

# Ways of Being in Teaching: Conversing Paths to Meaning

*Sean Wiebe*

*University of Prince Edward Island*

*John J. Guiney Yallop*

*Acadia University*

In this article, we invite readers into a conversation about ways of being in teaching. Through e-mails, telephone calls, and face-to-face meetings, we use our first conversations with each other as shared moments that we returned to, seeking to better understand how we made meaning in our individual school teaching careers, and how we continue to make meaning as teacher educators. Exploring together our memories, we use poetry and narrative to collaboratively interpret what those memories might mean for us and for educational communities.

Key Words: autoethnography, collaborative research, poetic inquiry, teacher education, writing as research

Dans cet article, les auteurs invitent les lecteurs à participer à une conversation sur les façons d'être comme pédagogues. Les conversations que les auteurs ont eux-mêmes engagées entre eux à travers des courriels, des échanges téléphoniques et des rencontres ont constitué le point de départ de leur réflexion en vue de mieux comprendre le sens qu'ils ont donné à leurs carrières respectives dans l'enseignement et qu'ils continuent à donner à leur implication actuelle dans la formation à l'enseignement. Explorant leurs souvenirs, ils ont recours à la poésie et à des récits pour interpréter ensemble le sens que pourraient avoir ces souvenirs pour eux et pour les milieux d'enseignement.

Mots clés : autoethnographie, recherche concertée, enquête poétique, formation à l'enseignement, écriture comme mode de recherche.

## SEAN'S NARRATIVE

We have constructed this article through a dialogue that continues a conversation John and I first began at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference at York University in May 2006. We have constructed a dialogical space with poetic and narrative accounts of our memories, and our e-mails, telephone calls, and our face-to-face meetings. In such a dialogical space, the nature of what we know, how we come to know it, and what we know of ourselves intersect and interrelate on multiple layers. These layers include the conversation about our readings, those texts that have been layered with and through our experiences, themselves an experience of reading, but also a means to interpret and reinterpret the givenness of events as they happen in our lives.

We converse with and through our read and reread readings, inviting new readers of this text into our conversation; such a practice of conversational acknowledgement is important to us to avoid bringing up dead authors' authorities to legitimize our work, where for example, we might be tempted to direct the reader to Barthes (1978), or Foucault (1972), or Lyotard (1984), and so on. Instead, we converse in the manner educators do around a staffroom table, constructing this dialogue enough to remove the gossip (but perhaps not always), and through the process of conversation render visible the poetic, narrating, and narrated selves in textualized accounts, which we feel are a way to explore those daily educational activities that comprise a practice. As well, by the unique unfolding of our dialogue (which is not the technique of dialogue), we are summoned by the other's interpretations and experiences that change the nature of the stories we might have told as a singular author. This discursive approach, we hope, fills our dialogue with a kind of intertextual autobiography (Wiebe & Snowber, 2009), an interaction and ongoing iteration between actualizing selves and textualizing selves.

Four years ago at the 2006 CSSE conference, at a morning session on poetry in the social sciences, the inviting tone of John's phenomenological question to the three presenters prompted my eye contact and admiration. With a graduate student's eagerness, I introduced myself to John after the session. The practical and professional merits of our relationship were quickly dispelled when I learned that John was not a full professor at a leading university with anticipated retirements the same year

I'd be defending my dissertation; rather, like me, he still had a year or two to complete his doctoral studies. For some, the conversation ends there, but our relationship carried forward with an openness to how our individual phenomenological understandings could become (and already were) dialogically part of how we layer and interrelate knowledge.

Later in the conference, John and I met for lunch, talked openly about our lives, and first connected on the notion that our ways of being in teaching are intimately related to who we are on our life journeys. John and I share a caring approach; we share a love of poetry and its value to education, and we share a similar life story. I took from our first meeting important words that John offered. He gave no advice. He made no attempt to highlight his wisdom, but did offer a few simple words: "Take care of your heart." The tone in which his words were spoken was meaningful to me. How John spoke, "Take care" was hopeful and orienting and yet left so much room for my own doubts and questions. His words also restored a balance between heads and hearts. What his words implied was also meaningful: In schools, hearts need caring, hearts need our attention, our investment and time. John seemed to be opening some space for my heart to breathe, as I was at the time besieged with knowledge claims related to methodologies in my dissertation. Hearts just didn't feel legitimate.

