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## Interwoven Story: A Narrative Study of Textiles as Educators

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### Abstract

Drawing from both narrative research and Joe Kincheloe's work of research bricolage this study inquired into how textiles have served as educator throughout my life. Weaving, as the earliest and most integral of textile fabrications, is particularly featured in this narrative inquiry. A loom, in its most basic form, consists of three components; a rigid weaving structure (the frame), cording to weave onto (the warp), and materials to weave with (the weft). This three-part weaving structure also acted as the metaphorical and physical writing structure throughout my work. Structurally, my work views narrative methods, supported by bricolage, as its research frame. This acts as the main frame for the analytic weaving of the study. The warp of my work were the textiles themselves, serving as the material educator I returned to as anchors for my woven stories. By understanding our own history of clothing, we might *un*clothe our relationship to textiles. This "unclenching" can act as a basis for grounding curriculum that is largely ignored in schools today.

## Weave: An Introduction

*weave*- verb, weev /wēv/

**: to introduce as an element or detail into a connected whole <She wove an old folk melody into her latest musical composition.>**

*One method of weaving is to take a small piece, an element, fragment, or thread, and add it into the whole you are making. Perhaps it is a story you are weaving into; 'I wove my mother's sentiment throughout my own biography creating a sweet, nostalgic whole from my familiar pieces.' Perhaps it is a recipe you weave together, lacing cinnamon into your pie crust to make a whole new pie. Or perhaps, as it is below, you are weaving thoughts throughout a body of work. To make it stronger and spherical. To **weave** the threads of knowledge and self-introspection into your writing.*

### To weave /Introduction

I grew up in French speaking household on a suburban street in English speaking Toronto. As I learned to speak and voice my thoughts I generally adopted a language best described as “frenghish”: an idiosyncratic blend of French and English. Of my employed frenghish the request I made the most was for my mother to allow me to wear *ma bleue robe*; a grammatically incorrect direct translation of the English request for a “blue dress”. I knew what I wanted to wear; I knew how I wanted to look. My blue dress was my favorite and even now I can remember the article as a cotton denim dress that felt smooth between my fingers and swirled around the center of my calves when I twisted to-and-fro.



*Figure 1. The bleue robe; beloved and requested many times.*

Many children begin requesting favorite articles of clothing as they develop and form opinions. These favorite items might reflect a favorite color or perhaps a character from a beloved story. Occasionally the clothing has more to do with sensory intake; a particularly soft sweater or pants that do not fit tightly. These early expressions of identity and aesthetic sensibility are important to a child's sense of self-worth and autonomy. In the formation of "favorites" the early choice-making behaviors that built my many identities were created. My *bleue robe* stays with me to this day as an expression of knowing what I wanted to look like and how I wished for a visceral clothing experience to be. Blue is still my favorite color. A blue dress that swishes is better still. I credit this dress with my early concept of powerful and fulfilling textiles.

I did not come to my own knowledge of textile manufacturing, processing, or artistry in a traditional classroom. I have been shaped by women interested in clothing and fashion; I collected and absorbed their stories. What it meant to clothe myself, where this clothing should come from, what role it served for both my personal world and the larger World; these are questions I answered intentionally. The seed of this knowledge has come from the women in my family; now the knowledge branches and reaches ever up.

My maternal grandmother was always in motion. I do not remember ever seeing her sit during daytime hours; save for her both prompt *and* homemade meals. At seven thirty pm she would sit down to tea and, not long after, go to bed. She was a woman highly concerned with aesthetics; I often remember her pointing to a newly acquired decorative object in her home and telling me her thoughts regarding its perceived beauty. She knew how to sew and made many of her own clothes, curtains, tablecloths, as well as matching clothing for her three daughters. She did not, to my knowledge, sew new clothing for her husband though she did mend and hem his purchased items. Her hand work was pointed out to me by herself within her home and later by her daughters in family photos.

Though she did not teach me to sew, the stories of her sewing have colored my life. I knew that her goodness, work ethic, and understanding of beauty was tied to her ability to sew. There was consciousness to her sewing. She did not knit, embroider, weave, dye, crochet, felt, or engage in any other fiber based art. Sewing was pragmatic and filled a need that seemed attached to her concept of womanhood.

Where my maternal grandmother was motion and vocation, my paternal grandmother was softness and indulgence. She often referred to herself as a "nutritional delinquent" when she delightfully shared cookies with me. She knew how to knit and sew with cheerful competence. She painted wooden furniture with angels and flowers and funny little owls. She stitched cloth dolls and fabric scrap birds. These activities were considered fun; they were a necessary pastime and craft.

Every creative whim I expressed to her was cherished and pursued. When I asked for my doll and me to have matching pink dresses she did not oblige my wish, she honored it. We went to get the fabric together. She made floral barrettes to match without any solicitation from my six-year old self, but with abundant delight. One had the notion that time spent with her always included time to devote to crafting and creativity.

These two women were my textile anchors. I go into the world, both the one I share and the one I create, held strongly by their passions and views. And from their experiences with *textiles themselves* I learned immensely. For then I went and sought the textiles. The respect they had for textiles imbued my learning with a consciousness that the textiles themselves had knowledge to offer me. Upon reflection, I can see that the textiles, often in the hands of a person working them, have served as one of the largest educational themes throughout my life.

### **Why do we weave? /Rationale and Purpose**

Drawing from both narrative research and Joe Kincheloe's work of research bricolage this study inquired into how textiles have served as educator throughout my life. Weaving, as the earliest and most integral of textile fabrications, is particularly featured in this narrative inquiry. A loom, in its most basic form, consists of three components; a rigid weaving structure (the frame), cording to weave onto (the warp), and materials to weave with (the weft) (See appendix A). This three-part weaving structure also acted as the metaphorical and physical writing structure throughout my work. Structurally, my work views narrative methods, supported by bricolage, as its research frame; the inquiry serves as a larger narrative itself. This acts as the main frame for the analytic weaving of the study. The warp of my work were the textiles themselves, serving as the material educator I returned to as anchors for my woven stories. By understanding our own history of clothing, we might uncloth our relationship to textiles. This "unclothing" can act as a basis for grounding curriculum that is largely ignored in schools today.

### **The Warp: Review of the Relevant Literature**

*warp*- noun, wɔrp /wɔrp/

**: the set of yarns placed lengthwise in the loom, crossed by and interlaced with the weft, and forming the lengthwise threads in a woven fabric.**

*The literal warp is the corded structure that supports the weaving on the frame once it is removed. Once a tapestry is woven, the warp structures the threads that are observably part of the tapestry. In this way, the study is warped by a detailed review of the literature; this is the backstage structure that each narrative is woven onto and, invisibly, supports the entire structure of the work.*

**How we warp /Overview**

A textile is largely defined as any form of woven cloth or fabric (Weibel, 1952). There are three main methods in the production of textiles; weaving, knitting, and felting (Weibel, 1952). Often felting is considered a subset of textile manufacturing as many felted fabrics are first knit or woven and only subsequently felted (e.g., boiled wool) (Weibel, 1952). As felting is often described in this way, for the purposes of this study, it will not be discussed further.

Though there is contestation among scholars as to the possibility that knitting does predate weaving, generally it is accepted that weaving is the oldest textile art. Weaving on a basic loom is defined as “the art of interlacing at right angles two or more thread-like elements, friction holding these two elements into one thread like entity.” (Grass, 1955, p. 185). Broadly, knitting is understood as a long series of interlocked loops created from a long string, called yarn, onto a long needle or machine pole (Grass, 1955).

