motivated me!
Markus chose his story, "How the Wiseman Tricked The Witches" (Markus, 1999, see Appendix C), with this particular storytelling group in mind as his audience. His grandmother had told the story to him. He didn't think that anyone else would have heard it and so he thought he would catch their interest with a new story. "And that proved to be true," he stated with satisfaction. His story had strong elements of repetition, as well as the novelty of witches being outwitted. It was also a new story to add to our repertoire. Students referred back to this story many times during the year.

Relating to an audience was an outgrowth that evolved as students developed storytelling skills. As with the other outgrowths from our work together, awareness of audience was not one-dimensional. A trusted audience made connecting easier for the storytellers. A story which would engage the audience, and an enthusiastic storyteller who was connected with the story were also important components.

Personality characteristics cannot be ignored when addressing the topic of audience. Some students thrived on the attention of other people. Rachelle instinctively leaned forward conspiratorially when telling an amusing part of her story and laughed with pleasure when her tongue twister "the Blueberry Fairy puts the blue in the blueberries fairly" came tripping off her tongue (Rachelle, 1998). Storytelling can give her a tool in which to focus her expressive talents. Others, like Markus, had wonderful language skills, but were hesitant or nervous to engage with an audience --
even with the trusted audience of The Storytelling Club. The fact that his story was so
well received, gave him positive feedback and the confidence to try again — eventually
to even go into a larger audience situation in classrooms in the school to tell his story.
Alice Kane, a respected elder in the Toronto storytelling community, emphasized how
storytelling could help people explore their strengths and find in themselves new
dimensions of possibilities — even the ability for a shy person to tell a story to others.
As Alice Kane said, “Storytelling taught me what it feels like to be a giant and I
stopped feeling like a rabbit” (Stasia Evasuk, 1990).

Storytellers and audiences (whether small or large) can connect with each other best
when the storyteller connects with her/his story. Choice of story, awareness of
structure, and expressiveness all contribute to the bond that can occur when a story is
told and received.

4.16 Voice

Cow of mine, cow of mine,
Have you ever seen a maid of mine?
With a wig and a wag
And a long leather bag,
Stole all the money
I ever had!
adapted from: Bob Barton, 1986, p. 21

Soon after students heard this chant introduced into a story, they began to join in with
the chant. At first only one or two of them quietly repeated the chant. But each time
the chant reoccurred in the story, more and more joined in until finally they were all
merrily chanting and wigwagging their bodies to the rhythm of the words. Students were being given an opportunity to explore the vocal qualities of their voices in the safe environment of this trusted group. The rhythmic quality of the chant in the story invited group participation and also invited body movement.

Exploring the Qualities of Voice

Some students naturally explored their voice given the opportunity. One day, the tape recorder was set up and turned on during the interlude between eating lunch and gathering together as a group. One student, who was ready early, seated himself before the microphone and began vocalizing. He trilled up and down the scale and creating many and varied sound effects – all for the fun of it. On another occasion, I was taping a conversation with two boys about their involvement with The Storytelling Club. We were interrupted by a student with a question. When I returned to our discussion, I discovered that the two boys had been using the opportunity to explore voice in the exaggerated mode of an announcer, ending with “And that concludes our interview with Mz-z-z-z Caulfield!” In both situations, the tape recorder offered students an opportunity to explore their vocal qualities. Through exaggeration and play, they could explore and become more comfortable with their personal range. They could also become more aware of the qualities that they could draw upon when they were telling stories. The tape recorder provided a safe, nonjudgmental audience. Since we tape recorded our sessions regularly, students often had a chance to replay a tape and listen to themselves tell a story. This gave
them an opportunity to experience their own storytelling from an audience's perspective.

It is the human voice that brings the stories to life. The human voice, with its warmth, vitality, natural rhythms, and personal traits is a gift from teller to listener. Voice, says Barry Sanders, plays a fundamental part in orality (1995). (Mr.) Robert, one of the leaders, alluded to the importance of voice in discussion with new students joining the group:

It is your voice that is the only way you have of communicating your ideas and your story. You don’t have pictures. You don’t have actions. All you really have is your voice.

Using the voice as an instrument is a topic that students seemed to have few opportunities to explore in regards to the spoken word. They did not seem to have specific vocabulary for this and frankly, neither did the leaders. When The Storytelling Club first began meeting, students’ responses to a story were often limited to “I liked that story” or “That was a good story.” During the year, they moved into recognition of a story being well told, yet had little vocabulary to express this idea other than “I like the way you told that story.” Encouragement to describe the quality that they liked in the story moved students to say: “You used good expression.” Perhaps this is a carry-over from discussions of oral reading. But it does not yet give adequate description as to how a person is using her/his voice well. (Mr.) Robert drew students into this discussion further by asking if one of the “senior
storytellers’ from last year could tell the group: “... how you use your voice differently to communicate different ideas and actions from your story?”

Students replied with the following thoughts:

student: If you were pretending that someone was yelling, you could raise your voice a little bit louder.

Silverwing: Well, you just use different tones in your voice like loud, quiet.

Vicky: Not just your voice but use other sounds like you go –

[Demonstrating with hands to make sounds]

Just as the musician plays his instrument, so too, says Ruth Tooze, “does the storyteller speak his words, sing his tones using his own voice as instrument” (1959, p. 41). The Storytelling Club was one of the few places in school where the warmth and quality of their voice was celebrated with students.

**Voice: Sounds and Signature of an Individual**

Within the storytelling experience, “voice” encompasses two facets. At this point, I have been discussing voice as it refers to the qualities of the human voice, with its richness, its nuances, and its ability to communicate emotions. Secondly, “voice” also refers to a storyteller’s choice of words which can reflect the speaker’s personality. Voice in this regard, refers to whether students are expressing their core – their self rather than merely repeating what another has done or what they think will be expected. Mary Beattie highlights Seamus Heaney’s perspective of voice, confirming
her connection with this personal element of voice as her bracketed inserts demonstrate:

... strike (my) note
... and fill the element
with signature on (my) own frequency
echo-soundings, searches, probes, allurements,
elver-gleams in the dark of the whole sea.

Mary Beattie, 1991, p. 68

This second aspect of voice, which reflects personality, was illusive and difficult to describe to students. Building confidence in their ability to tell the story *their way* promoted student development of their own voice. When students were assured that they did not have to memorize a story word by word, it gave them “permission” to explore their own language (Betty Rosen, 1988). One day, Janet was getting ready to tell a story to The Storytelling Club when Marie mentioned that Janet thought that her story might be in a book of fables that Marie had just discussed with the group.

Janet: I think it might be in there, but I don’t want to look at it – just in case – because I don’t want to sneak a peek

(Mrs.) Judy: Tell me why you don’t want to sneak a peek.

Janet: Because I want to tell it out of my own words.

Janet’s phrase, “out of my own words”, clearly identified her goal of making the story her own. It takes confidence to explore different perspectives and to use them in front of an audience. As students became more confident, they began to explore using their own voices. Gordon Wells discusses part of this process when children tell narratives:
At a later stage, however, there does begin to be a conscious shaping. To narrate a story – to tell it in words – necessarily involves a selecting and ordering of the elements to be brought together.  

Gordon Wells, 1986, p. 197

When communicating with an audience, students began to make choices of how to express the story in their own words and how to use their voice qualities. Of course, voice and bodily expression, are seldom split – a soft whisper is often accompanied by a conspiratorial look. The teller will often lean forward to convey a shared secret, the body and voice perfectly complementing each other in communicating mood. Just as voice and body language are closely intertwined so too are many of the components of storytelling.

Our goal was to have our students find their voice as a storyteller – to find that they too could bring their own personal signature to the telling of a story. We wanted them to discover that there was power in their own words and rhythms. We knew that they’d made it when the story they told was purely them. They were finding their own voice when they honoured a traditional story in shape and intent and yet the words and phrases came forth from them with their own personal rhythm and vocabulary.

4.17 Valuing Self and Other

Lorraine, a grade six student, shared this account of how storytelling was a part of her home life. Her two younger brothers, at that time about five and seven, loved listening to Lorraine tell them stories in the evening. One night she asked them if they had done
all of their chores and tidied up. They replied, "Yes," so Lorraine told them a story. The next morning she was dismayed when she discovered the bath towels laying all about and the basement a mess.

Lorraine: So anytime they don’t do their chores – their basic, basic, chores, I say: “Fine, no story tonight!” Except mostly they do by now, and that’s the best thing about it.

(Mrs.) Judy: So they’ll do their work just so that they can hear a story?

Lorraine: Yah, because, I like telling them stories. They enjoy the story – and I don’t enjoy cleaning up after their mess!

Lorraine was intertwining her own value of stories along with her societal/family values. She enjoyed telling stories and she found positive ways to share them with her younger brothers. She was also aware that her family valued an orderly house and orderly children. As the eldest daughter, it was her role to watch over her younger brothers. She could express herself "authentically" (Clark Moustaka, 1996) through her choice to take on the role of storyteller with her brothers, while meeting family values as well. Clark Moustakas, in his book *Personal Growth* says, “By his choices, the authentic person creates himself” (1969, p. 13).

