

Narratives in the Making: Imagination and Education

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple tree, while the night thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Frost at Midnight.

In his poem, Frost at Midnight, Coleridge deals with the role of imagination and memory as the unifying force between past, present and future. The poet's mind moves backward to memories within memories of his own childhood, and forward to imagine a future for his son very different from his own. Throughout the poem, the interplay of motion and stasis is central to the nature of the connections between memory and imagination, and the movement of the mind is simultaneously the subject of the poem and the means by which the subject is given form. The image of the film fluttering on the grate symbolizes the mind as it moves between past and future, recollecting, describing, and predicting. Suspended above time and space, the mind is a seeing, remembering and projecting entity with the power to liquify time as it moves backwards and forwards in an endless motion. Through this continuous movement of the "idling spirit" which gathers momentum and resists forward movement, the poet "makes a toy of Thought". Through the contraries of idleness and contemplation, it is the "idling spirit" that defines activity, and the striking reconciliation of opposites that is the route to seeing into the life of things. Balancing the backward movement of his memories, in the final lines of the poem, the poet projects his mind into the imagined and hoped for childhood and future of his son. He hopes that by being closely associated with nature, seeing the landscape reflected in the clouds, and all parts of the natural world fitting together in complete harmony, Hartley will learn to see and hear God in all things. Like the frost of the title, Coleridge believes that nature works below the surface of perception, and its teachings and influence, though not always observable contribute to the ethical and moral nature of human beings. In the final lines, the interplay between memory and imagination are reflected in the image of the icicles "quietly shining" to the moon, which bathes the scene in its soft clear light, and is reflected off the icicles which hold its image, as the moon itself holds the image of the sun.

Like nature in the poem Frost at Midnight, the learning community at Corktown works

below the surface level of perception, and its teachings though not always observable, contribute not only to the intellectual development, but to the ethical, moral, aesthetic, imaginative, and spiritual development of the individual.

Prologue:

Corktown Community High School is a publicly funded urban, secondary school whose programmes, culture and community events emphasize the education of the whole person—intellectually, emotionally, morally, socially, aesthetically and spiritually. Throughout the learning community at Corktown, there is an emphasis on the development of self-knowledge and responsiveness to others, creative and critical thought, and connectedness to the self, the school community and the larger global society. Relationships are at the heart of teaching and learning in this community, and it is within supportive and empathetic relationships that students learn to create their own narratives, to expand their consciousness of others in local and global contexts, and to develop respect and trust for the other in the context of their personal lives and in the creation of a democratic learning community and society.

The development of the whole person concept is incorporated into the culture and the structures of the school, and into the Outreach programme which is an integral part of the school curriculum. The Outreach Programme incorporates community service into the regular academic programme of the school, and provides students with rich and varied opportunities for making connections among the disciplines, for connecting school and life, and for developing a regard for learning as an integral part of life, rather than as a preparation for life. Outreach projects enable students to work with a wide variety of adults who are neither their parents or their teachers, to develop a wide range of relationships and friendships, and to learn the value of responsiveness, reciprocity, adaptability, flexibility, creativity, and collaboration. Working in conjunction with the academic and extra-curricular programme of the school, the Outreach Programme enables students to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to “weave a world for themselves”, as they develop personal and civic responsibility within the community at large, and as global citizens.

In 1993, Corktown was selected as a participant in “The Exemplary Schools Project”, a large-scale national research study, where twenty one schools across Canada were studied by teams of researchers. The purpose of this research was to explore and describe the nature of the success of these schools, which had been chosen from over two hundred schools nominated as successful by parents, students, professional organizations and community members. Corktown was chosen for the study because of its unusually high rate of student retention, engagement, achievement and success. The school was described as an “exemplary school” by parents, students and community members because of its success in meeting the needs of a population of

students who are largely 'drop-outs' from other high schools, and of enabling them to be successful. Seventy percent of Corktown's alumni go on to university; the other thirty percent go to freelance work in areas of the arts, media, education, social work and the service industry.

Corktown is one of the best kept secrets in town. . . with a tremendous emphasis on Outreach and art and involving young people in an equal role in the school through CEASA (The Committee of Evaluation of Academic Standards and Admissions), and other activities in the school like that. Well you know, it's an atmosphere. It's a valuing of the school and valuing one another. All their applications speak of the value of a controlled smallness. They all want to preserve a rather tight family identity, and the smallness of the school is a way of ensuring that. Some people learn better in that environment and that's great.
(Don Beggs, Superintendent of Curriculum,)

Corktown's distinctiveness and its role and mandate within the educational context of the School Board were outlined by the Associate Director of Education, who explains that it is expected that Corktown will:

.... provide a first-class academic programme for students that are going on through that school to a post-secondary education. That is clearly part of their mandate and I think they are accountable to that. In addition to that, their responsibility in terms of this organization is to provide a place for people who might otherwise find the large structures in our other schools are getting in the way of what they can achieve.

They take students that do have some kind of disenchantment with the "regular" schools system, but they still do look for students who will commit themselves to the programme on a very regular basis. They can provide an opportunity for those students to be successful in a smaller, closer environment. I don't want to belittle our large schools in any shape or form, they have their own unique challenges, but there are clearly students for whom that setting isn't conducive to the kind of progress that they can make, and that to me, is a mandate.

(John Davis, Associate Director of Education)

The distinguishing features of the school are thus:

- a) Emphasis on the development of all aspects of students' lives;creative, intellectual, social, emotional, moral, aesthetic and spiritual.
- b) Emphasis on freedom of expression, self-government and autonomy.
- c) Emphasis on relationships and a collaborative work culture, connectedness between school learning and life experience, and the development of commitment to community.

In 1993, I first visited Corktown as the Principal Investigator of a team of researchers who would be studying the school, should they agree to this. My first impressions of the school were gained from my interaction with the students who were walking towards the school as I searched for it and asked for directions. Next, I recall my first sight of the old Victorian brick building, the welcoming and colourful foyer, the large, sweeping staircase, and the uninstitutional feel of the place. Then I remember meeting with Rob and Isadora who were the co-ordinators that year, and

with the other teachers who were all interested in the proposed study, and explained that acceptance of participation in the study would be decided upon collaboratively with students and parents.

The research at Corktown began a few weeks later, continued through 1993/1994 and resulted in a case study, *The Case of Corktown Community High School*, and in a book publication, *Narratives in the Making*. It is in this research study that this paper is grounded, and in which I outline the nature and qualities of the imaginative teaching and learning that I found there. Using a narrative inquiry orientation to the research and a variety of narrative methods, I documented the nature and qualities of a learning culture where the focus is on the education of the whole person, where there is an emphasis on the development of self-knowledge and responsiveness to others, creative and critical thought, and connectedness to the self, the school community and society. Using narrative accounts of classroom and school practices, profiles of teachers and students, I sought to provide insights into the meaning of success as it is understood by Corktown teachers, students, parents, alumni and school administrators, and to show how students are encouraged to develop their own authentic voices and identities, to establish relationships where they learn from and with each other, and where they become increasingly aware of their roles and possibilities as global citizens.

At Corktown I witnessed relationships between teachers and students which I had not previously encountered in school settings, and observed a level of imaginative and creative teaching and learning that I had not previously encountered in schools or in adult education settings. At the time of the research, I had experienced a wide range of schools, and programmes during my teaching career in England, Ireland and in Canada. I had taught classes from kindergarten to Grade Thirteen, and had conducted a variety of inservice workshops for teachers and administrators prior to taking up a position as a faculty member at The University of Toronto, teaching graduate and professional education students. I had also conducted a number of field-based research projects at the time, and published a scholarly book, articles and textbook chapters. My research training as a narrative researcher, which was itself grounded in my earlier literary studies, provided the lenses through which I began to explore the ways in which the processes and practices of this learning community enabled students to make connections between the past, present and future of their lives, as the community members who had nominated the school had said it did.