The rich history of both these textile processes underscore the most basic concepts relevant to my narrative exploration. It is important to found all future discussion in a basic understanding of the rich and layered history of textiles. In this way, it will be possible to delve knowledgably into each fold of the fabric of this work.

**The warp of woven culture /Weaving; A Historical Overview**

Regarding textile fabrication, weaving particularly crosses cultures, histories, and time. The basic human need to clothe, to shelter, and to adorn is reflected in almost every cultures’ use of weaving, and more broadly, of textile making. The materials, methods, and uses differ, yet, in the most basic conceptualization textiles are necessary for many human endeavors to take place.

Though historians and archaeologists do express a few differing views regarding the origins of weaving, generally weaving is regarded as the invention of the ancient Egyptians. The Bible makes all references to cloth through woven cloth and the earliest examples of woven fabric we have date to about 6000 B.C., during the Neolithic period (Grass, 1955). Societies that employed weaving as a technique did so for various reasons. The Navajo culture utilized weaving as a narrative to parallel womanhood and the associated body of knowledge; Navajo custom attributes a woven tapestry to bearing a woman’s soul (Kahlenberg, 1972). Greek literature refers to women leaving behind their looms as disruptions to the whole of Greek society (Bergren, 1983).

It is difficult to separate the history of weaving from the history of women; so many of the woven contributions of societies were created and maintained by women. Indeed, the possibility that men acted as weavers is slim, weaving has been entrenched with the work of both the household and the feminine across cultures (Norrman, 2008; Gutiérrez, 1994). An interestingly

poignant statement about the relationship of women to weaving was made by Sigmund Freud, the famed psychiatrist of the early 20th century. In his work entitled *Femininity* Freud theorizes extensively on the relationship of women to their families and concluded with the following statement:

It seems that women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented – that of plaiting and weaving. (Freud, 1933, p. 132)

Certainly, there may be much to criticize within Freud's statement. Overall his controversial, yet influential, views have been much discussed since their initial writing. However, what remains poignant is that when Freud was ready to credit women with *nothing* concerning invention and creation, he paused at weaving. Weaving, Freud muses, is decidedly the work of women from inception through propagation.

### **The warp of knitting /*Knitting and Culture***

The earliest knit artifacts uncovered by archaeologists date back to the middle of the third century A.D. in ancient Syria (Grass, 1955). There is evidence that the ancient Egyptians also practiced the art of knitting; four ankle-style socks were discovered in a Coptic period tomb (Grass, 1955). Look down; the socks found in the tombs did not differ significantly from the ankle style socks manufactured today.

Though many knit goods available today are knit by machine, there is a growing body of individuals who knit domestically (Thakkar, 2008). In 2014, the Craft Yarn Council of America (CYAC) cited a 13% increase in individuals who knitted. This study of 3,100 knitters utilized quantitative survey methods to query female knitters about their preferences, interests, and their perceived benefits as knitters (Craft Yarn Council of America, 2014). This type of work underscores a movement in current culture towards new understanding in the fiber arts.

There is also a growing body of individuals who knit many items, domestically (Thakkar, 2008). JoAnne Turney began unpacking the motivations and themes consistent with knitters of today in her book *The culture of knitting* (2009). Turney argues that the ordinary nature of knitting creates an environment rife for understanding the social and political context of both the late twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries (Turney, 2009, p. 218).

Highlighting four themes within contemporary knitting trends; postmodern humor, activism, biography, and heritage, Turney ends her work by calling for further scholarship on current knitting culture.

Finally, there is considerable research concerning the movement known as “knittivism” which intersects feminist pedagogy, the visual arts, and political activism. Knittivists utilize the knit-

arts as a method of urban intervention (Springgay, 2010). They conceive of knitting as “systematic knitting for political ends” (Thakkar, 2008, p. 177). As activists, knittivists seek to disrupt a dominant dialogue they see occurring daily by installation of knitting pieces which utilize public space and public engagement (Turney, 2009) Yet, this type of activism cannot account for all current knitting activities leaving a gap in the spectrum of current knitting culture in North America.

### **Every classroom: warp! weft! weave! /*Textiles as Curriculum***

John Dewey once described textile use in classrooms as the “point of departure” for all worthwhile educational endeavors (1899). Yet, textile use in curriculum has been largely delegated to the realm of home economics education and, less frequently, arts education. Beginning in the 1950s the work of sewing, knitting, weaving, and spinning have faded from our educational landscape (Mears & Clements, 1983). Today textile work in classrooms is almost gone; this is due to *both* historical lack of textile education and a decrease in both art and home economics education. As both an educator and student I include this section to situate how textiles are learned and taught historically and today. I am left wondering how my own education might have been different had textiles been utilized as a curricular focus when I was in school.

In the late 1800s most education regarding the fiber arts was taught at home, almost exclusively to girls (Gordon, 2007). This domain of existence continued for many years where textiles were the work of at-home education. The gendering of fiber arts was largely due to the nature of roles assigned to women (Gordon, 2007). When courses of study were developed within schools that finally did involve textile arts it often followed the trail of the previously gendered territory.

Textiles merged with school curricular goals mainly in the late 1940s (Gordon, 2007). Courses in home economics led mainly female students through a series of lessons intended to instruct rudimentary sewing and embroidery (Gordon, 2007). The isolated work of home economics courses rarely entered the larger classroom curriculum. Teachers who took the work of textiles into their own classrooms did so mainly for the purposes of arts-and-crafts style lessons, or occasionally to attend to a student with a learning difference (Lowrey, 1979; Newby & Beadle, 1983).

Articles in recent publications continue the work of utilizing textiles as fodder for supplementary art activities. One such article published in *Gifted Child Today* highlights how fabric quilt making might be used as a supplemental experience for the gifted reading student (Black & Erickson, 2001). This curricular suggestion echoes the continued view that textiles should be used as a supplemental tool to facilitate overarching educational goals; the textiles do not serve as a motive or locus of education themselves.

### **Warp your-self /Weaving as Narrative**

Historical scholar Lena Elisabeth Norrman has written extensively about women and weaving. She posits that women not only created and carried out the work of weaving but that the weavings *themselves* can be read as a text, story, or narrative piece. Her work *Viking women: The Narrative Voice in Woven Tapestries* served heavily in the forming of my work and is discussed at length below.

Both weavers and their weavings, in a multitude of historical contexts, have been extensively studied. The concept of reading weaving, however, is relatively new. That a woven artifact might be read, much as text conveys meaning, has roots in the word text itself. Scholar Roland Barthes has argued that etymologically the English word *text* has been derived from the Latin word for *tissue*, a perpetually interwoven fabric (1975). He states “[...] we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue- this texture- the subject unmakes himself” (1975, p. 64). The idea that the word text, at its root, encapsulates the woven narrative reflects the tapestries woven over the course of history. Moreover, it grounds the idea that a woven narrative is possible to read in a physical weaving. It is additionally interesting to note that idiomatic expressions such as “spin a yarn” or “weave a tale” reference both story and textile; a coincidence that is difficult to overlook (Harris, 1975; Norrman, 2008).

In arguing for tapestry as text Norrman has articulated the nature of women’s work as interlaced with their weaving. As women are primarily in charge of rearing children, the world over, they required work that could be begun, put down, and repeated with ease (Norrman, 2008). In this way, she argues, women were engaged in meaningful work that did not interfere with their domestic duties. If a tapestry is “read” then it follows that the female weaver wrote her story while tied to her hearth. This view of history would give voice to the often-voiceless past of women who did not contribute to traditionally written history (Norrman, 2008).

