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## Fostering Wakefulness: Narrative as a Curricular Tool in Teacher Education


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**Abstract**

In a music education graduate class addressing teaching and learning strategies for learners with special needs, teachers were invited to consider the experience of the children in their music classrooms. Using narrative to enter into the learner's experience of school, teachers confronted their own perspectives and reconsidered those of their students. In this article, I seek to connect notions of wakefulness and empathy as I, too, make meaning of the story of one teacher and her encounter with Tyler, a learner with special needs in her classroom.

## Fostering Wakefulness through Narrative

*"Telling and listening to stories can be a powerful sign of regard—of caring—for one another."* Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 280.

In his poignant tale of Billy Charles, Barone (1989) skillfully explores the many ways of being "at risk" in school. In this paper, I explore the story of a teacher at risk, a teacher overwhelmed by the emotional needs of her students. The nature of Sonja's students' needs fostered a personal teaching crisis, causing her to question herself as a teacher. The process of exploring the narratives of others—learners also at risk but in ways she had not noticed before—enabled Sonja to reinvent her story of school as she became more wakeful to the child's experience of school and could place it ahead of her own.

Sonja was a teacher enrolled in my graduate class, *Teaching Music for Learners with Special Needs*. It was offered two evenings a week during the May-June term, a time of year when teachers are starting to count the days until school is out. The students participating in the class were elementary general music teachers. In the United States, this position is held by music specialists who teach music to students in Kindergarten through grade five, commonly seeing 600+ students a week, including all the students with special needs who attend school in their respective buildings. The enormity of this job, with the large number of students to nurture and to connect to in ways that would foster appropriate curriculum design and establish learning environments conducive for all, contributed to Sonja's feelings of vulnerability and despair. Yet embedded in her own feelings of being overwhelmed, she knew that her students' needs—personal and musical—were not being met and this was her deepest regret.

In the spring season, teachers may be working on music concerts or other culminating musical projects. Sonja had "one down, one to go" and seemed to have an "I can't wait to get it over with" attitude about her school year. A young teacher in her 30s, she had several years' teaching experience, yet was beginning to show signs of burnout—overwhelmed in her job and feeling exasperated not only by some of her students, but also by her own feelings of inadequacy in meeting their needs.

As a former elementary general music teacher, I understood Sonja's feelings and had known many teachers like her. I also knew how debilitating these feelings could be for teachers, if unresolved (Blair, 2008). The busyness of teaching and the high demands on specialists who work with hundreds of students every week provide little time or energy for teachers to reflect on these attitudes as they bubble up, percolating just below the teachers' emotional breaking points. Though painful to admit, some specialists view children with special needs as annoyances who continually disrupt "their" lessons.

As a result, children with special needs often enter and leave the music classroom unfulfilled musically and socially. Many students have music for 30-45 minutes, once (and, if fortunate, twice) a week. The limited time constraints often cause teachers to move at a fast pace within and across lessons—too fast for many learners— but making full participation especially difficult for learners with processing delays. The creative nature of musical experiences is a challenge for children who need predictability and cannot cope with a change in routine. In some settings, the ways that paraprofessionals "help" may inhibit the full engagement of learners with special needs (Zuziak, 2009). With noted time constraints and responsibilities in multiple buildings, teachers have little time (and for some, little inclination) to develop relationships, accommodate students' learning needs, and foster full inclusion with their students—important goals of the school experience.

The school day can be, for the music teacher, an equally fast-paced experience with six to ten classes a day and just minutes between classes. Unlike a classroom teacher that may have two or three students with special needs and a full teaching day every day to accomplish these important goals, the music specialist may begin to feel overwhelmed. These constraints of time and place, including limited access to student records that may inform the nature and history of successful accommodations and modifications, also limit collegial relationships that might provide connectedness for the teacher and also enable imaginative pedagogical support for creating universally designed music lessons for one's students (Adamek & Darrow, 2005; Florian, 2007; Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002; McCord & Watts, 2006).

