Re-authoring Empathy: Constructing Narratives of Empathic Understanding and Engagement in Higher Education

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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ABSTRACT

In this research study I write stories of empathic experience with 2 research participants. We write as a method of data analysis where we reconstruct our own lived experiences of empathy in order to become more conscious and self-aware in our understanding of how we each learned empathy. These experiences, brought forward into the present, create hope and possibility for new self-knowledge. This new self-knowledge supports the embodiment of empathy in a teaching practice. The self and other context of empathy is examined as a relational experience in this narrative inquiry, where feelings and understandings are brought to light through the narrative process of recovery and reconstruction of meaning in storied form. This research process supports my belief that knowledge is constructed, and that this holistic practice of curriculum as lived experience supports pathways for meaning-making and self-understanding.
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ON SELF KNOWLEDGE

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and nights.
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge.
You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.

And it is well you should.
The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;
And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.
But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;
And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.
For self is a sea boundless and measureless.

Say not, “I have found the truth,” but rather, “I have found a truth.”
Say not, “I have found the path of the soul.” Say rather, “I have met the soul walking upon my path.”
For the soul walks upon all paths.
The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.
The soul unfolds itself like a lotus of countless petals.

(Gibran, 1973)
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CHAPTER ONE: EMBODIED EMPATHY

Introducing the Writer and the Writing Context

Research that supports my learning of empathy is very important to me. Prior to my teaching years I supported clients as a mental health therapist in clinical settings. My empathic positioning with clients helped me to learn about myself, where I was conscious of the delicate balance between self and other. I learned that empathy is something that I value, and that this practice of empathy as a value is deeply connected to who I am. It is a foundational quality that is nurtured, for me, through self and other interaction. I took this self-understanding and my awareness of this learning with me into a teaching practice.

Presently I am an educator in a postsecondary institution where I teach counselling stream courses in a Social Service Worker Program at the college level. I work very hard to create empathic classroom environments and to be the most empathic person I can be, and I also teach my students to empathically position themselves with others as helping professionals. I have practiced teaching empathy in a variety of different ways over the last 8 years. None of these ways have been comfortable for me, and I really question how successful I am within this teaching practice of empathy with my students. How the threads of empathy are woven together throughout the curriculum is unclear to me, and I am often challenged to weave these threads differently in ways that are more meaningful for my students and for myself. This experience has led me to ask many questions around the appropriateness of the teaching and learning practices of empathy in my program. Empathy is a core value in the practice of social work. Faculty in the counselling stream courses teach to this value and assess the empathic skills of students in simulated role plays and diverse client scenarios. Empathy is taught as
required curriculum, where we focus on the skills that support one’s empathic positioning with another. I believe that my discomfort comes from this approach, as I have observed that students are not able to demonstrate that they are more empathic or that they understand empathy as a result of learning these skills. There are differences across faculty around the use of the word empathy, its definition, and the application and integration of empathy into the required curriculum across courses.

The purpose of this research is for me and the research participants to gain a heightened self-awareness around the practice of empathy and to become more conscious and self-aware within the context of self and other interaction. Engaging in my research, I hypothesize that being self-aware is an integral and necessary learning outcome, for teachers and students, if empathy is to be learned and embodied in the classroom. I am curious about the potential of becoming more self-aware for myself, so that I may reflectively consider a teaching practice or a teaching curriculum that requires the practice of empathy as a learning outcome. Although it is not explicitly stated, empathy competence is required in order to be able to attain most of the learning outcomes in the counselling stream courses that I teach.

My professional experience of teaching empathy, coupled with my learning of empathy throughout my life across time and place, forms the basis of my research content for this study along with the stories of two other research participants. Each research participant in this study is a teacher whose instruction involves the teaching of empathy in a social work curriculum, and each embodies her own foundation of learning and meaning-making in the research process. Embodiment is therefore understood as self-understanding in this research study. The research participants, and myself as a
participant researcher, explore the notion of embodied empathy through the writing of personal stories of lived experience. Soul work and empathy are embedded qualities throughout the writing that follows. I am hopeful that the relationship between these two qualities will create a vision from the heart, and a depth and value for each research participant that is personal and relational. Overall, my research is about empathy and my relationship with this word.

In this first chapter entitled *Embodied Empathy* I begin a process of constructing a more conscious curriculum of lived experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) for myself. I see this as a holistic approach (Miller 2000, 2007), where I begin to examine the foundation of my own learning and the relationship between this foundation and the experience of empathy. Throughout the developing field text of this study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I position my self as a participant researcher *working with* my research participants as we collectively write and share our stories of empathic experience. As we engage in this experience of a *being with* quality of empathy, the research participants, and I as participant researcher, construct a narrative inquiry around this quality through the writing and interpretation of our own stories. The relationship between embodiment, self-knowledge, and empathy is experienced and explored by me and the research participants in this study.

The research methodology and the research process are explained in detail in Chapters four and five. In order to position the writing of this chapter, and for clarity for the reader, I formalize the research methodology now as narrative inquiry. The methods that support the delivery of this methodology are writing and story. The literature that I have chosen to support my understanding of empathy as a value is discussed in Chapter
Three. Chapters six through eight contain the research content from each research participant, with Chapter nine offering a narrative inquiry and analysis into the themes and new perspectives that emerged from the process of the writing and the stories that were written.

**Questions that Position my Research**

As I begin the process of my research, I pose the following questions:

1. How did we as research participants (teachers who teach empathy) learn empathy in our life experience, and how do we embody this learning in our lives and teaching practice?

2. How did we as research participants recognize the presence of empathy (or not) in our educative experience as students and as teachers? What effect does this awareness have on our understanding of how to teach empathy or how to construct an empathic curriculum? Can empathy be taught?

3. What are the subjective attributes of empathy that are identified through the lived experience of the research participants, and how do these attributes create the core conditions for embodied knowing?

4. How does this enhanced conscious awareness of embodied knowing construct empathy as a value and a moral conversation that informs self-understanding, and a sustainable teaching practice that is socially constructed?

**Defining Curriculum: A Broader View**

I position this narrative inquiry within the context of curriculum. I consider curriculum as lived experience in this research study, meaning that using our own lived experience the research participants and I as participant researcher construct a personal
and professional curriculum through the writing and telling of our stories. The curriculum itself is life experience where the subject matter evolves through a connection with the personal. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) state that “a curriculum can become one’s life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow” (p. 1). In this broad sense, Connelly and Clandinin view curriculum as a person’s life experience. Dewey (1938) originally spoke to how one’s own narrative may be reflectively reconstructed for curricular reasons. “There is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking of impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves” (p. 64). When I consider curriculum as lived experience, then, I can align my learning, my new knowledge, to my values and my goals because the curriculum represents what I value. This valuing feels like an empathic curriculum, one where empathy motivates the learner. John Miller’s Holistic Curriculum, a curriculum that places learning within a relational context and centers on balance, inclusion, and connection (Miller, 2007), feels like an empathic curriculum.

Miller (2007) identifies relationship to the soul as one of these connections, where “ultimately the holistic curriculum helps us to realize our deeper sense of self, our soul” (p. 14). A holistic curriculum is grounded in the teacher’s ability to be present and where he or she is able to demonstrate caring through connection with others, with a focus on relationships (Miller, 2007). Caring, connection, and relational qualities are embedded within this research methodology, and are hopeful and preferred outcomes of increased self-awareness in relation to empathy.

Schwab’s (1962) student, teacher, milieu, and subject matter considers what I understand as caring, balance, and connection between these four aspects of curriculum.
Schwab named these four interrelated and intersecting aspects as the four commonplaces. I see each one of these commonplaces as collectively making a whole. In self-study I can move back and forth between them as I reflect on how each one informs a curriculum of lived experience for teacher and student. As a teacher I co-construct this curriculum with my students, where subject matter is tentative based on the milieu (the social context) that is present and accounted for in each and every classroom. Thus, these four commonplaces that Schwab spoke to support my holistic orientation of teaching as a relational quality where self and other intermingle together in a process of curriculum-making. I see this learning with quality as an example of empathy in practice. As cited in Shields and Reid-Patton (2009), Schwab (1962) “reminds us that these four aspects of curriculum intertwine in a learning space, and that often, it is the teacher and the atmosphere created that we remember across time and not the subject matter” (p. 5). Schwab is a reminder for me of how it is so important as a teacher and a mental health counsellor to be self-aware and to bring my authentic presence into the classroom and my clinical relationships with others. When I do this, I am opening space for empathy to be experienced by my self and others.

Miller’s holistic curriculum (2007) and Schwab’s four commonplaces (1962) are supporting curriculum guidelines for examining empathy through the lens of lived experience where curriculum is lived experience (Connelly & Clandinin 1988; Dewey 1938). If I can consider empathy through the lens of the curriculum theories mentioned above, I may be able to evaluate my own empathic positioning as a teacher as well as practice and model a curriculum of empathy throughout this research process, where teachers as research participants are writing a field text aimed at authentic understanding.
together in a relational dialogue with each other. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) speak to the oral and written forms of language in the following quote. I have found this quote to be very meaningful in my narrative work with others, where self-awareness is the preferred learning outcome.

In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who speak and listen and read and write – sharing, expanding and reflecting on each other’s experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community. Without them, individuals become isolated from others; and without the tools for representing their experiences, people also become isolated from the self. (p. 26)

A Foundation of Empathy

As I begin to write and reflect on my own lived experience in this first chapter, I am considering many things. I am hopeful that this inquiry process enables me and the research participants to become more conscious and more self-aware in our understanding of empathy. I anticipate that many more questions will evolve with the storied content, and I am open to shifting the direction of the research questions into more specific or even different open spaces of inquiry for myself and my research participants. I am assuming that a level of self-awareness already exists within the foundation of my own lived experience, as well as the research participants’. I begin my writing with my current self-awareness, which supports the foundation of knowledge that I am conscious of. Chapter One therefore represents partial knowledge. It is a tentative foundation that will be challenged throughout this research process. It is from this place of knowing that I
decided to do this research in the first place. The value of this knowing must certainly have something to do with empathy. I start by considering what I currently have come to know through the lens of my own lived experience. I am open to how this research informs me, and I am curious about the new knowledge that will be constructed. With many questions still unanswered, I begin this process.

I believe I have come a long way in my understanding of knowledge and how knowledge is constructed since my first self-study in education that was my Master’s research project. As I think about empathy I think of the need that I have to receive it, and how this need was received in my educative experience as an adult in a Master of Education Program. I think that much of my life has been about searching for that empathic connection between where I have come from, who I am in the present, what I desire to know, and who I want to become. There remains a lot of space between the past, present, and future that needs to be filled in order to connect my life events, values, expectations, dreams, and goals.

I understand that I experience embodied knowing when I am living my life in a way that is congruent with my expressed beliefs (Miller, 2006). For me the question has always been, “How do I know that I am doing this?” Some relationship, then, between self-awareness and the authentic understanding that comes from being self-aware, may be required in order to express my beliefs in a way that enables me to live my life congruently with those beliefs. Some articulation of the experience between congruency and the self-knowledge of values and beliefs, in my experience, is necessary. To clarify, I do not think that beliefs need to be expressed outwardly in an explicit way for
embodiment to be achieved as a way of knowing, but rather the conscious and aware self needs to be grounded in these beliefs, expressed or not.

I also understand embodied knowing as what Miller (2000) terms soul work. There have been many times in my life when I have had difficulty being able to express my beliefs. I didn’t know how knowledge was constructed then. I remember in my early writing saying that, “even though I have learned about many things in my life, I don’t know yet what I have learned. It has not been clear to me how I came to see what I see or know what I know” (Rankin, 2003, p. 7). I learned to believe what other people told me, where truth and knowledge were defined externally and by others. I learned that this was my knowledge. An example of this state of being is my journey toward authenticity. In search of meaning, in my younger years, I read many books on authenticity, trying to find out how I could get some. I was aware that this connection of authenticity was something that I wanted to have. This was a huge space on the inside that needed to be filled. It was always unclear to me what authenticity was, and it seemed that everyone else understood it except for me, or at least it felt that way. I remained separated from a self that would eventually embrace authenticity as a process and a state of being that is created. This process of creation enabled embodiment as a way of knowing, and a relationship with soul that I had not experienced before.

While studying as an adult learner in a Master of Education Program, I learned that for me authenticity and self-understanding are the same thing. It was the invitation of self-study that enabled me to come to this meaningful conclusion. Self-study was not something that was a part of the curriculum in my earlier years of education. I was 40 years old when I was asked to write a story, and at that time I didn’t think that I had one. I
think that most of my life up to that point was the result of what Greene (1995) refers to as “pre-reflective days,” because I didn’t have the knowledge of a process that could inform me to become more conscious of who I was and who I might become (p. 73). A narrative process of coming to know was my introduction to soul work, where my experience of the learning enabled me to be conscious of the beliefs and values that were silently waiting to be visible to me and for my voice to articulate them. I remember being overwhelmed with emotion while writing stories of my own lived experience, often crying silently at night while everyone else slept. The writing of my stories made it possible for my life experience to come forward and meet me in the present, where I was waiting to interpret and reinterpret the meaning I found there. These fragmented stories of my life experience began to make a definite pattern, and I began to feel more whole, as “it was these things that, collectively taught me how to live … the little scraps and nothingness of my life have made a definite pattern” (Carr, 1996, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 421). I learned that I could construct self-knowledge through the writing of my own stories, and I also learned that deconstructing these stories, and reconstructing them again, offered a process of a more conscious practice of self-understanding. Because I understood a process of coming to know, I was able to examine my own learning across time and place. The self-understanding that informed my worldview at that time felt very intimate and organic. Somehow I had accessed a space within me that had waited silently and in darkness for many years. Now I wonder if this experience was my first conscious experience of empathy. I wasn’t thinking about empathy then, but I was certainly getting to know myself. This learning about self
supported a balance between self and other, which I received from myself. Perhaps being empathic towards one’s self may be a critical step in the understanding of empathy.

It seems odd to me now that I needed to be drawn into this very new concept of being able to control the content of my own learning outcomes. Knowing became more than objective description, and the authority that I practiced through this experience helped me to take control in other areas of my life. In learning about myself, I learned about life. My professor at the time, Dr. Carmen Shields, participated with me in this journey, becoming an advocate for me as I experienced my own story through narrative methodology and the practice of a variety of narrative methods. She helped me to learn in ways that I had never experienced before, where she was working with me and allowing me to create and hear my own voice. This learning with felt very authentic and relational, because not only was the learning about me but it was also in relationship with someone else. When I think of this experience now, I am overwhelmed with emotion. As I was becoming a more authentic learner and authentic thinker with my teacher, I was becoming a teacher. I learned that a teacher is someone who cares, and someone who takes on a relational, empathic, and compassionate presence in the classroom with her students. I came to understand that these relational qualities of caring, empathy, and compassion can only be created and experienced with others, and not found. They cannot be taught through power points, textbooks, and lectures. The transmission form of teaching and learning (Miller, 2007) from my earlier years does not create space for these qualities to be experienced, and it is this transmission form of teaching that takes me back to the periphery of my vacant and fragmented childhood days in education. These qualities come forth through a curriculum that invites the whole person into a quest for
authentic learning, and I have experienced that empathy is a core value that supports such self-understanding. I learned that looking at my life with a sense of wholeness is part of the study of narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), and that narrative learning provides a process where self is front and center, which sets the stage for an empathic curriculum and the learning of empathy as a value.

I believe that I can now acknowledge that the importance of self and the process of becoming self-aware were and are significant experiences for me, and that the knowing from these experiences has now become what I value. I value these outcomes that I have embodied and that are blended into this research process. In my earlier writing, now 18 years ago, my new epistemology was of a personal nature. My writing supported a turning inward to a self that I had not yet constructed, a self that had not entered into my awareness. The unveiling of my authentic self was a painful experience. These were sacred moments where sacred stories were written (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Crites, 1971). I learned that I started to grow during this time and that growth can be uncomfortable. I learned that my life as a woman has influenced how I have viewed and experienced the world around me, through female role models such as Belenky et al. (1986), Heilbrun (1979), Gilligan (1982), and Greene (1978, 1995). I learned that I can be fully present in my own learning outcomes and that I can construct these outcomes, and I learned that change can be sustainable if the change is connected to what I value. Most importantly, I learned of the importance of self and that if I do not place myself within my own learning, there is no meaning. There is nothing to be present for. There is no awareness (Greene 1978) and no journey.
A sense of being whole, feeling whole, and living whole has grown from this foundation of self-knowledge. It is a tentative yet sustainable place. It identifies truth, clarifies, and validates. It makes change possible, and it makes change sustainable because it is born from a very sacred, internal, and connected place of being. Meaningful and purposeful knowledge is created here. It is the place of soul, where only I can be fully present. It is familiar only to me. This place feels like home, where honesty, truth, and authenticity resides. I am the only one who can be present within the context of this foundation. No one else can interpret the meaning within the context of my own experience or find this place of soul, and it is only through invitation that this place is shared. This sounds like empathy to me, and it feels like I would need to be present in my own foundation of knowledge, my own place of soul, before being able to be present in someone else’s.

Miller (2000) affirms my experience of soul in education stating that when soul is available to the learner in the educational process . . . “we can have an education for the whole person rather than the fragmented self” (p. 9). Palmer (1998) uses the metaphor of a mirror as a way of looking into soul. “If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge – and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject” (p. 3). For Moore (1992), as cited in Miller (2000), “soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and our selves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance” (p. 21). Miller connects empathy and soul.

The teacher sets the tone and the atmosphere of the classroom. If the student’s soul is to be nurtured and developed, it follows then that the process must begin with
the teacher’s soul. If the teacher’s soul is contracted and impoverished, then there is little chance that the student’s soul will be adequately cared for. Teachers who can not bring their authentic presence to the classroom each day, who can not attune themselves empathetically to their students are ill-equipped to give of themselves or respond appropriately to students’ needs. (p. 121)

Atkinson (1995) speaks to how “a life story is really the story of a soul of a person” (p. 4). Soul is referred to as the expression that comes from life experience, for me implying a quality only attainable for that person. I appreciate how Atkinson refers to this process as a deliberate one, perhaps meaning that there is some intentionality or consciousness associated with this soul place.

Telling our selves and others these deep stories of our lives is doing soul work. It is through stories that symbolic images and universal, timeless themes find their expression. Through this kind of deliberate, soulful expression we come to terms with our own experience, our own life, in relation to others. (Atkinson, 1995, p. 5)

It stands out for me that soul and empathy are both qualities that feel very similar. They are both anchored in self-knowledge and self-awareness. My own foundation then begins from an empathic positioning of self, where my own storied lived experience is viewed as sacred and a place of soul. Empathy practiced and embedded within the value of lived experience seems like a natural thing to do.

I understand my current research on empathy as a quest for knowledge. Greene (1995) refers to our lives in narrative form as a quest. “Seeing our lives as quests opens the way to our also seeing them in terms of process and possibilities” (p. 75). This next chapter, Chapter Two, reveals a story that has not yet been shared. This is a new story
and now that I have written it, it is a part of my awareness that will no doubt continue to inform my interpretation of this research. Through the sharing of this story, it now has a voice, which speaks to my consciousness and provides light for my soul.

Stories instantaneously bypass the ego. The ego cannot absorb the entire pith of story. The ego hears the story as a form of entertainment. While the ego is kept happy, thinking it is being entertained, the soul and the spirit are listening deeply. The flow of images in stories is medicine—similar medicine to listening to the ocean or gazing at sunrises. No direct interaction has occurred—the ocean did not jump into your body and fill you. But there is something about seeing, hearing, and smelling the ocean that has bypassed the ego, and straightened out many things that were in disarray within the psyche. Some people are remedied by thunderstorms, some by music, some by the voice of a person they love. Story has the same kind of influence. It flows where it is needed, and applies itself there—like an antibiotic that finds the source of the infection and concentrates there. The story helps to make that part of the psyche clear and strong again. (Pinkola Estes, n.d.)
CHAPTER TWO: RE-MEMBERING A LIFE

Home Child

In many ways, writing about this part of me now, this story, is clarifying for me how I may have felt the need to explore empathy as a value. This storied content is important for me to construct so that this new knowledge can support my empathic positioning in this study, as well as my self-awareness around my own lived experience.

*It was early in the summer and my mother and I were driving up north to my seasonal cottage just outside of Collingwood. I wanted to talk to her about my grandmother, and as it was we were driving a route near where my mother was raised, on a farm outside of Orangeville. As we talked my mother suggested that we drive past the property where she grew up and I agreed with interest. The scenery had changed remarkably over the years, and my mother had trouble recognizing where her farm had been. “Maybe here, maybe there,” she said, until we drove over a hill and she saw the landscape before her. “It’s here. This is where we all lived. It’s not the original farmhouse, but this is the land.” I realized that I had driven past this farm on numerous occasions, while experimenting with shortcuts to avoid Friday night traffic while on my way to the cottage. Now through a conscious lens I look out at this land, this land where my grandmother worked as a white farm slave. She had six children over 20 years with the farmer, who lived with his wife, my mother and her siblings in the main house. This is the story that I was told. I don’t yet know where my grandmother ate and slept. This is the silent story—the untold story. My mother told me that the farmer’s wife was never able to have her own children. I pulled over and silently acknowledged the*
abuse that must have taken place on this farm. I had driven past this memory so many times, and now it is there right in front of me. My mother once told me that my grandmother was out shoveling manure in the barn on the same day that she gave birth to my uncle, the youngest child. The children on the farm were called the town bastards. They were marginalized in every possible way within the community and at school. My grandmother, who left an orphanage in England to board a ship to a new world, never had the means to leave this farm, and I don’t even know that she had a choice to do so even if she could. So much is still unclear. (Rankin, Personal Story, 2016)

It is interesting and perhaps a little funny that as I begin to write my dissertation I am packing and discarding the contents of a life lived in my childhood home. Previously I have written extensively using the metaphor of a basement, where I wrote many stories about unpacking the boxes of my lived experience, sorting through the contents of my life that were associated with each box. Now, the sorting process in my childhood home has created many memories and conversations. I remember moving to my home, the place where I grew up, when I was 8 years old. I am now 58. My parents both lived in the house for 50 years and it is where they raised their four children. My older brother, David, my two younger sisters, Laurie and Leslie, and of course myself (Tami), all grew up in a spacious four-bedroom back-split that took us out of the up and coming diversity of the City of Toronto, around 1967, and right smack into the middle of a cow field, literally. New houses and lots of mud are all I can remember from that time in my life, with cows roaming in the background. Throughout the years the house accumulated the byproducts of several lives lived. My parents, unable to manage the care required to keep
the house going, needed to make decisions around what stays and what goes. My job was to pack the boxes this time.

I was blessed to be able to spend a lot of time with my mother in the fall of 2016. My mother’s mother was a Home Child, so my mother was the daughter of a Home Child and lived this life on a farm with my grandmother. It is only in my recent life that I have become aware of the context surrounding this situation, and as a result I have had the opportunity to find out more about my mother’s life experience. As I entered the room that my sisters shared for much of their childhood, I decided that the packing would start with the closet in this room. As I opened the door I could see that it was full of Christmas decorations and old family photographs. My mother immediately threw herself on the bed and started crying. I could only imagine how difficult leaving her home would be for her. It belonged to her, her safe place, her own history that was far removed from the one that she left years ago. Moving for my mother was overwhelming, so as she lay on the bed or sat on a chair, I would hold items up and ask her if she needed whatever the item was in order to live a happy life. Between decisions we talked. One afternoon I asked my mother, finally, if she ever really knew that she was homeless as a child, and if she understood that living on a farm where her mother birthed six children over 20 years, with the farmer who secured her services from the time that she was 16 years old, was a little strange, odd, or different. My mother is unable to respond to my questions in any way that satisfies my anger around this inherited intergenerational trauma. Her response is so normalized to her situation back then. “It was different then,” is always her response. There are so many untold stories, and no one who is willing or able to tell them.
When I think of empathy, I think of my mother and what she endured. I think of how she did not receive any empathy in her life as a child, and that as an adult it was very difficult for her to receive it even when offered, likely feeling that she was not worthy of such a gift. My grandmother, an orphan from England, shared very little about herself with her children. My mother recalls that she spoke of the orphanage only once when one of her children complained about their food. I recall being told that my grandmother spoke of being lucky to be fed at all. As I think about where I have come from, my own roots of empathy, I am very sad. The feeling is sadness. The anger comes from my mother’s denial of her life experience. This denial, I think, closed off the emotional connection that I longed to receive as a child. It is not to say that my mother wasn’t loving, because she was and is so. She cared for all of us and loved us. She still does. It is just that I did not receive the self-awareness that I needed from her in order to support the development of my own. I believe that it is self-awareness that is required for empathy to be given and received. I don’t remember feeling empathy from my mother. For much of my childhood and young adult life I remember feeling misunderstood or not loved, and these feelings linger to this day. Interestingly, I may have felt very similar to my mother when she was growing up, a parallel story across a generation. My mother is also one of the most caring people I know. I too have always been guilty of caring for others before I would ever care for myself. I believe that the balance between self and other is a goal of empathy, and that one can care for another without having the experience of empathy with that person.

My mother was never one to talk. Whenever I needed her support or understanding I was encouraged to not worry about it and move on—to be silent.
Water under the bridge, dirt under the carpet, don’t cry over spilled milk, and so on. I think now that this learned silence prevented me from articulating my true condition for the whole of my entire life. (Rankin, Personal Story, 2016)

My new knowledge of the lived experiences that were woven into my childhood learning, across generations, was magnified when Prime Minister Steven Harper made a public apology, to all Canadians, for the participation of the federal government in an act of white slavery. The apology came in 2010, the year of the Home Child. When my mother speaks of how things were different back then, I think that she means that abuse was tolerated, almost expected, especially in rural areas where morality was not necessarily a part of the balance between right and wrong. No one was watching. What was experienced was what was normal. There were no questions asked or alternatives to be sought. It was what it was. I can’t help it but think of the book The Glass Castle, written by Jeannette Walls in 2005. When I read that book, I was completely drawn in to the normalcy of life as shared by the daughter through her childhood years, not realizing until I got toward the end of the book that the family was homeless. The young girl that the author was writing about was herself, a homeless child, with a perceived experience or normalization that was completely believable for the reader. I experienced with the writer how normal this family life was through the lens of the experience of a young girl. The Glass Castle reminds me of my mother’s story and her response to it as a young child growing up.

