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Multimodal Narrative Inquiry: Six Teacher Candidates Respond

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Abstract

In this paper we present findings of a study on the implementation of a multimodal teacher narrative inquiry component, theoretically grounded by Rosenblatt's theory of transaction analysis, methodologically supported by action research and practically enacted by narrative inquiry and multimodal learning. In particular, the component offered teacher candidates a variety of multimodal activities, such as teacher body biographies, teaching museum and metaphor medley, all of which encouraged them to inquire into their teacher narratives both aesthetically and efferently. Portfolios consisting of resolution scrapbooks and reflective journals offered places to archive working material emanating from the teacher candidates' responses to the activities. A close reading of journal entries, the resolution scrapbooks, and the written transcripts of a focus group indicated that the teachers not only gained insight into their own narratives, but they also added to their

repertoires of teaching. At the same time, we acquired valuable information on future implementations.

Introduction

In the pedagogical agendas of the classroom, narratives act as the lenses, the spectacles, the theoretical perspectives through which teachers perceive their worlds and act upon them. Whether it is the reaction to a student's answer on an assignment, or the critical questioning of commercial materials about to be implemented in the school, teachers' narratives play integral roles in their daily instructional decisions. Jersild (1955) so thoughtfully articulated that unless teachers are endeavoring to understand themselves, they cannot make much headway in understanding and engaging their own students in the process of self-inquiry. Hence, ongoing inquiry into teachers' recurring narratives deserves further investigation. This paper focuses on the implementation of a short-term component of multimodal teacher narrative inquiry, theoretically grounded by Rosenblatt's theory of transaction analysis, methodologically supported by narrative analysis in relation to action research, and practically enacted by narrative inquiry and multimodal learning. More specifically, we asked, "What are the effects of a component of multimodal teacher narrative inquiry on the recurring narratives of six pre-service teachers?"

Background

Narrative Inquiry

Individuals' perceptions, based on their backgrounds, prior experiences, and subjective interpretations of life events, affect the choices they make (LaFontaine, Garner & Miedema, 2003). In the case of teachers, these perceptions and choices, otherwise referred to as narratives, are bound to influence their participation in teaching, from establishing a system of classroom management to knowing when to intervene in a student's struggle with learning to read. Watts (1999) emphasized that individuals "narratize" themselves in relation to their encounters with the world. Furthermore, Schulz and Ravitch (2013) posit, "Narratives illuminate the particular experiences of individuals" (p. 37). Pertinent research underscores the integral role that narratives play in the development and implementation of teachers' daily pedagogical agendas (Clandinin and Huber, 2002; Lortie, 1975; Fairbanks, Duffy, Faircloth, He, Levin, Rohr, & Stein, 2010).

For example, in his article on the lived experiences from his past life Leggo (1995) spent a week in the present walking through what remained of his childhood neighbourhood, which he commemorated in poetry, always acknowledging its recurrent influences. As Leggo states, "I know that I am selective in the scraps that I retrieve and keep...the experiences in ways that call forth identification...experiences that help define and shape and construct us as human beings" (p. 10). During their conversations on narrative inquiry, Saleh, Menon and

Clandinin (2014) emphasized the importance of continuously inquiring into the diversity of personal elements that they bring to their work as educators and researchers. More specifically, the three authors came to understand that their current modes of perception or narratives can be revisited and revised as they “work to attend to and honour the complexity of lives lived in different places, in different times, and structured by different landscapes” (p. 280). When Schultz & Ravitch (2013) began the Narrative Writing Group to gather stories about new teacher experiences of learning to teach in relation to two different pathways to teaching—a university-based program and an alternative program—they found a plethora of factors such as parental influences, mentor teachers, earlier memories, and a need to foster change in society, all of which played instrumental roles in shaping the teachers’ recurring narratives. As Schultz and Ravitch posit, “Teaching is a complex and ever-changing activity that requires teachers to respond to their students and the curriculum strategically and in the moment” (p. 44). In his seminal book on teacher awareness of their storied lives, Jersild (1955) states, “When teachers face themselves, they face a hard struggle, but they also look forward to great rewards” (p. 125). Hence, further investigation is needed to expand the range of practices available for fostering teacher narrative inquiry.

Multi-modal Learning

Multi-modal learning, defined by Siegel (2012) as “the social practice of making meaning by combining multiple semiotic resources” (p. 671), has the potential to play an integral role in facilitating teacher narrative inquiry. Albers, Holbrook and Harste (2010) claim that multimodalities can tap the full range of individuals’ potential, encouraging them to step outside themselves and see new possibilities. Moreover, Leggo (2008) maintains that narratives can be told in many different genres, from cartoon to clothing, from illustration to journal, from waxworks to yarn. In her response to Louise Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional analysis, Murphy (1998) referred to the importance of using multiple forms of representations and expressions to share reactions to the reading of texts—a key tenet of Rosenblatt’s work. According to Rosenblatt (1986), “The artifact, e.g., painted canvas or shaped marble, can become part of the whole spectrum of transactions” (p. 127). Transacting in pertinent texts such as books, films, photographs and artifacts helps teachers to make sense of their teaching lives or narratives as what Rosenblatt (1968) refers to as a happening or lived-through event.

Rosenblatt’s emphasis on many modes of expressions and representations for educational purposes has been shared by other advocates of multimodal learning. For instance, using visual arts projects to assess reading comprehension skills with secondary students, an English teacher provided them with choices such as painting, drawing, sculpture and photography (Holdren, 2012). The rubric used for the assessment incorporated both process and product, allowing the evaluator to “differentiate between authentic connections/understanding of the text and artful pontification” (p. 698). Despite many of the students unfamiliarity and lack of

confidence with their media of choice, Holdren reported that the “students enjoyed higher levels of engagement with the text, collaborative problem solving, and increased thinking stamina” (p. 700), while creating opportunities for peer collaboration. Bailey and Carroll (2010) investigated Carroll’s use of a multimodal multigenre research project in which her grade nine English students worked with various genres to synthesize their findings about a person who has overcome obstacles or obtained important goals. According to Bailey and Carroll, the students’ use of the multimodalities and multiple genres definitely appeared “to be a vehicle for making them more observant, more analytical, and more creative than they often are when composing only linguistic text” (p. 83). Using a qualitative case study, Costello (2008) investigated the application of collaborative comic book composing in her ninth-grade class, where she encouraged her students to use more easily accessible and economical materials such as scissors, paper and colored pencils to create visual representations of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Concentrating on a specific group of students in her study, Costello found that the students made extensive use of collaboration leading to a “genuine appreciation for each other’s efforts” (p. 6), while garnering a more nuanced awareness of the play as well as an increased aesthetic appreciation.

Wanting to provide teacher candidates, hereafter referred to as teachers, with a wide range of possibilities to inquire both aesthetically and efferently into their teaching narratives, we created and implemented a component of teacher narrative inquiry practically enacted by multimodal learning and theoretically grounded by Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional analysis. Details of the component and its implementation are as follows.

