Fall 2006

Autoethnographical Inquiry into Joyful Teaching: Explorations with National Teachers of the Year

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AN AUTOETHOGRAPHICAL INQUIRY INTO JOYFUL TEACHING:
EXPLORATIONS WITH NATIONAL TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

by

CAMILLE LOWE SHIRAH

(Under the Direction of Delores D. Liston)

ABSTRACT

Presently, schools in the United States are held within the tight grip of No Child Left Behind, signed into law in 2001. Since accountability is high, some teachers experience burnout and succumb to disenchantment with the profession (Palmer, 1998). Others find their commitments to education so diminished that they abuse their position and fail terribly in their charge to educate our youth. There are some, however, who find ways to continually affirm and sustain their commitments to education.

Within the following autoethnographical inquiry, the lives of three National Teachers of the Year are examined with the hope of finding out why these teachers have been able to rise above the negative forces which can inhibit their work. As teaching is viewed through the eyes of the participants, images of the teaching profession encourage a heightened awareness of how good teachers persist. Delores Liston’s book, Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence (2001), provides the theoretical framework for this study which recognizes joy as an internal source of strength, enabling teachers to keep going throughout humanly impossible days (Ayers, 2004).

INDEX WORDS: National Teachers of the Year, Joy, Sustainability, No Child Left Behind, Wholeness, Compassion, Care, Self-Reflection, Teachers, Autoethnography
AN AUTOETHOGRAPHICAL INQUIRY INTO JOYFUL TEACHING:
EXPLORATIONS WITH NATIONAL TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

by

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B.S, Mercer University, 1989
M.Ed., Georgia Southern University, 2002

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2006
AN AUTOETHOGRAPHICAL INQUIRY INTO JOYFUL TEACHING:
EXPLORATIONS WITH NATIONAL TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

by

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Committee:
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Saundra Murray Nettles
June E. Alberto

Electronic Version Approved:
December, 2006
DEDICATION

This study into joyful teaching is dedicated to the teachers with whom I work.

“One can only learn to love something from someone they love.”

(Sidorkin, 2002, p. 111)
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people who supported me throughout the dissertation process:

Delores Liston, my chair, who first encouraged me to pursue a doctoral program in curriculum studies and became not only my toughest professor, but my most meaningful mentor, wrapped in a good friend. My dissertation committee, Ming Fang He, Sandra Murray Nettles, and June E. Alberto, outstanding professors who continue to inspire me to keep reaching deeper, higher, and wider. My colleagues, who made important suggestions, provided encouragement, and still continue to be part of my most favorite memories. My family who waited patiently, listened carefully, and continually cheered me on, knowing all along that one day my time would be theirs again. My husband Richard who remains steadfast in his endless wisdom and much needed sense of humor. Finally, and most especially, I want to thank the participants in this study, Sandy McBrayer, Jan Gabay, and Betsy Rogers, whose remarkable lives speak clearly while showing us how to live in joy.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“We are as unfinished as the shoreline along the beach, meant to transcend ourselves over and over again.”

(Joan Anderson)

Teachers in Schools

Presently schools in the United States are held within the tight grip of the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] legislation, signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2001. One of the central components is “stronger accountability for results” (www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4). Rules for adequate academic progress are rigid. Students are categorized in school reports by so-called subgroups, such as Students with Disabilities, White, and African American. If one of these groups does not make predetermined progress, which is reported by way of a percentage and decided on by the state, the school does not make Adequate Yearly Progress, readily recognized by teachers and administrators as AYP. Not making AYP can result in increased demands by the state government, public awareness of failure, and additional involvement by governmental officials by way of assigned educational consultants.

With this type of accountability, teachers find themselves in a most vulnerable place; they are viewed as chiefly responsible for making sure student test performance is indicative of adequate progress. Perhaps the present day No Child Left Behind prescription for improved schools provides a valid reason for the stress and discouragement teachers are experiencing and even at times acting out. Maybe one can rest the blame here, but maybe not. Even so, it is within this pressurized context that I set out to discover for myself what I might do to counteract the pessimism which seemed to be infiltrating a profession I have passionately embraced for seventeen years.
I wanted to understand how teachers react to stress and, based on their experiences, I wanted to find out how they interact with their students, colleagues, and others amidst possible negativity. Did most teachers feel like victims, powerless to sustain classrooms which reflect meaningful teaching and learning? I knew some teachers harbor such feelings, and behave accordingly, but, in contrast, there are those who actively engage themselves and others in positive actions and attitudes within the teaching profession.