I feel very sad that my view of the world is now broken. Broken comes from the feelings that I have experienced and the understanding of these feelings that are now a part of my story through my Home Child family past. Not understanding this past for
most of my life rendered me unable to fully fill the spaces and connect the stories of my own lived experience across time and place. I see this situation now as an experience of marginalization within my own experience. I was separated from the knowledge of it. I think that the marginalization and oppression that my grandmother, mother, and siblings faced became a part of my being without my awareness, even as a young child. The story was not told so that space remained empty. The empathy that I longed for in the whole of my life was potentially hidden within a social and historical experience of marginalization and oppression. When I am not allowed or aware that I can have my own story, then I am marginalized into the story of another. There is no empathy.

**Returning to the Basement**

As I started to clean the basement in my childhood home, I looked around and realized that there really wasn’t anything worthwhile keeping in this lower level of the house. For me the metaphor of the basement has represented indecision and denial, the inability to move forward, and the many stories that are waiting to be told that likely never will be. It feels like a room that is on hold, waiting for someone to tend to the clutter of a lifetime. The items that were already determined to be questionable, in my mother’s basement, had been placed there over many years.

*I’m ready now to face the cobwebs, to throw out the garbage and to sort through those precious memories that I choose to take with me as I move forward in my life. It’s not easy coming to terms with that lonely, dark, and unpleasant place, the place of personal truth and resolve. The place where all there is to tell is known and cannot be hidden. Like my basement, I don’t have to keep the garbage. I can go to that dark place and remove it. I can take with me what I need*
and what supports and enriches my life. I really don’t need the rest of it, and I don’t need the reminder of it having been there. (Rankin, 2003, p. 1)

I know from my clinical work that clients tell the stories that they are able to tell or are ready to tell. Telling takes place in bits. Dillard (1990) describes this as waking in bits until I am more often awake than not. I know when I am empathic with someone else and with them in their story that I am getting only the slice of that story that is being served in that very moment in time. Self-disclosure is a delicate equation where trust and balance are always in the measure. I know that I have stories that will remain silent. They are in my awareness though; I just do not wish to hear myself say them out loud. I don’t want to risk the boundary crossing should someone else become aware of these untold stories. In a way these untold stories protect me, and I wonder if this was also the case for my mother. I like these stories in my basement. I have placed them there where they are safe and where I can lean on them if I need to. Although stored, I have unpacked them and have become familiar with their representation. I am aware if they are getting in the way of my experience of being fully present with another. Creating the empathic whole is the challenge that I face in narrative inquiry. I can name the fragmented stories of my mother’s life lived, as well as my own, as an example of this challenge. My life stories, written, told or untold, collectively have informed a more empathic sense of wholeness, which would not be possible without my awareness of how each story has filled the space of soul that I have previously referred to. Most important, this experience has made it possible for me to receive empathy from myself. Through the writing of my stories I can understand the experience of what empathy is and how it can support me in my teaching and empathic practice with others.
While I was organizing the garbage in the basement my mother came down the stairs and looked around. There was stuff everywhere, but she walked toward the small table in the back corner of the basement. “I would like you to have it,” she said. “You are the only one who probably cares about this table.” I asked about the importance of the table, which I had never noticed before. My mother explained to me that it was my grandmother’s table. It was the only material possession that my mother had from her mother. It was covered in a thick plastic cover that was stapled to the table from underneath. My mother said that she was trying to hide the scratches and the marks. I think the table, quite small, was likely used as a kitchen workspace. After many years in the basement, waiting in the back corner in darkness, my grandmother’s table made its way to the trunk of my car. (Rankin, Personal Story, 2016)

Now in the light of day, I am designing my study around this very table, unable to sand down the carved-in lines and scratches due to the stories of living in a very distant time that each one represents. Each damaged part of this table is now a reminder of the many stories that I will never know about farm life and the events that occurred for my grandmother and her family. Metaphorically I find it interesting that my mother gave me the reminder of these untold stories with this table, a table that deserves more than the basement. The carved lines and scratches are now a symbol of how the resilience of my grandmother’s stories survived over time and have become a part of who I am.

The newspaper article and photograph that I have shared as Appendix A is an indication that perhaps my mother has been paying attention to the awareness of Home Child life that has more recently been represented through the media. My mother cut this
article out of *The Toronto Star* in February 2016 and gave it to me with my
grandmother’s table in the fall of 2016. The evidence of abuse, unmarked graves in Park
Lawn Cemetery in Toronto, and the oppression and marginalization of these children
over time and across our country is clearly represented in this article. Where was the
empathy for these children, children who died from lack of medical attention,
malnutrition, or who were murdered for not working hard enough? It was far too late
before the moral questions were asked. These children lived out their lives with no
apology and no relief from the rural Canadian life that they received when they arrived
here. The Home Child story is only one example of what happens when empathy is
absent and not a part of the moral balance around what informs our actions. Empathy as a
moral question provides even more of a justification for those of us in education to
consider the need to educate students around the quality and the value of empathy.
Empathy supports us, nurtures us, connects us, and keeps us whole.
CHAPTER THREE: THEORIZING A CURRICULUM OF EMPATHY

Defining Empathy

In this chapter I bring to light some of the many definitions and opinions that contribute to the understanding of empathy across the literature. Three conceptualizations of empathy are presented that focus on self and other differentiation. Using the literature, I consider my lived experiences of empathy in relation to the existing definitions and theories of empathy that I have chosen to discuss in this study.

“The term ‘empathy’ comes from the German ‘Einfühlung’, meaning humans’ projection of feeling into the things and people they perceive” (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007, p. 502, citing Duan & Hill, 1996). Lipps (1903) applied the word “einfühlung” to psychology to explain the feelings that one has when reflecting the feelings of another person (Segal, Gerdes, Lietz, Wagaman, & Geiger, 2017). Tichener (1909) later used the English word “empathy,” which was then used as the “description of the psychological phenomenon of inner imitation that one person experiences while seeing the actions and feeling the emotions of another person” (Segal et al., 2017, p. 5, citing Davis, 1996).

The definition of empathy in The Social Work Dictionary is “the act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person” (Gerdes, Segal, Jackson, & Mullins, 2011, p. 110, citing Barker, 2008). An affective (feeling) and cognitive (thinking and understanding) response is therefore involved in an empathic experience based on this definition. In my opinion, referring to empathy as an act also implies that empathy is something that we are doing. I have experienced empathy as more of a being experience and that one might have to be
conscious of this *being* in order to accommodate the intentional action of the verbs *to perceive, to understand, to experience* and *to respond*. Mathieu Ricard (2015) defines empathy as “the ability to enter into affective resonance with the other’s feelings and to become cognitively aware of the situation” (p. 26). The *ability* is a state that for me requires further explanation. What must I be able to do in order to achieve these things? Ricard also states that empathy can alert the person to the suffering of others and “catalyzes the transformation of altruistic love and compassion” (p. 26). Batson (2011) defines empathy as something that we all have in common, where “one person can come to know the internal state of another and can be motivated to respond with sensitive care” (as cited in Segal et. al., 2017, p. 11). Noddings (2012) shares that empathy involves understanding, in addition to the feelings that are associated with the experience. She speaks of empathy in relation to caring, where caring is a moral way of life that involves care, attention, empathy, response, reciprocity, and receptivity. B. Cooper (2010) suggests that “the knowing of a person both emotionally and cognitively is one way in which we might understand empathy” (p. 82). I am not sure if I would need to know someone emotionally in order to develop empathic understanding, but rather understanding the emotions of the other where my emotions are not interfering with this understanding.

Segal et al. (2017) point out the complications that are involved in the two separate experiences of feeling and understanding, which I believe sum up much of the difficulties faced by educators across classrooms and clinical practitioners in the helping professions.
Feeling something and understanding what it means are different experiences. When you add the activity of trying to identify and understand the feeling of someone else to your own feelings and understandings in a given situation, matters become more complex, and then they become even more so if you do not know the other person or are very different from that person. (p. 2)

I would also add that matters become more complex if you do not know yourself. Perhaps the very act or practice then of how to be with someone else in a way that creates space for accommodating an empathic experience may be important. This is not to be confused with the “teaching” of empathy, which is a complicated conversation at best. It is rather the skills that support an intentional empathic positioning with another, specific to the feeling and understanding of the other’s experience. Segal et al. (2017) suggest that empathy can be taught given the right circumstances. For now I will say that my own experience, as someone who is responsible for teaching empathy in a required curriculum, is that empathy is either difficult or not possible to teach. The reason for this hypothesis is that I do not see empathy as a skill but rather a value, as skills can be taught and values when taught become oppressive. This belief has certainly positioned my developing definition and hypothesis of empathy as one voice within the vast interpretations of what empathy is.

Definitions of empathy are varied across the literature. In fact, it is understandable that there may be some confusion among educators in social work programs around how to approach the curriculum requirements of empathy in teaching and learning environments, considering the complexity and inconsistency of definitions and interpretations within and across disciplines. These differing views lead me to question
the appropriateness of trying to agree on what empathy is, as it is already so many things. In spite of this difficulty there seems to be an interest in developing an agreement amongst working professionals and researchers in the field as to how empathy should be defined. Who the agreed upon version would represent is yet another issue. “Coplan (2011) argues for a more concise definition of empathy to be shared so that we can better analyze and evaluate empathy-related research” (Segal, et. al., 2017, p. 2). I am concerned that a concise definition of empathy may narrow, predetermine, or compromise new research processes to fit within the agreed upon definition. I wonder if narrowing down the definition of empathy will marginalize the meaning of the word.

Gerdes et al. (2011) speak to how it is assumed in social work education that when we speak of empathy everyone knows what it is and that this seems to be implied through the lack of a consistency or consensus regarding the use of the word. I am aware that I have made this assumption in my social work teaching. Perhaps this assumption comes from not really understanding how to be in a conversation about empathy, so I unconsciously hide behind the potential for exploring the meaning further. In making assumptions about empathy I feel that I may be at risk of “teaching” through interpretation, and making the privileged assumption that everyone else is looking through the lens of my own lived experience. If I teach empathy as a skill, then am I teaching to one agreed upon version of empathy? If empathy is a value, then am I teaching to my own privilege of what I understand the value to be? When I teach to my own experience, is that not oppression in practice?

According to Gerdes et al. (2011), the literature related to empathy has been “haphazard and narrow” in social work and education (p. 110), citing Freedberg (2007)
and Raines (1990). What does the experience of empathy “feel” like? How does the receiver know that the giver is in a genuine and empathic place? As of 1986, almost no research existed toward understanding this process (Wispé, 1986). Wispé refers to empathy as a way of knowing, and that this knowing can be constructed by one self-aware person in relation to another, defining empathy as “the attempt of one self-aware self to comprehend unjudgementally the positive and the negative experiences of another self” (1986, p. 318). It is suggested that a self-aware self is required in order for empathy to be experienced. I understand this self-awareness as someone who is able to appreciate the difference between their interpretation of an experience between self and other, and the other’s interpretation of the same experience.

Carl Rogers influenced the conceptualization of empathy in the mid-20th century when he incorporated empathy into psychotherapy practice (Segal et al., 2017, citing Wispé, 1987). Segal et al. (2017) point out that Hackney (1978) noted 21 different definitions in the counselling literature after Rogers’s influence on the use of the word and the practice. Creating an awareness led to many different interpretations within the literature. Rogers (1992) considered empathy to be one of the several “necessary and sufficient conditions” of person-centered therapy and psychotherapeutic change, and spoke to a sense of separateness in relation to empathy, even with strong feelings of connection and understanding (p. 829). Rogers made reference to empathy as an “as if” quality, because we are never really fully in someone else’s private world (p. 829). Miller (2006) cites Rogers (1969), where Rogers speaks specifically to empathy and teaching.
Carl Rogers (1969) believed that empathy was one of the key elements in any helping relationship including teaching. He argued that, along with the ability to be genuine and convey respect, empathy was essential to effective teaching. (p. 60)

Empathy within a relational context is what stands out for me in support of Carl Rogers’s beliefs, as well as empathy as a “condition”. The thought that empathy is a condition for an effective teaching or therapeutic relationship is very interesting. Even more interesting for me is understanding what this condition might look like so that I can more consciously apply an intentional practice of this condition of empathy, in order to support learning in the classroom or change with my clients. When I asked students in a postsecondary gerontology course called Recreation Activation and Motivation how to motivate an older adult to participate in recreation and social programs in a long term care setting, the answer that came from our inquiry was empathy. My teaching has informed me that empathy is directly related to motivation. It may be that there is no motivation without empathy. I believe that this motivation comes from the self-knowledge that empathy supports and that self-knowledge is the preferred outcome of the empathic experience, for the giver and the receiver.

Batson’s (2011) recommendation around the inconsistent use of the word empathy is to “recognize the different phenomena, make clear the labeling scheme one is adopting, and use it consistently” (p. 20). As I explore the definition of empathy that fits within my own understanding and experience of this word, I appreciate that certain requirements are standing out for me so far. It is important, as well, to be clear about
what empathy is not, so I will outline this briefly in order to then proceed with the sharing
of specific theories of empathy.

**Sympathy, Altruism and Compassion**

There is some confusion around the difference between empathy and sympathy. Separating the meanings between empathy and sympathy has been the source of much debate over the years. Batson (2011) does not see any clear basis for favouring one labeling over another within a historical or logical context, stating that as long as one is clear about how they are using the term then that is enough. In other words, we don’t have to agree to the reasons around why they are different or the same. They can mean what we decide they mean, as long as we use the meaning consistently and within the same context. Gerdes (2011) points out the neurological empirical evidence that shows how sympathy and empathy are completely different states (as cited in Segal et al., 2011, p. 22). Matthieu Ricard (2015) refers to Darwin and Nancy Eisenberg’s definition of sympathy, which is more precisely as “altruistic concern or compassion for another person, a feeling that leads us to wish that other’s be happy or that their conditions improve” (p. 42). Singer and Lam (2009) as cited in Segal et al. (2017) describe the difference between empathy, sympathy, empathic concern and compassion.

The crucial distinction between the term empathy and those like sympathy, empathic concern and compassion is that empathy denotes that the observer’s emotions reflect affective sharing (‘feeling with’ the other person) while compassion, sympathy, and empathic concern denotes the observer’s emotions are inherently other oriented (feeling for the other person). (p. 84).
Having discussed the difference between empathy and sympathy over the last 8 years in postsecondary education leads me to agree that they are very different. Wispé (1986) provides my preferred descriptive difference between the two, in that empathy is a way of “knowing” and sympathy is a way of “relating” (p. 318). When I experience empathy with you I will come to know you and your needs, and when I am sympathetic I will only wish you well. Brené Brown (2013), in her animated short Empathy vs Sympathy, compares empathy as fueling connection and sympathy as driving disconnection. Empathy is a being with quality according to Brown. I have shown this video over the last couple of years in my counselling classes in order to demonstrate the difference between empathy and sympathy. Connection may be an outcome of an empathic experience, but certainly not the only outcome, and connection is not a definition for empathy, as how this connection occurs is unclear. Empathy fuels many things in my experience. I have also never thought of sympathy as disconnection. It is just not empathic connection which represents a different quality of experience. I understand empathy as something that precedes connection. My own experience of empathy as a way of knowing (Wispé, 1986) is more about relationship, and that the knowing is supported by a relationally positioned empathic response. In clinical work we know that successful client outcomes are largely supported by the helping relationship itself, along with the strengths and resources that the client brings with them into the helping relationship (Cournoyer, 2017). Successful client outcomes are therefore aligned with the empathic relationship between self and other and what this looks like. The relationship is grounded in a genuine, respectful, empathic, and warm response toward the individual in need (Cournoyer, 2017). The positioning of the relationship between self and other is critical to
the giving and receiving of empathy in my experience of client work and teaching clinical stream courses. If I consider my teaching within the same framework as what contributes to the success of client work, I can only imagine how drastically my approach to teaching would change.

Sympathy as a way of relating does not require a relational experience where one is present with another. As I continue to construct a curriculum of empathy and create empathic environments in education, I commit myself to the difference between empathy and sympathy. Perhaps sympathy is a polite lower level empathic response, one that is socially expected or required, where I can relate to someone (sympathy) without any sharing of feeling for that person or understanding that person’s feelings. When I am in a place of empathy, I can feel, act, and respond in ways that open space for compassion and caring because the feeling, acting, and responding are congruent with the feelings of the other. Empathy therefore opens space for compassion, where sympathy closes space. This closing of space within an empathic response can create a negative relational outcome. For example, I may feel badly for someone and in doing so I am placing a value on my own feelings if the other is not sharing these feelings. If feeling bad is in response to a client feeling bad and we both agree together that we are sharing this bad feeling, then the relationship is more open, lending itself to altruistic motivation and compassion.

In this research empathy and sympathy will be referred to as two separate concepts. The connection of empathy, altruism, and compassion is drawn from Ricard (2015).

These three dimensions, love of the other, empathy (which is resonance with another’s suffering), and compassion – are naturally linked. When altruistic love
encounters suffering it manifests as compassion. This transformation is triggered by empathy, which alerts us to the fact that the other is suffering. One may say that when altruistic love passes through the prism of empathy, it becomes compassion. (p. 58)

Empathy and compassion are therefore understood to be two different experiences where one—compassion, relies on the other—empathy. Feuerverger (2007) speaks of knowing ourselves in connection to others as compassion. Once we reach this destination, there is really nowhere else to go, and “acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do” (p. 58).

In summary, the definitions of empathy and the uses that come from this diversity are clear in the literature. Within this diversity, I view empathy as involving affective feelings and cognitive understandings that are exchanged within a relational context between self and other. It is a way of knowing, a way of being informed through a shared state of being with someone else, who needs to be understood and valued from the perspective of their experience by another, and not the interpretation of it by a misinformed and unguided self.

**Feeling and Understanding Empathy**

I have chosen three theories of empathy that I will discuss further in order to support the ongoing development of my own definition or theory of empathy. These theories have provided a more comprehensive understanding of empathy as feeling and understanding, supporting that there are affective and cognitive components that are in relationship with the experience of empathy.
The first theory that I have chosen is the research of C. Daniel Batson (2011), from his book *Altruism in Humans*. Batson uses the terms empathic concern or empathy to refer to “other oriented emotion elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone in need” (p. 11). Congruent means that the person perceiving the emotions of the other is perceiving them in the way that the other is expressing them and needing them to be perceived. Batson separates empathy and altruism and defines altruism as “a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare” (p. 20). Batson stresses that you can be motivated, but without an end goal of improving the other’s situation it is not altruistic. Empathic concern for the other creates altruistic motivation. There is always the potential for egoism when altruism is present, and according to Batson this is not harmful to the empathic process if the egoism is a by product of the altruism and the benefit of the altruism was not initially planned for.

According to Batson (2011), empathic concern can lead to altruistic motivation only when another is perceived to be in need and where there is intrinsic valuing of the other’s welfare, with the end goal of removing the empathy-evoking need. Empathic concern includes a constellation of emotions and is other oriented, meaning that it involves feeling for the other (Batson, 2011). Matthieu Ricard (2015) elaborates on Batson’s empathic concern.

Empathic concern should be extended to the point of becoming a resonance that is born from our shared humanity and from the fact that we share with all sentient beings the same aversion to suffering, even though they may experience suffering in ways that are different from ours” (p. 46).

In addition to empathic concern, Batson provides seven other approaches,
or practices, that may support empathic concern and articulates the challenges of each.

1. **Knowing another person’s internal state, including his or her thoughts and feelings.**

   Batson states that empathic concern requires that one thinks one knows the other’s state because empathic concern is based on a perception of what one thinks one knows. I agree with Batson in that we can only think we know of another’s state as we can never completely step into someone else’s experience. Accurate perception of the other’s feelings, although stressed by other researchers, is not the same as other-oriented feelings, according to Batson. He is saying that we can feel without understanding.

2. **Adopting the posture or matching the neural response of an observed other.**

   Batson suggests that although other researchers have supported this practice, “matching neural representations or mimicking another’s posture may at times facilitate feeling empathic concern, but neither is a necessary or sufficient condition” (p. 15).

3. **Coming to feel as another person feels.**

   Batson states that this is not a necessary requirement for achieving empathic concern, and that feeling as someone else does may actually contribute to emotional contagion, making it difficult for the person perceiving the need to separate the other’s emotions from their own.
4. *Intuiting or projecting oneself into another’s situation.*

Batson discusses how projection is not necessary when the feelings of another are obvious, and when they are not. Projection may lead to inaccurate interpretations of another person’s state due to self–other differences.

5. *Imagining how another is thinking and feeling.*

This has been referred to as an “imagine other” perspective (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997, as cited in Batson, 2011). As indicated above, I feel that this may lead to inaccurate interpretations of another person’s state due to self–other differences.

6. *Imagining how one would think and feel in the other’s place.*

Batson discussed this as problematic if it leaves one to feel emotional distress based on one’s own feelings. This can be helpful in order to achieve empathic concern but can also be misleading, as I have experienced that putting ourselves into the shoes of another does not mean that our perception is left behind in our own shoes.

7. *Feeling distress at witnessing another person’s suffering.*

This is self-oriented and does not enhance empathic accuracy but rather hinders it, as the distress may not be feeling “for” the client but rather feeling for ourselves. (Batson, 2011, pages 12–19)

Batson discusses the above seven approaches as contributing to empathic concern because of their effect on perception (2011), but they do not create the conditions for empathic concern on their own. Only empathic concern “is both necessary and sufficient
to make an altruistic motivation arise in our mind and urge us to action” (Ricard, 2015, p. 51).

I chose to share the above seven approaches because I am familiar with all of these different practices as strategies. These strategies support and/or inform the teaching of empathy in my counselling curriculum. In my clinical work I have experienced the stress associated with not being able to separate my self from the stories of another. Feeling distress when supporting another is problematic in that it can lead to vicarious trauma, where the self and the other are more one than separate. This is also referred to as emotional contagion (Ricard, 2015), where I have experienced that the self begins to fade away, making it difficult to distinguish between self and other.

An essential characteristic of empathy is entry into affective resonance with the other, while making a clear distinction between self and other. It turns out that people who have difficulty clearly distinguishing their emotions from another’s can easily be submerged by emotional contagion and, because of this, do not reach empathy, which is the next stage. (Ricard, 2015, p. 52)

All of Batson’s (2011) approaches are at risk of facilitating this outcome of emotional contagion as they support our perceptions of another. In my teaching I remind my students that as we perceive the experiences of another, that perception is linked to our own lived experiences. There is always some level of emotional contagion because we can never be value free or emotionally vacant in our work with others. Our perceptions often include our own triggers from lived experiences that include trauma, mental health distress, and mental health diagnoses. We have all experienced trauma, so we can be easily triggered by the stories of another, and sometimes we don’t even know
this is happening until we experience symptoms. Through the use of role-plays and client scenarios, strategies (which is how I refer to specific practices in counselling curriculum) are practiced with students in order to create the feeling of being present with another in an empathic helping relationship. We practice perceiving the needs of those who have them, expressed or not. To me these perceptions support the value that Batson refers to, which is the value that is attached to the welfare of another. I interpret this to mean that values are integral to the empathic process as values are required for an altruistic response to empathy. Empathic concern is therefore grounded in a practice that supports what someone may value. It is the intrinsic valuing of another’s welfare, according to Batson, which places the value on the other who is in need.

I am drawn to Batson’s (2011) research because of the focus on values, as I believe that empathy is a value in and of itself. Problematic in this theory is the valuing on the part of the person who is grounded in the empathic concern for the other, as knowledge of our own values needs to be in front of us and available to us if we are to know that these values are not getting in the way of our empathic responses and altruistic motivations. I am constantly stressing to my students that the process of putting our own stories of experience behind us so that we can focus on the client’s is highly ineffectual. If my own values are behind me, then how will I know that they are getting in the way? How will I know if they are creating my own agenda, and that it is my agenda and not my client’s that is front and center? A preferred practice would be for me to keep my story in front of me where I can see it at all times, and where I am conscious and aware of my feelings and the understandings of those feelings that support my client work and the positioning of my self with the other. It is the values of the recipient of the empathic
concern and the values of the giver of the empathic concern that are connected to each other and that support the success of the feelings and understanding that must occur, that give way to altruism, I think. Batson does refer to the difficulty in being value free, for even advancing someone toward their goal would be of interest to the helping professional, and this would benefit that person’s own welfare. In other words, there will always be some egoistic motive that takes the ride with the altruistic one. I can never be free of what I value, but rather just conscious of it. How we manage this transference and countertransference is more the issue. For now, I will say that I believe it is with practice and self-understanding that the values of self and other can be learned, respected, and acknowledged.

Batson’s reference to feeling sorry for the friend who lost her job, in the scenario that he provides, is consistent throughout the text where this example was used (2011). I have to disagree with Batson around the use of the term feeling sorry for. I can not feel sorry for my students or my clients if my feeling and understanding of empathy is to lead to altruism in order to support an end goal. I think that feeling sorry for someone is more like sympathy. I am relating to someone, but my story and the perception of the other’s need are in a direct collision course. When I feel sorry for someone I am at risk of upsetting the apple cart so to speak. I am placing myself in a position of power, where my values are determining my feelings toward the client. This is not a being with practice. Feeling sorry for someone may close the space for empathy, and others may view me as being better than they are and in judgement of them.

In my research I use the word empathy within the same context as Batson’s (2011) empathic concern, although I feel that empathy is also different from empathic
concern. Concern for another, even empathic concern, may not be empathy. I believe that empathy is a different quality as it requires one to be “with” another, and yet still separate. I am primarily drawn to Batson due to his focus on motivation, where the experience of empathy motivates altruism, and for me the experience of compassion, learning in education, and change in client work. I believe that it is the value that is experienced from the empathic concern that motivates the student or client.