The Multimodal Teacher Narrative Inquiry Component

Context and Participants

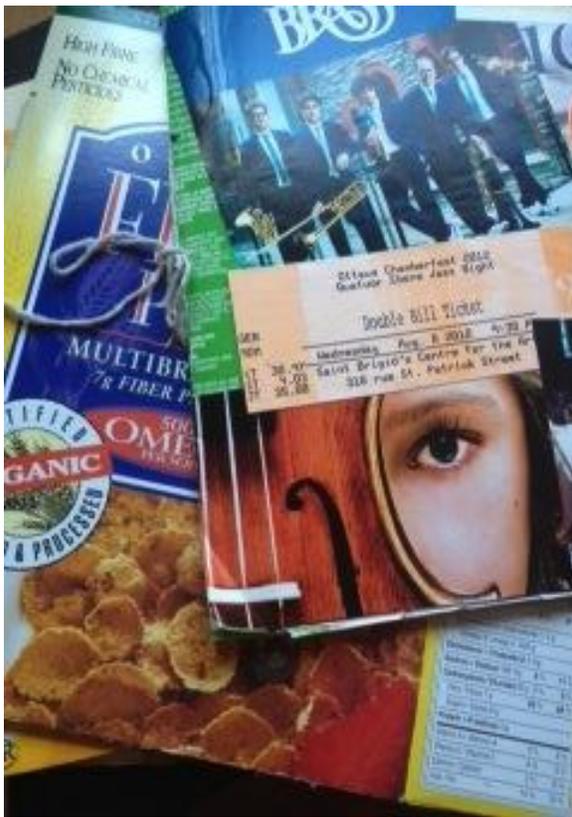
Students accepted into a Canadian teacher certification program were issued a written invitation several weeks before the beginning of the academic year to participate in the study on multimodal teacher narrative inquiry. The multimodal teacher narrative inquiry component, consisting of six two-hour sessions, began the last week in August just before the regular teacher education program commenced. The first five sessions occurred during that week in August, while the sixth session took place at the beginning of the winter term. The one-year regular program, which began in September and ran until the end of April, provided students with academic courses and practicum field experiences to certify them for teaching in the province. During each semester, students took required courses and then fulfilled a four-week teaching practicum in the schools.

The program consisted of three divisions—primary-junior, junior-intermediate, and intermediate-senior. For the primary-junior division, students are not required to declare a teaching subject major. For the intermediate division, students need to declare a single major.

For the intermediate-senior division students must identify two teaching subject majors. Students who enter the teacher certificate program have already completed their undergraduate degrees. The majority of the students come to the program with a background of experiences related to teaching. A number of students may also hold graduate degrees as well as prior work experience in other fields such as finance, engineering, or computer technology. The first six students who accepted the invitation to participate were included in the study. One was enrolled in the Primary-Junior Division, another in the Junior-Intermediate Division, the other four in the Intermediate-Senior Division. The teaching subject majors represented by the group included History, English, Geography, Music, and Biology.

General Description

Facilitated by the reading and viewing of relevant works such as picture books, novels,



excerpts of teacher autobiographies, and film clips, each session was devoted to a particular set of multimodal activities such as body biography, early recollections via paper tearing, poetic responses, and museum displays, all aimed at providing the teachers with a supportive environment to help them make individual and collective sense of their recurring teaching narratives. Portfolios or pocket folders, containing hand-made journals and resolution scrapbooks both constructed during the first session, offered a place to archive their working material from every session for current and future consideration. Taking the lead from the teacher in Costello's (2008) study of the *Romeo and Juliet* Comic Book Project, emphasis was placed on the use of easily accessible and more economic materials, specifically found and repurposed ones such as wrapping paper, cardboard boxes, and string.

Figure 1. Journal cover.

Portfolios: Physical Structure and Materials

On the first day, teachers constructed their journals and resolution scrapbooks, which were stored in pocket folders when not in use. For the journals, which were used to record and store responses arising from the multimodal activities, teachers selected a material of choice (e.g., cereal box cover, file folder, cardboard from commercial packaging) to construct the covers, which they then cut to size to fit the blank white paper supplied for journaling. Next, using a simple binding technique, they attached the covers to the paper, adding personal touches such as their names, photographs, quotations, and drawings. For the resolution scrapbook, teachers used large sheets of cream-colored art paper to construct four-leaf format fold-a-books (Bohning & Cuccia's, 1990), simple origami books that "require not glue, tape, stitching, fasteners, or staples" (p. 527). The final form consisted of a front and back cover and six pages in between. The format and content of the scrapbook pages follow in the order introduced during the sessions.

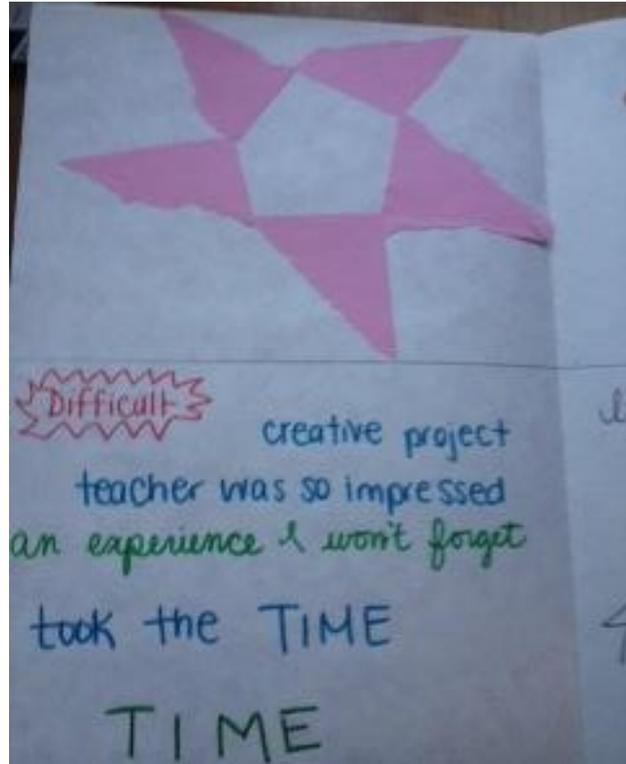


Figure 2. Positive teacher memory.

Session 1, Nameplates

To allow teachers to become acquainted with each other and to begin to establish a conducive environment for the subsequent sessions, teachers participated in the nameplate activity. First, teachers folded a standard-size piece of cardboard in half. Using markers, they then printed their first name on one side of the folded cardboard and on the other side they printed a word that they associated with the term "teaching". Teachers then introduced themselves to the group, identifying and explaining their chosen word.

Session 1, Recollected Teachers—Pages 3 and 4

Adler (1927) asserts, “There are no indifferent [...] recollections” (p. 50). That is, our early memories offer insight into our present beliefs. An adaptation of Colvin’s (1994) activity in which she used images from literature to guide new teachers through various stages of composing a teaching philosophy, this activity focuses on teachers’ early recollections of former teachers. To provide a context for the activity, teachers initially listened to an opening



Figure 3. Negative teacher memory.

paragraph of a narrative from Sandra Cisneros’s (1984) book *The House on Mango Street*, and viewed excerpts from videos featuring Ken Robinson, Maxine Greene and Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Next, referring to a series of reflective prompts as a general guide, teachers listened to several stories from O’Reilly-Scanlon’s (1992) book on individuals’ recollections of former encouraging educators as well as the picture book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998), which thoughtfully conveys a student’s touching story about a teacher who helped the student face herself and learn to read. With a stack of colored construction paper and glue sticks at hand, teachers first identified an event featuring their former teacher’s qualities, and then using Milgrom’s (1992) practice of responding metaphorically to a text, they

selected a colored sheet of paper that best represented the event, and then, with their fingers, tore the paper into abstract or realistic shapes, arranging and gluing them at the top half of page 3. Debriefing occurred in both dyads and whole class formats. Then, teachers wrote about the same event in their journals, underlining key words or phrases, which they next arranged in poetic forms of choice on the second half of page three, followed by whole class sharing. For page 4, the teachers first listened to two excerpts concerning situations where teachers hindered a student’s reading development. The first one, from *Somebody Else’s Kids* (Hayden, 1982), featured a teacher berating a student’s reading performance in front of the class, while the other one, a scene from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), focused on a teacher admonishing Scout for allowing her father to teach her to read. The teachers then went through the same process as above, but focused on a teacher who had a negative or discouraging impact on their learning. At the end of the session, teachers came together and shared the processes they went through to arrive at their two representations of early

recollections of teachers, pointing out reasons for such choices as colors and shapes. For the final segment of the activity, teachers reflected in their journals on the connections they made between their recollected pieces and their current views of what it means to be a teacher.