I began the research in the classrooms and in teachers' practices to identify, describe and analyse the qualities of this learning community. I believed that this was the best way to try to understand how this environment provides a context for the development of self-knowledge, the

education of the imagination, and the possibilities for students to create a narrative that is true to who they are and to the persons they wanted to become. Through classroom observations, attendance at extra curricular events such as the coffee-houses, and field trips, I began to see how the teachers worked to “weave a web of connections among themselves, their subjects and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (Palmer, 1998).

1. Interacting Narratives: Developing Voice, Choice and Identity

Teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a web of connections among themselves, their subjects and their students, so that students can weave a world for themselves.....The connections made by teachers are not held in their methods but in their hearts---meaning “heart’ in its true sense as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self.

(Parker Palmer, 1998, *The Courage to Teach*, p.11)

Supportive and empathetic relationships between teachers and students are at the heart of teaching and learning at Corktown, and they provide a context for the creation of good learning experiences, which become part of the individual’s memory bank, and a resource for the imagination. It is within these relationships that students develop deep emotional connections to the people around them, to the content of the curriculum, and to the school community. Many students and parents speak of these relationships as the major reason for students’ engagement in the curriculum and community, for their retention in school to graduation, and for their academic and professional success. Students also explain that the levels of support, empathy, patience, and caring which teachers show enables them to learn from their experiences, and to work through the difficult phases of their lives rather than to be defeated by the struggle. As students build up a body of positive experiences and memories to replace the negative ones which many hold when they first come to the school, they begin to develop their confidence and self-esteem to take a more active part in the life of the classroom and the school, and to bring about positive changes in their lives.

The Tao is the symbol of Corktown Community High School, and it is a constant visual reminder of the value of the duality of opposites, of contradiction as well as harmony, and of the constant dynamic state which brings order through the dialectic, and coherence and unity through multiplicity. The Tao is an apt symbol for Corktown, in that it symbolizes a culture and community members who acknowledge the complexities of human beings and of adolescent learners, and of the processes of self creation and of knowledge making. The presence of the symbol throughout the school and on all school documents and materials, reminds community members of an acceptance and respect for all sides of people and of situations, of an emphasis on working

towards synthesis, balance and harmony, and of the reconciliation of opposites as the route to seeing into the life of things.

Teachers at Corktown look for ways to establish connections with students, and to show them that the learning community is both supportive and tolerant. There is an open acknowledgement of the realities of real learning—the emotionalism of it, the intellectual work of it, the difficulties of managing the ups and downs of it, of tolerating the uncertainties of it,— and of providing the support and encouragement necessary for students to deal with these and to persevere and progress. They encourage students to develop their voices and expressiveness, to develop self-knowledge, and to try things out without fear of embarrassment or punishment. There is an acceptance of students' right to freedom of expression, and of the teacher's role in helping them to develop more informed and sophisticated ideas, understandings and voices. As one of the teachers, Joy explained:

A great many students who come here have very strongly individual opinions and they insist on having their voices heard and recognized. They don't necessarily insist on having their own way, but they insist on having their voices heard. Very often it is a voice that would be intolerable in other places because it's a voice that is young and uncouth, and sometimes it can be rude. There is a space to let that roll by and (to wait for) the next stage to come forward.

(Joy, Interview, December, 1993)

The voices of students, teachers, and parents can be heard in the governance and policies of the school, and in the curriculum and classroom practices. Teachers and parents sit on the Board of directors and are involved in the making of new policies for the school and in the interpretation of existing policies. The teachers and students who sit on the CEASA (the school's disciplinary committee) make decisions regarding the infringement of the rules of the school; they also make decisions regarding what courses will be offered and how they will be taught. Students develop a sense of involvement, responsibility and ownership as a result of their levels of involvement in the life of the school. The development of students' identity is fostered by the teachers at Corktown who get to know them as whole persons, and show interest in their personalities, eccentricities, interests and priorities as well as their intellectual and creative capacities and achievements. Students are also encouraged to get to know teachers in this way, and interpersonal relations are informal, friendly and co-operative. Students all speak of being treated as worthwhile persons in the community, of feeling that they belong, and that they are valued community members who have something to contribute to the community. They speak of teachers recognition of their need to be personally comfortable in the school and to be able to trust before they make any major commitments.

As they observe and experience the levels of support and responsiveness shown to them, students learn the value of respect, trust, and responsiveness towards others, and develop the

connections and commitment necessary for the growth of these relationships and the creation of a democratic learning community. This kind of environment provides a safe, supportive and tolerant context for the development of students' voices and identities, for higher-risk learning, and more intensive explorations of questions and ideas, for sharing knowledge and ideas, for being vulnerable and for seeking help. It provides a context for the development of creative and critical thought, for making connections and seeing patterns, and for imagining and enacting alternative narratives for the self, for the school community and for society. It provides that safety net for the imaginative explorations that Eisner (2002) describes as individuals experiment, rehearse and the try on roles in the process of constructing an identity.

Imagination, that form of thinking that engenders images of the possible, also has a critically important cognitive function to perform aside from the creation of possible worlds. Imagination also allows us to try things out---again in the mind's eye---without the consequences we might encounter if we had to act on them empirically. It provides a safety net for experiment and rehearsal.

(Eisner, 2002, p.5)

2. Rehearsal, Experimentation and Making Connections: Learning through Outreach.

There is almost unanimous agreement among community members that the Outreach Programme is one of the major reasons for the school's success, as it links the school community to the outside communities in mutually-beneficial ways. Through Outreach, Corktown becomes a "school without walls," taking advantage of the people, the places, and the programmes in the community outside, and also allowing the members of the school community to give back to the external community in many ways. It provides students with a range of rich opportunities to connect their own interests and aspirations to school learning, and in which to explore their intellectual, artistic, career, and employment interests. Students interact with a wide range of situations and of adults who are not their parents or teachers, engage in dialogue with their perspectives and ideas, and cultivate new possibilities, new visions and new narratives for themselves, others and society.

From the outset, the Outreach Programme has been an integral part of the school curriculum. It is one of the most distinctive aspects of the programme, and a mandatory part of the school curriculum that is linked to the academic school subjects in formal ways. Outreach provides opportunities for students to be involved in their own growth at the same time as they are helping the community, and availing of the city of Toronto as a learning environment, with all its museums, hospitals, libraries, offices, schools, institutions, alternative communities, theatres, and historic properties. In the choice of Outreach projects, there is a guiding principle of two self-actualizing projects to one altruistic project. Students do not earn credits or money through their

Outreach projects, but they tie in their Outreach projects to one of their academic courses for 20% of the mark.

Outreach programmes are structured so that students can receive the support and guidance they need as they learn to be independent in three levels or stages.

Entry Level: Entry level programmes take place in the school where students work in groups, are closely monitored, and can receive a lot of support and individual attention. Success at this level enables students to put forward proposals for more independent work, and to make closer connections between their own interests and the proposed projects. Here, they can explore potential careers, employment situations, and learn the realities of the world of work.

All students who are new to the school will be in entry level (with the exception of mature students or other students who have experience in self-directed learning). Entry Level Outreach programmes are often group oriented and hosted at the school by an in-school sponsor. These are normally teachers, but may be senior students or parents.

Mid Level: Students who have successfully completed one semester of the Outreach programme will be Mid-Level. Mid-Level programmes are community based and may or may not be group oriented.

Advanced Level: Advanced Level Outreach projects may be community based or academically based. Advanced level projects may or may not be group oriented.