The second theory of empathy is from Amy Coplan (2011). For me, Coplan’s focus on self-understanding is the anchor for empathic teaching, and also in my case the teaching or learning of empathy. I interpret Coplan’s theory as one that is supported by self-understanding, which is a state that is also grounding my research, for self–other differentiation is not possible without self-understanding.

In cases of psychological engagement with clear self-other differentiation, one keeps separate one’s awareness of oneself and one’s own experiences from one’s representations of the other and the other’s experiences - in both directions. One thus remains aware of the fact that the other is a separate person and that the other has his own unique thoughts, feelings, desires, and characteristics. This enables deep engagement with the other while preventing one from losing sight of where the self ends and the other begins and where the other ends and the self begins. Without clear self-other differentiation, we are almost certain to fail in our attempts to empathize. We either lose our sense of self and become enmeshed or, more often, we let our imaginative process become contaminated by our self-perspective and thus end up engaged in a simulation that fails to replicate the experience of the other. Self-other differentiation allows for the optimal level of
distance from the other for successful empathy. We are neither fused nor
detached. We relate to the other as an other but share in the other’s experience in a
way that bridges but does not eliminate the gap between our experiences. (p. 57)

Coplan (2011) proposes three essential features of empathy—affective matching,
other-oriented perspective taking, and self–other differentiation in her effort to narrow
down the definition of empathy. Affective matching refers to making sure that we get it
right when we are naming emotions. The emotions of the other need to be experienced in
a way that supports the specific affective response, meaning that there is a sharing of
affect. Other-oriented perspective taking requires that the other is understood within the
context of their story and not the story of the helping individual. Finally, self–other
differentiation, meaning that we are able to manage our own self so that our
understanding of another’s story remains separate from our own. Coplan states that all of
these features are necessary but not sufficient on their own. “Together these features
make up empathy, a unique kind of understanding through which we can experience what
it is like to be another person” (Coplan, 2011, p. 6). She suggests that self-oriented
perspective taking should not be practiced unless combined with other-oriented
perspective practice. To clarify, I contend that the practice of self–other differentiation
begins with the self. Perhaps the self-oriented perspective taking is necessary in order to
become self-aware, and combining this with the practice of other too early could
contaminate this process. Self-understanding may be a requirement of empathy and living
in the moral realm. If I don’t know who I am, then how can I engage with another? My
position on this is that self-understanding comes first and is always evolving into
something else. In my work with students and clients, I must know my foundation and
understand how this foundation supports and interferes in my relational and empathic work with others. This foundation grows in awareness as we practice being in relationship with others. The more I am aware of my own self-knowledge, the more effective I become in my empathic work with others. Noddings (2010) supports this idea of self-understanding when she states that “one must learn (consciously or unconsciously) what it means to be cared for before one can learn to care for others” (p. 148). Greene (1978) relates self-understanding to a moral obligation. According to Greene, if we are wide-awake we are more likely to identify situations as moral ones. Gilligan (1982) refers to the relationship between self and other as a requirement for living in the moral realm. Hoffman (2000) connects empathy and morality through the context of one’s egoistic needs and one’s social obligations. I understand empathy as a moral issue and one where the understanding of one’s self is of equal importance to the understanding of another. There is a balance within this relational context. Empathy as a moral practice, then, is one where self-oriented perspective taking as a practice of self-understanding may be required for the ability to achieve effective self–other differentiation. When I am wide-awake (Greene, 1978), I am able to see alternatives, hopes, and possibilities because I understand the origin, which is what defines my own values. My own self-understanding is elevated through the understanding that the more wide-awake I am, the more likely it is that I will be able to achieve the experience of empathy with another. To summarize my thoughts here, the importance of self-understanding that may be an outcome of self-oriented perspective taking should not be underestimated in its value. Reflecting on self-knowledge in education, Palmer (1998) beautifully represents my own values.
In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my own unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know my self, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (p. 3)

The third theory of empathy that I have chosen to discuss is presented by Segal et al. (2017). Segal et al. first cite Batson (2011) and Coplan (2011) as a building block for their own interpretation of the requirements of empathy. These researchers identify five components as a way to break empathy into understandable parts, with each part offering a tool for successful empathy that will in some way support the coming together of one’s own personal, historical and social contexts. These five components are affective response, affective mentalizing, self–other awareness, perspective taking, and emotion regulation. An affective response refers to the emotions that are available to us in response to the need of another. Affective mentalizing includes a physiological and a cognitive response, bridging the emotional or affective experience to one of reasoning. Self–other awareness is being able to identify with others while maintaining a clear sense of self. Perspective taking is the ability to place oneself in the experience of another, being mindful that without differentiation between self and other, one may cognitively consider the other’s experience as if it were their own. Emotion regulation speaks to our ability to maintain a sense of calm and understanding around our own emotions when
immersed in the emotional responses of others, so as to not feel overwhelmed and at risk of taking on the emotions of others.

Segal et al. maintain that bringing these components from the unconscious to the conscious is something that can be developed and taught (2011). As much of my inquiry is motivated by the process of how one might teach empathy in a counselling program, this is of significant interest to me. If I can teach individual components of empathy that collectively make up a whole, and if these are grounded in a process that develops a self-understanding in relation to one’s personal, historical, and social contexts, then I may be able to teach a process that is grounded within the context or story of each student. This fits within my goal of holistic curriculum (Miller, 2007) in education as well as my value of education as lived experience (Dewey, 1938) and curriculum as lived experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

In addition to the five components of empathy, Segal et al. (2011) identify two different kinds of empathy, the first being inter-personal empathy and the second being social empathy. Social empathy is defined through Segal’s definition “as the ability to understand people by perceiving or experiencing their life situations and as a result gain insight into structural inequalities and disparities” (2011, pp. 266–267, as cited in Segal et al., 2017, p. 25). The foundation of social empathy is considered to be interpersonal empathy. In the next step of social empathy, systemic issues of marginalization and oppression are taken into consideration. Without empathy then, through self-other differentiation in its most basic interpersonal form, these macro issues that likely exist cannot be understood as they will continue to not be recognized. The requirement of self-understanding, again, stands out as an essential requirement of empathy. Segal et al. add
two components to the original five that support interpersonal empathy to include a contextual understanding of systemic barriers and macro self-other perspective taking (Segal et al, 2017, citing Segal, Wagaman, & Gerdes, 2012).

Although Segal et al. (2017) have articulated interpersonal and social empathy as separate, understanding the two through my own teaching practice leads me toward considering interpersonal empathy and social empathy as the same process. Interpersonal empathy enables one to be present within a social interpersonal context. I am not sure that I should separate the two or make any distinctions between them, as that in itself can support a fragmentation of the teaching and learning of empathy, thereby teaching to the separateness of marginalization and oppression rather than considering it as a systemic practice embedded within the whole. I view empathy as empathy and do not wish to fragment it into different kinds of empathy, where one kind is for me and another for those who are different from me. I assume that experiences of marginalization and oppression are an embedded systemic practice that creates barriers for my self, my students, my clients, and so on. This assumption is called an anti-oppressive practice and cultural competence in social work literature (Cournoyer, 2017; Mullaly, 2010; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2012), and students can learn a consciousness around this practice as a requirement of empathy.

Hoffman (2000) links the quality of empathic engagement with clear self-other differentiation. I see anti-oppressive practice and cultural competence in addition to self-awareness and self-understanding as collective factors that also influence the quality of an empathic experience. I visualize empathy as a quality that can be situated on a continuum of experience (Dewey, 1938), where one positive outcome may elevate and
make possible the next, resulting in an improved awareness of difference and an ability to support empathic relationships. The thickening of a whole story supports a macro practice with another. It is not what kind of empathy I am deciding to use in a moment of empathic connection, but rather a consciousness that I am not the same as others and they are not the same as me. Collectively, our storied lives are bright, colourful, and diverse. To use the metaphor of my perennial garden, I love how the colours change and evolve as the season moves forward. I am conscious of when each flower blooms so that my planting strategy reaps the benefits of colour at all times, a colour combination that is nurtured through conscious care and consideration. The richness of this metaphor is a goal of empathic connection in my teaching, where each student’s colours can be understood within the context of the whole classroom. I nurture my classroom in the same way that I nurture the diversity of my garden, with conscious care and consideration.

When I am with someone else I am a researcher of lived experience. I want to know more and I am curious about this knowing. I think about my self as a part of this experience as it unfolds before me, although it is not interpreted from my experience. Now that I have experienced it though, I can take this knowledge forward with me and it becomes a part of my experience. I can’t experience something and not have that awareness move forward with me in my practice. This is demonstrated in the stories in Chapters six through eight, where interpersonal empathy practices are experienced within the social context of others. Experiencing the experience therefore becomes a potential requirement within the teaching and learning of empathy, and a focus of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

POST MODERN, QUALITATIVE, AND NARRATIVE CONCEPTS

Post Modern Concepts

I often use the metaphor of a kaleidoscope in my teaching, as this metaphor helps me to explain how we can all see something differently when we look through the inquiry lens because we are all grounded in our own foundation, which determines what we see—our world view. Slattery (1995) wrote about “Kaleidoscopic Sensibilities” in Chapter 12 of his book Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era. In this chapter, Slattery speaks to how the metaphor of the kaleidoscope supports postmodernism, as it helps us to see “the diverse and complex understandings within each unique context” (p. 243). Each unique context within Slattery’s kaleidoscope metaphor creates the possibility of a new individual narrative in this postmodern vision, and not one master narrative. This idea moved me away from a master narrative in my own life, and away from a deficit perspective toward one that offers possibility and hope. For me, possibility and hope have shifted the lens of inquiry. If I just turn the lens ever so slightly I have the opportunity to see something different. The colours illuminate, they are stronger and more vivid, or perhaps they fade and retract into the distance. If I intentionally hold the kaleidoscope toward the light, the colors become brighter and they reflect on each other so that I can see the intensity more clearly. It is always a mystery—an awakening waiting to happen. One never knows what one is going to see when the lens is shifted. I remember having a kaleidoscope as a child. It didn’t seem to do much really, as far as toys go, but I do remember how much fun it was to turn the lens and create the potential for something new to appear. All of those little crystals had to fall into place, and there were so many
colors trying to make their way into the geometric spaces and patterns. It is only over time that I have become aware of the intense colours and patterns that have started to develop in my personal and professional life, as I continue to turn the lens in my writing and to consider my own self-development and development as an educator. For me, the personal and the professional are an inseparable pair. I actually find it interesting to think of my childhood kaleidoscope now, and that I had the metaphor available to me but I was not aware of how to use it. It is this kaleidoscope that enabled me to enter into the moral realm of self, where self and other are of equal importance.

The research methodology that will support my research questions is therefore grounded in the potential for the hope and possibility that the postmodern kaleidoscope metaphor provides. My own experience of postmodernism has evolved through the intentional pursuit of my own self-understanding. What is interesting to me now is that I understand postmodernism as something that I am in a process of experiencing. I can’t learn postmodernism externally from my self when I am a part of the learning. This postmodern perspective has supported a process of becoming, or quest (Greene, 1995), enabling an examination of a worldview as seen through the lens of my own lived experience in narrative form.

Doll (1993) writes about this quest for freedom as self-organization, where he states that the only concept in postmodernism that is foundational is self-organization. I teach many courses with foundational concepts, and I am now questioning the more modernistic view that this foundational approach supports, as self-organization is not an identified learning outcome in these courses. I worry that although I am talking in a language of postmodernism and like to think that I am helping to construct that world, I
may still be drawn to the conflict between the post and the modern in my teaching. For example, learning outcomes that are determined ahead of time and in isolation of the learner do not feel like a postmodern perspective. At times I feel like I am teaching to these learning outcomes and not the students in front of me, because the curriculum is designed ahead of time to support the outcomes and not the students. When I am teaching empathy I am thinking about the core conditions, the foundation, that must be present for empathy to emerge and to support client progress or student learning within the discourse of my own learning. Perhaps the students should construct the learning of empathy on their own through their own process of self-organization. If I tell them what empathy is, then I may be at risk of supporting a curriculum that is oppressive and delivered within my own worldview. As the literature strongly indicates in Chapter Three, there are many definitions and views around empathy and empathy theories. If I teach to my own view, then I wonder if I can support the hope and possibility that the kaleidoscope metaphor provides for my student learners. Slattery (1995) also speaks with caution about the postmodern view, and that one must consider postmodern thinking within a diverse eclectic framework in order to avoid turning one view into a positivist approach. One thing is for sure, and as pointed out by Doll (1993), everything that replaces the foundational approach to knowledge from the modern view is now relational. Knowledge is therefore understood to be constructed within a relational context between self and other as a core positioning within my research methodology, and it is this balance of self and other that is an essential practice for the experience of empathy.

The postmodern perspective for me takes on a chaotic, messy quality as I consciously place myself within it, trying to make my own sense out of constructing and
organizing my own foundation, so that I am able to support my adult learners to do the
same. Shifting the lens of inquiry toward a student-centered process of self-discovery
certainly feels messy, where I have to remind my self that it is a good thing to leave the
students with their own chaotic mess and not to feel like I have to organize their way out
of that. This position is often met with resistance from students who want the answers
and the clarity provided for them. My position in the classroom as an educator has
therefore become one of learner, where I have consciously moved away from expert
knowledge and objective description. Slattery (1995) speaks of how there is no longer
one ideology or episteme that dominates in a postmodern view, and that one must rethink
some very sacred beliefs and structures that have been entrenched in our consciousness.
This postmodern view supports my learning of empathy where I value a broad definition
of the word, more in keeping with Hoffman (2000). The narrowing of the lens (Coplan
2011) feels more like a positivist approach.

The methodology for this research study demonstrates what Slattery (1995) calls a
postmodern process of moving away from the borders toward a paradigm shift of an
movement as postformal thinking and notes that different frames of reference are needed
in order to develop the cognitive power of empathy. I think that empathy, through
postformal thinking, can be practiced and experienced within the context of self and other
interaction in order to ensure that these different frames of reference are present and
practiced within the experience of empathy. “One of the most important features of post
formal thinking involves the production of one’s own knowledge” (Slattery, 1995, p. 26),
which includes seeing the world as text to be interpreted. This research is embedded within this postmodern context.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research, or inquiry focused on quality as opposed to quantity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), can best be understood by considering the type of research it collects and also the purpose of that research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Holistic and naturalistic in its design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), qualitative inquiry embraces an approach to inquiry that believes in the existence of “multiple realities that are socially defined” either individually or collectively (Firestone, 1987, p.16). In an attempt to reach understanding instead of explanation (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), a qualitative researcher actively participates in the research, seeking unique, rich descriptions of experiences to gain a view of the “world in action” to which they can embed their findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10). With a focus on building relationships, qualitative researchers are careful to avoid declaring universal applications in their findings (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The hallmark of qualitative research is the understanding that “there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 25). As cited in K. Cooper and White (2012): “Maxine Greene, Elliot Eisner, and William Pinar all introduce the idea that the search for meaning in terms of understanding is of paramount importance” and “that qualitative research considers reality not as a fixed, objective and constant construct, but as a more fluid, ephemeral and ever changing thing” (p. 6). K. Cooper and White state that the *process* of doing in qualitative research is of equal importance to the actual research results. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also place a focus on the research *process* as being of equal importance to the research questions,
because narrative inquiry is understood to be relational. In the study of empathy I would also consider the *process of being* as equally important.

As a qualitative researcher I recognize that knowledge is socially constructed, and that my own self-understanding comes from the deconstructing of this very complex social system of experience within my own historical context. Pinar’s *currere* supports this understanding.

*Currere* emphasizes the everyday experience of the individual and his or her capacity to learn from that experience; to reconstruct experience through thought and dialogue to enable understanding. Such understanding, achieved by working through history and lived experience, can help us reconstruct our own subjective and social lives. (Pinar, 2011, p. 2)

In a 2005 interview, William Pinar speaks about qualitative research as an umbrella term (K. Cooper & White 2012). He refers to this term as being very useful, as the umbrella offers an inclusive space. I see this inclusive space as offering permission for the diverse and multiple qualitative perspectives and approaches to coexist with one another, and that each one represents a choice that supports the purposeful and unique position of each researcher within her or his own autobiographical context.

My writing and research are embedded in both a qualitative research paradigm and a postmodern perspective representing an interpretivist approach. As a qualitative researcher I can construct knowledge, and I can interpret the knowledge that I have constructed. Interpretivism includes self-study, autobiographical methods, current ethnographic theory, and narrative research (K. Cooper & White, 2012). “Interpretivism
suggests that the search for generalizable truths and laws about human behavior be abandoned” (K. Cooper & White, 2012, p. 18).

Interpretation is the productive process that sets forth the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience, or text. Interpretation is transformative. It illuminates, throws light on experience. It brings out, and refines, as when butter is clarified, the meanings that can be sifted from a text, an object, or a slice of experience. So conceived, meaning is not in a text, an object or a slice of experience, or its representation. Meaning, interpretation, and representation are deeply intertwined in one another. (Denzin, 1994, p. 504)

I am drawn to Greene (1978), where she speaks to reality as an interpretation. “It presents itself to us as it does because we have learned to understand it in standard ways” (p. 44). A previous narrative inquiry helped me to reinterpret a reality constructed from my own lived experience. Before this inquiry I had never questioned how I came to know what I know. Qualitative research opened a door for me to see that my perspective could be one of multiple perspectives that were of value. My way of knowing in the past was very much positioned on the periphery, where I was watching my education unravel before me as an observer of other people’s experiences. The truth that I interpreted was not my own. I think now that this was an experience of marginalization, and clinging to the margins as a site of resistance offered me “the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (hooks, 1990, p. 150). My position in the margins helped me to imagine that many worlds are possible (Bruner, 1986). I was able to see that meaning and reality are created and not discovered (Bruner, 1986). I understood that qualitative research focused on the postmodern and provided a platform for including voices that had previously been absent
from research that was viewed objectively and from singular perspectives. Moving away from the margins and into the core was the result of an invitation that supported my understanding that I did have a story and that I could construct this story of self in relation to other.

**Narrative Methodology**

The focus on self-understanding that comes from a more conscious examination of lived experience, and allowing the past to inform the present, is embedded in the narrative methodology of this research. In this research one genre of qualitative research, narrative methodology, provides the structure for empathy to be explored as a moral conversation between and among research participants, with the focus on knowledge that is constructed from experience. This study uses the narrative methodology of Clandinin and Connelly (1991, 1994, 1995, 2000), where the research participants and I recover and reconstruct meaning through the historical and social context of our own lived experience. The meaning is recovered from the past through a process of remembering that is reconstructed and brought forward to the present for new meaning. This new meaning applied to the present supports change where different interpretations can support new knowledge that we can take with us as we move forward in our lives. What stands out for me the most in Clandinin and Connelly’s narrative approach is the emphasis on being involved in the narrative process as a researcher with the research participants. This being *with* and *in* my own experience as I experience the experience of others is a practice that I feel models the teaching and learning of empathy as a core value and an embodied way of knowing.

Not interpreting the meaning that others construct from their own experience is a strong value that supports my positioning as a researcher. My story, viewed within the
context of the experience of others, is how I might make narrative sense of my own experience, allowing for a more socially constructed understanding. I see this position as supporting an integrated other-oriented and self-oriented process, where the social construction of meaning takes place individually and together. I am also grounded in this practice in my teaching and my clinical work.

Narrative Inquiry is the study of experience, and experience as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally. Participants are in relation, and we as researchers are in relation to participants. Narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189)

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) speak of narrative learning as “an individual’s psychology considered over a span of time” and that “education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories” (p. 2). Schwandt (1994) states that “we do not simply live out our lives in time and through language; rather, we are our history” (p. 120), and Shields (2005) notes “in accounting for why we know what we know, we can not leave our pasts behind us as we live our lives” (p. 2). In keeping with the writings of Clandinin and Connelly (1991, 1994, 1995, 2000), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and the postmodern and qualitative perspectives presented in this chapter, I have learned that it is essential for me to bring my past forward in my writing and in self-study in order to create a field text that is a strengths-based open space for interpretation, construction, and reconstruction of meaning for me, the person writing and sharing the stories. I have experienced that this is where meaning, learning, and change emerge in the writing process, in the learning process, and in my clinical work.
Writing as Method

Writing as a method of inquiry will support the telling of the stories that the
research participants construct. Richardson (1994) describes writing as a way of knowing
and that “form and content are inseparable” (p. 516). This process supports Kinchloe’s
holographic mind to holographic reality (Slattery, 1995), meaning that the text is wholly
written by hand as the person named as author. The writing informs the author and directs
the narrative. Denzin (1994) speaks of writing as experience, and he notes that
interpretation does not precede experience. The process of the writing, then, creates the
possibility for interpretation through the experience of the writing, and this experience
often creates clarity when “something new becomes clear” during the writing process
(Denzin, 1994, p. 504). In agreement with Richardson (1994), the meaning from the
writing comes from the process of the writing, the form, which creates the content.
Writing is therefore a creative act of discovery and inquiry. Richardson (2001) speaks to
writing as a method of inquiry. It “is a way of nurturing our own individuality and giving
us authority over our understanding of our own lives” (Richardson, 2001, p. 35).
Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre refers to writing and inquiry as “a condition of possibility for
providing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently” (Adams St. Pierre,
1997b, as cited in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 969). Each writer, then, may be
informed differently throughout the process of writing. Denzin (1994) beautifully
describes the written text.

Their lives gone out of control are vividly described. Their Lives, suddenly
illuminated with new meaning and new transformation of self, are depicted. What
is given in the text, what is written, is made up and fashioned out of memory and
field notes. Writing of this order, writing that powerfully re-inscribes and recreates experience, invests itself with its own power and authority. No one else but this writer could have brought the world alive in this way for the reader [or the writer]. (p. 505)

**Story as Method**

I have learned that looking at my life with a sense of wholeness is part of the study of narrative (Clandinin & Connelly 1994), and that collectively the ongoing narrative of my stories has provided a reflecting surface where meaning can be created. This meaning would not be available to me if the stories had not been written in the first place. Story is a way for me to direct my own interpretation of experience and my own person-centered learning outcomes, which in therapeutic terms represents the unique outcome (White, 2007) of a more conscious awareness of power, authority, control, and self-determination. These unique outcomes, I believe, create pathways for conversations that are grounded in a knowing that originates from a more conscious place of self-understanding that is authentic and real.

A hundred years ago Wilhelm Dilthey (1894/1997) wrote of the importance of developing an empathic understanding of human action through examining one’s actions, intention, and history within the culture, language and meaning systems in which one exists. Extending this tradition, many contemporary psychologists and other observers of human nature have illuminated the importance of the subjective, imaginative and metaphorical ways of knowing. (Witherell, 1991, p. 90)

In my study, this empathic understanding that Witherell (1991) is referring to is accessed through the storying of the experience of empathy as a way of knowing. In fact,
story feels like the only method that is appropriate, given that an empathic process allows for each research participant to have their own story. Each author’s actions, intention, history, culture, language, and meaning systems are uniquely and creatively accessed and constructed by them through story. For me, story provides the empathic and compassionate space that invites one to move away from the periphery. Story can provide a holistic narrative experience focusing on subjective inquiry, self-understanding, and multiple perspectives, which supports my broader view of a more holistic curriculum. To me, a holistic curriculum is an empathic curriculum. Most importantly, story creates a pathway to self, which I have experienced as the starting point for empathic teaching and a holistic practice.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) speak specifically of being centered and grounded within the telling of a story, where a story should be told in four simultaneous ways.

By inward we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes . . . By outward, we mean existential conditions, that is the environment . . . By backward and forward we are referring to temporality, past, present and future. To experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways. (p. 417)

My experience of story has informed me that “stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). Through the lens of story there is a value that is present. When empathy is storied, it represents the experience as a value, as something that is important to the writer. Perhaps experience in and of itself is a value and, when storied, creates the pathway for the social construction of the value of empathy.
Connelly and Clandinin’s approach to narrative inquiry fits very nicely with Michael White’s (1995, 2007) narrative therapy, where he designs a process around the authoring and re-authoring of lived experience. Re-authoring is an invitational process of telling stories about our lives, with a focus on identifying the stories that are on the outside of the dominant story (White, 2007). These are referred to as unique outcomes or exceptions. The unique outcomes are scaffolded into different storylines that offer possibility and hope for a more strength-based life practice. This is where I find it possible to locate sustainable learning and sustainable change. Methods in White’s narrative therapy (2007) also include externalizing conversations, re-membering conversations, definitional ceremonies, and inviting an audience to support and appreciate the client story. These methods for *thickening the story* (Geertz, 1973 as cited in k. Cooper & White 2012) are helpful in a narrative process. Re-membering conversations, looking back into our history of lived experience with others, the use of audience, and the sharing of our stories with each other are practiced in the narrative inquiry of this research through the writing of our stories.

The intent of story as method represents what Belenky et al. (1986) refer to as connected knowing.

Connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people’s knowledge. At the heart of these procedures is the capacity for empathy. Since knowledge comes from experience, the only way they can hope to understand another person’s ideas is to try to share the experience that has led the person to form the idea. (p. 113)

Atkinson (1995) writes about the connections of our stories over time.
In the life story of each person is a reflection of another’s life story. In some mysterious way our stories and lives are all tied together. A life story gives us the benefit of seeing how one person experiences and understands life over time. In telling our life story, we gain new insights into human dilemmas, human struggles, and human triumphs, while also gaining a greater appreciation for how values and beliefs are acquired, shaped and held on to. In this way the story of one person can become the story of us all. (p. 4)

Integral to this connected knowing is the requirement that empathy is about sharing experience and being with someone in the sharing. Empathy experienced through story is therefore an experience of connection. My empathic positioning supports connection as an experience that helps one to understand and achieve empathy. The sharing of this experience supports a holistic approach, enabling the research participants to feel empathy through inclusion, connection, and balance (Miller 2007), or a balance between self and other.