To illustrate the tension, I offer below a small selection from my journal. The entry followed the conference, and came a few days after my conversation with John.

*Perhaps John was sensing that I needed such a reminder? Perhaps I had not yet realized I was neglecting my heart. Had I? In the daily grind which can be teaching, had I forgotten to care for my heart? Was the way I was teaching including my heart? If I had neglected my heart, would I neglect the need to care for others' hearts? What does it mean and look like to care for one's heart? What tensions are involved in choosing to care for my heart in addition to all the other practices that are pressed on me to care about? (Journal Entry, June 6, 2006)*

Less than two years later, John and I met again at the First International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry in October 2007 at the University of British Columbia. We had not been in communication. I hadn't followed up responsibly to e-mails John sent out. Even so, our connection was still

there. In the midst of finishing an un/autobiographical dissertation that included poetry and a fictionalized story line, I'd like to think that almost two years later I was worrying less about how legitimate my knowledge claims were, and learning to take care of my heart.

Since that first intersection of the storylines of our lives, we both had created ways, contexts, and strategic relationships to explore the nature of what we know and to situate that knowledge in poetry and narrative. And we were connected by circumstance, because John and I were both scheduled to defend our dissertations in the spring. From the gap in our communication, which could have been framed as a neglect, as a falling out, or as miscommunication, John and I found a fertile place to grow our own work. Deepening my understanding of "take care of your heart," John added two more words that summed up for me what every class needed: *safe space*. But he didn't just add those words; he troubled them. He challenged the conference attendees at the symposium to consider if there were any safe spaces, or if there could be—and "Who decides if a space is safe?" In my own presentation later in the day, I spoke of what students need from teachers. Too often in the writing classroom student needs do not get the attention or the value they deserve. I argued then that educators need to hold students' words tenderly, that we need to open safe spaces for students to feel like they really belong as writers.

#### JOHN'S NARRATIVE

Like the beginning of the relationship that Sean and I entered, so begins this article: the ends, as ends might ordinarily be conceived, are not yet understood. Instead, we are anticipating points along the way where the convergence of our thoughts and experiences will provide stepping out points for others who join this conversation as readers or as writers. We speak of convergence as a kind of difference, hoping that we can articulate the subtle nuances of our disagreements, of the complex ways we have come to hold our difference as an important marker for articulating our shared beliefs.

We invite each other into those moments of convergence, or we arrive uninvited and wait to be welcomed or not, to be noticed or not, but always open to the possibilities of the next step. Very early into our writing of this article, Sean and I lost our awareness of who invited and who

accepted. Our shared arrival became our shared invitation and acceptance, our shared willingness to journey together into our writing. Although we look backward to understand our choices, we are not interested in determining any order of choices, but rather we are interested in probing deeper into a collection of shared choices that make meaning possible.

We are aware that our knowledge is located and temporal. We believe that all knowledge is so. We accept these limitations; we embrace them. We see in them possibilities. Our doctoral dissertation supervisors (Hoogland, 1996, 2001, 2003, 2006; Leggo, 1994, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007) were among those mentors who supported us as we opened spaces to create our knowledge and recreate our lives. We are grateful to them for guiding us. They shone their light into places we needed to go, places from which we are now shining our lights—into ourselves and into each other, and into what we are claiming as our knowing.

Days before I first met Sean, I was writing in my journal the first draft of my poem that would be called "What Hate Is" (Guiney Yallop, 2008, p. 54). I had at one point titled the poem "On Being A Teacher." The connection of those two thoughts is telling. Although I loved teaching, and felt loved as a teacher, the education community is one in which I had witnessed and experienced hate. After the conference where Sean and I met, I wrote:

*Today is my last day as a teacher with this employer. I rejoice. My last day of work? No, more a new beginning of a more complete focus on what is becoming/has become my work—my writing. I am a writer, a poet, a researcher, an educator. I rejoice.*  
(Journal entry, May 31, 2006)

I was able to tell Sean to take care of his heart because I had learned to take care of my own heart. I had left something I loved in order to survive. The experience was one that both frightened and excited me at the same time; while those words are certainly cliché, they are also, for me, very real.