At every level, students are placed in Advisory groups where staff members act as advisors and monitor student progress over the semester. Students must complete proposal and sponsor agreement forms at the outset of the semester which are reviewed by the Outreach Co-ordinator and the staff. The proposal must contain descriptions of the student's and sponsor's intentions and expectations for the Outreach project. Staff advisors are responsible for the three evaluations of each student's project which take place throughout the semester, and of generating a mark that is then tied into a course from the student's timetable. Outreach projects are evaluated on the basis of 30% for the product, 30% for the presentation, and 40% for the process. The process includes the drafts of the proposal, the evaluation by the sponsor, written accounts of progress, a self-evaluation, attendance checks, and the results of an evaluation meeting prior to the presentation.

There are three in-school days per semester during which students make presentations on their projects. At mid-term, the advisory groups gather for a seminar during which they discuss

ongoing work. Students can get help in presentation methods and public speaking at this time. A student who has not successfully completed all components of Outreach is ineligible to give a final presentation to the whole school audience on Outreach Presentation Day, and receives a reduced mark.

Outreach has been running in this school as long as the school has existed. The philosophy behind Outreach is to put back into the community what we've been taking out. It gives students a chance to personally experiment with different skills in a different environment, or to try on new careers. Students are involved in experiences that involve their own growth but they are also helping the community. . . .

It seems a lot like Co-op but the real difference is that students don't get anything really tangible from Outreach. They don't earn a credit, they're not allowed to earn any money, but the intangibles are numerous. Students begin to realize that there's a lot of value to those intangibles and that you don't have to have a little carrot dangling from a string in order to recognize the value of something. The more materialistic our society becomes. . . we have to learn as well that we can be rewarded without things.

Students set up their own sponsor agreements, they design the project and they have to tie part of their project into one of their academic courses for 20% of the mark. One student this year is working in a laboratory at the University of Toronto so she might tie that into science, and write a report for her science class that her science teacher would mark. . . .

As the Outreach co-ordinator, I try to visit every site to make sure that things are going well. . . .

(Margaret, Corktown teacher/Outreach Co-Ordinator)

The following account of Outreach Presentation Day illustrates the details of some of the projects in which students were engaged during one semester at Corktown. The morning programme was organized by the Outreach ambassador who was responsible for the sequencing of the presentations, and who directed the flow of events. The account of the event shows how the Outreach programme provides a structure in which students can learn to be independent in stages and to receive the support and guidance they need at each stage. The projects presented were entry level,(school-based), mid level, and advanced level. Some were self-actualizing projects and some were self-fulfilling. These distinctions were not noted during the presentations. *One after the other, students stood up individually, in pairs, and in groups, and spoke about their involvement in either an Outreach or Inreach ("entry-level" or "in-school Outreach project"). They gave the details of their placements, told about what they had learned, gave the highlights of the experience, and answered questions from students and teachers.* The account of the presentations shows how the Outreach programme provides for the education of the whole person, and opportunities in which students can develop intellectually, emotionally, morally, aesthetically, and socially. They show how this programme provides students with rich and

valuable experiences for the development of self-knowledge, for connecting their interests and imaginations, and for exploring the possibilities and options available to them for future learning in the local learning community, and beyond.

The details of one Outreach Presentation Day are presented here from the researcher's perspective.

Outreach Presentation Day

The temperature is minus 20 degrees outside, but inside Corktown the mood is festive. Everyone is preparing for Outreach presentations. The message on the big green notice board in the foyer says "Happy Outreach Day." The school is still quite cold and I exchange comments about this with Laine the school administrator in the outer administrative office where Lola is photocopying materials, and Margaret is typing. Isadora is already working at the computer in the inner office. Students mill around and begin to congregate in the student lounge. The sounds of music and of informal conversations greet me as I make my way in there. One of the students, Terry is playing his electric guitar quietly in the corner, and groups of students are sitting around talking. (I remembered Terry from the Coffee House in November where he had played very loud, jazz/rock music accompanied by another student who played the saxophone.) Two big tables are already set up at the front of the room. I find that I'm being drawn over to the side by the sweet scent of herbs and dried flowers. A table covered with a multicoloured cotton cloth is all set up for a presentation on herbal medicine, and it is giving off these perfumed scents. This is where I decide I'm going to sit, so I get comfortable and wait for the proceedings to begin. The table is spread with bowls of dried petals, bunches of dried herbs and flowers tied with ribbon, a container of dried lavender, and bottles of liquid. The two girls I'm sitting beside turn out to be the organizers and presenters of this display, so I watch as they skim through their notes and the books they have brought as part of their presentation.

At 10 a.m. Margaret brought the group together to introduce the day, and to present Melanie, the student Outreach ambassador, who would direct the proceedings. The music and conversations stopped, and Melanie handed out an agenda for the presentations of the day. The first item on the agenda, a play being performed by the Anti-Homophobia group, began. The four scenes of the play were enacted at the two large tables at the front of the room, and characters with exaggerated homophobic attitudes were shown in "real life" situations. None of the dilemmas was resolved; the purpose seemed to be to present them to our consciousness and to engage our thoughts, and emotions. Afterwards, the presenters/characters explained that the play evolved from the improvisations they had done in the drama group after they had discussed issues surrounding homophobia, watched films, and listened to speakers on this and related

topics. They wrote the script, acted the parts, and in the words of one of the presenters; "It was a journey of self-exploration. We played the stereotypical roles and we were a bit over the top, as we thought this was the best way to present our message."

After the Anti-Homophobia play, a young woman who had been a student-teacher assistant at White Public School in grades three and four, made her presentation. She spoke of her experiences and said: "I had thought about becoming a teacher. Now I know that it wouldn't be in grade three or four." In answer to a question from the audience about why she wouldn't teach at this age level, she said: "They are very hard to control." Several questions followed and the young woman explained that the experience had taught her something about communication styles.

The next item on the agenda was presented by Meg and Margaret. Margaret began by telling of how Meg (a senior student about to graduate) had taught her to use the dark room in the school. Between them they explained how Meg had taught the basic principles, shown Margaret how to make prints, and to do a little bit of hand tinting. They spoke of having listened to good music in the dark room as they worked together, and to going out on a couple of photo shoots around the city, focussing on the themes of the urban environment, the skylines, and the parks.

Sandy was next and she told of her work at the Physics Department at the University of Toronto with a young professor "who gets major grants from the government to look at a specific family in the periodic table to determine whether they are good superconductors." In the process of her work she said that she had learned a lot about superconductivity, and one of the highlights had been the taking apart, cleaning and putting back together again of an electron beam furnace. She spoke of how she had enjoyed the work and the people at U. of T., had learned a lot, and concluded by saying: "The [physics] department has a real family environment and I would recommend it highly."

Wenda described her project at True Davidson Acres where she worked with Senior Citizens. Mark and Joseph had been at The Food Bank:

"We stacked crates of food, packed boxes, filled bags with things like potatoes. The image you have is of a warehouse full of people stacking boxes full of food. This is not the way it is. The place is empty. It is only at Christmas that people care, and that it looks like that. Most of the time people don't give a hang. It takes a lot of work but I'd go back to the food bank again."

Sam was next, and he explained the work he did on *The Brigantine* at Harbourfront, doing maintenance, renovating a room, learning how to use the radio telephone, doing diesel engine repairs:

"There are all kinds of things you have to be able to do, such as know how to fix an engine in the middle of nowhere, so I go on Friday evenings and Saturdays too. I also have to get my C.P.R. renewed. In the summer, we take 14 to 18 kids on board for a week, and we teach them to sail. In the winter the officers renew their knowledge by taking courses and lectures. I go to those too."

Judy spoke of her work with an artist in the building across the way from the school (a renovated warehouse), and she said:

"I thought I'd be doing more art but we had a lot of repairs to do, deliveries to make, things to pick up. We made some large cows and she (the artist) has some of them displayed in a gallery downtown."