Consciousness as Method

When speaking of consciousness, Freire (1970) refers to the essence of it as a method.

The essence of consciousness is being with the world, and this behaviour is permanent and unavoidable. Accordingly, consciousness is in essence ‘a way towards’ something apart from itself, outside itself, which surrounds it and which it apprehends by means of its ideational capacity. Consciousness is thus by definition a method, in the most general sense of the word. (p. 69)
Developing a more conscious experience of empathy is supported through the method of writing and the method of story. Writing is considered the practice that supports consciousness as method in this research, and the experience of being present. The writing process itself may be considered a mindfulness practice. When I am present in my own story I feel more with the story, enabling me to transfer this feeling of being present onto others in their very own story, as if it is a part of my own experience and yet still separate. This separation of self and other is a conscious practice in the experience of empathy, and I believe that this practice is an intentional and conscious one that can be practiced in research and implemented into a holistic practice of empathy.
CHAPTER 5: THE PROCESS AND ANALYSIS OF WRITING STORIES

The Research Participants

In this research study there are two research participants and me as a participant researcher. We all meet the criteria of being professors in a postsecondary teaching environment, where we teach empathy as part of a required curriculum in a social work context. Due to the nature of the methodology and the small sample size, we do not represent a diverse sample, but rather one that is diverse in and of itself due to the complexity of lived experience and the resulting intersectionality of these complex experiences. The participants who chose to be involved in this research study were aware that they could withdraw at any time without consequence, although certain information such as contributions to group discussions would remain in the study. Research participants in this study were unpaid. The benefit of participating in this study for the research participants was the experience of self-study, the opportunity for self-development, and the outcome of gaining self-understanding through the writing of an empathic inquiry of lived experience. The research participants and I share an interest in empathy and how the teaching of empathy could be approached in a postsecondary social work program.

Time Frame

The time frame of the research took place over a 3 month process, allowing time for individual writing and reflection to occur between and among the research participants, with the writing requirement accommodating busy life schedules.
Informed Consent

A detailed Informed Consent Document was signed by each research participant. The template of this document is included as Appendix B in this research study.

Participant Inquiry and Use of Story

Each research participant understands that their written material belongs to them, and that the collective sharing as well as their individual stories are included as the research content of this study, unless certain materials were requested to not be included by a research participant. Participants were able to select materials of a personal nature that they wished to share while at the same time withholding others from the writing and sharing process at any time. I regard the sharing of personal information as a choice and a process that develops over time. Within the context of a time-limited study, the meaning that is drawn from the text and the sharing that takes place is relevant only within the time frame of the study, considering that we may only know and share what we know within the context of time and place. In qualitative research, this context may change and grow over time. Richardson (2001) speaks to how postmodernism “recognizes the situational limitations of the knower. It recognizes that you have partial, local and temporal knowledge – and that is enough” (p. 35).

In this dissertation I include stories that were written and shared by the research participants, with full disclosure and referencing to the writer of the story. The use of personal names was not required of the participants; however both decided to be identified and chose to use their full names. The research participants therefore chose to be known as authors of their own chapters in this study. In Chapter Six the content of
Susan’s stories are shared. In Chapter Seven Lauren’s stories are shared, and in Chapter Eight I provide the research content of my own stories.

**The Use of Personal Stories as a Way of Knowing**

Stories of a personal nature can elicit emotional responses within the context of a narrative inquiry. Safety within the research group and the attributes that we expected from each other were discussed in the introductory session and were agreed to verbally as a confidentiality agreement. For example, the research and the personal stories would not be shared outside of the research group. As all of the participants in this research study have a clinical background, the issue of confidentiality is familiar. We teach our students how to have conversations about confidentiality with others, and we practice these conversations while being empathically positioned in client scenarios. The conversation about confidentiality was expected and was comfortable. Research participants in this study were asked to write stories of empathic experiences. Some research content, and this was expected, was acknowledged but not written, written and not shared, or omitted from the story completely as the authors decided that they were not ready to make public that which was written or reflected upon.

**Use of Audio Recordings**

There are no audio recordings of meetings with the research participants. Initially I had thought that I would record the meetings that we had. The narrative inquiry process and the writing felt very informal once we got started. Because we teach in the same program and we were writing together, the audio recording felt too formal by the time we got to our final meeting. When we did get together we shared some of our writing, what
stood out for us within our individual writing, as well as the shared themes across the writing.

**Publication Post Dissertation**

The research participants are aware that any resulting publications from this study in the future that are authored by the primary researcher, Tami Rankin, will include appropriate documentation, citations, and referencing specific to the research participants (authors) in this study. A group publication sharing the outcome of the research will take place within 6 months of the doctoral degree completion and will include the research participants as the authors of their own stories. Research participants are not required to participate or include their personal stories in a group publication.

**Choosing a Story**

The research participants and I used the following list of potential entry points to support the writing of our stories. Stories did not have to come from this list, as the list was to serve as an introduction to the potential stories of our collective lived experiences of empathy. Research participants wrote of an experience of empathy in storied form and then reflected on that story. Separating the story and the reflection was a conscious writing practice in this research methodology.

Write a story about a lived experience of empathy such as:

- An experience of empathy that I remember from when I was a child
- How I felt when someone was mean to me
- Something that my favourite teacher did for me
- My worst teacher ever
- The nicest thing that anyone ever did for me
- One time when I understood how empathy supported my work with others
- A story about a teacher and student relationship
- How I felt when someone judged me
- When I didn’t have a voice
- When I learned something important about myself
- An experience in education where I felt supported
- A student whom I can’t forget
- My biggest regret ever related to my work with students
- Being the best teacher I can be
- When I knew I was an empathic person/teacher
- How I model empathy in my teaching practice, an example through story
- Teaching empathy and how a student received this teaching
- A conversation about empathy that took place in the classroom
- How I have received empathy as a teacher
- How I give empathy as a teacher
- A positive experience of learning in the classroom
- A negative experience of learning in the classroom
- A time when someone gave me advice
- I realized I had my own story when…
- Something that happened in my family
- My best friend
The Process for Writing a Story

The writing process in this research study supported what Clandinin and Connelly (1994) refer to in narrative writing as an inward, outward, backward, and forward process. The participants chose a starting point for the writing of their own stories. The writing process required research participants to write stories and to reflect on those stories. After each story, the authors (research participants) considered the content of their stories and wrote and reflected further on their content. The content of the collective stories provided the research content or field text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and the reflecting surface for this research study. After the writing of each story, the author wrote a reflection on that story using the following questions, or their own questions, to support this process before the next story was written.

- What are the feelings that I had in this story, and what is my understanding of these feelings now?
- Has anything new become clear?
- How has the writing process informed me?
- Is there another story within this story?
- If someone else were to read this story what might they say to me?
- Have I learned something new about myself?
- What do I know now that is different from what I knew before I wrote the story?
- Is there a different way to interpret or reframe the experience that I have storied?
- How has this story elevated my understanding of my own experience of writing stories?
- If I look into the space between the beginning and the end of my story, what do I see?
- How do I feel now that I have written this story?
- Is it important to share this story, and if so, why?
- What is important for me to continue to write about now that I have written this story?

Writing Stories in Increments of Three

After the writing of three stories, each research participant paused to reflect on her three stories in a written reflection. The following questions were used to support this reflection, although the reflection was not limited to these questions. The questions were used to guide and support the writer, where the writer made decisions around what she was drawn to in her own story lines.

- What do my stories have in common?
- Are there shared meanings between my stories?
- What stands out for me when I consider the collective experience of writing my stories?
- Does this collective experience inform me in some way?
- How is my writing process supporting my understanding of empathy as lived experience?
- What stands out for me when I consider the three stories that I have written?
- Are there common themes and connections between the stories?
- What is important to talk about further now that I consider the content that I have constructed in my stories?
- What can I share with others about these stories that may be relevant to the lived experience of others?
- What do I feel that I need to write about further?
- How do my stories relate to the research questions of this study?
- Considering my stories, how might I respond to these research questions?
- Has my writing led me to consider questions that may guide my empathic inquiry further?
- Has there been a shift toward a more conscious self-understanding of empathy and if so why do you feel that you have experienced this from the writing of your stories?

**The Sharing of Stories**

After the writing of the first three stories, the authors had an opportunity to share and reflect on the collective research content as well as the writing process. This break in the writing process was purposeful in that it provided us an opportunity within an individual and group context to determine how the present writing was informing the writing of the next three stories that were not yet written.

This writing cycle may be considered metaphorically as a kaleidoscope, as discussed in Chapter Four, where what we see individually when we look through the lens of our own stories can be adjusted and reinterpreted as we shift the individual lens to one of community. Collectively we can create the potential to turn the lens and see something entirely different. In my experience stories may also be viewed as a spiral,
where each story told raises an expectation for the next because we are elevated from the
telling.

**Analyzing the Data**

The analysis of the data in this study represents and demonstrates multiple ways
of knowing and not a single master narrative. The validity of my work as a narrative
researcher comes from my lived experience and the voice and authority that comes from
this temporal storied research. I have learned that, like truth, validity is personal, and so
as a narrative researcher I am always searching for what is valid through a subjective
lens. If I do not know my self, then how can I know another in a way that is authentically
empathic? The validity of this study is therefore grounded in the construction of self-
knowledge. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) outline the redefinition of validity in self-
study work as trustworthiness of the storied data. Mishler (1990) also argues that the
trustworthiness of a study is created by the social constructs of the researcher and the
research participants as well as the self-understanding that is constructed in the specific
field of study.

The meaning from the field text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the written
research content, is validated through the interpretive lens of the author. When writing is
used as a method of data collection, meaning the writing of the stories in this case,
method and analysis cannot be separated (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018). In this
process of data collection, then, each writer (research participant) determines the meaning
from her own collection of data. There is no narrowing of a definition of empathy or
meaning within this research, but rather a creation of open space allowing for an
authoring and re-authoring within this space. The writing and storying of the experiences
of empathy open the space as wide as possible for inquiry, respecting difference and diversity within the resulting meaning that the writing process and the stories provide. To summarize then, the storied content serves as the field text of this research to be interpreted by each writer/author as part of the research text. Collectively, all of the writing of the research participants and myself create the research content for this study.

“I find the very effort to shape the materials of lived experience into narrative to be a source of meaning making” (Greene, 1995, p. 75), and for me this effort alone involves a process of interpretation that is also storied and grounded within lived experience. This storied link to experience makes the interpretation of anything other than the value of my own experience inappropriate in an empathic research process. To interpret the experience of others we have to rely on our own lived experience and imagination (Epston, White, & Murray, 1992), where we are at risk of reframing or controlling the lens of interpretation to fit within our own experience and understanding. Epston, White, and Murray discuss how the most we can do is to identify our own experience of the experience as expressed by others (1992). The interpretation then knowingly rests within us. The following quote from hooks (1990) is a reminder for me about the importance of not speaking to the experience of another.

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speak subject, and you are now at the center of my talk. Stop. (pp. 151–152)
Warren and Hotchkins (2015) speak to false empathy and false consciousness, stating that “false consciousness makes one believe that he or she knows more about the plight of disadvantaged or marginalized people than he or she actually does, and as a result, the inequality of subordinated groups maintains its permanence” (p. 269). To be empathic as a researcher, I am aware of my own story so that I know that it is not interfering with the stories of others and the meanings that those others come to understand from their own stories. Thus, “empathy is a critical factor in the interpretation or understanding of the experiences of others” (Epston et al., 1992, p. 96) as we write and share our stories. The experience of empathy in the research process therefore guides the interpretations of the field text as constructed by the research participants. In this way empathy is present in the data collection and the data analysis, as the writers experience being present in their own experience of their own story, as well as their own experience of the experience of others. In this study this understanding supports the consciousness of a self-oriented perspective of empathy, which is possible given the fact that the research process itself is an empathic one where access to the experience of empathy is embedded in the writing.

The availability of applying a new self-oriented perspective within an other-oriented context may be a unique outcome of the research process itself, where one is present within a story that is not theirs through the sharing of the stories. The methods of story and writing invite an empathic relational way of knowing where one is able to experience the experience of empathy in relation to self and other. The writers of this research write as a method of data analysis (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2018) using the writing of personal stories within a historical and social context where self-
understanding informs the qualities that are required for the experience of empathy and the practices of self-oriented and other-oriented perspective taking. Richardson (1994) refers to data analysis in writing as method as “experimental writing”, as cited in Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2018). There is no right way to do it, and each writing process may be different. The analysis in this study therefore relies on the direction of the individual and shared meanings as well as the common themes that are understandably determined after the meanings are constructed by each writer/author.

**Practicing the Research Process**

In order to introduce the stories in the next three chapters, I share how the idea of this writing came to be. In one of my doctoral classes at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at The University of Toronto, I practiced the methodology for this research. I wanted to experiment to see what would happen if I asked other students in the class to write about an experience of oppression in education. The focus of my research moved toward empathy later on, but these stories helped me to see the relationship between the lack of empathy and the experience of oppression. These stories supported the development of my research specific to empathy. The students had 5 minutes of class time to write these stories, which were submitted anonymously, so I never knew who wrote them. There were nine stories in total. I am sharing three of them, and they are shared exactly as they were written.

*Student 1: It was my first course in Canada. Everything was new to me, new country, new classmates, new education system, and new teaching style.*

*Since all the readings were not written in my mother tongue, and there were over 100 pages every week, I spent a lot of time and efforts to read them. But even*
though, as an international student, I could not understand most of the local educational topics in the articles. Because I didn’t understand readings, and most of classroom discussions were related to readings, I almost didn’t say any word in that class. I kept silent . . . I felt margined. Every week, it was suffering to go to that class. I guess all of these were because of culture shock and heavy course load. I don’t blame the instructor for such embarrassing situation. I just need more time to adapt to the new environment. Because I didn’t talk in the classroom, the instructor didn't notice that. (Rankin, 2014, Student Story)

Student 2: I have two-year experiences of undergraduate studies in Ohio. At that time, I am usually the only Asian student in one class because it is a private school. I remember in one class called multicultural education. I chose that course because I am really interested in different cultures. Moreover, I expected it would be a class that is more tolerated. However, it is not like what I expected. There were 90 percentages of students from Music Education major, and they seemed not to be kind to me. Although our teacher was very nice, I still feel isolated from my whole class. I still remember in every class my teacher would make sure if I understood what they are talking about. Sometimes, I was shocked because she would ask me, “Do you know what XX mean?” I felt very embarrassed because she made me feel not included. She may try to be nice to me, but actually I don’t like this feeling. (Rankin 2014, Student Story)

Student 3: When I was 7 years old in grade 3, I was getting a drink from a water fountain in the school hallway when a student, with annoyance in his voice called me “gay” for some reason. At the time I didn’t know what that word meant,
but I knew that based on who the comment was made by, that it was not a term of endearment. So I asked around what the word meant and I discovered that it referred to a guy who liked guys in a "lovey way" rather than liking girls. I had a bit of a sense of liking, and being afraid of, girls (in a sense). I knew I liked getting positive feedback or attention from them so I caught the gist of what the word gay meant - eventually. I think there were two main effects on me from being called gay that day - and a few other times. I was already very apprehensive about being a “wimp” already. I wasn’t aggressive, big and strong. I knew that life at school would be better for me if I was taller and stronger and a fighter (if need arose). I wanted to learn how to fight, and not be a wimp. I learned that being called gay, did not help my non-wimp aspirations.

It also established in my mind the idea that being gay was not desirable. It contributed to my early prejudice of gay people. I’m sure I contributed to the persecution of some kids, in some way, under the surface. (Rankin, 2014, Student Story)

This very short writing assignment created a lot to talk about in the debriefing after the writing took place. The dialogue was emotional and personal. The feelings that were felt and the understanding that was informed by those feelings were very easy for the writers to identify in a very short period of time. The stories were very quickly retrieved, so they were close to the surface and perhaps waiting to be told or written. I knew then that the telling of my own stories and the stories of others would create the pathway for my research on empathy. Each one of these stories provides an example of how something was taken away from the person who wrote the story. I cannot speak to
what that was now because I am not able to have a conversation with them, and speaking for them would only further marginalize their experience that became their story. I will say, though, that it seems that there is a relationship between what we remember, how we are treated, and what we learn. The writers shared feelings of being judged, feeling separate, feeling embarrassed, margined, and bullied in their stories. These were described as oppressive feelings that were experienced within the context of their own stories, and self and other interaction. The availability of meaning that was accessed through the writing of these stories created an awareness for me that writing about lived experience can help one to feel and understand within the context of that experience. These feelings and understandings make possible a richness of interpretation that perhaps is possible through a connection to what one values most.

I invite the reader now to enjoy the next three chapters of stories, each one written by a different research participant named as author. The stories are intended to share with you, the reader, empathic experience and reflections that are blended within the personal and the professional, enabling a meaning-making journey and quest for new knowledge.
CHAPTER 6: SUSAN’S STORIES OF EMPATHIC EXPERIENCE

An Introduction to the Authors

Susan Pratten, a research participant in this study, has written the stories in this chapter, Chapter Six. Research participant Lauren Kaluzny-Kozac has written the stories in the following chapter, Chapter Seven. My stories as participant researcher make up the content of Chapter Eight. Susan and Lauren graciously participated in a writing process with me where they wrote stories of their own lived experiences of empathy from the past and then reflected on them in order to reconstruct the meaning held there in the present. I think it is fair to say that the writing was far more work than we originally anticipated. The thinking that accompanies this kind of writing is from the heart, and I believe that heart thinking stays with us as we think and make decisions about what we will write about next. As authors we have included our present-day interpretation of the meaning that we created as we reconstructed our stories from the past within each chapter. I appreciate the courage to share and make public what is most sacred, our life experience, as well as the support and validation that I received from both of these empathic women through the writing and sharing of their stories. The remainder of this chapter is authored by Susan Pratten.

An Introduction from Susan Pratten

I am writing this chapter as a research participant in this study. My career spans an amazing 45 years of direct social work practice, applied research with older adults, and teaching in a college social service worker and social service worker gerontology program. Although I never contemplated a teaching career when exploring my early career path, after 12 years as a clinical social worker and experience supervising Social
Service Worker Diploma, Bachelor of Social Work, and Master of Social Work students on practicum, it seemed like a natural transition to pursue an educator position. My clinical experience as a social worker was primarily in hospitals, community mental health, addiction settings, crisis intervention, and geriatric social work. In addition to teaching a wide range of clinical courses, I have been active in curriculum development and also held the positions of Program Coordinator, Field Practicum Coordinator, Practicum Liaison, and Academic Advisor throughout my social work and teaching career in a postsecondary institution. I am 69 years old and am currently approaching retirement after 37 years of teaching.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to write about my personal experiences of empathy and to engage in a reflective process to see beyond surface observations and to discover themes and underlying meanings and connections in relation to empathy. Dialoguing with the other participants in the study and reading their stories provided an even deeper experience. I hope that the readers of our stories might be inspired to also reflect about the role of empathy in the world today and in all areas of their lives. At the start of my career I began by thinking empathy was merely a core social work skill that was challenging to teach and evaluate. As this part of my career comes to a close, I see it as a much bigger and more significant concept that needs to be nurtured on micro, mezzo, and macro levels of all domains and systems—social, physical, intellectual, emotional, employment, economic, political, educational, leisure, religious, and spiritual life. How might empathy be infused in all areas of life to enhance individuals, families, communities, businesses, governments, cities, nations, the environment, colleges and universities?
Story 1: Emotional Abandonment and Lack of Empathy

My first story describes my early experience of being emotionally abandoned by my parents and how I think this has impacted my emotional relationship with others and myself. My mother was not able to comfort me as an infant, and as a result I did not learn how to comfort myself. My father could comfort me when he was there, but he was absent at work for very long hours, leaving my mother and me alone. This has made it difficult for me to be kind to myself, which I see as self-empathy or self-compassion.

Throughout my early years I felt very alone and insecure. My mother did not want children and no doubt succumbed to the social pressures of the 1940s, giving up her career to be a wife and mother. She had married my father after a short courtship just as WW2 broke out before he went overseas. I can only imagine that when he returned 4 years later he must have felt like a stranger to my mother.

My mother was often depressed and suicidal. I remember feeling more in tune with her emotions than she ever was with mine. My role was to comfort her. She was not very good at comforting me and in fact got very upset if I cried, and if I did she thought I was feeling sad. I became good at hiding my feelings and tuning into other people’s feelings. I became a good listener to others but lived mainly in my head. Social work was appealing because I could listen to others and not have to share much about myself. Friends told me they found it very helpful to talk with me as I gave them lots of non-judgmental ‘air time’, and did not hand out advice. I did not think about whether I was showing empathy but I was able to convey to them that I accepted their feelings, even if I did not always
understand them. As I listened to them, often they either felt better through the process of talking, or in fact came to their own conclusions about what they wanted to do next. Having a nonjudgmental listening witness to their stories was enough to help them reflect about what was truly in their hearts.

I do not recall feeling really listened to by any of my friends, family members, or teachers, including when I completed my social work training. None of my professors ever gave any feedback about my ability to show empathy. I don’t recall any discussion of empathy during my undergrad Psychology degree. The first I heard of empathy was during my social work education in the 1970s. We watched videos of Carl Rogers, who was held to be an expert in active listening and empathy. He was an early role model for me of how to be skillful at paraphrasing at a deep level. We did some role-plays in class but I do not recall any helpful feedback about my skills. I was generally too anxious to really process what I was doing or to hear any feedback. I recall questioning whether it is possible to teach empathy at all and whether it is possible to become more empathic.

In reflecting on my first story I do not know how I learned to listen so well, other than I was exceptionally quiet and was fearful about talking. When people told me their stories I did not have any thoughts about what advice I might give, so it was easy not to give advice. Unfortunately this included what advice to give to myself when it came to making choices and decisions. I was, and still am, easily influenced by what others think. Whether conscious or not, I followed my mother’s unfulfilled life expectations rather than giving “voice” to my own desires. I was painfully attuned with her feelings at the
expense of my own. This helped me develop a high level of empathy with others, but I ignored my own heart. My lack of self-empathy makes me quick to judge myself, and I often feel confused about which path to take.

**Story 2: Impact of Fear and Anxiety on Learning**

My second story describes one of my early experiences of being a volunteer in the Women’s Prison in Kingston and how much I would have appreciated a mentor or supervisor who would listen to my experiences and my feelings and help me learn from what I was doing.

_I completed my high school years in Kingston, Ontario, which is known by the public for being the home of Queen’s University and the Royal Military College or being home to several prisons. At its peak, there were 10 penitentiaries in active operation in the Greater Kingston Area. My family lived within walking distance of both the men’s and women’s Federal Maximum-Security Prisons. There were also six minimum or medium security prisons in the area. Prisoners were often seen working in the fields where vegetables were grown for the prison kitchens. Whenever there was an uprising at one of the prisons or somebody escaped, my mother would warn me about the dangers of talking with strangers. Our doors were always locked, whereas I have been told by friends that in those days people often left their homes unlocked and neighbours were free to drop by at any time._

_When I began my psychology degree I volunteered in the recreation program at the Women’s Prison. I was 19 years old and had worked summers at the local psychiatric hospital in the occupational therapy department where I had_
learned to make leather purses, belts, wallets and so on. My volunteer job at the prison was to run a craft group and participate in various recreational programs. I had no orientation to the job other than being sure to account for, and secure, all tools, knives, and such at the end of the program. The first time I approached the prison doors I felt overwhelmed and frightened but also determined to follow through. I felt even more frightened when I returned to the main doors to leave about 8 p.m. as nobody had told me how to arrange my exit. Finally a guard did assist me, somewhat reluctantly, or at least with no interest in what I was doing at the prison. I do not recall any conversation between us.

In fact nobody from the prison ever met with me. I was left alone to run an evening craft group for 8 weeks with about 10 female prisoners who had been found guilty of an offense serious enough to earn a sentence in the only maximum-security prison for women in Canada. Most were quite friendly and enjoyed telling me their stories, often warning me of risks in the world. Others perhaps intended to shock me. I recall several acting very protective towards me, advising me not to follow their paths. And I recall them talking about how much they missed their families. This was the first time I observed lesbian relationships, and when I shared this with a classmate in my psychology class she was repulsed, and I did not feel safe to discuss this elsewhere. I wrote a paper for my psychology course and achieved an A grade but received very little feedback about my work or my learning. After that experience I felt disillusioned with my psychology courses, which were more experimental than clinical, and I decided to switch my
focus from psychology to criminology. I planned a Master in Criminology once I completed my B.A. In fact I did not do that—but that is another story!

In reflecting on my story I am struck by how alone I felt, and yet the women in the prison were friendly and welcomed me. I sometimes wonder what, if any, impact I had on them. I can really relate to how fearful our social service students are when they go for their first practicum. I think we could do a better job of validating their fears and anxiety.

**Story 3: Being a Witness**

My third story describes my early experiences in the early 1980s as a college professor in a 2 year social service worker diploma program. Most of my courses were in the clinical stream and involved teaching therapeutic values and qualities, helping skills, and interventions. I struggled with how to teach empathy and whether I could determine whether a student is empathic or not.

* I recall many of my early classes, wondering how to teach empathy. Students were familiar with the concept of sympathy but did not comprehend why pity or feeling sorry for another person was generally not helpful. After all, they did feel sorry for the person and sought to help the person feel better. Many thought their job was to find solutions and that they needed to merely advise the person what to do.

Discussion about empathy often ended with questions, for example, how they can show empathy to someone they don’t like, or someone they disagree with, or to someone who had done harmful things to another person, especially a child. Often my students concluded that they needed to experience the same thing as the
other person in order to truly empathize. They questioned how they can feel empathy if they can’t understand or relate to the other person or don’t feel the same emotions as the other person. And if they do feel the same emotions, why can’t they just say that, or say that they understand what the person is feeling. One of the challenging questions for me was how to convey why talking about their own situation in any depth or how they would handle the situation is not considered helpful. How do you decide how much of your personal story to share?