So, when I met Sean again at the First International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry, where Monica Prendergast and Carl Leggo brought together about thirty poetic researchers, I had moved into another identity.

I was no longer needing to write in my journal that I was a poet to convince myself of such a statement. I knew that I was a poet. I had assumed the identity. I felt it. I owned it. I loved it. And, what was clear to me, others met or knew me as a poet, and warmly welcomed me as such. I felt a strong sense of belonging—a clear awareness of my identity and a connection to a community. Sean and I shared a meal together, and a bottle of red wine, and we talked into the late hours of the night. We talked about our love of teaching and our difficulties with the institutional environments that have been entrusted by our society with the teaching of our children. And they were “our children.” It wouldn’t be until our next meeting, where we began to work on this article, that we would speak in greater depth of another shared life experience that influenced our own beliefs about schooling; we are both parents, both fathers of school-aged children.

#### SEAN’S NARRATIVE

In one of the high schools where I worked, we had horribly boring professional development sessions, but fantastic retirement parties; the irony of it still makes me smile. Two times a year, we walked the long narrow hallway to what were known as our semi-annual professional development days. These days included large staff meetings for an administrative agenda, such as new field trip protocols, or new accounting protocols, or a review of supervision protocols. Following large staff meetings, there were smaller department meetings, which most often looked at student results, department budget requests, and the content of upcoming exams. On many occasions during these meetings, I took to doodling in the margins and writing poetry. One of the poems found its way into a conference paper:

#### *The Poet’s Guide to Robert’s Rules of Order*

*Leave the flaccid soggy carton  
of camels hidden, no*

*matter how tempted to take  
a puff, uncurl crossed arms,*

*when you see his eyes shift,  
that's the signal to make*

*your argument—just go gentle,  
not too strong, nor so easy going*

*as to begin muttering  
and murmuring in the back.*

*Never begin with, I might have  
had a vision, never ask*

*for what is out of reach,  
and never, never, on a whim*

*tell all, give details, or explain,  
instead say I'd like to have...*

*it will be less than we thought  
and when questions arise,*

*simply move rocks around  
tilt your head, and say,*

*there are exceptions, always  
or, that's an entirely different*

*matter. Learn the early warning  
signs for a fiasco, the shy scent*

*not so innocent, such as  
quasi secrets now completely*

*airborne or hunches that can't  
be checked. A habit which*

*helps shape you is to yell out  
point of order, point of order*

*whenever your opponent seems  
to have you at the stake—unless*

*she is beautiful and you will be  
tied together lying down.*

*(Wiebe, 2008, not paginated).*

Thinking that these two days a year of professional development had little impact on my teaching, I was hoping that they were fading further into the distant recesses of my memory of working in high schools. They do not fade, however. Rather, they emerge here as opportunities for new learning—not the kind of learning that was likely intended, but learning for which I must acknowledge gratitude. They remind me to make choices about which stories to tell and how to tell them.

Of those stories, I'm reminded to tell one which takes place in another hall where the ceilings are high and the architecture is meant to inspire learning, even the greatness that comes with applied study. Not unlike entering a historical cathedral, this hall inspires awe. On special nights, like the opening of a student play, or a guest lecture from a local professor, or a retirement party, the hall finds its social purpose. A cash bar is usually part of these evenings, and sometimes colleagues break out into revelry, enjoying an evening free from distress. On such occasions, we were free to remember the pleasures of living well together.

For me, the highlight of one of the retirement evenings was the reading of students' memories of a long-time teacher, over 30 years in this one school. Known as a quirky but truly exceptional math teacher, he served as a department head while pursuing graduate studies in math education. Initially, I thought students might comment on all the lunchtime math tutorials, all the early morning meetings in the office, the math competitions, the inspirational class moments when the light went on, that general love and pursuit of the discipline of math. How wrong I was. Student after student commented on this teacher's commitment to



after-school sports. Athletics and this teacher weren't obviously connected. This teacher didn't spend hours in the gym, didn't have the right stats with the bench press or the squat. His six-minute mile was well above six minutes, and just about everyone else in the school had a better chance than him at converting a layup or a three-point shot.