A salient example exists in ancient Heian culture (794–1185 AD; Japan) where women were tasked with producing both textiles and, later, text. After studying the woven tapestries of Heian women Carole Cavanaugh states that “if the Heian woman’s first text was textile, female authorship in the one culturally important activity may have sponsored authorship in the other” (1996, p. 612). Thus, Heian women began their narrative work as weavers and eventually moved to written text. Their work in weaving stories mirrored their later contributions to written narrative, and, their early work acts as an additional narrative itself (Norrman, 2008).

Norrman herself is particularly interested in the weavings of Viking women and how these might be “read”. Embarking on a close examination of the Overhogdal tapestry located in Uppsala University in Svedberg, Norrman begins at the bottom right corner. She argues that both the weaver and reading begin here (2008). She continues:





Figure 2. Micronarrative sample from the Överhogdal tapestry, possibly an excerpt from the story of Brynhildr (Norrman, 2008).

“At this point, the narrator reveals how she would like to tell the narrative by the way she sets up the warp and how she decides to insert the shuttle with the weft, thus deciding what she intends to share with the audience. [...] The first micronarrative consists of a figure lying flat in an enclosed area. The figure may represent someone dressed in unusual clothing, perhaps even armor. [...] One possible interpretation might be the story of Brynhildr...” (Norrman, 2008, p.127).

This type of reading is a literal text transcribed from the narrative of the tapestry. Norrman makes no distinction between the interpretive nature of both her textual story or the woven story; both are a reading. It is not a leap to infer the

reading of non-text items; “oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all” (Ong, 1982, p. 8). The oral expression far predates the written, therefore, the reading of woven non-textual tapestry is simply another dimension of reading a tangible, yet unwritten, expression. That a storyteller, almost always a woman, would weave meaning is a logical step.

### The Frame: Building and Framing an Inquiry

*frame-* noun, fraem \ 'frām\

: the rigid supporting structure of an object <such as a vehicle, building, or piece of furniture>

*To frame an action, thought, or process one gives it clear borders and limitations. Framing is both a physical and metaphorical process that clarifies what is included and excluded from an area of interest. Below the frame for the study is echoed both literally and metaphorically. I have worked to echo this framing in the quality and content of the work.*

### The corners of a frame /Research Questions

This paper is crafted with bricolage research and woven with the stories of my narratives. It remains grounded in the principal question: How have the textiles served as educators in my life?

After writing several narrative vignettes<sup>1</sup>, I asked this central question of both myself and the stories. This question was followed by asking the relevant sub questions:

1. What role have the textiles served in my early childhood?
2. What role have the textiles served to my identities as student?
3. What role have the textiles served in my identity as a teacher?

By continuously asking myself the above questions my hope was that the research would become both focused and deepened, and that an overall woven narrative of textiles acting as educators emerged.

### **A physical frame /Methodology**

This woven document is framed by bricolage research yet remains laced with narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry, understood here as stories lived and told, provided the overall structure of my work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Carl Leggo asserts that “Just as an artist represents a still image of the ocean rolling onto a beach, the writer holds a moment, or part of a moment, in order to draw attention to it” (2008, p. 4). The narratives written into this inquiry are small moments within my overarching textile narrative. It is my aim to understand the purposes of narrative inquiry as underscoring “[...] some of the possibilities of meaning that lie always in the seemingly tangled messiness of lived experience” (Leggo, 2008, p. 5).

A term derived from French, *bricolage*, translates as ‘a process of crafting or cobbling together’ (Rogers, 2012; Kincheloe, 2001; Lincoln, 2001). Similarly, a *bricoleur*, is one who engages in bricolage. The term is dually poignant within this study: I am an individual with an immersive French background and I am reflecting on a subject matter that is steeped in art and craft. Interestingly, I grew up with the same grandmothers who often stated, when asked what they were doing, “ah, je bricolé” (colloquially meaning “oh, just crafting”).

The inquiry itself is balanced between a written narrative (written study) and a physical narrative (weaving). Methodologically this was structured in the following way:

To begin each exploration the recent experience of building, warping, and weaving on my own loom is written. As this narrative emerged narrative vignettes from my own past, particularly those regarding textiles in relation to my identities as a young child, student, and/or teacher, were written.

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<sup>1</sup> *Vignette* has been intentionally chosen to describe the piecemeal nature of each narrative story I write. Each story acts as both a complete story itself, as well as a small piece of the overall textile narrative. To me, the word *vignette* captures this dual role.

Pragmatically, the vignettes written focus on the narrative of my current weaving interspersed with past narratives of textile as educator. To help root the reader in each series of stories present-day weaving narratives are represented with **black ink** and past textile narratives are represented with **blue ink**. A border divides these narrative to help draw the reader from present to past experiences.

Following these vignettes, my narrative will be interpreted to seek the specific lessons of the textile-educator within the framework of Joe Kincheloe's research bricolage. Thematic meaning-making will be used to focus on recurrent and emergent themes within the narratives.

Intersecting a close reading of both the loom-building narratives ("weaving narratives") and the textile-as-educator narrative a thematic searching will ensue. The two-part process described by Butler-Kisber will be used to highlight themes found in both the coarse-grain and the fine-grain phase (2010). Detailing the themes that arise within narrative segments will further the overall meaning of a textile-as-educator story (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Huber & Whelan, 1999). Each narrative was read several times and emergent themes physically highlighted and sorted.

To ground the written work, a section of physical weaving will be added to the loom that was constructed and warped during the writing of both the introductory and literature review sections of this paper. I actively draw from Clandinin and Connolly's claim that "narrative inquiry is stories both lived and told" (2000, p.20). By telling a story and physically living the weaving, narrative inquiry is carried out two-fold.

The textile element of the research was conceived of to draw together the mental elements of this narrative work. My textile life seeks to stay connected to the work of creating textiles. "As humans, we are continual makers and shapers of symbols and, hence, meaning. With this in mind, meaning making cannot be viewed as static but as a dynamic process, a way to reposition ourselves as new in the world that allows us to think metaphorically and symbolically and to try on new perspectives" (Albers, Holbrook & Harste, 2010, p. 167). To maintain a multi-dimensional awareness within my narrative inquiry I felt strongly that it must exist in a cognitive, emotional, and physical world; to *reposition* itself throughout the work. I am weary of discussing textiles as educators without tactilely engaging in the work myself. Additionally, as narrative requires a great deal of self-reflection, this structure afforded me the opportunity to think about biographical elements as I physically worked.

### **Framing self /Positionality: Self and Assumptions**

Within my own narrative I am choosing to view textiles as a meaning-making group that acted as educators themselves. This important distinction highlights an epistemological assumption I am making as a researcher; that an inanimate object (here, the textile) can be read

as a source of knowledge and insight *in and of itself*. I am interested in what the textiles have taught me.



Figure 3. Dying cloth in 2006

I began sewing as a child and have been knitting for seven years. I am rarely without handwork available to busy my hands during the day. I enjoy embroidering my dishcloths and stitching my curtains; I am an enthusiast to say the least. I have chosen to feature weaving as the tactile methodology for my work as it is the only textile art that personally remains unexplored. It thus serves as both a metaphorical and tangible educator; because I am well versed in the textile arts I will be both learning *to and from* weaving.



Figure 4. Stranded Scandinavian knitting from 2009

Kincheloe described research bricolage as a meaning making endeavor informed by available and relevant sources, stories, and materials (Kincheloe, 2001). Consistent with this I take a social-constructivist approach and view the knowledge imparted by textiles as an accumulative and collaborative process. Each lesson learned acts as a thread within the woven tapestry I am making.