The potential for a helpless mind-set reminds me of the words of Saundra Nettles, in her book, *Crazy Visitation* (2001). She recounts the battle she won against a possible deadly brain tumor, and after describing myriad results of such a physical assault, admitted to being weakened, but adamantly affirmed she was not a victim (Nettles, 2001). Is such a strong resolution what teachers need? Should they acknowledge hardships and even, at times, an almost impossible task, but at the same time assure themselves they will not be further victimized by their own perceptions or the damaging assessments by others? Are teachers stalled by preconceived metaphors for teaching or seriously hindered by a society which will not let teachers teach as they think they should?

The questions appeared endless yet full of significance. Today’s teachers must have answers which reach beyond effective teaching strategies or new-found school trends such as leadership teams and professional study groups. The time for encouragement is crucial to teachers and pertinent to what makes schools the best places of formalized education presently offered to generations of children. Teachers must find ways to be sustained and affirmed in their practice. Kozol, in *The Night is Cold and I am*
Far from Home (1975), suggests the reasons teacher sustainability is significant to our schools:

What the teacher teaches is by no means chiefly in the words he [she] speaks. It is at least in part in what he [she] is, in what he [she] does, in what he [she] seems to wish to be. The secret curriculum is the teacher’s own lived values and convictions, in the lineaments of his [her] expressions and in the biography of passion or self-exile which is written in his [her] eyes. (p. 83)

Teaching as a Profession

For the last seventeen years of my life I have been a public school educator. Teaching in first, second, fourth, and fifth grades has given me knowledge of the instructional standards for students and an understanding of children at various stages in their lives. Having worked in three different counties in Georgia (Spalding, Fayette, and Glynn) provided me an awareness of diverse school cultures from the suburbs of Atlanta to the coastline of southeast Georgia. Spalding County is about forty-five minutes south of the Atlanta airport. Spalding’s central city is Griffin, which is an old southern town rich in history and socio-economic diversity. Fayette, on the other hand, is a booming, affluent community frequently inhabited by airline pilots who desire to live near the airport, but far enough away to have luxurious homes and estates. Glynn County, better known as Home of the Golden Isles, is made up of the port city of Brunswick, Jekyll Island, Sea Island, and St. Simons Island. Here schools are varied and mostly outgrowths of the neighborhoods surrounding them. These neighborhoods range from inner city housing projects to million dollar condominiums and/or private homes.
For two of the last seventeen years I assisted teachers in every subject area while serving as the Instructional Coach at St. Simons Elementary School. Presently, I am the Assistant Principal at Oglethorpe Point Elementary School on the northern end of St. Simons Island. Additionally, in my first year of teaching, I was named Spalding County’s Most Outstanding First Year Teacher and in the seventh year of my career, after becoming Griffin-Spalding County’s Teacher of the Year, I became a state semi-finalist for Georgia Teacher of the Year. My experience as an educator helped form my personal educational philosophy and influenced my study into the possibilities of joy in teaching. However, my inquiry into the teaching profession began long ago in a small kindergarten located in a brick school house, sitting close to Peachtree Road, in what some call the center of the south, Atlanta, Georgia.

*Teaching as a Story*

“Sing your song, dance your dance, tell your tale.”

*(Frank McCourt, *Teacher Man*, 2005, n.p.)*

Drive straight, from the heart of Buckhead, head south, and you will find the same delightful building where I first decided teachers were heroes. E. Rivers Elementary continues to function as an elementary school as it stands along winding sidewalks, splendid evergreen trees, and an old neighborhood, somehow still remaining amidst Atlanta’s phenomenal growth and real estate development.

Sometimes, I remember as if it were yesterday, and on other days, I wonder if I dreamed of this place where I felt so loved and affirmed by teachers who cared enough to notice a tall, shy child with spiraling blonde hair who loved to dance, draw, and daydream. Yes, there were many teachers I loved: Mrs. Head, Mrs. Martin, and the list
continues, but there is one, just one, who lodged something deep inside of me simply by her presence.

Miss Clary had black hair and huge brown eyes. I thought her smile was beyond beautiful, and I was fascinated by her lovely gait. She, however, probably would not agree with my description of the way she walked, because her belabored movement was a direct result of paralysis in both legs. Crutches supported her as she moved steadily along the school’s wooden halls. I was mystified by her strength and courage. I wondered how she could stand so tall and with seemingly so much joy after battling a disease considered the ultimate deadly fate of the 1950s.