**Thought, Society, and Self**

Robert Hartman (as quoted by Clark Moustakas, 1969) symbolizes the three levels of values as: Thought, Society, and Self. Our focus on story can be seen from the
perspective of engaging students' intellect, and hence valuing "Thought". The students were engaged in learning the literary skills of how stories are structured; of the effective and exciting power of language; and of how stories connect and how students connect to stories. While the valuing of oral storytelling can be a strong commitment to the intellect, Clark Moustakas (1969) would remind us that to focus solely on the intellect is to focus on just one aspect of values. Because of the nature of narrative which enhances personal connections, and because of the universal themes which are present in folk tales and fairy tales, the values of Society and Self also emerged from student work in The Storytelling Club. As leaders, we had not set out to focus on one particular element or value at any time. Storytelling as a holistic activity allowed through student and teacher input, an authentic response to the stories and to the students needs and interests at any given time. John P. Miller (1988) defines holistic education as based on relationships. Our work with The Storytelling Club was holistic in that it fostered relationships between individuals and the community of storytellers; acknowledged, accommodated, and connected varied learning modes from oral to visual to sensory; supported student exploration of personal and societal values; and encouraged both linear and intuitive thinking.

Maria, who was a new immigrant to Canada, was a member of the group for just over two years. She joined the group in response to her friendship with Silverwing, a regular member, who also spoke Arabic — Maria's first language. As Maria's English skills grew, and as her confidence as a member of this community grew, her
contributions to group discussions gradually increased. It was through Marium that discussions of the morals of stories evolved: “What is the moral of this story?” she would ask. “My grandmother’s stories always had a moral.” It was Marium who nudged us into considering this aspect of stories. Marium was encouraging us to ponder society’s values.

Marium: I learned that when you help people you get the help that you give back. [This was Marium’s response to the story Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story From China (Ai-Ling Louie, 1982, see Appendix C)]

Marium: They think that most of the stories have – things [lessons] just like the story I am telling.

(Mrs.) Judy: Do you find that most of your grandmother’s stories have a moral to them?

Marium: Yeah. All of them – except for one.

On another occasion, Marium talked about the story that she and Silverwing had told to The Storytelling Club. Originally Marium had planned to tell us a story that her grandmother had told her, but instead she chose to tell a story that she had seen on TV. She called the story “The Boy Who was Spoiled” (Marium, 1998, see Appendix C).

(Mrs.) Judy: Can you tell us why you liked that story and how you remembered it?

Marium: I might like how people teach lessons and tell them to work.
Silverwing: You have to work and live by your money – not anyone – other people’s money. So you have to work. And also, it is a good story I think.

The story didn’t end pedantically with “The moral of the story is …”, but both girls saw the story as having a “lesson”. This was the story that Marium had asked Silverwing to help her tell to the group and although she struggled to express her idea of the lesson – or moral – in English, she was able to tell the essential element of the story. Silverwing, with her more sophisticated English, expressed the work ethic of the story clearly and recognized that it was a good story too.

By expressing in their own words the morals of the stories, students were integrating society’s values into their language use. They were not just repeating a saying, but choosing how to express and understand societal values and their own perspective of them. Gavin Bolton reminds us of the awareness that can come from oral expression by quoting Alice in Wonderland: “‘How can I see what I think till I hear what I say?’ asks Alice.” (Gavin Bolton, 1979, p. 121) These opportunities to articulate ideas were important. We chose folk tales and fairy tales as our main source of stories because of their richness. They have been honed across generations. They remain in our cultures because of their universal themes. These stories might be described as: “stories that have their source in the great questions of human existence” (Alan Howe & John Johnson, 1992, p. vii).
Betty Jane Wagner reminds us that our students are swimming in an ocean of facts, but facts do not "add up to wisdom, or to the kind of knowledge that provides guidance for making choices" (1999, p. 11). Our storytelling community gave students an opportunity to explore emotions, relationships, roles, etcetera as they listened to, responded to, and learned to tell folk tales and fairy tales.

In a conversation about his perspectives on The Storytelling Club, Mosie reiterated the importance of being able to "express our feelings in front of other people." This was a recurring theme throughout his conversation. Mosie was working at the level of Self Value (Robert Hartman, as quoted by Clark Moustakas, 1969). He was recognizing a personal need which he could explore and contemplate. When asked for advice for a new student he replied: "... come and enjoy yourself. It is a way to express your feelings. You can come have fun." Draco joined into this conversation with a different perspective which evidenced his own Self Values: "We're telling the people what we like to associate with — storytelling." It is clear that Draco wanted to be seen to be associated with stories. This was a positive identity for him and a way that he could express his personal values. Draco continued on to say: "We get to associate with a lot of different people." Draco, a very social student, appreciated the positive opportunity to gather ("associate") with a variety of people. These two boys were close friends: "We've always come in a package." "Yup — two for the price of one!" Even though they thought of themselves as a "package", they were both comfortable in allowing each other to
express and engage in the storytelling experience from different independent perspectives. This acceptance of each other meant that they were “free to feel and express openly and honestly the nature of these feelings” (Clark Moustakas, 1969, p. 10). The Storytelling Club offered students opportunities in an open environment to explore, and express personal Self Values.

When discussing animals’ traits, inspired by the story “Anansi’s Old Riding Horse” (Philip Sherlock, 1966, see Appendix C), students reflected on animal characteristics that they connected with personally. Through story, they had an opportunity to reflect upon their own personal qualities and how they valued them.

(Mrs.) Judy: What characteristics of an animal would you have? (Many hands go up.) They all think that they are an animal now!

Yasmin: A cheetah.

(Ms.) Marion: A cheetah – now why would you choose a cheetah?

Yasmin: Because they run very fast.

(Ms.) Marion: They run very fast – so you have the quality of a cheetah!

Jane: A leopard.

(Ms.) Marion: Why a leopard?

Jane: Because I’m smart.

(Ms.) Marion: Because you’re smart and leopards are smart?

Jane: Yes.

Karen: I would be a lion.
(Ms.) Marion: A lion – and why a lion?

Karen: Because they can attack people.

(Ms.) Marion: So are you an attack kid?

Karen: Ya.

(Ms.) Marion: Somewhat? Do you have a temper or are you territorial in some way?

student: Ya. [She does.]

Karen: I have a temper.

(Ms.) Marion: You have a temper.

student: She's really territorial. Like Karen cannot be ...

(Ms.) Marion: You don't like people to get into your things.

Through these comments, students could openly express and validate their personal attributes. They heard a wide range of responses which acknowledged individual values. (Ms.) Marion responded positively to Karen's comment that she was like a lion “Because they can attack people.” Rather than chastising Karen for a trait that some might consider to be negative, she helped Karen to elicit the descriptors which might help to illuminate this quality. “Somewhat? Do you have a temper or are you territorial in some way?”

Along with expressing personal values, and exploring their own personal traits, students discussed the character of Miss Celine in “Anansi’s Old Riding Horse.” This
led to discussions and the expressing of opinions about traits and how society viewed them. In this way, students were exploring societal values.

(Mrs.) Judy: What do you see Miss Celine being like? What kind of person is she?

Draco: She's a snob.

(Mrs.) Judy: A snob? Would you tell me what a snob is like – because I think that might be a good describer.

Draco: Like a person that is snobby.

Mosie: It's someone that is very, very rude and stuck up.

several voices: She thinks she's a hot shot – stuck on herself.

As a group, the students were validating perspectives on personality – Miss Celine was not only conceited but she set herself apart from her community. It was the consensus of this group that this was not positive. Betty Jan Wagner (1999) sees drama, in its role of role-play and reflection, as an opportunity for students to clarify their attitudes and see the consequences of certain types of action. These children were using the storytelling discussion to consider Miss Celine and how others may think of her if she maintained her “snobbish” ways. They were clarifying the attitude of their community (the larger community rather than the community of The Storytelling Club) and how their community responds negatively to anyone who becomes “snobbish”.

Robert Coles (1990) notes that some of his most significant observations of children's spiritual lives have come in less structured situations when he was truly listening,
respecting, and responding to the children. (Ms.) Marion and myself have experienced conversations with students in unexpected moments where indications of spiritual values emerged. The unstructured casual setting of eating lunch together often brought out varied topics of conversation – some of them alluding to a spiritual nature. Perhaps the trust and respect established across time allowed an openness towards expressing topics not usually broached in class. It did not occur to me to use the tape recorder during our lunches together. For one thing, there was a multitude of simultaneous voices and topics. Also, it would have seemed to have set a formal tone to our informal chat. Perhaps, since the conversations were not tape recorded, they were unguarded moments both for the students and for the leaders. What has not been recorded then, are the small moments such as when the Muslim students explained to others why they fasted for Eid, and how the routines of their days changed to accommodate this religious observance. Later, the topic of fasting was brought into our conversations about stories. It was referred to when (Ms.) Marion was leading a discussion of relative experiences:

(Ms.) Marion: It’s like riding my bike in the rain and then having a bath – the bath feels so much better! It’s a relative experience – compared to ...

Marium: It’s like fasting – the food tastes so much better after you have fasted!

The open, caring atmosphere allowed Marium to share this information just as others shared how they related their lives to stories.
Rachel offered a glimpse into her beliefs when she told about the story that she had created. “The Blueberry Fairy” (Rachelle, 1998, see Appendix C). Her character Justin had pursued the question in the story “Who puts the blue in the blueberries?” all the way even to God, who replied, “Well, didn’t you know, Justin, I put the blue in the blueberries.” Rachel’s clear, firm statement, and her decision to add this ending added a clear tone of her spirituality to her story which otherwise had had an ongoing tone of hilarity. She had proclaimed the spiritual part of her life through story.

