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"Sum singis, sum dancis, sum tellis storeis":
Looking into Storytelling

Margaret Nicolai

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Education

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 1992

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ISBN 0-315-73623-2

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ABSTRACT

Sum singis, sum dancis, sum tellis storeis
Looking into storytelling

Margaret Nicolai

We are all storytellers: the narrative form is the way in which human beings structure experience, lived or imagined, in order to communicate it to others.

In this study, I have focused upon the telling of literary stories to groups of children and adults. I have asked both children and adults to try to explain their experience of storytelling and what stories mean to them. In addition I have written of my own experience and reflected upon it.

From interviews and observations, I have constructed phenomenological descriptions. These have been analysed in an attempt to reach the basic themes which bespeak the essential nature of storytelling.

Storytelling emerges as the embodiment of Dilthey's hermeneutic circle. Storytelling is a personal way of communicating with others, a way of sharing experience with others, and in turn being open to what others have to give.

It has not been my intention to seek for causal relationships, or to predict how it could be effectively used in the classroom. I aim to interest the reader to a degree that my questions should become his or her questions, a source for reflection and praxis.

DEDICATION

To Mike

With my love and more thanks than I can tell.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all the participants in this study for generously sharing their experience and their ideas with me.

I thank Dr. Sandra Weber, my advisor, for sharing her knowledge, for waiting patiently for me to make discoveries on my own, for her support, advice and encouragement, and for her unfailing sense of humour. I was lucky to work with her.

I thank the members of my committee, Dr. Mary Maguire, Anne Board and, especially, Dr. Florence Stevens for her support of my initial endeavours, and her continued interest and generosity.

I thank my family for their love and tolerance. I thank Kathy, in memory of butterfly wings. Finally, my thanks go to my mentor, Margaret Adam, who introduced me to storytelling.

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CHAPTER 1: APPROACHING THE PHENOMENON

The White Rabbit put on his spectacles.

"Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?" he asked.

"Begin at the beginning," the King said gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop."

Lewis Carroll

INTRODUCTION TO STORYTELLING

What is storytelling? The word conjures up different situations to different people. To some, the image that springs to mind is that of a teacher reading a picture book to a group of young children. To others, it may be the picture of an imaginative parent, telling invented stories to children at bedtime. It may mean the telling of one's own story, the sharing of personal experiences, for example, one's experiences as a teacher.

In this study, I focus primarily on the telling of literary stories to a group of children and/or adults. According to folklorists, the story to be told should be learned from an oral source in the way of the "oral tradition" (Pellowski, 1977). However, nowadays, parents, teachers, and librarians often tell stories that are learned from written sources before being told orally. Sawyer (1966) describes storytelling as a folk-art:

I believe storytelling to be not only a folk-art, but a living art; and by that I mean much. Music in all its forms is a living art in that it becomes a reality only when it is played. Dancing is a living art, for it lives only while you watch the movement, grace, interpretation of the dancer. So is it with storytelling; it lives only while the story is being told. True, child or adult can sometimes go to a book and read the story again for himself (herself); a good and an abiding thing to do, but not the same thing. (p. 19)

Storytelling is very different from storybook reading quite simply because, in the presence of a book, the attention of both reader and listener is directed towards the book. In storytelling there is more freedom: the teller speaks directly to the listeners, observing their reactions and structuring her telling according to their response. A circle of intimacy is built in which each individual is free to interpret the narrative in his or her own way.

Pellowski (1977) defines storytelling as:

The art or craft of narration of stories in verse and/or prose, as performed or led by one person before a live audience; the stories narrated may be spoken, chanted, or sung, with or without musical, pictorial, and/or other accompaniment and may be learned from oral, printed, or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes must be that

of entertainment. (Pellowski, 1977, p. 15)

THE ORAL TRADITION AND PEDAGOGY

Storytelling is an ancient and universal art (Baker, 1977; Chambers, 1970; Colwell, 1980; Shedlock, 1951; Tooze, 1959). It grew from lived experience and the basic need of articulate human beings to share their experience with others (Sawyer, 1966). Baker (1977) and Pellowski (1977) cite the first written record of what was apparently a storytelling situation in the Westcar Papyrus (2000 - 1300 B.C.), a description of an encounter between the renowned pyramid builder, Cheops, and his sons:

Know ye a man who can tell me tales of the deeds of magicians? Then the royal son Khafra stood forth and said, "I will tell thy Majesty a tale of the days of the forefather Nebka..." (Pellowski, 1977, p.4)

Pellowski (1977) refers to the Oxford English Dictionary (1709) as the earliest English record of the term "storyteller".

The same dictionary under the entry for "story" cites a line from William Dunbar's Poems (c.1500 - 1520) : "Sum singis, sum dancis, sum tellis storeis." (Pellowski, 1977, p.3)

The above quotations illustrate three elements of the oral tradition: stories told were a source of pleasure and

entertainment; they dealt with the magical or fabulous, and with the legendary deeds of forebears.

Travelling minstrels went by many names, eg. scalds in Scandinavia, bards in Wales, ollamhs or seanachies in Ireland (Baker, 1977; Colwell, 1980). But storytelling was not confined to "professionals". Stories were told around the family hearth, to lighten the tedium of repetitive work; stories were told amongst soldiers and sailors; they were told in the marketplace, and in places of worship. With the advent of the printing press in 1450, the oral transmission of stories ceased to be necessary, but storytelling has never ceased to be.

In every generation, storytelling seems somehow to endure. For instance, the publication in 1812 of Kinder und Hausmarchen gesammelt durch die Bruder Grimm kindled the interest of an educated, literate population in the oral tradition. In the United States, library storytelling dates from 1899. Pellowski (1977) notes the support of educators such as Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey for storytelling, but observes that teachers did not embrace it with the enthusiasm of librarians, perhaps because:

Pedagogy generally exerts pressures for explanation, interpretation, rationalization, and justification. This is the antithesis of storytelling as practised by the well-known tellers that librarians emulate. (Pellowski, p.92)

Those who inspired librarians in North America were principally Marie Shedlock, who became a professional storyteller c. 1890, Anne Tyler, who held the first storytelling symposium in 1909, Ruth Sawyer, a teacher, writer and storyteller of renown, and Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen, a gifted storyteller and teacher, who believed that listening to stories prepared children for reading (Baker, 1977). Each of these storytellers had her own individual style, but they all regarded the art of storytelling with a certain reverence which might be summarized in the words of Ruth Sawyer (1966):

Not a clever sharing of the mind alone but rather a sharing of heart and spirit: I think storytelling must do this if it is to endure. (p.18)

In 1968, the literary critic, Benjamin, bemoaned the demise of the storyteller in an information-hungry age. Yet, now, twenty three years later, storytelling is again enjoying a revival in North America, eg. National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, October, 1990; Toronto Festival of Storytelling, February, 1991; Springboards Annual Language Arts Conference, Montreal, April, 1991; The Narrative and Education, University of Toronto, April 1991. One hundred years after Dewey's endorsement of its pedagogical value, storytelling appears to be interesting to teachers.

PEDAGOGY, LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND STORYTELLING

What is the pedagogical value of storytelling? To answer this question it is necessary to understand what storytelling is. It is my intention to explore the nature of storytelling in order to come to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the qualities which comprise it. Van Manen (1984) states that the problem of phenomenological inquiry is:

that our "common sense" pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question. (van Manen, 1984, p.46)

Thus it is imperative that I explain my beliefs, biases and assumptions.

The process of language acquisition in early childhood seems to me to provide a model for pedagogical practice. Wells (1986) explicates the interactionist view of language acquisition as a social process as well as a cognitive process. He stresses that the fundamental basis of language learning is the need to communicate with others:

Conversation is thus the all-important context of language development. Although the child's earliest contributions are extremely rudimentary, they permit the adult participant to build around them; and thus to provide the framework within which the

child can learn by taking part in the interaction.

(Wells, 1986, p.17)

A child learning language is engaged in meaningful communication, in making sense of real situations. Brown (1977) describes the language learning process as learning to converse, focusing two minds on the same subject in an effort to communicate meaning and promote understanding.

The image which emerges in much of the literature on early language acquisition (Lindfors, 1987; de Villiers and de Villiers, 1979; Vygotsky, 1962; Wells, 1986) is that of a supportive "framework" created by caring adults, enabling a young child to create and construct language. However, a different image emerges in Heath's (1983) description of early language learning in a small community called Trackton. In the words of "community cultural broker", grandmother Annie Mae:

He gotta learn to know 'bout dis world, can't nobody tell 'im. Now just how crazy is dat? White folks uh hear dey kids say sump'n, dey say it back to 'em, dey aks 'em 'gain 'n 'gain 'bout things, like they 'posed to be born knowin'. You think I kin tell Teegie all he gotta know to get along? He just gotta be keen, keep his eyes open, don't he be sorry. Gotta watch hisself by watching other folks. Ain't no use me telling him: "Learn dis, learn dat. What's dis? What's dat?" He just gotta learn, gotta know; he see one thing one place one time, he know how it go, see sump'n like it again,

maybe it be de same, maybe it won't. He hafta try it out. If he don't he be in trouble; he get lef' out. Gotta keep yo' eyes open, gotta feel to know. (Heath, 1983, p.84)

What is it that these two images of language learning have in common? Perhaps it is a basic trust in the child as a learner. It is taken for granted that the child will learn to speak. Learning occurs in an environment which is emulative and affectionate rather than instructional or threatening. Language is learned because it is useful. Children learn to speak without a program of special training. Holt (1967) envisages the absurdity of a hypothetical language learning curriculum:

Bill Hull once said to me, "If we taught children to speak, they'd never learn." I thought at first he was joking. By now I realize that it was a very important truth. Suppose we decided that we had to "teach" children to speak. How would we go about it? First, some committee of experts would analyze speech and break it down into a number of separate "speech skills". We would probably say that, since speech is made up of sounds, a child must be taught to make all the sounds of his (her) language before he (she) can be taught to speak the language itself. Doubtless we would list these sounds, easiest and commonest ones first, harder and rarer ones next. Then we would begin to teach

infants these sounds, working our way down the list. Perhaps, in order not to "confuse" the child.....we would not let the child hear much ordinary speech but would only expose him (her) to the sounds we were trying to teach. Along with our sound list, we would have a syllable list and a word list. When the child had learned to make all the sounds on the sound list, we would begin to teach him (her) to combine the sounds into syllables..... Suppose we tried to do this; what would happen? What would happen, quite simply, is that most children, before they got very far, would become baffled, discouraged, humiliated, and fearful, and would quit trying to do what we asked them. (p. 56 - 57.)

The process of language acquisition from the interactionist perspective turns Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of learning on its head. A child learning language does not move through Bloom's neat progression from "knowledge" through "comprehension", "application", "analysis" and "synthesis" to the pinnacle of "evaluation". The interactionist perspective implies, instead, that the child simultaneously evaluates, synthesizes, analyzes and applies what he or she has learned in an integrated way in order to comprehend and to come to know.

It might be useful to view storytelling in the light of the language acquisition process. Storytelling, too, is a

quest for meaning. Benjamin (1968) notes that a real story "contains, openly or covertly, something useful" (p.86). Stories are pleasurable, non-threatening and non-competitive. Without visual aid, they are open to many sorts of interpretation. Listeners create their own individual pictures in the mind, conjured by the sounds of the words, and the facial expressions and gestures of the teller.

Yolen (1981) states that the eye and the ear are different listeners. She cites an anthropologist who observed that "people in preliterate cultures that are still more of the ear than the eye say "I hear you" when they mean they understand something. But we say "I see" (p.47). Perhaps, in our visually oriented culture of school, we do not pay enough attention to the ear, forgetting its importance in the process of understanding. Discussing American literary interpretation, Palmer (1969) notes:

We have forgotten that the literary work is not a manipulatable object completely at our disposal; it is a human voice out of the past which must somehow be brought to life. Dialogue, not dissection opens up the world of literary work.....Literary works are best regarded as humanly created texts which speak. (p. 7)

Storytelling is a bringing to life of literary texts. Perhaps storytelling has always endured because it nourishes the mind. In James Stephens' (1965) The Crock of Gold, the Philosopher goes on a journey of discovery:

"I have learned ," said the Philosopher, "that the head does not hear anything until the heart has listened, and that what the heart knows to-day the head will understand to-morrow." (p.174)

Storytelling appeals to the "heart". The revival of storytelling to-day is not a call to return to the mouth-to-mouth transmission of literature, but perhaps it is a call to the literal breathing of life into the printed word in order to deepen understanding. Palmer (1969) writes:

A work of literature is not an object we understand by conceptualizing and analyzing it, it is a voice we must hear, and through "hearing" (rather than seeing) understand. (p. 9)

Perhaps teachers who are interested in storytelling see in it a way of understanding both their pupils and their subject more deeply.

To me teaching is an ongoing learning experience which stems from what van Manen (1984) calls a "pedagogic love" both of those who are to be taught and the subject matter to be taught. I believe that storytelling kindles and nurtures an interest in people and an interest in literature.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE QUESTION

I work from a personal interest in storytelling. As a teacher of pre-school children, I used to tell stories daily. It is an experience that, I believe, can only be understood in

"doing" it. Because storytelling has always interested me and is important to me, I have spent much time reading about it and reflecting upon it. I have also started to "do" it again. I am both a listener and teller within a group of adult storytellers. In addition, over a period of two months, I told stories to a group of Grade 1 students.

Storytelling is at once always the same and always different: each storytelling situation elicits fresh insights into the relationship between the teller, the tale, and the listeners. Responses of listeners are always enlightening. For example, a ten-year-old who had just listened to a story observed, "You have to think more when you tell a story than when you read it."

Rosen (1987) criticizes cognitive approaches towards storytelling:

They wrench the storytelling situation into a special experimental context. They show us what is remembered but not why it is remembered. They are preoccupied with "information". Most of the studies have a deafness, if not actual antipathy to the achievements of millennia of literary and rhetorical scholarship. There is almost nothing here for those of you who want to know, need to know, "what is a storyteller doing and why?" (p.32).

In this thesis, I focus on the "what" and "why" of storytelling, the nature of the phenomenon of storytelling. My

study is an attempt to reveal the meaning of the experience of storytelling for those who tell stories and for those who listen to stories. Through this study, I endeavour to come to a deeper understanding of storytelling and its place in learning.

THE STUDY: USING A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

Initially, my inquiry into storytelling was not going to be a phenomenological one. I was interested in probing the relationship between listening to stories told and learning to read, an idea based on observation of my own two daughters' ease in learning to read after much listening to stories told. Thoughts of this causal relationship coloured my interpretation of the literature I earnestly perused. I also felt a need to prove that storytelling to groups of young children is "better" than storybook reading. However, after considerable reflection and after having begun, once again, to tell stories myself, it has become clear that probing of causal relationships is of less interest to me than looking to the phenomenon itself in order to perceive its essential nature.

Van Manen (1990) defines phenomenology as "the study of the lifeworld - the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it" (p.9). It had not occurred to me initially to become personally involved in storytelling as part of this research.

I wished to be outside the situation, to maintain an objective stance. But being involved in storytelling has shown me a different type of objectivity - that of allowing the phenomenon itself, storytelling, to appear as it is. This requires what scholars such as Denton (1979) have called bracketing:

.....With bracketing, the researcher is able to see and describe a phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, to interpret it against many backgrounds and to locate it in some conceptual field. The procedure itself is simple enough: one puts aside accustomed perceptual sets in order for the phenomenon to appear as itself. (p.6)

I do not find the procedure "simple enough", but I have made a conscious effort to suspend my own preconceptions and presuppositions, in an attempt to gain as many perspectives as possible on the phenomenon of storytelling. To this end, I have interviewed adult storytellers, told stories to children, observed others telling stories to children, and spoken to children about their experience of storytelling.

Spiegelberg (1975) states three requirements which must be met by any study which purports to be phenomenological in approach:

1). A phenomenological approach must start from a direct exploration of the experienced phenomena as they present themselves in our consciousness
.....without committing itself to belief or

disbelief in their reality.

2). It must attempt to grasp the essential structures of these experienced phenomena and their essential interrelations.

3). It should also explore the constitution of these phenomena in our consciousness, i.e. the way in which these phenomena take shape in our experience (p. 267)

Gathering Life Material

In collecting data or life material from adults (including myself) and children I addressed the first of Spiegelberg's requirements. The other two requirements were addressed in the structuring of phenomenological descriptions, and careful analysis thereof. I have used as a guideline the interpretive process described by Barritt et al (1983) and van Manen (1984) by:

1). Transcribing the tapes of interviews attentively, and constructing phenomenological descriptions of both my interviewees' and my own experiences of storytelling. In my writing, I have attempted to evoke the living situation, the sounds and nuances which comprised it.

2). Exploring themes which emerged, checking through the data to see whether they are shared themes or variations on themes.