### **Building the frame /A Research Bricolage Framework**

Bricolage research, first conceptualized by Denzin and Lincoln (1999) and expanded upon by Kincheloe (2001), is loosely defined as a mixed genre multi-perspective and multi-theory research approach (Rogers, 2012). In 1966 Lévi-Strauss first referred to the term *bricolage* to signify general ways of knowing, specifically within his anthropological work (Lévi-Strauss,

1966).

Bricolage was conceptualized as an antidote to a crisis Kincheloe describes as a national deskilling of teachers (Kincheloe, 2003). He feels that teaching, as a body of work, has lost its purpose (Kincheloe, 2003). “Indeed, as a society we don’t seem very interested in the complex and deep processes that generate our dreams and our sense of purpose” (Kincheloe, 2003). What has been termed a ‘handcuffing’ of teachers caught between fact-memorization and meaning-making is where Kincheloe draws the rationale for bricolage work (Kincheloe, 2003). In his book *Teachers as researchers* Kincheloe sees bricolage research as the work teachers must engage in to reskill and revalue the work of teaching (Kincheloe, 2003).

For Kincheloe the bricoleur is the teacher; in the context of a classroom teaching becomes a facet of the methodologies of bricolage research. Bricolage is conceived of as active research; it does not utilize pre-existing research guides (Kincheloe, 2003). Additionally, bricolage assumes that problems evolve and cannot exist in a vacuum (Kincheloe, 2003). Kincheloe sees teachers as scholars who pursue knowledge in the form of both explanation and engagement in a large, historical or democratic discourse (Kincheloe, 2003).

Bricolage focuses on interdisciplinary methods and the utilization of these methods suited to the task at hand. As such, it is often critiqued as superficial research (Kincheloe, 2001). Additionally, critiques have centered on how bricolage as methodology tends to create researchers who know “everything about nothing” (Kincheloe, 2001; McLeod, 2000; Freidman, 1998). These concerns are addressed by calling for researchers engaged in bricolage to continually review the literature and address relevant knowledge gaps (Kincheloe, 2001). There is a vigilance implied in bricolage research. It asks for an active researcher who engages with questions and problems actively, and continues this activity throughout their research careers. Indeed, bricoleurs should engage in “a lifetime commitment to study, clarify, sophisticate, and add to the bricolage” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 6).

### **The Weft: Narrative of a Textiled Life**

*weft-* noun, /weft/

**: threads which are woven crosswise to the warp to form the web, sometimes called the filling.**

*The weaving strands referred to as weft stands are the threads of active weaving. The act of weaving is the act of moving a weft strand over and under warp strands repetitiously. The active element of weft mirrors the active motion of writing narrative and searching for emergent themes.*

### **Why Weft? /A Narrative Inquiry into a Textiled Life**

The narrative inquiry that follows is divided into three sections. The first narrative highlights the work of building the loom for this study, and the vignettes that emerged as the loom took shape. Afterwards the loom was ready to warp; that is to lace a tense corded structure on which to weave onto the loom. As I warped the loom more narrative vignettes emerged and are written within the body of that ensuing narrative. Finally, while weaving on the prepared loom my work brought forth further narrative stories related to this final section of inquiry. Taken in their totality they represent a narrative inquiry into my textiled life. The themes that emerged from these narratives are inquired into following all three sections of narrative writing.

#### *Weft, 1 /Create the loom, remember the stories*

I drive to a store that smells like wood and hires an awful lot of men. I buy so many boxes of teeny tiny nails that they spill off the counter. When ‘the guy’ asks me what I’m making I am terrified to admit that I have never, ever, used a saw. I cryptically tell him ‘we’ll see’. My smile feels like a lie. In the parking lot, all the parcels fit in the bed of my boyfriend’s truck which is standard. I only learned to drive standard this summer and when traffic slows on a hill I get immediately sweaty- even in winter. With the materials to build a loom in the bed of the truck I sweat the whole way home anyway- no hills though.

I take all the packages out at home; three trips up my shaky apartment steps. Before I even think about how to begin building a frame loom I put on a pot of coffee. Coffee makes my brain work better. At least this is what I tell myself.

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...Climbing the steps of the apartment laden with materials I remember the first time I felt the weight of a fiber project...

I was going to sew a tiny pencil case for my stuffed puppy Jimmy-Tony’s pencils. He was an A student and he deserved the best. My mother drove me to a shop for materials but I bought them with my own carefully rolled quarters. It cost just under eight dollars which felt like the fortune that it was to my seven-year-old pocketbook.

I held the little square of blue felt tightly and bit the corner of my lip as I pushed my sewing needle in and back out being careful to stay near the edge. I am not sure if



*Figure 5. Doll creation from early grade school sewing*



anyone taught me how to do this but I know I sewed the pencil case alone. It was a tri-fold rectangle of denim blue with pink edge stitches. My spotted dogs “pencils” were made of toothpicks cut carefully in half and painted to resemble pencils.

I felt such a sense of pride holding that little pencil case between my fingers. No bigger than a book of matches it still held the world. I felt I had taken care of the supplies I worked hard to buy. I knew I had taken care of Jimmy-Tony’s needs. Pride pushed my rib cage in and out with each breath. I wanted my father to hold the pencil case and feel how special it was. My seven-year-old self never doubted that anyone would be able to see the weight of that sewing project.

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I have read five different books on how to do this. None of them had perfect directions and I know I must improvise. I measure the boards carefully in half and get the saw ready. Realizing I’ve placed the mitre box backward on my table I take a breath, spin it around, and start again. The first cut is not a disaster. The second isn’t either. I get out the hand drill and feel really, really, **really**, tough. Like no-one-better-mess-with-my-baby-brother tough. I felt this way when my mother bought me my first pair of bell bottom jeans back in 7th grade. I looked tough and awesome in those pants. The memory floats in as I drill a hole in the center I have marked on each pine board. I smile. ‘This is going really well’ I think to myself. I say it aloud to see how that feels; “This is going really well!”

When each board is drilled, I step back and stare. My floor is covered with saw dust and a tiny part of my Type-A conscience wants to mop it up before continuing. For no rational reason this seems like cheating to me and so I forge ahead. I even step in the pine dust for good measure. Take that!

Lining up all four boards in a square I push a carriage bolt through each hole and attach them with a washer and wing-nut. I like the words carriage bolt. It feels like something old and strong at the same time. Now the frame is assembled and I want to celebrate its completion but without the tiny nails creating warp pegs I know that my work is barely complete.



Figure 6. Coffee near my partial frame

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I remember another time my work remained incomplete...

When I was finishing my master's degree I began knitting a lace vest to wear over my graduation dress. The simple linen shift was inherited from a friend. To dress it up I wanted to knit an airy lace vest of cloud blue mohair. The same friend who gifted me the dress dyed the yarn the perfect matching shade.

I cast on for the vest three months ahead of time. I knitted cheerfully each evening tiny stitches for the back panel of the vest. They did not slide easily off my needles. Hours ticked by and only a few rows would be completed. At the end of the first month only a quarter of the back panel was completed.

Not ready to call the project lost I redoubled my efforts. I knit during my lunch break at school while sipping smoothies to avoid the trouble of chewing. I knit at traffic lights<sup>2</sup>. After the second month the back panel was indeed complete but without *both* front-facing panels it would have been an avant-garde vest at best.

At graduation I wore only the linen shift. The vest felt like a defeat. As I write this the vest remains unfinished in my knitting cupboard; a reminder of a defeat I have yet to face again.