One of my long-time friends has developed multiple health issues over the last 2 years. He has lost much of his body strength and is in considerable pain at times. I often feel helpless and wish I could do or say something that would be helpful. He has told me that my calm presence when he is in distress is soothing—that there is really nothing I need to say or do. When he talks about his fears for the future, I find that showing interest and warm eye contact, and being a witness without judgment to his story is comforting to him.

It has been almost 70 years since my first story when I felt so disconnected and alone. I tend to forget how powerful the experience of a caring witness can be. The experience of being “seen” and “held” in the context of a safe, caring, and trusting relationship can be very supportive and healing. I can recall some classroom discussions where students have told their stories and the whole class has listened with their eyes and hearts open. The room would be full of many emotions and a great deal of warmth and caring for those speaking. Writing this raises more questions: Is this what compassion
feels like? What is the difference between empathy and compassion? Is it necessary to feel compassion in order to show empathy? How can we become more compassionate?

**Reflection on Stories 1–3**

As I review my first three stories, I am struck by the significant absence of empathy for me from others and from me to myself. The ongoing impact of not experiencing empathy in my formative years is greater than I had realized. Somehow I learned how to convey empathy to others, as evidenced by feedback from my friends, colleagues, and students. Tuning in to my mother’s pain as I grew up left me no space to feel my own feelings. I was able to easily tune into the feelings of others. At times I felt this was a unique gift, close to being an empath. But as a result I often felt overwhelmed with emotions and could not feel my own other than an overall heaviness. I developed a high level of empathy with others, but I ignored my own heart. I often feel confused about how I am feeling and vacillate between most sensations as polar opposites. This makes it difficult to decide which path to take when I need to make a decision.

How is it that I pursued a career, both as a social worker and an educator in the social service field, which has a core requirement to feel empathy and an ability to show empathy to others? And to teach empathy? When I think back to my early career choices, they were not in the so-called “people” or “helping” professions but in nature. I wanted to be a forest ranger and later a geologist. I don’t recall any support or encouragement for those paths. My mother trained as a nurse and had unfulfilled career goals, and my father had a long career in the mental health field. A social work career seems more aligned to their expectations than mine. It makes me wonder where a different career path would have taken me.
The lack of interaction or discourse in my stories contributed to my feeling rather alone and inadequate at the work I was doing. Almost invisible. Yet I was doing the best I could. I did not feel secure to request feedback and more guidance. How does one acquire a supportive mentor in an unsupportive system? The system failed me by not providing any sort of context or process to reflect on my work and provide meaningful feedback. For me, empathy requires a deep listening to self and the other without judgment of either. In my stories I engaged in lots of inward thinking, but in a vacuum. Engaging in an outward thinking process with a listening witness would have validated both my work and me as a person. I would have felt heard and seen.

My most rewarding and nourishing interactions with others have occurred when the other person truly and deeply listens without judgment and does not give advice. This has been an infrequent experience for me. When I do not feel truly heard and understood, I end up questioning my feelings and being critical of myself. I feel alone and am quick to judge both others and myself. I tend to forget how powerful the experience of a caring witness can be. At the end of my third story, I reflect on how the experience of being “seen” and “held” without judgment in the context of a safe, caring, and trusting relationship is very supportive. And I asked, “Is this what compassion feels like?”

At this point I am left wondering about the difference between empathy and compassion—is it necessary to feel compassion in order to show empathy? How can we become more self-compassionate? I am struck by how much my mind is a strength, and how many of my interactions have been on an intellectual level more than an emotional level. I see compassion as a path to interacting from my heart and soul. When I consider this, I feel hopeful about engaging in relationships and with life in a more authentic way.
Story 4: Trauma When Empathy Is Absent!

My fourth story describes my career path changes from psychology to criminology to social work. In my second story I wrote about my volunteer work at the Women’s Prison in Kingston while completing my Psychology degree. I can now look back and appreciate how important the social interactions during the evening activity group that I ran must have been for the women. At the time I was uncertain whether my work there was helpful, but I was very curious about the women and their stories and became interested in the field of criminology.

*After graduating with my B.A. in Psychology I wanted to understand more about the criminal justice system and obtained a job at the Ontario Hospital Penetanguishene with male offenders being held on a Lieutenant Governor’s Warrant (LGW) after being found “unfit to stand trial” or “not responsible by reason of insanity”.*

*These were interesting times in the criminal justice system, as the law had just changed to allow an appeal process to “loosen” the warrant, which meant the man could be transferred to a less secure setting, or even released to the community. Until the late 1960s men on a LGW were sentenced to an indeterminate detention in a maximum-security setting. Most lived their entire lives incarcerated and were buried in a cemetery on the grounds. Many of the men I worked with were given the diagnosis of “psychopath”. They generally felt justified in their actions, which were mainly towards women. Many had murdered their girlfriends, wives, or mothers. Part of my job was to prepare the men’s files in preparation for their appeal hearings.*
I lived on the hospital grounds in a building with female patients who had chronic mental health conditions. I also worked in a geriatric hospital unit. This was when older adults were often locked up, as they were considered “senile” and “mentally ill”. Looking back I am sure many were living with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia. The term Alzheimer’s disease was not applied until about 10 years later.

During my job at Penetang, I had very little supervision or guidance. I was 18 years old, and this was my first time working and living away from home. I often felt helpless and alone. Most of the staff lived in houses on the hospital grounds and socialized together. The nearest community was a few miles away. Being without a car, it was not uncommon to spend my weekends at the hospital. I really got to know the men whose backgrounds I read about in the case files. I met some of their families when they came to visit. It was very intense. I remember feeling confused and uncertain about whether I was helping or not. I am still not clear about it. The feedback on my work was always positive, and I was congratulated on how well I prepared the case files. But nobody asked how I was feeling or gave me any feedback on my interactions. We did have periodic team meetings, which I found fascinating, but I was generally a quiet observer. When I was not completing the case records, I joined the recreation staff who planned a number of activities for the patients, including a camping weekend, and the production of a musical by the patients.

I learned a lot about the mental health justice system and forensic psychiatry. Although I did not know anything about vicarious trauma, looking back I believe that I
experienced this listening to the stories of all the people I interacted with—especially the inmates and the guards. I cannot believe this was not an issue for most if not all of the staff there. Maybe as a self-preservation I decided not to pursue a criminology degree, thinking there was not enough known about this field. I was determined more than ever to understand what motivates people, and I was accepted to the Masters of Social Work Program at the University of Toronto.

**Story 5: Deep Connections Saved My Life!**

My fifth story describes my early recollections as a student of social work at the University of Toronto in 1970. I was in the clinical stream—it was called “Individual, Family and Small Groups”. The other streams were “Administration” and “Research”.

_In my early days at the Faculty of Social Work I felt lost and alone. My plans to live in the graduate residence on campus fell through, and I was lucky to move into an apartment with two women who had just moved to Toronto to begin their first jobs in the business world. The three were recent Queen’s grads who were not close friends but had met at various events on campus. Other than that we had few interests in common. Our apartment was on the second floor of a travel agency business, in a house in the east end of Toronto directly across from the subway station. I thought I would never get to sleep at night with the screeching of the streetcar wheels. I was often alone in the apartment, as my housemates both spent much of their nonwork time with their boyfriends. This was helpful for studying, but I felt quite isolated._

_When I began my studies to become a social worker at the age of 22 I discovered I had considerably more experience than the majority of my_
classmates, most of whom were direct from undergraduate studies. As described in my previous stories, I had worked in a variety of roles (recreation, occupational therapy, social work) in the mental health, correctional, and forensic systems. Even so, I did not feel a lot of confidence in my abilities. I recall two textbooks during my Master’s, The Casework Relationship by Biestek, and Social Casework: A Problem Solving Process by Perlman, both seminal works in the social work field. I did not find them helpful. Biestek’s seven principles—individualization, purposeful expression of feelings, controlled emotional involvement, acceptance, nonjudgmental attitude, client self-determination, and confidentiality—are pillars in social work. I don’t recall much discussion in class about what they looked like in practice, except for confidentiality. Nor do I recall discussions about the role of empathy in the helping relationship. There were some structured role-plays, but I generally felt too anxious to participate. I felt too embarrassed and timid to ask for help with this.

About six weeks into the first semester, one of the newer professors invited a small group of eight students to participate in an experiential 8-week group experience consisting of trust exercises and lots of dyad work about emotions and personal growth. This remains a highlight of my social work education. I felt engaged and safe, supported by the other students who truly listened to me without judgment. We laughed and cried and shared our challenges and successes in studying social work. I moved from my apartment to share an apartment just off campus with one of the women in the group. It turned out we were assigned the same field practicum in both first and second years. Finally I felt connected with
kindred spirits. Three of us in the group remain long-term friends after almost 50 years, even though our paths have gone in different directions. One of them left social work and the other one moved to a different city. Yet our connection is very strong, and I feel truly heard and validated by them whenever I need to talk.

After I graduated, I worked on a crisis intervention unit where people in crisis were hospitalized for 36 hours. As the social worker on the team, I was responsible for completing a psychosocial assessment of the patient and their family, with recommendations for follow-up interventions after discharge. There was no discussion of empathy or establishing relationships. The focus was on completion of the assessment for presentation to the team, and then the chart along with effective referrals to community services. At times it felt like an assembly line, and I did not feel connected even though most of the patients were very expressive about their situations. I do recall one tense interaction with a male patient who was angry (rightfully so) with me for my insensitivity and lack of professionalism. I remember approaching him in the lounge area of the crisis unit and, rather than inviting him to the privacy of my office (which was on a lower floor), I began our interview in the lounge. He was a new admission, and I would have to complete my documentation for the file and make a presentation to the team the following morning. He snapped at me and was very upset that I was asking him personal questions in public. I was feeling tired and pressed for time. I was shocked at my lapse in sensitivity and recall saying something about that to him. We then went to my office to begin the interview. As I think back on the crisis unit experience, it would have been interesting to interview the patients and their
families 6–8 weeks after discharge and ask them what aspects of the crisis unit experience were helpful and which were not helpful.

Story 6: Empathy Calms My Heart and Soul!

My sixth story concerns my career change from social worker to educator. Being a teacher was never a career choice. I thought my work as a social worker would be a lifelong career. It never occurred to me to teach in the field. In fact, teaching was about the last career I had any interest in. I had not had good experiences with teachers or with learning in either elementary or high school. I had no positive role models.

I was hired as the third Social Service Worker Program Coordinator at a local college in 1980. Until then I had moved from each of my previous jobs as a social worker in the aging, mental health and addiction fields after about three years. I had run groups as a social worker and did some staff training but had never taught a semester-long course. In fact it was one of my colleagues who saw the job posting and encouraged me to apply. I had not been job hunting and was enjoying being a field practicum supervisor for SSW, BSW, and MSW students. Generally an introvert, I was quite nervous at the prospect of teaching several times a week for the next 4 months of the semester.

Thankfully I participated in the teacher-training program before classes began. It helped to connect with others who formed an informal cross-college support group for those early days of teaching. I delighted in seeing the students grow into beginning professionals over the 2 years of the program. In those days the program was smaller, and I taught every student throughout their 2 years. Quite a number went on to university, and grads from my first class attended the
45th Anniversary of the SSW Program 2 years ago. It was a natural step to assist with the development of the Social Service Worker-Gerontology Program in the early 1990s.

In those early days I had no thoughts of falling so much in love with my work. My heart and soul opened to my students and colleagues, and I thrived in an environment that supported lifelong learning. Becoming an educator was not an easy process at times, and in my early days I struggled with preparing lectures. Fortunately the role of the teacher has shifted away from being a “sage on the stage” and even a “guide on the side” to more a facilitator of “shared learning.” Even before my first class, I recall struggling with how to teach helping concepts like empathy. I consulted textbooks but did not find any guidance at the time. I had used role-plays with clients and felt comfortable with role-plays in class, where students practiced the skills of active listening and validating feelings. Students seemed to enjoy it, but I was not sure how to evaluate whether they were becoming more skillful.

In my early days of teaching, an office reorganization brought me three new office mates, all professors in the early childhood education program. As students came to see the person next to my desk, I could not help but overhear her conversations with students. She truly was an expert in listening and empathy. And as I got to know her, my conversations with her were very supportive and empowering. I felt heard and validated in a way I had not experienced in my career, or perhaps even in life. She was truly a mentor, and I give her credit for helping me enhance my own empathy—for myself and for others.
Is it necessary to experience empathy to develop empathy? What does this mean for our curriculum in preparing students to work in the helping professions? Our students often do not show empathy for each other or for themselves. Do we as educators demonstrate empathy with our students and our colleagues? Thinking about empathy as a quality in the helping relationship is a narrow perspective. How is empathy conveyed in a team meeting, in a supervisory session, in the admissions office in a college or university, in the business office, with the housekeeping and security staff?

**Reflection on Stories 4–6**

My second set of stories capture the role of connection on many levels as being essential for empathy—not just a mental understanding but an emotional and perhaps spiritual connection. I am reminded of the ancient Chinese symbol for listening—with undivided attention, listen with the eyes, ears, mind, and heart, which summarizes my understanding of what is essential to convey empathy. For me this also relates to compassion, which I think is an essential component of the experience of empathy. It seems to me that compassion calls forth the heart, not just the eyes, ears, and mind. It would require encouraging a culture of kindness, caring, and gratitude along with the current focus on creativity and critical thinking.

I recall a computer program called Eliza that was developed in the early days of Artificial Intelligence in the late 60s. The program emulates a Rogerian psychotherapist. It was a clever program, but my experience is that empathy is much more than the ability to paraphrase, although this is a helpful skill to convey understanding. As educators, we teach active listening and paraphrasing, but I am not sure how or if we teach how to listen from the heart.
How do we invite students to “go beyond” their present understanding and skill? We ask our students to write journals about their learning and to apply theory to practice, but I don’t recall assignments to write specifically about empathy. It occurs to me now that having students write their stories about empathy would give them an opportunity to reflect about their experiences and construct their own conclusions about empathy, just as I, and the other participants have done in this study. Rather than the teacher evaluating (judging) the students’ ability to show empathy, is it not more important for social service students to learn to evaluate themselves by reflecting about their own stories in a culture of kindness and compassion?
CHAPTER 7: LAUREN’S STORIES OF EMPATHIC EXPERIENCE

An Introduction from Lauren Kaluzny-Kozac

I am writing this chapter as a research participant in this study. I am a 26-year-old woman, wife, daughter, sister, friend, teacher, and colleague. I am a registered social worker with a specialization in working with children, adolescents, and families. I have clinical experience working as a social worker in hospital, school, community, trauma and mental health settings. I work as a clinical therapist for children and youth and teach in a college social service worker program. As a clinician and educator, empathy is extremely important to me. However, I never thought to explore its meaning. Before this research, I had assumed that empathy was what I learned in school, which was the ability to understand and share feelings with another person. I am often brought back to the saying, “put yourself in someone else’s shoes.”

I am the person I am today because of all my experiences, each one creating a story that helps embody who I am as an individual. This research helped me understand this. Having the opportunity to write, share, and reflect on my stories, provided me with a deeper meaning of what it is like to feel, provide, and teach empathy. I hope that the following stories provide the reader with a new perspective on empathy and promote the use of story as a way to inspire new meaning.

Story 1: I Am Not Alone

The first story that I am choosing to write about is an experience where a peer helped me to realize that I had a story to tell. I was in my second year at Brock University, sitting in my Child and Youth lecture. I was about 18 years old. When I reflect on my journey of becoming a social worker, I am reminded of this experience.
I was sitting in the back of the lecture hall waiting for the class to start. The room was big, with a stage at the front where the professor taught. The class was loud. I was shy and didn't have many classmates to talk to, so I just sat there waiting patiently with my notebook in front of me. The class suddenly became still as a girl walked on stage. The professor introduced her and told us that she would be bravely sharing her story. I was confused, as it was one of the students in this class. I had met her a couple of times but didn't know much about her. I wondered why she was up there and what the professor meant by “bravely sharing her story.” I sat up straight in my chair and listened with curiosity. I couldn't help but feel a sense of nervousness for her standing in front of 200 students. She began to talk. Her voice was confident. She started to talk about her experience of living with a mental illness. She shared what it was like and how she was overcoming it. I remember feeling a pit in my stomach as she talked. I too was living with a mental illness; however, unlike her, I was not open to sharing my experience. I felt an instant connection to this girl. I remember looking anxiously around the classroom at my fellow classmates, wondering what they were thinking. I had always been worried about what others think. I couldn't help but put myself in her shoes. I remember the confusion I had felt as I watched the classmates listen to her story. They looked engaged and were showing respect. I wondered, “Could there be others experiencing this too?” “Was I not the only one who had connected with her story?” I felt a sense of comfort as I continued to listen to her story. The class applauded her when she finished, and she walked off stage and into her seat.
I felt the need to personally thank her, so, after class, I rushed back to my dorm room and I messaged her on Facebook. I told her how brave she was and how she inspired me to reach out and connect with her. I felt a sense of trust and started to type out my story. I told her that I was struggling with similar concerns. Without hesitation, I pressed send. She messaged me back and asked if we could meet. I remember sitting in my dorm room filled with panic. I sat back in my chair and asked myself, “What did I do?” I can't remember how I persuaded myself to meet with her, but the next thing I knew I was sitting in front of her in a coffee shop.

I had always kept my story to myself and ultimately denied it of having a purpose. I was so concerned that if I shared it, I would be judged negatively. Seeing my peer bravely share what I had thought was a weakness was astonishing to me. Seeing the positive response from the class was inspiring. I felt a sense of relief. For the first time, I felt understood. This inspired me to do the same. Why was I denying my experience? Since then, thousands have heard my story and commented on how they, too, were inspired.

I believe that everyone has meaningful stories to share, despite whether they feel it has a purpose. Through other’s experiences, I feel we cannot only learn a lot about other people but also about ourselves. Sharing my story helped me overcome my own challenges and motivated me to become the person I am today. Reflecting back on this moment reminded me of the importance of embracing my experiences as a way to learn. It emphasized the need to be open and provide an opportunity for people to share their
stories. What would have happened if she wasn’t given the chance to share? Would I have continued to be silenced and ashamed?

**Story 2: Learning to Accept Myself**

One of my former jobs was working in a day treatment classroom with children who were unable to attend a mainstream classroom due to various mental health concerns. Our main goal was to provide support and teach them skills to prepare them to return to their schools. I found that as the end of the school year was approaching, many of my students struggled with the fear that their peers would not accept them. I seemed to always have a soft spot for them. This is why.

> It is my first day of high school. I had prepared myself for this day all summer. I had this vision that I was about to start the best years of my life. That I would meet new friends, be involved in various clubs, and most importantly, be seen differently than in middle school. During elementary and middle school, I was shy and often felt that people viewed me as a “nobody” that was never willing to take risks. I was never a part of the “cool” group and was never invited to any parties or late-night walks around the neighborhood. I wanted so badly to be different, and this was finally my chance. That summer, I begged my parents to buy me new clothes—ones that were trendy among all the girls my age. The night before, I set my alarm to 6 a.m. and laid out my new outfit. When the morning came, I jumped out of bed, showered, and made my way to school. I remember walking on the sidewalk, feeling a pit in my stomach. “What if it wasn’t going to be the way I made it out to be?” “What if my outfit isn’t cool anymore?” “What if no one likes me?” I took two deep breaths as suggested by my mom and continued to walk.
Before I knew it, I was standing in the front foyer of the school. Students were running around and reconnecting with their classmates. I quickly looked around to see if there was anyone I knew. As I watched my peers hug each other and form groups, I quickly found myself in a panic. I felt alone. I felt discouraged. I quickly went into the bathroom and tried to catch my breath. I really wanted to be brave and meet new people, but I found myself scared to even make eye contact with anyone. I remember walking with my head down, ashamed of who I was. This was not how I imagined my first day.

When I think of this experience, I think of my own anxieties. Perfectionism has been a constant presence in my life. It shapes the way I see others and how I perceive others to see me. It causes anxiety, often causing me to step back from taking risks. For as long as I can remember, I have always been terrified to make mistakes. I somehow made myself believe that mistakes equal failure. This, in turn, led to my questioning almost everything that came out of my mouth. It led me to over analyze every step I took. It led me to fear myself for who I truly was and instead focus on who I was not. I would compare myself to others and wish that I too could articulate my thoughts like them or look as cool as them. I was so focused on my weaknesses, that I was unable to see my strengths. I had convinced myself that I was a “nobody.” However, now looking back, I know that this was not the case. My worries were creating my beliefs. I somehow convinced myself that I was never cool, but what is cool? Who defines who is and is not cool? If I were to ask one of those “cool kids,” would they have similar insecurities? Would they even identify as being “cool”? 
I often tell my students to be confident in themselves. To challenge their negative distortions with evidence. That we are in control of how we see ourselves and how we want to be seen. Others can think what they want, but ultimately, it is our decision. I find that most young people, similar to how I was, have a hard time accepting themselves for who they truly are and instead get caught up in who they think they should be. Schools often emphasize the need to accept others including ourselves, but is it possible to accept ourselves for who we truly are if we are constantly comparing ourselves with others and or allowing our anxieties to shape our beliefs?

I believe that it is difficult to truly understand without acceptance. Once I accepted myself for who I truly was, I was able to allow myself to take risks and ignore the negative thoughts that used to weigh me down. As a clinician and educator, it is my job to validate my clients’ concerns, challenge their worries, and support them as they learn to accept themselves. People have always commented that I am understanding and that I make them feel heard. I believe that I am able to do this because I know what it is like to feel controlled by my anxieties and insecurities. To me, empathy involves the act of understanding someone, but is it possible to truly understand someone if we have yet to accept ourselves?

**Story 3: The Instructor Who Understood**

I was in my first year of my MSW program at the University of Toronto preparing for my final exams, one being the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE). The OSCE is an oral exam where students are asked to conduct a mock counselling session with a trained actor. During the session, professors mark the student on their therapeutic skills and implementation. To help prepare us, the teaching assistants (TAs)
held practice classes where each class was provided a trained actor to play the client and was asked to practice in front of their peers. This next story shows what I remember.

The anxiety in the room was extremely high that day. I remember entering into the classroom and seeing the fear in people's eyes. It was quiet. Our TA entered the class with a giant smile. “Are you ready?” she asked. The class stayed silent. I remember sitting there with a pit in my stomach. One by one, each of my peers went up and performed. Eventually my name was called. I stood up, moved to the center of the room where I sat looking at the actor, as if I was in a session. The TA told me to begin. I can’t remember exactly how it went and what was said, but I remember the feeling during it. I was terrified. I saw this as an opportunity to show everyone how skilled I was, as if it was determining whether I was fit to be a social worker. Even though our TA reassured us that it was practice, I still felt judged. I remember focusing so hard on what the actor/client was saying and mentally recapping all of the skills we learned. I remember feeling stuck at some points. My anxiety was increasing with every second. Most importantly, I remember the feeling when I heard my TA say, “Stop.” I immediately relaxed my muscles, and took in a sigh of relief. I thought I would have felt good knowing I was done, but that was not the case. I instantly felt like throwing up. The class was asked to take a break and instead of going for air, I sat back in my chair. I felt a lump in my throat as if I was about to cry. I went quiet. My TA walked up behind me, put her hand on my shoulder, smiled and stated, “Don’t worry, you did a great job.” I instantly started to cry. For the first time in a very long time, I felt understood by an educator.
Growing up, I never really had a hard time with teachers. This was probably because I was shy and kept to myself. When I think back to all of my teachers over the years, I notice a theme. The younger the grade, the stronger the teacher–student relationship seemed to be. Could this be because they had the same students every day for 7 hours? In my experience, as I got older teachers seemed to spend less time with students and appeared to have more boundaries. By the time I reached university, I became immune to this. My relationships with teachers seemed to be less nurturing and more professional. I often wondered, was this their way to ensure we were treated like adults, or were they unable to take the time to get to know their students?

Through my experiences, I have learned that I am a very relational person and thrive when I feel heard and nurtured by others. The lack of attention and support I got from teachers in high school and postsecondary school gave me anxiety. I developed a fear that I was being judged and started to believe that I had to prove myself to my colleagues and instructors. At some points, I felt like I was just a number and that they truly never cared about what was internally going on for me. I never really understood this until that moment in my Master’s, when my instructor showed me that nurturing/relational side. It had been such a long time since I had felt understood without having to ask for help. At that moment, I believed that I cried because I was relieved that my time in the spotlight was over. However, now I am wondering if it was a different kind of relief. All of those years of feeling like I could not have a personal connection to my teachers made me feel discouraged. I often wondered, will I turn out like this? Will I lose the ability to form relationships with my clients and students?
Over the years I have learned a lot, specifically how it feels to be a student. I learned that you don't need to be silent and that you can reach out for help. I learned that you are not expected to know everything and prove yourself. Rather, it is acceptable to be vulnerable and make mistakes. I also learned that despite constantly hearing this advice, sometimes you require an instructor to take the time to understand and help you stay on track. My TA probably didn’t think much of her actions, but to me it meant a lot. That moment made me feel understood, but most importantly, it made me feel a sense of hope that empathy can still exist between students and postsecondary teachers.

**Reflection of Stories 1–3**

After writing my first three stories, I realized that they all were based around self-judgment, acceptance, and opportunity. What was more interesting was that all of my stories seemed to stem around my lack of self-esteem and insecurities.

For as long as I can remember, I have always had difficulty accepting myself. The fear of not being accepted by others directly affected how I perceived myself. All those years of worrying and caring about others’ perceptions of me literally weighed me down. I noticed that the anxiety started to fade once someone else showed me nurture and ultimately accepted me. In fact, once I started to feel accepted, I learned to accept myself. This in turn helped me accept and understand others. To me, empathy involves the act of understanding someone, but is it possible to truly understand someone if we have yet to accept ourselves? Is it even possible to learn how to accept ourselves without the help of someone showing that they accept you?