These are but small windows of understanding into these children’s spiritual lives. The fact that they chose to share them confirms the atmosphere of trust and caring established in this group of storytellers.

4.18 Summary

In this chapter I have identified and examined the outcomes that occurred when students were given the opportunity within The Storytelling Club to be engaged in story listening, story telling, and story talk. As the outgrowths emerged through the use of illuminating moments, it became evident that there was no apparent hierarchy within these outcomes. They came forth in response to a variety of situations, and in response to individual needs and interests within the work of The Storytelling Club. None of them presented as the most significant or the first element needed to promote development of storytelling in students. The outgrowths themselves were often
interconnected – enhancing student development through their interplay. Personal connections were shown to enhance vivid imagery. Heightened listening assisted memory. Language play and awareness of rhyme promoted remembering. They were interconnected. As (Ms.) Marion wrote:

She wants to know how you “gave” so well and you want to know how it is that she “received” so well. Give well and your receivers will receive well, perhaps.

Each outgrowth made the whole of the storytelling experience stronger and more powerful. Ignoring one would have been to weaken the understanding of this phenomenon.

What did emerge – clearly – was that narrative was at the core of all of the work. By its very obviousness, it was, perhaps, assumed and could almost have been overlooked. Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin urged people to “bump into the glass walls” (1988, p. 10) as they read their book on curriculum. This same advice might well be given to researchers to bump into what may appear to be the obvious and to explore it further. As I listened to tapes of the meetings of The Storytelling Club, I discovered that narrative was not only the content of our work – through the exploration of the stories told – but it was also the form of our work. We framed the stories we were telling and exploring, with stories. Students came to the meetings with stories of sharing the stories with trusted family members and friends.
Teacher/leaders too shared stories of their connections to the stories and also stories of the origins of the stories.

Story became both the content and the form, giving rise to a visual image for me of "The Story Container" – a beautifully formed vessel with many intricate designs. Narrative itself is the form – The Story Container. It is well crafted – well-formed. Its very form is the essence of meaning-making. It is narrative form which assisted the listeners in predicting what would happen next, building timelines which would promote understanding within the story, and building ideas logically in order that they would make sense. The narrative container was also sturdy enough to be trusted as a useful container. Yet, narrative is also the contents of the container. The many different stories held within it – trickster tales, tongue twisters, cumulative tales, tales from many lands, tales with morals, tales from grandparents, tales newly formed – amply seasoned with personal practical knowledge – were the contents of our study as well.
4.19 Indiividal and Collective Outgrowths from The Storytelling Club Experience

Illustration #4
CHAPTER 5

STORY MATTERS: IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

5.1 Final Illuminating Moments

One day, during her fourth year as a member of The Storytelling Club, Silverwing arrived ready to tell us a story. There was an easy comfort in her manner as she sat in the chair. She spoke confidently. She knew the story, the sequence, the whole of what she wanted to express. The story she told was a wonderful, humorous, pattern story. Silverwing’s pleasure in the story’s humour was evident as she laughed along with us at the predicaments that arose. It was the tale of a husband who was so worried that he’d forget his errand to get medicine for his wife, that he repeated “medicine, medicine, medicine” as he walked along. But when the husband stood watching a fisherman, while continuing to repeat “medicine, medicine, medicine,” the fisherman lost his concentration and in a fit of anger, swatted the man saying, “You could at least say ‘five or six big ones’.” Off the husband went repeating the new phrase. The story continued with the husband triggering a series of incidents involving the repetition of inappropriate phrases while constantly being admonished to repeat new phrases. Finally someone told him he should get medicine for his headache. “Medicine!” he exclaimed and he set off to get his wife her medicine.
The other students listened intently to Silverwing’s story, not wanting to miss the key phrases on which the situations hinged. They quickly picked up on the improbability of the circumstances and often chuckled as they anticipated situations. Students’ responses after the story reflected the community aspect of this group.

student #1: I really like the way you told the story.

student #2: Where did you hear that story?

Silverwing: My grandmother told it to me in Arabic a few weeks ago.

It was a little hard putting it into English.

When we heard that Silverwing’s grandmother had told her the story in Arabic, the leaders coaxed Silverwing to tell us a bit of the story in Arabic so that we could hear the story in the language that she had heard it. “You won’t understand it!” she said. “I know,” I replied, “but I’d like to hear the rhythms of the language.” The students listened spellbound as Silverwing retold the first two episodes of the story – this time in Arabic. I had the feeling that she could have told the whole story to us in Arabic and we’d have listened intently through it all – predicting which dilemma the husband was finding himself in, and appreciating the language patterns.

The ensuing conversation included comments from a few students discussing the various dialects of Arabic that they spoke: “I speak slang Arabic.” “I speak Egyptian Arabic.” “I speak Lebanese Arabic.” Several students went on to compare words in various Arabic dialects, letting those of us who only spoke English into a bit of the world of their language. It was a wonderful moment. There is little
open discussion of students’ other languages in this school. English is the language of the school and there is very little acknowledgement of other languages as a part of students’ lives. The acceptance and sharing of personal connections was a highlight that day.

(Ms.) Marion: I could tell the part when he said, “medicine, medicine, medicine.”

Silverwing: Actually, in Arabic it is “mesh, mesh, mesh” – or seeds, seeds, seeds [like beans or lentil to make soup] At the end of the story, someone says “meshe” [which means walk] which sounds like the Arabic word “mesh” for seeds, so I had to find an English word instead.”

Silverwing’s willingness to tell her story to us in Arabic demonstrated that she trusted us to respect her language. It also demonstrated the strong element of community embedded in this group which could support sharing the story in her grandmother’s native tongue. Community has emerged as a significant element for these students in The Storytelling Club. While the questionnaire (done in the first year of the research) did not divulge a large quantity of data, it did indicate the importance of friendship to these students. Throughout the research there was vibrant evidence of the support, trust, encouragement, and bonds that evolved in this community.

Interwoven through this anecdote, is the story of Silverwing as an accomplished storyteller – one who could translate a story from one language to another even though it was “a little hard putting it into English.” She had sufficient awareness
of the nuances of both languages not to translate the story word-for-word, but instead to tell the essence of the story. She recognized that when the story was told in Arabic the resolution hinged on similar-sounding words reminding the husband of his errand. He was reminded by a person who said “meshe”, an Arabic word which sounded very much like “mesh”, the Arabic word for “seeds for cooking”. However, in translating this story to English, Silverwing faced two problems. First, the particular cooking “seeds” referred to in Arabic, were not likely an ingredient that these English-speaking students would recognize. Second, it was two similar-sounding Arabic words which had triggered the husband’s memory – using seeds as a model was not going to particularly make sense to this English-speaking audience. Silverwing explained part of the process that she went through to try to make the story make sense to us:

“It was kind of hard because I had to think of a kind of a verb for somehow getting him out of the church, [in her story “meshe” had meant walk], and a food that sounded the same [beans or lentils called “mesh” had been the original cause for the husband’s errand]. – So it was kind of hard.

Realizing a direct translation would not give the same effect, Silverwing changed the story starting with a request to go for medicine so that she could tie it together with someone actually telling the husband to get medicine since he now had a headache. This would cue him to return to his errand. What brain power (thanks to David Booth for this expressive phrase) she was employing in her narrative skills!
Silverwing is the epitome of our goal to have the students learn a story by coming to recognize patterns, both the basic chants and repetitions, and the grand patterns that connect stories with other stories and themes. Coming to know the story also means having personally explored what the story means rather than having memorized the words of someone else. My previous realization, two years before, that what I wanted for my students was a "physical embedding of the sound, rhythm, and the joy of language" is shown to be evident in Silverwing’s storytelling.

It is moments like this that hint at some of the internal learning that was occurring for students who were a part of The Storytelling Club. In many ways we could only guess at the effect that being part of the group might have had upon students. Certainly their lives had many dimensions – The Storytelling Club being just one of them. The leaders did observe, however, that students exhibited more confidence and competence in their storytelling skills as the year progressed. Those students who were members of the group for several years truly earned the designation “senior storytellers” due to their increased skill and their contribution to the community of The Storytelling Club. Yasmin was a good example of this. She joined The Storytelling Club when she was in grade three and continued to be a regular member until she moved away in the first term of grade five. When she told stories during the first year, her partners were essential in helping her to bridge gaps in the sequences within the stories that she was telling. About a month before she left, she told me that she was working on learning to tell one last story to The Storytelling Club. It was her gift to us before she left. Her story was well received by students and teachers alike.
It was well told with connecting phrases bridging events in the story. She had become a confident storyteller who demonstrated pleasure in sharing the story with us. A few weeks after Yasmin left, one of the students asked to listen to the tape of her telling the story. "Just hearing her voice reminds me of her!" the student stated. Just as when I heard Dan Yashinsky’s voice telling a story on the radio (Chapter 1.7: Celebrating the Qualities of the Human Voice) and was reminded of my connections to him, so too this student experienced connections, triggered by her friend’s voice.