And yet. He held the stopwatch. Every day after school, laps one through four, and often more, this teacher called out the lap times and a word of encouragement. And how far those words of encouragement went. They crossed countries and continents. From different time zones his words still have their profound influence in students' lives. Nothing profound here, though. Simply words called out while another is running: "You can do it!" "It's all you!" "Almost there!" "One lap to go!" And still I wonder at it. How could these words trump his mastery in math, his profound influence on the department, and such a deep impact on colleagues? Certainly, I'd underestimated how much an impact being there, with an encouraging word, would have.

This story leaves me wondering about the profound impact of encouragement and being there, and how these two priorities have left a lasting impact on students' lives. Sæverot (2008) suggests teachers reflect carefully on their words of encouragement. Insightfully, Sæverot points out that today's teachers are led to praise according to curricular outcomes, so that a student's attainment of a mandated goal becomes the ringing of the bell by which praise is given. He advises instead that when teachers do give praise, it should be given spontaneously (p. 50), considering a child's history (p. 51), and offering direction according to a child's interests and abilities (pp. 53-55). Perhaps also at issue here is a teacher's *way of being* in the classroom. A teacher who makes a way of praising is not picking and choosing who to praise and when, but makes a practice of celebration, encouragement, and engagement with a child's growth. In the story above, *being there* speaks to this math teacher's 30 plus years of being with students. There is a safety net offered in being there. This is the kind of reliability that inspires trust. There is a day-after-day appeal to being there.

Sometimes, day-after-day evokes a kind of drudgery in recalling how challenging teaching is, and yet, here the influence seems to be at its strongest. Add to it the notion that what teachers do every day is en-

courage, and there is something radical about this way of being in the world. No unkind word. Focus only on what is positive. Certainly we all have moments we can remember where a few encouraging words were enabled by the context. And we speak those words. And we know the profound influence such words can make. But beyond those moments, encouragement is difficult to find. Here is the encouragement I think this story offers: The encouragement that is there every day, and the encouragement that others come to trust and rely on day-in-and-day-out.

I tell this story, now part of who I am as a teacher, because this retirement party was the best professional development I've ever had. After the reading of these students' memories I was inspired. After their words, I knew my chosen profession mattered. It was this appreciation that increased the value of what teachers do. Is this not part of the etymology of appreciation? To find value? To appreciate somebody is to increase her or his value. It is also to increase our own. The context that elicits a teacher's choice of words thus begins before the class with that more important choice of how to address the children on a daily basis. Hyde (1983) suggests that "the way we treat a thing can sometimes change its nature" (p. xiii). Like Sæverot (2008), I would suggest that a child's history does matter, and a teacher can choose to be an agent of change in that history, transforming it with present words of praise. The teacher's history also matters: that is, over many years to be an always, ongoing source of encouragement. Encouragement as a daily life practice (which stretches into years of encouragement) is not meted out as favour, nor as praise that can be manipulative, all too readily aligned with other classroom behavioral controls (Sæverot, 2008; Kohn, 2001), but is simply there, a safety net by which students can take greater risks in their learning and discovery of identity. I'd like to suggest that with a healthy helping of appreciation, schools can be places of growth and warmth and care. It is not the warm and fuzzy feeling that I want more of, but the commitment to the kind of ways we will speak and be with one another.

### *The Retirement*

*No one really arrives late  
except maybe the gossip,*

*finally out of place against  
such accomplishment.*

*Here, a few kind words  
don't mind being the centre  
of attention, even as professionalism  
(who invited him?) fashions*

*a suitable, a suite of speeches,  
for just such an occasion.  
Hearts, and love, and compassion  
matter, however briefly, here,*

*in the after party, their schoolday  
comeback permanently delayed  
in committee, too difficult  
to measure, too fuzzy,*

*overly sentimental.  
Ah, student work collected from over  
the years lines the white walls,  
hangs from fluorescent lights,*

*teachers' comments too small to read  
insignificant as the cake bursts  
through the double doors,  
running, shouting, everyone*

*seems to want something,  
that is soon forgotten tomorrow  
morning, when the bell urges them into  
occupations so eagerly begun.*

#### JOHN'S NARRATIVE

Are retirement parties, such as the one that Sean describes above, those safe spaces I have been hearing people talk about in education? Is leav-

ing teaching, and leaving it at the 'right' time and in the 'right' way, the only way that we can experience safety in it? Is the experience similar for students? Is that why students seem to feel so relaxed when they return to visit their former schools? They don't have to be there anymore. Is this why there's such joy at retirement parties? The teacher no longer has to come to school.