Right before Miss Clary’s wedding, she became sick with polio. I remembered hearing she had survived and would marry later. She was back at school in the fall, her wedding was on hold, and I was ecstatic to be in her class. As that year moved along, I read books of all kinds and content, but as Paulo Freire might say, I really learned to read the world around me (Freire, 2003). And this world of mine, contained in childlike insecurities and doubt, included one of the most inspiring women I have ever known.

Eventually, my third grade year passed, Miss Clary married, and I went on to fourth. Somewhere, however, buried within me was an intense knowing that would surface decades later. At the age of forty, I entered the teaching profession with a dream to be just as courageous, wise, strong, determined, and compassionate as this woman who taught me so many years ago. That was my frame of reference at the start of my career. I thought all teachers should change the world for the better. I decided ours was the mission to help insure children kept their greatest gift….freedom to find out the wonderful talents and abilities each child possesses. That was my beginning. Miss Clary
was my model…one fragile woman hobbling along yet smiling and offering warmth that even today is not describable.

Were my thoughts naïve? Probably. Too romantic? Perhaps. Impossible? I hope not. Did I remember Miss Clary exactly as she really was? I doubt it. However, my childlike perception remained as do many of the impressions children hold onto long after days turn into lifetimes. The picture held in my memory made a difference. An impression was left, which ultimately accompanied my life into a passionate vocation known to me as teaching.

Hence, as I begin my eighteenth year in the field of education, I continue to believe teachers ought to be examples of courage and resilience. As I reflect on my profession, I tell myself the stories of teachers…some teachers I have admired, others with whom I have not agreed, and finally I tell the stories of those teachers I choose to remember. While laughing at my optimism, a friend once accused me of being a product of the radical and often over the top idealistic sixties, and most likely she is correct. Still I see many teachers as passionate souls in search of ways to better the ways we live, and more than that, I believe children are worth our utmost endeavor. Possibilities, held within the imaginings of our students, frequently surface in classrooms. Teachers have the potential to encourage or discourage those very possibilities. So I tell the stories of teachers, hoping to offer insights into their vocation and into the needs of the children they teach.

Presently, I live by the sea, and frequently walk ten minutes to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. As my feet hit the sand, often my mind wanders into the expanse before me, and once in a while, I am reminded of a short story about a woman who comes across
a hauntingly homeless man. “How in the world do you keep going?” the lady asks the disheveled man. As the frail, old man stands at the edge of the beach and stares out to the horizon of bluish green, he seems to choose his simple yet profound words slowly, but responds with a strong, almost defiant voice, “I consider the view!”

As a teacher, I, too, consider the view. I watch for the overlapping waves of diversity and difference which engulf students and teachers. The vast oceans of thought and consideration fill my expectancy as I enter classrooms. The potential for intellectual and meaningful travel is immense. Above all else, I feel connected to something bigger and hugely more important than myself even as I stand in a classroom or as I stand by the sea. Each offers endless possibilities for vast discovery and connection.

However, what do I do on the rainy days when my life seems like the choppy ocean raging beneath a grayish sky? Where is the calm, melodious action of a teacher who can look to wide open spaces, covered by miles of a darkened sea yet be reassured by the potential for student voyages? Where do I go, and where do the others, named as colleagues, retreat? What happens to teachers when hurried school days grow tiresome while reform models leap upon us like untamed tides? As salt water drenches our overflowing baskets of pedagogy and floods purposeful places aimed at student imaginings, how do we hold belabored dreams, soaked by the realities of school life? As the ocean washes over patterned beach towels laid out for perfectly planned fun and frolic, so do school politics and societal expectations overcome personal classroom goals made by good teachers. Who and what stops tides of despair from drowning the goodness still found in the teaching profession?
How do teachers keep going when clouds of system expectations cause the seas of stress to snip and surge at us like an enormous enemy? What stills the seas and returns them to places of meaningful voyages? Can I pinpoint a source of courage and clarity? Do I find joy amidst my hardest days? Do other teachers reach within themselves to pull that which can shed light on days darkened by frustration, cynicism, and lost motivation? What can we tell each other? Do we have anything to say?