Because of these issues, I chose to include narrative experiences in the coursework of this class.[1] It was my hope that engagement with narrative focusing on the stories of children with special needs integrated with the theoretical and praxis aspects of the course would enable teachers to reconsider their stance in the classroom and toward their students. Tappan and Brown (1991) expressed a similar sentiment, sharing what was their "hope that by listening to the voices of children…as they tell their own stories, educators…[would] come to appreciate how powerfully educative and truly liberating such an experience can be" (p. 188). Greene (1995), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986/1997), and Ladson-Billings (1994) resonate with the notion of self-knowledge as emancipation—learning as transformation of self. By offering teachers, through narrative, a window into the stories of persons with special needs, I hoped to foster wakefulness; that is, an attentiveness to see life through someone else's eyes, particularly life in school and, ultimately, how learners with special needs experience life in their music classrooms. I connected with Clandinin and

[1] As in Bresler (2009), the teaching examples are not given as "prescriptions to follow but as invitations for readers to generate their own activities and experiences" (p. 9).

Connelly's (2006) call for wakefulness in the narrative inquirer's on-going reflection and Greene's (1995) description of being wide-awake through arts and arts education to enable the releasing of imagination. Polkinghorne (1995) suggested, "Stories are linguistic expressions of this uniquely human experience of the connectedness of life" (p. 7).

Through the use of narrative to make and shape meaning, it was my hope that these teachers might find connections within their own stories of school as well as connections to the stories of their students. I hoped that they might sense, each in their own way, areas of tension within their practice—areas unknown to me, but areas that might be addressed if the teachers would be open to the stories of others. It is in times of tension (Dewey, 1938/1998; Vygotsky, 1978), or when we notice a "bump" in our planned or lived stories (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 35) that we pause to reflect in- or on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991), narrating to self or others the events that create a ripple in our understanding of self and in the stories we live by. Here I hoped that teachers would reconsider their story of life in the music room into one lived by children with special needs in the music room. It is "most often in moments of tension that the possibility of a shift in the stories to live by [is] possible" (Clandinin et al., p. 132).

Through the process of waking up to issues within one's own practice by thoughtfully considering the experience of the child (van Manen, 1991, 2002), Sonja and her peers were able to be wakeful to the stories of their own and their students' lived experience (van Manen, 1990) and to envision new possibilities, to imagine a different way of being. Noddings (1984/2003) expresses this as the fundamental aspect of caring, to "try to apprehend the reality of the other…To see the other's reality as a possibility for my own…to begin, as nearly as I can, with the view from his [the child's] eyes" (pp. 14-15). In doing so, Noddings suggests, "When we see the other's reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream" (p. 14). For these teachers, our first step would be to find ways to make their students' experiences with music and with others more meaningful while in their classrooms.

Narrative inquiry (Barone, 1995, 2001, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995) is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the way people make meaning of their lives and their interactions with each other through the vehicle of story. Narrative inquirers "keep in the foreground of [their] writing a narrative view of experience, with the participants' and researchers' narratives of experience situated and lived out on storied landscapes as [their] methodological frame" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 128). Not only do human beings share stories, but "the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). At the core, narrative inquirers share the notion that storying one's life is a basic human activity whereby people connect past, present, and future, enabling a sense of identity and as

well as a sense of possibility, of becoming—a hope or feeling for "what might be, what *I* might be." Narrative inquirers share a:

> view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)

Narrative inquiry in education is the study of the experience of storied lived experience, marrying "theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). In addition, the research—the sharing of the research experience— is presented as narrative with story as its central feature. It is used extensively to seek to understand the stories and experiences of teachers, learners, and others within an educational community (Blair, 2008, 2009a, Clandinin, 1992; Clandinin et al., 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1995; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Shultz & Oyler, 2006; Saldaña, 2005). Witherell (1995), Witherell and Noddings (1991), McEwan and Egan (1995), and Florio-Ruane (2001) have also explored the role and use of narrative in teaching and learning throughout a variety of contexts, including formal and informal teacher education. Witherell and Noddings (1991) eloquently present a foundational stance to which I also subscribe when choosing to use narrative as a curricular tool. They explain that they share:

> the belief that narrative and dialogue can serve as a model for teaching and learning across the boundaries of disciplines, professions, and cultures….We take classroom discourse to be at the very heart of the teaching-learning process, as it represents the meaning systems mutually constructed by teachers and their students….The power of narrative and dialogue as contributors to reflective awareness in teachers and students is that they provide opportunities for deepened relations with others and serve as springboards for ethical action. Understanding the narrative and contextual dimensions of human actors can lead to new insights, compassionate judgment, and the creation of shared knowledge and meanings that can inform professional practice. (p. 8)