Session 2: Multiple Intelligences in the Flow—Page 1

To offer additional images of teachers and their approaches to teaching, while setting the stage for the subsequent activity, students viewed two video clips of two distinct teaching styles shown in the film, *Dead Poets Society*. The first one depicted a private school teacher who began his first English class by urging his students to not only question the authoritative voices found in their textbooks, but to also tear out the pages containing their words. The second one showed the headmaster substituting for the English teacher who was eventually

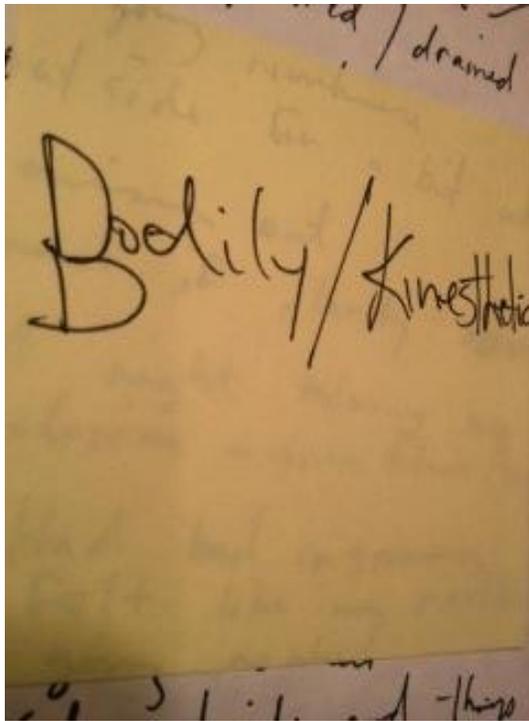


Figure 4. Multiple intelligence in flow.

dismissed. Taking a stern lecture style approach and using the textbook, which unbeknownst to him had pages missing, the students eventually rebelled when their former teacher entered the classroom to collect his belongings. After the conclusion of the lead-in segment, teachers turned to page 1 of their resolution scrapbooks, and participated in a two-part activity. First, the teachers wrote about a specific learning situation where they experienced “flow”—a state of complete immersion in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), such as practicing for a solo violin performance, playing in an intramural basketball play-off, or solving a challenging math problem. Small group and whole class sharing followed. Then, the teachers participated in an overview of Howard Gardner’s (Stanford, 2003) theory of multiple intelligences, and selected two intelligences that best represented their flow experience by writing each one on separate post-it notes. Teachers next approached the blackboard and placed their post-its under corresponding headings of intelligences arranged across the classroom blackboard. A whole-class discussion on the pattern emerging from the placement of everyone’s post-its followed, with special emphasis placed on the way teachers approach classroom instruction in relation to their preferred learning styles and intelligences. At the conclusion of the activity, teachers retrieved their post-its and placed them on page 1 of their resolution scrapbooks. Teachers next reflected in their journals on the connections they made between their recollected pieces and their current views of what it means to be a teacher.

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represented their flow experience by writing each one on separate post-it notes. Teachers next

Session 2: Perceived Sibling Position—Page 2

A primary factor in the family system is the sense of belonging that the child assumes in relation to other siblings, or in the case of only children, the absence of them (Shulman, 1962). That is, the positions that individuals assume and establish for themselves earlier in their own family systems play important roles in the formation and enactment of their teacher identities (Arthur; Shulman, 1962). After sharing excerpts from novels such as *Anne Frank; Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1993), *Jacob Have I Loved* (Patterson, 1980), and *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967), each capturing the essence of a character's experience as a specific perceived sibling

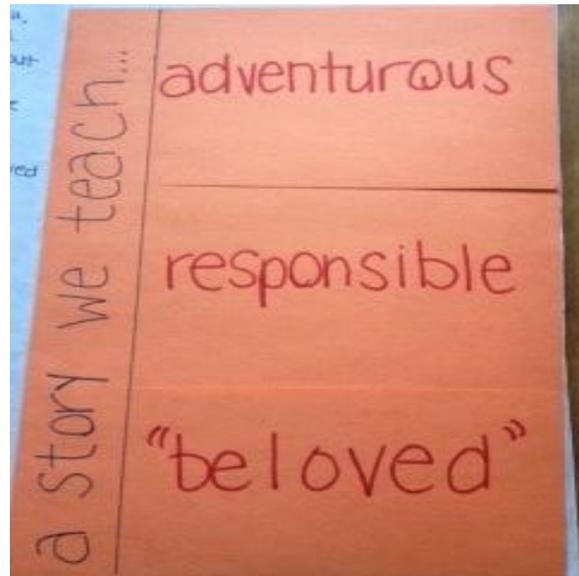


Figure 5. Sibling perception.

position in the family, the teachers were asked to identify their perceived sibling positions in their own family constellation. Next, after grouping themselves according to their identified sibling position, each group composed a list of the characteristics that they felt represented their specific sibling position. All groups then came together to participate in a general discussion on the impact that perceived sibling position can have on the course of individuals' lives. To make connections between the sibling position and teaching narrative, each teacher first constructed a foldable booklet (Fisher, Zike & Frey, 2007) by folding a piece of construction paper in half lengthwise and then making three equally distanced flaps by cutting horizontally from the long edge of the top page to the middle, up to the crease. Next, to represent their own sibling position, each teacher selected three characteristics from their brainstormed list, writing one characteristic on the top of each booklet flap. Under each corresponding flap, each teacher then addressed, in writing, the implications of that characteristic for their teaching practice. A whole group discussion ensued, followed by teachers turning to their journals to reflect on the insights gleaned from the session.

Session 3: Teacher Body Biographies—Page 5

To prepare teachers for the activity, they first viewed a video of the author-artist Ashley Bryan, who makes extensive use of found materials. Next, working in two groups of three, each teacher engaged in a round robin journal response by first responding in her or his own journal for two minutes to the sentence stem, "A teacher is..." Then, passing her or his entry to the teacher on the right, each teacher then read the received entry and responded in writing

to this entry for three minutes. The latter process repeated itself until each teacher receives her or his original response back. A brief discussion with everyone ensued, followed by the teachers reassembling in their respective groups to represent and express their collective version of the concept of “teacher as educator” in the form of a human sized body biography. More specifically, the teachers first drew life-size body outlines on large sheets of paper.



Then, using a variety of colored markers, crayons, pens, various craft supplies, and found materials such as string, yarn, wrapping paper and fabric, they filled in their body outlines with pertinent quotes, descriptive words, symbols, phrases, and physical features. During the process, they drew from their feelings, thoughts and physical reactions, while striving to be creative, analytical and informed. The teachers then taped their respective biography to the wall and presented it, inviting discussion. At the conclusion of the session, photographs were taken of the biographies, just before the teachers responded to the session in their journals. The following day, teachers placed their respective photographs on page 5, composing headings from the text done for the round robin journal responses.

Figure 6. Teacher body biography.

Session 4: Museum of Teaching—Page 6

Teachers first viewed a film clip from *Black Board Jungle*, which featured a teacher in a potentially violent encounter with one of his students. Next, with music playing in the background, and having access to a variety of materials, such as pencils, markers, and crayons, teachers completed the ending of the scene in their journals. First in dyads and then with the whole group, teachers shared their entries, while addressing such questions as the following: What choices did you make to complete the scene? What/Who influenced your decisions? What were you thinking about? What were you feeling? Did you begin with one medium, and then switch to another? Did you want to work with a particular medium, but felt that you would not be able to effectively execute its use? Would you like to develop your skills in a particular medium? At the completion of the discussion, the session transitioned into the main phase of the activity, adapted from Collison’s (2004) lesson on establishing a classroom museum in a secondary literature class. First, teachers began curating their teaching lives by first identifying three artifacts and a related story that they associated with their

teaching narratives. (They were informed the previous day to bring the artifacts to the session.) Having already been assigned designated spaces in the classroom, teachers then arranged their artifacts, each one having a card that contained name, title, medium, date acquired, and pertinent description, including the artifact's significance. After completing preparations for their display, each teacher presented her or his artifacts, sharing the stories behind each one. Teachers then circulated among the displays to obtain a closer view of the artifacts and the accompanying texts (cards). At the conclusion of the session, teachers included the three descriptive cards on page 6 of their scrapbooks, after responding to the session in their journals. Photographs were also taken of the displays and given to the teachers the following day to place in their resolution scrapbooks.