Along the barrier island I call home, the beaches carry the brunt of storms much like teachers carry the weight of accountability. However, teachers are also asked to not only protect, but improve our most important natural resources, our children. Moreover, these same teachers seem laden with their own lived experiences, which surely bring additional pressure and stress. So what can teachers do to keep going amidst the ebb and the flow of life?

I imagine teachers to be people who see themselves as vital to changing the lives of children. Whether too lofty or too optimistic, still that is the expectation I have for myself and my colleagues. In contrast, however, I have witnessed many in our profession who are unhappy, disillusioned, weary, and downright negative. Often they see their vocation as a place of dismal demands and hopeless expectations. What makes this even more thought-provoking is that I have witnessed, as I am sure many of us have, at least two teachers who are in the same school at the same time with similar classes yet are widely divergent as far as attitude and level of professional enthusiasm. In some classrooms a positive connectedness between teacher and child has dissipated, and there appears to be no joy of one’s vocation left. In fact, many teachers’ metaphorical likening
to barrier islands evaporates quickly when one views what is really going on in some schools today.

Without a doubt, we need substantial metaphors which help, not hinder, the life projects (Greene, 1973) of those who are educators. Bateson (1989) says that “we use metaphors, consciously or unconsciously, all the time, so it is a matter of mental hygiene to take responsibility for these metaphors, to look at them carefully, to see how meanings slide from one to the other” (p.133). In my opinion, business or factory metaphors bind teachers to practices short of imagination, courage, caring, compassion and morality. I believe many teachers and students have a sense something is missing, but are not sure what might offer help during our present era of standardization and accountability. First as a teacher, and now as an administrator, I have labored over what might bring strength and wisdom to me and to our profession. Parker Palmer (1998) says,

Authority comes as I reclaim my identity and integrity, remembering my selfhood and my sense of vocation. Then teaching can come from the depths of my own truth and the truth that is within my students has a chance to respond in kind. (p. 33)

What is the truth of which Palmer speaks? As I reflected on days gone by, to what did I attribute times of personal persistence? What would I do in the days to come? This was my search, coupled with the shared stories of teachers, who informed my own voyage on a sea of significant signposts. I suspected these signposts would offer direction as I sought to discover if joy supported my efforts. Was it joy that shed light over my years of teaching young children? Was it such a spiritual force, forging its way through my inner being? Did I, and do I still, find joy in my vocation? Yes, I love children, as
most teachers profess, and hope for the best, but I know, on days of stress or sameness, there must be more than love and hope available for me. Indeed, I proposed joy energizes one from within.

Searching for Joy

During one summer in my doctoral studies at Georgia Southern University, a book on joy became required reading for an ethics class. As I read, I began to consider my own teaching career, present day complexities of teacher morale, and hard-hitting educational legislations that were often coming from the top down to teachers and their students. I started to question whether or not teachers have ways to counteract potential daily doses of defeat while offering enlightened moments for learning.

Furthermore, I considered the effect a new metaphor, based on joy, may well have on schools. I asked myself what if schools could actually be transformed into places of caring, justice, and what is right in the world? Finally, I began to recognize joy as a source for lifting teachers to places of imagination, courage, caring, and morality. Reading Delores Liston’s book, Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence (2001), became a personal opening to my study into the possibilities of joy for teachers and their life work; also, it became an impetus for my own much needed search into joy.

The more I questioned myself, the more I contemplated what I really wanted to find out in relation to teachers. Finally, however, my research began to move into a definite direction, and I clearly understood its central theme and the research format. I decided to ask three National Teachers of the Year to become part of my study of joy, written in the format of an autoethnography, with the intent of exploration into their lived experiences intertwined with mine. Within these constructs, the theoretical framework of
my study would be based on Liston’s book, *Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence* (2001). I sought to find out if joy existed in the lives of good teachers, and if so, what ramifications might joy hold for the teaching profession in general.

In particular, I determined three questions would best focus my research: What enables teachers to persist in a profession fraught with excessive accountability, strict standardization, and often nearly humanly impossible days? Can joy (Liston, 2001) contribute to this persistence? How will the lives of three National Teachers of the Year inform my inquiry into joy?