5.2 Story Knowledge: More Than Linguistic Structure

As I reflected upon the research that I had done on The Storytelling Club, I was reminded once again of linguist Klaus Wedekind’s (1990) study of Gedeo, a Highland East Cushitic language in Ethiopia. He developed a semantic frames roster consisting of sequenced lists of predicate frames in order to determine what linguistic knowledge a speaker of Gedeo was employing. Notwithstanding Klaus Wedekind’s contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the structure of Gedeo, he failed to answer for me one of the questions that he set out in the introduction to his study: "When a story-teller ‘knows how to tell a story,’ what linguistic knowledge is he or she employing to tell it? And when a story-teller ‘knows a story’, what exactly is it he or she knows?" (Klaus Wedekind, 1990, p. 1) Through his semantic frames roster, he has been able to predict sentences and structure. But this would seem to me to be answering only a part of the question. Linguistic knowledge is only a part of what we
bring to our storytelling experiences. What have I discovered that my students
“know” when they know a story?

Yasmin used her personal practical knowledge to help her connect to, and remember
the woman in “The Cat that Walked by Himself” (Rudyard Kipling, 1964, see
Appendix C). With her own long, braided hair – fingering it as she talked – Yasmin
told us how she remembered the woman who quickly bound up her hair at the sight of
a mouse for fear that the mouse would run up it. For Yasmin, this personal
connection was a bridge in keying memory of specific parts of a story. It also acted
to bring rich personal context to the section.

Sharon brought awareness of effective use of language when she cited her favourite
part of the tale “The Hoca [sic] and the Candle” (Barbara Walker, 1967, see
Appendix C) in which the Hodja accepted a dare to stay outside all night long with
nothing to keep him warm:

Not with a coat.

Not with a blanket.

NOT a problem.

She knew that the short, rhythmic repetition, and the emphasis of the word “not” were
effective in communicating to the listener the character’s determination and emphatic
statement.
Rachel brought her knowledge of language play to the creation of her own story “The Blueberry Fairy” (Rachel, 1998, see Appendix C) which employed onomatopoeia and a good sense of fun for effect: “Didn’t you know the Blueberry Fairy puts the blue in the blueberries fairly?” She had been both receiver and creator of language play.

Marie knew how to bring her own voice – her signature – to a story as she told it to her reading buddies. She used her own phrases and sense of humour to bring the story to life. Marie demonstrated confidence in herself to tell the story her way without worrying about having to use the exact words of the storyteller from whom she had first heard the story.

Janet and Marie knew how to collaborate to bring shared meaning and hence richer understanding to a story. Their collaborative work also strengthened bonds of shared understanding. When they were ready to tell the story, they could trust the other members of this community to be supportive.

Laila knew how to connect to the value her grandmother set on stories with a strong sense of morals. She let this personal knowledge guide her in choosing stories to share that were important for her.

Lorraine knew that she could imagine the characters more completely when she imagined her own family in the story. She knew her brothers’ characteristics and
could better understand the characters in the story when she imagined her brothers as the characters. Lorraine also brought her personal experiences to play in creating strong images for the landscape of her stories:

Anansi was walking down the hot steamy road. All you see is the heat waves on the road. Anansi was very hot. It was very humid. He walks along and he decides to walk in the cool forest.

Lorraine’s personal images were informed by her family ties to Jamaica and her own visits there. The details were clear to her: “... palm trees, bumpy road, um, coconut trees – yah!” Through her clear images, she was able to see and respond to the story on a personal level and she was able to bring that to her listeners in her choice of words when she told this Anansi tale. (Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock, Eric Kimmell, 1985, see Appendix C)

5.3 Limitations

There were limitations to this inquiry. As a phenomenological study, it focussed on the students involved in The Storytelling Club. The age of students was limited to late primary and junior students (grade three through grade six), who chose to take part in The Storytelling Club. Children who chose not to join, therefore, could not be included – either in the experience, or in the data. There are several reasons students chose not to belong to this group. Some preferred the freedom of a lunch hour without structure. Others chose to be with friends and left The Storytelling Club when friends no longer came. At the beginning of the school year, when new members were invited to join, one boy left after eating lunch, even before the
storytelling began with the statement: “I have to leave. I'm not a good reader.”

His anxiety over his reading difficulty eliminated him from seeing himself as a possible member of this group – even though reading was not a part of the work and even though he may have benefited greatly by the opportunity to participate in storytelling activities. The Storytelling Club was not able to enhance his self worth.

As previously noted in Chapter 3.8: Ethical Issues Encountered in the Gathering of the Data, two students who continued to be members of The Storytelling Club during the research period were not included in the data. Their parents, while supporting their children’s participation in The Storytelling Club, did not consent to their children being a part of the research. It was necessary, but regrettable to exclude their contributions to the group from the research.

Volunteerism is another limitation of this research. The research depended on the goodwill and dedication of teachers to lead such a group during lunchtime. Teacher/leaders were those who felt able to give extended time throughout this endeavour. One such teacher, (Mr.) Robert, changed schools mid-study and was no longer available. (Mrs.) Kanin, in her capacity as a supply teacher, did not have a choice as to which school assignment she was offered and so was not always available to attend in subsequent years. Other factors that might have affected teachers’ ability to participate were: the timetable at lunchtime; increased lunchroom supervision duty for teachers; committee workloads; and class preparation.
5.4 Further Inquiry Possibilities

This research has been – as it necessarily must be—a narrow focus on one specific phenomenon under the magnifying lens of the question: “What is the learning that develops from participation in The Storytelling Club?” Other questions arose as the work progressed. Some of which might be considered for further research.

Further research could include how story is a part of the lives of these students beyond The Storytelling Club. Some students have given hints of this. Lorraine shared how she integrated storytelling into family life and used storytelling as a reward for her younger brothers. Draco talked about telling his stories to his mother. Rachelle’s story “The Blueberry Fairy” was shared with friends outside of The Storytelling Club. The focus of the study could be expanded to explore how students of this age use storytelling in connection to their life experiences outside of school. Carol Fox’s work with pre-schoolers and storytelling (1993), and W. Labov’s study of black teenagers’ oral stories outside of school (1972) are both models for inquiry into students’ story lives.

My school’s ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher spoke to me about one member of The Storytelling Club who she saw as having made great gains through her experiences with the storytelling group. She noted changes in the student’s language skills. She also noted that this student’s peer conflicts were greatly reduced, which the teacher attributed to the student having gained confidence and being more able to communicate with her peers. Documentation of ESL students as they develop
understanding of their second language through storytelling could offer further insights into second-language learners.

Would working with a storytelling club translate into changed or different classroom practice for teachers? Researching the work of a classroom teacher involved in storytelling might reveal ways in which narrative practice would be or could be embedded in teaching practice.

Harold Rosen has pondered about the narrator: “What does a narrator learn in the art of narrating?” (1985, p. 35) He documented the learning and awareness that had unfolded as he prepared to tell to a high school class the story of an event in his life. He asserted that for himself, there was discovery learning in the process of storytelling. This has the potential to be another fascinating perspective on the process of storytelling.

A colleague recently responded to my research by asking whether I had considered having students take language skills tests before and after the research to assess growth in language as a result of participating in The Storytelling Club. This colleague felt that my research would be considered more seriously with the inclusion of this quantitative element. Within my research project, testing of students would have been outside the written parameters discussed and agreed upon between myself and the students and their parents since their permission was specifically for taping of storytelling and conversations within The Storytelling Club. No access to records
was requested or given. I believe that introducing an element of testing could have significantly changed the relationship between the teacher/leaders and the students. The carefully nurtured atmosphere of leader and students as learners together might have been shattered. My preliminary research (Judy Caulfield, 1996) had involved taping two students as they told a story, discussed the story and retold it again to refine their storytelling. This specifically identified their success in building cohesion, refining their language, and employing more elaborative language in the second and third telling. However, I had concluded that this offered too limited a view of students' work across time within the community of students who were developing their storytelling skills. Furthermore, I doubt whether a Language Skills Test, with its isolation of language skills, would connect significantly to the integrated holistic language experience that is a part of The Storytelling Club. It is possible to combine qualitative and quantitative research. Would I choose to do this kind of work? Probably not. As I reported in Chapter Three, when I asked the students to do a questionnaire on their experiences with The Storytelling Club, I became more aware of my multiple "I"s, which included myself as both teacher/leader and as researcher. I was ever mindful of the students' goals when they joined The Storytelling Club. I did not want the research to be intrusive nor one-way (3.5: The Questionnaire: A False Start?). I chose not to use techniques that would intrude upon the time which students were freely giving to become storytellers.
5.5 Illuminating My Learning

As I draw the pieces together, concluding this part of my journey, I ask myself what has been significant for me as a researcher/teacher/storyteller. Foremost for me has been the discovery of how firmly narrative has been embedded in my work. I have begun to see the layers of narrative. Listening to the tapes, I gradually saw through the "glass walls" (Zerubavel, 1979), and became aware that time after time, both my partner and I framed the traditional stories we told with a narrative of those stories in our lives. Students were encouraged to tell the stories of their experiences with stories. When I discussed my work with my colleagues, I told the stories of the students telling the stories. We used story to bring meaning and clarity. Hence, while I had, in previous unpublished writing, explored the concept of the narrative container — I now found practical examples that demonstrated that narrative, as form and also as content, was an integral part of my lived experience. Just as earlier in Chapter Four (4.2: Knowing How to Connect), I had found that (Mr.) Robert's beliefs were reflected in his teaching and that he had, in a brief glimpse, shared that revelation with us, so too I have experienced the revelation of how deeply narrative was embedded in my work with students.