To use narrative activities as coursework is supported by Hanson (1986, as cited in Witherell, 1991, p. 89) with "self-knowledge [described] as an activity rather than an entity and that the act of imagining is actually grounded in self-knowledge: 'I want to suggest that the ongoing enterprise of the production of images—or pictures or interpretations—of the self is the mirror of the activity of self-knowledge.'" For teachers to consider change, an image of the story of

their students' experiences in their classrooms would need to be juxtaposed against their story of their classrooms. Sonja seemed to have a tacit image of her students' experience of school, but when forced to really see school through the students' lens—if only for a moment—she was confronted with a different image of what that might be. With the conflicting mirrored images of their own self-knowledge and their students' stories, the teachers—if open to and honestly receiving the images—might be able to envision a different possibility, as the "the act of teaching calls us to live in the worlds of actuality and of possibility and vision" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 9). For the music teacher frustrated by students who "disrupt their lessons," a new story—how students experience "doing music at school"—might take on new meaning, resulting in a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered vision of the school musical experience.

I did not begin teaching this graduate course as a teacher-researcher. The teachers were not engaged in research *per se* but were invited to consider the stories of learners in ways that might deepen their understanding of school with the explicit goal of informing their own practice. Because Sonja and her peers were forthcoming about the transformative nature of the coursework early in the semester, I requested and received permission from all participants to engage in this study early, re-entering my classroom as a teacher-researcher, collecting data through their writings and final projects, our discussions, and an extensive interview (audio recorded) held after the last the class meeting.

When the semester ended, I returned to the data that had been collected. This included my own field notes concerning class discussions (which had not been recorded), the written narratives submitted as coursework and my responses to their coursework, the recording of the group interview, and the students' final presentations. While the emerging story of these teachers' lives was lived daily and shared with me and their peers regularly throughout the semester, I could not, at the time, foresee the culminating events that would transpire and shape the story of these teachers' experiences when asked to "construct the story of a child's experience at school." The use of narrative as a curricular tool was intentional but, in reflection as I analyzed and interpreted (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2002) what was now data, I reconsidered its value. It became apparent that the success of narrative as a curricular tool was dependent on the teachers' openness to engage with narrative, their students, and each other in order for the stories they were living and telling to be transformative. The narratives shared through the curriculum of the class enabled a sense of "not being alone," increased the teachers' sense of risk taking as they revealed their own situations to their peers, thus providing a doorway into engagement with their own narratives. Because of the compelling nature of Sonja's experience with the ways she became open to "seeing" Tyler, her story is the focus of this paper.

## Using Story to Foster Empathy

Early on in the course, the teachers were asked to write two narratives of their experiences with learners with special needs. In her first narrative, Sonja described an experience with an autistic boy that left her, as she told me, "feeling like a complete failure."

> I have a little boy with autism in fifth grade. I never really took that much time to understand his condition because in the two half-hour sessions [a week] that I see him, he seems to function reasonably well. He can cooperate in small groups and enjoys making music. No worries, right? Well, one day Kevin came into music and he refused to participate in what the class was doing. Instead of just leaving him alone, I began to question him and ask if there was a reason why he didn't want to do what the class was doing. So, he looked at me, and then turned his back to me. Well, by now, of course the entire class is silent and staring at me to see what I would do with this situation. So, I crouched down and tried to get his attention again. "Kevin," I said, "You can't just sit here in the middle of the room and not participate with the class, you'll be in our way. If you refuse to be with us, then you have to move over to the side of the room." Well, at that point he continued to sit right where he was and not look at me or respond in any way. I tried again, probably not so nicely. "Kevin, look at me, we are waiting for you to make a decision." No response.
>
> Now, some of his classmates began trying to help and several people were talking to him at once. All the talking must have overwhelmed him because he just started crying and not softly. I was at a total loss. We tried to move on, at that point, and leave him alone and just work around him, but he sat there and cried for the entire class. When his teacher came, he would still not move from his spot. It wasn't until we called the resource [room] teacher that he finally exited the classroom. Later in the day, I went to see Kevin's classroom teacher to ask her what I could have done differently to have been able to avoid the situation. She said that it was "one of Kevin's meltdowns" and that they were basically unavoidable. She felt that he was really spoiled and coddled at home and that anytime he was pushed to do something he didn't want to do that he behaved like that. That conversation left me with many unanswered questions. I don't understand autism; I don't know how much is too much to expect from those that have it.