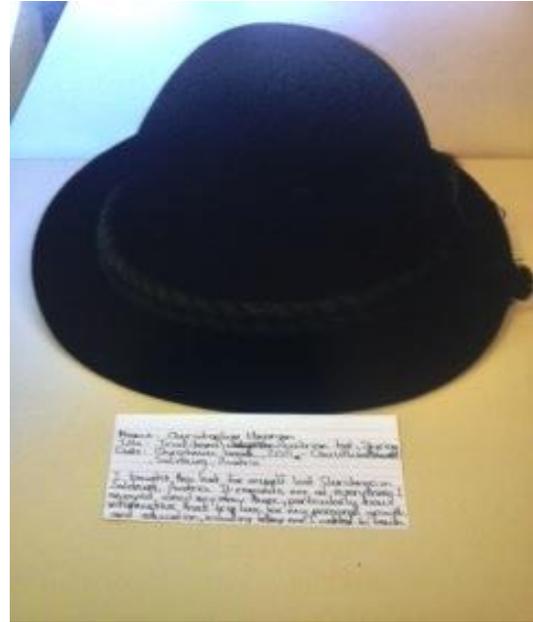
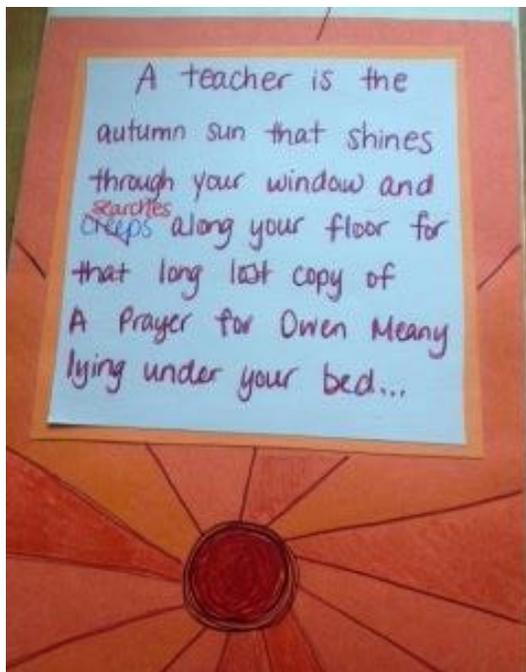


Figure 7. Museum hat artifact.

Session 5: Metaphor Medley and My Letter —Front Cover and Back Cover

Adapted from Garcia's (1990) lesson on using sentence stems in relation to metaphors for



creative writing, this activity made use of metaphors to create another way for teachers to access the stories by which they teach. For the first step of the activity, each teacher made associations in relation to the concept of *teacher* for each of the following words: *building*, *song*, *book*, *film*, *feeling*, *object*, *shape*, *time*, and *sound*. For example, one teacher selected *A Prayer for Owen Meany* for the word *book*, while another teacher chose a Sousa march for the word *song*. Next, teachers, working in their journals and using their associations, composed a paragraph starting with the sentence stem, *A teacher is...* Sharing, first in pairs, and then in the entire group followed. Teachers next selected a portion of their paragraphs to rewrite and illustrate on the covers of their resolutions

Figure 8. Metaphor cover.

scrapbooks. For the back cover, teachers assuming the perspective of themselves as beginning teachers, wrote a letter either to their future students, past teachers, or themselves. In the letter, they made connections from their past and present in relation to their future hopes and dreams as aspiring teachers. Upon completion, each teacher placed the letter in an envelope, and glued it to the back cover of their scrapbooks. At the conclusion of the activity, teachers were invited to share the content of their letters. As was the case in the previous sessions, teachers wrote down their thoughts and feelings regarding the activities in their journals.

Methodology and Related Considerations

Theoretically grounded by Rosenblatt's theory of transaction analysis, methodologically supported by narrative analysis in relation to action research, and practically enacted by narrative inquiry and multimodal learning, this study investigated the following question: What are the effects of a component of multimodal teacher narrative inquiry on the recurring narratives of six pre-service teachers?

Narrative inquiry rooted in action research acted as the primary means of investigation for the study of the narrative component. Aligning with the premise that action research is a form of ongoing examination of the understanding and improvement of one's own practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2006), Reason and Bradbury (2004) contend that the action research, "seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to [...] individual persons and their communities" (p. 1). In particular, Noffke underscored the integral roles that teachers and students can play as creators of knowledge in advancing the field of education (Hirsch, 2014). In the community of classroom learning, both teachers and students play integral roles in providing feedback regarding the theoretical and instructional practices under study. Narrative inquiry, the study of the ways humans experience the world via the construction and reconstruction of their own stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) was the method used to obtain the data or working material derived from each session via the teachers' resolution scrapbooks and journals. As Rossiter (2002) states, "Learners connect new knowledge with lived experience and weave it into existing narratives of meaning of teaching (p. 1). Furthermore Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) posit, "Narrative inquirers study an individual's experiences in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others" (p. 42).

Data Collection

Narrative analysis, in which narrative data are collected from research participants and the narrative data are analyzed for common themes, metaphors, plotlines, and so on to identify general themes or concepts (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) was used for the study. More

specifically, a variety of data collecting procedures, namely two focus groups conversations and teachers' post session daily journal entries, were used to capture the teachers' collective and individual responses to their participation in the narrative component. In addition, teachers' completed resolutions scrapbooks and journal entries done during the activities were consulted for additional information. For the focus groups, which "often produce data that are seldom produced through individual interviewing and observation and that result in especially powerful interpretive insights" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903), each teacher, with her or his portfolio at hand for easy reference, participated in two group conversations based on the relevant collected data. One group occurred at the conclusion of the narrative component, and another at the beginning of the following term. To ensure careful representation, it was at these times that participants had the opportunity to review, extend, and reply to their previous responses and related work (Mertler, 2009). A trained research assistant administered the end-of session journal entries, as well as the focus groups, which were audio taped. The use of the different forms of data collection allowed for rigour, complexity and depth to the proposed research inquiry via triangulation by "process of using multiple perceptions to [...] identify different ways the research is being seen" (Stake, 2005, p. 454).

Data Analysis

Using an inductive approach (Hendricks, 2009; Mertler, 2009) to data analysis, we (the principal researcher and co-researcher) carried out a close reading of both sets of journal entries, the resolution scrapbooks, and the written transcripts of the focus group conversations. Rather than turning to a software program to determine the outcome of our findings, we opted for a more organic and multimodal approach, which would allow us to more closely access the nuances found in the transcripts. More specifically we used colored highlighters to indicate initial themes throughout the pages of data, which we then cut apart and physically arranged and rearranged until we reached a final decision on our findings (McAteer, 2013; Mertler, 2009). Like the researchers (Nolan & Patterson, 2000) analyzing the data from their study on the use of skits to teach English adolescent and adults, I (principal investigator) generated the initial categories and then conferred with the co-investigator, to complete the analysis. Always keeping in mind the research literature and the original question (Baumfield, Hall & Wall, 2013), we periodically stepped back from ongoing inspection and interpretation by way of introspection (Mertler, 2009). "Constant comparison, a thematic form of qualitative work that uses categorizing, or the comparing and contrasting of units and categories of field texts, to produce conceptual understandings of experiences and/or phenomena that are ultimately constructed into larger themes" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 47), played an integral role. We incorporated selected examples of the participants' multimodal works to illustrate specific aspects of the research findings, which we now present within the framework of five themes—(i) expanded teaching repertoires, (ii) collaborative and individual reflection, (iii)

teaching practice, (iv) logistics, and (v) connections to the program.