Newly reinforced for me too, has been the understanding of how much can be learned from students when you truly listen to them. I listened as a participant during group meetings, and then as a researcher to the tape recordings of the meetings. I sought out the illuminating moments that would help me to understand the process of these
students becoming storytellers – and the students themselves showed me! Students’ astute comments, and the way they listened, shared, and worked together illuminated the data. Michael Connelly refers to Vivian Paley’s belief that her students were her colleagues and her collaborators, and recognizes that this reflects his own experience (1999). Robert Coles acknowledged how much he learned from the children that he was studying. He crystallized this thought with the words: “one’s informants, one’s teachers” (1990, p. 106). I too was fortunate in learning from the participants – my students and co-teachers. This is why I strove to use the participants’ own words, and to highlight their words in bold face print. Their words have a quality and power that is rightly their own.

The children also demonstrated for me that they were a community and that they had built an environment of trust through shared stories. Because of my personal associations with other storytellers, I have always felt a part of a community of tellers, I now saw how we –these students and teachers together –were building through story a similar community of trust, friendship, caring, and support. Finally, day after day, students shared how vital their personal connections were in bringing understanding to stories.

5.6 Is Storytelling a Part of Children’s Lives at School?

Story is how we make meaning in our lives. It is a “primary act of mind” (Barbara Hardy, 1978). On an informal basis, students do have stories embedded in their lives
at home and at school through personal anecdotes. Many a teacher has heard
students’ anecdotes about why homework was late because of what happened at home
that prevented the child from starting the homework, or from completing it, or from
bringing it to class. Teachers likewise spontaneously tell anecdotes to students.
These may be cautionary tales of what happened in another class when a student
didn’t finish homework and how to avoid a similar problem, or they may be personal
anecdotes connected to school topics. What many children don’t experience is the
opportunity to hear more formal (and well-formed) stories told. In some cases,
students don’t even hear stories read regularly at school.

These children are missing opportunities for “sustained listening” (Bob Barton, 1999)
– the engagement of the listener when a well-formed oral story envelopes and
captivates her/him for the length of the tale, be it ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes long.
Barry Sanders (1995) has reminded us of the unique awareness of the listener during
oral stories. Listening must be intense or details and connections will be lost. Telling
traditional folk and fairy tales can enrich students’ lives through the rich language,
vivid images, and strength in structural elements that are present. Students who have
opportunities to listen to stories regularly have their lives enriched substantially.

But this does not often happen for the majority of students. Why? The electronic
media has taken the place of personal oral storytelling in many people’s lives. People
no longer feel the need to sit around the kitchen table in the evening and tell stories of
their lives and their heritage – they can be simply and inexpensively entertained by
television. It takes much less effort from the receiver. The images are clearly there—no matter how tired the person is. While TV may be considered "inexpensive entertainment", it has hidden costs. One cost may be that TV images are not ones of personal creation, but are manufactured by others—robbing us of precious opportunities to create our own images, tell our own stories, or retell those of our ancestors.

We seem to have lost the knowledge of stories as powerful narrative sources that connect deeply to students' past, present, and future. Teachers who hear a fine storyteller tell stories to their class are often amazed (Bob Barton, 1999). Like the old woman in the opening story in Chapter One, when teachers see a storyteller work with their class, it rings a clear tone—it is almost like a deeply buried secret. They often muse about the powerful listening that students exhibit. They recognize it, but they need to be reminded of the power of story!

There is hope. *Orbit* magazine's special issue "Story Matters: The Role of Story in School" (David Booth, 1999) was a persuasive collection of articles demonstrating the power of story in teachers' lives and students' lives. It addressed gender issues, multicultural issues, ecology, intertextuality, nursery rhymes, and storytelling. We have brilliant authors who continually, persuasively show us the power of using story with students.
Teachers need to be exposed to stories, inspired to use them in their classrooms, and given the tools so that they can find ways to embed story in their work. Few teachers themselves have had the opportunity to experience the power of oral storytelling. Instead of learning it at the knee of a relative, now they often turn to taking courses to gain understanding and confidence in storytelling. Storytelling does need to be seen as accessible so that teachers and students can visualize themselves as storytellers. In my school, when students go to tell stories as invited guests in classrooms throughout the school, other students and teachers alike see that it is possible for students to be persuasive storytellers.

5.7 Where Will My Journey Lead Me Now?

Unless its citizens create a shared body of narratives, a tellingware that includes a nation’s many diverse voices, the people of that land will have little power to imagine a common future for themselves.

Dan Yashinsky, 1993, p. 12

I have come to understand more deeply than ever before – or perhaps I am like the old woman in Chapter One’s story, being just now able to verbalize what my soul has grown in knowing – story matters. It matters in essential ways to who we are and how we are able to express that. It matters in how we connect to each other – to our past, present, and future. Now, if teachers are to use this knowledge, I think they need to have tools to incorporate them into their classroom practice – to have the words to defend their work to students, parents, principals, and the Ministry of Education. Teachers need to be able to use narrative as a form which connects learning, rather than feeling that it is one more requirement or “should” in a busy day
too full of "shoulds" already. Helping the hurried, harried teacher (Patrick Diamond, 1991) to see how story will bridge curriculum subjects, bring meaning, and connect deeply with their students – that is the significant work that I aspire to do. I believe that storytelling can play an important part in this work.

We are all members of different storytelling clubs – from the youngest child who begins to connect to his/her own past through family stories to adults who tell stories to colleagues, friends, and family, thereby bringing form and meaning to their busy lives. When we take the time to listen to each other and to hear each other's stories then we have a chance of knowing each other – of connecting – of making sense of who we are. If we are good listeners, we will receive each other's stories and we will have the kind of bonding that is possible through shared stories.

"I would ask you to remember only this one thing," said Badger. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. One day you will be good storytellers. Never forget these obligations."

Barry Lopez, 1990, *Crow and Weasel*, p. 4
EPILOGUE

OUR LIVES ARE INTERWOVEN THROUGH STORY

A good friend in the storytelling community passed away suddenly a couple of years ago. The grief we all felt was palpable. She was a wonderful storyteller and a vibrant member of the Toronto community. As we gathered to mourn her death, and later still to celebrate her life, we told stories. Sometimes her favourite stories were retold. Other times we told stories about her. Her life and ours were interwoven through story. People didn’t state “She was a good listener.” Instead they told the stories of her involvement in her neighbourhood – of how teenagers would come to her house and tell her anecdotes of their latest escapades (parents too, it seemed came to tell of their life’s happenings). She gave neither lengthy advice nor admonishment, but the gift of listening as various people made sense of their lives through story. So we too, in the storytelling community told stories of this friend, weaving her even more deeply into our own life-stories and making sense as best, and as only, we could.

Story matters. Storytelling enriches our lives.
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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE STORYTELLING CLUB
The Questionnaire

Name_______________________________

Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?

(If you are returning, why?)

..................................

What is it about stories that you like?

..................................

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

..................................

Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story? Tell about it.

..................................

Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

..................................

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to?
Questionnaire Summary

The questionnaire was given to all students who were participating regularly in The Storytelling Club. One student who was not participating in the research project still filled out a form since his input was of value to me as a leader of the group of storytellers. Giving him the form also included him in activities rather than making him feel excluded. This student’s questionnaire, when received, was clearly marked so that it was not included in the data. The participants fell into two basic groups: those who were new to storytelling that year, and those who had been members of the group for one or for two years. Questionnaires were colour-coded so that I could differentiate whether there was a marked difference in any particular area between the two groups (students new to The Storytelling Club and students in their second year of The Storytelling Club). I chose open-ended questions to encourage a broad range of answers.

There was wide variation in how the questionnaires were filled out. Some students seemed to answer two questions with one answer. For example to the two separate questions: Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club? and (If you are returning, why?) One student wrote the following between the lines – leaving it for me the researcher to interpret whether this was an answer for one of the questions or a combined answer: “Because I enjoy it. I like telling it.”
Students who were returning to The Storytelling Club for a second year were in most cases the older students. However, more lengthy answers were not necessarily written by the older students. One second-year student wrote three short sentences for her whole response, while one first-year student wrote several sentences for each question. Students who wrote short answers were not necessarily less involved in The Storytelling Club, nor were they less successful as storytellers. Rachel, a student who had been in The Storytelling Club for two years, was an uninhibited storyteller who enjoyed her audience’s responses to her stories. It is Rachel who created the story “The Blueberry Fairy”, a humorous, rapid-fire tongue twister. Yet Rachel wrote only three brief answers to the questionnaire. This in itself was a clear message to me that the questionnaires could contribute only a small part of the data – listening and attending to the children as they were engaged in The Storytelling Club would be more fruitful.

Several students who were known to be academically challenged had an adult scribe for them. We attempted not to influence their answers, yet I recognized that having someone write for them meant that their answers were frequently longer and more detailed than the answers of some other students who didn’t have scribing done for them.

In the responses to the questionnaire, there was frequent reference to students’
enjoyment of listening to stories and learning stories. There is also frequent reference
by students to connections to people. Some students came because their friends said it
was “cool”. Other students came because their friends were there. Several students
mentioned telling stories to a family member or telling stories told by a family member.

Seven of the student response sheets are included as a part of this Appendix. Here is a
sampling of some of the responses:

**Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?**

*(students new to The Storytelling Club)*

- I have chosen to come because people said it was fun and I like telling stories.
- I have chosen to come because people said it was really cool and because I like
  hearing stories.
- To listen to stories.
- Because I like to tell stories

*(students returning to The Storytelling Club for the second year)*

- I find it fun.
- For the stories and more and more because it’s fun!! fun!! – Because it’s fun.
- Because I love telling and hearing stories.
- Because it’s fun and my friends are here.
- To be involved.
What is it about stories that you like?