The purpose of asking Sonja and her classmates to write narratives of their experiences with learners was two-fold; first, it enabled me to assess their prior experiences with learners with special needs and to respond appropriately throughout the course. Second, it required Sonja and her peers to actively reflect upon their experiences and to share them in a way that made sense both to them as writers and to me, their intended audience. Often these stories were

scattered fragments of their school day; piecing them together seemed to draw them into closer focus and enable them to take an honest look at what happened and how they felt about it. The teachers told stories of their interactions with students, interactions that they felt were pedagogically unsound, personally demoralizing for themselves and devastating to the student.[2] The storying and restorying of their teaching experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) provided an important pedagogical tool in developing their reflective practice.

> Difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change. We imagine, therefore, that in the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story (p. 71).

These painful experiences were hidden or "secret" teacher stories (Clandinin et al., 2006), submerged from the daily stories of musical success and joyful teacher-student interaction that were also part of their lives. Because I asked for their stories, a floodgate opened and stories of heartache and frustration began to flow. Note how Sonja's fragile sense of self-efficacy begins to surface in her second narrative.

> Yesterday began like any other day, my first 5th grade class came seven minutes late to music and of course the teacher was very sorry. She is always very sorry, but nevertheless continues to be late. I particularly needed the time with them because we are learning a song for the fifth grade farewell. After two fifth grade classes, I have a fourth grade. In this class there is a situation happening with bullying between two girls—Courtney and Tammy; Tammy is supposedly the one that bullies. I have been instructed to "keep a close eye" on these girls. Due to a complaint by the gym teacher that this was impossible to do to the extent that is necessary, a parapro has been sent to help.
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> Fourth grade is working on making their own melodies on the recorder in groups. I stepped into the hall to check on a group and all of a sudden I heard screaming coming from the classroom. I ran inside to see two girls in absolute hysterics—Courtney and Brandy. I tried to intervene to calm them down and find out the problem. They were completely ignoring the parapro…. Apparently Courtney had been a distraction and had been making it hard for the group to make their music. When questioned Courtney responded, "They're trying to take away my personality." To which Brandy screamed,

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[2] To protect the privacy of both teachers and students, details of these accounts are not included in this report.

"Oh my GOD Courtney, no, we aren't." Courtney interrupted with an even louder scream, "LIAR!!!" At this point I have had enough of the screaming over what seems to be a huge overreaction. I separated the girls and spoke to them privately.

Brandy felt that she had given Courtney many chances to be her friend but Courtney is loud and interrupts and acts silly much of the time. Brandy doesn't really want to hurt Courtney's feelings but she was tired of dealing with her and just wants a break. She asked Courtney to leave her alone and give her space. Courtney will leave her alone for a short time, but then is back and needing attention again.

Courtney has hurt feelings, but was seemingly very quick to recover. In the time I was talking with Brandy, Courtney had found another group and was laughing and all smiles. When I pulled her aside, she told me that Brandy was being mean to her and that she is always mean to her. She feels she is picked on for her silly behavior. She doesn't understand why Brandy needs space. She is full of excuses for her behavior. Very little music was made today.

The day continues…
Kindergarten arrived after the 4th grade and they have a sub. Matthew saw me and immediately started crying; he has been doing this lately. "I miss my mom." He lost his mom two years ago, and though he never used to cry in my class, I now see him twice a week because he is in a special program for intervention of low[-functioning] kindergarteners. We have become closer and so now he cries…I hold him and keep him by me until he seems able to play the instrument alone. I have divided the class into three groups, we are working with fast and slow and speeding up. Each group represents a tortoise, hare, or pony. While I am working with one group, I notice Jacob just wandering around. I asked what he was doing. He didn't want to be in the same group with Craig. Craig fools around too much. I asked Jacob to go to another group, he told me he doesn't want to. I talk to Craig and share with him that his behavior is making Jacob uncomfortable. At the same time I saw three more children arguing. Lara, Jessica and Tyler are fighting because Tyler says Lara can't go to Jessica's house after school. He wants to go to Jessica's house after school. I tell them we will talk about it later. They can't even stop arguing to listen to me. It is time for the class to sit down to get ready to go. The three children are still standing; they have no idea that the class is all waiting for them. Again, I try talk to them. Jessica keeps talking over me. Finally, I get her to stop talking and listen to the directions. They have accomplished nothing this day in music. Too busy deciding who is going to Jessica's house, no respect for adult intervention. Unless I yell over them, and physically pull them apart from one another, I can't get through.