Findings

In her work on literature and the arts, Cornett (2007) posits that fun and enjoyment are integral to learning. All six teachers unanimously agreed that their participation in the narrative component was a positive one. The words “fun”, “enjoyable”, and “cool” emerged throughout their comments. In fact, one teacher remarked, “This scrapbook is a brilliant idea”, while another one said, “I could have spent all day here”. A third teacher, who arrived after one of the sessions started for the day exclaimed, “Came late today...not by choice, however; I really enjoy being here! A fourth teacher added, “The tactile and creative aspects were fun and satisfying”.

Expanded Teaching Repertoires

As they considered their own practice as both researchers and artists, Albers, Holbrook, and Harste (2010) recognized that “what we say (e.g., statement) is shaped by how we say it (e.g., aesthetics, techniques, background experience)” (p. 165). The six teachers all provided comments that support the use of multimodalities for their narrative inquiry and future teaching practice, while offering insight into their preferred ways of learning. For example, one teacher remarked, “but I think the way we did it was definitely really excellent and better than sitting here, reading and doing a straight discussion like school, seminar wise [...] it was fun to work with different materials”. Another concurred, “We learnt various ways to express something in a different way as a community... as we are disconnected to these things as we mature.” A different teacher added, “It’s nice to work with hands for a change [...] adds texture to the curriculum and encourages abstraction.” When Berghoff, Borgman and Parr (2003) co-taught and experimented with an arts-infused curriculum in their teacher education classes, they found that as their students shared “with each other, they realized how powerful learning can be when learners are allowed to make meaning through their preferred modes” (p. 361).

Some of the activities that the six teachers mentioned as memorable for delving into their teaching narratives included creating and maintaining the journal, the museum activity, and the use of the film excerpts to generate reflection. Most of the teachers felt that the construction and use of the journal provided them with benefits for inquiring into their narratives. For example, one teacher who appreciated the journal because she could use her favored mode of expression—writing, remarked, “Having us make our own journals is interesting because there is an element of pride in making something yourself. Another teacher appreciated “learning how to weave the yarn into the cardboard.” For the museum activity, a number of teachers commented on creating their displays, especially collecting the various artifacts. For example, two of the teachers found identifying their artifacts a challenge

that made them think back to their past in relation to their present as beginning teachers. The film excerpts used as lead-ins to the sessions prompted some of the teachers to also make

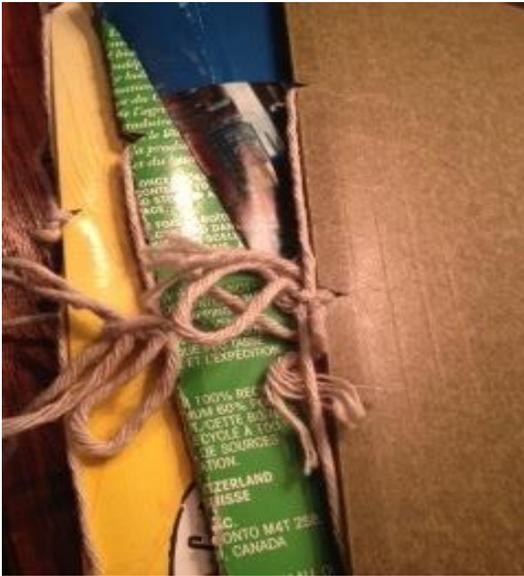


Figure 9. Journals.

connections from their past. To quote one teacher, “The films [...] sparked up personal memories from within the classroom and our teaching initiatives.” Another teacher who created a cartoon for his response to *Blackboard Jungle*, claimed that the music influenced him to produce a specific ending with “..the trade-off being that I did not think seriously about what I would have done if I had been the teacher. Thinking now, I believe I would have backed off.” As Short, Kauffman, and Kahn (2000) stated in relation to their work on multiple sign systems, “the process of taking understandings created in one sign system and moving them into another [...] is not a simple transfer [...] because the meaning potentials in each system differ.” This same teacher, however,

later commented on the “variety of non-conventional, expressive activities [...] as the biggest aspect of the narrative component.” In her study on the use of transmediation in language arts, McCormick (2011) found that “Translation forces them [the students] to confront ambiguity” (p. 581), and consider if the meanings created in one system extends and strengthens the meanings in the second system.

The body biography received special recognition as a vehicle for learning and teaching. Identifying the activity as one of her favorite exercises, one teacher articulated, “It was a creative way to get at what a teacher really is [...] I can see myself using this in class sometime. Creative activities like this tend to stick in a person’s mind, so this would theoretically be beneficial to the memories of students.” As Orzulak (2006) maintains, “when teachers can experience teaching techniques as active participants, they can imagine new methods for engaging students as creative participants in the classroom” (p. 79). One teacher in particular who had acknowledged that she felt more comfortable expressing herself in a linguistic medium and had no inclination to use visuals remarked that she did, in fact, benefit from her engagement in multimodalities and felt “it is one I should be using.” The teacher continued, “It was great to see how recycled goods could make a beautiful piece of art [body biography]. I really enjoyed the magic [...] and it was good to be reminded of this experience, and realize how important it is to allow students to have this experience.” During the course of her commentary, she acknowledged preventing one of her former tutees from using a more

kinesthetic way of learning. She concluded, “Some people like drawing, some writing labels, and some using 3D physical objects.” As Stanford (2003) concluded in her work on multiple intelligences, “Because of individual differences among students, teachers are best advised to use a broad range of teaching strategies” (p. 39).

Another teacher, who identified himself as a cynic and initially viewed participation in the teacher narrative activities as “more like self-indulgences than self-explorations”, found the body biography activity “very fun and definitely something that would be good to use.” In her research on the factors in teachers’ lives that influence their actions and beliefs in the classroom, Vinz (1996) makes the point, “Reliving and reconceptualising our experiences isn’t just narcissistic, it’s a way to effect new connections in experience and to see that what we set out to do has some underlying pattern, which sometimes needs to be challenged” (p. 7). In fact, during the second follow-up focus group this same teacher conceded, “The biggest aspect of the narrative component “was the variety of non-conventional, expressive activities that we engaged in.” In particular, it gave him a preliminary taste of the kinds of lessons he encountered in some B.Ed. classes, either for personal reflection or future use in the classroom. As Short, Kauffman and Kahn (2000), emphasize, “Although we have different abilities within different systems, we all have the potential to use these systems as tools for making and sharing meaning” (p. 169). They continued, “If we had been immersed as students in these systems [...] we would be able to use them in more meaningful ways in our lives today” (p. 169).

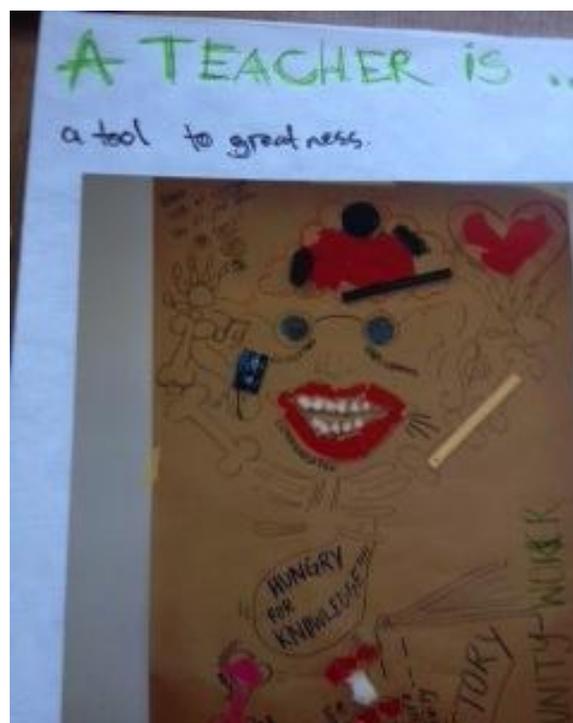


Figure 10. Teacher body biography.