*The Significance of My Study*

The significance of my study rests in stories told, moments of conversations, the writings of or by the teachers themselves, and the observations I made as an ethnographer. The simple yet vastly important words of participants, speaking in voices formed by years of classroom and personal experiences, both good and bad, offered a world of meaning to me in my search for joyful teaching. Bateson (1989) states:

> It is important, however, to see that, in finding a personal path among the discontinuities and moral ambiguities they (women) face, they are performing a creative synthesis with a value that goes beyond the merely personal. We feel lonely sometimes because each composition is unique, but gradually we are becoming aware of the balances and harmonies that must inform all such compositions. Individual improvisations can sometimes be shared as models of possibility for men and women in the future. (p. 232)
As I completed my study, I grew closer to rekindling my own identity thus inspiring myself to be in the world as I ought. More importantly, however, I discovered significant implications for teachers and their classrooms. The childlike picture I painted of my favorite teacher, Miss Clary, still holds within my memory and, even though faded by years and somewhat skewed by reality, continues to challenge me to accept the joy of living my life as a teacher. Hopefully, my study into the possibilities of joyful teaching translates into a better view of what it means to teach, and why, certainly amidst the powerful No Child Left Behind Law, we might choose to change our present metaphors of schools to a new metaphor as experienced through joy. As Liston says, “Why make the world in anger, disgust, and depression when we can create the world in Joy¹?” (2001, p. 217)

Based on Liston’s theory, I proposed that joy can supply teachers with the energy to be courageous (Palmer, 1998), the light to see with imagination (Greene, 1995), the mysterious quality of compassion (Ayers, 1995), and finally, the spirituality which runs deeply with morality (Purpel, 1989), while engaging us in justice. Joy holds the potential for not only a new metaphor of education, but is the energetic light force which can transform us from within (Liston, 2001). Maxine Greene suggests, “Teachers have the capacity to make it [light] shine in all sorts of corners and, perhaps, to move newcomers to join with others and transform” (Greene, 1997, p.5). Furthermore, Greene brings clarity to why I am embarked on a study of joy when she says, “Teachers who are

¹In Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence (2001), Liston capitalizes the word Joy, regardless of the position of the word in a sentence, to emphasize the restoration of the word to a “more powerful and poetic interpretation” (p. 23). Therefore, Listons’s quotes will include capitalization of Joy.
consciously and reflectively choosing themselves as participants in school renewal are being challenged to clarify their beliefs and to defend their practices. If teachers can begin to think of themselves as among those able to kindle the light, confront the dread, keep alive the sense of possible happiness, they might find themselves existing proactively in the world” (http://www.lesley.edu/).

It is the possibility of which Greene speaks that encouraged my study. I wanted to find out if good teachers found ways to see the world through a clearer lens, pressed on amidst dismal standardization, and responded based on internal strength. I suspected “Joy initiates a knowing of possibilities” and it is this very knowing that offers transformative teaching to students (Liston, 2001, p.198). My search included personal reflections of three National Teachers of the Year who joined me in exploring what transforms us, thus illuminating our classrooms, organizations, and schools. I engaged the lives of teachers and I believe we came to know each other well enough to learn from one another, “especially in this unexplored terrain” (Bateson, 1989, p. 103) of my search for joy.

I believe public schools are foundational to our democracy and to our sense of what is just and compassionate in our world. I have grappled with gross inadequacies of our present school systems, and, at the same time, I have applauded times of authentic teaching and learning. I have listened to more negative voices than positive. I have seen excellence in teaching, and I have witnessed teaching by those who desperately need to leave the profession. Nevertheless, through seventeen years as an educator, I have held tight to an unwavering belief that our public schools are worth the grandest effort we can, and ought to, put forth in behalf of all children in the United States.
For that reason, I am determined to find ways in which teachers might be able to rise above the often demoralizing and terribly negative forces which can inhibit their work. I believe teachers hold the greatest potential for positive influence on students. I even propose that teachers can and should be the prophetic educators suggested by David Purpel (1989).

Consequently, my desire is that as we view teaching through the eyes of the participants in my study we see images of the teaching profession, which encourage a heightened awareness of how good teachers persist. Often it is not the success stories that alter our thinking, but shared difficulties that offer us vigor. We must find out how to live, and live effectively, as teachers who are much more than docile workers, but instead, ones who are able to call the highest potential from children and offer pathways to meaningful lives.

Hopefully, my research into possibilities of joyful teaching will be a source for teachers who need affirmation that theirs is a craft which is noble. Maybe good teachers, who are contemplating quitting, will find purposeful ways to continue, and ones who are seeking positive change, will uncover conduits to internal strength and artful passion. Perhaps, some teachers will realize teaching has turned into a painful career which needs to be desperately altered. Whatever the need and whatever the search, hopefully, some teachers will stop and reflect on their profession.