3). Questioning my interpretations, asking myself and asking

others whether this is a truthful interpretation or whether it is something I wanted to find and, therefore, found.

4). Reading the literature in search of further information to add clarity to my interpretations.

5). Writing and reflecting, rewriting, re-evaluating.

Initially, it was my intention to "separate" the three parts of the storytelling event, the teller, the tale and the listeners, for the purpose of study. I aimed to glean descriptions from adults to represent "the teller". Observations of and descriptions from children were to represent "the listener". In addition I planned to conduct separate research on "story". However, as the research progressed, it became increasingly apparent that the separation of teller from listener is antithetical to the nature of storytelling. Adults spoke of listening as well as telling, and in speaking, they told me of story. Children refused to accept their placement as listeners, but instead became tellers of story. Therefore, this study has become a study of adults as they see storytelling, and children as they perceive it.

Barritt et al (1983) mention that changes in phenomenological research are not unusual. Indeed, to me, it has been an exciting dimension of the research process. As I began to explore the themes which emerged and to reflect upon them, it became apparent that the storytelling event is an embodiment of Dilthey's hermeneutical circle of understanding - the meaning of the whole is defined by the parts and the

parts can only be understood in relation to the whole (Palmer, 1969).

Van Manen (1984) describes phenomenological research as "the attentive practice of thoughtfulness" (p.38). This study represents my search for what it is that happens when a story is told. Following the title, I have looked into storytelling, thought carefully about it, and described those themes which appear to bespeak the essential nature of storytelling. However, as van Manen (1984) states:

A phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer, description. (p.40)

In the following chapter, I introduce the adult participants who have shown me different perspectives on storytelling. I describe how the interviews were conducted and present the phenomenological descriptions which were constructed on the basis of the interviews. I have included a description of my own lived experience of storytelling both as an additional perspective on the phenomenon and as a means of alerting the reader to personal biases which might colour my interpretations.

CHAPTER 2: ADULTS LOOKING INTO STORYTELLING

THE PARTICIPANTS: CAROLE, HELEN, AMANDA, RUTH, MARGARET, ELIZABETH.

By chance rather than design, all the participants in this study are women. To protect their identity, pseudonyms have been used. Perhaps it is fitting that the voices of the storytellers should be women's voices. In 1928 (A Room of One's Own), Virginia Woolf spoke eloquently on the absence of women's voices in English literature, an absence which, she suggested, was due to the conditions under which women lived. To the women of Girton, Woolf said:

Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think, suggested who made the ballads and the folk-songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, or the length of the winter's night. (p.55)

Storytelling has never been the exclusive province of either women or men, but since the beginning of this century women in North America have played an active role in promoting storytelling and guarding against its demise, for instance Marie Shedlock, Ruth Sawyer, Augusta Baker.

Brief biographical notes.

Ruth, Carole and Amanda belong to the group of storytellers which I have lately joined. This group is composed of teachers and librarians who meet frequently to tell stories and arrange functions eg. storytelling workshops. Three times a year they hold open meetings or "swapping grounds" which are attended by a variety of people who are interested in storytelling. Until recently, Helen was a member of the group: she still attends the "swapping grounds". Elizabeth moved recently to Montreal from Toronto where she was actively involved in storytelling.

Carole.

Carole is a high school teacher. She grew up in England and, in her teacher training, specialized in Drama. Since her arrival in Quebec she has taught both English as a Second Language and Drama. She tells stories regularly to preschool, elementary and high school children, and to adults in the storytelling group.

Helen

Helen teaches older elementary school children (Grades 5 and 6). She is highly experienced in the holistic approach towards the teaching of language arts. She tells stories in the classroom and encourages her students to tell stories.

Amanda

Amanda has extensive teaching experience. As a professional storyteller, she tells stories to many groups of elementary school children. She also tells stories to mixed audiences of adults and children at church meetings.

Ruth

Ruth is a kindergarten teacher who wrote her Master's thesis on storytelling. She tells stories in her own classroom and is very active in promoting storytelling in Montreal: she gives many workshops for teachers and university students.

Margaret

I am Margaret. As a teacher in South Africa I used to tell stories daily to pre-school children. During the course of study for a Master's degree, I have become increasingly interested in the nature of storytelling, and have started to tell stories to older children and adults.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is qualified both as a librarian and as a teacher. She uses storytelling in her own classroom and has experience as a professional storyteller in a variety of elementary schools in Toronto. She has also conducted workshops in personal narrative for adults.

THE INTERVIEWS

My approach to interviewing was determined by the hope that the interviews would serve as a source of deepened understanding of the phenomenon of storytelling for both my interviewees and me. Palmer (1969) cites Gadamer's typology of the "I-thou" relationship:

This is the relationship that does not project the meaning from the I that has an authentic openness which "lets something be said": "He who allows something to be said to him is in a fundamental way open.".....It is the kind of openness that wills to hear rather than to master, is willing to be modified by the other. (p.193)

The interviews were unstructured. Though I had with me a list of questions to serve as a guideline, this list was rarely consulted. My aim was to discover what storytelling as teller is like for each of my informants, what each sees herself to be doing when she tells a story. The interviews were conducted in the spirit of:

a joint reflection on a phenomenon, a deepening of experience for both interviewer and participant.

(Weber, 1985, p.65)

As storytelling is something that frequently takes place in a group, I decided to try a group interview. Amanda, Carole, Helen and I were present. The only question I asked was, "How did you first come to tell stories?" From there the

"interview" was more like a friendly conversation which had spirit of its own. To me, it appeared to be the way Gadamer (1984) describes a conversation:

A conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself (or herself) to the other person, truly accepts his (or her) point of view as worthy of conversation and gets inside the other to such an extent that he (she) understands not a particular individual, but what he (she) says. (p.347)

This first session was approximately two hours in duration. It was recorded on audio-cassette and transcribed later. Subsequently, I interviewed Amanda, Carole and Helen individually, asking each person, "Could you tell me what it is like to tell a story?"

Ruth and Elizabeth were interviewed individually. As in the group meeting, the conversation seemed to flow naturally and most of my questions were answered through the participants' own flow of thought rather than my posing questions directly. The questions included the following: What kinds of audiences do you have? How do you choose stories? How do you learn stories? How do you arrange the group ie. is physical arrangement of the audience important to you? Do you like to use some form of illustration to accompany your story? Could you describe an occasion when storytelling "worked" and one when it did not "work"?

My object was to elicit the interviewees' lived experience of storytelling. From the transcriptions, I constructed individual descriptions and asked each person whether she felt that the description was a true reflection of her experience. I have used their words as much as possible, and tried to preserve each person's individual style. When I read the descriptions, I hear their voices, but I am aware that the descriptions are flat and lifeless in comparison with the oral situation. Barritt et al (1983) maintain:

Accurate description is the first task in a phenomenological study. After description comes the search for themes which represent the significant meanings for subjects. In phenomenological research the important information lies in the situation itself and not behind in a set of internal rules, or before in underlying causes....it is in the description of experiences that human consciousness can be revealed. Consciousness is a process which is directed away from the person who possesses it and towards the world. Phenomenologists call this movement of consciousness "intentional". (p.67)

Spiegelberg (1975) states that: "the watchword of phenomenology from its Husserlian beginnings to Heidegger and beyond has always been "To the things!" (Zu den Sachen) (p.58). This means a conscious turning away from theories and hypotheses and turning towards the phenomena in their concrete reality. While the interviews can be seen as my vicarious borrowing of the informants' experiences, it is also a

comparing of experiences in order to reach towards deeper understanding.

LOOKING INTO STORYTELLING

Amanda: "Hey, this sounds fun!"

Family storytelling was part of Amanda's childhood. She was vividly reminded of this a few years ago when she attended a storytelling festival in Toronto. Paging through one of the books on display, she came across directions for making a mouse out of a handkerchief. Immediately, she was thrust back to her childhood; her father made just such a mouse as he told her stories, and she remembered her fascination with the "magic" of it.

Amanda's response to an advertisement for a three day intensive course on storytelling was, "Hey, this sounds fun! I think I'll try it." She remembers the first time she told a story. She was apprehensive, especially as one of her fellow participants at the course "just fell apart" and was unable to try. But Amanda liked her story, Childe Roland. She felt that she "really got into this story." She could visualize the scenes, the rooms, all encrusted with jewels, and her telling went well. Like many of the people at the course, Amanda was amazed that she could tell a story, and enjoy doing it.

Amanda explains what it is like to tell a story:

When you're telling, you're really not there,

somehow. The story's going but you're not doing it even. It's very odd. I mean, you work at it before. I really work hard at it. I tape it and I listen back. But then, when you're telling, it just sort of comes. It's very odd.

While she is telling the story, Amanda is aware of her listeners. She needs to see their faces, their eyes, yet it is not like talking to them face-to-face. She feels that it is, somehow, on another level. She tries to include everyone, and she senses when she is making contact, but it is a contact which is "removed" in comparison with the contact made in conversation.

Amanda muses about this "removed" contact. She wonders whether it is due in part to her involvement with remembering what comes next in the story. On the other hand, she does not memorize the text. She visualizes key images and uses many of her own words to build the story, memorizing only the most eloquent phrases. Though it is not the contact of talk, Amanda says, "You feel what's going on. You know when you've caught the people, I think. Something happens, but I'm not sure what it is that happens."

Amanda sees the story clearly in her own mind. She enjoys telling it and finds it very interesting to hear what the listeners see. She likes to ask for comments and questions after a story. Amanda finds storytelling "ageless" in the sense that she does not feel a difference between adult and child audiences. She believes that: "adults are just

older children, really." In hearing a story, adults listen like children to the unfolding of events, but they appreciate it on a more symbolic level. Amanda cites the story of Freedom Bird which celebrates the unconquerable spirit of freedom in human beings. She says:

I think people get that at very different levels.

I mean, the children see that the bird always lives, but the adults would see it in a quite different light. But they all enjoy it. They all participate.

She feels that stories touch people "where they're at" and therein lies the power of storytelling. She has heard "real" storytellers, native storytellers, who have mesmerized her. She believes that theirs is a true art, something which has been "given" to them. "How do you presume that you're a storyteller?" she asks. "We're just beginning, but having fun with it."

Helen: Teaching and Telling

Helen became involved in storytelling as part of a new approach to the teaching of English. When she first started teaching, teachers were "allowed" to read a story once a week, on Friday afternoons. Helen explains:

If you read a story more often than that, there was the feeling, "I'm not teaching. I'm not doing my job." And of course we were using basal readers, so

if anybody needed to hear stories, it was those poor children, who didn't get to read real books.....

With the advent of a holistic approach to language learning, children began to read "real books" in the classroom, and teachers rediscovered picture books, with their wealth of stories. However, as children hurry to grow up, they quickly discard picture books, before they have had time to savour the stories. Helen finds that older children who regard picture books as babyish will, nevertheless, listen to the stories, told.

Helen regards herself as a novice storyteller, but last summer she felt that she had "glimpses" into the power of storytelling. She was teaching a summer course for children from inner city schools. Most of the children had volunteered to attend, but some were there under duress. Helen tells of her experience:

I remember sitting on the floor. It was a hot, hot day and it was really hard to keep everyone's attention focused. The morning hadn't really gone that well and I still had to tell the story. When I'm telling a story, I don't always look around because I'm so busy seeing the pictures in my head and concentrating on that. But this time when I looked up, it was magical to me to see the faces of the boys in that group. They were sometimes disruptive and muttered that they didn't want to

hear a story, but now they had been drawn right into the story. There was one little boy who found it very hard to settle to anything....and he had his mouth open...

From a teacher's point of view, Helen found that this occasion was a time when storytelling really "worked".

From a personal point of view, she feels good about storytelling when she finds that she has lost her self-consciousness and become absorbed in the images of the story. She describes this as "telling the story without really being aware of telling it." This does not always happen to her. When she feels self-conscious, she finds herself stumbling over words, groping for words. It is not that she does not know the story well, but rather that she is aware of herself in the role of "storyteller" and she feels uncomfortable.

This feeling of discomfort occurs sometimes when she is telling stories to adults. In storytelling and in many other circumstances, she feels more comfortable with children. Yet she feels drawn to stories with adult content, particularly her collection of Irish tales:

When I'm learning them and reading them to myself and hearing how I would like to sound, I can imagine the setting and I get very excited about that. But even when I try to tell them to my husband, I don't feel comfortable doing it...Maybe with the children I feel I'm speaking more from the heart, and when adults are around, it's more of an

intellectual sort of exercise.

Helen is soft spoken and the stories she tells are quiet ones. She learns stories according to the "scenes". The best time to practise is when she is alone, moving about, doing housework. She does not find it difficult to learn stories. Although it is "work", in a way, she enjoys doing it. She does not "put off" learning stories, whereas writing, sitting faced with a blank computer screen, is something she will postpone. She finds the best way for her to learn stories is to tell them in class, even when they are not quite ready: "With each telling, I begin to see from the response and from the way I'm feeling, how I am going to tell it. With each retelling it improves."

To Helen storytelling involves sharing. She shares a meaningful story and she expects her audience to "meet" her by making an effort to listen. She does not, as a rule, ask questions after telling a story. And yet, strangely enough, she finds that after she has read a story, she moves easily into discussion. After she has told a story, however, she prefers to leave it "lingering". She believes that:

Storytelling is an experience, something that's happening to all of us right there, and we can just enjoy the happening, and not worry about questions that are going to be asked afterwards.

Helen believes that silence is powerful and talk somehow cheapens the experience. She feels the same way when students share their own writing with a group. Sometimes it calls for

discussion, but sometimes it is better to allow people to ponder in silence.

Helen tries to engender storytelling in her students. She finds that it is a valuable way in which older students, as storytellers, can make contact with younger children, breaking down the strict chronological age group "barriers" set up by school.

Ruth: Making connections

Ruth grew up in a household of storytellers, but she did not regard storytelling as being important until her son told her how he loved his grandfather's stories. Then she started to "listen with a different ear." Her interest heightened when she was doing her Master's degree at an American university where there was a very strong storytelling component. Nurtured in the family, her interest in and approach to storytelling became academic.

Ruth feels that she is a different storyteller with each different audience:

You read each audience and you begin to blend with your audience. If it's children, then it's just automatic that you're going to begin to gear down in vocabulary, to make sure that they understand, that it's meaningful to them. Whereas with adults there's more of a philosophical approach. The aspect of wisdom and life experience in a story

becomes much more natural to involve yourself with.

Because that's where they're at.

To Ruth, personally, storytelling is "a most wonderful way of transmitting information in a way that people reflect on it." She feels that the storyteller takes a story, her own or someone else's and, in her telling, changes the story, giving to it her own life experience. The listeners, who receive the story, blend it into their personal experience. Ruth believes storytelling to be:

a very, very personal means of communication. It's personal and it's private and yet it has a universal quality, because it usually relates to universal situations - the things that all human beings love, fear, honour. It encompasses what I see as some of the most important human elements and human aspects of interaction.

Ruth chooses stories which impart wisdom. Sometimes she asks children questions afterwards, to try to elicit what the story meant to them. However, she would never explain to them her own interpretation of the story.

Ruth chooses stories with care. She reads many stories and, when she encounters one which really touches her, she will reread it until she feels that she has a sense of the story, and knows its secrets. She then visualizes the story "like scenes in a play". If it is not a literary story, for instance, a folk tale, she does not adhere to the written text in her telling. It is only in the telling of a literary

tale that she feels a need to retain the exact words of the author.

Ruth has had considerable experience in telling stories. She recalls an occasion last summer which was, to her, a "wonderful" experience. She was attending a master storytelling class led by an eminent storyteller, who describes himself as a "coach".

I always worry in telling my stories, that I'm not very dramatic, because I'm very involved in the visualization of my story. I sit pretty quietly and just transmit it from the pictures I have built in my own mind. I worry that I'm not really sending it out - the feeling of the story, the characters. Are other people receiving how it is? I attended this class and told the story The Terrible Things, which was written for the holocaust. As I was telling it, I could feel the power of it. I was surrounded by very qualified, highly experienced storytellers and, when I got through, I knew the power of it had reached them. I knew that I had really connected. It was a completeness.

Ruth does not see herself as a performer when she tells stories. She sees herself as a transmitter of meaning. She creates pictures with words and shares her own sense of the story with her listeners. As a teller, she feels that she, personally, makes many gains. She gains a great deal from the joy of the story which she has selected and from the pleasure

of human interaction as she tells it. She feels satisfaction in the feeling that, in telling a story she is perpetuating something of worth and value. She believes that: "There's also a great gratification in seeing the response. You see that light in people's eyes as you're telling the story, and that's your reward."

Response to stories is often unforeseen. Ruth cites an instance when she had taken her kindergarten children on a field trip to the outdoor market. On their return, she told the story, The Enormous Turnip. In this cumulative tale the help of a number of people and animals is enlisted in order to pull up the turnip. Shortly afterwards, in the school yard, several children came running to her. "Come quickly", they said. "We need your help right away. We've found a root and we can't pull it out. So now we need the children, the teachers and a dog and a cat and a mouse..."