Judy explained that it was an eye-opener for her. She thought that the life of an artist would be all about making art.

Luke was next and he began by saying: "I worked with a film producer but he wouldn't let me touch the equipment until I wrote a screen play, so that's what I did." Someone asked him about the plot of the screen play and he reeled off the details of an elaborate plot line about a character who becomes involved with a girl, is stabbed by a Moroccan, and is eventually killed by a guitar player!

A group of three students had been teachers' assistants in grade 7 and 8 classes, and had made a video. . . . One explained; "I worked in the school library and learned the Dewey Decimal system." The other said; "I taught kids Art, and we made Dreamcatchers. I didn't want to be a teacher, and I found out that I really don't want to be a teacher." The final student in this group explained: "I helped kids to use computers as part of an OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) project that was going on at the school."

Next on the agenda was the Recycling Group who presented range of colourful objects. First, a male member of the group wheeled in a renovated bicycle with a banana seat and a crossbar covered with dalmatian-print fur. He explained: "It is made from two old bikes that didn't work and some new parts. I sanded the frame completely, did the paint job, and the upholstery." Some of the other group members explained that they had visited the Goodwill and the Salvation Army stores for their supplies. A female member of this same group brought on a huge dragon fly with multicoloured wings which seemed to fill the room with colour and light. She explained that she had made it from chicken wire covered with papier-maché, and she had also used water bottles, tennis balls, and a glue gun. Another female member of the group, showed the "junk jewellery" she had made and passed it around for us to take a close look. There were bracelets, earrings, pendants. . . all made of "junk," and all crafted with attention to detail and style.

One after the other the students presented their projects to the assembled audience of the whole school, speaking of what they had learned from the experiences, and answering the many questions were asked. Teachers had told me earlier that it was very difficult for some of these students to speak to such a big group of their peers, yet, to a greater or lesser degree, every student sounded knowledgeable, informed and confident about what they knew. Some were expressive and eloquent, and all described their endeavors with a lack of artifice. There was an absence of extravagance in describing what had been done. Terry had said, "I taught four people to play the guitar, but they are not here this morning so I guess they didn't think much of the course!" (Melanie, the student Outreach ambassador had made a video of each these students in their Outreach situations, and it was shown in the foyer during lunch. Visual confirmation and extension of what was said in the presentations was available, and Terry's teaching, and his four students all playing guitars, was both a visual and an audible reality!)

The next student to present was JJ, who explained that he got an old motorbike that wasn't working and took it apart: "I think it works now although it is too cold to start it. The engine won't start in this cold anyway, but it should be working now." I'm reminded that it is minus 20 degrees outside, and it is easy to forget this because of the engaging content of what is going on inside this room. JJ is followed by a group of students who tell of a sewing group taught by a parent volunteer, and they (males and females) displayed the garments they had knitted and sewed. These students had requested this Inreach programme, and a parent was found to run it. They explained that they had made their own patterns, learned to use a sewing machine, and had made a variety of garments. One girl had made a denim dress from recycled jeans, another (male) member of the group showed a knitted scarf and a blanket that he had made. Others displayed a variety of pants, dresses and skirts they had made in this class.

Next, a young man told of teaching a blind student from Zimbabwe who was currently studying at OISE and who was unable to read Braille. He had taught him to use a computer programme which talked.

Maheet and Yanina talked about their "Herbal Remedies" project and spoke of the difficulty they had had in finding a sponsor. "Our resources were books," they said as they displayed books they had used and the products they had made. They held up bunches of dried herbs, comfrey and thyme, which they had gathered on the Bruce Trail, had dried, and arranged artistically. They had used navy and wine coloured threads on one bunch, and a plain blue ribbon on the other. They spoke of the two herbal remedies they had made:

Stinging nettle is good for eczema and skin disorders, also good for hay fever and allergies.

Nettle is a plant associated with strength, rich with many minerals and vitamins such as iron, chlorophyll, potassium, manganese and silica, and comfrey salve is great for cuts, bruises, sprains, and so on.

Comfrey contains allaution nurtens which encourages bone, cartilage, and muscle cells to grow. Harvest it in the early summer.

The two girls then spoke of the experiment they had tried when they attempted to make a cream which didn't work. "We added two emulsifying agents that didn't go together and it didn't work. It was a good experiment though."

There was lots of humour throughout. Martin stood up and said, "I played my cello, I went for cello lessons, I painted, and I did a painting of a cello which is on display in the gallery. As he put a tape in the boom box, he said, "I didn't bring the cello with me this morning for obvious reasons," and then slow, melodic cello music played for two or three minutes. We listened in silence as he stood. Then he said, "That's not me," as he smiled and sat down. We all laughed and it was a lovely moment.

When the audience settled back down, Ehren stood up and said: "Kris has coached me in English, especially in spelling this semester. (I remembered Ehren from the Coffee House where he had recited his poem about Columbus. Ehren is a native Canadian, he weighs about 200 pounds, and he is gentle and mild-mannered. After the Coffee House, I saw the written version of the poem he had recited, and was amazed at the difference between the literacy level I had assumed, due to the content of the poem and the way in which it was read, and what I saw on the page. The written text was barely legible, yet Ehren is a poet.) Ehren read a few new poems, and he was articulate, confident, and eloquent. There was silence in the room as he recited his poetry and loud applause at the end, just as there was when he had read at the Coffee House. Kris stood up and said,

"I got a lot out of helping Ehren to learn to spell too. I became more aware of my own spelling and in helping him to use the dictionary, I started to see how to really use it myself. We moved on from there too, and we worked on sentences, syntax, and the organization of the writing. It made me more aware of the way writing works."

Students spoke of working in a recording studio and making a demo tape; of working in a used book store; and at a television station where one of the "duties" was to assist in interviewing James Earl Jones (the famous Hollywood actor). A young man spoke of working in a film studio: "I learned how to use different equipment, got to use the editing suites and made a 16 millimetre film called To-day's Soup. Irma told the group that she had seen this film and that it was a very good film. Greta asked if it could be shown at lunch hour, and was told that it can.

At the outset, Margaret had said, "I know that we all need a smoke break, but we're going to go straight through without a break this morning, so I ask for your patience." They agreed so that

there would be time for all the presentations. Melanie then began to draw the proceedings to a close with her own presentation, and she thanked everyone for their participation and goodwill. She talked about her role as student ambassador, and then invited us to watch the video she had made of various students in their Outreach placements.

As we made our way out to the foyer, Margaret asked the staff to begin to plan the Inreach programmes they would put on for Semester two. In the foyer, Rob was serving slices of a huge carrot cake. We watched the video, talked and laughed; some drifted off at the end, and some watched it over again. Ehren gave me copies of his writings, the poems he read that morning, and also the ones he read at the Coffee House in November. Maheet and Yania also gave me their notes on the herbal remedies, and I began to record the details of Outreach Presentation Day while they were still fresh.

The details of the Outreach Presentation Day show the principles of the learning community in action—self-expression, creative and critical thinking, the education of the whole person, and the development of connectedness between self, school and society. *The details of the projects show a wide range of student interests and abilities, and show how these self-chosen projects allowed students to pursue their interests and purposes, to develop increasing awareness of their own learning processes, to establish working relationships, connections and networks, and to try out new things and ways of being. They show how students gained valuable experience in diverse work settings, and were provided with "real-life" situations which required them to learn to plan; to write proposals and contracts; to communicate with prospective sponsors; to negotiate a mutually beneficial contract; to collaborate Outreach sponsors and others in a work environment; and to present what they had learned in a wide variety of forms. They show how the Outreach programme provides students with built-in structures within which they learn to think independently, to use their intellects and imaginations in the present, and to be creatively looking at their options and possibilities in their future lives. They show how these experiences help students to develop their interests and identities, to experiment and explore at their own pace, according to their evolving interests and levels of maturity, and to create the narratives of their lives.*

Justin, an alumnus of Corktown tells of how his involvement in Outreach fostered engagement, and led in indirect ways to the discovery of new interests and sources of self-fulfillment in his life.