In our communications through e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face, Sean has expressed a belief that an education system can still be a place where an individual can grow and develop and, generally, where individuals can enhance their own sense of authority. It's a belief I want to share. I believe, however, that it is only by resisting an education system that an individual's identity remains intact. Sean believes this, too—or wants to. We live separately and together within those tensions of desire and (dis)belief. Schools can be (often are) oppressive sites for individuals and for communities. They can also be places where, in certain classrooms at certain moments, students can find their voices and those voices ought to be encouraged and supported.

### *The Bell Rings*

*The bell rings  
the line forms  
the teacher exits,  
or on cold days waves a hand,  
to direct students inside.*

*Bags, books, and bodies—  
all have their places inside school walls.*

*Bells ring throughout the day dictating the where  
and the when  
of those bags, books,  
and bodies.*

*What if there were no bells?*

Students are aware of the power that teachers hold and teachers are aware that students are aware. Students who are not aware are seen as deficient and in need of awareness. Who's in control here, after all? To be fair, this pattern is repeated throughout the hierarchies in education systems; it's clear who's at the top and who's at the bottom. And where do parents fit in? Where do we locate those parents who do not have a voice in education, who are seen as deficient because they do not know the language, or when they do know it (such as parents who are also teachers) are seen as betraying it by interrogating it?

#### SEAN'S NARRATIVE

When John speaks of system hierarchies that perpetuate deficiency, I'm reminded of a tension ever-present in my beliefs about teaching. On the one hand, I am strongly influenced by the retirement story above, and on the other, I saw over the years how my students found it quite impossible to believe that they were writers. The system John speaks of seems to have worked against my students' identifying themselves as writers. Even with the simple definition of "writers write," therefore, "you are already writers," years of schooling has told them otherwise. For one, their words were not usually in print somewhere. Few of them received a cheque in the mail for something they had written. Even in the world of blogs and social networking, few understood their influence or the wider audience of their work. Even further, many distrusted their own opinions. Plagiarism was more rampant than I'd like to admit because students believed someone else could say it better—a real writer. Even with my intention to be encouraging, as part of the system, I was just as likely to hinder their formation of a writing identity. Too often, my marginal comments confirmed their low opinion of their voice. I primarily made comments that showed lack: that showed what could be done better. Thus I still failed in my efforts to encourage and show growth, to demonstrate that my students were already doing the good work of real writers.

From a student's perspective, teachers hold authority in their lives because teachers are in the business of skill development, or comprehension, or any other kind of learning that positions students as beginners. What students often don't realize is that teachers also create the catego-

ries and larger frameworks by which students can interpret the nature of the social world they live in. Through school systems, for example, young students come to differentiate the disciplines. Thus, by virtue of the bells and a weekly timetable, language arts is distinguished from social studies, and so on. Rarely do students learn these categories by investigating the nature of the discipline itself (Jardine & Friesen, 2006).

Like other systems, the knowledge system in K-12 schooling relies on repetition and patterns, as predictability comes from the coherence in the system whereby patterns are recognized and meaning ascribed to them. Learning, then, can be described as the process of ongoing coherence, that is a student's ability to fit new knowledge claims into that system with the right amount of credibility (or to reject those knowledge claims), such that some knowledge will be whole-heartedly embraced, some stored, and some rejected. As regulators in the school society, teachers hold a great deal of knowledge authority in their most immediate contexts, and how teachers hold that authority can significantly impact students' present and future claims to knowledge. In other words, current inequalities in our society are related to how teachers have engaged and addressed knowledge in the classroom.

Foran and Olson (2008), in their definition of pedagogy, emphasize "the relationship between teachers and students" (p. 25) rather than any "technical craft" or "art" (p. 25). Following van Manen (2002), they are concerned with a teacher's nature of address (see also Pinar's, 2004, pp. 190-201, extended discussion of Ellsworth, 1997). What matters is the "pedagogical thoughtfulness" (Foran & Olson, 2008, p. 25) that emerges as teachers and students "open themselves more expansively to pedagogical possibilities . . . by becoming more aware of their presupposed institutional confinements" (p. 26). Foran and Olson (2008) wonder, "What occurs in lived time, lived body, lived space, and lived relationships when the place becomes pedagogical?" That is, when we are "absorbed . . . authentically in a learning experience" (p. 24).