Last, I noticed that in my first and third stories, there seemed to be something to be said about providing the space and opportunity to share. In story one, someone was
given the opportunity to share her story, which ultimately inspired me to do the same. What would have happened if she had not been given that opportunity? In story three, I experienced an educator providing me nurturing and validation. If she did not provide this, what would have happened? Would I have been discouraged from that experience? Would I have fought through my insecurities and become a clinician?

**Story 4: The Boy Who Didn’t Understand**

In my second story, I shared that I used to work in a day treatment classroom. There was one student in particular who stood out to me, and this was because it was the first child that I had to restrain.

*It was 10:30am and the students were working on their math. One of my clients started to become dysregulated. He started to mumble to himself and swear. I could see the frustration building inside of him. I knew that he struggled with math and, I could tell that he had reached his limit. I slowly walked up to him and asked if he was okay. He looked right in my eyes and started to yell at me. “Go away!” “You are stupid!” I was confused. Did I do something wrong? I kneeled beside his desk to get down to his level and, in a nice quiet tone, I asked him, “what is going on? You look upset? What can I help you with?” My instinct was to defuse while at the same time figure out what was going on. He immediately became more frustrated, picked up a marker and started to throw it towards me. I quickly dodged out of the way and stood up. Before I could even get in another word, he stood up, flung his chair back, and stood in a threatening manner towards me. I was scared and didn't know what to do. My colleague walked into the room after hearing the noise. She saw the terror on my face and,*
being experienced, she took the lead. Using a firm voice, she said, “I can see that you are frustrated and I think it is a good idea to take space.” The boy yelled, “No!” Using a firmer tone, she said, “I am going to count to three. Please take space in the calm room. If you do not, we will assist you.” I felt a pit in my stomach. I had never had to escort anyone, let alone a child. I knew what I signed up for when I started the job, but I didn’t imagine the feeling associated with it. The boy refused to walk himself to the calm room. After “three” was said, we gently escorted the boy to the room. Once in the room, he started to flail his legs and begin to kick and pinch us. I was so full of adrenaline that I didn't feel it. My colleague told him to stop and told him that she would have to hold him if he continued. He then started to punch her. She looked at me as a signal to help, and together we put him in a hold to ensure safety. The adrenaline was flowing through my body. The sweat was pouring down my face. After 3 minutes, he stopped kicking, started to cry, and agreed to behave. We left the room to give him space. I closed the door and took a deep breath. I was winded and felt nauseous. I looked down at my hand, which was covered in blood from his sharp nails that he dug into me. My colleague asked if I was okay, and I immediately started to cry. It was the first time that I had to do a hold on a child. Seeing him cry made me so sad. Were his behaviours that bad? Was it necessary? What have I gotten myself into? My colleague comforted me and told me that it was the right thing to do, and that she too had a hard time with her first restraint. She told me to take a break. I slowly walked to the washroom and splashed cold water over my face. I looked at myself in the mirror and thought, “who have I become?”
When I felt ready, I returned to the class. The boy had calmed down too, and it was time for me and my colleague to debrief with him about what had happened. I walked into the room assuming he was going to feel immense guilt for what just occurred, so I told myself that I would start slow to avoid shame. He was sitting in the corner smiling, almost as if he was proud of what he had done. I was taken aback.

I don’t know what was worse, the fact that I had to use a restraint or the fact that he showed no remorse for his actions. Reflecting on this moment gives me chills, as it really took a toll on me. In all my experience working with children, I had never encountered a child like this boy. I remember feeling eager to help this child, but with each day I became more and more frustrated. It was the first time I felt this about a client. I did not know what to do to help him. Every time we tried to teach or provide empathy, he struggled to grasp the concept and had a hard time accepting it from others. As a child, he experienced a lot of trauma and, therefore, did not receive a lot of love and nurturing. Knowing that he lacked nurturing, did this boy even understand what empathy was? Was he even capable of learning or showing it? I for one struggled to connect to him. I was scared. But why? Why did this child affect me so much? Why did I feel that I was unable to help him?

**Story 5: It’s Going to Be Okay**

My fifth story explains a time when I provided an extension for one of my students. It was my first year of teaching a postsecondary course.

*It was the start of my lecture. The students were talking amongst themselves as I set up my slideshow. Suddenly the door opened and one of my students rushed in.*
Normally the class doesn’t notice, as it was normal for certain students to come in late, but this time it was unusual as the student who entered was always punctual. The class of students looked up in confusion. The student came in looking frazzled and was breathing heavily as if he ran to class. I could tell something had happened. Knowing his good record, I smiled at him hoping to send the message that “it was okay.” He smiled back and sat down. I continued on with my lesson as per usual. However, I frequently found myself looking in his direction. Every time I made eye contact, we would share a smile and I would continue teaching. All the while, I could not help but think, “Was he okay? Should I approach him?” Before I knew it, the class was over. The students started to pack their bags, each one rushing to get home or go to their next class. I too started to pack my things, excited to be done for the day. “Excuse me Miss,” a student stated. I looked up and that same student who appeared frazzled was standing in front of me. “Yes?” I said. He looked as if he was about to cry. “Is everything okay?” I asked. He began to tell me that he had been up all night working hard on his paper that was due. He shared that he was proud of what he had written and was excited to share it with me. I smiled. I felt proud. He continued and explained that he had technical difficulties and that he had lost all of his hard work. His eyes began to tear up. I felt a heaviness in my stomach. I quickly lowered my tone of voice and said, “It is going to be okay.” He looked relieved. I asked him if he had backed up his files or if he had contacted IT. I was trying to problem solve for him. He said he tried everything. He quickly started to become anxious. “I want to rewrite it... I don't care if it is late, I can't afford to lose marks.” I stopped him. “Try not to fret, it
happens to the best of us. Can you finish it within a week?” He immediately smiled and sighed with relief. “Yes.” I told him he had until the end of the week. I smiled at him. I could see the tears building in his eyes again, but this time it appeared to look like tears of joy. I smiled to myself and continued to pack up. Two days later, the assignment was handed in and attached was a long email. In it was a message from him thanking me for providing him with an extension. He thanked me for taking the time to listen to him and offer to help. He stated that he has had negative experiences where professors never gave him the time and or tried to help which made him question whether or not to approach me. He stated that he was glad he did. I sat there reading the email and felt a warm feeling within my heart.

This experience was interesting for me as I experienced both positive and negative feelings from it. I remember feeling proud that I had helped a student, but I also felt a sense of guilt. I remember being in that moment thinking I had done the right thing. However, when I got home, I remember feeling guilty. I was a new instructor and took it upon myself to give the student an extension without asking if extensions were even allowed. I remember sitting there with a pit in my stomach thinking, “Did I do the right thing? Am I going to get in trouble?”

When I saw the student rush through the doors, I had a sense that something was not right. I was immediately brought to my own experiences of being late. I remembered multiple times when I thought that I would fail or that my teachers would see me as careless, even though I was extremely punctual and organized. I immediately was brought back to those feelings of anxiety. I remember smiling a lot during that class. I often smile at others. It is my way of acknowledging them. In the moment, I smiled
because I wanted him to feel welcome and acknowledged. I wanted him to know that it was okay. As a recent graduate, I know how stressful it can be as a student, which is one of the reasons I started teaching. As an educator, I want students to feel respected and understood so that they feel safe approaching me. When he stated that he had felt those with me, it made me feel successful as an educator and hopeful that he will one day pay it forward.

**Story 6: Growing Up Sad**

For as long as I have known, I have had what feels like an instinctual need to help others feel a sense of happiness.

> I am 17 years old. I haven't been feeling like myself lately. I am home alone. The house is quiet. I like the silence. I am listening to music when a song comes on that brings me back to a memory. Not my memory, but rather one that my mom shared with me. It was a song that my dad used to love, a song that reminds my mom of him. I start to feel a pain in my stomach. Suddenly, my throat feels like there is a lump in it and my eyes start to tear up. I start to think of my dad. A single tear drops on my lap. I have been holding in this sadness for a while and it finally feels okay to release it. I suddenly feel the instinct to go to the basement. I walk up to the shelf and pull out old photo albums. I turn the pages and look at each picture. With each picture comes a different feeling. Some make me feel comforted, some make me feel angry, some make me feel lonely, some make me laugh and some make me cry. Each picture shows a different story, a story that I can’t recall. Pictures and videos are all that I have to know my dad.
I remember growing up and always feeling different and almost distant from my family. Unlike my older siblings, I didn’t remember my dad. He passed away when I was only 2. I couldn't contribute to the memories. I didn’t feel the same grief that they did. In fact, I don't remember most of my childhood before the age of 4. I believe that I blocked it out. I am told that the first 3 years of my life were hard, and that I was constantly surrounded by sadness and sorrow. The old pictures and home videos support this. In them are various pictures of me as a little girl with light brown hair and dark brown eyes. In every picture, I have the same facial expression—a blank stare and an almost lifeless smile. I don't see a cheerful toddler; instead, I see sadness and pain.

As I sit there with the photo album on my lap, I close my eyes tight and force myself to recall memories of him. I can’t. I start to cry more. The frustration is building. I want so badly to remember him—to remember his touch, his voice, his smile. I gently place the albums back so no one would notice that I was looking at them and head towards the television. I put in a VHS and start to watch. I start to cry when I hear his voice and see him hugging me. I fast forward. This time he is no longer with us. It is Christmas and we are gathered in my grandparent’s living room. The environment appears still. My uncles are quiet, which seems unusual. It’s time to open gifts. As a young child, I appear excited. I run towards the tree to open up a gift. Suddenly the room lights up. My uncle puts a Santa hat on my sister. The attention is on me. “Lauren, smile for the camera.” They smile when I open up their gift. “Is that what you wanted?” they ask. I look excited, which makes them smile. The room is no longer quiet and still; instead, the room is filled with my family laughing and smiling.
I may not remember my dad, but I can remember seeing my loved ones suffer. I remember being in the backseat of the car while my mom cried in the driver's seat. I even remember being the human target to my brother when his grief came out in anger. I remember growing up scared to ask questions or talk about my dad. I had this fear that if I did, I would make everyone around me sad. Even at the age of 17, I felt like I had to sneak around. Maybe this was a way to ensure that I wasn’t put in that sad environment again.

Did I receive empathy during this? Yes, but I only remember receiving it from my family. To me, empathy seemed to be directly related to understanding. In order to understand, one must experience similar feelings. As a child, it angered me when someone gave their condolences and stated, “I know how hard it is.” Or “It’s okay, I understand.” I always thought, “How? How could you possibly understand what I am going through?” It seemed that the only comfort I had was when I was around my family. Even though I never shared my feelings with my family, the fact that they too experienced the loss made me feel comforted.

**Reflection on Stories 4–6**

Ever since I was a child, I have believed in the saying, everything happens for a reason. I believe that every experience we have helps build a piece of who we are as individuals. It shapes our beliefs and helps to create our goals. One of the main reasons I got involved in this field is because of the many experiences I have had throughout my life. Experiences that were both positive and negative.

In all three of my stories there seemed to be a theme of understanding. In my sixth story, I shared an experience of my childhood. As a child, I felt empathy through family
members because they shared the same experience. I felt comforted and believed that they in fact did understand. Similarly, in story 5, I was able to resonate with my student using my past experiences, which made me feel comfortable and confident that I could provide empathy. In story 4, I felt the opposite. I felt very uncomfortable, confused, and incapable of helping. I believe that this was because I did not feel that I shared the same experiences as my client and thus had a hard time understanding his behaviours, or so I thought.

As an educator, I come across a lot of students with different beliefs and experiences and ones that I might not understand. Is there something to be said about not feeling comfortable in these situations? If empathy is understanding, how can I ensure that I am showing it if I do not feel that I understand? Maybe it is not about understanding the exact experience, but rather, feeling comfortable enough to provide the opportunity for others to share. This is interesting, because there have been times when I have listened to my clients’ stories, and found similar themes. When I think back to these, I can't help but notice that those themes seemed to be associated with feelings. We as individuals all have the ability to experience emotions. Although the meanings might be different, it seems that the feelings are consistent. For example, I might not have understood what it was like to not feel remorse like my client did in story 4, but I was able to feel similar feelings of rejection, pain, and confusion. Maybe I understood more than I thought.

Looking back at all my stories, I am drawn to my last one. This was the hardest for me to write. I learned to avoid so much as a child to protect others, but I ended up hurting myself. I suffered in silence because I was too scared to confront my feelings
with others. It was obvious that I was suffering by looking at my body language in those pictures, but did people know the real reason why? It wasn’t because I lost my dad; it was because I felt alone, scared, and guilty. Things are not always what they appear to be. Experiencing this made me not only understand the importance of reaching out to others, but it also reinforced the need to be openminded and look beyond the surface. Today, I find I am drawn to those who are not as open with their stories and/or struggle to show their emotions. Is this because I experienced this?

As a clinician, I get the opportunity to get to know my clients on a more personal level, which allows me to better understand them. As an educator, I often find that I do not get the same opportunity with my students. Teaching often does not allow me the time or ability to get to know my students on a deeper level. I find that this is because I am too focused on providing my students with the course material to ensure that they understand and complete all of their expectations. In the program that I teach there is a lot of self-reflection; however, they seem to still have guidelines and requirements. This is interesting, especially because I remember struggling as a student writing similar assignments. People always told me that self-reflection was a way to cope with my anxieties; however, looking back, it seemed to be more of a trigger. I always felt judged on what I wrote, as if there was an expectation. In fact, I remember feeling this when I started writing in this study. I felt worried that I would not write my stories correctly and struggled with the concept of letting structure disappear. This was a strange concept for me. I wonder if students share the same feelings about these assignments. I wonder if they do not feel accepted enough to complete the assignment without following the “rules.” Having the opportunity to write freely allowed me to feel accepted and open to
sharing my stories. What would happen if students were asked to write and evaluate their own stories? Would they feel accepted to share freely? Would they find meaning in their experiences just as I was able to?
CHAPTER 8: TAMI’S STORIES OF EMPATHIC EXPERIENCE

An Introduction from Tami Rankin

I previously provided a brief introduction at the beginning of the first chapter. I am a 58-year-old woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, teacher, colleague, and student and am the participant researcher in this study. My vocation is now one of educator; however this evolved from the merging of many different pathways. One of these pathways includes my experience as a mental health therapist where I had the privilege of working with a diverse client population over several years. Supporting these clients empathically has been a significant life experience for me. My personal experiences of empathy along with my developing teaching practices in postsecondary education have inspired me to create an inquiry that may inform my self and others around empathy as a value. Writing as a method of inquiry and the stories that support this writing have become very important to me in my personal and professional life. I hope that the following stories offer some resonance for the reader and also an inspiration to write and utilize personal story as a pathway for embodied knowing across all of life’s experiences.

**Story 1: Confidence and Caring**

The first story I am choosing to write is my first memory of an experience of empathy. I believe I was in grade 7, so I would have been approximately 12 years old. In fact, this is the only story that I can share about a teacher from my childhood years whom I still remember to this day.

*I was sitting in my normal geographically assigned space within the classroom, which was three to four desks away from the teacher’s desk. They*
were very small cube-like desks with a small cubby underneath the workspace for books and school supplies. The room was full of these desks, all positioned to look forward to a large blackboard that spanned the room in all directions. Mr. Henry was my history teacher. In grades 7 and 8 we were on full rotation, so I had this teacher for the required history curriculum. I imagine myself sitting in his class. I am getting ready for a fill-in-the-blanks history test. I can’t remember the content, but I think it had something to do with Aboriginal studies and explorers because I still remember the answer on the test that I said out loud. The test was delivered to my little cube-shaped desk, and I looked at it without even picking up my pencil for a long period of time. Mr. Henry walked over to me and kneeled beside me, looking at me, eye level, and said, “Tami, I know that you know this.” Everyone else seemed to be finished, and I hadn’t started. I felt eyes on me as the conversation with my teacher continued. He kept looking at me, waiting patiently, and I said nothing. I was frozen in thought that was filled with nothingness. “Say the answer out loud,” he said. In a whisper I uttered very faintly what I thought the answer was, and he said, “yes, now write it down on that line.” I remember that he smiled at me and then told me that I could stay in for recess and finish the test. I did, and my grade was 10/10.

When I think of this story now I see it as a defining moment in my academic growth, but it was short-lived. Mr. Henry showed me that I was not just a C student. In fact, I became an A student in his class. I felt very motivated to do well because I felt that he cared that I did. I think that because he cared it was important to me to do well. I felt good about myself when I did, and he reinforced this feeling of feeling good each time I
accomplished something. Mr. Henry was the first teacher that I had ever had who cared about me. I see this now as a motivating factor that continued to develop over time, where I became noticeably more confident, not just in history but in other courses as well. I got an A grade in history in grades 7 and 8 while he remained my teacher. I think that this teacher taught me that I am not just who people say I am. Up to the time of this experience in my education I was always a C student, and that was that. I performed to the lower bar and believed what the report cards told my parents. I was just average. Mr. Henry helped me to believe in myself and to understand something different about who I was. I believe this self-understanding came from a relational connection between my teacher and me. My teacher cared about who I was and not just about my academic performance. He cared about my potential, and he helped me to learn about that. The subject matter seems insignificant now that I look back at this experience. After Mr. Henry, I never felt this kind of connection again in my educative experience until much later in my life. When I think of empathy I think of Mr. Henry. Most importantly, he allowed me to have a voice, and when I heard this voice speaking out loud I became closer to myself. For me, there is a strong connection between saying something out loud and having that voice received in a caring and nonjudgemental way. The more I experienced the value of voice, the more confident I became. This story that I have shared about Mr. Henry was the first of many experiences with him as my teacher where he went out of his way to understand my silence and to draw me out. He saw something in me that had been missed by my previous educators. They didn’t seem to notice my silence.
Story 2: I Don’t Have a Story

This is a story of my second experience of empathy in education. This experience, coming many years after the first when I was in elementary school as a grade 7 or 8 student, was when I began a Master in Education Program at Brock University when I was 40 years old. I remember this story well and I still feel embarrassed by how this story informed me as a woman of this age.

I am sitting in my Research in Education course. It is my second course in a Master of Education Program, and I am still wondering what I am doing here. I look around the room and see everyone else coming in and sitting beside other students that they know. I feel isolated within the room, not having connected with anyone yet whom I might have something in common with. I like the teacher. She seems very conscious of being inclusive and drawing out all of the voices in the classroom. Some like to talk a lot. I find that irritating. I have been at home raising my children for most of the past decade. Being back in school was a choice that I made in order to find myself, to figure out my career pathway after a period of interrupted development. On this day, at the end of class the teacher assigned homework. She told us to write a story—just any story about an experience. I am looking at her stunned, that she didn’t give us a topic or tell us what to write about. I am feeling really uncomfortable with the lack of clarity around the expectation of the writing assignment. I want her to tell me what to write. My previous experience in education would have supported that process. Class is over and I am waiting for the class to empty so that I can talk to her. “I don’t have a story,” were the words that I heard come out. Her response to me
was, “Oh, I think you do.” On the way home that night, all I could think about was what I would write and if there was some reason why everyone else seemed to have a story except me.

I still try to make sense of this experience, but sadly the truth is that at that time in my life I was not experiencing any connection at all with myself or others. Not being able to identify my own life experience as worthy of storying is still upsetting. I am very emotional when I think about how this could have happened to me. How could I have been so disconnected from my own self-knowledge? I actually didn’t know what self-knowledge was at the time, not being aware that I could construct my own knowledge and gain some control around what that looked like. I have written about authenticity in this research in Chapter One, where it was something that I was actively looking for and not understanding how to get it. There seems to be some connection for me between having my own story and authenticity, for when I have one, the other is more accessible to me.

Being conscious of not having a story was the beginning of falling down the stairs into the basement, metaphorically speaking. It was dark, dirty, and dusty. Boxes were everywhere to sort through. Stuff was just thrown down to the bottom of the stairs and it was piled up everywhere. It was a lot of work getting out of the basement. It took a long time. Once I found a story to write about I couldn’t stop writing. My teacher, Dr. Carmen Shields, now of Nipissing University, helped me to find my own voice through the writing of my stories. I was able to write my way out of the basement. Her empathic responses to my writing was a connection that I will never forget. The learning experience was relational, not only between teacher and learner, but with myself. I didn’t
think that I could be the content of my own learning. Carmen invited me to do so, and because of this I now have many stories that have developed multiple pathways for my personal and professional growth. When I didn’t have a story I felt oppressed, incomplete, isolated, and on the outside of something with no access to what others seemed to have. It felt like my voice was not present and that I didn’t even know what that voice sounded like. The more I heard my voice, the more confident I became. This confidence spilled out and flowed over the rest of my life experiences, making others who thought they knew me feel uncomfortable. My growth it seemed was uncomfortable on many levels outside of the classroom. Perhaps I was not the person that I thought I was.

**Story 3: Back to the Periphery**

The story that stands out for me the most that I have never talked to anyone about took place in an employment setting. My supervisor was new in her position, and I was invited in for feedback from a recent interview that I had with her for a full-time position. I had been very upset about the interview situation because I was given the wrong information from Human Resources and arrived to the wrong place in the wrong city for my scheduled appointment. The interview team waited for me as I drove 40 minutes, to arrive more than fashionably late, to this very important opportunity to discuss my interest in full-time employment. As I am writing this I can recall a very conscious decision on my part to not share with my husband what happened, as he would have been livid, knowing how important the interview was for me. My silence around the experience was a choice that I made so that I wouldn’t create too much attention around
what had happened. That attention might not be good for me, and I was embarrassed that it had even happened in the first place, even though it was not my fault.

As I parked my car in the parking lot I was completely frazzled. I grabbed my briefcase and walked as quickly as I could, without running, to the interview room where a group of my colleagues who knew me well were waiting for me. My heart was racing, and the beating became louder when I realized that my anxiety was likely turning into an anxiety attack. I couldn’t get my heart to cooperate with my mind. Fear of failure had already kicked in. Fear of not being good enough, being too old to be successful in academic jobs, knowing that I am not comfortable talking about myself, and the flurry of racing from one geographical location to another accumulated to, “May I just excuse myself for a brief moment so that I may use the restroom?” Once in the restroom, I washed my face with cold water, careful not to disturb the mascara, and took a moment to self-talk my way into the mood of an interview, but my heart raced even faster. Leaving the restroom I felt discouraged and frustrated. I was thinking that I shouldn’t have to do the interview under these circumstances, trying to bargain my way out of it and already starting the grieving process around the loss of this opportunity. I arrived to the room and sat down, took the water that I was offered, and completely zoned out as all eyes were on me. I don’t remember the first question or my response to it, but I slowly came around and started to relax into it. For the next 45 minutes I focused on being present and answering the questions in a way that also supported what I value as a teaching professional. I felt that my genuine self was offered and that I was a good sport, all things considered. I waited several weeks
to find out that I didn’t get the position. The waiting was painful. I was however offered a follow-up meeting. I remember every aspect of this meeting with intense emotion. In fact, this is the only time in my life where if I were asked to name an emotion, I would not be able to, because they were all so connected and fragmented that I was not able to identify which one was the primary emotion. It was more of a turmoil. I was informed by my supervisor that I didn’t get the position for good reasons and that the decision therefore had nothing to do with how the interview process went down (my interpretation). The feedback included statements such as, “You don’t know how to have a conversation within an anti-oppressive practice,” and “You may get a position but not any time soon.” I was so completely stunned that I could not say anything. I was shut down. I recall staring at this person, trying to figure out if this was really happening. How could this person know so much about me after a 45-minute interview? She had never even spoken to me before. I felt like she should have been talking to someone else—nothing that she said about me was true. I didn’t recognize any of it as content that would even come close to fitting with what it is that I value, the person who I am.

This is the first time that I have written about this life experience. When I look back on it now, there is more clarity. I believe that what I received from the feedback meeting was an oppressive experience for me because it did not fit with what I value about who I am. I was unable to think of anything else for a couple of months after this “receiving” occurred. I remember feelings of depression, loss of motivation, anger, and frustration. I think I can recall now that feeling depressed was the primary emotion, and
the most important one to name. The feedback did not include me so the one-sided focus made me feel that I was being told who I was. Having worked very hard for several years to not be defined by what others think of me perhaps made the triggering aspects of this experience much worse. In the end, my voice was excluded, and the voice that replaced mine did not fit with my view of myself or my world. It was interesting that the comment about my not knowing how to have a conversation within an anti-oppressive practice was supported by the most oppressive conversation that I have ever been the recipient of, which was not unlike much of my experience in education. I questioned if the problem was that I didn’t know how to receive feedback, but when I review the story I can see that the feedback was missing and that the context was personal for me. I was not given the opportunity to have a voice, to discuss my feelings, to contribute in a strength-based way to the conversation, to feel like an equal, to have goals, a vision, or a dream. As I was pushed back from the center I reclaimed my space on the periphery of my life experience. This is a space that I know very well, where the truth is defined by what others think and that maybe it is true that I don’t have a story. This is a familiar place of deficit thinking and marginalization, where nothing ever feels empathic and compassion is rarely felt. Interestingly it takes only one significant person to invite one away from the periphery, and then just one other to push one back.

**Reflection on Stories 1–3**

When I look back on the first three stories that I have written, I am drawn to the specifics of what feels like empathy and what doesn’t feel like empathy. For example, more positive feelings are associated with phrases like:

- I felt like I was accomplishing something
- I felt like he cared about me
- I felt motivated
- I felt good about myself
- I learned about who I was
- I believed in myself
- I understood something different about who I was
- There was a relational connection between my teacher and myself
- I became closer to myself
- I began to realize my potential
- She helped me to understand
- I was allowed to have a voice
- Hearing my own voice
- Feeling more confident
- In a nonjudgmental way

The more negative feeling or feelings that were more associated with experiences where empathy was not present sounded more like:

- It was personal
- Loss of motivation
- Depression, anger, and frustration
- I felt pushed back
- Oppressed, incomplete, and isolated
- No voice
- Why don’t I have my own story?
- Loss of connection between self and other
- Not my values

There are also definite themes that already stand out for me. I had never thought of these experiences within the context of empathy before, until I wrote my stories. The stories, although separate, feel like they are connected in many ways. The first way is that I notice a connection between the experience of empathy and voice. When voice is present, there is also a connection with feeling more confident. When I feel more confident, I want to hear my voice more and practice voice. I find this very interesting as I am already aware that my story of education is primarily about the pathway of voice and that this pathway enabled me to get to know myself in ways that I had not experienced before. This pathway opened the door to experiencing the positive benefits or affects of empathy, which in turn opened many other doors. I can’t help but think of Parker Palmer (2000) here in his discussion of the way opening and the way closing. For me, voice was the way that led me toward teaching as a vocation. So empathy, when experienced, offered me the opportunity to explore my own story and to give voice to that story, but most importantly it allowed me to have my own story in the first place. For me, the permission that came through the invitation of story came first in the experience of empathy.