Of course the Outreach programme was key as well because I worked for a photography studio which enabled me to have a portfolio by the time I went to Ryerson (from which he graduated with a four year degree in media and film). Also, I worked with other students on one of the Outreach programmes teaching photography.

So not only did the Outreach get me a portfolio, it also got me into teaching because it sort of showed me what strengths I had in as far as teaching less able students to do something. So that was extremely valuable.

(Justin, Corktown Alumnus)

Many of the benefits of Outreach are intangible, but one of the very real and practical benefits, well appreciated by students is that it enables them to make connections which often lead to various forms of future employment in both the near future and the distant future. Margaret, the Outreach Co-ordinator explains how students value this very practical aspect of the programme.

:

Yes, definitely, it happens regularly. A lot of students that come to this school will graduate and they won't necessarily go [straight] on to university because often they don't have the money. So they'll go back to their Outreach sponsor, and sure enough they will land a job. We have someone who's making theatre sets right now, based on what he did in Outreach. Sometimes they get part time jobs out of it and that kind of thing, which is good. Sometimes they just use them [the Outreach sponsors] for references, or sometimes they become friends.

(Margaret, Corktown teacher/Outreach Co-Ordinator)

Because of the guiding principle of two self-actualizing Outreach projects to one altruistic project, students have many opportunities to learn about their roles as responsible citizens in the context of the programme. As they reach out to the broader community to get the experiences, information, knowledge and skills they need, they also learn about giving back to the community that supports and provides for them. Therefore, as they develop their self-awareness and personal skills, students are also gaining a deeper awareness of communal and societal issues, and an understanding of the importance and benefits of connectedness and commitment to community. Students who have been identified as intellectually gifted or intellectually disabled can chose learning projects suited to their own abilities, maintain their self esteem and dignity, appreciate each other's contributions, and each be successful in his or her own way. For many students, Outreach projects provide significant opportunities for making connections between academic, social, and functional knowledge, which can facilitate the understanding of concepts learned in the academic disciplines. By providing real-life application for knowledge learned, Outreach experiences can also promote depth of comprehension, and provide support for the understanding that learning is pleasurable, self-fulfilling, and life-long.

Several of the Outreach sponsors spoke of the benefits of the programme for students they had sponsored , and explained that it enables them to make significant connections between their current interests and future plans at a very concrete and practical level:

(i)

[it is] extremely important for students to get into the community and to choose what's important for them. Students need to see the diversity of society and it gets the community more involved also. We take some responsibility for our

students so it is a mutual involvement. . . . I was impressed by her [the student's] liberal thinking. She took risks. . . .

(ii)

I'd do it again next year. I'd be happy to have another student. I worked with him one day a week for six months, moved him around. . . .office help, coffee, etc. He wants to get into film when he leaves school and basically he learned about dealing with the public and making a \$40 million T.V. programme. . . . It gave him a reality lesson as it showed him adults working. . . . I wish I had it when I was at school. He learned to deal with different kinds of people, a myriad of personalities. He got exposure, responsibility and learned about being part of a flourishing business. It was a "life experience" leading to being a better corporate and global citizen. . . .

(iii)

It was the highlight of his year. He approached us as he had some ideas, and wanted to learn about equipment. He came once a week and learned about artists' co-op (artists' co-op for independent filmmaking). It gave him a chance to see how a co-op works, how projects need money, and how volunteers work. We are all independent filmmakers so we are very busy. He did phone work, probably met three or four people a day and it gave him an opportunity to see an avenue into independent film making. He wanted to study film, and he got a better idea what to look for. He definitely learned the questions to ask, and it helps him to look at and to choose the right courses for him. . . .

In Outreach Advisory groups, teachers are constantly called upon to determine the extent to which any given Outreach proposal is educative and worthwhile for an individual student, and the extent to which the proposed project will develop a needed dimension of that student's profile. Teachers monitor the balancing of the altruistic and self-fulfilling requirements of the programme, and are aware that some students can take it easy in a system where it is imperative to trust and have faith in individuals; and where it is impossible to check up on everyone. Sometimes students do not want to challenge and stretch themselves to their fullest capacity, and want to be in a placement where they feel safe and secure. By listening to students' wishes, allowing them to determine their own level of involvement, and to determine the pace of their learning, teachers can show trust and respect for students'; and can build and strengthen the learning relationship.

This issue was illustrated from the students' perspective by Lem, an alumnus of Corktown who had graduated as a high school teacher (English and History), from The Faculty of Education , University of Toronto (FEUT) in the 1993-1994 school year. Lem's reflections on his time at Corktown illustrate the issue from the perspective of a beginning teacher, who says:

I think one of the things that Corktown was great for was the Outreach programme, because it gave me experience in the outside world. It gave me the opportunity to think: "If I want to do a job like this, where is a place that I can go for that?" A lot of people then didn't make as much use of that as they could

have done.

One or two of the Outreaches that I did were at daycare that I had done a placement at before, when I was doing a course. I maintained that connection to the daycare, and ended up working there for a number of summers. But I think I could have chosen something that would have expanded me a little bit more. Although, sometimes at that age, you need something that can make you feel safe too.

The thing about Outreach that I think is so great too is that it exposes you to people in other areas, because, otherwise, the only adults you come in contact with are teachers and your parents. . . .

(Lem, Corktown Alumnus)

Within supportive and empathetic relationships with teachers and Outreach sponsors, students create good learning experiences for themselves and furnish themselves with memories on which they can draw. In this way, they develop the abilities to work through the differences they have with others, to move towards shared understandings, and to engage in the continual reconstruction of self. There is a reciprocal telling and valuing of individual's stories and a movement towards the making of new relations, new principles and new meanings for self and others, and shared understandings. As they connect memory and imagination, they construct new narratives for their lives, and as they do so, they change, learn and grow, giving up the stories of themselves that they hold when they can replace them with richer and more significant versions more suited to their current situations and the futures they foresee. Through the interaction of narratives, the teachers, Outreach sponsors and students at Corktown collaborate in the telling and retelling of stories of the past and in the co-creation of stories for the present and the future. (Beattie, 1995).

3. Creating New Narratives: Weaving a World for the Self, Others and Community.

....imagination is what, above all makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called "other" over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers' eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definition...

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or "common-sensible" and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably *is*.

Greene, 1995, *Releasing the Imagination*, (p. 3-19)

Many educational researchers such as Greene, (1995, 1977), Dewey (1916,1934) , Eisner (1994, 1991), Hunt, (1987) Miller (2000, 1996,1993), and Noddings (1984) , have documented the connection between the development of the individual's voice and the growth of identity, between the ability to shape one's own narrative and to become more responsive to the narratives of others, and between these and the capacity to imagine a better world and to enact social change. These researchers all emphasize that we need schools which foster the development of the whole human being, and where students learn about the interconnectedness of self, society and the whole of humanity. They emphasize that despite, or perhaps because of the fragmentation and relativism of our current times, we really need schools where learners express their own meanings, build understandings across differences, construct visions of possibility, and develop a commitment to their roles and responsibilities in a democratic society and a global world. The creation of new meanings and new visions requires individuals to open their ears, eyes and understandings to worlds outside their own experience, to see situations and issues from multiple perspectives, and the ability to envision and enact personal and social change. Maxine Greene, in all her writings, has consistently called for a liberating and humane definition of education that emphasizes the development of the whole person, that nurtures the imagination, and that is based in the principles of freedom, equality, care and concern.