Thinking of my writing students again, they experienced a fundamental inequality in school: the expert/beginner dichotomy. As I point out above, how teachers *hold* their authority within this artificial dichotomy significantly impacts students' development as writers. For example, immediately recognizable in dualistic systems – that is systems

where members have only two categories by which they are labelled (such as beginner/expert, men/women, gay/straight, god/man, teacher/student) – is the adoption of an us/them characterization of authority. Teachers have authority to make claims and students do not. Dualistic groupings are simplistic labelling systems that profoundly limit a member's ability to imagine difference, while at the same time setting up power struggles between the categories as members cannot usually shift categories or invent new ones. The dualism implicit in the K-12 system is teacher/student, and in this simplistic categorization, teachers hold all authority and claims to knowledge. The point being, how is a student to develop in a system where he or she is positioned as student, as not teacher, as beginner and not expert? Should we expect teachers and students to be so imaginative as to be able to invent the kinds of difference that would enable them to share knowledge authority together? Here is where the system must change.

Doucet and Mauthner (2008) explore the tensions present in knowing, focusing particularly on the question, "What can be known?" (p. 399). This question is often the curricular concern of teachers, almost to an exclusivity, in both planning and evaluation (Eisner, 1985; Ladwig, 2009). But if we are to take van Manen (2002) seriously, that "how and what we see depends on who and how we are in the world" (p. 23), then teachers' planning and evaluation strategies ought to be much more open to the question, "Who can be a knower?" The shift from *what* to *who* underscores a serious point made above: that students too often in schools are not given the right to know. In our social positioning of knowledge students are viewed as non-knowers, and given less privilege to explore, create, and play with the possibilities of learning.

What helped somewhat in my own practice was exercising the freedom I had, or chose to take, as a high school teacher who had his own class. What helped was doing a few things that my colleagues typically did not do. What helped was giving students class time to write, believing that what they had to discover and say through their writing was as important as anything I might teach that day. If writing is valuable, then it deserves class time. Many of my colleagues had students write at home, as student writing, positioned as the inferior homework, could not take up valuable class time. What helped my students feel empowered

was encouraging them to send their work out for publication. This meant constantly changing the nature of my assignments to fit the most recent calls. This meant that my favourite essay question on *To Kill a Mockingbird* had to take a back seat: I couldn't teach what I taught the previous year. What helped my students begin to embrace a writing identity was calling them writers, and calling me their editor. This changed the reasons for my comments on spelling and punctuation and grammar. It also helped to foreground the importance of an idea. What helped was restricting their need to go to the library to find others' words to validate their own. What helped was identifying ways where young writers can be true experts, and finding with them markets where their voices mattered. What helped was assisting young people to see how adult words position them, and how some of that positioning is based on fear and lack of understanding. What helped was reminding myself that I needed to focus on empowerment, that empowering my students' words could give them access to power in their lives.

#### JOHN'S NARRATIVE

Both Sean and I have spent many years as teachers, and in other roles, in education systems in Canada. Sean has pointed to some of the times when he has failed to be what he wanted to be for students. I have failed, too. I have allowed my own distress around the lack of a real sense of community in education to affect my relationships with students. I have sometimes been hesitant to try new ideas, or to encourage my students to try them. I have lost my patience. I have been fearful of allowing my own mistakes and inadequacies to be too visible. None of this serves students well.

What Sean described in his secondary school is also possible in elementary schools. What I found helped me in teaching was telling my students that they could be everything I could be in the classroom. Students in elementary schools can be readers, writers, researchers, presenters, collaborators, educators. Teachers often, all too often, use the word *accountability* as a justification for not doing things differently, for not taking the risks their students need. What helped me was reclaiming the word *accountability* as a marker of professional ethics where, as teacher, my ultimate accountability was to those who needed me most—my stu-



dents. What helped me was imagining new ways of being with my students, new ways of being in teaching. There is an urgency for imagination in education. Only through the imagination, I believe, will we in the education community bring that joy of the retirement party back into the classroom, the staffroom, the school library, the hallways, the administration office, and the school yard—even for the teachers on duty. We seek to make educators aware of this urgency and we then seek to engage teachers, students, teacher educators, parents, administrators, and community members in conversations about ways of being in teaching.