> As the day went on, one situation after another brought someone to tears from every class. I left school feeling really drained. I feel responsible for so much more than music education. I worry about the state of children these days. Is it normal to have emotional outbursts in seven out of ten classes in one day? The other issue I struggle with continually is that the kids seem to have so little respect for adult authority. If my teacher had asked me to go into a different group, I would have gone. If the teacher had asked me to stop talking, I would have stopped. I talk and they don't listen. I ask, and they say no. What?????

Sonja was at her breaking point. When I saw her the next day before class, I asked, "Was today any better?" Tears filled her eyes and I responded with a hug. I asked her if she wanted to talk about her experience with the class and she nodded. I knew from reading her classmates' narratives that they had had similar experiences and I hoped that the sharing of stories would help them all realize they were not alone in their feelings, nor in their efforts to improve their teaching.

Our allotted class time to discuss assigned readings was replaced by the verbal sharing of teacher stories[3], a type of dialogue van Manen (1977, p. 218) suggests "is not adversative, but … 'like friends talking together'" and, when successful, is infused with elements of care (Noddings, 1991). Through their impassioned reports of teaching "failures," I came to sense that their frustration with learners with special needs was rooted in their own feelings of self-doubt, low self-efficacy, and lack of preparation in their various pre-service teacher education programs. The overwhelming nature of their jobs, with incredibly large numbers of students in their teaching loads prohibited the kinds of relationship building needed to truly be successful with students who require special attention. The teachers in this particular graduate class were also proactive in their storying—sharing accounts of successes and sharing strategies they had found to be helpful thus far in their teaching. Some teachers immediately tried to establish a consistent routine and found that their students with autism were able to "get through the whole class." Teachers with new understanding of their students' lack of coping skills began to provide emotional space for children instead of punishing them for uncontrollable outbursts—thus avoiding a student meltdown. Others learned to give more wait time for student responses, providing learners to process information or skills at their own pace. A sense of possibility emerged as the teachers realized small successes in their own classrooms and rejoiced in those of their peers.

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[3] On the notion of "teacher talk," see also Clark, 2001; Florio-Ruane, 1991; Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007; Witherell & Noddings, 1991.

The course content focused on special education, including issues of law, equity, inclusion, access, universal design, etc. In particular, as we learned about the characteristics of the various categories of disability, we explored the teaching strategies used in other classrooms and how we might apply those strategies in the music classroom. However, throughout the course, the students were continually asked to consider the child's experience in the classroom. Coupled with selected readings by van Manen (1991, 2002), Noddings (1984/2003) and through the "meeting" of children with special needs through class experiences, these teachers were asked to reconsider *their* story of school with learners with special needs—to shift their perspective of "my classroom" and "that student who always disrupts my lessons" to consider the "story of school *from the child's eyes.*"

The two guests[3] who spoke about autism nudged Sonja (unbeknownst to them) to begin to shift her pedagogical stance. Because of the stress she was feeling in her job, realizing the anxiety that students with autism face simply coping with the school day resonated with her. In her next narrative assignment, she wrote:

> My experience with children with autism has been very limited. I only know of one student in my building that has it, Kevin, who I told you about in my first journal. Ever since that experience I honestly have just tried not to set him off. I did not feel at all equipped to know how to help Kevin in my class to be more successful. Autism has always been hard for me to understand and really get a handle on, but looking at it from the aspect of the child overcoming constant anxiety really helps. As I said in class, this gives me a new empathy for children suffering from autism. I feel like at least I have a frame of reference to go by with feelings of anxiety; *that* I can understand!

Sonja later shared one of her teacher stories in class, explaining what happened when preparing the fifth graders for the farewell program. She had miscalculated how they would process into the gymnasium while singing. Some moments of confusion followed for both her and the students as she figured out how to straighten out the problem. Kevin was not handling the transition or unexpected delays well and Sonja observed that he was close to a meltdown. Quietly, she asked him if he would like to "sit down over there until she had things figured out." She said Kevin looked so relieved to get away from the confusion and when things were once again on course, he willingly rejoined the group. "You know, before I would have thought he was just trying to make trouble for me. I was so glad that I was able to be more

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[3] A presentation by Nick Dubin (2006), a local educational speaker and writer who has Aspergers Syndrome, was both moving and informative.

empathetic to his needs. I never would have noticed that before. It was so much better for both of us and he was great in the program."