To Ruth, storytelling is:

.....one of the greatest bonding activities that you can find. You get through to people because, I think, you don't place someone in the spotlight. It's a very reflective way of looking at life, looking at problems, looking at situations, looking at yourself. And you can do it without feeling that someone is pinpointing you, asking you for answers. It is not threatening.

Carole: "Let's pretend."

Carole speaks in story. Although she says that she would not presume to introduce herself as a storyteller, she tells stories, naturally, all the time. Carole sees storytelling as a time of comfort and relaxation. There is also the sense of "entering" a place where there just might be something totally new and different as the story is shared. She says:

For me, sharing implies a kind of trust and that's what I think I'm always looking for in my storytelling. It's really like there are two of you together, and the story. I happen to be telling the story this time, but it's as if we're putting it out there to see.....to say to each other, "You see?".

Storytelling takes Carole and her listeners into the world of "Let's pretend". Children spend a great deal of time in an imaginative world but, as Carole says, there is a certain age when we stop pretending openly. She believes that storytelling takes us back into that world where we're allowed to fantasize and just imagine.

She recalls a time when, to her, storytelling really "worked". It was shortly after her arrival in Montreal that she went to a session of the Montreal storytellers. She heard the story of The Dollar Bill, a story about a man who has a suit made to measure. It is an extraordinary suit, for every time he places his hands in his pockets, he draws out two \$50

bills. As you can imagine, his lifestyle changes dramatically. He wrestles with his conscience and finally decides that he must burn this suit. He drives up to the mountains and sets the suit alight. He watches the smoke curling upwards and looks, reflectively, at the ashes. But, when he turns around, his car is gone....and you know the rest of the story. Carole listened to a masterful telling of the story:

When I first heard it, I thought, "Was it true? It wasn't real?" But I sat in this never, never land, in this state of belief/disbelief. The day after I heard that story, I almost ran to class. And I said, "You've just got to hear this story". And I sat on the desk and I think I was so overwhelmed by the story that I told it as if it were mine. And afterwards they were all asking, "Did it really happen?".

To Carole it does not matter whether a story is true or false, but that it is believed, as it is told. On this occasion she felt that her listeners "were all on this journey with me."

Whilst she is telling a story, Carole looks at her audience. She looks to hold them, but at the same time she is seeing the images of the story in her mind. She feels that she is asking her listeners to look, not at her, but at the images she is seeing: "It's not really me to them. It's sort of the story in me to them."

Carole feels that the story is greater than the

storyteller. It is the story that has stood through the years. The storyteller is "merely passing by, telling it." However, she believes that there has to be an element of performance. The storyteller wants it to "work", she wants it to be compelling. She needs to evoke an atmosphere and a response to her story. The response need not be verbal, but if the children do not respond at all, if they are up and off to other pursuits as soon as her last word has died, Carole feels that she has failed.

She wonders about the study of storytelling: "The more you go into things, techniques and this and that, anything that you might come across spontaneously, now has a measuredness about it." For example Carole once found that using someone else's technique destroyed her own telling of a story. Owl is her favourite story. She had told it successfully a few times. Then she read about an Indian woman in the islands who wore a hat when she told Owl. Carole thought she would try it:

The hat was on the table. But I was incredibly conscious about it. I had to put it on and I knew then that this was a gesture I was very conscious about. And I just thought, "I'll never do that again." I was too aware of the technique....Whereas normally I so love that story that I sort of travel on the story's back. If you're out there pushing the story, you know that it's you first, and the story's trailing. It doesn't work.

Carole likes to tell stories without tools, accessories or puppets. Storytelling, to her, is natural and simple, "my lips to your ears". She thinks that storytellers, consciously or unconsciously, choose stories which reflect their own inner being. When, as a little child, she listened to her grandmother's stories, she had the feeling that "time stopped". Now, when she tells stories she tries to share this feeling with her listeners. She says, "I just love to tell a story, because a story is."

Margaret: What is it?

I started telling stories before I knew anything about storytelling. Perhaps this is how I do things. I had a baby before I knew anything about child development. Maybe it is not too bad to do things this way. One has no preconceived notions or expectations, has made no prejudgments. One just meets the phenomenon, and learns about it by doing it.

I was taking a diploma in Early Childhood Education and was informed by my lecturer that stories were told, not read in the nursery school. The idea was to take a written story, one's own or a story from a book, learn it and tell it to the children. It seemed to me a peculiar notion. I loved reading to my little daughter; it was a time of great mutual pleasure. Why, I wondered, when there is a wonderful selection of picture books, why waste time learning a story? It was telling a story for the first time that convinced me

the preparation was not a waste of time. Something happens when one tells a story. It is something hard to explain, something ineffable.

I had been told by my supervisor to write a story for a group of two-and-half to three-year-olds, a story about a little girl, waking up and getting dressed in the morning. I wrote the story and made a flannelboard figure with various items of clothing for the illustration. What a dull, prosaic little story, I thought. I was full of apprehension, very uncertain that I could go through with it. It was bound to be disastrous. To make matters worse, the supervisor would be there, making written criticisms. To me, she was the epitome of excellence in an educator.

It was a lovely day, sunny and breezy. We sat in the garden in a circle, seven black mats for the children, one for me and a small chair for the supervisor. Shakily, I began the story. Then it happened, this strange thing. I was amazed. All these bright eyes were fixed on my face. They all looked expectant, eager. Seven little bodies leaned forward and, as the story progressed, there was nodding of heads and delighted comments like "I do that, too!". I was caught in their enthusiasm. Suddenly the story became interesting. I don't remember how I told it, I just remember this amazing feeling of being held, all together, in thrall. It was not a waste of time.

The first time I told a story to a group of adults was a year ago. It was told to a group of student teachers. I did

not think of it as a story for them. It was to be a demonstration, not to show them how to be a storyteller, but to give them some idea of the difference between listening to a story told, and a story read. It was a children's story, Wanda Gag's Millions of Cats. Again, I was amazed. They cast off their rather tired, politely attentive "student" faces. They looked like little children, eager, expectant, animated, involved. It was there again, unexpected, the magic.

It is not always like this. Sometimes when I tell a story, it is merely the performance of it; just a miniature dramatisation of a tale, in which I feel that neither the listeners, nor I have been touched, drawn into this strange contact which belongs not to me, or to them, or to the story itself but, somehow, to an interweaving of everything. It is fragile, so easily rent apart by an interruption. Once, for example, I was telling a story to a group of children. The story was well underway when another adult joined the audience. Somehow, it felt like an intrusion and I lost the thread of the story.

Would that have happened if I did not "memorize" the text? I do not know. Since I began to study storytelling, I have learned that memorization is not the way to learn a story, but I choose stories because of the words. Words arranged artfully, sonorously, rhythmically fascinate me. I do not want to use my own words. They would not convey adequately the images wrought by the author of the story. I do not think that I am a "real" storyteller at all. I am a person who

loves to tell other people's stories. I like to imagine the scenes, the tones of the characters' voices and the expressions on their faces. When I tell a story, I am giving the listeners my understanding of it, but not in a didactic way. Each one can see his or her own pictures. I feel that I am saying, "Here, take it, and make of it what you will".

Elizabeth : "It's natural".

Elizabeth has always been involved in storytelling. Her father came from the Bahamas where there is a very rich oral tradition. He maintained the oral tradition in his own home, always telling stories rather than reading them. When Elizabeth trained as a librarian, storytelling was an accepted part of the curriculum. To her, storytelling has always seemed a very natural thing to do.

Elizabeth makes up stories very easily. Sometimes she takes her stories from books, but the best way for her to learn stories is the way of the oral tradition:

I find the most natural way for me to get stories is from hearing other storytellers, and I'll remember them. In fact, one of my favourite stories I heard from Alice Kane. It's an Egyptian story and she told it at the museum in the Egyptian room. It was very powerful. I was there with my nine-year-old daughter, and all the way home in the subway, we kept trying to tell the story...and

helping each other. We didn't want to forget it,
and by the time we reached home we had a rhythm to
it.

She does write stories down to help her remember, but she finds the most vivid impressions come from hearing stories. A story, to Elizabeth, is not something that is etched in stone. Even when she is reading stories, she improvises and embellishes them in her own way. She knows when she has found a story she can tell because "it feels right". She believes that one's choice of stories is determined by one's particular stage in life. At present, she finds she is telling stories which have humour, faith and hope. They feature strong characters: "They do something for me. But I think stories really have to say something about where you are and who you are right now."

Elizabeth uses storytelling in her classroom "in a very natural way". She feels that, though she enjoys reading to children, the book is somehow in the way, between herself and the children. When she tells a story, she is more involved with them, aware of their reactions and the effect the story has on them. She makes eye contact, and in certain stories, involves her listeners in the telling. Children easily become involved in a story, but she finds adults are more reticent.

Although I think adults become like the children.

It might take longer, but if the story really touches something in them, there is an excitement.

It's like listening to stories lets them become

freer to participate, themselves.

When she tells stories to adults, Elizabeth says she feels she has to be more prepared. She plans the evening, so that there is less room for "going with the flow", as she does when she tells stories to children. With children, she says, "I'm not afraid of failure." Although adults may not participate, physically, as fully as children do, when they do become involved, they start talking afterwards, telling one another stories, sharing experiences. The listeners, Elizabeth feels, are of prime importance:

And you are so high when you're telling a story to a really good audience. I think adults are really the most satisfying. Maybe it's because with the children I'm so much myself and so relaxed, but with the adults there is more anticipation. I'm more nervous beforehand.

Storytelling gives Elizabeth great pleasure, she derives self esteem from the practice of it. She feels that she gives to her listeners something which they can take and use themselves. She does not ask for a response after she has told a story, but usually they talk. Unbidden, the children write the story in their journals, much in the same way that Elizabeth writes down stories: so that they do not forget them.

To Elizabeth it is "such a pleasure" to tell a story:
I find that I am enjoying the story and not
thinking about the words of it, but caught up in

the present of it, the flowing of it. It's very natural. It's not as if you're removed from it. It's all one and rolling.

Sometimes, however, it does not work:

I remember one time when it didn't work well. It was in a particular school where the children had been fabulous.....And then this one class came in. And they just sat there..... woodenly. I was half-way through the story and I kept thinking, "I wish I could get out of this. What's wrong? Everything is the same as it was for the three previous classes..." It turned out that this class had a teacher who was very sergeant-majorish. She came in and "placed" them in a particular way and then sat at the back, watching. So maybe none of us was comfortable. The group was conscious of their teacher, and I was trying to fight it. It was draining. I felt exhausted and frustrated.

It is very seldom that anything like this happens. Usually, Elizabeth finds when she returns to a place where she has told a story, the children will run up and hug her: "It's like they know you. You've touched them in some way, and they've touched you. You feel a warmth towards those people."

Elizabeth finds it strange that storytelling, as a normal, everyday occurrence, has stopped. It has become something which people are forgetting to do. She says that it is almost as if we have "hammered a vital part out of us." It

is odd, to her, that we should have to organise special interest groups to do something which should be "completely natural."

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS THE STORYTELLER DOING?

The voices of the storytellers we have just heard in the preceding chapter are different. Each description evokes a different, personal feeling about the lived experience of storytelling, but recurrent themes seem to weave through all the accounts. I have used my own experience as a guide in my search for the "important" themes that address my question: what is the storyteller doing?

STORYTELLING AS COMMUNICATING

Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu

(People are people through other people)

Xhosa Proverb

People speak to one another. Our capacity for language distinguishes us as human beings. Gadamer (1984) writes: "Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all." (p. 401). It is impossible to imagine a human world without language. By the same token, it is impossible to imagine a world without stories. Telling stories is a distinctively human thing to do. It concerns reaching out from one to another, making connections, communicating. Ruth says that storytelling is: "a very, very personal means of communication. It's personal and it's private and yet it has a universal quality, because it usually relates to universal

situations....."

Storytelling takes place in a group, at the very least a group of two, held together by the story. As Ruth notes, the story deals with human issues; in Amanda's words it touches people "where they're at". The teller has been touched by the wisdom of the story. She has been stirred by a feeling of recognition of what Ruth calls: "the things that all human beings love, fear honour.....". She invites her listeners to hear, to understand. She gives her interpretation, but each individual who hears, creates his or her own interpretation. Listening to stories is, essentially, personal and private. MacNeil (1989) writes about the privacy of listening to the radio:

It spoke particularly to me and I did not have the feeling that other people were listening. I seemed to be listening as privately as I read a book, reading to myself; I was listening to myself, in effect. Television gives the feeling that other people are watching; even if I am alone, I cannot watch to myself (p. 197)

Even though there are others present in the storytelling group, without visual effects, each listener listens to herself or himself.

Storytelling speaks to people as individuals, but it speaks of the things which bind individuals to one another. It is at once intensely private and social. The story touches a common chord in that it speaks of what it is to be living a

human life as an individual who shares a communal life with other individuals. In storytelling, one is part of a group, but not part of a crowd. In discussing aesthetic experience, Greene (1978) writes:

An individual who is part of a crowd becomes anonymous; the sense of responsibility is weakened; autonomy erodes. In such a state, we are hardly likely to engage in the kinds of perceptual and cognitive activities needed for making sense of the world. We are unlikely to frame the significant questions that move human beings to go in search of meaning, to pursue themselves, to learn. (p.199)

Storytelling is an invitation to learn, to think and to come to know, personally, as an autonomous individual. It plays upon the essentially human quality of imagination. Imagination is that unmeasurable facility we have for going beyond mere survival, for stepping back from an event, holding the picture of it in our minds, wondering and reflecting, making sense, making connections. Without the exercise of the imagination, storytelling cannot be. The teller uses it in her interpretation of the story and her attempt to convey the story to the listeners. The listeners use it in order to understand. The story itself is an imaginative creation of a human mind. Rosen (1984) writes:

We might be disposed to take stories more seriously if we perceived them first and foremost as a product of the human mind to narratize

experience and to transform it into findings which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others. (p.12)

Teller to listener: a "removed" contact

Amanda speaks of the contact between the teller and listeners as a contact that is "removed" in comparison with the contact made in conversation. She says: "You feel what's going on. You know when you've caught the people, I think. Something happens, but I'm not sure what it is that happens." Carole says that she looks at her listeners to hold them but at the same time she is seeing the images of the story in her mind: "It's not really me to them. It's sort of the story in me to them." Ruth alludes to this feeling of communicating the story:

As I was telling it, I could feel the power of it.....and, when I got through, I knew the power of it had reached them. I knew that I had really connected. It was a completeness.

Helen says: "But this time when I looked up, it was magical to me to see the faces of the boys....they had been drawn right into the story."

The contact between teller and listeners is a contact through story. It is not the direct contact of conversation in which we try to communicate our ideas, but a contact at one remove, a contact of active imaginations. Is it a basic

human need to have this "removed" contact? Sometimes it is difficult to communicate face-to-face. Virginia Woolf (1978) puts this succinctly: "Their eyes met in a common effort to bring a common meaning to birth. They failed...." (p.112) If we are all looking, in our minds, at the illumination of a story, we make connections to each other through it.

Perhaps in telling a story we are, in effect, saying, "Listen to this story. It will tell you something about me that I cannot express directly, and maybe it will tell you something about you that you cannot express directly." Elizabeth describes how she is greeted when she returns to a place where she has previously told a story: "It's like they know you. You've touched them in some way, and they've touched you. You feel a warmth towards those people."

Barry Dixon seemed to me to be describing this way of touching others, "knowing" people through story. He is a social worker in Toronto who has spent many years working with abused children. At the Toronto Festival of Storytelling (1991) he spoke about his efforts to communicate with such children. He has used many different methods, based on various theories but, he said, nothing works as well as storytelling. He described how it is to fetch a young child from an apartment in which she has been left alone for some days. He sits with the tense, damaged child in a taxi and he tells a story. He says that he sees the little body relaxing as the story progresses. The story opens a way for him to make contact with a troubled child, to forge a connection.

In storytelling it is sometimes possible to reach "unreachable" children. Every teacher knows some children who do not find it easy to communicate with adults. I remember feeling that during stories, uncommunicative children and I formed some sort of bond between us. Helen believes that through telling stories to younger children in school, her Grade 5 students are able to break down, to some extent, the barriers erected by the school system. In the story, these children who have thus far shared very little, are able to share a moving experience which forges some sort of bond amongst them. Ruth describes storytelling as: "....one of the greatest bonding activities that you can find. You get through to people because, I think, you don't place someone in the spotlight."

Nobody is directly answerable to anybody else in the storytelling situation. Helen says "we can just enjoy the happening and not worry about questions that are going to be asked afterwards." Perhaps the non-threatening quality of the contact allows people to be "drawn in" as Helen describes it or "caught" in Amanda's words. Helen speaks of reluctant listeners in a situation where she, herself was not feeling particularly positive. Almost against their will, she and her listeners became absorbed in the story.