Collaboration, Connectedness and Commitment to Community.

The development of connectedness to self, to others, and to community is emphasized throughout the philosophy, pedagogy, and programmes at Corktown. The development of a personal vision which sees the universe as a whole is stressed throughout the learning community, and an ethic of separateness, disconnection and dependence, is replaced with an ethic of unity, connectedness, and interdependence. Through classroom and community activities and responsibilities, students are provided with a range of choices, the opportunities to make their own connections, and to construct narratives for their future lives which are consistent with who they want to become. They are encouraged to focus on making connections between the various domains of knowledge, between science and art, between linear thinking and intuition, between different ways of knowing, between what is learned in one class or situation to another, between the content of the curriculum and life itself, and between self, school and society. The community events, the field trips, the school rituals, the involvement in the governance of the school through CEASA, are all designed to help students to develop the capacities for doing so, and for developing the abilities to be more responsible, and adaptable to the needs of others, the school

and the wider community. It is emphasized that self, school and society are interconnected in inextricable ways in a democratic society. As Fiona Nelson, a school trustee points out:

Toronto really is an interesting laboratory for a whole lot of social change around urban organization, and how people interact with one another, and how a democracy functions. The school system has to be a part of that, and children have got to learn those things. There are so many ways that people can isolate themselves from their responsibilities to society, and there has to be an enormous counterbalancing to make them see that this just doesn't work. . . . The whole business of personal and civic responsibility is essential for this society to function and at the moment it isn't.
(Fiona Nelson, Corktown Trustee)

Most students are stimulated and challenged by a school culture and curriculum which encourages them to respect and learn from their first hand experience, to collaborate with each other and to become more aware of their roles as responsible global citizens. Most understand that as they participate in the classroom and in the learning community, they are developing the skills and the knowledge to engage in participatory democracy both in the school and beyond. Interdisciplinary approaches to learning are encouraged throughout, and the physical space and size of the school, and the size of its population, are conducive to collaboration and ongoing interaction, as they facilitate communication and extended conversations among community members. All classes have scheduled activities which take place in small collaborative groups where students help each other, and where the teacher provides individualized instruction to those who need it. These collaborative groupings form spontaneously when necessary in classrooms, and this is facilitated by the ease with which the furniture can be rearranged from the horseshoe shape required for whole class instruction, to informal groupings determined by the students themselves. Classes are informal, conversational, and open to spontaneity, dialogue and discussion:

"You get to know the people in your classes and the whole school staff. You're able to sit in the class and talk to your teacher while there's other people around, but that doesn't really dissolve the class at all. It's small enough that it stays in context and flow keeps going in the class whatever the subject is.
(James, Corktown Alumnus.)

The emphasis on making connections between the curriculum of the school and the creation of the individual's own narrative is illustrated from a student's perspective by Eva, an alumnus of Corktown. Eva tells of the way in which the classes and culture at Corktown stimulated her to make significant connections between her own interests, the school curriculum, and the local and global contexts in which she was living. Her story provides insights into the ways in which the development of voice and identity is connected to the development of increasing self-awareness, connectedness to others, and the growing ability to imagine things as if they could be otherwise. It shows the connection between care for self, the development of care for others and the ability to envision and to enact social change.

Eva's Story

Eva spent three years at Corktown and graduated in January 1993. She returned to the school in October 1993, to interview teachers and to make a video of the school as part of an independent study assignment on community for one of her courses in the first year Arts programme at university, in which she was enrolled. Professors and students at the university found it difficult to relate to her descriptions of her high-school as a community which engaged students in real life issues through its programmes, and were disinclined to believe that "such a high school existed." Eva decided to conduct a study of Corktown and to present it to them, factually, philosophically, and visually. She then admitted that before she came to Corktown, she had been an "at risk" student, and that she was currently "at risk" of dropping out again. Eva went on to explain:

It seemed to be a real artist's haven when I came here. It was a very creative place to be. It was human and small, and I couldn't handle the other place (a well known, prestigious high school close by). The whole point of Corktown is to help you to get the most out of every situation, to sample things; you are connected to the world. Now, I find university a big disappointment. They assume you know nothing. I find it very degrading. The place is not involved in the community it is in. I'm taking courses in World issues and I'm supposed to just sit there and talk about this and do nothing about it. It is a very pessimistic view, focussed on grinding you down; get you into one system and to keep you there.

When I came to Corktown, Yes, I had almost dropped out and had a part time acting job. I wanted to be connected to the real world and to do things that were meaningful. It is the connection with people that keeps you from dropping out at Corktown. This is what makes you want to come to school even if you don't go to class. Teachers are not threatening and will talk to you about why you do not come to their class. The papers I wrote, I did many of them because I felt that I owed something to the teachers. They had done so much for me, I couldn't let them down, so I did it. I couldn't not do my independent study. Here everything is connected and Outreach is the key. It is so intense, you spend a lot of time here. It is inviting, you can discuss ideas, do work. Whenever I come into town, I always come back to see people and to be in this atmosphere. . . .

I remember sitting in a class [at Corktown] and something being said connected with things I had just done in another class, and it's all connected to the real world, and you're not just sitting in an ivory tower. Here they are trying to teach us to put things into a context and the courses are all about reality, living in the world, living in Toronto. Corktown teaches you to have trust in yourself

and to trust your own judgment. At university, they assume a very low level of awareness and a low ability to function as an individual. The more they teach that, the more it becomes true. I have a knowledge that things can be different in life so that is why I'm writing this paper for university about community. The things I've heard from any one class here are more meaningful than what professors say where I am now, and they are lecturing to a hall full of hundreds of students. In terms of learning what I don't know, putting things into context, inspiration that what I'm learning matters, I am so disappointed.

In classes [at Corktown] you can talk to teachers about things. I was in Irma's Politics class and I did a project on Nicaragua. I got so connected to this, so inspired. Then one day I went into a cafe and they had photographs on the walls. I said "Oh God, this is Nicaragua". There was an advertisement on the wall also. The artist had a write-up of the photos and the project and the phone number for volunteers to work there rebuilding schools. I called and went there in the summer for a month. I raised it at a student meeting and it was accepted for the coffee house proceedings to go to the project. I came back then for the last semester. I did a presentation about the Brigade in one class, and in OAC art, I did a paper about the murals of Nicaragua and the relationship between politics and Art. It was all really connected. . .the individual parts and the incidents of my life. . . .

In the 1993 Corktown Yearbook, there is a "Postcard from the edge," dated July 29, 1992. It has a picture of a smiling young woman, holding a machine gun in one hand and a baby who is breast-feeding in the other. The postcard is from Eva, in Managua, Nicaragua, and it reads:

Irma:

What can I say to you to thank you for this fate? I have been here for two weeks and there is so much to say. Jungle plants abound in the lush anti-city of Managua. The rains keep coming and the people keep hoping. The revolution ain't half over!

Eva.

Eva's story shows the development of self-understanding, of social awareness, and consciousness of her role and responsibilities as a global citizen. Her story provides insights into the effect of a learning environment where adolescents feel connected, feel that the curriculum is connected to the outside world, and where they can develop the confidence and capacities to explore connectedness in increasingly wider arenas. A further postscript to this story tells what happens when this is not the case. Eva dropped out of university in April 1994.

4. Creating New Narratives: Connecting the WOWS to the Curriculum

[The challenge is]. . . to provide experiences where students react with a "WOW," to connect the learner with his own learning and to accelerate his ideas. Then the art and the difficulty of teaching is to encourage and help the learner to translate the "WOWS" into a product.