Sonja's sense of pedagogical thoughtfulness, her *pedagogical tact,* (van Manen, 1991, 2002) was reemerging and she was self-aware of the process. The teachers informally generated teacher talk at the beginning of each class and Sonja shared that she felt that she had been "much more caring" or "idealistic" when she was a new teacher and that "something had changed along the way." She had become increasingly annoyed or irritated with difficult children or perceived their misbehavior as purposely trying to "get to her," fueling her sense of burnout. She wondered how and when this had changed. She felt she had been sympathetic toward some children but had not taken the next step toward an empathy that might better inform her practice. She was, however painfully, reassessing her "way of being" in the classroom and shared that she felt she was now "nicer to be around and the kids seem to leave my classroom happy."[4]

Throughout the semester, we entered the stories of others as told or relived through first-person accounts in writings, educational or Youtube.com videos, and guest presentations by persons with special needs[5]. Each offered a different perspective of the story of living with disability; without exception, each offered a sense of acceptance for circumstances and most importantly a sense of "what might be," a sense of hope and possibility for their future. These stories often included an inspirational figure[6] who would not allow barriers to control dreams—for self or others—and we contemplated the ways we tacitly accept, create, or enable barriers for our students and ourselves.

## Entering into the Child's Experience

The final narrative assignment was for each teacher to "construct the story of a child in one of their music classes—to try to see school through that child's eyes." I encouraged them to select a child with special needs whom they found particularly challenging and spend as much time with that child as possible during the school day with the purpose of seeing what school is like from the child's perspective. What barriers might there be? How does the student interact with teachers and peers in contexts outside of the music room? What strategies are in

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[4] When I saw Sonja later that summer, she shared that this was the first summer in a long time that she "couldn't wait to go back to school in the fall."

[5] Guest presentations included an adult with ADHD, a parent with triplet sons who all had ADHD, and educational consultants for autism and for the hearing impaired.

[6] Youtube.com videos about Patrick Henry Hughes and the book and news story about "Ballerina Dreams" (Thompson & Ferrara, 2007) were particularly moving for these teachers.

place in the student's classroom that might be useful in the music room? With a wide range of possible outcomes, the teachers embarked on this assignment.

***Sonja's Story of Tyler***

Sonja shadowed Tyler several times throughout the school day as her schedule allowed. As she wrote up her narrative, she decided to include her experiences with Tyler in her final, more formal presentation on ADHD[7]. Sharing Tyler's lived experience in school, thinking about the ways Tyler experiences and "sees" school was eye opening for Sonja. This process—the living, constructing, and sharing—of a child's story of school proved both informative and unsettling as Sonja confronted issues she had tacitly accepted and had previously never questioned. Read and listen[8] to Sonja as she presents Tyler's story (each section below represents a slide from part of her PowerPoint presentation, emphasis in original).

***Audio may be found online at http://www.ijea.org/v10n19/audio/***

To consider Tyler's experience for a moment, we might look at Noddings' (1984/2003, pp. 59-65) description of the child "who knows the difference between being received and being held off or ignored" (p. 61). Can the child perceive his "best self" or is he constantly reminded of his least self? To be excluded from the school-wide assembly was a glaring reminder of his exclusion from being a full participatory member of the community where he spent most of every day, among adults who did not seem to "be crazy about him" (p. 61). Noddings states, "more important than anything else, however, is whether the child is welcome, whether he is seen as a contributing person" (p. 65). Exclusion, particularly overt exclusion where students are separated from the community by having to stay in a separate room, with the separation here viewed as "punishment," is the antithesis of feeling welcome and removes any possibility of being seen as a contributing person. A child's sense of possibility of his "best self" is lost to what the child could only perceive as his "least self," a self unattractive and unwanted as evidenced by his exclusion from friends and adults who, for him, apparently must "know best."

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[7] Sonja had spoken to me about her final presentation and had asked permission to include her experience with Tyler. Because I sensed that it had been a transformational experience for her, I asked and received her permission to audio-record the presentation, which is shared here.
[8] Audio may also be found online at http://www.ijea.org/v10n19/audio/.