I carefully measure each inch of pine board using a yard stick and pencil. This work takes far longer than I anticipated. I sit on the floor to tap a nail half way down on each marked hole. My lower back hurts as I do this and I muse about the usefulness of a work bench. I drink more coffee which will not help with lower back pain but will help my resolve. When I finish, there are 116 finishing nails divided between the top and bottom boards of my frame loom. I take pictures and wish I had a social media account of any kind to post them too. Immediate validation does have its place. So do massages; I'd love a back massage.



...The last time I remember wishing for instant validation was just before my senior prom...

I was in high school when I begged my parents to pay for formal sewing lessons. I had sifted through every recess of my creativity by hand stitching square pencil cases and amateur embroidering doll dresses with colored floss. Plus, high schoolers were too old for doll dresses.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an incredibly dangerous thing to do. I would not do this again and I have included it to signify my desperation to finish my vest. *In no way* am I recommending this be repeated.



I did not like my prom date much, but, I decidedly loved my prom dress. It ended up being a pale mint green confection with a sweetheart neckline. I stitched it over the course of a month. The hem had to be rolled by hand and slowly tacked. Sitting hunched over on my futon bed I still feel an ache in my lower back when I imagine the nights I stayed up until 2am finishing that hem.



The night that I completed it was a warm spring night. At midnight, I was certain none of my friends would have appreciated a phone call; but how I wished someone could have patted me on the back right then! I wanted someone to notice my work that moment. Not until the prom was that moment bestowed.

Figure 7. Mint green



*Weft, 2 /Warp the loom, weave the stories*

I begin by cutting each cord three times the length of my frame. I need twenty-nine total. The strings I use are purple cotton and they slide through my fingers. My years of knitting make me excited about this part; the cotton yarn feels familiar and safe. It feels like a small homecoming yet as I settle into that feeling the job is done and I am ready to warp each set of two pegs.



...I remember when I last felt at home with yarn...

When I moved to Ottawa for graduate school I was swept into an opposing world of both loneliness and excitement. I felt I had finally established a moment in time I wanted to belong to; an “Ottawa chapter” I would write. Yet I had left behind some of my greatest friends, at least in body, and did not know a thing about Ottawa other than where Parliament was and that parking would rarely be free of charge. Three weeks in and I was lonely.

This led me to one of the most prolific knitting chapter of my life. In a month alone I had made a vest, four washcloths, a fluffy hat, and a modern cardigan from yarn that had been lingering in my supply chest for years. The textiles brought me the warmth I needed to recalibrate when I returned from a foray into the city- into the unknown. The curative act of returning to an art form I both knew and loved helped center me as I learned and grew in the city.

It was an emotional settling to parallel my work of physical settling. I felt lucky that I had this skill to draw from and re-teach myself peace. As a relatively introverted person this work helped me turn inward after days spent out: I had to venture out for groceries, for classes, to join social events and meet new people, out for coffee and out for laundry- it was a month of out. And the textile, my perennial educator, was my in. It drew me in over and over until I was both settled and very warmly dressed.



This is a bit daunting. There have been no books with proper instructions for this part. I have no references. I know that I will draw the cords around the top two pegs and back down to the opposite two. I will need some type of knot that can be kept taut yet easily readjusted.

I begin on the right-hand side. I am right handed and in a moment of clarity realize that working across in this way will make it so I am never working over the past set of warp threads. This is a particularly practical idea-normally not my strong suit-and I feel a little surge of intellectual pride. “Ha!” I think to myself “take that!” Take that! is an oft repeated phrase on the preschool playground. I know it well and am transported.



...I taught the preschoolers in my classroom to knit...

Every single student who came to me learned, in some fashion, to knit a row. I did it so their hands would know what it was to make meaning without conscious thought. At least, those are the words I gave the endeavor.



Figure 8. and Figure 9. Images of typical preschool craft supplies offered in my classroom

When I stopped actively teaching I packed up my classroom supplies and moved them into my parents' basement storage space. It hurt to move away from the physical space of my classroom and I wanted few visual reminders of how I had loved it.

My parents cleared out their storage space a year later and my classroom boxes had to be unpacked. The first box I opened was littered with scraps of yarn and little half-finished bunnies that preschoolers had begun to make before the school year ended. I held up a scrap of hole filled knitting to my nose. The stitches held a story that existed only in the past, yet, the same stitches fit in my hand today. The passing nature of the learners endured in this stitched square. I could carry them with me and let them go too.



The knot situation is another issue entirely. It brings me back. I try a slip knot and but I can't get it taut at all. I try a bow knot that is partially invented and partially remembered from some camping trip long ago. It gets so tangled I cut it off the frame pegs and cut a new warp thread altogether. I am twenty minutes in to knot-trials and I have made no progress. The carefully placed warp threads, all twenty-eight that remain, are laughing at me. I can tell.

I wrap the cord around the pegs in a figure-eight shape. This seems promising. I can pull and make the threads tighter and it seems like I could loosen it. All at once, like being unexpectedly pinched, I remember how my boyfriend taught me to tie up the dinghy when we went sailing last year. At the time, it felt like a tiny bit of sailor knowledge that I would never use again, but enjoyed having. I fancied myself ready for a desert island and a small (errr, manageable) shipwreck. "Oh yes," I would tell my aghast rescuers "I am a whiz at the clove-hitch! I think it might have saved our lives out here!" ... When I try out that knot, that clove-hitch thing... (or was it a half-hitch thing?) ... it works beautifully. I can tension the warp thread,

I can undo the warp thread. I can even leave it all set-up for whenever I am ready to weave! "Brilliant!" I say aloud this time.

Aforementioned boyfriend looks up from his laptop computer. "What is?" he says. I just smile. It would be a pity to admit that I'm not totally sure about what the knot is called-



Figure 10. Final warped loom

considering how brilliant I am feeling for using it in the first place. Instead I say “Oh, only twenty-eight warp strands to go.” Turns out I’d rather be crazy than wrong just now.

### *Weft, 3 /In which I weave the past and present*

The first color of wool I select for weaving is a deep teal blue that reminds me of the “bleue robe” I loved so as a girl. Not the same shade of blue, yet, somehow the same depth. That dress shone in the sun to my five-year-old eyes much as this wool captures light around me now. A tangible link to my first textile educator. I wind it softly around a piece of cut cardboard shaped to hold it like a makeshift bobbin. Years ago, a friend told me that weavers were the most inventive of all crafters. “They never have the perfect materials,” she said “so... they just make it up!” The cardboard bobbin would have met with her knowing approval. A Cheerios® box from my neighbor’s recycling bin. New life indeed.



...New life seemed like the theme of my sixteenth birthday too...

My father took me on a trip to New York City to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were featuring an exhibit on the works of Michelangelo and my father walked the frames languidly. My brain liked the excursion but my heart wasn’t in it. There was nothing about Michelangelo’s work that ignited my aesthetic impulses. Until a little tiny frame with a purple wave painted inside it caught my eye.

It was minute and sandwiched between two large imposing sketches. The diminutive size is what attracted me- somehow I could grasp the tiny world within its gold beveled edges better than the detailed monotone work surrounding it. Then I read the caption describing the work. The story was detailed as follows:

One day Michelangelo commissioned a female model from Bologna to meet him at his studio. Preparing for her arrival Michelangelo draped a piece of thick fabric in waves on a bench. She would lounge here to be sketched. However, as he stepped back to gaze at his draping technique he was fascinated by the ripples and richness of the textile itself. He wanted to sketch this and promptly cancelled the model. It is unclear if she was paid for her trouble, but Michelangelo did paint the textile instead.