POWER AND CHOICE IN STORYTELLING

The teller and the story

What is it that compels in storytelling? Wherein rests the power? Apparently the power is wielded by the storyteller. It is she who has chosen the story. It is she who dictates when and how it is to be told. But is the power in the story or the storyteller? Carole believes that the story is greater than the storyteller; as she puts it, she is "merely passing by, telling it". She says:

I so love that story that I sort of travel on the story's back. If you're out there pushing the story, you know that it's you first, and the story's trailing. It doesn't work.

Ruth speaks of feeling the power of a story as she told it and feeling that the power of the story had reached her audience.

All the participants spoke of choosing their stories with care. The stories they choose to tell have to touch them, move them or transport them in some way, whether it is to laughter, tears or excitement. When I read a story for the first time and find that I am crying, then I know that this is a story I wish to tell, can tell and sometimes need to tell. Carole describes this feeling aptly when she tells of running to her class and saying, "You've just got to hear this story." Helen says that she feels good about storytelling

when she has lost her self-consciousness, become absorbed in the story and is "telling the story without really being aware of telling it". Elizabeth says: "I find that I'm enjoying the story and not thinking about the words of it, but caught up in the present of it, the flowing of it." Amanda appears to be expressing the same feeling when she says: "When you're telling, you're really not there, somehow. The story's going but you're not doing it even." There appears to be a self forgetfulness where the storyteller is controlled by the story or, perhaps, for those moments she and the story become as one.

At the same time a certain self knowledge dictates both the choice of story and the manner of telling it. Carol believes that storytellers, consciously or unconsciously, choose stories that reflect their own inner being. I know that I choose stories which reflect my own cultural background and which deal with issues that are important to me. Ruth chooses stories which impart the wisdom of experience; she believes that a storyteller gives, in her telling, her own life experience to stories. Helen is drawn to quiet stories which reflect her own demeanour, and to Irish tales, the tales of her forebears. Elizabeth says:"....But I think stories really have to say something about where you are, who you are right now."

Each teller uses her own natural style. Amanda was drawn to storytelling because it sounded "fun"; the stories she tells are filled with humour. It is questionable, though,

whether the stories would be funny without Amanda's interpretation of them. Her "technique" appears to be entirely natural; she seems to be the real author of the tale. Carole tells how things went awry when she adopted the technique of another:

The hat was on the table. But I was incredibly conscious about it. I had to put it on and I knew then that this was a gesture I was very conscious about. And I just thought, "I'll never do that again."

The experience of storytelling opens windows into oneself. The strange thing is that in looking for a story, one is not consciously searching to discover oneself. It just happens. For example, optimism is important to me. I particularly like the stories of Oscar Wilde, and thought of learning The Nightingale and the Rose in order to tell it. I found that, although it is a beautiful story, it is one which I cannot tell. The note upon which it ends is a note of despair. Upon reflection one sees oneself mirrored in the story but the initial choice seems to be pre-reflective: "...what the heart knows to-day the head will understand to-morrow." (Stephens, 1965, p. 174)

Perhaps the power of storytelling rests in a conscious self forgetfulness and a sub-conscious self knowledge into which the storyteller is drawn by her own imaginative interpretation of the story. Polonius counselled his son:

This above all: to thine own self be true,

And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(Hamlet, 1, iii, 58)

In storytelling, the power is a power of sincerity. Both in her choice of story and her rendition of it, the storyteller is true to her own self. Virginia Woolf (1929) writes:

I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else. Do not dream of influencing other people, I would say, if I knew how to make it sound exalted. Think of things in themselves. (p.193)

When storytelling "works", when the magic, the power is there, the storyteller is being herself. She does not "dream of influencing other people"; she is thinking of "things in themselves" and needing to communicate her own delight to her listeners. Young (1987) writes of the "Taleworld", the inner world of the story as opposed to the real world of daily life:

Tellers and hearers are directed to the Taleworld by the story, that direction originating in the realm of social interaction and susceptible to its strategies. Although all participants in the storytelling influence the shape of the story, tellers are understood to have more control than hearers over its angle of entry into the Taleworld and the perspective it provides on that realm. (p.16)

The listeners and the story

While the teller has the power to direct the entry into this world of the story, the listeners wield their own power. Quite simply, it is their choice whether or not they will hear. Successful communication depends at least in part, on the willingness of the listeners. It depends on their engagement. Genette (1980) states: "....the real author of the narrative is not only he who tells it, but also, at times even more he who hears it." (cited in Rosen, 1987, p.7)

This is what happened to me when I told my first story. The "authors" of my story were the little children to whom I told it. I was initially sceptical about storytelling, my invented story seemed to me a dull and lifeless thing, but the response of the children ignited enthusiasm in me. It was they who showed me what storytelling was. Carole says:

It's really like there are two of you together, and the story. I happen to be telling the story this time, but it's as if we're putting it out there to see...to say to each other, "You see?"

As a listener, Amanda speaks of being "mesmerized" by native storytellers. The word "mesmerized" conjures an image of a hypnotic state in which one is insensible to pain and is in a state of muscular rigidity. Helen creates this image when she speaks of the little boy who "had his mouth open". Likewise, Harold Rosen (1988) writes of a sophisticated London audience, listening to Caribbean storytellers: "Their

jaws were dropping and their eyes intently focused - like any bunch of primary school kids who have listened to my stories."
(p. 166)

What is this trance-like state? It appears that the listeners are spellbound, bewitched, at the mercy of the teller of tales. But "their eyes (were) intently focused". This seems to me to be an important point. The immobility of the body does not denote an immobility of the mind. It is in the mind that the listeners exercise their power. It is the power of recognition, of knowing, understanding, of saying inwardly "Here is something which is not me and yet pertains to me." The physical body, the consciousness of self is forgotten, held in thrall, but at the same time the mind is intensely aware. When Elizabeth heard master storyteller, Alice Kane's rendition of an Egyptian story, she found it "very powerful". One can imagine her and her daughter listening, immobile and enthralled, but their minds were keen. All the way home, they retold the story to one another, lest they forgot.

Power is "ability to do something or anything" or "ability to act or affect something strongly" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). The listeners in the storytelling situation use their ability to understand, and by their reactions influence strongly the direction which the story told will take. Elizabeth talks of being "so high when you're telling a story to a really good audience", but when the listeners sit "woodenly" and do not respond, she finds

storytelling exhausting and frustrating.

Power can also mean "possession of control or command over others" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). In this sense, power can be used to good or ill effect. The participants in this study are aware of the power of the stories they tell. It is a positive power which, in turn, empowers them. Amanda told me in an informal conversation that she feels awed by the power she perceives herself to wield when the listeners' attention is directed towards her. I understand what she means. It is a sense of power which is unbidden. It is bred not of a will to dominate but a will to communicate meaning.

Could this power be used to manipulate the listeners as Amanda wondered? The image which springs to mind is that of people being manipulated by the rhetoric of a charismatic speaker. It is an image of a crowd where, as Greene (1978) notes, the feeling of individual responsibility and autonomy cease to be operative. But the image of a storytelling situation is diametrically opposed to that of a crowd. Without the listeners' sense of autonomy, storytelling ceases to be. Essentially, those who listen to a story are free agents. Jean-Paul Sartre maintained that "literature addresses itself to the reader's freedom:

For since the one who writes recognizes, by the very fact that he (she) takes the trouble to write, the freedom of his (her) readers, and since the one who reads, by the mere fact of his (her) opening

the book, recognizes the freedom of the writer, the work of art, from whichever side you approach it, is an act of confidence in the freedom of men (and women). (p.166)

The power of storytelling is essentially a power of freedom. Storytelling "works" when power is shared amongst teller and listeners in their involvement in the story. The "magic" is there when power is balanced, when nobody exerts undue influence over anybody else, but when all feel freely, actively engaged.

STORYTELLING AS GIVING, SHARING, AND BARTER

Is the story shared or given?

Power is shared in storytelling. Most writers refer to storytelling itself as a form of "sharing" (Bryant, 1924; Sawyer, 1966; Chambers, 1970; Colwell, 1980.) I had always thought of storytelling in terms of giving, the story being my free gift to the listeners, to use it as they would. Elizabeth expresses giving in a different way when she says, that stories "do something" for her and she feels that she gives her own enjoyment of them to her listeners. The verb "to give" comes from the Old English word *gefan*. It means "to bestow gratuitously; to hand over as a present; to confer gratuitously the ownership of on another person." (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). I began to wonder whether the

story is, in fact, a gift to the listeners.

Giorgi (1985) describes a situation of giving. His gift was a chess set. It was his own chess set, lovingly and, as he puts it, "sacramentally" given to his son. Later it transpired that his son was using the chessmen, not as intended for a game of chess, but as a source of leaden weights. Giorgi's immediate reaction was one of anger, but then he reflected on the nature of a gift and apologized to his son. Giorgi (1985) writes:

Aquinas once wrote that "the quality of a gift is determined not by the giver's ability to give, but by the receiver's ability to receive." I learned that day what that meant. I had given my son a gift which was not merely the chess set, but all the value, meaning and sentiment which I attached to it. For me, the chess set was a symbol of what a father desires to give his son; for my son, the chess set was a source of lead weights. I had offered him a gift that he was not able to receive...(p.9)

The story is a gift only insofar as the listener is able to receive it as a gift. Listeners who are touched by a story perceive it as a gift. I have seen adults who have been profoundly moved by a story. Afterwards they felt compelled to go to the storyteller, shake her hand and thank her. For when one gives a story and it is perceived by the listeners as a gift, it is not only the story, but also the gift of self.

Giorgi's chess set was a symbol of himself. In telling a story, the teller opens herself to the listeners. When they are deeply moved, and able to receive her gift, they feel she is someone with whom they can feel safe. Trust is born.

However, taken literally, giving means that the gift no longer belongs to the giver. It has become the property of the receiver to use as he or she sees fit. In storytelling, the teller gives in the sense that, because it is a living art, this particular storytelling event will never be repeated. But she still retains ownership of the story in her own mind.

Storytelling as sharing

Perhaps sharing is indeed a word which describes more aptly what the storyteller is doing. Carole sees storytelling as sharing when she says: "for me, sharing implies a kind of trust and that's what I think I'm always looking for in my storytelling." She feels that in storytelling the participants share a part of themselves. The teller is, to some extent, vulnerable as she puts out her story to say "You see?" She places her trust in the listeners' readiness to meet her. Helen, too believes that storytelling involves sharing, both in the sense of the listeners and teller sharing some sort of history together, something which they have in common, and in the sense that she expects her listeners to meet her by making an effort to listen. She believes that sharing implies a willingness for both teller and listener to be vulnerable.

Gadamer (1984) writes:

To be present means to share....To be present, as a subjective act of human attitude, has the character of being outside oneself....being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness and it is the nature of the spectator to give himself in self-forgetfulness to what he is watching. (p.111)

Being present means sharing. Gadamer describes being present as "being outside oneself" and therefore able to give oneself wholly to something else. His image of a spectator giving himself or herself in self-forgetfulness to what he or she is watching corresponds to the images evoked by Amanda, when she describes herself as being "mesmerized" by native storytellers, and by Helen when she speaks of the little boy who "had his mouth open". The same self-forgetfulness is perceived by the tellers, themselves. Amanda says, "you're really not there, somehow." Helen says she feels good when she is "telling the story without really being aware of telling it." Elizabeth describes it as being "caught up in the present of it". Storytelling requires all who are there to be truly present, in the way Gadamer describes, and in being present, to share:

Ruth Sawyer (1966) writes:

Every traditional storyteller I have heard - and I have gone into many countries to find them - has

shown above everything else that intense urge to share with others what has already moved him (her) deeply....not a clever sharing of the mind alone, but rather a sharing of heart and spirit: I think storytelling must do this if it is to endure.(p.18)

Storytelling is a sharing of mind, heart and spirit. In a civilized, literate Western society which prizes rationality, we tend to dichotomize thought and emotion. Zimiles (1986) cites Piaget as saying, "Freud focused on emotions, I chose intelligence," (p.3). Later, however, Piaget admitted that the two could not be isolated; they are thoroughly integrated and one cannot operate without the other. Paterson (1989) writes about the meaning of the word "idea":

And in Japanese the word is i, which is made up of two characters - the character for sound and the character for heart - so an idea is something that makes a sound in the heart (the heart in Japanese, as in Hebrew, being the seat of intelligence as well as the seat of feeling). (p.28).

Storytelling could be viewed as the sharing of ideas, the sharing of "something that makes a sound in the heart".

Is the story a "kind of merchandise"?

French critic Roland Barthes (1985) asks:

Why do we tell stories? For amusement or

distraction? For "instruction" as they said in the seventeenth century? Does a story reflect or express an ideology, in the Marxist sense of the word? Today all these justifications seem out of date to me. Every narration thinks of itself as a kind of merchandise. In The Thousand and One Nights, a narrative is traded for one more day of life - in Sarrasine, for a night of love. (p. 89).

Is storytelling, indeed an exchange, a trade? Is the story an object of barter? I was taken aback when I read Barthes' pronouncement. I had thought of a story as a gift, of telling as giving. Helen and Carole see it as sharing. However, Ruth feels that when she shares her own sense of a story with her listeners, she makes many personal gains. The joy of the story lives while she tells it: "There's also a great gratification in seeing the response. You see that light in people's eyes as you're telling the story, and that's your reward." As tellers we need a response. Elizabeth talks of a time when storytelling did not "work". She was faced with a sea of blank faces. She could hardly wait to finish the story and, at the end she felt completely exhausted, drained.

Bartering involves an exchange of commodities. Ruth and Elizabeth appear to feel that they exchange a story for the personal gratification of the listeners' response. In the days of the itinerant troubadour, stories were a means of livelihood. They were exchanged for food and drink. But why do we tell stories and listen to them?

I recall Barthes' example of The Thousand and One Nights. It is an exchange of a story for one more day of life. But Barthes has not looked at the whole story. King Shahriar embarked on his path of monstrous cruelty because he was wounded by the infidelity of his wife. In trying to avenge himself, he determined to eliminate all young women and lost sight of his own humanity. Sheherazade was cunning. She told the King only half a story each night. Like all listeners, the King needed to know what happened next, so her life was prolonged. However, in listening to her telling of tales, the King underwent a change of heart. He learned or re-learned about compassion. He was transformed and redeemed. He rediscovered what it is to be a human being.

Superficially, Barthes is correct in citing The Thousand and One Nights as an example that "every narration thinks of itself as a kind of merchandise." (Barthes, 1985, p.89.) However, the whole story is not about barter. It is about transformation and self-discovery.

We listen to stories because we learn from them. Like Sheherazade's tales, all good stories have suspense which engages and holds the listeners' interest, but essentially it is the discoveries made possible by the story that the listeners hold in their minds. It is the giving or sharing of "something useful" (Benjamin, 1968, p.86.) which lies at the core of storytelling. It is in the telling that the storyteller "shows" her listeners what the story holds. When they are able to take what is given or shared, the listeners,

as Carole and Elizabeth noted, want to share their own stories. It is then that exchange takes place.

STORYTELLING AS A PERFORMING ART

Bauman (1986) writes that the:

....essence of oral literature, including its artfulness, is not to be discovered in folklore texts as conventionally conceived, but in lived performances. (p.8).

Storytelling is an event and the storyteller is the one who "performs" in order to bring about the event. It is tempting to compare the art of storytelling with dramatic art. Ruth worries that she is not very dramatic: "I sit pretty quietly and just transmit it from the pictures I have built in my own mind, I worry that I'm not really sending it out - the feeling of the story, the characters." Carole believes that, although the story is greater than the storyteller, there has to be an element of performance. The teller wants it to be compelling and therefore needs to evoke an atmosphere for her listeners to enter the story.

Surely, storytelling has elements of drama, but Tolkien (1965) illuminates the essential differences between drama and narrative art when he writes: "....the characters, and even the scenes, are in Drama not imagined but actually beheld - Drama is, even though it uses a similar material (words, verse, plot), an art fundamentally different from narrative

art." (p.51). Marie Shedlock (1951) declares that the art of storytelling is more difficult than acting:

First, because the narrator is responsible for the whole drama and the whole atmosphere which surrounds it. He (she) has to live the life of each character and understand the relation which each bears to the whole. Secondly, because the stage is a miniature one, gestures and movements must all be so adjusted as not to destroy the sense of proportion...The special training for the storyteller should consist...above all in power of delicate suggestion, which cannot always be used on the stage because this is hampered by the presence of actual things. The storyteller has to present these things to the more delicate organism of the "inward eye". (p.31).