Sonja shadowed Tyler for only one day and yet the experience served as a blaring wake-up call as she considered the experiences of Tyler and for all of her students. With a demanding schedule and the limitations of time and energy, she had not before fully considered what school might be like for a child with special needs. With the requirements of graduate coursework, she had made the time to pause and reflect on things she had allowed to slip away from her—her sense of purpose as a teacher and the sense of caring (Noddings, 1984/2003) she longed to rekindle.

> It is that condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as "good." It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring—to be in that special relation—that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be *moral* in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring (p. 5).

Sonja perceived herself as caring, had openly admitted that she wondered "what had changed," and was hoping she could reclaim that part of her teacher persona. Her presence in the graduate class (an elective) was indicative of her desire to grow as a teacher. She simply needed and sought the time and space to regain her footing. She (and I) could not have imagined where this narrative journey would take her and the ways she found new purpose and energy in her role as teacher,[9] immediately implementing teaching strategies and rethinking the nature of her classroom environment. The moment Sonja connected with Tyler to see the hurt in his eyes and voice was a pivotal experience in Sonja's reconnection to her sense of caring and it catapulted her into action. In that moment, she was ineffably connected to Tyler in a way that is uniquely human and the profound nature of the experience allowed her to reconnect to herself, her practice, and her sense of calling as a music teacher and one-caring (Noddings, 1984/2003) for the young musicians in her classroom.

Revisiting Witherell's (1991) call for the use of narrative in teacher education, she states as one of her reasons

> for a prolific use of narrative in teaching …has to do with the power of story and metaphor in offering up possibilities for human action and feeling. Whether inventing, reading, or listening to stories, reading or writing journals…the teller or receiver of stories can discover connections between self and other, [and]

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[9] Not only has Sonja re-envisioned herself as teacher, she has joined her school's school discipline committee, now seeing herself as an agent of change. In addition, for her master's thesis she chose to study her interaction with the paraprofessionals assisting learners with special needs in her classroom in an effort to support their pedagogy and enhance her students' musical experiences.

> penetrate barriers to understanding….Story and metaphor provide a form of educational encounter that renders us human and frees the moral imagination. They enable us, in Cynthia Ozick's words, to "leap into the other" (1986, p. 65), imagining the experience and the feelings of the other (p. 94).

The notion of "leaping into the other" aptly describes Sonja's experience with Tyler, as she not only connected to his story but *to him,* not only considering how she might serve him better in the music classroom, but finally *seeing the child before her.* Sonja, as Witherell (1995, citing Shabatay, 1991, p. 137) describes, was on a "journey of redemption… redeemed by the stranger who presents himself in all his otherness and asks by his presence to be met" (p. 40). In the journal noted earlier, when Sonja was nearing her breaking point, her focus was on her own experience in the classroom with extensive use of "I." In the last paragraph, she wrote, "I feel drained," "I feel responsible," "I worry," "I struggle," "I talk and they don't listen. I ask, and they say no." The transformational nature of narrative with the focus on *another's* story enabled the beginnings of a shift for Sonja, with the power of Tyler's story to not only inform her with a linear account of happenings but with a connection to human feeling, Tyler's feelings.

That Sonja was able to see beyond her own practice to greater issues within the structure of her school environment was remarkable, an indication of the ways in which Sonja was becoming less concerned about herself and becoming more "wakeful" to the children and circumstances around her. Sonja came to realize she had tacitly accepted as appropriate the school-wide discipline plan of "checks and pink slips." She saw the hurt in Tyler as he expressed that he had "never been to an assembly in my whole life!" She realized that eight-year-old boys do care about assemblies and about being included in the life of the school. Sonja also saw that what was a policy intended to motivate good behavior resulted in a small boy's feelings of disenfranchisement and exclusion, something he shared with the other students forbidden to attend this community-building, school-wide event. These children were at-risk for behaviors often not in their control, behaviors they (and others, including the adults in their lives) did not fully understand and with which all struggled to cope. She realized that children with special needs long for inclusion (Greene, 1993; Jellison, 2006; York & Reynolds, 1996) and that this behavior system was grossly counter-productive to their sense of belonging and acceptance in the school community. For Tyler, the pink slips were a continual thorn in his flesh, an outward reminder to him and others of "being different." Sonja's burgeoning wakefulness rekindled her idealism, her ability to dream or envision a different kind of learning community for Tyler.