Collaborative and Individual Reflection

Studying the implementation of alternative ways of knowing and interacting in a secondary school English class encouraged O’Donnell-Allen and Smagorinsky (1999) to rethink their own teaching and “reconsider the power available through classroom interactions that build on respect, consideration, support, and collaboration” (p. 40). A similar reaction appeared throughout the six teachers comments in relation to their participation in the narrative component. In general, they agreed that the collaborative aspect of the narrative component

provided opportunities to learn from each other, while inquiring into their individual teacher narratives. One teacher in particular remarked, “Having a discussion while in the act of creating is a good way to dissolve boundaries. People can feed off of each other physically as well as mentally.” Another teacher focusing on her group’s vision of “teacher” in the body biography activity added, “Showing what a teacher means to us through these crafts and statements allowed me to discover what other students thought teaching was and their own experiences.” In her insightful and inspiring book on creating and reading visual texts in the English language arts classroom, Albers (2007) emphasizes that the use of multiple forms of meaning making encourages individuals to “pay attention not only to what someone is expressing, but how what is being expressed is constructed” (p. 11).

During the first focus group, when one of the teachers asserted, “the best part was hearing other people’s ideas and other people’s experiences”, the other teachers readily nodded in agreement, including still another teacher who echoed, “The best part of it was sharing and hearing everybody else’s internal reflections.” In particular, the teachers also all concurred that the exposure to the other teachers’ thoughts and feelings greatly contributed to their own teaching narratives. When Cuero, Bonner Smith, Schwartz, Tuchstone and Vela (2008) engaged teacher candidates in the use of aesthetic representation to explore the complexities of reading comprehension, they found, “the process benefitted students not only as artists, but

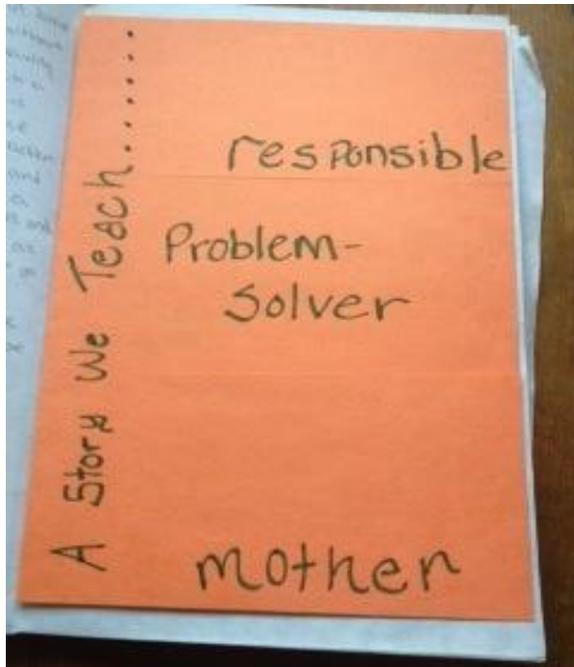


Figure 11. Sibling perception.

also as audience members. As each aesthetic representation was shared, other students had the opportunity to add to their schemata of reading comprehension” (p. 20). This same sense of shared learning continued to emerge across the six teachers’ comments. For example, one teacher emphasized the body biography “made me look at new insights on what teaching is...” Another teacher, referring to the museum activity, maintained that the artifacts included in the other teachers’ displays inspired her to consider her own selections. In his work on the arts and the creation of mind, Eisner (2003) concludes, “We learn through interaction how to use our mind” (p. 341). One of the teachers, claiming that he had always been an introspective individual and had not learned anything further about himself as a person, later admitted that the group work had

influenced his personal opinions and prompted him to consider, “what does that mean for me

as a teacher?” Furthermore, when he reflected on the perceived sibling position activity, he commented, “reflecting about the study in the months to come will be useful and insightful”, especially in relation to “working with a larger group and then actually working with people who were in the other position and seeing how they interact.” Another teacher, also referring to the perceived sibling position activity said that hearing other teachers’ experiences in their sibling position sparked insight into her own position as an oldest child. That is, “I think that played a huge part in my experience especially being asked to stay home from school and babysit.” According to Nicoll and Hawes (1985), “From the day we are born, families remain powerful influences [...] The particular lifestyle or personality of individual members will be affected by their perceptions of personal value within the family constellation” (p. 149). In their article on the merits of facilitating critical inquiry in teachers in relation to authentic group process, Jordan and Kaplan (2014) assert, “collaboration is the act of co-constructing knowledge” (p. 30). In the case of the six teachers in the narrative component study, it is apparent that interaction with each other played an important role inquiring into their teacher narratives.

Researching on the professional identities of teachers in relation to curriculum making, Schultz and Ravitch (2013) state, “Narratives illuminate the particular experiences of individuals” (p. 37). Delving further into the teachers’ responses, insights gleaned from narrative work of a more individual nature appeared. For instance, in reference to the journals, one teacher remarked, “the journal entries were helpful because they could capture our personal experiences in the group setting.” Another teacher, who found that creating the journal from scratch made it all the more personal, added, “Taking the time to activate a response to various activities and sessions certainly made me think about them more.” Smith (2001), an advocate of journaling because it provides a vehicle for self-reflection posits, “In journaling, students are given an opportunity to talk to themselves [...] and personally discover the new ideas they are attempting to process (p. 3).

When investigating the representations of teachers in popular films, Harris (2009), remarked, “If, by watching a film, we question [...] what it really means to be a teacher; then perhaps the cinematic experience will have some resonance for critical debate” (p. 17). The teachers’ attention to their increasing self-awareness as teachers also appeared in their comments regarding the activity on the film clip from *Black Board Jungle*, where the high school teacher had to confront a student brandishing a knife, and the six teachers had to complete the scene in a mode of their choice. For example, one teacher explained that he would have used positive peer pressure to empower himself and influence the attitude of the aggressive student, buoyed by “My past experiences with “problem” children, informing my decision.” A different teacher shared, “I am not afraid if someone starts mouthing off to me because that’s what I used to do too and I know how to deal with it [...] it is reflective on how you perceive yourself”, while another remarked, “I’m a peace-loving person and I don’t believe violence is

ever the answer so that influenced how I would react.” Still another teacher, remarking that the activity could be a study unto itself, intimated, “That is something that really concerns me because I’m a very quiet non-confrontational person [...] and if I had to deal with them [making reference to students she had seen in the library] on a daily basis, I don’t know what I would do.” This same teacher added that she would like to have spent more time on this activity. Recent research regarding the concerns of beginning teachers indicates that classroom management surfaces as the biggest challenge (Goodwin 2012) and teachers value the support they receive from their more experienced colleagues (Bieler, 2012).

Other activities that generated working material on a more individual level for the teachers’ narrative inquiries included recollected teachers, the flow, the final letter, and the nameplate. In the case of recollected teachers, one teacher conveyed in the second focus group that the activity “really got me thinking [...] those two extremes [...] are really nice reference points.” Never having deliberately considered the influence of a negative teacher on her life before, engaging in the activity “reminded me of how important a good teacher can be and how a bad teacher can exert a negative influence over the years, however, subtly.” Another teacher, also considering the notion of “bad” teacher during her teaching practicum stated, “I know for myself that I don’t want to be that or I want to try to be this, so in my practicum it was similar because my practicum teacher did things I absolutely loved and some things [...] I would never do.” In her practice on having teachers compose their teaching lives, Vinz (1996) emphasizes, “Remembering teachers and reflecting on how they have influenced our constructions of teaching, may help us understand our own beliefs and practices” (p. 4).