Figure 11. *Drawing of drapery*, c. 1500



I felt deeply awake. Here was a man- a genius by all other names- who had, if only for a moment, been so fascinated by a textile he suspended his costly interest in the human form to paint it instead. A thread connected us. I too loved the bolt of cloth whenever I found it! The textile had educated the great Michelangelo; painter of the Sistine Chapel, sculptor of The David, and architect of St. Peter's Basilica. Surely it was a worthy life...



I begin the weaving on the right as I am right handed. I gently pull the wool over and under and over again. I move my way slowly across the bottom of the loom until I reach the left edge. This takes longer than I imagined it would. It is a challenge not to pull so tight that the warp stands pucker in at the edges. This puckering is technically called draw-in by weavers. It occurs when the weft is drawn too tightly. I imagine my grandmothers' observing my work, one on each shoulder. My maternal grandmother would have a crinkle between her brows, focused on the methods of the work. I imagine she would find it difficult to sit still. On my other shoulder my imaginary paternal grandmother would smile and nod gently. She would most certainly ask me if I was having fun.



...I'm not sure that I am...

My paternal grandmother once sewed me a blue flowered dress with a white lacy apron. I was about ten. She even took the time to make a hair bow with the fabric scraps. When she gave it to me I felt like I had never owned anything so beautiful. I held the dress against my chest and stared and stared at it. I declared someday I would get married in that dress.

The dress was worn to school and much admired by many of my peers. They held the hem of the apron between their fingers and lamented they didn't have a dress like mine to wear to school. When I took the dress off in the evening to put on my pajamas I left it sitting on the corner chair in my room. I remember waking to gaze over at it and make sure it was still there. I understood the ephemeral nature of beauty in some way back then.

The dress did not fit me forever. Dresses are not made to last in that way. But when I close my eyes and imagine any feelings of loveliness against my skin, it is this dress that I picture. The

way it felt to be that beautiful and certain without a doubt of this truth. The dress taught me to carry that inside me; dresses don't last forever but their memory might.



### **Weaving in the final weft strand /Looking for Themes**

I hang this tapestry of narratives I have written on the wall. I stand back and look at the images, colors, textures, and words that weave through the work. I am looking for the themes of my tapestry. Threads that lend voice to the textile educators in my life and my multiple identities. As themes emerge from the strands I look for the most salient ones. I am reading the tapestry for themes that pluck the resonant core of my textiled narrative.

### **Tapestry: Themes, Conclusions, and Futures**

*tapestry*- noun, / 'təpəstrē/

**: a piece of thick textile formed by weaving weft threads *or* used to reference to an complex weaving of items and events.**

*The tapestry might be seen as a final product of weaving, or, it might be seen as the interlaced work of weaving at once complex and expansive. A tapestry need not imply a conclusion. It can easily be the enmeshment of objects, thoughts, communities, and voices reaching forward and continuing to add and grow with newly added threads.*

### **Hang your tapestry /Themed Methods**

As I have looked for themes within my woven narratives I have attempted to choose those both recurrent and emergent. Butler-Kisber's outline of a coarse-grain and fine-grain approach to theme finding led me on a two-part thematic search (2010). First I hung the narratives on my wall, physically. I took colored pencils and circled words that captured the essence of the narratives. Words that recurred, were unique, rung true, or were even, at times, troublesome. From these circled words I wove larger synonyms, or blanket-words, that highlighted the core essence of the theme. Connecting Barthes' words that "text is a tissue, a woven fabric" and that "text is experienced only as an activity of production" I worked to experientially draw themes from my textile narrative by physically gazing, writing, and poetically rendering emerging themes (1977).

Returning to the central question *How have the textiles served as educators in my life(?)* I focused on themes that shed light into this central question. Keeping in mind the three sub-questions asked (1. *What role have the textiles served in my early childhood?*; 2. *What role have the textiles served to my identities as student?*; 3. *What role have the textiles served in my*

*identity as a teacher?*) I sought themes that considered these plural identities and their intersections.

In understanding the narratives of craftartists, scholar Elliot Mishler devotes significant time discussing the nuanced, “complex, non-linear features” of the craftartist identity (2000). He pays particular attention to the shifts and changes within any singular yet plural identity (2000). Keeping both the textile educator and the plural identities I inquired into in the foreground of my mind, I have settled on the following three themes: *aesthetics*, *belonging*, and *curiosity*.

Every theme is particularly significant to one facet of my identity; for instances aesthetics as theme particularly applies to my identities as an early child. Each one of the three themes is discussed below, and, subsequent to this discussion, interpreted poetically. As this report is framed heavily by bricolage research I have engaged in “incorporating many different perspectives”. Utilizing bricolage methodology I borrow from different scholarly literature, each appropriate to the theme in question, to critically analyze the role of textile as educator within the theme in question. Bricolage research requires the researcher to “accept the responsibility that comes with the interpretive process.” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 11). As such I conclude this section by offering a rationale for educators and potential applications of textiled narrative in future work.

### **Blue tapestry threads /Themes of Aesthetics**

As I read and observed my narrative tapestry the theme of aesthetics emerged. Words such as *lovely* and *gaze*, phrases such as *held the world*, and more generally, a sense of the beauty I had both appreciated and transmitted in my textiled endeavors shone in between the words and pictures I have chosen. Dewey particularly spoke of important aesthetic experiences in early childhood. He claimed that “the notion of aesthetic experiences as the moment of quality when individuals realize the aesthetic potential of situations and the ordinary becomes noticeable” (2005). This theme of aesthetics laces throughout the plural identities of my early childhood. Indeed, Dewey goes further in saying that aesthetic experiences “entail all the moments of feeling that provoke deeper inclination that is different from ordinary experiences” (Kazuyo, 2009). These poignant remarks about the importance of aesthetics in early childhood shed light on my identity and experiences of textile educators.

When I first write of textiles, the *bleue robe* and later my puppy’s pencil case, the beauty of these textiles acted as an act of awareness, indeed “ordinary becoming noticeable” for my early childhood self (Dewey, 2005). My awareness of learning from textiles centered heavily on their perceived beauty as objects. It is again Dewey who claims that young children’s learning is influenced heavily by their unique perceptions of beauty (Harter et al., 2008). My own unique perceptions of beauty were woven with experiences of feeling beautiful in a dress, of holding a

cloth puppy and wanting beautiful cloth items for him.

Scholar Maxine Greene has called for the importance of arts based education and asserted the importance of expression (2013). She asks; “How can we engage authentically with the world around us, how can we attempt to translate what we perceive – both physically and emotionally – into our own unique aesthetic responses?” (Greene, 2013, p. 251). In seeking this unique aesthetic response, the textiles have served as my educators. My youth sought both an aesthetic experience (the textile) and a material aesthetic response (working in a textile medium). Indeed, it is in textiles that I have found my “own way of expressing the unique impact of beauty” (Greene, 2013, p. 251). The theme of aesthetics within my textiled narratives serve as a foundation elemental in, as Greene claims, our desire to express and observe beauty. The revolutionary Buddhist scholar Thich Naht Hahn has said “When I look at a child I always see him or her as a flower; fresh, beautiful and open to the moment” (2008, p. 10). It seems my early self was open to the moments of textile education by being in tune with their aesthetic influences. Below I explore this theme poetically, making sense of the aesthetic role of textile as educator with the context of my early childhood identity.

### *A tapestry of an aesthetic child/ Held*

When I was younger I held beauty,

i  
t

As it is h all children I was beautiful; myself.