**Walking in the Shoes of Another**

In this study there are multiple layers of narrative: first, there is the use of narrative as a curricular tool. We sense the linear narrative as the story of the class unfolds. My own narrative is present as I make meaning of the events that transpire and as I seek to represent them in a way that is meaningful to me as I learned from my students, and may be meaningful for the reader who may connect to them. There is Sonja's story of emerging wakefulness. As an active participant, Sonja's narrative of her story in her own words is represented in the data as she reflects upon her teaching past and present and wonders about how she might become a better and more sensitive teacher. Most compelling is Tyler's story of school—to hear his voice among the many adult voices and to realize that his words were so transformative for Sonja who, for that moment, really saw him and was changed.

Eisner (2008) describes arts-based research as a way to enter into another's experience. Narrative inquiry is one of those ways. For teachers who are not engaged in formal research, taking the time, even briefly, to enter into another's story, to consider school from another's perspective, may serve to enrich their understanding as they interact with their students. Sonja's construction of the narrative of a child—one who previously challenged her at many levels—proved to be a powerful vehicle for envisioning possibilities and fostering empathy, thus informing her pedagogically and personally. Engagement with narrative provided a pathway for Sonja to represent knowing, construct knowing, and to foster deepened knowings about herself and her relationship to her students. While one never knows how one's journey with narrative will develop, Sonja's wakefulness to Tyler allowed her to be "open, present, following closely and caringly, attending to nuanced qualities much as an accompanist is present for a soloist" (Bresler, 2008, p. 231). Eisner describes this "walking in the shoes of another" as a journey in empathy leading toward compassion.

> Experiencing a situation in a form that allows you to walk in the shoes of another is one way to know one aspect of it. Empathy is a means to understanding, and strong empathetic feelings may provide deep insight into what others are experiencing…. The ability to empathize with others is a way of understanding the character of their experience that, in some ways, is the first avenue to compassion" (p. 6-11).

For Sonja, a specialist who teaches large numbers of children, the pressing nature of her students' needs and her lack of self-efficacy about meeting their needs put her on the brink of a pedagogical crisis. Sonja is good teacher but one who was functioning on the verge of tears; she felt as though she was being swept away in a sea of needy children. The opportunity to be buoyed and once again find her direction proved transformative.

The layers of narrative presented here are many and intertwined. The emotional needs of each storyteller seem to be the crux of the matter. Tyler desperately sought care (Noddings, 1984/2003) and struggled to both find and receive it. Sonja had lost her sense of care-giving and was desperately trying to find it again. Though a painful process, she seemed revived when she found support and was once again able to shift her focus beyond herself (van Manen, 1991, 2002). She reported that both she and her students had a renewed sense of joy in her classroom. Through narrative she was able to sense that there were other stories surrounding her own story of school, compelling her to change her own teaching and involvement with her school community.

How might the academy better support the emotional needs of teachers so they can move beyond themselves to focus on the emotional needs of the children in their care? In teacher education, we provide encounters with educational philosophy, psychology, and teaching strategies, but seem to leave the emotional connectedness of teaching for novice educators to figure out on their own, many of whom are just a few years past adolescence with formative notions about their own identity. The elephant in the room, their emotional maturity—or immaturity—directly manifests itself in the lives of learners.

Classrooms and teacher education classrooms alike have unique social environments. Narrative construction is no magic bullet but may offer teacher educators a malleable pedagogical tool for fostering care among teachers in any content area. Sonja's openness to the experience of entering other's narratives enabled her own success. During the frenetic final days of the school year, Sonja was able to slow down enough to reengage with her learners, her school community, and herself. Confronting her own narrative and being open to the narrative of her students fostered growth in her personal and professional development. As she gave and received support from her peers in this class, she began to move forward again as a teacher, no longer feeling the despair she had known a few weeks prior.

Sonja's tale of her emotional maturing is her own, but one that may invite others to consider their own stories, the stories of teachers and teacher educators, redirecting and deepening the conversation (Barone, 2001) toward the children's stories of school—stories of youngsters like Tyler who, like any child, longs for care and a sense of belonging (Blair, 2009b).

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