That is the hardest thing to do, and sometimes I think students have a fear of trying to do that because they know they can go on. Without this connection, they can sort of play it safe and flow through the system. That's the sad part.
(Rob, Corktown Teacher-Co-Ordinator)

The development of imagination, the cultivation of new visions, and the development of commitment to community in the context of constructing one's own life story, are major goals of the Corktown learning community. Teachers work to stimulate students' imaginations, by providing opportunities which open their eyes to new ways of knowing and being, and to enable them to cultivate new visions of how things might be otherwise. These experiences are chosen for their potential to awaken students to new ways of thinking, to challenge the taken-for-granted, to be open up to new possibilities, and to envision alternative realities, The challenge, however, as Rob says, is to translate the "Wow" factor of the experience into increased student involvement, engagement and interest in the school curriculum, and in their own learning and development.

Field-trips are an integral part of the curriculum, and they serve to advance the goals of the learning community in many ways. All classes have a number of field-trips associated with their curriculum, and a portion of the school's budget (\$8,000) is allocated for transit tickets. Classes of students visit the galleries, libraries, neighbourhoods, and events of the city throughout the school year, and these experiences are used to enrich the school curriculum by taking advantage of the richness of the city at their doorstep. Each year also, there are a number of all-school, half-day field-trips which include events such as university/college tours, an annual baseball game with City School, and a visit to the Boyne or Boyd conservation area. These all-school events help students and teachers to get to know each other outside the school setting, to have shared experiences that are both pleasurable and educative, and to build relationships and community spirit. Field trips also provide a venue for informal conversations and dialogue, humour and fun. In the 1993-1994 school year, some of the field-trips students went on included the following.

The grade 12 Ancient History class had three visits to the Royal Ontario Museum.

The OAC Drama class went to see a play entitled, "Avant Gandhi".

The OAC Physics class had a physics day at Canada's Wonderland.

The grade 10 Science class had a waterfront walk and a tour of the St. Lawrence market

The grade 11/12 English class visited The Metro Reference Library and The Native Canadian. Community Centre.

The grade 10 Canadian History class went to the Enoch Turner School House, Toronto's first Post Office, McKenzie House, the archives of the Toronto Board of Education, the archives of Metro Toronto, Campbell House, Spadina House and the Canary Restaurant (the former Palace Street School).

The grade 12 Media class went on a tour of CITY TV, a visit to The Bay for Liz Taylor's personal appearance there, and students were required to go to various TV and radio stations on their own time.

The OAC Art class visited The Galleries at 80 Spadina, Ontario College of Art open house, The Art Gallery of Ontario, WARC (Women's Art Resource Centre), private artists' studios, and the Ydessa Hendeles Art Gallery.

On a Thursday in November, as a part of her OAC Art programme, Isadora visited the Ydessa Hendeles Art Gallery with her class. The purpose of this field-trip was described as "exposing this group of working artists to the works of other artists in the community", and Isadora explained that Rob had already seen the exhibition, and had recommended it for her class. She had prepared students prior to the trip, and they had all read the review in the Canadian Art magazine. Isadora expected that students would be stimulated and inspired by the experience; she expected that it would be educative in a myriad of ways, and that it would expand the possibilities they would be able to imagine and enact in their art-making and in their lives.

Visiting the Ydessa Hendeles Gallery in the company of a group of working artists

It was a beautiful sunny day in mid-November as we walked up to the street car and looked forward to what we would see at the gallery. Like many others in the group, I had read the article in Canadian Art magazine about this show, and there was an air of excitement and expectation amongst the group which I felt too. Rob had seen the show and had told Isadora that it was a "must" for her OAC Art class. We took turns borrowing The Canadian Art magazine to which the school subscribes, and reading about it overnight. Rob's exact words were that the show was "amazing." He had told Suzie that we were going, and, as we headed out, we were surprised and delighted to find that she was joining us. Suzie asked Isadora why we were going to the gallery, and Isadora explained that part of her mandate was to include the artistic community of the city in her class. "We go to lots of galleries as part of our programme," she said. "These students are

working artists and I want them to see and know about what other working artists in the city are doing. This is very much a part of our outreach with the community."

The streetcar whisked us along King Street, and we noticed all the renovations, the new restaurants, stores, and additions to this vibrant cityscape. The gallery was housed in a converted factory, and, once inside, we took our coats off, signed the visitors book, and went in to see the huge display of Muybridge's photographs on the ground floor. We looked at these photographs individually and in groups, talking to each other about the amazing way in which he had captured the details of movement with his camera. He had explained movement to a 19th century world so that the way in which people understood motion and movement, was forever changed. Then, in groups, we made our way upstairs where the installations were housed in individual galleries.

Suzie and I went upstairs together. I was relieved to have her company when I found that I was going to enter the darkness of a seemingly gigantic boiler room where Bill Viola's "Arc of Ascent" was installed. I was terrified by the loudness of the rushing water, my own powerlessness to stop the body jumping into the depths, and then disoriented and dizzy by watching the body drifting calmly down the river. Gradually, I managed to get a grip on my thoughts and feelings, and took a look around. I saw that small groups of the students were sitting on the floor in this gigantic room with no windows, their eyes glued to the 50 foot screen and the rushing water. They seemed so relaxed and calm, talking to each other about the technicalities of the installation from the artist's perspective, just as they had done with Muybridge's photographs, without ever taking their eyes off the big screen. With Muybridge, they had pointed out the variety of camera angles he had used, the positions he had taken, and the perspectives achieved. Now, the workings of the installation, the processes used and the results achieved by the artist were under discussion and analysis. The talk here was more animated though. They were excited and stimulated by the actuality of what they were seeing, and by the possibilities offered by the technology.

As Suzie and I went from one installation to another, we kept meeting groups of students in the long darkened hallways. They were excited enough to express the "WOWS" of what they were seeing, and they passed us, and each other, saying things like:

"Have you seen "Tall Ships" yet? You must go in there. It is amazing! Watch out for the velvet curtain at the doorway. Don't let it freak you out."

"Have you seen "The Boxer? Don't miss it whatever you do."

It was great to be with this group of students, to hear and feel their excitement and also to feel my own at such a wonderful learning experience. Afterwards, when I told Isadora about my reactions, and she said: "I want them to see my initial response to the show also. I want them to see my honest, straightforward, and not second hand reactions. This is why I didn't preview the show, so I was seeing it for the first time too. Rob had recommended it and he goes to a lot of galleries. I want them to understand that I'm learning all the time too, and I want them to see that."

In the streetcar on the way back to the school, we talked all the way about what we had seen and experienced, describing our varying responses to the exhibits. We talked about the links between the Muybridge photographs and the different installations, and how we saw the possible connections. "We go on great field trips from our school," said Joseph, "but the best of them all was the time we went to Phenoxia, a commune outside the city. We all went, the whole school. . . and it was fantastic," he said. I asked why it was so great, and moving his head to the left, then to the right, and back again, he said: "Because it was one "WOW" after another. Everywhere you looked you saw something that was the opposite to what you were expecting. It was an amazing experience and it was Rob's idea. He organized that one."

In the course of conversation with Rob the next day, I told him what Joseph had said about the field-trip to Phenoxia, and how all the others had agreed. He smiled and said: "Yes, that was a good one and of course the challenge then is to have them translate the "WOWS" into products once they get back into the classroom. We want them to have diverse and stimulating experiences, but it isn't all fun and entertainment. The "WOWS" are great, and they can be a stimulus for seeing things in different ways."

The account of the field-trip to the Ydessa Hendeles Gallery shows the power of the aesthetic to stimulate students' intellects, imaginations and emotions, and intellects. It also shows the importance of shared learning experiences, of dialogue and conversation in which students learn from and with each other in informal and collaborative ways. The students' responses to the photographs and installations at the gallery reveal a sophisticated knowledge of the forms and means of representing meaning, and the propensity to inquire, to question, and to extend their knowing.