It seemed that beautiful things laced the color of  
everything else

There was a way to hold them close  
to create them (in the holding) or (in the making)

And that is what has stayed

that **the** more we create the beauty

**o**  
**l**  
**d**

the more that is

*held.*



*Figure 12.* Here I wear a shirt I both chose and found beautiful.



### **Green tapestry threads /Themes of Belonging**

Alfred Adler has claimed that it is a basic human drive to seek belonging and worth within our communities (1937). As I gazed at my narrative tapestry I was struck by how often themes that referred to belonging and fulfillment emerged. They lingered as a pulse behind almost every story. When I created my prom dress it felt as though this narrative was of a high school student's need to create the physical manifestation of goals and dreams in order to belong to them. My identity of student has generally been grounded in the textile educators who thrust me toward this sense of belonging. Perhaps, in the context of textile as educator, it becomes necessary to create a term such as *textiled*-belonging, or, a meshed process of searching for fulfillment within a textile medium.

In her book *Displacement, identity and belonging: An arts-based, auto/biographical portrayal of ethnicity and experience*, Alexandra J. Cutcher writes about the unifying experience of the arts within her own experiences of displacement and/or foreignness. She quotes "Art is among the few occupations where it is not an initial disadvantage to be a foreigner" (Kunz, 1985, p. 109). Though the experience of "foreigner" in her work is largely literal, the experience of being *outside* of remains metaphorical. That the arts, and here specifically textile arts, can act as the medium that *brings in*, or, creates belonging, is one of the central arguments of her artistic auto/biography (Cutcher, 2015). For me this is so. The textile acted as the internal draw, the belonging, which I searched for. Within my identities as student, the search for a *textiled*-belonging is echoed in the words "feeling as if you belong is about feeling unified" (Cutcher, 2015, p. 226). The textiles unified my plural identities as student.

Within the narrative exploration of beginning graduate school and feeling vulnerable, the thread of seeking belonging within textile educators resounds. Though the theme of belonging hardly encompasses one thing alone it is worth acknowledging both how deep and plural this word is as I read my woven narratives. Belonging has also been called the act of "being voluntarily associated with" (Corsini, 1980, p. 110). In my active quest to continually learn from textile educators I voluntarily chose to belong to them, and inversely, to ask of textiles to belong to me. This act of voluntary association permeates my identities of student within my woven narrative.

***A tapestry for the student who belongs! Grow up***

I am looking for myself  
and finding maybe yes, maybe no,  
maybe *maybe*

I am learning for myself  
of the student my parents want  
conversant at the dinner table  
and even of the parents of students  
and who they might want

I am seeking, seeking, in circles  
for a dance step I absolutely  
(surely!)

used to know

There is not only I when **stitch, knit, scissors, sewing...**

weave an assignment

knit a story

No I in my work.



Figure 13. Experimental backpack design circa 2003

***Pink tapestry threads /Themes of Curiosity***

The stories that dealt with my current weaving adventures were particularly relevant to my identity as a teacher. Though my current teaching practice is not *active* I would nevertheless currently identify myself as a teacher. The theme of *curiosity* emerged from my past textile narratives, yet even more so, in the narrative exploration of building, warping, and weaving on my current loom.

Writer Elizabeth Gilbert has called curiosity a “friend that teaches us how to become ourself” (Tippett & Gilbert, 2016). Dewey labeled curiosity as a “natural resource for thinking” and Paulo Freire described it as “what makes me question, know, act, ask again, recognize” (1938; 1980, p.

10). I feel that the willing curiosity of following what textiles must teach me has been touched by all these definitions. It is a path I wish for all students I have taught or have yet to teach. That you (the student) may live a life whereby “following your curiosity. You’ve created a life that is a very interesting thing, different from anybody else’s. And your life itself then becomes the work of art, not so much contingent upon what you produced, but about a certain spirit of being that I think is a lot more interesting and also a lot more sustainable” (Tippett & Gilbert, 2016). It is precisely this spirit of recurring curiosity that I have sought to imbue in my classroom, and my own endeavors.

Furthermore, I align myself with Shenaar-Golan and Gutman who state that “As educators, our task is to create a challenging learning environment that highlights the unique contributions of this [curiosity] method, to advance its use for realizing the professional value of empowerment, and to spark students’ interest in its benefits. The authors consider curiosity a key component to heightening students’ interest” (2013, p. 350). A classroom permeated with this curious impulse would naturally undertake a textile educator without rigorous attention to product has been my experience. I quote my own narrative in re-stating that “Every single student who came to me learned, in some fashion, to knit a row.” I did not teach students to knit so they would become knitters. I taught students to knit so they would become curious about textiles, art, method, craftsmanship, and handwork. More generally I taught them to knit so that they would know deeply that “curiosity is available to everyone” (Gilbert, 2015, p. 63).

My current teaching practice is informed by all three themes present within my textiled narrative, however the theme of curiosity is heavily aligned with how textiles influence both my past and present-tense pedagogies. Within the context of being a graduate student in education I continue to seek an active space for my own pedagogical views and practices. Textiles within my interim report act as an exploration of my curiosity and creativity, a path I continue to follow for with equal parts patience and perseverance in this new phase of my teacher identity.

*A curious classroom tapestry/ teach(h)er*

There will be a pause  
the moment when the children, outside, no  
longer need you  
(you will wonder if they ever did)

In this gap you will look in to (your) self or  
fear an inside-gap, you will find something  
to busy your hands.

Either way don't worry.  
You belong here too. The threads that tie  
you to worthiness  
that remind the students, who  
remind you, that you too

are curiously noble.

You, my worthy work, are who I will want  
beside me  
when my busy hands are going and the  
teacher I wish I was  
flies.

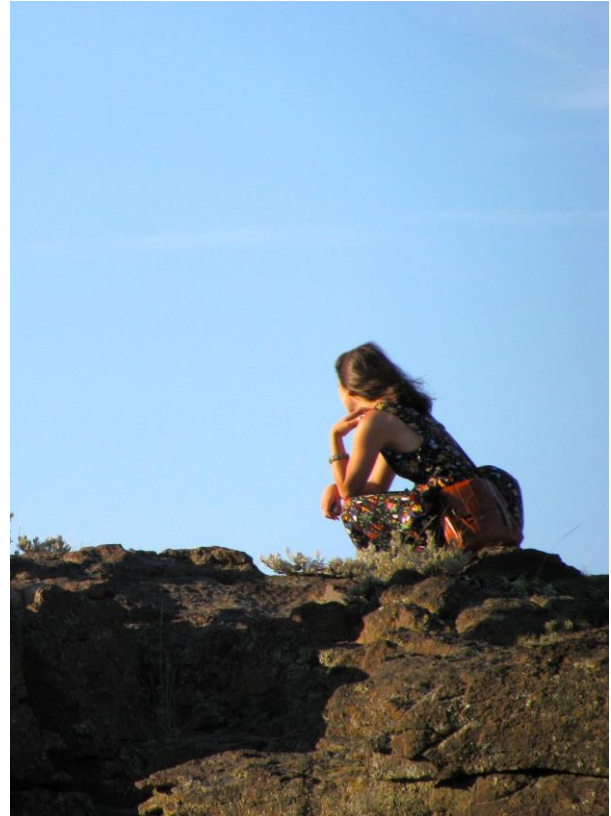


Figure 14. A dress made during my master's degree work

**Step back, look again /Themes and Possibilities**

I imagine that the themes of textile as educator that emerge in my growing tapestry are impermanent. The work of writing and weaving this work into a collective whole has, itself, been a shifting practice. It greatly echoes Mishler's claim that research itself is a "craft or skilled practice" in its own rite (2000, p. 162). When I gaze at my work these themes ring truest today. However much as the fibers of cloth or wool shift and interlock differently over, and over, again the themes that emerged from reading my tapestry may do so in the future. I have chosen the word blankets of *aesthetic*, *belonging*, and *curiosity* because they strike the deepest chord within my narrative tapestry right now. The craft of meaning-making within my tapestry will, in many ways, remain ongoing. I acknowledge that much as everyone gazing at a tapestry in a museum may read something different, I myself might read something different *in my own tapestry* as I grow and continue to learn from textile educators.