The storyteller has no book, as Elizabeth says, "in the way". Neither is she "hampered by the presence of actual things". In the lived performance of the story, she relies on her voice, her face and her gestures to convey "the whole drama and the whole atmosphere that surrounds it". The way in which she does this, is the way which is natural to her. For example, I have watched and listened to a masterful telling of The Juniper Tree. The storyteller stood, with her hands firmly clasped behind her back. Her voice told the tale; changes in facial expression were slight and subtle. Yet she created the tale with such vividness, clarity and emotion that the entire

audience in the lecture room sat motionless. I could not tell a story in this way. I need to use my hands. Other storytellers move about; Elizabeth says that she does this sometimes if the story seems to her to dictate it.

There is no recipe for the technique of storytelling, no rule which will guarantee the efficacy of the lived performance. Only this is essential: that the storyteller be natural. It is not always easy to be natural and at the same time to be "performing". Sometimes it is tempting to take on the technique of another but, as Carole discovered, it does not work: "...this was a gesture I was very conscious about. And I just thought, "I'll never do that again". I was too aware of the technique..." When she tells a story in her own way, Carole feels that she "sort of travel(s) on the story's back". Elizabeth describes the same feeling when she says that she gains the greatest pleasure when she is not thinking about the words but is "caught up in the present of it, the flowing of it".

To be natural in telling a story the storyteller needs to know herself, to be true to herself. To tell the story at all, however, she needs also to imagine. As Carole says, storytelling takes her and her listeners into the world of "Let's pretend". Children move easily into the world of "Let's pretend". Without any props they become space-monsters, dragons or unwanted orphans with wicked stepmothers. Carole described her four-year-old daughter playing "hospital" with her friend. Effortlessly, they "became" the characters of

their make-believe world. But when Carole asked her Grade 9 students to pretend, they were flummoxed; they could not even decide what to pretend. Perhaps this is the "vital part" that Elizabeth says has been "hammered out of us". Storytellers need to remember how to pretend and give free scope to the imagination.

Tolkien (1965) writes: "The human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present. The faculty of conceiving the images is naturally called Imagination." (p.46). The participants allude to their image making. Amanda could visualize the bejewelled rooms in the story of Childe Roland, Carole and Helen speak of seeing pictures in their minds, Ruth visualizes the story "like scenes in a play". Elizabeth speaks of being part of the story: "It's very natural. It's not as if you're removed from it. It's all one and rolling." I know that when I tell stories, I see the scene and "become" the characters. Gadamer (1984) writes:

A child begins to play by imitation, doing what he (she) knows and affirming his (her) own being in the process. Also, children's delight in dressing-up, to which Aristotle refers, does not seek to be a hiding place of themselves, a pretence, in order to be discovered and recognized behind it, but on the contrary, a representation of such a kind that only what is represented exists. (p.102).

This is what the storyteller, too, is doing. She moves into

the world of the story, beckoning her listeners into this world, to "see" with the "inward eye", to recognize what is there for them to see and to suspend judgement. As Carole says, it matters not whether a story is true or false, but that it is believed, as it is told.

To tell a story, one needs to imagine. Katherine Paterson (1989) writes:

The Sino-Japanese character pronounced so, which means "to imagine", has three parts. First you draw a tree and then you draw an eye behind that tree. And then, underneath the eye, spying out from behind the tree, you put a heart.....I love the idea of spying as tied up with the act of imagining. And since the heart in Japanese is the seat both of feeling and of the intellect, we're not talking about some sentimental peeping, but the kind of spying, the kind of connecting that Einstein did, and Shakespeare, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. (p.65).

Is storytelling a performance? Is it an art? Yes, it is both. But what the storyteller is doing, when she performs, is being herself as she moves into the world of the story, as she imagines it. Perhaps, though, the way in which she presents the story depends on the age of her listeners.

STORYTELLING TO CHILDREN AND ADULTS

"The Child is father of the Man."

William Wordsworth

According to Aries (1962), there was no concept of childhood in Western civilization prior to the seventeenth century:

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken, or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children; it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. (p.128).

From a twentieth century perspective, it is curious to contemplate a time when there was no particular separateness between children and adults, when children were part of the adult life of work and play, and storytelling. In this century, "the child" has been exhaustively studied; childhood is seen as a period distinctively different from adulthood.

Does the storyteller perceive a difference in the way she tells stories to audiences of children and to those of adults? Ruth says she is equally comfortable with adults and children but, chameleon-like, she tends to blend with her audience. With children she automatically simplifies her vocabulary so

that the meaning of the story will be clear to them, but with adults she takes "more of a philosophical approach." Helen seems to feel this difference too, but in another way. She is more comfortable telling stories to children: "Maybe with the children I feel I'm speaking more from the heart, and when adults are around, it's more of an intellectual sort of exercise." Carole and Elizabeth speak of feeling that they have to be more prepared when they tell stories to adults. Elizabeth says there is less room for "going with the flow" as she does when she tells stories to children. With children, she says, "I'm not afraid of failure".

All the participants appear to believe that adult listeners will have different expectations. There is a feeling that adults need to be intellectually stimulated by a story, that adults will be critical. The tellers perceive themselves as more able to relax and be natural with children.

However, in the actual event of storytelling, adults do become involved in the way that children do. Elizabeth says:

...I think adults become like the children. It might take longer, but if the story really touches something in them, there is an excitement. It's like listening to stories lets them become freer to participate, themselves.

Amanda does not perceive a difference between adult and child audiences: "I think adults are just older children, really." She believes that adults and children appreciate stories on different levels, but that they all enjoy the story and

participate in it.

Storytelling seems to blur the division between children and adults. It is an invitation to open ourselves to the story, to suspend belief and judgement. Frye (1963) writes:

The art of listening to stories is a basic training for the imagination....If Bertrand Russell is right in saying that suspension of judgment is one of the essential operations of the mind, the benefits of learning to do this go far beyond literature. And even then what you react to is the total structure of the story as a whole, not to some message or moral or Great Thought that you can snatch out of it and run away with. (p.49).

The whole story is the meaning. Children or adults, we become involved in the experience of it, accepting it for the moment as a real lived experience. We laugh or we cry real tears in what Carole calls a world of "let's pretend", where "we're allowed to fantasize and just imagine".

Stories are about desirability. They are a product of the imagination. Frye (1963) writes:

Science begins with the world we have to live in, accepting its data and trying to explain its laws...Art on the other hand begins with the world we construct, not with the world we see. It starts with the imagination, and then works towards ordinary experience, that is, it tries to make itself as convincing and recognizable as it can. (p.6).

Stories touch us, child or adult, when they are "convincing and recognizable". A good story has something to give at several different levels because, unlike a television newscast, a story is not in Benjamin's (1968) words "shot through with explanation" (p.89). Stories leave room for wondering. The listeners attend avidly to the storyteller's words because they want to hold them in their minds, to remember.

Benjamin (1968) writes:

It has seldom been realized that the listener's naive relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. (p.97).

When we hold something in memory there is a possibility of reflection, of making connections, comparing what we have heard to what we have experienced and coming to understanding. There is a possibility of recreating or reproducing the story. Stories do not explain things to us, but they open our minds, to wonder, question and reflect, to take from them something useful to us and to pass it on. Children and adults listen to stories in the same way, naively, in order to remember what is being told. Ruth Sawyer (1966) cites the traditional Irish ending to the telling of a story: "Take it, and may the next one who tells it better it." (p.11).

In storytelling there seems to be no strict division

between childhood and adulthood. We listen to stories in the same way, as people. We listen to stories because they touch us deeply.

God guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone;
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone.

(William Butler Yeats. A Prayer for Old Age)

STORYTELLING AS WORK AND PLAY

In Western culture, just as we dichotomize childhood and adulthood, we dichotomize work and play. The world of work belongs primarily to adults and the world of play to children. Both words derive from Old English. "Work" comes from "weorc" meaning "something that is or was done; an act, deed, proceeding, business". "Play" comes from "plega" meaning "rapid movement, free movement or action" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Both words denote action, but work is action directed towards a definite end, whereas play is exercise or action for recreation; play is an end in itself, or perhaps it has no end. Gadamer (1984) writes:

If we examine how the word "play" is used and concentrate on its so-called transferred meanings we find talk of the play of light, the play of the waves....even a play on words. In each case what is intended is not tied to any goal which would bring

it to an end....The movement which is play has no goal which brings it to an end; rather it renews itself in constant repetition. (p.93).

Play is essentially free. It is an exercise unbound by the specific objectives of work; it is a self-renewing, recreating activity, something which all children do without waiting to be taught. It is our first form of entertainment, an agreeable, interesting occupation. It is also our first way of learning about the world around us and about ourselves. Gadamer (1984) writes: A child begins to play by imitation, doing what he knows and affirming his own being in the process. (p.102) In play we learn, but a goal has not been set. In work, on the other hand there is a specific something to be done; whether the end is a work of art or a means of gaining one's livelihood. Work is arduous. It entails effort. It is purposeful, the serious business of life.

What is a storyteller doing when she tells a story? Is it work or play? Amanda says: "...you work at it before. I really work hard at it. I tape it and I listen back. But then, when you're telling, it just sort of comes." Ruth works at storytelling. She reads many stories in her search to find one which touches her. She then works on her preparation, rereading the story many times, visualizing it and structuring it for her own telling. Helen works on her stories by practising the telling of them when she is alone, moving about, doing housework. The preparation of stories for telling

is work; it is action directed towards a definite end. But the end in view is a recreational end.

Pellowski (1977) states that one of the purposes of storytelling "must be that of entertainment." (p.15). Stories have always been told for amusement. Pellowski (1977) alludes to a depiction by Ovid of women sewing or spinning and telling tales to make the work move more swiftly. (p.6). Chaucer's pilgrims told stories to amuse themselves on their journey. Though the preparation of stories involves work, the work itself is not arduous. Helen finds that she does not "put off" learning stories the way she postpones writing. And in the telling itself, the work appears to be forgotten. Amanda finds it "fun". To Elizabeth it is "such a pleasure" Carole sees it as a time of comfort and relaxation. In the telling of stories the action seems to move from work to play, the telling of the story is an end in itself in that it is not didactic. As Helen says: "...we can just enjoy the happening, and not worry about questions that are going to be asked afterwards." Carole says, "I just love to tell a story, because a story is."

Stories charm us. Our bodies may be inert, but our imagination is actively at work, or at play. In Tristram Shandy Laurence Sterne wrote:

...no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as

well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own. (p.90).

The storyteller is likewise "paying compliments" to her listeners, inviting them to use their imagination freely, but as busily as she herself does. Storytelling eludes our dichotomy; in the storytelling event, work and play appear to merge.

STORYTELLING AS A GIVING OF TIME

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means.

(Dylan Thomas, Fern Hill)

Both Carole and Helen are concerned about the pressured lives of the children they teach, a theme comprehensively explored by Elkind (1988) in The Hurried Child. Not only are their "school" lives highly structured, but after school they attend several extra-curricular activities. There appears to be little time for children to "play and be golden", little time when they are left to their own resources, little time to wonder. Before they go to school, young children have difficulty in understanding chronological time. Words like

"yesterday", "tomorrow", "later", have little meaning for them. It seems that they live naturally in a timeless dimension. By contrast, adults live a life dictated by clock-time; it is a constant rush, trying to accomplish more each day than time allows. It appears that nowadays, perhaps unwittingly, we rob children of their time.

Carole was asked by the principal to organize lunch hour debating for a group of students, but, remembering how "time stopped" for her whilst she listened to her grandmother's stories, she decided to tell stories instead. It was a time of peace and relaxation, a time outside their hurried lives and the students responded in a way she had not anticipated. Unbidden, they were eager to share their own stories. In the words of Ruth Sawyer (1966) "Time went by on slippered feet". (p.15).

Helen believes that children are in such a hurry to grow up they discard picture books which feature traditional folk tales and fairy tales before they have had time to savour them. Storytelling represents for her a giving of childhood time to her students. They consider picture books babyish, but will listen to the old stories, told. She feels too that storytelling represents adult time given to children. So often, adults half-listen to children. They are glancing at the newspaper or mentally mapping out the next day's schedules, whilst a child recounts the events of his or her day. In storytelling, the adult is present to the child, not only for the time of the story, but also in the time which has

been spent preparing the story for telling.

It is time consuming to learn stories. Elizabeth and Ruth allude to the careful process of selection. Ruth talks about the way she rereads a story many times until she feels she knows its secrets. Amanda talks of working hard at it, Helen practises when she is alone. Before I told a story, the idea of learning it for telling, rather than just reading it seemed to me to be a waste of time. It was only after I had told a story that I became convinced it was time well spent.

In colloquial speech we often refer to time in the same terms as we refer to money; for instance "wasting time", "spending time", "lost time" something done to "gain time". We imply that time is a manageable entity like money; that it is possible to exercise some sort of control over it. Chronological time is a linear succession of events. It is quantitative, measurable and divisible into parts. But kairotic time, the time of eternity is a timelessness. Perhaps it is this sort of timeless moment, which is experienced when one enters into the world of a story, an experience described by Carole as the "stopping" of time. When we listen to a story we move in imagination into another realm. Narrative time becomes our preoccupation. We move outside ourselves into a realm of being with the characters of the story as they meet various challenges on their path to accomplishment. The very words with which a traditional fairy tale begins and ends convey the sense that the story transcends the relentless passage of ordinary time. "Once upon a time..." and

"...happily ever after" mark the story as beyond our time, as extra-ordinary, the time which is held in the imagination. Frye (1963) writes: "If even time, the enemy of all living things can be broken down by the imagination, anything can be." (p.38).

We speak of stories as having "stood the test of time." Carole says that as a storyteller she is "merely passing by, telling it (the story)." In order to be worth the telling a story needs to speak of truth that transcends any particular time frame. We listen to a story when it speaks truly to us and then we hold it in mind, remember it and pass it on to our listeners. When we hold a story in memory we are able to transcend the fetters of time in another way. In our minds we turn from the end to the beginning to see whether the conclusion was plausible, possible within the story world, acceptable and authentic. In so doing we turn time around in a way that is not possible in ordinary life. The story gathers both teller and listeners into a time out of time.

CHAPTER 4: LOOKING INTO STORYTELLING WITH CHILDREN

THE CHILDREN

In addition to investigating how adults view storytelling, I have tried to gain some insight into what it is like, for children, to listen to stories. Much of the early childhood research literature concerns an abstract, theoretical Child. Living, breathing children are absent. Should children's voices not be heard in research which purports to concern them?

Considering the constantly expanding technology and bureaucracy which characterize modern education, Coe (1987) writes:

Occasionally I meet politicians and administrators in Britain who regard children as slightly difficult and embarrassing. How much simpler it would be to run an educational system without them - so neat, so exact, and things would happen as they are planned! But of course, our work is with people and the humanness of people. Sometimes society itself forgets that or ignores it. (p.66)

His remarks could be applied to educational research. A great deal of research appears to be intent on reducing education to a manageable, measureable, systematic science. We tend to forget the people. Van Manen (1991) remarks on the absence of a connection between parenting and teaching in North American educational literature. He writes:

It is as if in the minds of education theorists the education of children is not an integral part of the whole process of growing up....There is no single word in English that describes the entire moral, intellectual, physical and spiritual complex process of bringing up children. (p.6)

Van Manen notes that in Dutch there is such a word, "opvoeding". Twenty years ago, Vera Webber, the principal of the college where I trained as a teacher, made the same observation. "Opvoeding" is also an Afrikaans word. The closest she could come to an English equivalent was the word "nurture". In common parlance, the word has undergone a narrowing of meaning, but originally it encompassed "1. breeding, upbringing, training, education, moral training or discipline 2. nourishment 3. the bringing up of some one; tutelage; fostering care". (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Words such as "nurture" serve to remind us that education is not merely a process of transmitting information to the next generation. Education involves care, the communicating of ideas and the fostering of new ideas. It involves helping those in our care to suspend judgment, to think carefully before coming to a conclusion. Education involves learning as we teach and teaching as we learn.

It is difficult to find out what life is like for children. "Can you remember learning to read?" I asked my twelve-year-old. "What did it feel like?" She looked surprised. It is not the usual sort of question adults ask

children. An educational system which is based on the attainment of basic skills is not concerned with how it feels to live through an experience. Test scores which are intended to elicit whether or not children have mastered skills reflect how readily children, in an artificial, tense situation, can remember what they have been taught, not how it feels to learn. It is impossible to measure feeling objectively and yet feeling colours everything that human beings do. It is impossible to measure imagination objectively and yet this is the world into which children slip naturally, without being taught. As Coe (1987) writes:

Of all the qualities we seek to nurture in children as they grow, use of the imagination must be one of the most important. Indeed, our imaginings grow more important with every passing year as our technology develops and becomes even more amazing. We must remember that every machine first has to be imagined by someone. (p.71)

In trying to elicit what it is like for children to listen to stories I am asking them to tell me the sorts of things they have not been trained to tell. I am asking them about feeling and imagining. van Manen (1990) notes that:

...with young children, it is often difficult to generate written descriptions or to engage in conversational interviewing. So to gain access to the experience of young children, it may be important to play with them, talk with them,

puppeteer, paint, draw, follow them into their play spaces and into the things they do while you remain attentively aware of the way it is for children.