*(students new to The Storytelling Club)*

- When I am bored I can tell myself a story.
- They [the stories] are interesting.
- When I am bored I can tell my brother a story.
- I like stories because they help me write my own stories with more detail and ideas.

*(students returning to The Storytelling Club)*

- The patterns in the story.
- Watching and listening to the person.
- Remembering stories.
- Because it will help when I tell them.

Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

*(students new to The Storytelling Club)*

- Yes, when my sister Silverwing told the story. It reminds me when my grandma told me it.

*(students returning to The Storytelling Club for the second year)*

- The story my grandma told me. Because it has repetition, it’s funny and it has a moral to it.
Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

*(students new to The Storytelling Club)*

- Yes, I always thought telling a story would be easy, but you have to practice to get it right.

*(students returning to The Storytelling Club for the second year)*

- It is calm not wild.
- You can use your imagination.

The advantage to using a questionnaire had seemed to be to gather a quantity of data in one fell-swoop. But, questionnaires are uni-dimensional. There is little or no dialogue between researcher and participant, no clarification, and no context. I do confess to having my own bias – when faced with a questionnaire, I find it difficult to be contained to a certain number of lines or wording. In the words of Margie Buttignol, I find myself “colouring outside the lines” (1998, p. ii). I often scrawl my own comments about the questions in the margins. It is the clarification that such scrawls can make that I seek from my students. For the purposes of this study, The Questionnaire was just a beginning.
Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club

Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?

(If you are returning, why?)

I like to listen to stories because they are fun and exciting.
What is it about stories that you like?

When I am bored, I can tell myself a story.

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

Simple pictures are best.
Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Yes, I can picture the shoemaker and his wife with all their stuff and the photographer trying to warn them simple pictures are.

When I'm bored, I can tell my brother, a story best.

We get to tell stories.

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to?
Storytelling club
Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?

Because I like stories, and the pictures are fascinating.
(If you are returning, why?)

What is it about stories that you like?

They are interesting.
I like the pictures too.

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

Well I learn new stories
And I try and memorize them.

Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Yes when my sister Sabria told the story. It reminds me when my grandma told me it.

Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story? Tell about it.

Yes, whenever the storytellers tell stories I picture the pictures in my mind.

Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

Yes more people from story telling are wanting to tell stories and in the starting they people didn't want to tell story

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to?

Because it is about stories.
Name

Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?
I really like listening to stories and telling stories.
(If you are returning, why?)
Because sometimes stories get really exciting words and things.

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

The gunny wolf. Every time I hear that story I picture the mother telling her daughter not to go in the woods.

Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story? Tell about it.
I can picture the mother telling her daughter not to go in the woods.

No, Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to?
Name_________________________

Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?

(If you are returning, why?)

Because I enjoy them

What is it about stories that you like? I listen very carefully and then I get better

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story? Tell about it.

Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to?
Name________________________

Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?
Because I like listening to stories
(If you are returning, why?)
Because I want to listen to
more stories
What is it about stories that you like?
(There are sometimes funny, cliffhangers and the quality)
(There are all different and)
To always come to meetings.
What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a
storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

The story my grandma told me. Because
it has repetition, it's funny, and it has a meaning to it.
Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong
personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story?
Tell about it. The man walking to the stones

No. Nothing at all

Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

There's no running, jumping or etc.
There's more listening.

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you
have belonged to?
Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club?

(If you are returning, why?) because it's fun and my friends are here

What is it about stories that you like? because I love stories and folk tales

... it has gave me self incurement

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

The five mean and ugly men
Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.

Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story? Tell about it.

... the background mostly

... Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories? it's fun

... How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to? all the other one were sports clubs
Name ________________________________

Research Questionnaire on The Storytelling Club
Blue form = new students to the club
Green form = student who is returning to the club a second year.

Why have you chosen to come to The Storytelling Club? Because I like telling and hearing stories.

(If you are returning, why?)
There is a large variety of different stories.
What is it about stories that you like?
I remember stories better. Because it will help when I tell them.

What do you think has been most important for you in becoming a storyteller? Why has it been so important for you?

Three hairs from the devil’s beard.
Can you think of a particular story that you like to tell that has very strong personal connections for you? Tell about it.
It’s about a boy who needs three hairs from the devil’s beard.
Are there any pictures in your mind connected with this story? Yes.
Tell about it. For the devil I see this huge red guy with a beard.

No.
Has anything surprised you about storytelling or learning to tell stories?

It is calm, not wild.

How do you see the storytelling club as different from other clubs that you have belonged to?
APPENDIX B

LETTERS OF CONSENT
Information Letter to Parents A

September, 1997

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As a member of the Storytelling Club, your child has been meeting once a week at lunch hour to hear stories and learn stories to tell.

I would like to ask your permission to include your child in a research study of this group. The research will involve taping the groups’ discussions and storytelling sessions. Students will also be asked to complete a questionnaire to give further information on their perspectives of their learning in the storytelling club.

I am conducting this research in connection with my Doctor of Education studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. As a teacher I have continued my own education in order to further understand the process of learning for students. Storytelling has always been of special interest for me. I see it as developing crucial oral communication skills. Through this study I will further develop my understanding of how students become storytellers.

The project will involve the students in seeing themselves as learners and how they perceive this occurring in the storytelling club. The research material will be confidential to protect the privacy of individuals. Names of students will not be revealed. The research will be published as part of my thesis and may be a part of further writing I may do on the topic of storytelling and students. I look forward to sharing with my fellow educators the exciting work that involves these students.

Your child will continue to be a welcome member of the Storytelling Club even if you do not wish your child to be a part of the gathering of research data. Students wishing to withdraw from the project may do so at any time.

I hope that you will support your child’s participation. I have found that students find it exciting to be a part of the discussion of how they are learning. If you have comments you wish to contribute from your observations on your child and his/her participation in this group, I’d be pleased to receive written comments or have a conversation with you. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at ____________________________.

(Parents/Guardians are invited to add comments or questions on the back of this sheet.)

Thank you for your consideration.

Mrs. Judy Caulfield.
Student/Parent Consent Form A

I ____________________________, with the permission (student)
of my parent or guardian, _________________________.
(parent or guardian)

agree to be involved in the research project on the Storytelling Club which is being conducted by Mrs. Judy Caulfield.

I understand that this research will include tape-recording of the discussions and some of the storytelling by students and teachers who will be involved in this Storytelling Club.

I give permission to Judy Caulfield to publish transcribed materials (or parts of transcribed materials) from any tape-recording or from any discussions in which I took part during the school year from September 1997 to June 1998. Judy Caulfield agrees to refer in the published version to me by a pseudonym. Judy Caulfield also agrees to keep the tape recordings and transcripts in a secure location.

Date: ________________________________

Student: ________________________________

Parent/Guardian: ________________________________
Information Letter to Parents B

December 1, 1998.

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As a member of the Storytelling Club, your child has been meeting once a week at lunch hour to hear stories and learn stories to tell. As a group we discuss the stories and our learning. One of the learning strategies involves taping these discussions. Our work together meets the expectations for oral communications in the new Ontario Curriculum.

I would like to ask your permission to include your child’s contributions in a research study on storytelling. This is a continuation of research begun last year with the Storytelling Club.

I am conducting this research in connection with my Doctor of Education studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. As a teacher I have continued my own education in order to further understand the process of learning for students. Storytelling has always been of special interest for me. I see it as developing crucial oral communication skills. Through this study I will further develop my understanding of how students become storytellers.

The project will involve the students in seeing themselves as learners and how they perceive this occurring in the storytelling club. The research material will be confidential to protect the privacy of individuals. Names of students will not be revealed. The research will be published as part of my thesis and may be a part of further writing I may do on the topic of storytelling and students. I look forward to sharing with my fellow educators the exciting work that involves these students.

Your child will continue to be a welcome member of the Storytelling Club even if you do not wish your child to be a part of the gathering of research data. Students wishing to withdraw from the project may do so at any time.

I hope that you will support your child’s participation. I have found that students find it exciting to be a part of the discussion of how they are learning. If you have comments you wish to contribute from your observations on your child and his/her participation in this group I’d be pleased to receive written comments or have a conversation with you. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at ______________________. Parents/Guardians are invited to add comments or questions on the back of this sheet.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mrs. Judy Caulfield.
Student/Parent Consent Form B

I ____________________________, with the permission of my parent or guardian, _______________________
(student) (parent or guardian)
agree to be involved in the research project on the Storytelling Club which is being conducted by Mrs. Judy Caulfield.

I understand that this research will include tape-recording of the discussions and some of the storytelling by students and teachers who will be involved in this Storytelling Club.

I give permission to Judy Caulfield to publish transcribed materials (or parts of transcribed materials) from any tape-recording or from any discussions in which I took part during the school year from September 1998 to June 1999. Judy Caulfield agrees to refer in the published version to me by a pseudonym. Judy Caulfield also agrees to keep the tape recordings and transcripts in a secure location.

Date: ____________________________________________

Student: ____________________________________________

Parent/Guardian: ____________________________________
Information Letter to Teacher Participants

November 9, 1998.

Dear __________:

As you are aware, I have been pursuing my Doctor of Education at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education / University of Toronto. We have frequently discussed together the research that I am conducting on the Storytelling Club. Through this study I will further develop my understanding of the crucial elements affecting how students become storytellers.