The second way that the first three stories have informed me is that there appears to be a relationship between voice and confidence, which were identified at the beginning of this reflection as affective experiences of empathy. For me I can see that the experience of confidence is a unique outcome (White, 2007) that has been exposed through the makings of my own narrative. Through my writing I can see that as my voice
became more practiced, and louder, I became more confident. This confidence helped me in many ways in my life, and I believe it is the confidence that came from this empathic positioning of voice that motivated me. This motivation enabled me to become something other than what I thought I was capable of being in my adult life.

The third way that I have been informed by my stories is that I understand now that there are connections in and among my stories and that there is information in these connections. In the first two stories, where empathy was experienced in a positive way, I feel that I was able to stand up to previous knowledge that was more objectively defined. My receiving of empathy supported a deconstructing process, where I began to question what I knew. I was encouraged to draw meaning from my own content, which defined a more whole experience of learning and one where I believe the learning was sustainable because it was connected to what I value. Fully feeling what my values were and feeling like my own story was worthy of being valued helped me to experience and understand empathy.

In my third story I relived all of the negative feelings that were associated with it through the writing of it. Anxiety and depression seem to hang out together and lie beneath the surface, waiting for an opportunity for those doors to start closing so they can knock loudly on those doors. Palmer (2000) discusses depression as “the ultimate state of disconnection, not just between people but between one’s mind and one’s feelings” (p. 62). In spite of all of the benefits of empathy from the first two stories, just remembering the experience in the third story stands out for me. It was completely opposite in its representation, as I felt badly after it happened. There was no empathy, and I remember feeling like I was being pushed back into the periphery of my lived
experience, where I was an observer of the experience of others. I felt a loss of connection between self and other. I wasn’t allowed to have a voice or speak to the experience of the interview that was so important to me. It was personal, where I suffered a loss of motivation and confidence. I remember being easily triggered by life experience in general after this experience occurred, for me indicating a delicate balance between self and other within a relational context, and remembering how easy it is to take something important away from someone without a second thought. In my situation, I can identify that it was what I valued and knew about myself which was being silenced or taken away. This isn’t something that I understood at the time, but rather it came to me through the process of writing about it. I felt oppressed. I know that I have to really listen to someone to really hear them, and there is no room for power and alternate agendas if empathy is to prevail and benefit us all. If nothing else, this third story has elevated my awareness around how I may be interpreted in the classroom and with colleagues if I am not careful about my own representation and how I am aware of my own practice of balancing a self and other connection.

Story 4: You’re Not Just a White Person

I met a student on the very last day of class. Interestingly, I always seem to end up with what I need right in front of me in order to challenge me forward. This next story was retrieved from my many teaching stories, and I am still informed by this student today.

*In my second year of teaching I had a brief encounter with a student that still haunts me to this day. It was the last day of class and I had to get the required evaluations done in order to then start the final exam. It was standard*
procedure to leave the classroom and to assign a student the responsibility of collecting the evaluations, sealing the envelope and then walking them to the faculty office. While waiting out in the hallway consumed with thoughts of what I had to accomplish on that day, one of my Black female students came out into the hallway in tears. I wondered what was wrong and asked her what the matter was. She looked at me with sadness and said, “I just wanted to tell you that you’re not just a White person.” I didn’t say anything to this student that I would consider a response to the comment that she made, because I couldn’t find the words. I gave her a hug and told her that I was pleased that I had a chance to be her teacher. I went back into the classroom to administer the exam. (Rankin, Personal Story, 2013)

It was the last day of class and I never saw this student again. I am very sad that I wasn’t able to talk to her about her tears and what they meant. I looked for her after the summer in the fall semester. I couldn’t find her, and I can only conclude that she perhaps fell through the cracks and did not complete the program. I wanted to know more about her and her story. The delivery of her message was not at the best time in that it was prior to the exam and I was of course consumed with other thoughts of doing. I wasn’t present with this student in the way that I should have been. I now see a student who had likely experienced oppression in her life and at school, but at the time I thought only that I must be doing a good job in the classroom and that it was positive feedback for me, an egoistic interpretation. Considering now what this student was receiving in my class has been quite consuming for me. What should I be doing more of in order to reach out more to students? Should I not have known about the learning journey of this student before the
last day of class? Could I have drawn her out more to learn more about her? Without the conversation with this student I will never know the story that informed the feedback she gave me on that day, but I could have known if I had taken a moment to give an empathic response to this student. I could have opened the door a crack for her. I could have met with her afterward, or perhaps supported her academically so she could have graduated. I could have listened. I feel responsible for the outcome of this student now and that the relational door is closed. I know how important it was for me to experience empathy in my own learning, where the relationship between my self and my teacher had a profound impact on me. I really didn’t know anything about this student. Now I can’t even remember her name. How could I have had any effect on her at all?

**Story 5: An Unconscious Act**

In my first year of teaching I was marking a paper for my Foundations of Counselling class. This was the first submission of a journal that students were to submit twice, reflecting on class topics and writing assigned reflections. The reflective process itself was disappointing in that we do not teach the students how to engage in an internal dialogue that is reflective. What I was “marking” at the time were primarily descriptions of the topics that we covered in class, which were void of reflecting on experience. The only paper that I remember was a full dialogue on how I had practiced discrimination in the classroom (unknowingly). This particular student reviewed how I had marginalized the gay and transgendered population in the classroom by not insisting that a group take that topic for a group role-play, which was an academic assignment for this course.
By allowing the topic to not be chosen, I was therefore further marginalizing this group. (Rankin, Personal Story, 2013)

The learning for me in this story helped me to further examine my own worldview and how much of it, unexamined by me, was coming forward in my teaching. At the time I was very upset that this student would imply that I would marginalize the potential learning of the LGBTQ group, as it spoke to the very depth of who I believed myself to be. Now, reconsidering this response, I can see how this student was justified in giving voice to this experience of learning in our classroom. I had accomplished exactly what she accused me of, but in an unconscious way. The interpretation of my teaching that was brought forward by this student was not in my awareness at that time. I had not thought about my privilege and how that informed my teaching decisions in any detail at all. I participated in silencing a voice, and potentially multiple voices in the classroom, that deserved to be heard in a teaching and learning community. At the time I reflected on the comment that the student made in her academic paper, which is where she wrote of her disappointment in my response. I defended my position, taking her feedback quite personally and protecting my privilege and authority. I am disappointed in myself. As I was teaching to a marginalized populations assignment, I was practicing the marginalization of one of these groups. I never spoke to this student in person. I really did have the opportunity to do so in this case, but chose not to. I chose to close the space for empathy and connection with this student. That was the conscious part of the experience.
Story 6: Motivation

In my third year of teaching, I received an email from a student. I have received many thank you cards from students and even gifts, but this particular email was the best gift that I have ever received. It is shared in the exact form that it was received.

Hi Tami,

I hope you are enjoying the begging of summer so far. I just wanted to show my gratitude’s for the great time, knowledge and motivation I acquired during these past few months in your class. Your style of teaching, your help/support and the way you presented yourself during class sessions was not only professional, it has also given me the motivation to do better in life and help others strive for the best in their life as well. Prior to coming to college, my previous high school informed me that I would not be able to attend college or University due to who I was as a person and also the reputation that portrayed the school. After I attended few classes that you taught, not only have I gotten the motivation I needed to succeed, I can now return back to my previous high to inform them that not only have I attended college and gotten my diploma, I have also been accepted into York University in September for (BA-Honors) in the Social Work program. Again, thanks for your great help/support and it has been a pleasure having you as my professor. (Student Email, April 2013)

Again, I never had the opportunity to discuss this communication with this student. After receiving this email I never saw him again until graduation. He was wearing his African gown in bright oranges and yellow, not the blue one provided, and he was very proud. I watched him with his family from a distance with a smile on my face. I
felt a great sense of accomplishment that I did what I was supposed to do as his teacher, although I wondered what that was exactly. I didn’t know anything about this student’s story during our time together in the classroom. I wanted to know more about his story and about why he was told that because of who he was he would not succeed. I was and still am interested in the resilience of this young man and how he was supported to achieve the change in his life that he desired, with so many apparently trying to pull him back into the sub-standard expectations of others and what others said he would be. I wonder what he is doing now. I felt very blessed that I received this email from him, and also very sad because of how educators had treated him in his school experience.

**Reflection on Stories 4–6**

Stories 4, 5 and 6 collectively have made a pattern, in that all three situations involved a voice from a learner that needed to be heard and acknowledged. In all three cases I was not able to or did not receive that voice, falling short of my own expectations of myself as an educator and a person. To be clear, there was an expression of voice, but it was not within a relational context, and I was not with the students in their stories. I did not respond with empathy. I also can see now how much I have in common with these student experiences, as I too found the gift of empathy in the classroom. This gift was possible because of the experience and expression of voice where my story was valued and where my values were heard. As stated in my first reflection of my first three stories, this valuing was unconditional. I wish now that I had heard these voices earlier from my students so that I could really listen and receive their stories. I was not able to act compassionately because empathy was not given the opportunity to inform this compassion. The significance of voice cannot be underestimated. I learned that voice is
sometimes silent and that this is not to be confused with no voice at all. The silencing of my voice was an experience of oppression in my education. Feuerverger (2007) speaks about the importance of listening to the silent as well as the spoken voices in the classroom “and to have a conversation about not only what is said but also what may be felt even without it having been expressed in words” (p. 4). To expand on this, I also think that in some unconscious way I may have not supported these student stories because they were understood to be different from mine, and perhaps my practice of empathy is potentially directed toward others who are more the same as me. I don’t really know if this is true, but I wonder. Maybe I participated in silencing voices, or I was not aware of how my privilege informed my teaching practice. During the time of these stories I was developing my voice as a teacher. It was a time of transition for me where the personal was meeting the professional. Although I was self-aware at the time in my own story, I may not have been conscious of managing that in relation to others. I may not have paid attention to the importance of opening the space for the story of another. This new self-awareness has now positioned my inquiry in a more conscious way.

When my student confronted me about marginalizing the LGBTQ community, I took it personally. I was uncomfortable with it so I chose to not pursue the conversation. Why was I uncomfortable? Perhaps I was protecting my own story or my own values, even at someone else’s expense. Perhaps I didn’t want to admit that I was guilty of practicing the marginalization of this group, or I didn’t want to consider the possibility that this occurred even as an unconscious act. I took the empathic response out of a relational context, which resulted in no response at all. I wonder what this student from my fifth story would say to me now about her own interpretation of this experience.
When I wrote story 3, where empathy was not present, I wrote, “In the end, my voice was excluded, and the voice that replaced mine did not fit with my view of my self or my world.” I have to wonder if this is a shared experience that I had with the student in story 5, in addition to creating this experience for her. Voice is important, but at the same time it can also be oppressive. When I protect my voice it may be at the expense of another. When I do this I am the oppressor and unable to respond with empathy.

In summary, the most common thread from the writing of my six stories is the awareness of voice as a reoccurring theme. Voice is obviously very important to me because of my experience of accessing the value of voice in my own life. This value is a part of who I am, so my interpretation is likely swayed in this direction for that reason. I think it is important to say that my positive experiences of empathy where I practiced voice are undeniably significant for me. Once I embraced the value of voice in my own life, I found it very difficult to not protect it. Understandably my experience of empathy is therefore validated within the context of my own lived experience and my awareness around this experience. For me, empathy would therefore represent self-understanding more than anything else, because if I don’t have that I will have a hard time being empathic toward another or being empathic toward myself. I feel that storying my experiences of empathy supports me as I move forward in my teaching, and relationships with other, as a more aware self. I will be more able to identify a conscious position of empathy toward others, and this consciousness that was created from writing and reconstructing my stories will support an ongoing examination of the unconscious. I have many more stories and much more that I can learn.
CHAPTER 9: THEMES AND NEW PERSPECTIVES THAT EMERGED IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In this final chapter, I delineate the themes around empathy that emerged in this study, and the impact they have on my thinking going forward as teacher and counsellor. I have been changed through the storying of experience that my participants and I engaged in, and I know that lessons I have learned will find a place in my teaching practice and in my interactions with others more generally.

Looking back over the chapters now, I see that my inquiry into the issues that surround the teaching of empathy has shaped a more conscious and informed perspective of empathy for me. Susan, Lauren, and I, have all been touched by revisiting our stories of lived experience across time and place, where empathy was present, or not. These stories now inform each of us in the present when we consider how we brought the meaning from our stories forward with us in our lives, either consciously or unconsciously. This meaning informs our own journey of empathic understanding moving forward, which embodies not only a teaching practice but also a life practice.

Knowing what I know now, I most likely would have asked different guiding questions for this study, questions that would support the process of the writing and not so much an answer to a question. For example, Susan asks her own questions as a part of her narrative inquiry of meaning-making in this research text. In response to her own stories, she asks, “Is this what compassion feels like?” Susan also asks in her writing, “Is it necessary to experience empathy to develop empathy?”, and, “Do we teach how to listen from the heart?”. In Lauren’s inquiry, she asks, “Is it possible to truly understand someone if we have yet to accept ourselves?”, and, “Is it even possible to learn how to
accept ourselves without the help of someone showing that they accept you?”. Among the three of us, we created our own layers of inquiry that were constructed from our lived experience, and these layers overlapped with the research questions for this study. A highlight of my learning from this narrative self-study is that focusing on the questions that come from the writing process is the more important outcome, because the outcome is then embedded in the process of the data analysis and the questions that were raised from that process, which is unique to each one of us. The representation of the analysis is present within each storied chapter that Susan, Lauren and I authored and offers another layer of analysis that can be taken forward with each author that is authentic.

Writing as a method of data analysis and a process of meaning-making in this narrative inquiry has provided the authors with an experience of empathy. For example, as the participant researcher I was able to be present in my own stories and experience self-empathy, and I was also able to be present in Susan’s and Lauren’s stories and practice listening to the meaning as determined by other, without judgment or any reinterpretation. I can then experience feeling empathy from Susan and Lauren when they receive my stories without judgment or any reinterpretation. I learned throughout the 3 month writing process with Susan and Lauren, that when I write with others I am experiencing difference within a social and historical context and that this writing process is one where empathy can be practiced and felt.

**Self and Other Differentiation: Research Question #1**

*How did we as research participants (teachers who teach empathy) learn empathy in our life experience, and how do we embody this learning in our lives and teaching practice?*
The themes across the chapters that link the literature and the writing of the research participants and me to this first research question have resulted in the knowledge that empathy is learned through our life experience, specific to the relational interaction between self and other. The nature of the learning ultimately depends on whether empathy is present or not within the interaction. Lauren spoke to the relationship between learning and life experience when she shared, “Reflecting back on this moment reminded me of the importance of embracing my experiences as a way to learn” (p. 99). Susan also spoke to experience when she wrote, “It occurs to me that having students write their stories about empathy would give them an opportunity to reflect about their experiences and construct their own conclusions about empathy, just as I and the other research participants have done in this study”. These reflections stood out for me. I see the permission to let our experiences guide us as a gift that enables us to learn from our stories of the past, to appreciate who we are in the present because of what we have experienced, and to consider how this new knowledge will move forward with us in our lives. This feels like an experience of empathy and an act of self-compassion.

As Harper Lee (1960) suggests in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it” (p. 39). Such a practice enables empathy to be experienced by the other person. It allows them to have their story. In my own lived experience I have been able to identify, in part as a result of this study, that in order to climb inside of someone else’s skin I have to climb into my own skin first. I need to understand myself in order to learn how to be present with another, and I need to learn my own point of view in order to understand if that point of view is interfering in my
ability to be present with another. I know that I am able to become aware of this requirement of self and other through the examination of my own lived experience. For me, writing the stories for this study informed this experience of self and other differentiation.

In Chapter One, I stated that the purpose of this study was to gain a heightened self-awareness around the practice of empathy and to become a more conscious self-aware self within the context of self and other interaction. I hypothesized that a self-aware self is necessary if teachers and students are to engage in the learning of empathy together in the classroom. The methodology of this study as practiced by the research participants and me enabled an individual experience of empathy by each one of us, where we were able to identify being more self-aware as a result of this experience. This self-awareness was a significant learning outcome in this study that was shared by all of us. A heightened self-awareness of empathy places each one of us within the context of our own curriculum of lived experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), where our experience of the experience of empathy elevated our self-awareness and self-understanding around the practice of empathy. This new knowledge allowed us to experience our selves in relation to one another. In the literature Wispé (1986) suggests that it is a self-aware self that is required in order for empathy to be experienced. The learning of empathy therefore seems to be connected to what one might need to pay attention to in a conscious way. Coplan (2011) stresses that self-differentiation—understanding how the self is different from other—is a necessary understanding for empathy to be achieved. Coplan stresses that “without clear self–other differentiation, we are almost certain to fail in our attempts to empathize” (p. 16) because we stand to lose
our sense of self and become enmeshed with the other. Ricard (2015) speaks of empathy as affective resonance that supports the difference between self and other. I believe that my experience of this research and the supporting literature demonstrate that the more self-aware we become, the more effective we are in our efforts to be empathic beings. According to Ricard (2015), “once one has established a better relationship with oneself, it becomes easier to feel kindness and compassion for others” (p. 321).

From the stories that Susan, Lauren, and I wrote, it seems that we learned about the value of empathy through our interactions with others, which for me validates the relational quality of empathy. The feelings and understandings that were experienced through the self and other interaction in our stories embodied a learning that was different for each of us; however, the requirement of self and other interaction was the same for each of us. I learned that self-knowledge is a critical factor in the learning of empathy, as this directs my interpretation of who I am in relation to others. This self-knowledge was nurtured through the many questions that were asked throughout the writing by each author. As a researcher of my own lived experience, I was able to practice self and other interaction within a relational context and to therefore learn about empathy by reexperiencing it.

I see this as a holistic example of curriculum (Miller, 2007), where the research participants and I constructed our own content and experienced having this content received by others within a learning environment that Carl Rogers (1992) termed as “unconditional positive regard.” I found it interesting that collectively our stories resembled self and other interaction in such a way that we were able to learn and reflect on what that interaction feels like, and what might be required to sustain it. For example,
I experienced that I was able to listen without judgment, I was able to feel safe, I was able to practice voice and be heard, I was able to understand the context of another’s feelings, and I was able to gain understanding around the life experiences of another, thus supporting empathy within a social context. I was able to feel the difference between empathy being present or not and was able to become conscious of this feeling. It was quite pleasant to experience how our histories came together through our stories and that this in a sense modeled a practice of learning together within a socially constructed curriculum. I don’t have to worry about understanding that another is different from me when another is integrated into the process of the learning.

The experience of self and other interaction in this study constructed a practice of perspective taking. This process of perspective taking (Batson 2011; Coplan 2011, Segal et al., 2017) is referred to in the literature as a contributing factor to being empathic with another and one that can be practiced. Coplan (2011) stresses that self-oriented perspective taking should not be practiced without other-oriented perspective taking. This study enabled both to be practiced simultaneously within our own stories and in our interactions with each other. In my clinical teaching, however, I have found that it is very difficult to practice other-oriented perspective taking with students who are not self-aware or who are disconnected from their own story due to depression, anxiety, trauma, learning disabilities, and various other diagnoses. Often these students struggle in their interpretation of the other’s story, and are quick to judge or give advice. The self-awareness and self-knowledge that are required for the successful practice of empathy can be a difficult project in these situations. Every student is in a different place of self-awareness and their understanding of their own life experience, as we were in this study.
Managing this difference and the potential triggers associated with it can be challenging, especially in the classroom.

As Susan, Lauren and I reexperienced the experience of our empathic understanding in relation to others in the deconstruction of our stories, we were able to practice our interpretation of these experiences specific to empathy. In this way, we experienced an organic approach to self and other interaction. Within these interactions the balance between self and other ebbs and flows throughout our writing. Self and other intersect across the story lines of all of our stories. Who am I, and who am I in relation to others? We all asked these important questions in one way or another. It occurs to me that as we sorted out the meaning of each story we were also sorting out the meaning of self and other at the same time. Empathy can be learned through our lived experiences and this learning can support the self-awareness that is required for the practice of empathy. This new knowledge supports an embodiment that each research participant can take forward into curricular choices that support personal and professional growth for our students and our selves.

**Feeling and Understanding Empathy: Research Question #2**

*How did we as research participants recognize the presence of empathy or not in our educative experience as students and as teachers? What effect does this awareness have on how to teach empathy or how to construct an empathic curriculum? Can Empathy be taught?*

In this second research question(s), when considering how we recognized the presence of empathy (or not) in our educative experience as students and as teachers, our stories showed us that we recognized the presence of empathy through feelings. I am
aware of the presence of empathy, the attributes, through my feelings and the understanding that I construct from my awareness of these feelings. The subjective attributes that are identified through the lived experience of the research participants and me are varied and are grounded in a feeling vocabulary that either supports the feeling of empathy or not. The feelings and understandings that we have reflected upon came from the stories that we each chose to write. The experience of feelings and the related cognitive understanding, which is discussed in the literature in Chapter Three as being a requirement of the experience of empathy, were therefore practiced throughout our writing over the 3-month time frame of this study. Across the literature and more specifically in Batson (2011), Ricard (2015), Coplan (2011), Noddings (2012), Segal et al. (2017), and B. Cooper (2010), to name a few, all agree that empathy is about feeling and understanding, or affective resonance and cognitive understanding. I understand this feeling and understanding as something that needs to be experienced within the context of self and other for an experience of empathy to occur. I appreciate how the process of writing enabled each of us the opportunity to experience these requirements of the experience of empathy. I think that curriculum that supports the experience of feeling and the understanding of these feelings is a significant requirement if empathy is to be nurtured as a value in environments of education. I have noticed in my teaching that this practice of feeling also helps to develop a feeling vocabulary, which can support the development of voice as one learns to articulate one’s feelings and emotions. Batson (2011) also refers to the constellation of emotions that are associated with the feeling of empathy. With so many emotions potentially influencing the other in an empathic relationship, in my experience it is important that the other be asked to name their own
emotions in order to support the empathic interaction. In this way we can ensure that we do not make assumptions within our own feeling vocabulary.

This study has demonstrated for me that being present in my feelings, understanding my feelings, and practicing different interpretations of my feelings is an important practice in my learning of empathy. I can teach empathy more effectively if my students have opportunities to experience and name their feelings. Sorting this out in a classroom curriculum where students can write and reflect on their own feelings associated with their lived experiences between self and other would certainly support the learning of empathy. I believe that when we are connected to what we feel, we cannot help but take the personal nature of that learning forward with us in our lives, as what we feel is connected to what we value.

This experiencing of empathy by providing opportunities for feeling and understanding is modeled by Mary Gordon (2005) in her Roots of Empathy Program. This program is used all over the world in elementary school settings and focuses on emotional literacy and empathy as a lever for change. Focusing on mind and heart, the cognitive (perspective taking) and the affective (feelings and emotions) are practiced in a classroom setting where a baby is the teacher. Throughout the course of the school year, a baby visits the classroom every 3 weeks. A program facilitator supports the children to reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others. By focusing on feelings, and cognitive understanding, children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice through their enhanced emotional awareness. By focusing on feelings this program demonstrates how one can become more self-aware and more able to experience empathy and act compassionately toward others. In this way we can teach empathy to others.
The Subjective Attributes: Research Question #3

What are the subjective attributes of empathy that are identified through the lived experience of the research participants, and how do these create the core conditions for embodied knowing?

For this third research question I have selected some examples of feeling vocabulary across the writing from Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight. In Chapter 6, Susan identified a thread throughout her writing where listening and not being listened to were identified as a recurring theme. She identified feeling alone, feeling helpless, feeling invisible, feeling not listened to, feeling isolated, and not feeling secure in life experiences where empathy was not present. When Susan did experience empathy, she expressed feelings of connection and validation. A positive experience was in relationship with a mentor where Susan shared that “she was truly an expert in listening and empathy. I felt heard and validated in a way that I had not experienced in my career, or perhaps even in my life” (Susan’s Story 6). Susan wrote about feeling more for others than for her self, which was a response learned in childhood and that this learning supported silence.

In Lauren’s writing, sharing her story with others ultimately helped her to confront her fears of being judged by others. She expressed feeling relieved and understood. Lauren articulated a sense of comfort, connection, inspiration, and trust that came from the sharing of her personal mental health story. Where connection was not present, she expressed feeling panicked and alone. She felt discouraged and ashamed, sharing that “I found myself scared to even make eye contact with anyone” (Lauren’s Story 2). In Lauren’s third story she spoke to the importance of mentorship as an
experience of empathy where she shared that through a role-play demonstration in her Master of Social Work Program, she felt understood by an educator for the first time in a very long time. Anxiety was named as the negative experience or feeling of not being understood. Lauren named self-judgment, acceptance, and opportunity as factors that supported her stories. Lack of self-esteem and insecurities were named as negative experiences and feelings where empathy was not present. Lauren identified that “once I started to feel accepted, I learned to accept myself” (Lauren’s Reflection of Stories 1–3).