(p.68)

He is right. Ideally, I should have liked to follow children into their own world. I should have liked to listen and to watch them at play. I saw the children who participated in this study during school hours. I observed them only whilst I told them stories, and I listened to their telling and talk of stories during brief group interviews.

It was by chance that I met the children who participated in this study. A friend of mine was substituting for the librarian of an elementary school in Montreal. She called me the evening before her day in the library, wondering whether I would like to tell a story to a class of ten-year-olds in the afternoon. As it happened, I had been preparing a story to tell to the adult group of storytellers. It was The Happy Prince by Oscar Wilde. This is a long story. Its language is the literary language of nineteenth century Britain. It is complex and deeply meaningful. Would it be appropriate for ten-year-old Canadian children in 1991? I was doubtful. I felt sure that the nuances of the story, its delicate touches of humour, and its poignant moments, would escape them. Yet I wanted to tell the story. It was so long since I had told a story. I agreed. Then the proposed audience expanded. My friend was concerned about discipline. Apparently the

children tended to be very rowdy in the library, but she had a solution. Hearing of the storytelling plan, the Grade One teacher had asked whether she could bring her class too. Six and seven-year-olds: the story would be even less appropriate for them, but for the sake of the disciplinary presence of a teacher, I agreed.

I was very nervous. I am always nervous before I tell a story. We were crowded into a space too small so that our circle was squashed and I could not see all the faces of the listeners. It was warm and rather airless with that familiar smell of school, a strange mixture of chalk dust and gym shoes. A few more adults arrived; storytelling was something of a novelty. I started shakily but then the story itself took over. And the children listened. Even when I stumbled and went blank for a moment, they stayed hushed, expectant. Some of them began to fidget near the end, but most of them were still, eyes wide, intent, their expressions mirroring the emotions of the tale. At the end there was silence, until the teacher prompted group discussion.

She then asked me whether I would be interested in telling stories to her class on Friday afternoons. Thus I came to tell stories regularly to a class of Grade One children. It was my first experience of telling stories to a group of children who were unknown to me. Previously, I had told stories only to my own children and to my classes of pre-school children. I was, to these children, an unknown storyteller. I came in on Friday afternoons (a notoriously

unfocussed time of the week in classrooms), told a story and departed. But by the second story, the children seemed to feel that they knew me. I was greeted like a friend. When I entered the classroom during the silent reading period, eyes would light up in recognition, hands would be raised in little waves and the whispered word passed around, " Margaret's here". As soon as silent reading was over, the children clustered round. "What story are you going to tell to-day?" They brought books from home to show me. They read me their own stories which they had written at school, and I was given several suggestions for future stories.

Usually the stories were quite long, about ten to fifteen minutes, and the children for whom English is a second language, tended to become restless, but the majority were absorbed. I never asked questions, but their teacher usually initiated a short discussion before they had to leave for their next class. As they were filing out, some of them would come to tell me that it was a good story or they would tell me about their plans for the weekend.

A Story of Storytelling

After the March break, there were three Fridays when we had to cancel storytelling; either the children went swimming or I was at a conference. When I returned, the children were not very pleased with me. "Where were you?" they demanded, looking reproachful in the way that is peculiar to young

children.

Luckily I had a lovely story for them. It was a story that Carole Edelsky used in her workshop at the Springboards 1991 Language Arts Conference, Coyote Cry by Byrd Baylor. I was entranced by the story. My daughter thought it was "too hard" for Grade Ones but this particular group was composed of many animal lovers and I felt sure that they would, in some way, appreciate the story. It started well. Directly opposite me was a little group of wide-eyed boys who were locked into the story from the start. It was hard to tear my eyes away from them and include the other members of the group.

It must have been about midway through the story when an extraordinary thing happened. Unbeknown to me, there was a woman seated at the desk behind me. Quite suddenly, she started speaking on the telephone. It was a shock. I had not even heard her dialling the number. I was jolted right out of the story world and my mind went blank. The children looked at me, patiently waiting for me to continue. There was silence. In no way could I remember where we were in the story or what came next. The only thing to do was consult the text. Apologizing to them, I looked at the written story. In a minute we were back. Luckily, the most poignant moments were yet to come and the children seemed unperturbed by the interruption.

At the end of the story, the teacher started a discussion, and then a little voice piped up, "I know a story off-by-heart, too." I asked the child whether she would like

to be the storyteller, but she shook her head shyly and looked down at the floor. The teacher then asked who else knew a story and several hands shot up, waving enthusiastically in a bid to be noticed. It was agreed that the following week all those who wanted to be storytellers would have a chance.

Children telling stories.

So many children were anxious to tell a story that we held two sessions. At first, the atmosphere was rather rowdy. These children were beginning readers and the stories they told were those that they had practised reading many times. Perhaps unaware of it, they had memorized their reading and many of them knew all the stories. They could not resist prompting and correcting the storyteller if he or she were at all hesitant. Generally, the children told stories in the way young children tend to read, in a sing-song voice punctuated with loud intakes of breath. One could almost hear the page turning. They were all so eager to try that at the teller's last word, there was a great clamour of, "Can I be next?". "Can I have a turn?" or "Can we listen to the tape?".

Then Janine told a story she had made up that morning, about a little girl who was lonely and found a friend. The teacher seized the moment to talk about different kinds of stories, those that are personal, those that are invented and those that come from books.

From the teacher's point of view, the most exciting

happening was Emma's story. Despite every encouragement in an open, warm and friendly classroom, Emma had never managed to contribute to a group discussion. But now, there was Emma's hand up, waving her intention to tell a story. Masking her amazement, the teacher called upon Emma to be the storyteller, and, with considerable aplomb Emma began her story. She did not manage to finish. After a couple of minutes, she suddenly stopped and waited for the teacher to ask her whether she wanted to continue. She moved back into her cocoon of shyness, but for a little while she had spoken to the entire group and they had listened.

INTERVIEWING THE CHILDREN

Almost all the children in the class were eager to be interviewed. I took them, two or three at a time, to a corner of the classroom where we set up the audio-cassette recorder to record our conversations. The interviews were about ten minutes in duration. Perhaps the best part of the experience from the children's point of view, was listening to themselves on tape. Only Adrian was not pleased. He blushed, grinned and put his fingers in his ears, declaring that he sounded "awful" and not like himself at all.

I tried not to be too directive in my questions. I asked whether there was a difference between listening to stories, told, and listening to those read from a picture book, and I asked them to tell me about their favourite stories.

I have chosen to describe five of the children in order to provide a representative picture of the group. The choice was difficult to make as each child had "something to say." To protect their identity, pseudonyms have been used. Zoe and Adrian were selected because they both appeared to be especially attentive listeners. I never noticed their concentration flagging, and they were both eager to contribute to discussion after the stories. By contrast, Steve seldom contributed to discussion, but would listen carefully to others, nodding his head in agreement when various points were raised. He was very quiet and appeared to be a contemplative listener. Jenny was chosen because I found her storytelling to be remarkable. I selected Antony because he was one of the children who was eager to share news of his life outside school. The following descriptions have been constructed on the basis of: my observations whilst I told stories, brief informal contacts I had with children before and after storytelling, their own telling of stories, the interviews, and the children's writing. Although I have confined myself to descriptions of only five participant children, I shall include contributions by other children in the class.

Zoe

Zoe is a lively, articulate little girl, the sort of child beloved by teachers, because she is so responsive. She speaks quickly and clearly. When I told stories, Zoe was

always a very attentive listener and made a point of settling herself quite close to me on each occasion.

Once or twice after a story, she came to me and said, "Your long stories make me sleepy". When I interviewed her, I asked her what she meant. Did she find the stories boring, I wondered? She was quite emphatic that this not the case. "I find them very, very interesting", she said. "It's just 'cause they're very long... and most of them are really nice". How did she know what the stories were about, I wondered, when there were no pictures. "Well, like we share it," said Zoe, "and you sort of tell the pictures to us".

Zoe seemed to be quite impatient with my questions. I interviewed her twice, and on both occasions, her main aim was clearly to tell her stories, jokes and riddles. She was the first child to show me her own written work and to read me a story from the classroom library. At the end of the term, Zoe wrote me a long letter:

Dear Margrit

Thank you so mach for telling us sach lovly storis.
Can you come tell us more storis in grad two? I
wish you colde. I like the stori abot when the
ciowty tok the littil puppy to wher she livd in the
roky hills. And the boy finds it and tacks it back
to its mother. And the kiowty is sad. But the
mother can still ramember when her babby was
stowlin. I can't ramember all the storis you told
us but I no that one was my favrit. from your best

pall Zoe.

Adrian

Adrian is a serious little boy. Whenever I glanced at him whilst I was telling stories, he was always looking steadfastly at my face. He sat cross-legged, leaning forward slightly, his arms folded in his lap. When I asked him about the difference between telling and reading, he told me:

Well, when you tell a story, there are no pictures, only in your mind, and when you read a story there are usually a few pictures. In the book it has to be this picture for a certain thing, because you can see it, but when you tell stories you can make the pictures however you want it.

On the subject of pictures, I wondered whether he had ever heard a story and subsequently seen a movie of that story:

Adrian: Yeah, except not in a good way. I saw another version of a story that was told to me and it was really gross.

Margaret: Why was it gross?

Adrian: Because it was one of the King Arthur stories and it was really bloody. Lots of people getting stabbed and stuff.

Margaret: And in you head it wasn't that bad?

Adrian: No. In my head it wasn't bad at all.

Adrian's favourite stories are the

legends of King Arthur. He was, at the time, in the process of writing a story in class. He told me how it began:

Long ago and far away there was a brave knight who killed dragons and tamed man-eating crocodiles. One day he was looking in the forest and he couldn't find any water. He got very worried so he started to run. He was still running when he saw a dragon. He thought he was seeing things, but the dragon was real. He found out that it was real and tried to kill it. It took him two whole hours to kill the dragon. Then a miracle happened. It started to rain. It was still raining when something very strange happened. It started to rain blood. Yeugh! I don't know what happens next.

Jenny

Jenny's father tells her stories, in her words, "made up" stories. She told one of these stories to the whole group. It was the last story of the afternoon and the children were very restless. Jenny was nervous. Her voice crackled and at the beginning she was hesitant, but unlike others who gave up when memory failed, Jenny was determined to tell the whole story. Her perseverance was rewarded; the unruly audience ceased their clamour and listened.

Jenny's story: The Witch in the Daycare

Once upon a time there was a witch that was flying around on her broom and she was dressed in black from head to toe.

Her cape was black.

Her hat was black.

And her socks were black.

Even her hair was black.

She made happy people into sad people.

And glad people into mad people...

Etcetera.

And one day she went flying over a daycare. And she saw all kinds of kids. And they were all happy. And they were dancing and singing and they were very happy. And the next day she came back and she was dressed as an old lady. And she knocked on the gate. And somebody came and opened it and said, "May I help you?".

And the witch that was pretending to be an old lady, said,

"Yes. I haven't eaten for three days. Can I come in and have something to eat?"

And the person said,

"Well, I am not sure because the children have just eaten. But I will go ask the cook." She said, "Just wait a moment."

And she came back in a jiffy.

And she said,

"We have plenty."

And she took the old lady (that was a witch) in.

And she gave her a big plate of stew.

And she said,

"Yeuk, I hate stew!".

And she put on her witch's hat and she said,

"I'm going to make spell on this daycare".

And she went outside and she started to make her spell.

And she went,

"Abracadabra, abracadabra..."

And the kids that were playing saw her and they said,

"She looks pretty angry. Maybe we should sing a song".

So they all held hands and they sang happy songs.

And she turned grey and then to white. And then she said,

"I have to make a spell on this daycare. But I won't make a bad spell. I'll make a good spell. So when kids are mad, they'll be glad. And when they're sad, they'll be happy".

And then she went away. They planted a tree where she was standing and they made a stone fence around it. And if you go there, it will still be standing.

Jenny retold her father's story, not as a synopsis, but in its entirety. She was determined to use the right words. Initially, she had trouble remembering: "She made happy people into sad people," Jenny announced, and then there was a long

pause whilst she struggled to remember "and glad people...into mad people". After this, she pronounced, "Etcetera" with satisfaction. "What did you say?" enquired the teacher. The word was repeated and echoed by some of her peers, "Etcetera". From then on, the listeners' attention was engaged and Jenny's thoughts flowed easily.

When I interviewed her, Jenny told me that she likes her father's stories because they are often "so funny" and, as she put it, "You can see the pictures in your head. You can make up your own pictures in your mind."

She talked of making up her own stories:

Sometimes I get ideas in a book. Sometimes I think of things.....like a chocolate bar. My brother dreams of chocolate bars. So I make up a story about my brother and chocolate bars.

Steve

Steve did not offer to tell a story, but he was a careful, participating listener. I interviewed him with his friend, Jeffrey. From the start, Jeffrey monopolized the talk. He launched into a long story about Aaron's adventures in Legoland. Steve listened with obvious interest, and interjected to make connections or negotiate meaning. For instance, at the beginning of the story, a fairy offered Aaron a magic potion to drink. This would effect a reduction in Aaron's size so that he could enter the land of Lego people.

"Oh yeah," said Steve, "you mean like Alice in Wonderland."

When Jeffrey sped off to find a particular issue of National Geographic that he wanted to show us, Steve and I conversed. He told me that he likes animal stories. He claimed to have "millions of them" at home. He likes to hear true facts about animal behaviour, but he also likes picture books where, he says:

It doesn't really happen. It's just like an artist made it up. I mean...I know a lot about animals and I know that animals cannot play instruments and they're not gonna, you know, come up and do something...and talk.

He likes stories that his father reads to him where animals do human things, like deciding to leave the busy, overcrowded city in order to seek peace and serenity on an uninhabited island.

Steve was the only child who told me that he especially likes fairy tales. When I asked him which was his favourite story of those I had told the class, he said:

Steve: I like the one you told us...umm what's it called? It was the first one you told us.

Margaret: The Happy Prince? When you were with the Grade Threes?

Steve: Yeah, Yeah, that one. When his eyes were made out of sapphires.

Antony

Antony was one of the children who would come up to me after I had told a story and tell me about his plans for the week-end. One evening, Antony and I were surprised to meet at a school play; his sister's and my daughter's school. We chatted for a while, marvelling at finding ourselves out of context, as it were, and then I moved to the back of the room to find a seat.

Before long, Antony was at my side, dragging his reluctant parents along to meet me.

"This is Margaret," he beamed. "She's the one that tells us stories." His parents had not been caught in their son's enthusiasm. His mother looked over my head, "And there's my friend," she remarked, as she bustled off to speak to a woman a couple of rows back. Steve's father looked uncomfortable. As if searching for something to say, his glance focused slightly past me, he enquired,

"Is Antony a good listener?."

"Oh yes," I said warmly, smiling at the beaming Antony, "he's a very good listener." The father nodded. Demands of courtesy appeared to have been fulfilled.

"Well Antony," he said, "we'd best be getting back to our seats."

When I next saw Antony, he showed me what he had written in his journal:

Yestrday at my sists pla I sa mrgrit she has a

lottol gool in grad 5.

When I asked him about stories, he told me that he likes all kinds, but especially scary stories. I wondered whether he liked hearing them at bed-time or whether they keep him awake.

He replied:

No. I am not scared of anything but dark.

Just kidding, I'm not scared of the dark.

I used to. But now I'm not. I'm not scared of anything, not even bad guys.

Margaret: How did you stop being scared of the dark?

Antony: I just got older and older and I got braver and braver. Now my Dad turns off the light. He doesn't even know I'm still awake at 1 o'clock. He closes the light in the bathroom. I still keep it open 'cause I'm kind of....and then he closes it. I'm in the dark alone.

Margaret: Absolutely alone, and you don't feel scared at all?

Antony (with bravado): Nope.

Despite his penchant for "scary" stories, Antony's favourite story of the ones I had told, was a Jane Yolen fairy tale, Princess Heart O'Stone. In the tradition of all true fairy tales, this story ends "happily ever after".

THE CHILDREN TOLD ME....

In October, 1989, I had the privilege of meeting British educator, Alice Yardley, and hearing her speak about the education of young children. One of the points which she stressed most vigorously was that, as educators, we should take care to watch the children, listen to the children, and learn from them. "What you learn from the children," she said, "is irrefutable."

In this study, I had initially sought to place the children: their role was to be that of listeners. Mine was to be the teller. They were listeners, certainly, but when I interviewed them, they refused to be so neatly categorised. They showed me that they were also tellers. I learned from the children that listening to stories leads naturally to telling stories.

The urge to tell.

It would be simplistic to think that it was my few sessions of storytelling which made tellers of the children, but perhaps my storytelling prompted them to tell. Perhaps it occurred to them that, as in conversation, I had had my turn and now it was theirs.