The account describes the effects of an enriching environment in which students responded actively and deeply to the work of other working artists, practiced their skills of perceptivity, developed more sophisticated levels in their understandings of symbolic forms, and were inspired to further develop the skills and means of visual representation in their own work. The conversations and dialogue on the streetcar back to the school, were a testimony to the

importance of direct experience with the aesthetic for generating excitement about learning. As the group laughed, talked and enjoyed each others' company, they discussed the artwork, and their own work; the informal relationships providing an ongoing context for the exploration of ideas, collaborative reflection, and shared meaning-making.

Experiences such as this field trip to the Ydessa Hendeles Gallery figure prominently in what students and parents say about why Corktown is a "successful school" in their terms. For both parents and students, these kinds of events promote connectedness between students' interests, their imaginative projects, and the academic work of the school. They enable students to learn to see things from new perspectives; to make new connections and relationships; and to develop the potential to translate the excitement of the new and novel into engagement, productivity, and creativity.

Epilogue: Connecting memory and Imagination: a work-in-progress.

The challenge is to make the ground palpable and visible to our students, to make possible the interplay of multiple voices, of "not quite commensurable visions". It is to attend to the plurality of consciousness — and their recalcitrances and their resistances, along with their affirmations, their "songs of love". And yes, it is to work for responsiveness to principles of equality, and principles of freedom, which still can be named within contexts of caring and concern. The principles and the contexts have to be chosen by living human beings against their own life-worlds and in the light of their lives with others, by persons able to call, to say, to sing, and ---using their imaginations, tapping their courage — to transform.

Greene, M. 1995, *Releasing the Imagination*.

The narratives of Corktown and of its community members are all narratives-in-the making, and as the people, the programmes and place interact with each other, and with the surrounding communities to which they are connected, there is a recognition that they are all works in progress. The narratives they create are temporal, and are transformed as individuals work to weave a world for the self, to develop a sense of personal coherence and an ethic of connectedness and of civic and global responsibility. Like the frost of the poem, *Frost at Midnight*, the learning community of Corktown works below the surface of perception, and its teachings though not always observable contribute not only to the intellectual development of the individual, but to the ethical, moral, aesthetic, imaginative and spiritual development.

The narrative of one of Corktown's alumni, Linda, shows the interplay of memory and imagination in one student's life, and the transformative influence of supportive and empathetic learning relationships and community. Linda's narrative provides a glimpse into the relationship between a

learning community to which students are connected and committed in significant ways, and the development of connectedness and commitment among its community members.

Linda graduated from Corktown in 1987 having completed grade 12 and 13, was accepted at The University of Toronto where she studied History and English, and graduated with a B.A. In the 1993-1994 academic year she was accepted in the secondary teacher education programme at the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto, specializing in the teaching of History and English. At this time she was teaching as a volunteer at Toronto Alternative School which she had attended as a student in grades 9, 10, and 11, prior to attending Corktown. Linda's narrative shows how her image of herself as a teacher is grounded in her personal experiences, and in her memories of being a student at Corktown. The image is grounded in the understandings of teaching and learning she constructed there, and it shapes her current conceptions of teaching and learning. Linda explains that the purpose of schooling is in "teaching students how to think, as differentiated from teaching them what to think", and of the teaching of writing as helping students "to express new meanings, as distinct from repeating what has been heard from others." She explains that her philosophy of teaching and learning, is focussed on "teaching the whole person.....imbued by a sense of caring".

Portrait of a New Teacher: Linda, An Alumnus of Corktown

Corktown provided a really good space for me to do some very good work. When I look back at some of the things I thought and wrote about, I'm really impressed. In a Women and Literature course, it was excellent, and it sort of gelled for me how to write an essay, because I felt I was learning about something that was important. I think that's really one of the best aspects of the school. It felt like your work was important. In History, we had Myrna G., and she was doing Canadian labour history for us in grade nine. There was just so much passion involved because she loved what she was doing, but also because it felt like this is real history, this is people. This is actually a lot of work on the teacher's part because they really have to know their stuff. That was one thing about Myrna for sure, she knew her stuff. This was true of Bob as well, and of Rob. They are wonderful.

I've thought a lot about this since I left Corktown. I think that it would be really good if the kids, at some point or another, understood the philosophy behind what was going on there. One of the things that made me appreciate all the schools I was at was that I had done a lot of reading. I read a lot about Summerhill and so I could see why we were doing what we were doing. A lot of kids had such bad experiences at school that they still saw it as "them" and "us", and so they felt that whatever they could get away with was ok. It takes a long time to get that out of your

system, so sometimes I think it would be good to sit down and say why we do things the way we do. I worry about how well it works when you just jump into this kind of system after being in a straight system all your life. However, I think it can work too because I see people who've just all of a sudden gone:

"This is what I've been looking for so long!"

I think so many people go to school and see it as a "them" and "us" thing, and I think I could create a space where it's not like that. I mean, my experience right now at Toronto School has been really good that way, and I know that has partly to do with the kids, because they've already chosen to go there, so they already had a little bit more trust in teachers. It is amazing because I can also see the baggage of people sitting there going, "Nope, I'm not doing that."

As soon as I stepped into university I was doing really well. I think in some ways it had to do with the fact that I had always been working on my own. There is so much independence and you have to be so self-directed at Corktown. I also benefitted by being familiar with the issues being discussed. For some people university was the very first time they ever talked about sexism, racism or whatever, whereas we had been discussing these issues for a long time. At Corktown there's a basic belief in non-authoritarian teaching and respect for the student; that's really the most important thing; but I think the nugget has to do with being a critical thinker. I think that one of the things that gave me strength to continue to be who I am is to be able to come here to Corktown and to Toronto School. If I was thrown into a regular high school where the teacher did not really know my name, or where I connect in the world, or anything about me, it would be difficult.

One of the first things that Noel (a student-colleague from Toronto School who is now team teaching the English course there with Linda) did with our class, was a piece called, "Tell me who you are." The kids had to write three pages about who they were because I really felt like I can't mark them, and that they wouldn't take me seriously if they didn't feel that I cared a little bit about who they were. It seems that's one of the biggest things that I've learned in this course is that teaching really has to do with the whole person. Students are not going to trust you, they're not going to work for you, unless they feel that you actually care a little bit. I wouldn't want to be writing for a stranger. It's like you put a piece of yourself forward whenever you write. And it's amazing that we expect people to do that all the time. Of course they write things that are, sort of taken from the introduction to the book, or they go on and on and say nothing. It's a way of masking themselves, because it's really scary to say something, to actually perform, and to think about something

Linda's story illustrates the connections between experience and imagination in the life of one of Corktown's alumni as she envisions and enacts her narrative as a teacher. Her story presents her experiences of learning in a community where she was encouraged to think creatively, to trust and develop her own voice, to develop a commitment to community, and to imagine and enact a way to implement that philosophy in her life and in her choice of career. Her story shows that the influence of a school such as Corktown cannot be assessed only according to numbers of credits or Ontario scholars graduated, but must be understood through the work and lives of its alumni whose lives have been shaped and directed by the experiences and the people there. Linda's story shows that the legacy of Corktown can be found in the stories of lives changed and transformed by the philosophy, pedagogy and educational processes of this educational community. This legacy can also be found in the stories of students who gained confidence in themselves as human beings, completed high school, and whose retention in another school would have proven difficult or impossible. It is in the stories of their achievements and academic successes, the growth of personal awareness and social responsibility, participatory decision making, and commitment to their roles as global citizens. The transformative power of a school such as Corktown can also be seen in the daily lives of its graduates who work to create holistic, humane, and inspirational learning and living conditions for all human beings.

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