Sean and I are attempting to look back at our own teaching, at our own relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and community members. We are attempting to revisit our experiences gently, but with honesty. We are attempting to uncover our practice and our theory. We are working with each other to understand. We are engaging in a dialogue that locates us within and without teaching. Now, as academics, we have the privilege, and the responsibility, to look even more closely, and to attempt to articulate what we see. Our methodology as poetic researchers enables us to bring a reader into the moment of our experience, to show a reader what we experienced. There is a tension in our work as poetic researchers (Guiney Yallop, in press) and as autoethnographers in the academic community, and in the education community beyond the academy—a tension of identity. This is a tension we want to hold, that we feel we have a responsibility to hold, to not shy away from. We want to work together to hold this tension, within ourselves and within our work—and between us.

#### SEAN'S NARRATIVE

John has pointed to teachers' uses of accountability to justify their (mis)management of students. I, too, have heard this word, and when drawn into staffroom conversations, I'm still curious about why the statement, "This will prepare them for the real world (of work)," is so often put forward as a rationale (for just about any teaching practice). With deep concern to understand and improve the lives of students in classrooms, I offer the poem below, and its appeal to the rules of wide open spaces, as a way into shifting how students are positioned, their subjectivities constructed, their voices silenced.

*I love that time of year*

*I love that time of year  
which has no name  
in between summer and fall  
when still a few surprising days  
are scattered in amongst  
the colder forecast.*

*It is as if some saint  
sent back to make complaint  
upon all this human measuring  
suggests a patience  
a lingering into each season  
letting each one fall*

*where it may. Such  
lessons surely register  
after the final bell  
where the rules of wide open spaces  
come full speed down the hall,  
tumbling out of turn.*

It is a systemic construction that disempowers students, particularly students who are writers (and artists, and actors, and others on the margins of school curriculum). The justification that teachers are training students for future employment devalues student work. Although being ready for the workforce (or university) is a reasonable K-12 goal, and does empower students financially, it disempowers them in knowledge authority. To explain: Successful students in the K-12 system often graduate with the skills for further training, and with further training they gain expertise. What began back in kindergarten as the possibility of discovering knowledge ends with an expertise that can be traded in an economy of goods and services. By this system, a person is valued conditionally, according to her or his market value. In myriad ways, schools prepare for and perpetuate this dehumanizing system, this tendency to-

ward reduction of a person's value as a person. In school, whenever the future economic value of learning cannot be ascertained, the value of the learning comes into question. Thus, even though it disempowers students, being "readied for the workforce" (or university) is a catchall phrase for doing what schools do.

Is it possible, through school systems, to retrieve a general value, to empower human beings apart from their economic contribution to a society? We suggest that it begins with how we care about a person's knowledge claims, that is, how much value we give them. We also propose that when teachers nurture students' words, listen deeply to them, are influenced by them, encourage them, celebrate them, and increase their value, then all students in a classroom will raise their expectations for how much authority they carry in the world; such expectations will have a positive correlation toward equality, regardless of difference.

#### JOHN'S NARRATIVE

As with the questions and ideas our students have, our questions and our proposals are ones that we know we cannot fully engage separately or even together as two. We need our communities to find our own voices, individually and together, and to bring those voices forward in the collaborative manner in which we have done here. This collaborative venture is a reflection on our experiences as educators in schools. As well, it is an expression of our fears about what schools can do to students, and to teachers, and an expression of our hopes for what young people and adults might find in schools. This venture is also an exploration of what is possible through conversation, through attending to each other's words, and to our own words, and to the spaces between words.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our gratitude to Acadia University, for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Institutional Grant, and to University of Prince Edward Island for a Collaboration Grant, both of which supported this writing project.