The research material will be confidential to protect the privacy of individuals. Names of students and participating teachers will not be revealed. The research will be published as part of my thesis and may be a part of further writing I may do on the topic of storytelling and students.

__________, you have been a key part of this Storytelling Club and have made contributions which would add further substance to the research. I hope that you will be willing to have your contribution included within the research data. I would like to continue the collaborative relationship that we have established into the writing of the research. To that purpose, I will share with you the writing which particularly relates to your participation in the group. Your feedback and comments are an important aspect of understanding the research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at ________________.

Thank you for your consideration.

Judy Caulfield
**Teacher Participant Consent Form**

I _______________________________________________________________________.

(teacher in the Storytelling Club)

agree to be involved in the research project on the Storytelling Club which is being conducted by Mrs. Judy Caulfield.

I understand that this research will include tape-recording of the discussions and some of the storytelling by students and teachers who will be involved in this Storytelling Club.

I give permission to Judy Caulfield to publish transcribed materials (or parts of transcribed materials) from any tape-recording or from any discussions in which I took part during the school year. Judy Caulfield agrees to refer in the published version to me by a pseudonym. Judy Caulfield also agrees to keep the tape recordings and transcripts in a secure location.

Date: _______________________________________________________________________

Teacher Participant: _______________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE STORIES REFERRED TO – IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER BY TITLE
"Anansi and the Moss-covered Rock"


When Anansi discovered the power of an unusual rock that could render someone unconscious just by saying the phrase “moss covered rock”, he made a plan. He decided to use this information to his advantage. He invited animals for a walk in the forest, tricked them into saying “moss covered rock”, and robbed them while they lay unconscious. Little deer observed the trick and set things right by tricking Anansi himself into saying, “moss covered rock.”

Anansi stories originated in West Africa and travelled to the West Indies, the United States, and beyond through oral storytelling. Anansi is a spider/man who usually takes on his spider form when he has gotten into mischief.

"Anansi Finds a Fool: An Ashanti Tale"


Lazy Anansi was always on the lookout for someone to do the work while he reaped the benefits. He tricked a friend into gathering wood, making a fish trap, hauling in the fish, and then selling them. Anansi did the “work” of watching. The chief
shamed Anansi for his greed when Anansi went too far and tried to sell the fish trap after it had been wrecked by an eel.

Anansi stories originated in West Africa and travelled to The West Indies and the United States through oral storytelling. Anansi is a spider/man who usually takes on his spider form when he has gotten into mischief.

"Anansi's Old Riding Horse"


Anansi, the trickster, tried to tell Miss Celine not to date tiger because he was “just an old riding horse.” To demonstrate this to Miss Celine, Anansi pretended to be sick and tricked tiger into carrying him on his back to see Miss Celine - with a rope in his mouth and a blanket on his back - looking very much like “an old riding horse.” Miss Celine, however, rejected both suitors and married peacock.

Anansi stories originated in West Africa and travelled to The West Indies and the United States through oral storytelling. Anansi is a spider/man who usually takes on his spider form when he has gotten into mischief.
“The Blueberry Fairy”


Rachelle created a pattern story whereby Justin, a young boy, went from mother, to father, to sister, to his friend, to the principal, and finally to God to ask: “Who put the blue in the blueberries fairly?” The first six answered: “Didn’t anyone ever tell you that the Blueberry Fairy put the blue in the blueberries fairly?” But Justin didn’t believe it. Finally, God answered: “Well, don’t you know Justin, I put the blue in the blueberries.”

“The Boy Who Was Spoiled”


This is a story about a spoiled prince whose father asked him to earn money. Each day the boy just took money from his mother. When he handed the money to his father the king, the king would just throw it out the window. The day that the boy objected to having the money thrown out the window was the day that he finally had earned the money himself.
"The Cat that Walked by Himself"

This is a story from the time when all the animals were wild. Cat watched with three friends – dog, horse, and cow – as woman made a home in a cave. Each of the three friends became curious, visited the woman in the cave, and subsequently exchanged freedom for food. Cat was not so interested in giving up his freedom and exacted an uneasy truce with the woman. He managed to get her to praise him three times in spite of herself, and therefore earned a warm place by the fire and some milk to drink.

This is a literary tale written by Rudyard Kipling.

"Clever Manka"

This story can be found with many variations. In this version of the text, a farmer is challenged by the burgomaster (a local judge) to prove his ownership of a wayward calf by answering three riddles. Fearful that he may lose the calf, the farmer tells his problems to his daughter who, in the morning, offers him three wise answers.

Riddles abound in this story. When the burgomaster discovered that it was Manka
who answered the riddles, he set her several riddles to test whether she would be worthy to wed him.

"The Cow on the Roof"


This humorous tale is common in many countries. This version comes from Wales. It involves a reversal of roles where the wife goes out to work in the fields and the husband stays at home to do the chores. How the cow ends up dangling from the roof is the fun of it all.

"Crow and Weasel"


This (modern) fable tells the quest of two young animals who seek to travel further than their people have gone before. They discover their relationship to the land and to others. After many hardships they return with new-found confidence and many stories which will be inspiration for their people for many years to come.
“The Fat Cat: A Danish Folktale”


This is a humorous, cumulative tale in which the cat, who is told to mind the gruel while the old woman is out, eats the gruel, the pot, and the old woman too when she returns. As the cat walks through the village, he boasts – by repeating the list of those he has eaten – and then gobbles up the next one he meets. When the cat confronts the woodcutter the cat ends the list of who he has eaten with: “And now I am going to eat you!” The woodcutter puts an end to it all with his axe. All of the previously swallowed characters emerge from the cat – apparently unscathed!

“The Fisherman and His Wife”


When a fisherman takes pity on a talking flounder and returns it to the sea, his wife is furious. She is sure that the magic fish can give them a wish. The greedy wife then proceeds to send the husband back again and again, for grander and grander wishes. Finally, she demands to be the creator so that she can command the sun and the moon. For her greed, everything is taken away and both the fisherman and his wife find themselves back in the humble shack again.
"The Forgetful Man"


This is the tale of a husband who was so worried that he’d forget his errand to get medicine for his wife that he repeated “medicine, medicine, medicine” as he walked along. But when the husband repeated the phrase, he was constantly annoying people who would instruct him to repeat something else. Off the husband would go repeating the new phrase. The story continued with the husband triggering a series of incidents that involved him repeating inappropriate phrases and constantly being admonished to repeat new phrases. Finally someone told him he needed to get medicine for his headache. “Medicine!” he exclaimed and he set off to get his wife her medicine.

"The Four Hairs from the Beard of the Devil"


There are many variations on themes connected to the different versions of this story. In this version, told by Marion, a mother sent her stepson to the devil to bring back four hairs from the devil’s beard. These were supposed to heal her sick cows. On the
way, the stepson met three people who asked, while he is visiting the devil, if he won’t just ask a question for each of them about a problem they needed to solve. The devil’s wife, charmed by the boy’s courteous manners, got him the four hairs and got the answers from the devil too. The boy returned with the four hairs to give to his stepmother and the three answers. He was richly rewarded for finding the answers.

"Gold in the Chimley"


This is a pattern story. It is the story of two sisters who went out to seek their fortune. The first sister found a job with a witch who told her not to look up the “chimley” [sic]. When the witch went out, the girl looked up the chimley, found some gold, and took off. As she ran away with the gold she was asked for help by a cow, a horse, a sheep, and a mill but refused them all. When the witch found her, she turned the girl into stone. When her sister did not return, the younger sister set out to find her. The younger sister also hired herself out to work for the witch. She too found the gold. When she was running away with the gold, she gave help each time it was requested by the cow, the horse, the sheep and the mill. She was rewarded by being protected from the witch by each one of these characters in turn by – and so she outwitted the witch.
“The Gunniwolf”
In this story, the mother leaves to go to the market and cautions her daughter not to go into the woods because “the Gunniwolf might get you.” However, the little girl ignores her mother and is innocently drawn into the woods following a trail of flowers. First a patch of white flowers, then yellow flowers, and then red flowers lead her deeper and deeper into the woods. She does meet the Gunniwolf but she escapes using a lullaby to put him to sleep.

“The Hoca and the Candle”

The Hoca boasted that he was hardy enough to stay outside in the cold all night long without a coat or anything to keep him warm. His friends made him a bet: if he succeeded, they’d cook him dinner – if he didn’t then he’d have to cook them dinner. When he explained that it was the light of a candle across the square that gave him the strength to make it through the night, his friends declared that the Hoca had forfeited the bet. The Hoca illustrated his point by heating their dinner (ever so slowly!) in a cauldron suspended one meter over a candle.
In this story, the Hoca used his wisdom to make his point. At other times he seems more like a fool. Often referred to as a “wise fool”, this folk character can be found in the Middle East, the Balkans, and Greece. He may be referred to as: Hoca, Hodja, Nasreddin, or Nasreddin Hodja.