Most significantly, however, is the possibility that as a result of redeeming teacher influence, a few students might realize a world which is, after all, caring, compassionate, and just (Purpel, 1989). Hopefully, as I have offered a study written with the intent of
helping teachers, they might take heart and continue to travel through the “humanly impossible days” (Ayers, 2004, p. 119) with dignity, nobility, and self-worth.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dancing on the Earth

Take me to the places on the earth that teach you how to dance,

The places where you can risk letting the world break your heart,

And I will take you to the places where the earth beneath my feet

And stars overhead make my heart whole again and again.

(Oriah Mountain Dreamer, 2001, p.109)

The Beginning is Joy

Liston’s writings, found in *Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence* (2001), bring clarity and innovative thinking to the word *joy* (Liston, 2001). Challenging us to greet our worlds through a new metaphor of joy, Liston suggests that as teachers “create caring, compassionate, and life-supporting communities with others” (Liston, 2001, p.217), they invalidate otherwise oppressive environments and replace them with avenues for joy, which sheds light, thus enabling us to see the world and ourselves more clearly. In addition, Liston values relationships as a means of being in the world and recognizes them to be imperative to our growth as human beings. Liston’s theory offers the potential for grasping joy in a more life-enhancing way, and it is this very possibility that forms the structure of my own inquiry into joyful teaching.

The meaning of joy and the understanding of the word were at the forefront of this study, because joy, I suspected, weaves imagination, courage, mystery, and morals into a purposeful path of learning for both teachers and their students. I believed, based on Liston’s theory, that joy sheds light, as Greene suggests (Greene, 1997, p. 5), and offered teachers a way of seeing the world through “justice, compassion and fulfillment”
(Liston, 2001. p.198). Indeed, that one statement was enough to entice me to search for joy.

Parker Palmer, reflecting on his interaction with teachers, says, “Educators of all sorts are in real pain these days, and that pain has compelled them to explore unconventional resources” (Palmer, 1993, p. 1). Thus, I am suggesting that joy is one of the unconventional resources teachers may seek to offer solace and strength in a stressful and difficult vocation. As my study progressed, I realized stories not planned and patterns not sought after, but my theoretical framework, wrapped by joy, bathed my pathway with a lens for seeing how and why teachers persist against disturbing odds.

Joy as Theory

What is joy?

Joy is not just happiness, gladness, or contentment. Joy is beyond merry-making or even hope. Joy as a word conjures up energy. According to Liston, “The Greek meaning: its logos and world-making power includes powerful and poetic connotations of an inner and profound light radiated from the human spirit. It is within this light that Joy empowers us to imagine and create our worlds” (2001, p. 9). In fact, Liston goes on to say that she is rescuing the word joy from the bothersome limits which many Westerners still put on the word (2001). In contrast, joy, as inner profound light, holds vast implications for humankind to respond to an external world through internal reflective power.

Where is joy?

In 2000, Herb Childress completed a journey into the lives of teenagers in a small and rather dismal town in the Midwest. Throughout the year spent there, he searched
through the common place to find the significance young people placed on their lived experiences. Childress based his study on three questions and in the end, he felt joy held the answer for all of them (2000). This is what he discovered:

On November 18th Childress attended a high school play where he found the teenagers operating in joy. What he saw was joy fueling the efforts, and, therefore, recognized what was missing in the town in which he had spent a year observing the people and their ways of living.

From that night on, Childress “began to look for joy, and he reports he found it in the places of learning, patience, attentions, lots of the efforts, beautiful and exciting environments, high achievement – all things that we try to get at from all of the wrong directions”. Childress says that “with joy the outside standards are meaningless; when we do what we love to do, we keep after it, we always want to know more and do more and keep going. There is no such thing as good enough” (Childress, 2000, p. 257).

Childress makes reference to *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi who discusses how people enjoy…find joy…in what they are doing when they act “with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life” (1990, p.40). Indeed, those who are able to find life-enhancement in being in the present moment…in the “ongoing stream of experience, in the process of living itself”…are able to have internal control over their lives. When power is no longer relegated to outside forces one is liberated from external controls. For teachers, exacerbated by an era of chronic accountability, often negative perceptions of teachers, and demoralizing remarks about public education, I
suggest that one ought to find places of internal balance (Nieto, 2003), and that such a place might be found in joy.