## REFERENCES

- Barthes, R. (1978). *A lover's discourse: Fragments*. (R. Howard, Trans.). New York: The Noonday Press.
- Doucet, A., & Mauthner, N. (2008). What can be known and how? Narrated subjects and the Listening Guide. *Qualitative Research*, 8(3), 399–409.
- Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the power of address*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Eisner, E. (1985). *The art of educational evaluation: A personal view*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.
- Foran, A., & Olson, M. (2008). Seeking pedagogical places. *Phenomenology and Practice*, 2(1), 24-48. Retrieved February 21, 2010, from <http://www.phandpr.org/index.php/pandp/article/view/15/65>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). London, UK: Tavistock.
- Guiney Yallop, J. J. (in press). Being a poetic researcher: Holding the tension of artist in the academy and academic in the world. *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*.
- Guiney Yallop, J. J. (2008). OUT of place: A poetic journey through the emotional landscape of a gay person's identities within/without communities. Unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.
- Hoogland, C. (1996). The geography of consciousness: The Dutch immigrants' daughter as artist. *Journal of The Canadian Society for Education Through Art*, 27(2), 14-21.
- Hoogland, C. (2001). *You are home*. Windsor, ON: Black Moss Press.
- Hoogland, C. (2003). *Cuba journal: Language and writing*. Windsor, ON: Black Moss Press.
- Hoogland, C. (2005). *Second marriage*. London, ON: Canadian Poetry Association, London Chapter Publishers .
- Hyde, L. (1983). *The gift: Imagination and the erotic life of property*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Jardine, D., & Friesen, S. (2006, May 27-30). The contemporary state of curriculum: What is happening to the disciplines? Paper presented at the meeting

- of the Canadian Society of the Study of Education (CSSE), for the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies (CACs), Toronto.
- Kohn, A. (2001). *Five reasons to stop saying 'good job!'* Retrieved February 21, 2010, from <http://www.alfiekohn.org/parenting/gj.htm>
- Ladwig, J. G. (2009). Working backwards towards curriculum: On the curricular implications of Quality Teaching. *Curriculum Journal*, 20(3), 271-286.
- Leggo, C. (1994). *Growing up perpendicular on the side of a hill*. St. John's, NL: Killick Press.
- Leggo, C. (2001). Research as poetic rumination: Twenty-six ways of listening to light. In L. Neilsen, A. L. Cole, & J. G. Knowles (Eds.), *The art of writing inquiry* (pp. 173-195). Halifax, NS: Backalong Books.
- Leggo, C. (2004). Living poetry: Five ruminations. *Language & Literacy: A Canadian Educational E-Journal*, 6(2). Retrieved February 21, 2010, from <http://www.langandlit.ualberta.ca/Fall2004/Leggo.pdf>
- Leggo, C. (2005). Pedagogy of the heart: Ruminations on living poetically. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 39(2), 175-195.
- Leggo, C. (2007). *Come-by-chance: A collection of poems*. St. John's, NL: Breakwater Books Ltd.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Pinar, W. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Sæverot, H. (2008). Teacher praise and encouragement: Towards an education for democracy. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 2(1), 49 - 62. Retrieved February 21, 2010, from <http://www.phandpr.org/index.php/pandp/article/view/24/75>
- van Manen, M. (2002). *The tone of teaching: The language of pedagogy*. London, ON: Althouse Press.
- Wiebe, S. (2008, May 30). Poetic tactics: Teaching writing for critical literacy. Paper presented at the meeting of The Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies (CACs), University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.
- Wiebe, S. & Snowber, C. (2009, October 15-18). To flourish and nourish with poetry: An intertextual autobiography of spiritual practice. Paper

presented at the meeting of the Second International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry: Poetry as a way of knowing. University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI.

Sean Wiebe is an Assistant Professor of education at the University of Prince Edward Island. His recent research explores how poets have influenced teaching practice and are insightful theorists.

John J. Guiney Yallop is a parent, a partner, and a poet. An Assistant Professor at Acadia University, he teaches literacy and writes poetry to explore the form and content of experience.

Contact:

Dr. Sean Wiebe  
Faculty of Education  
University of Prince Edward Island  
550 University Avenue  
Charlottetown  
PE C1A 4P3  
Phone: (902) 620-5073  
FAX: (902) 566-0416 e-mail: [swiebe@upei.ca](mailto:swiebe@upei.ca)

Dr. John J. Guiney Yallop  
School of Education  
Acadia University  
Wolfville  
NS B4P 2R6  
Phone: (902) 585-1191  
FAX: (902) 585-1761 e-mail: [johnj.guineyyallop@acadiau.ca](mailto:johnj.guineyyallop@acadiau.ca)