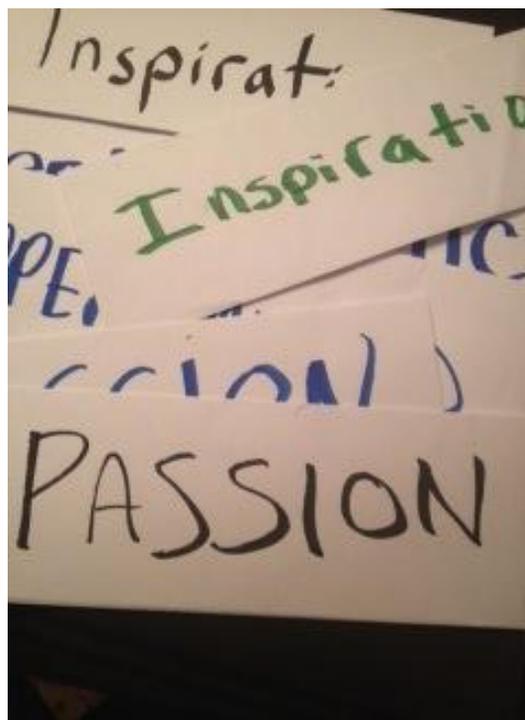


Figure 12. Name plates.

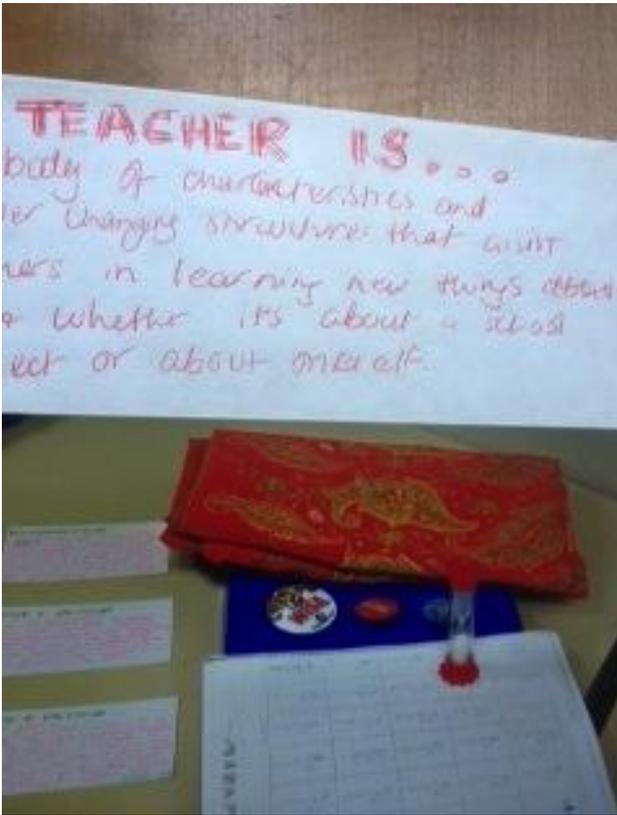
The other identified activities also helped to facilitate the teachers’ self-awareness as teachers. One teacher in particular claimed that the flow activity triggered a nostalgic reaction and underscored the importance of attaining such a state in his own students. He however, questioned, “But how can I accomplish this goal within the confines of the curriculum? I mean I failed with some of them [meaning his former students] [...] and I was so disappointed and then I got frustrated [...] but there is just so much to learn”. Also looking toward the

future and her teaching, a different teacher emphasized the importance of completing the final letter, which she addressed to herself. More specifically, she concluded, “I learned so much about myself through that [...] and I’m excited to read this later and I want to see what could happen after a year.” Finally, during the last focus group, all the teachers provided comments on the nameplate activity, particularly when they were asked to reconsider their initial choice of words for the concept of “teacher”, made at the outset of the narrative component. Although two decided to change their words, and the other four did not, they all agreed that their experiences in the narrative component reinforced their decisions. For example, one teacher kept the word open-minded, declaring, “I think things are always changing [...] and I realized that you have to be flexible to it and you have to have an open mind to welcome change.” Another teacher retained the word “inspiration” because “I feel you have to love what you do and feel the need to be inspired to [...] do it differently”, while a different teacher kept “passion”, which she associates with many things in her life, including linking it to whatever subject matter I’m doing and I wouldn’t change it. Definitely not.” The fourth teacher, also identifying the word “passion” stated, “I guess I’ve had some struggles but the hard work is the one thing that is the constant, always, and that is related to passion.” One of the teachers who elected to change her word from “enthusiastic” to “passionate”, cited “passion as inspiring other passion” in teaching. In fact, during her first practicum, her students claimed, “You just love your teaching subjects and we like learning from you because you are so passionate.” The other teacher expressed the desire to change his word “inspiration” to another one, claiming, “it just feels a little teacher oriented.” This same teacher considered the word “*fostering* or something that is more outward”, but didn’t want to make a commitment to another word just yet. In their collaborative research on narrative inquiry, Saleh, Menon & Clandinin (2014) maintain that narrative work is an ongoing process requiring both personal and collaborative introspection.

Teaching Practice

The six teachers all agreed that their experiences in the narrative activities influenced their future and current teaching practice. For example, one teacher said, “As I volunteer at a local high school, I make sure to give students positive feedback because that was something I really reflected on in the resolution scrapbook. Interestingly, the majority of the comments focused on how the teachers could use the narrative component activities in their own teaching. According to current research (Goodwin, 2012; Bieler, 2012), beginning teachers identify a lack of resources and guidance for lesson and unit planning as one of their major concerns and value any help they can obtain. The six teachers’ comments echo this finding. One teacher commented, “By understanding well ahead of time the importance of multiple intelligences, I was able in class and practicum to create some really good, integrated lessons.” Another teacher who made successful use of the museum activity during her own practicum in a grade five class, and underscored her appreciation of *Faithful Elephants*

(Tsuchiya, 1951/1988), a picture book used as a lead-in for one of the narrative component activities explained, “and it was nice to learn that we could borrow these ideas and use them



in our teaching and initiatives.” In particular, the museum activity allowed her to discuss classroom behavior with the students, while the picture book formed the centerpiece of a lesson. A different teacher also mentioned the museum activity as “something I can use in future classes. In fact, she commented that the narrative component activities “can apply to many subjects in the classroom, which is great.” She also shared that the body biography would be one to use in the future. Because of the challenging nature of the student body in her practicum class, she did not feel comfortable bringing in the body biography because “I don’t think they were ready for some of the activities because we [this teacher and her associate teacher for her practicum] were struggling so much to get them in the room.”

Figure 13. Museum activity display.

Pertinent research (Marquez-Zenkov & Harmon, 2007; Schofield & Rogers, 2004; Schwartz & Pace, 2008) indicates, however, that when teachers expand the curriculum by way of multiple possibilities, from photography and film, to drum making and song lyrics, to cooking and collage, students become engaged in the learning process. As Schofield and Rogers (2004) found, “Teaching entails scaffolding their multiple literacies so that students can find their voice through a variety of media texts as they strive to be heard and read” (p. 247). In fact, one teacher in particular remarked that he used a number of the activities for his practicum assignment—teaching English at the secondary level. More specifically,

we created journals, we kind of did the whole thing like creating it from scratch and from scraps, so they brought stuff and I brought extra things and we just kind of took whatever was available to promote the idea of sustainability [...] I took your museum idea as well. It was awesome. They brought the things we did the cards and everything and it was wicked! We actually had the museum and then we walked around...I think this is really cool because it’s easily applicable throughout any

grade [...] it's trying to get kids on board.

Logistics

When the teachers were asked to provide feedback concerning the logistics of the narrative component, they offered valuable information for future implementation. The six teachers appreciated the general structure of the individual sessions: lead-in exercise, journal reflection, main activity, small and whole group discussions and a follow-up exercise. One teacher liked the semi-structured format, which generated, "great flow", while another appreciated its openness, which "Allowed for self-expression." Reminders that there were no wrong or right answers or pre-determined ways of engaging in the activities, prompted one teacher to state, "So, it was good to just be able to be free, and do these assignments and draw and there is no right or wrong way to making this journal, like if you make it upside down or if you staple it." To encourage creativity in learning, Beghetto (2005) underscores the need for teachers "to provide some level of choice in how students complete the task" (p. 261).