"How the Wiseman Tricked the Witches"


This is a story told to Markus by his German grandmother. Marcus reported that his grandmother had told him several versions. In the version Markus chose to tell, witches invade a small town which makes it impossible for the villagers to go out at night and see the moon. After one hundred years, the people go to the wiseman for help. He takes thirteen young men with him to the witches’ cave and tricks the witches into believing that he can teach them how to dance between raindrops. The witches shrivel up and the people are once again able to go out to see the moon.
“Just in Time for the King’s Birthday”


This modern tale is a humorous pattern story. When a farmer sets out to take a marvellous cheese to the palace for the king’s birthday, he meets many animals who want “just one little taste.” When he refuses, they persuade him to let them take “just a sniff” and then they proceed to gobble up the cheese. Each time a larger animal chases away the animals that are eating the cheese, but then asks for “just one little taste” in repayment and so the cycle continues. Eventually the king comes to the farmer’s rescue, but by this time the cheese is all gone. The next year, the farmer is determined not to let anyone have a taste or even a sniff of the cheese for the king’s birthday.

“Rainbow Crow: A Lenape Tale”


When Earth’s first snow fell, the animals were getting cold and disappearing under the snow. It was crow who braved the terrible task of retrieving some of the fire to bring back warmth and light. He succeeded, but he lost his beautiful voice because
the soot from the burning brand choked him as he carried it. Crow's feathers were changed from all the colours of the rainbow to a burnt black.

"The Riddle"


This is a story that Draco created sometime after hearing the story “Clever Manka” told. The story involved a man who worked for “The Riddler”, a stable-owner. In order to claim his pay, the stable hand had to answer three riddles. Draco wove into his story a man who, like the farmer in Clever Manka, was only able to answer the riddles with help. In the end, the man was given three bags of gold – one for himself, and one each for his wife and daughter who had helped him with the answers.

“A Story, A Story: An African Tale”


In the beginning, it was Sky God, Nyame, who kept all of the stories in the sky in a box beside him. Anansi spun a web and climbed to the sky to ask for the stories. Anansi was able to earn the stories by accomplishing three tasks. He brought three creatures to Nyame: Osibo, the Leopard with sharp teeth, Mboro, the hornets who
sting like fire, and Moatia, the fairy whom no man has ever seen. So, it is Anansi who brought the stories to earth and this is why some countries in West Africa call all stories Anansi Stories.

Anansi stories originated in West Africa and travelled to the West Indies, the United States, and beyond through oral storytelling. Anansi is a spider/man who usually takes on his spider form when he has gotten into mischief.

"The Three Little Pigs"

There are many versions of this folk tale. When the three little pigs leave home, each one builds a new house. It is only the house of the third pig—the pig who uses bricks for his house—that survives the wolf’s huffing and puffing. The third pig continues to outwit the wolf until the wolf finally slides down the chimney and lands in the little pig’s cooking pot.
"Trading the Goat"


This is a story that Silverwing’s Lebanese grandmother told her. The story is about a poor family whose last possession is a goat. On Christmas Eve, the children persuade the father to take the goat and trade it so that they will have something for Christmas. This humorous tale has the father getting the better of each merchant or person with whom he trades the goat for goods. Each time the father is kicked out and the goat is kicked out too. The father ends up back home with fruit, money, and the goat!

"The White Dove"


A princess who got lost in the woods when she escaped a robbery, was helped by a white dove. The dove magically provided food and shelter to the princess. In return, the princess stole a ring from a witch. This transformed the dove back into a prince.
"Why the Tides Ebb and Flow"


This is the story of an old woman who seeks help from the Sky Spirit for a hut for shelter. As the story evolves, it is the old woman who takes her fate in her hands and sails out to sea in her stew pot to get the rock that sits in the bottomless pit that is the hole in the sea. She wants the rock for shelter from the weather, but removing it starts the water going around and around and down into the bottomless pit in the sea. The story is resolved with the woman returning home with a dog, who will protect her; a young woman who will be her daughter; and a young man who will build her a hut.

"Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China"


In this story, a young girl, who is mistreated by her stepmother, has only one friend – a fish. She feeds the fish each day even if that means that she does not have any of her meagre portion to eat herself. When the stepmother discovers that Yeh-Shen has a pet fish, she kills it and cooks it. Yeh-Shen retrieves the bones, and it is the spirit of
the fish (through the bones) that is able to help her, eventually giving her fine clothes to wear to the festival and so to win the heart of the King.
APPENDIX D

“THE WHITE DOVE”:
A SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT
OF COLLABORATIVE STUDENT STORYTELLING WORK
"The White Dove"

Lorna and Jean tell "The White Dove" to The Storytelling Club. It is their version of a fairy tale that Lorna has read. The original source is not known.

Lorna: Once upon a time there was a little princess riding through the forest in her coach. She was bumping along over the pebbles and stones when all of a sudden robbers jumped out from the trees and said, "YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIVES!!" [Use of different tone and loudness for robbers.]

Jean: Before the robbers could get to the other side of the coach, the little girl managed to slip out before the robbers. And she ran and she ran and she ran. And she ripped her dress. She lost her shoes on bushes. She stopped running when she couldn’t hear the echoes of the robbers’ voices any more.

She said, "Oh no. What am I going to do without any food or water, or anywhere to sleep. I’ll get too cold and I’ll ..."

Lorna: [whispering] Freeze.

Jean: ... freeze to death. And she heard a little "coo, coo" over top of her and she looked up and there was a white dove.

And the dove said, "Do not Cry." And the dove said, "Because I have a key." And the dove dropped the key at her feet. And the dove said, "Behind that tree there is a keyhole. Stick it in and turn it and you will find some bread and butter to eat."

So she did what the dove told her to do. And there was bread and butter. Then she said, "Now I am done, but I am getting sleepy. I’ll get too cold." Then the dove dropped another key down and said, "In that tree over ... over to your right, there is another key hole. Open the door with the key and you will find a bed just small enough for you to sleep in."

Lorna: So the next morning the little girl woke up and the dove was there and every day – every time – the girl needed something, the dove dropped a key below her feet. Until one day ...
Jean: The dove asked, “Will you do me a favour?”

And the girl said, “Okay, anything for you.”

And the dove said, “Over there ... over at the end of this path there is a old cottage, and there is a lady in there and she is going to be sitting by the fire in a rocking chair. Can you go there? And pass the lady on her right side and don’t talk to her and there will be a table of rings.”

Lorna: And so the girl did what the dove told her. And while she passed she covered her mouth so she wouldn’t be tricked.


Lorna: And so the girl went back and asked, “What colour is the ring?”

“It is a gold ring with a red jewel in it.”

And so she ran back. She covered her mouth so she wouldn’t be tricked of talking to the old woman. And the red ring was not there. So, but then she saw the lady with her shawl and she could see a little birdcage under the old lady’s shawl. She knew that that was the birdcage and she knew the ring was in it. And so she snatched – she ran and she snatched the cage from the old lady and there was the ring.

Jean: So she ran to the tree. But the dove was not there, so she started to cry. But then the tree – the tree grew arms and became softer, and softer, and said, “Do not cry.” And then the tree turned into a prince.

And then the girl – the princess said, “Who are you? Where did you come from?”

And the prince said, “I am a prince and the old lady is a witch. She cast a spell on me and on my friends.”

She looked around and all the other trees were forming into people. And the prince said, “Those are my friends and we went too close to the house and then she turned us into trees. But I am a dove also. Because I am a prince, she let me go around as a bird for two hours.”
Lorna: So the princess and the prince got married and they lived happily ever after.

Jean/Lorna: Questions? Janet?

Janet: At the beginning, when you said she lost her slippers on a branch – it is just like Cinderella when she lost one of her slippers on the step.

student #1: Did you make up the story or did you get it from a book?

Lorna: We got it from a book. Well, I got it from a book.

(Ms.) Marion: What kind of book was it?

Lorna: It's a fairy tale book – well, I'm not sure if it is native or anything. But I had it since I was really little and I just remembered the story. And I was trying to tell Jean the story but I was mixing stories up and I couldn't remember it. So I found the book and I read it over again.

(Mrs.) Judy: That happens to storytellers all the time. If we were living long ago and there were no books, we would go back to the person who had told us the story and they would tell it again and we would be able to get the details. But you're lucky that you had some memory of it, and you went back to the book to sort it out.

Where's Karen? Karen, this reminds me of you with your "Rainbow Crow" story because it's a story that Lorna read a while ago and liked well enough that some of it stayed in her mind. And she has gone back to it.

Yasmin: How did you decide who would do each part?

Jean: Well, we had these papers. Lorna had an orange marker and I had a yellow marker and we marked off the parts that we were gonna do and I forgot the paper at home. So we just had to - stuff that we forgot we just had to kind of re-memorize it.

Lorna: Yah – that's why we were looking at each other – like once in a while.

(Mrs.) Judy It is something you're going to need to decide with your partner today – or in the next week – is how you share the story back and forth. I noticed that too, Yasmin. There was one point
that I knew that it was Lorna’s turn because her partner said, “so-o-o-o” and her voice let us know that she was passing the story on.

Karen: I liked it. [how they shared]

(Mrs) Judy: And they did assist each other when they had a few details missing. They assisted each other so gently that it didn’t spoil the story. You are right. They were very organized.

(Ms.) Marion: Very good selection. It has all the qualities of a traditional tale. It is one that the ear tunes into very quickly and wants to listen to the next part. I think part of it is once you are familiar with the kind of story, you get involved because you are guessing what is going to happen next.

(Mrs.) Judy: And there were some lovely little details there and it helped my mind fill in the pictures. So, you remembered those details really well.

I don’t remember the title?

Jean and Lorna: “The White Dove.”

(Mrs.) Judy: It’s a new one, and yet I recognize some of the patterns.