Wells (1981) has documented how the rules of conversational turn taking are clearly established long before a child has reached linguistic maturity. A two-year-old

understands that in a conversation one person listens whilst the other speaks, waiting for the speaker to finish before taking his or her own conversational turn. Moreover, in a conversation, what is said relates to what has been said by the previous speaker.

Storytelling is similar to conversation, but it is not the same. Listeners need to attend for a considerable amount of time to a sort of sustained monologue delivered in literary language. They attend to something which does not pertain directly to the context, as is the case in conversation, but to something which pertains to them through their own imaginative connections. I told stories to the children. I did not tell them how it was to tell stories. When I asked them to tell me how it was to listen to stories, they in turn told me through story. Story was perceived by them to be the context for our interaction.

I was reminded of Julie Cruikshank's (1990) description of her interviews with Native women in the southern Yukon Territory. She wrote:

I always brought questions to our sessions, but as I began to take increasing direction from the narrators, the kinds of questions changed. In the beginning I asked about their childhood experiences, about seclusion, about marriage and childbirth, and about how events like the gold rush and Alaska Highway construction had affected their lives. The women would give brief answers to my

direct inquiries and then suggest that I write down a particular story they wanted to tell me. Usually such stories involved a bewildering series of characters and events, but with practice I learned to follow the complex plots and to understand that when women told me stories they were actually using them to explain some aspect of their lives to me.

(p.14-15)

It seems to me that, through story, the children I interviewed were trying to explain something about themselves to me. Zoe was impatient with my questions. During both interviews, she was bursting to tell me her jokes and riddles. For instance, Zoe asked me, "What's a crazy astronaut?". Before long I gave up. "An astronut," she proclaimed, delightedly. Perhaps Zoe's joke telling reflects her own celebration of a newly found ability to appreciate the double meanings of words which are so often exploited in jokes.

According to de Villiers and de Villiers (1979) young children often fail to comprehend a joke, though they may laugh because they perceive it to be socially appropriate. De Villiers and de Villiers cite an example of a child's retelling which "wrecks the joke".

For instance, a child is told the following:

"Why is the man in the fish market stingy? Because his job makes him sell fish (selfish)"

He is likely to retell it as follows:

"Why is the man in the fish market stingy? Because

he sells fish."

Zoe clearly understands ambiguity and the joys of using words as playthings.

Adrian's story about the brave dragon-killing knight may have been his own resolution of his disturbed feelings about the King Arthur movie he had seen. In the light of his apparent disgust or fear, I was surprised that in his own invented story, "it started to rain blood." It was as if he were confronting his own discomfort by using the offending imagery in a story where he could control the outcome.

Jenny's story about the witch showed me how she had listened very carefully in order to remember her father's story so faithfully. In her retelling, she was determined to tell the whole story, to use the right words, to pass on and share with others what she herself had enjoyed.

Steve, too, showed me how he listened with care. To an adult, Jeffrey's story of Legoland was long-winded and not enthralling, but Steve listened with interest, interjecting and participating in the story.

Antony told me about trying to overcome his fear of the dark. He professed to be "not scared of anything", but he still likes to have the bathroom light on because he is "kind of (afraid)".

It seems to me that the children showed me, in their urge to tell, something about themselves. They showed me, too, that stories are traded. I had entertained them with my stories; now they set about entertaining me with theirs. Was this

Barthes' (1985) concept of barter in operation? "Every narration thinks of itself as a kind of merchandise." (p.89)

As I mentioned earlier, almost all the children in the class volunteered to "be the storyteller." The idea of telling was prompted by my behaviour. When I lost the thread of a story after an interruption, I had to consult the text. Most of the children then "told" their reading books. It is important to note that these children do not follow a class text. Their classroom is rich in storybooks from which they, personally, choose which stories they will read. It seems to me that what they were doing bears a close resemblance to what most of the adult participants in this study speak about when they allude to selecting their stories with care. On their own level of literary experience these children selected their stories to read. The stories that appealed to them were read many times and then told to a large group of people.

Jenny, like adult participant Elizabeth, was different. She, too, liked her story but she did not learn it by reading. She learned it because it, literally, said something to her. Like Elizabeth, she learned her story by listening.

Our own pictures in the mind

In discussing the world of "orality", a world of talk, story and song, Lord (1986) writes:

The images, and the ideas too, are refracted in the mind's eye, an eye that sees images directly rather

than letters and written words. Thus sounds carry ideas and images without any other intermediary in the process of communication.(p.19)

Zoe seemed to be making this very point when she told me how she knows what the story is about when there are no pictures. As she put it: "Well, like we share it, and you sort of tell the pictures to us." With wonderful economy, Zoe told me how the listener understands the storyteller. There is a common point of entry into the story, something to which both can relate so that it can be shared. Through sounds, the images are conveyed directly to the inner eye of the mind.

Adrian pointed out very clearly how the images in storytelling are under the control of the listener. He said: "In the book it has to be this picture for a certain thing, because you can see it, but when you tell stories you can make the pictures however you want it." Jenny's views accorded with his: "You can make up your own pictures in your mind."

Sometimes, as adults, we are tempted to censor stories, to cut out those elements which we believe might upset children, for example the violence in many of the old traditional fairy tales. It seems, though, that young children are well aware of their own ability to control the situation when they listen to stories, Howarth (1988) writes:

There is a tremendous difference between hearing a story which your mind interprets and illustrates and watching as real child actors are left alone in a deep forest on a hypnotizing screen. In the first

instance your mind censors and interprets to meet your own needs and experience. In the second, nothing is left to individual imagination; the child cannot get away from the realistic images set before her.... When they hear traditional tales, without seeing an adult's interpretive pictures, children imagine their own and slough off the elements of a tale for which they have no use.(p.165)

Adrian made this point when he told me about his disappointment in watching the movie of a King Arthur story he had previously heard. In the movie he found the violence and bloodiness "really gross" but in his own head it was "not bad at all".

Likeness and difference in listening and telling

...by remembering it he had made the story his; and insofar as I have remembered it, it is mine; and now, if you like it, it's yours. In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood.

Ursula K. Le Guin

Without exception and without hesitation, all the children told me that they liked listening to stories. They appeared to be affirming narrative's universal appeal which was proclaimed by Barthes (1977):

...narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society...caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural; it is simply there like life itself. (Cited in Toolan, 1988, p.79)

Everyone liked stories, but they differed in the sorts of stories they liked best. As Ong (1986) noted: "There is no universal listener. There are only individual listeners....." (p.149)

We all listen to stories in the way that children do, to find out what happens next. But if we like a story it is not just a string of events which reaches a plausible and satisfying conclusion. To like a story, the listener needs to hear something in it which speaks directly to her or to him, something which is important and useful at a particular stage of the listener's life. The adult participants alluded to this: Amanda, Elizabeth and Ruth spoke of stories touching people "where they are." As Paterson (1989) puts it: "...the story must ring true. It must tell us something we already know but didn't realize we knew." (p.62)

Zoe liked Coyote Cry. She remembered it vividly in her letter to me. I, too, like Coyote Cry. To me it is a story of the birth of tolerance, a story of coming to know through lived experience. To Zoe it was important that the mother dog remembered her baby after their enforced separation. She reminded me that when I first read the story, this particular

incident was important to me, too. I remember racing ahead in the text, needing the confirmation that the dog would accept her puppy though it was tainted with the scent of coyote. Later, as I saw the story on a symbolic level, I had almost forgotten my naive reading. Amanda's words echo: "Adults are just older children really."

Adrian liked stories of "Long ago and far away". Perhaps the very distance from himself is important to Adrian. Perhaps the thrilling deeds of valour and the ultimate triumph over apparently overwhelming obstacles speak indirectly to Adrian about things which concern him. Perhaps Adrian is of the same spirit as Tolkien. Bruno Bettelheim (1989) cites Tolkien speaking of his childhood:

I had no desire to have either dreams or adventures like Alice... Treasure Island left me cool. But the land of Merlin and Arthur was better than these, and best of all the nameless North of Sigurd of the Voelsungs, and the prince of all dragons. Such lands were pre-eminently desirable. I never imagined that the dragon was of the same order as the horse. The dragon had the trademark Of Faerie written plainly upon him. In whatever world he had his being it was of Other-World....I desired dragons with a profound desire. Of course I in my timid body did not wish to have them in the neighbourhood, intruding in my relatively safe world. (p.118)

Steve wanted me to know that he understands the difference between reality and the fictional world of story. Animals are interesting to him. He has made it his business to learn a great deal about their behaviour. He knows that "animals cannot play instruments" but it is perfectly acceptable to him that animals do human things in stories. He seemed to be telling me that things which happen in stories are not real but they must have a point to which he can relate. His favourite story which his father reads him appears to be upholding the values of the simple life, a theme beautifully explored in Beatrix Potter's Johnny Town Mouse.

Of the stories that I told, both Steve and Antony chose fairy tales as their favourites. Tolkien (1965) asserts: "Fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened desire , satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded." (p.40) The fairy tale must have a happy ending, or as Tolkien (1965) puts it, "the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale)." (p.68). Jenny's story was such a tale: the little children join hands and sing their happy song to vanquish the evil intent of a wicked witch.

The children differed widely in their choice of preferred story matter, but they were firmly united on one point: stories should end happily. As one child remarked, "It's bad to have someone die at the end."

Happiness and hope

Happy endings or "joyous turns" give comfort and consolation. In the happy ending there is alleviation of distress or a release of tension after suspense. Yolen (1981) cites G.K. Chesterton:

If you really read the fairy tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other - the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. This idea which is the core of ethics, is the core of the nursery tale. (p.27)

Traditional stories concern society's observation of itself. The hero or heroine is subjected to a number of tests which mirror life's vicissitudes, before he or she triumphs over the forces of evil and attains the state of living "happily ever after". Stories spell out the conditions for happiness but not the state of happiness itself. The listener is left to imagine, to wonder what happens next. But the happy turn of events kindles hope. Perhaps, in their insistence on happy endings, the children were telling me that this feeling of hopefulness is necessary to them. Perhaps the mood of expectation, the mood of "morning songs" is essential to childhood:

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house,
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,

I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay,
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades,
That time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace.

(Dylan Thomas, Fern Hill.)

Perhaps by living in a state of hope themselves, children help adults to be hopeful on their behalf. Van Manen (1990) describes this hope:

But children make it possible for men or women to transcend themselves and to say "I hope I live with hope; I live life in such a modality that I experience children as hope." (p.96)

Home and school in the lives of children

...And then the whining schoolboy,
With his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping
Like snail
Unwillingly to school.....

(Shakespeare, As You Like It, 11. vii)

Dylan Thomas captures the ebullience and optimism of childhood; Shakespeare illumines the entrapment of school. When children go to school, they encounter a different set of

expectations from those that they have hitherto experienced. At home when a child learns to speak there is no possibility of failure. However, at school children quickly become aware that their performance is evaluated, that they are compared with their peers, and that they are supposed to produce concrete evidence, products, of their learning. There is an "in school" world and an "out of school" world, often with little connection between them. But in story there is a link.

When I met Antony out of school, he was determined to introduce the teller of stories to the most important people in his home life. When I asked the children about stories, they told me about home:

"My mum tells me stories about when she was little.

She didn't have any Barbies and she made dolls out of buttons."

"My dad makes up scary stories."

"We tell stories in the car. We take turns. But my sister's too little; she's only three."

Home is a dwelling place, a place of nurture, rest and refuge from the world outside. Home is a place where we are allowed to be ourselves, a place of privacy, sometimes of secrets. School is a public place with pressures to conform, perform and prove oneself amongst peers. Story straddles both places.

The children are aware that story pervades their lives and that everyone is a storyteller. To them, stories are not just the things that come from books, read or told. Stories concern the real lived experience of their parents. When these

stories are told, they confirm one's own membership within the family. Stories seem to grow naturally from speech.

Shirley Brice Heath (1983) has clearly documented the distinctive Ways with Words of two different communities. Their ways of storytelling reflect their different ways of being. Folktales and family tales belong to the folk who create them. The details and nuances are particular, but the themes are universal because stories are basically about life itself. Frye (1976) has observed that folktales are great travellers. Colwell (1980) quotes Joseph Jacobs who said: "....that he had edited an English version of an Italian adaptation of a Spanish translation of a Latin version of a Hebrew translation of an Arabic translation of an Indian original." (p.12) Stories speak to every human being because they are a natural way of giving shape and order to experience so that the meaning of the experiences, real or imagined, may be communicated to others.

Without difficulty, each child told me about the stories that he or she personally likes. Talking of stories led to the telling of them or to talk about subjects of concern, like being afraid of the dark. The children showed me that, to them, a good story is something to be shared. When they shared their stories, their thoughts and feelings, I was awed by their trust in me. I had only seen these children for eight half hour periods. But I had told them stories and this seemed to convey the message that I could be trusted. To tell stories to children is to take on a responsibility towards them.

Storytelling as entertainment

In her definition of storytelling, Pellowski (1977) states: "...one of its purposes must be that of entertainment." (p.15)

The storyteller entertains in the sense that the story she tells engages the interest of the listeners; it amuses them. To "entertain" also means "to receive as a guest; to show hospitality to" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). In this sense too, the storyteller entertains: she invites her listeners into the story world. Her objective is that they should share her pleasure in the story. Storytelling is, as Amanda puts it, "fun".

In an educational world which is dominated by talk of basic skills, accountability, objectives, performance and results, anything that can be described as "fun" is suspect. Perhaps, though, when we are engaged in something pleasurable, we are unwittingly practising "basic skills". Pellowski cites the reflections of an eminent man of letters. T.S. Eliot, recalling his own youthful experience of literature wrote: "I incline to come to the alarming conclusion that it is just the literature that we read for "amusement" or "purely for pleasure" that may have the greatest and least suspected influence upon us." (p.21)

The children to whom I told stories clearly enjoyed themselves. Each storytelling session was greeted with great enthusiasm. They listened attentively, and when I interviewed

them, I was surprised by their detailed memories of the stories. Zoe wrote of a story she had heard several weeks previously: "I like the stori abot when the ciowty tok the littil puppy to whe she livd in the roky hills...."

Steve remembered: "When his eyes were made out of sapphires."

Jenny remembered: "And she came back in a jiffy."

Stories are stored in memory. We have the ability to recall or recollect them, to bring them back to mind, reflect upon them and retell them in our own way. Listening to stories is recreational in the true sense of the word. It is a pleasant pause for refreshment of mind, heart and spirit. It leads the listeners to re-create.

I end with a story. One Friday afternoon a friend invited me to come and tell a story to her Grade 1/2 class. During the story, one little boy lay down on his stomach with his head on the floor, his eyes closed. Usually, I like to see all the children's faces, but oddly enough his behaviour did not bother me. He was so clearly listening.

After the story, we handed out large sheets of paper and paints. Most of the children were seated at small tables, but two boys were at individual desks, separated from the others. "Troublemakers?" I asked the teacher. She nodded, with a wry smile.

The boy who had lain down during the story was seated at one of these desks. With deft strokes and intense concentration he started to draw. He talked to nobody and his drawing took so long that he did not have time to paint it.

His finished picture was a marvel, a detailed impression of the bearded monster which was featured in the story. It was duly admired by all.

As he was getting ready to go home, this little boy turned to his teacher and said, "That was the best day of my life."

CHAPTER 5: RECALLING THE BEGINNING

Northrop Frye (1990) wrote: "The academic aim is to see what the subject means, not to accept or reject it." (xx). My intention was to look into storytelling in order to understand what it means, what it is, what the storyteller is doing. I have spoken to adult storytellers who shared freely with me their ideas about storytelling and their descriptions of what they perceive themselves to be doing when they tell stories. Their accounts showed how teller, tale and listener are essentially interwoven in the storytelling event. I have written and reflected on my own experience of telling stories. I have spoken to children and learned something of what seven-year-olds perceive to be happening when a story is told, what a story is, and what is done with stories. I have looked carefully for recurrent themes which appear to reveal the essential nature of storytelling.

However, as Frye (1990) observed:

Academics, like other people, start with a personality that it is afflicted by ignorance and prejudice, and try to escape from that personality, in Eliot's phrase, through absorption in impersonal scholarship. One emerges on the other side of this realizing once again that all knowledge is personal knowledge, but with some hope that the person may have been, to whatever degree, transformed in the meantime. (xv).

In the course of this study, I seem to have travelled a circular path, starting from personal knowledge, attempting to "transcend" or at least suspend my own beliefs, and returning to personal knowledge which has, to some degree, been "transformed" on the way.