*Why does joy matter?*

Maxine Greene says that teachers frequently feel like it is “difficult to breathe” (Greene, 1988, p. 14). As teachers implement the beliefs of those who hold power, while letting go of their own, they hinder the possibilities of personal creativity and most probably, their own potential actions (Ayers, 2004). Following decades of teacher reform and present day extremes in accountability, many teachers are retreating to stations of frustration, negativity, depression, and even victim-like behavior (Palmer, 1998).

In his book, *The Courage to Teach* (1998), Parker Palmer talks about his cross-country trips and the many times he talked to teachers from every part of our nation. In the beginning of these conversations, the dialogue was positive, but inevitably, the verbal exchange began to spiral downward as the negativity surfaced. Palmer thinks as teachers align themselves with those in power over them, they run the risk of buying into ideas which supersede their own logical beliefs. If teachers, in contrast, look within, where all real change begins, they will see that authentic power is internal (Palmer, 1998). Here is the place teachers can go to release victim-like postures and begin to resist feeling as though they have no control within even their own classrooms. Perhaps if teachers exist in joy, that sheds light, they can begin to stop coddling themselves, and, instead, they can begin to see themselves as authentic agents of transformation. Teachers can begin to live large and offer to themselves and their students an education full of possibility (Greene, 1995). Victims cannot make such offers, but teachers, with internal resources, can.
Joseph Featherstone, professor of education, journalist, activist, and former school principal, admonishes teachers in a letter to a new teacher, “You will never survive your years as a teacher by listening to what passes for vision now in the United States” (Ayers, 2001, p. 185). If teachers do not choose to stand against the present day folly of testing madness, and speak with courage and imagination, visions for our schools will be left to those who, most likely, see things in a linear fashion, thus leaving teachers to exist in a profession which may well condone philosophies and pedagogies different from what they know is best for children.

Public schools are strategic political, social, and cultural institutions through which the vast majority of people in the United States most pass, if just for a few beginning grades. We cannot give up on our public schools, as Deborah Meier, Principal of the Mission School in Boston, says, because they hold the potential for the creative work of all children (Meier, 2002). As a matter of fact, about ten years ago, a tiny energetic kindergartener, son of a journalist in our medium-sized southern town, offered profound advice to a friendly second grade teacher who was teasing Charlie about skipping first grade and going straight on to second. Quickly and without missing a beat, Charlie replied, rather indigently, “But, Ms. Magner, everybody has to go to first grade!” (personal communication, Charlie Jones, 1995)

Isn’t that how we feel about school? Yes, most people go to school, but what are we, as teachers, doing to guard ourselves against the tremendous pressure of trying to teach the world’s children? Where do teachers go to refuel ourselves and stay focused in a society which, at times, does not respect the teaching profession or the failures to which
they think teachers contribute? Is there something that keeps good teachers in the flow of their profession? Could it be joy?

Where does joy come in and where does it go? I believe joy provides light for imagination in which possibilities are revealed, abounds in the mystery of why one cares enough to help another, calls deeply to the moral nature of humanity, provides courage to keep going, and circles back to pull a tight knot around all four of these attributes wound in one’s internal makeup. Of even greater magnitude, I suggest that one cannot be caring, imaginative courageous, or moral unless one is able to be in the present moment with other human beings. I put forward the idea that joy affords us that time and space, waiting within each of us.

*Theories Intertwined by Joy*

Weavings

Joy, Magnificent!

Fosters Imagination,

Abounds in Mystery,

Infuses Morals with Spirituality,

Finds Courage,

In the Joy,

One Believes is Good.

(Shirah, 2005)

Why did I examine how joy relates to imagination, courage, mystery, and morality? Why not just study joy by itself? Because, I do not believe joy exists to tickle our emotions with positive feelings. Joy is far from a single act of making one feel
happier. Instead, I propose that joy is a far reaching energy for changing the inner workings of teachers, thus changing the possibilities for transformation. Liston tells us, “Joy exists within a moral framework that resists hierarchy and oppression through connection to caring, compassion, and the possibilities of life-supporting behaviors related to the human spirit” (Liston, 2001, p.198). I believe this framework includes imagination, mystery, morality, and courage; joy is the spiritual force which perpetuates and sustains these life enhancing attributes, which I believe are central to what makes a teacher good and able to persist amidst pressures of the teaching profession. In keeping with non-dualistic thinking, I believe joy, imagination, courage, mystery, and morality are interrelated, and joy is crucial to each one, because it enables each to spiral into one another and eventually into one’s awareness. Based on the work of Greene, Ayers, Purpel, Palmer, and Liston, I intend to further explain their relatedness.