When empathy was identified as a positive feeling in my stories, I spoke of feeling like I accomplished something; I felt cared about, I felt motivated and good about myself. Because of these feelings I understood that I was learning about who I was. I was believing in myself and understanding something different about who I was becoming. I identify the feelings of empathy as being present within a relational connection where I was able to feel closer to myself. Realizing my potential, helping me to understand, and being allowed to have a voice helped me to feel more confident. Negative feelings associated with not experiencing empathy felt more personal where there was a loss of motivation, feelings of anger and frustration, feelings of being pushed back, feelings of being incomplete and isolated, and not having a voice. I understand these feelings to be nonrelational where there was also a loss of connection to my own values. Voice and confidence feel connected across my stories. Where empathy is present, voice is also present. Voice is the common thread that weaves through my lived experience, and for me, it is voice that supports the aforementioned attributes of empathy.

The attributes identified in the individual stories do not represent a complete list. They are complete within the context of the stories written in this study. I can see that the
process of the writing of the stories in this methodology has brought to light the presence of diverse feelings and cognitions that are embedded in the stories, and that these feelings and cognitions can inform and support embodied knowing for the authors.

**Shared Themes: Self-Esteem, Mentorship, Voice**

There are themes within each authored chapter that rest solely within the interpretation of each writer, and there are also shared themes. When we met at the end of the writing process, we spoke about what stood out the most for us in our writing. Susan responded with listening and self-esteem. Lauren also responded with self-esteem, and I said, “That is interesting because I didn’t get that from my writing.” Susan then suggested that all of the positive attributes that I had listed as benefits of an empathic experience are what self-esteem is made of. I have had a chance to think about this, and I have to agree with Susan that the core components of self-esteem are present in my list, even though I didn’t name it as such. As teachers of clinical stream courses, we teach the difference between self-esteem, self-concept, and self-awareness, so as research participants we are familiar with these terms. Negative interpretations of self and other interactions may possibly be associated with low self-esteem in our story lines. Ricard (2015) spoke to self-esteem in a way that resonated with me. Ricard highlighted the difference between self-compassion and self-esteem as presented by Kristen Neff, who I have often referred to in my teaching of compassion. Neff speaks to the difference between self-compassion and self-esteem in that self-compassion is more readily available and precisely when self-esteem fails. Self-compassion is focused more on acceptance and kindness “that recognizes that imperfections are part of our human condition, even when self-evaluations are negative” (Ricard, 2015, pp. 320–321).
Mentorship is also a shared experience in our stories of empathic understanding. Each of us was able to identify a mentor that was significant in our lives as a role model, where empathy as observed and experienced through the interaction with our mentors supported our self-understanding. Through this shared meaning I have learned that empathy is therefore something that can be inspired, modeled, and learned through others, and that mentorship can lead to motivation and action.

Although we all discussed voice as something that was either given or taken away, we did this to varying degrees across our writing. Susan spoke about voice but focused more on listening and being heard or not being heard. Being silenced instead of coming to voice was more of what Susan described in her stories. Lauren spoke about voice as well, but more within a context of fear and silence. Lauren shared her experience of receiving the story of another as a motivating factor to her giving voice to her own story in order to benefit many others, becoming a role model in response to being informed by one. Voice is practiced throughout the individual writing, and I am suggesting that collectively our voices are being practiced and heard within each of our stories of empathy. These experiences of empathy support the relationship with voice differently amongst and between us. I feel that it is safe to say that voice and empathy interact with each other, and that the extent to which this is so may vary between individuals as does our self-awareness.

Looking Forward: Research Question #4

*How does this enhanced conscious awareness of embodied knowing construct empathy as a value and a moral conversation that informs self-understanding and a sustainable teaching practice that is socially constructed?*
In order to address this final question, I position myself within my learning from this research study and I consider how I will take this learning forward with me in my teaching practice. I have already started to reconsider my teaching of empathy in a more conscious way, and I will surely be a different self the next time I am interacting with students in the classroom where I am “teaching” empathy. Segal et al. (2017) collectively agree that empathy can be taught, and I also embody this belief moving forward. I think that this vision is hopeful and full of potential. I can bring the unconscious to consciousness through various teaching strategies, and I am aware that what becomes conscious is as diverse as the students in my classroom.

As I consider the diversity of the understandings and definitions of the word empathy within the literature and throughout the empathy curriculum in my program, I can’t help but think that starting with more of an open space that the students can fill with their own experience would be more helpful. Citing Shields and Reid-Patton (2009), Van Manen (1991) writes that students (and clients) do not come to us as “empty vessels [waiting] to be filled” but come to us from somewhere. They come to us with a history and it is this history which shapes the learning which does or does not take place (p. 7).

I resonate with so much of this perspective in my teaching and clinical work, as well as my own life experience. I know that the “empty vessel” is likely not very empty at all, and I believe that the vessel is never quite full. I have identified in my own learning that I am constantly in a sorting process around what I wish to keep or not keep as I grow and move forward as an educator, making space for new knowledge and new perspectives. I keep revising and reinterpreting my self-knowledge in a process of lifelong learning that transforms my lens into different ways of looking and different ways of knowing. It has been only recently that I have had to acknowledge that teaching
empathy to my own definition is likely an oppressive act. This is actually one of the more significant learning outcomes of this study for me. If I do not construct curriculum that enables students to explore their own experience and value of empathy, then I am teaching a curriculum that oppresses the experience of other. When I do this, the students can not experience a relationship between self and other, and they are not likely to feel empathy or understand its meaning. They are not likely to be able to re-sort and reinterpret what they have brought in to the learning within their own social and historical context.

It is not so easy to move students and clients forward in their stories within their own historical context when that context leads them to be stuck in a negative story, a negative interpretation, or even an experience of trauma. I never know who I am going to get in my classroom or what I may face on a daily basis. I have had a student share in her writing that she has never told anyone that she was sexually abused as a child, repeatedly and over a long period of time. I have had a student share that for 3 days she hid under dead bodies in a war-affected country in order to stay alive. I have had a student share that he was having thoughts of suicide and that he had a plan to follow through with it, after the class on suicide intervention. A teacher who cares, who challenges negative interpretations and perceptions, who empathically responds to the emotional needs of students, who builds the story lines outside of the negative story for her students is an empathic teacher, and a goal of mine is to take this self-awareness with me every time I enter the classroom. I recognize that the required curriculum is secondary to who my students are and who they may become. I ensure safety, trust, and confidentiality, and I am so glad that my training as a mental health counsellor informs these teaching qualities
on a daily basis. I have experienced that teaching and learning is therefore something that happens in relationship with others and that, if I am self-aware, I can model an environment of empathy, kindness, and compassion that nurtures my soul and the souls of my students. If I am to embrace the historical context that each student brings with them into the classroom, a multiple layering of stories, then I need to be prepared to hear and respond to these stories while at the same time sharing my own. I believe that being present and with these diverse student stories, as well as my own, is the challenge of empathy in practice and for me as an educator.

In light of the richness that I appreciated from the stories that were written and shared in this study, it is clear to me now that Coplan’s (2011) suggestion of the narrowing of the definition of empathy would be what I earlier termed as an experience of marginalization. The narrowing of the definition of empathy would surely represent some experience at the expense of others. The more open and illuminating that the lens of empathy is, the more likely that self and other differentiation will be practiced and understood in learning and clinical environments as we intentionally turn that lens to create new perspectives. As an empathically positioned teacher, and a teacher of empathy, I believe that the core conditions of empathy are subjective and that this subjective nature of the experience of empathy is what I was able to embody in my learning in this study. This embodiment makes it impossible for me to move forward in my teaching without applying my new learning, as my beliefs and values have changed.

There is no collective agreement among the writers in this study as to whether or not empathy is a value, although our feelings and understandings are grounded within the storied context of what we value. This leads me to believe that empathy, when learned
through our own lived experience, is essentially a value. If empathy is a value, it is important that I understand what this value means to me and how this value supports me in my life so that I can ensure that my values are not interfering with the values of another. Empathy was referred to as a skill, a value, and compassion across our writing and in different contexts in this study. Our own definitions of empathy therefore support the diversity of definitions that are demonstrated within the literature in Chapter Three, and I believe our own definitions also support the need for this diversity. There were questions in the written stories around empathy and compassion and how they interact with each other as well as which one comes first. It is clear that we all started our writing in this study with a different understanding of empathy as well as different questions around what empathy is, and that writing as a method of analysis thickened this line of questioning and inquiry. As I stated earlier in this chapter, the questions that were most relevant to each one of us came from our own writing. We did not discuss or come to any agreement on the definition of empathy prior to, during, or post research. It is clear to me that even as teachers of empathy curriculum we are seeking clarity in our learning and that this clarity is a process that meets a different requirement for each of us.

I started my storying with the re-membering of my grandmother in Chapter Two, which was a significant missing piece of my own conscious history. This story helped me to define my values and to reconsider who I am and where I have come from. I felt that it was significant for me to place my grandmother’s story at the beginning of my writing, as it constructed a new foundation for me from which to start a shared inquiry with my research participants. This re-membering story helped me to understand the experience of marginalization and oppression as a part of who I am. Prior to this time I always
questioned my ability to respond to students in the classroom around these experiences. I thought of myself as a White person of privilege within a diverse student population, listening to but not really understanding what oppression and marginalization feels like. Being more conscious of my family history and this intergenerational trauma, which has become a part of all of us in my family, has prepared me to embrace conversations with students that are more specific to the feelings that are associated with oppression and marginalization. Others may view me as a person of privilege on the surface; however this does not define my empathic positioning with students, or separate me from being able to understand. I can be conscious of my own meaning and how I interact with this meaning. I am not suggesting that because I have a family history of marginalization and oppression that I now understand others who have also had this experience. My awareness of this story has helped to quite simply illuminate my potential for the self and other interaction that is required for empathic relationships. The more I understand my own difference as an educator, the more likely I will be able to understand the difference of others. In Fuerverger (2007), I am drawn to a piece of writing from Nussbaum (1997).

The interculturalist rejects the claim of identity politics that only members of a particular group have the ability to understand the perspective of that group. In fact understanding is achieved in many different ways and being born of a group is neither sufficient nor necessary. Knowledge is frequently enhanced by an awareness of difference. (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 137, citing Nussbaum, 1997)

The awareness of difference can be practiced in the classroom in safe, trusting, and respectful environments where empathy is front and center as a core value. This study has demonstrated that this is possible, and I see my teacher role as one that
facilitates this learning process for my adult students. Understanding marginalization within my own experience of difference has helped me to be more present with the feelings, emotions, and cognitions that are created from these kinds of lived experiences, and this in turn will continue to inform me and make me a better and more attuned teacher. Perhaps in the future I will not miss out on opportunities to discuss student experiences that are important to them even though they seem very different from my own, as in my fourth, fifth, and sixth stories in Chapter Eight. For me, acknowledging, accepting, and responding to difference is self and other differentiation. I do not have to be the same or have the same experience as someone else to respond empathically. There is a lot to think about and to integrate into a teaching and learning curriculum where empathy is a core value. I don’t think that I would be able to help anyone if I had to be the same as they are. In fact this approach of being or feeling the same may fragment the self so deeply that we may simply cease to recognize it. It seems to me that empathy calls the self forward and out of isolation.

One of the obstacles in teaching difference is that my students often express that they are accepting because they see everyone as being the same so they treat everyone the same. This is not a practice of self–other differentiation. We are not all the same. Students who have experienced marginalization and oppression understand this. Working with students to bridge this divide is very complicated and difficult work. In this practice my students are always stunned when I point out to them in a class role-play that they directed the client with their own agenda or their own story. Students really don’t understand how this has happened most of the time. It takes everyone in the class to contribute and to reflect on how the student who is playing the counsellor role became
enmeshed with the story of the client. This is difficult teaching if the student is not self-aware, and impossible teaching if the teacher is not self-aware. Then the connection of empathy cannot be felt, and the motivation for the student or client cannot be attained. The storying of experience can offer students an opportunity to construct curriculum that is relevant to their own values so that the learning will support and sustain them in a more strength-based way. When students story their experiences of empathy, I believe that they will be able to more effectively differentiate between self and other in their own empathic relationships and client responsibilities within the helping professions.

Experiencing and encouraging the presence of multiple values and multiple voices between and among us around the defining of empathy feels like a way to teach empathy that supports the learning of self–other differentiation. When I do this, I am not teaching my understanding of empathy, but rather I am working with my students to create a more conscious platform, or foundation, from which to start a learning process of understanding empathic connection. It is not likely that I will be able to make generalized conclusions about empathy when the foundation that supports the learning of empathy for each student is grounded within the context of their own lived experience.

I understand empathy as a responsibility and a value that is modeled to students through my approach to teaching. I also understand this responsibility and moral obligation as one where I am learning with my students. I understand this learning with as a removal of power that often interferes with self and other differentiation within the empathic experience of teaching and learning. If I can neutralize the imposition of one self upon another in the classroom, then I feel that as an educator I have been successful in my empathic approach to teaching and learning. If one self becomes more confident
and motivated to create change, which in turn supports self-differentiation, then again I feel that I will have been successful in my teaching curriculum of empathy. I cannot underestimate my own experience and the experiences shared in the stories of Susan and Lauren, in that mentorship has supported us all in our own processes of becoming the women we are today. My value of mentorship that I shared in my story has become a part of who I am in my teaching, where I am conscious of the influence that I have on others as I practice a warm, genuine, respectful, and empathic presence in the classroom. I know that when I live what I have learned, I model an authenticity and embodiment for my students that invites the same, where there is an open space for soulful learning and where subject matter, teacher, student, and melieu interact and support each other (Schwab, 1962).

As a teacher of counselling I have put into practice all of Batson’s (2011), Coplan’s (2011) and Segal et al.’s (2017) components of empathy in my social work curriculum over the last 8 years. Knowing that empathy can emerge as a shared core value in social work and in education seems to imply that curriculum overall could model more openly the representation of this value, and that this value should not be spoken to but rather constructed with in environments of education. This is where I see myself as an empathic educator, where my lived experience and the lived experience of the student interact with each other in a holistic sense.

The relationship between empathy and morality is clear in the literature. Hoffman’s (2000) broad definition of empathy considers our ability to understand the feelings and understandings of others as being essential to moral development. Are we teaching morality then when we are teaching empathy? The literature strongly suggests
that learning empathy may be a requirement for moral conversations in the classroom and beyond. Mary Gordon’s (2005) Roots of Empathy Program seeks to nurture the capacity for these moral conversations by exposing children to the feelings and cognitions of empathy at an early age in the classroom. Another example comes from Feuerverger (2001) in her book, *Oasis of Dreams*, where she sought to create moral conversations through the context of the lived experience of students in a Jewish-Palestinian elementary school. This endeavor existed within the backdrop of intergroup conflict. Feuerverger (2001) focuses on narrative as the link to teaching morality. This link to lived experience through narrative then, may support not only the experience of empathy but also our ability to take empathy further into the moral realm of choices and actions. By having conversations about empathy within the context of cultural competence, social justice, anti-oppressive practice, and diversity, my students and I can learn and practice empathy together within a moral context. Within a much broader vision, it makes sense for me to consider the narrative of empathy within a moral context for myself and for others.

The feeling of community that was nurtured through the writing process in this research study is an example of the kind of community that I desire to create in the classroom. I have experienced writing as a tool for learning self that I will also continue to practice in the classroom for myself and my students. I am most humbled by the experience of positioning myself within the literature and the writing of others that resonate so deeply with my beliefs and my values. My vocations of teacher and counsellor have merged together in ways that have supported my self-knowledge of who I am becoming as an educator. It has occurred to me that teacher and counsellor are closely aligned for me and that, regardless of the role that I am in, I am still educator, first
and foremost.

I see myself as an advocate for empathic and holistic curriculum that supports the development of the whole person. I loved how Susan spoke of wholeness in her writing. “With undivided attention, listen with the eyes, ears, mind and heart.” (Susan’s Reflection of Stories 4–6). John Miller speaks of the “thinking heart” as teaching from wisdom and compassion, which focuses on the whole person—body, mind, and soul (Miller, Irwin & Nigh, 2014). Susan, Lauren and I courageously placed ourselves within this research from our “thinking heart”. I felt this from all of our writing. This heart thinking embodies who we are and who we can become as educators. I am now an educator who understands how to teach a required curriculum of empathy with depth and clarity, where the life experiences of my students, their feelings and understandings, offer connections to themselves in relation to others. I am hopeful that this meaning-making, when experienced by my student learners, offers pathways to the heart and soul for each one of them. I aim to illuminate the dark back corners of the classroom and draw those hiding there to the forefront of their own lives. My hope as I end this study is much as Feuerverger (2007) has described in her work in disparate communities.

These teachers are not afraid to face their relationship with the “other”, to their own experience and hence to negotiate the interplay between identity, language and cultural differences. They look within their own village school and within themselves for strategies of negotiation as well as seek conceptual guidance from professional and academic sources from outside. All face the issues of desire and loss as they develop curriculum. It is a question of belonging—to retrieve that which has been expropriated emotionally. Thus they continue to push the limits in
their dynamic interaction and to struggle for greater voice as they reach higher
and higher and dig deeper and deeper in their community building and social
REFERENCES


  https://youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw


Anonymous in death, now given identity

British ‘home children’ sent to Canada to build a better life often suffered a sad fate

Christopher Reynolds
Staff Reporter

Charles Bradbury was still a child when his throat was slit with a razor on Feb. 1, 1897. His charred remains were found the same day in a burned-down barn near the Don River.

The live-in farmhand had quarrelled with his landlord and employer before falling into a “sulky fit” and earning a “slight kick” from the plowman, a local newspaper reported two days later. The man was never prosecuted for his death, dubiously deemed a suicide.

Several news stories, a name and a number — 983 — scribbled onto a graveyard plot card are all that survive to mark the boy’s existence.

Charles is one of 75 children whose remains lie buried, unmarked and virtually forgotten in a pair of mass graves at an Etobicoke cemetery. They were Drops in the wave of British home children sent in droves from the U.K. to build a fresh life on Canadian soil.

Now a research group has dug up their identities, giving new life to youths all but anonymous in death. The revelation unfolded as part of an effort to reclaim the pasts of more than 185,000 children shipped across the Atlantic as indentured servants between 1869 and 1948.

“This thing at Park Lawn Cemetery was held under wraps for many years,” said Lori Oschefski, who heads the British Home Child Advocacy and Research Association.

The non-profit, which she leads from Barrie, researched the children’s dates of birth and family backgrounds (five of the 75 remain unidentified).

“We can’t just let the children go unrecognized and not know who they are,” Oschefski said. “Every life is valuable.”

Some — like “Baby Boy Ray,” born and died April 9, 1920 — were stillborn or infants. Others were teenage mothers who died in childbirth. Still others died from diseases like tuberculosis or septicemia, succumbing in some cases to a lack of proper medical attention.

Oschefski has spent much of the past two years tracing the children to families in the U.K. The only hint of their internment was the misspelled names on their plot cards, collecting dust on a cemetery shelf, as well as a solitary stone in remembrance of one of the children and “dedicated to the memory of the members of Dr. Barnardo’s Homes.” The second plot has a headstone, a grassy void in a forest of granite.

“There ain’t many records,” said Ron Comek, in charge of plot sales at Park Lawn, who said he didn’t know of the graves until recently. “I’ve been in this business 35 years and I’m still scared to go up there.”

Comek noted the two plots, still owned by the Barnardo’s children’s charity after more than 120 years, lie in the oldest part of the cemetery, mouldering undisturbed by memory or footsteps. “It was very difficult to find them.”

Barnardo’s, founded in England 150 years ago by Christian evangelist Thomas Barnardo, took responsibility for tens of thousands of the children contracted out for years at a time to rural families in Canada. Dozens of other receiving homes did the same, but on a smaller scale.

At the time, authorities believed they were solving a problem: Destitute children in the overcrowded, disease-ridden cities of Victorian Britain needed a fresh start; Canada’s rural areas needed labour.

All too often, the freshly minted farmhands and domestics — many as young as 10 — emerged from poverty or orphanhood overseas to find abuse, neglect and isolation on the other side.

Barnardo’s did not respond to requests for comment.

Oschefski discovered the mass grave partly by luck. Her husband was visiting an antique shop when the owner mentioned he used to play in Park Lawn, despite the “rumours” of a mass grave filled with children.

Expecting to learn of a dozen plots at most, Oschefski contacted the cemetery. They sent her a list of 75.

“That just blew me away,” Oschefski said.

Over 50 years, their remains were pilled into plots intended for no more than 24 caskets.

Jennifer Harrington, who curated an ongoing home child exhibition at Black Creek Pioneer Village, said many home children “were treated poorly, or even terribly abused.”

One article from 1905 on the death of a 15-year-old Barnardo’s child reads: “The autopsy showed he had been prodded with a pitchfork, was under-nourished and poorly clad and bruised, had severely frostbitten hands and feet, and fractured skull. He lay on a bed of manure in his coffin.”

Harrington noted the sense of shame that accompanied the term home child. “They felt a bit like outcasts, and sometimes they were treated that way.”

Some were well cared for and taken in as family. The children were supposed to go to school, though this often depended on the farmer’s needs and harvest season.

“They worked on the farm with the idea that they would… have a nest egg once they were adults,” released from their contract at 18, with their meager earnings supposedly held in trust by organizations like Barnardo’s, Harrington said. “Payment didn’t always happen.”

Oschefski hopes to raise $15,000 to install a memorial with the names of all 75 children at Park Lawn.
Anonymous in death, now given identity

Barnardo’s home children at the landing stage at St. John’s, N.B. Rural Canada needed farmhands. Thousands of destitute British children needed homes.

(Reynolds, 2016)
Appendix B
Participant Information Package and Informed Consent

Questions That Position This Research

As a research participant you will be participating in a writing inquiry, using the following questions as a guideline.

1. How did I, and the research participants (teachers who teach empathy), learn empathy in our life experience, and how do we embody this learning in our lives and teaching practice.

2. How do I, and the research participants, recognize the presence of empathy (or not), in our educative experience as students and as teachers? What effect does this awareness have on our understanding of how to teach empathy or how to construct an empathic curriculum?

3. What are the subjective attributes of empathy that are identified through the lived experience of the research participants, and how do these attributes create the core conditions for embodied knowing.

4. How does this enhanced conscious awareness of embodied knowing construct empathy as a value and a moral conversation that informs self-understanding and a sustainable teaching practice that is socially constructed.

Choosing a Story

Please use the following questions to help you decide how to start writing your first story. Choose the topic or question that links or connects to a life experience that you can story. You do not have to choose from this list. You may choose your own story that you are drawn to after reading the research questions for this study. This
is not a reflection but rather an actual story of lived experience. You will have an opportunity to reflect on the story after you have written it. The story that you write will create the content for your reflection later.

**Write a story about a lived experience of empathy**

An experience of empathy that I remember from when I was a child

How I felt when someone was mean to me

Something that my favourite teacher did for me

My worst teacher ever

The nicest thing that anyone ever did for me

One time when I understood how empathy supported my work with others

A story about a teacher and student relationship

How I felt when someone judged me

When I didn’t have a voice

When I learned something important about my Self

An experience in education where I felt supported

A student whom I can’t forget

My biggest regret ever related to my work with students

Being the best teacher I can be

When I knew I was an empathic person/teacher

How I model empathy in my teaching practice, an example through story

Teaching empathy and how a student received this teaching

A conversation about empathy that took place in the classroom

How you have received empathy as a teacher
How you give empathy as a teacher

A positive experience of learning in the classroom

A negative experience of learning in the classroom

A time when someone gave you advice

I realized I had my own story when...

Something that happened in my family

My best friend

**The Process for Writing a Story**

The writing process in this research study will support what Clandinin and Connelly (1994), refer to as inward, outward, backward and forward.

By inward we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hope . . . By outward, we mean existential conditions, that is the environment . . . By backward and forward we are referring to temporality, past, present and future. To experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways. (p. 417)

As a participant in this research study you will choose a starting point for the writing of your stories. The writing process will require you to write stories and to reflect on those stories. After each story, you will consider the content of your story and you will write and reflect further on this content. The content of your stories, your lived experience, will provide the text (research content) and the reflecting surface for this research study. After the writing of each story you will write a reflection on that story using the following questions to support this process. Then, write your next story.

Has anything new become clear?

How has the writing process informed me?
Is there another story within this story?

If someone else were to read this story, what might they say to me?

Have I learned something new about my self?

What do I know now that is different from what I knew before I wrote the story?

Is there a different way to interpret or reframe the experience that I have storied?

How has this story elevated my understanding of my own experience of writing stories?

If I look into the space between the beginning and the end of my story, what do I see?

How do I feel now that I have written this story?

Is it important to share this story, and if so, why?

What is important for me to continue to write about now that I have written this story?

**Writing Stories in Increments of 3**

After you have completed writing 3 stories, take a break in your writing process to reflect on the following and provide a written reflection. You may add your own questions and thoughts to this reflection.

What do my stories have in common?

Are there shared meanings between my stories?

What stands out for me when I consider the collective experience of writing my stories?

Does this collective experience inform me in some way?

How is my writing process supporting my understanding of empathy as lived experience?

What stands out for me when I consider the 3 stories that I have written?

Are there common themes and connections between the stories?

What is important to talk about further now that I consider the content that I have constructed in my stories?
What can I share with others about these stories that may be relevant to the lived experience of others?

What do I feel that I need to write about further?

How do my stories relate to the research questions of this study?

Considering my stories, how might I respond to these research questions?

Has my writing led me to consider questions that may guide my empathic inquiry further?

Has there been a shift toward a more conscious self-understanding of empathy and, if so, why do you feel that you have experienced this from the writing of your stories?

**The Sharing of Stories**

After the writing of 3 stories the authors of this research will come together to share and reflect on the collective research content and to determine how the current writing informs the writing of the next 3 stories within an individual and group context. This writing cycle may be considered metaphorically as a kaleidoscope, where what we see individually when we look through the lens of our own stories can be adjusted and reinterpreted as we shift the individual lens to one of community. We can create the potential to turn the lens and see something entirely different. In my experience, stories may also be viewed as a spiral, where each story told elevates an expectation for the next. Once a story is told, we may consciously consider this story as a movement towards something else that is different from the previous experience before the writing. It is elevated and positioned in a more conscious place within our minds and in our hearts.