Although a couple of teachers mentioned wanting more time to complete a journal response or continue a discussion, all six supported having one two-hour sessions per day. To quote one teacher, "I think this is an excellent length. Much shorter and we would run out of time, and much longer we would run out of stamina", while another teacher asserted, "It allowed you to get your ideas down without overanalyzing [...] I guess that is part of the point." When they considered the size of the group, all agreed that "six" was an ideal group size for both individual reflection and group interaction. To quote one teacher, "Sometimes when we went around as a group we couldn't voice our entire story, but it was assuring to know that our personal story was written down and it would not be excluded from the research." One of the teachers noted, however, "I felt I got to know half of the group better than the other half of the room [...] like we did stuff in big groups but it would have been nice to mix things up." Despite the differences that emerged, one teacher's comments in particular, seemed to summarize everyone's thoughts about the narrative component, "I never felt like I was spending too much time stuck in my own thing and I never felt that there was too much time as a group [...] So I think they really do work well together, like the individual time and the group time." Finally, two teachers provided recommendations for making future teachers' experiences even better. One would have liked to have the conversations on teacher stories recorded for future reference because "it [the recording] would have provided a greater [record of my] narrative than what I had written down." Another teacher underscored the importance of recognizing family, friends, and colleagues who contributed to their teaching journeys. In particular she intimated, "I know my parents were the biggest factor in my development as a teacher yet very little in this resolution scrapbook would say so--- except(ing) the artifact on page 6."

Although the implementation of the narrative component was carried out with the six

teachers, their recommendations remain valuable for its use with a larger group, such as one integrated into the curriculum of a teacher education program. While whole class discussions with a larger group may necessitate adaptations, smaller groupings of varying sizes as well as individual work could still be effectively included. A study on the effects of group size on student satisfaction and perceived participation involving first year medical students indicated that they preferred small group sessions, which supported their active participation in learning (Kooloos, Klassen, Vereijen, Kuppeveld, Bolhuis & Vorstenbosch, 2011). The length of each session for the narrative component could be extended by one half to one hour. One teacher remarked, “Six was intimate, twelve might have been better, although there would have been less time for sharing.” Another teacher holding a similar view said, “The group of six was actually very interesting and manageable. If we had more, than make sessions longer.”

Connections to Program

During the final focus group, the six teachers voiced their concerns over the lack of opportunities to inquire into their narratives on a regular basis in their current teacher education program. For example, one teacher explained, “I mean some of our final assignments were about our philosophy of education or philosophy of assessment or philosophy of a topic of whatever it happened to be but it was more a culminating task than let's talk about this today [...] but none of the professors really said to talk about teacher narrative.” Another teacher who took my course (principal investigator) said, “Yeah that one, but none of the others.” Still another revealed, “Honestly, I didn't think that was addressed in any of my classes...we never really talked about it too much.” Lamenting on the focus of the professional course that is supposed to address teacher narrative, one teacher exclaimed, “it's been more administrative”, and “it's only once every two weeks”, and as another teacher described, “it's like a strange netherworld that I go to every two weeks.” Schultz and Ravitch (2013) echo the teachers' words, claiming, “while in teacher education programs, they are rarely given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on teaching as a profession and their acquisition of a professional identity” (p. 44). Yet, Jersild's (1955) study involving interviews and conversations with hundreds of teachers suggest to him that their understanding and acceptance of themselves “is the most important requirement in any effort [they] make to help students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance” (p. 3).

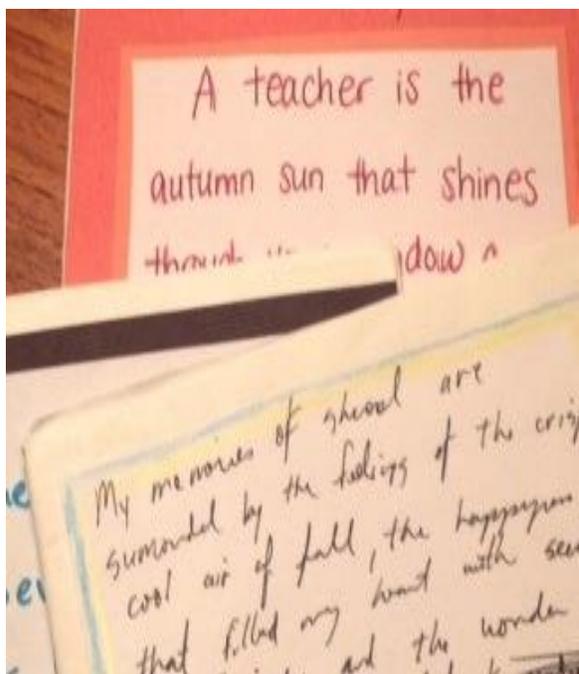
Conclusion

In her classic work on *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, Rosenblatt (1978) states, “Always there is an individual human being choosing, selectively constructing meaning, and consciously or unconsciously transacting with the factors, contextual and human, entering into that particular situation” (p. 187). Several years later, in *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros (1984) confides, “Usually when I thought I was creating someone from my imagination, it turned out I was remembering someone I'd forgotten or someone standing so

close I couldn't see her at all [...] real life stories, rarely come to us complete" (p. xxii-xxiii). It is the nearness of such remembered moments that provide material for our recurrent lives—narrated collages of fast cuttings, juxtapositions, temporal enjambments and shifting points of view (Dillard, 1982). As one of the six teachers confided:

My scrapbook came together with color and texture of experiences, it reminded me my narratives are not structured and sequenced, but consist of depth and color without any specific order. Considering we started from the middle to the end to the first page, I finally noticed that our narratives have no specific end time.

In their research on the diversity of ways of learning, Lafountain, Garner and Miedema (2003) underscore the contributions that Adler made to the areas of multiple intelligences and



learning styles, stating, “Adler would most likely find that when people understand themselves (e.g., how they learn), they are freer to focus on others rather than themselves” (p. 217). In considering the responses of the six teachers who participated in the multi-modal narrative component, it became apparent that they brought a wealth of prior experiences and acquired knowledge to the formation of their recurring narratives, which cannot help but affect their students’ learning. It is here that Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional analysis, specifically, the efferent, what is carried away, and the aesthetic, what is personally activated (Rosenblatt, 1985), becomes apparent in relation to the teachers’ narratives in their recurring classroom presents.

Figure 14. Resolution scrapbooks.

How should I handle the student disrupting my lesson? Where can I find support to implement a new teaching unit? Is it possible to be creative in a curriculum of standards and testing? When should I step outside the boundaries of the designated sequence of classroom learning to meet better the needs of my students? How can I maintain motivation in my students? These questions, and many more not only surfaced in the interactions with the six teachers, but actually emerge on a day-to-day basis for many teachers. “Teaching is a complex and ever-changing activity that requires teachers to respond to their students and the curriculum strategically and in the moment” (Schultz and Ravitch, 2013, p. 44). And, the teachers’ multimodal transactions with their own narratives in the current study played integral roles in

allowing them to address such questions from both efferent aesthetic stances. In fact, Rosenblatt (1981) herself emphasized the value of formulating questions that leads individuals “to think back over what has just been lived through [...] to see the structure of the experience more clearly” (p. 8).

As they moved from journal entry to small group discussion, from artifact to remembered teacher, from museum to film clip, and from letter to body biography, the teachers not only gained insight into their own narratives, but they also added to their repertoires of teaching. At the same time, we, the researchers, acquired valuable information on future implementations of a narrative component, from making adjustments in time for use with larger groups, to varying the membership of groupings to expanding opportunities for interpersonal interaction. In their commentary on the use of multimodalities, Albers, Holbrook and Harste (2010) emphasize that such means of expressions encourage “us to step outside ourselves and see new possibilities” (p. 168). Those teachers, who endeavor to engage in recurrent narrative inquiry, while remaining open to different ways of making meaning, will be in an advantageous position to identify and create such possibilities for themselves as well as their students. To quote one teacher, “I think it is important to learn from our past, and the activities [...] helped us to make sense of our experiences in a way that is pertinent to our future teaching goals.”

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