Eisner (1992) addresses the question of objectivity in educational research, a contentious issue. He writes: "When we say we have an ontologically objective view of things we mean that we see things they way they are." (p.10) This was the type of objectivity I was attempting to attain. In Chapter 1, I wrote of trying to bracket "accustomed perceptual sets" (p.14) in order that the phenomenon, storytelling, should appear as itself. But this is a lofty aim, and I am not sure that it is within the realms of possibility. Eisner (1992) writes: "What we come to see depends on what we seek, and what we seek depends on what we know how to say." (p.12) In other words it is dependent on a personal framework. My understanding of what others have described is limited to the extent that I share a framework or context with those to whom I spoke. However, I believe that in making the attempt to suspend judgement, to listen attentively to others, and to try to grasp the meaning, one's framework, and the understanding which is possible within it, is enlarged. I shall explicate this expansion of understanding by referring to the hermeneutic circle.

A CIRCLE OF UNDERSTANDING

In Chapter 1, I stated that storytelling could be seen as an embodiment of Dilthey's hermeneutic circle of understanding; the meaning of the whole is defined by the parts and the parts can only be understood in relation to the whole (Palmer, 1969). The modern word, hermeneutics, refers back to Hermes, the Greek messenger God who "translated" messages which were beyond the scope of human understanding into a form that people could grasp. The Greeks believed that Hermes discovered language and writing, which people use to communicate with one another. Palmer (1969) suggests that hermeneutics can be seen as: "the process of bringing to understanding, especially as this process involves language, since language is the medium par excellence in the process" (p.13)

In what ways does the storyteller perform the functions of Hermes? Language is first heard before it is written down. Our first mode of understanding is the oral mode. Palmer (1969) writes of the "weakness" of written language: "all written language calls for retransformation into its spoken form; it calls for its lost power." (p15) Of course this retransformation need not be literal; it may be internal, as one reads a text, giving to it the nuances and emphases of spoken language. But in storytelling the restoration of lost power is a literal one. The storytellers in this study take

printed stories, interpret them and tell them aloud. Sounds carry the ideas and images directly from teller to listener without the intermediary of print or illustration. "How do you know what the story is about when there are no pictures?" I asked Zoe. "Well, like we share it," she replied, "and you sort of tell the pictures to us." The storyteller mediates between the world of the story and the world of the listeners. Through her telling, she "translates" a strange and unfamiliar world, for example the world of the fairytale, into something her listeners can grasp.

To "explain" has several meanings, one of which is "unfold, make plain or intelligible" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). The storyteller explains things in this sense, but a story is not an explanation in the sense of a textbook explanation of a natural phenomenon. Indeed, as Benjamin (1968) states: "...it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it." (p.89) He cites Herodotus' story of Psammenitus as one which exemplifies this freedom.

When the Egyptian king, Psammenitus, was vanquished by the Persian king, Cambyses, the latter determined to humble his prisoner. To this end, he arranged that Psammenitus should watch the triumphal Persian procession. Furthermore, it was arranged that Psammenitus' daughter should pass by, dressed as a maid. While the other Egyptians lamented this spectacle Psammenitus appeared to be unmoved. Likewise, when his son

passed by on his way to be executed, Psammenitus showed no reaction. However, when he saw his old servant amongst the prisoners, "he beat his fists against his head and gave all the signs of deepest mourning." (Benjamin, 1968, p.90)

That is it. The story does not explain why Psammenitus reacted in such a way. Centuries later, the question is still open to conjecture. The very power of a story to interest and provoke thoughtfulness lies in the fact that a story does not explain, that there are gaps in the text, that the reader or listener is left to ponder.

Through reflection on the nature of story and storytelling, I have come to see both the story and the storytelling event as the embodiment of the hermeneutic circle of understanding. Understanding is a referential process. We understand something by comparing it with something that we already know. So is it with stories. They "speak" to us when we hear within them something which we recognize. As Paterson (1989) puts it, the story tells us "something we already know but didn't realize we knew." (p.62) Moreover, we respond to the story as a whole, not to the individual words or sentences. Certainly, we pay attention to the individual parts but it is the dialectical interaction between the whole and the parts that gives the meaning of the story.

The research process itself showed me how this dialectical interaction between whole and parts operates in the storytelling event. I aimed to divide the essential

parts, the teller, tale and listeners, for the purpose of study. It was in my search for themes which "show" the essential nature of storytelling, that it became apparent that the relationship between teller, tale and listeners is interwoven to a degree which brooks no division. In describing their experiences the tellers referred to listening to stories and when I asked children about listening to stories, they became tellers of stories. The themes themselves show clearly that whichever way it is regarded, storytelling is a continuous, unbroken circle of understanding.

RECALLING THE THEMES

Communication through sounds and pictures in the mind

The story is a "product of the human mind to narratize experience and to transform it into findings which as social beings we may share and compare with those of others." (Rosen, 1984, p.12) It is at once a social activity in that it takes place in a group, and that it deals with universal human issues, and an individual activity in that each person within the group is free to interpret and use the story in an individual way. Without visual effects, each person imagines what it is that the story conveys. As Adrian put it, "when you tell stories, you can make your own pictures however you want (them)." The connection made between the people in a

storytelling event is a connection of active imaginations. People "know" one another through story.

At the beginning of the analysis (Chapter 3: What is the storyteller doing?), I cited the Xhosa proverb "Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu." Sparks (1991) cites Buntu Mfenyana, a Johannesburg sociologist:

...to understand the full meaning of the word ubuntu one must first separate the prefix ubu from the root -ntu. ntu is an ancestor who got human society going. He gave us our way of life as human beings. It is a communal way of life which says that society must be run for the sake of all. This requires co-operation, sharing and charity...ubu refers to the abstract so ubuntu is the quality of being human....It is this quality which distinguishes a human creature from an animal or a spirit. When you do something that is not humane then you are being like an animal.(p.14)

Storytelling epitomizes "ubuntu", the quality of being human. Physically, it is a human activity, depending only on our "ordinary" capacities to hear the human voice, to read the human face and to imagine. It is bred of a need to communicate with one another.

Rosen (1988) attempts to explain a burgeoning cross disciplinary interest in narrative:

The answer may lie in the fact that we live in a

world cowering under terrifying dehumanizing forces that make ordinary people feel puny and helpless, and thus easily manipulated - that give them very limited powers of reflection and creativity. It may be more than ever necessary to seek out and cherish those universal human activities that display inventiveness, cunning evasion of oppression and communicative ruses of all kinds. (p. 167)

The stories we tell celebrate what is humane. They celebrate co-operation, sharing, charity and hope. This is not to say that they omit to deal with pain, suffering, cruelty and violence. These things are part of life and stories mirror life. However, the ultimate message of folktales and fairy tales is one of optimism. The spirit in which they are told is one of co-operation rather than domination or manipulation. It is a spirit of sharing.

Stories speak to the individual imagination. Imagination takes people into other worlds; it allows us to live in other bodies, to feel the cares or the joy of others. It helps us to move beyond survival, to suspend judgement, to think of other possibilities, of desirability. In A Defence of Poetry, Shelley (1821) wrote:

According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action, which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one

thought to another however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity.Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things.. (p.603)

Shelley wrote in response to Peacock's disparagement of poetry in an age which prized reason and scientific thought. Today scientific thought is regarded with reverence, and Shelley's remarks still ring with truth. Imagination is about making connections, respecting "similitudes of things." As such, it is a faculty which needs to be nurtured in the minds of children who have been born into a difficult, changing world.

Words for survival

Tolkien (1965) stated that the raw materials of narrative art are words, verse and plot. In describing the themes which appeared to characterize storytelling, I have looked carefully at words, their derivations and their many shades of meaning. MacNeil (1990) writes:

The words that survive from Old English, enriched

by Old Norse brought by the Vikings are still the core of our language, often the first essential words a child learns about identity (I, me, we, you, they...), and possession (mine, yours his hers...), about the body (eye, nose, mouth, head...), about necessities (food, bread, meat, drink, water, milk), about size (big, little, tall...)...Perhaps it is because they are such essential words, a survival vocabulary, first imprinted on a child as he (she) feels his (her) earliest emotions, that the Old English affects us so strongly. (p.74)

I have looked at the words which represent the themes that appeared to recur throughout the descriptions. Many of the words which denote action, doing words, such as giving, sharing, work and play are Old English words. Perhaps it is these words that tell what lies at the core of storytelling.

I questioned whether in telling a story one is giving, sharing or bartering the story itself. To give comes from Old English "giefan, gefan." A share comes from Old English "scearu." But to barter comes from Old French "barater." When I spoke of the children exchanging their stories, it was the Old English word "trade" which came to mind. Storytelling emerges as a situation of giving or sharing depending upon how the listeners and the teller perceive the story, how they make connections through it, forgetting themselves and moving in imagination into the world of the story.

Storytelling appears to resist division. In Western culture, we dichotomize work and play, but in telling a story, the storyteller appears to be both at work and at play. Storytelling is work in the sense that it is an activity with a definite objective. The selection and preparation of a story are done with the goal of its public performance. However, the telling of stories is an activity which is recreational. Stories are told for entertainment, for amusement. In essence storytelling is a self-renewing activity. Stories "live" whilst they are being told; they renew themselves in repetition, retelling, re-creation. Stories are not confined to a "home" life or a "school" life. They are found everywhere because stories are about life itself.

Some of the words representing important themes are not of Old English origin. Words such as "communicating", "power" and "choice" came to our language from Latin and Old French. But there can be no communication without sharing or giving in some form. Nobody can exercise power or choice without freedom, a word from Old English "freedom." Moreover, the power of storytelling is a power of the dialectical interaction of teller, tale and listeners, rather than a power which belongs to any of the individual parts which form the storytelling event. MacNeil (1990) calls Old English words "a survival vocabulary." Giving and sharing, working and playing, exercising freedom: these are words which typify storytelling. They appear to indicate that our survival as thinking, caring people depends in large measure on the stories we tell.

STORYTELLING AND EDUCATION

In the history of education, storytelling has not been a pillar of the curriculum. Although its value was endorsed by Dewey, Montessori and Froebel (Pellowski, 1977), storytelling does not "fit" the model of schooling which issues demands for accountability and proof of attainment of basic skills. Testing and storytelling are diametrically opposed to one another. There is no place for storytelling in the factory model of school. Although the designers of tests appear to believe that every dimension of human life is measurable, the benefits of storytelling cannot be reduced to a test score. Stories are about life and as Frye (1963) has noted, the benefits of listening to stories go "far beyond literature." (p.49)

Storytelling "fits" a model of education which is based on the premise that education is about thinking and caring. Storytelling corresponds to the educational "model" of early language acquisition which is universal, but particular. All children learn to speak the language of their community, unless they are severely handicapped. Shirley Brice Heath (1983) illuminated how ways of learning the same language differ markedly according to ways of being in the community. But in every case there is a basic trust in the child as a learner. The child's attempts to speak are supported in different ways, but there are strong affective bonds between learner and "teachers."

Despite our efforts to create uniform classrooms by grouping children of like chronological age, children are different. Multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, the children in today's classrooms bring with them to school a multitude of differences. Family patterns have changed. Many children live confusing stressful lives. How can teachers reach all children? How can they convey to the child a basic trust in him or her as a learner? How can they form the strong affective bonds which support each child's learning? Storytelling is a way of reaching children.

To tell stories is to do something that people have always done. It is a universal practice which caters to each person as an individual. Benjamin (1968) remarked the storyteller is one who has "counsel." He wrote: "Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom." (p.86). Real stories are those which speak of experience and, in the telling, the experience of the tale becomes the experience of the listener. Stories are not concerned with transmitting proven information. Stories call upon the listeners to think for themselves. Stories call for active meaning making. Simultaneously, stories involve thinking and feeling.

In this study, I mentioned how storytelling appeared to be a way of reaching "unreachable" children. I found in storytelling, a way of communicating with children who found it difficult to talk to adults. Helen found that reluctant listeners were "drawn" into a story, almost against their will. "Special ed" children, whom I observed while Amanda told

a story, were an interested audience. Their lively discussion afterwards revealed considerable depth of involvement. Bettina Kulsdom (1991) spoke at a conference in Toronto of her experiences in using storytelling with a class of high school girls. She found that storytelling involved reluctant learners:

The most interesting observation I made was that two girls who normally did not do any work without a great deal of persuasion/threatened punishment or simply did not come to school were among the first to volunteer to tell their stories, and were both in class when it was their turn. (p.1)

Both Bettina Kulsdom and Betty Rosen (1988) have used storytelling as a springboard for their students own oral telling and writing. Their results were remarkable. Rosen's results are described fully in her book And None of it was Nonsense.

I observed in Chapter 4 that storytelling is recreational in that it leads listeners to re-create. The mind needs nourishment in order to thrive. Children who have been richly fed with stories are those who have the raw material with which to create anew. Storytelling is also recreational in the sense that it is amusement. The storytelling event is non-threatening; it makes no specific demands upon the listeners; there is no possibility of failure. It is something to which everyone can relate. Hardy (1975) regards narrative as a "primary act of mind":

....What concerns me here are the qualities which fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives. For we dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future. (cited in Rosen, 1987, p.13)

Storytelling is a process of self discovery. The adult participants in this study alluded to their search for stories which they can tell. The stories selected by a teller appear to reflect her own inner being at her own particular stage of life. The telling of stories is in a way an affirmation of self. At the same time in the lived performance of a story there is a self forgetfulness as the teller "becomes" the story, reaching out to her listeners through its medium.

Storytelling, like language learning, is an interactional process. The storyteller, to a degree, opens herself to her listeners. She is dependent on their response and it is through their response that she learns about them and learns from them. In opening oneself there is a risk of being hurt but there is also the possibility that others will respond in like manner. There is the possibility that trust will develop amongst all who participate in the story.

Storytelling is a popular topic at teachers' conferences nowadays. However, it is important to remember and respect the spirit of storytelling. In Ruth Sawyer's (1966) words, storytelling is: "Not a clever sharing of the mind alone but rather a sharing of the heart and spirit." (p.18)

Teachers who have been trained to plan lessons with exactitude might look for "recipes" for storytelling. We live in an age of "How to" manuals. But there is no manual with a recipe for storytelling. If the teacher who plans to incorporate storytelling into her teaching practice wishes to engender a love of stories in her pupils, she needs first of all to love stories herself. She needs to read widely and avidly in order to find the stories which are "right" for her and her students. She needs to work and to play with words and verse and plot. It is a process of constant learning. In order to lead her students to re-create she needs to share her own passion for her subject. It is in her voice that she brings stories alive, and she needs to be willing to listen to their voices, to support their fledgeling efforts.

THE END

"Begin at the beginning," the King said gravely,
"and go on till you come to the end: then stop."

Lewis Carroll

Barritt et al (1983) explain that a goal of educational research is to "be useful, by understanding situations from

the point of those living through them." (p.102). Van Manen (1984) writing about phenomenological research, states:

As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing. (p.39)

The metaphor of a poem is an interesting one. Frye (1963) paraphrases what Aristotle (Poetics, 1451) said about the poetic epic of his time:

The poet's job is not to tell you what happened, but what happens: not what did take place, but the kind of thing that always does take place. (p.24)

In this study I have tried to focus on "what happens" when a story is told. It has been my intention to interest the reader, to show what I see and hope that the reader, too, may be led to ponder and reflect. Reflection leads to praxis, thoughtful action, which seems to me to be the usefulness of educational research.

I shall end with the beginning: "Sum singis, sum dancis, sum tellis storeis." I used Dunbar's words for my title because I wanted to stress that storytelling is a living art. Ruth Sawyer (cited on p.2) articulates clearly how music and dance "live" only in their performance. Likewise, the story "lives" only whilst it is being told. To sing or to dance we need music, melody, rhythm, harmony. Storytelling depends on harmony, the harmonious use of language, the pleasure it gives

to the ear, and the harmonious interaction of those who are present. We sing, dance and tell stories because these activities give pleasure to those who perform and those who watch and listen. In storytelling we learn about ourselves and others. A story, often told by storytellers, provides an illustration of this point:

There was once an anthropologist, and if you know anything about anthropologists, you know that they make every effort not to disturb the life that they are studying. I suppose this anthropologist was tired of not disturbing things. He said, "I am going to find some village and I am going to change those people all to pieces." So he decided to give them television, these villagers who had never had any contact with the outside world. He put in a generator and he connected the television and as soon as the television was turned on, all activity stopped in the village. People clustered around, amazed to see the visions of this box. At the end of the day, when it was time to eat they drew lots to see who would have to cook food for all of them so that they would not have to be interrupted. He stayed there for days and they were still watching. Then he left. Six months later he returned and went first to the television. It wasn't even on. He tested it. Everything was working. He stopped one of the villagers and asked, "Why aren't you still

watching the television?" "Oh," said the villager, "We watched the television for quite a while." "But why don't you watch it now?" "I guess it is because we have our storyteller." "Your storyteller? Don't you think the television knows more stories than your storyteller?" The villager thought for a moment and said, "It's true the television knows many stories, but our storyteller knows us."

When she tells a story, I think that the storyteller is saying, "Know me and please let me know you."

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