As of now I have not found weaving to be *fun*. I have found it equal parts monotonous and slow. I have always found sewing fast, knitting meditative, and, now, weaving falls somewhere in between. My mind wandered as I wove the same color and the same strands. Hours were lost with little visual progress, a frustration for someone who enjoys forward momentum. Yet in this slow gentle frustration it was easy to let my mind wander to the *whys* of this work.

Why engage in this kind of narrative exploration? Why do I think textiles matter at all? Why do I want to bring this work to the classroom? The words that kept swimming in and out of my consciousness were those of Henry David Thoreau. “Begin where you are and such as you are, without aiming to become of more worth [...]” By building the loom, warping my construction, and weaving alone in my apartment I felt I had begun where I was both physically and mentally. Beginning with my earliest textile educator, a humble blue dress, and ending with a hand built loom on which the weaving feels unending, I feel I have begun exactly where I am: with myself.

I have had the experience of someone telling me their passionately held views; usually they *know* they are right. Their passion verges on aggression. They lean in, they cite obscure sources, maybe they even touch my shoulder. I have had this experience and I can say, unequivocally, that even if I might have agreed with them, it was not possible for me to feel moved under these conditions. Motivation, conviction, and passion are difficult feelings to pass along to anyone else. Therefore, I have begun the work of textiles as educators with myself. By rooting the work in my own experiences my hope is that I enter another phase. A phase where research regarding textile educators in the lives of others is completed with my eyes wide open. I am beginning where I *am*.



Figure 15. I begin weaving my bleue robe

I have had the privilege of learning from textiles for many years. They have taught me to listen carefully to the stories of materials we take into our lives. They have taught me that an object so rich in history, in hands, and in context is rarely (in)animate. The textiles have reached into my



life and wrapped the mundane experiences of getting dressed, of filling a shopping bag, of walking across a rug. Within these experiences, so easily taken for granted, it is the textiles themselves that have imbued the activities with meaning. Now my tablecloth is a historical artifact and my mittens a map.

### **Twining the weft /Epilogue**

In the interest of my own authentic weaving narrative I wish to leave this paper, not behind, but with a gaze toward the future. A nod to both my incomplete tapestry and the future textile educators I will interact with again and again.

### **A Fragment of Tapestry/ Weaving on Sunday**

*I am sitting to weave and the chair is hard  
a  
r  
which is trying (so hard!) to focus  
on the now of threads over  
and thread under and  
over again*

*“the arts help children say  
what cannot be said”<sup>3</sup>*

*I am choosing blue  
for my dress and the little girl I was  
that the hard chair/task/day wants to swallow*

*and my table cloth, a map to a machine  
and a woman  
and a boat  
and work*

*so far away across oceans  
and so small and echoed here  
in my own small machine  
small hands*

*a  
r  
d at work; weaving*



Figure 16. Weaving on Sunday

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<sup>3</sup> Elliot W. Eisner, 2002

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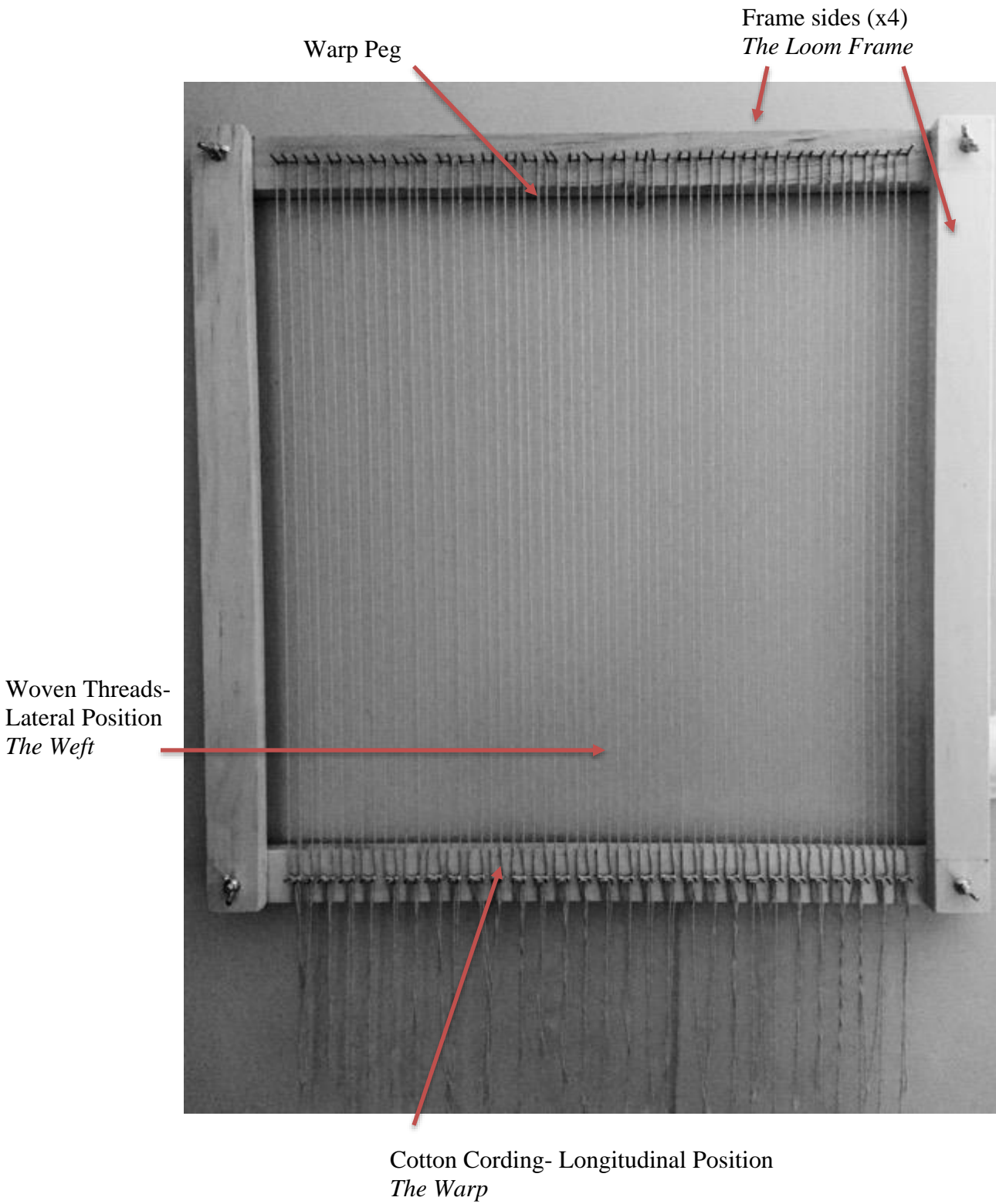
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### **About the Author**

Catherine-Laura Tremblay-Dion is a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education. Her research interests lie primarily in intersections of textiles, text, literacy and sustainability education. She was an active preschool teacher for ten years and a textile artist for twenty-two years.

**Appendix A**



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