Liston expounded on a purposeful theory of joy and made meaningful suggestions as to what joy may well produce in schools. She even suggested that joy become a new metaphor for teaching and learning. However, my study took Liston’s theory of joy further as I exposed the life experiences of three National Teachers of the Year. I wanted to know if, in truth, joy made for a more compassionate, caring, and just world and if so, how? I wanted to find out if my own teaching years yielded hints of joy, and if my present role as an assistant principal deepened my own need for joy. I wanted to realize what, if any, relationship joy had in the day to day journeys of my participants. I decided if I could see joy in the lives of good teachers, I might be able to offer ways of sustainability for the teaching profession, thus influencing schools for the good.
“So I hug her, too. And feel joy,” says Principal Deborah Meier of her immediate response to a young teenage girl who came to school pregnant. Why did Meier feel joy amidst a seemingly dire situation? Surely she did not mean she was happy? One can imagine the hardships of having a baby while still being a teenager, but Meier said, “She felt joy” (Meier, 2002, p. 13). Was Meier captivated by something that calls to a deeper, more profound measure of reality? Does she see past the present while existing completely in the moment with the young girl? And I wonder, is that joyful feeling…that moment of “being in the present” (Liston, 2001)…really what it means to live as teachers filled with joy? Are joy-filled teachers able to live in the present while still imagining a future that is larger than what they see? Do they have almost mysterious connections with what is of value in life? Does joy offer them courage? Do good teachers see through a clearer lens because joy sheds light on what is valuable? If so, then, what will it take to usher in a metaphor for education, based not on a factory or business model but on joy? (Liston, 2001)

The ways in which joy may infuse us with imagination, courage, mystery, and morality are crucial to our understanding of joy, but, also, to our grasp of the possibilities of keeping our schools open to freedom of thought and purpose. Indeed, I posited that joy as a “profound light radiating from the human spirit” (Liston, 2001, p. 9) energizes imagination, courage, mystery, and morality, thus enabling one to create the every day likelihood of goodness in the lives of students and teachers.
Joy Sheds Light on Imagination

“Joy generates an awareness of the possibilities available to us and our role in the generation of these possibilities and response-abilities. That is, through Joy, we respond (take response-ability) as co-creators of our worlds” (Liston, 2001, p. 198). In accordance with Liston (2001), Greene tells us, as she implores educators to recognize the superior ability imagination holds to invade our often fossilized ways of doing and thinking that “we who are teachers know that imagination has this multiple power: to create orders, to provoke authentic vision, and to surprise” (Greene, 2001, p. 83). One of the most powerful reasons to encourage imagination is so our view of life will be “big” (Greene, 1995, p. 10). What an awe-inspiring thought! “To regard the world and mankind as something great, glorious, and significant, justifying every effort to attain some modicum of esteem and fame,” says Greene (1995, p. 10) is reason for imagination to infiltrate our schools (Greene, 2001). This big outlook cannot trap us into calculated, statistical, and inflexible standards of schooling. Instead, we will find students who think through problems, engage in imaginative solutions, and liberate themselves to find their own journeys in a world which seems desperate for innovation and incompleteness.

In Releasing the Imagination, Greene discusses “teaching for openings” (Greene, 2001, p. 109). These openings, indeed, are the places in which students begin to break from the humdrum of life and enter into the possibilities of human existence. However, if teachers intend to open spaces for students, they must, first of all, open spaces for themselves (Greene, 2001). I offer joy as the way for teachers to open these internal spaces. As joy generates an awareness of imaginings, then, and only then, will teachers be able to offer students the possibilities of creation. Liston says that we must only “make
a slight turn in the direction of Joy” and joy will be recognized (Liston, 2001, p. 20).

Through an internal joy, external joy can be offered to students…that way of seeing humanity with the imaginings of the divine.

If we do not live through imagination, we will not be able to overcome the boredom and sameness in schools. Instead, we are going to witness the continued decline of meaningful learning. Until we decide to interlock students’ imaginations with the lives they lead, thus unleashing their potential for creative ideas, schools will remain places of passive receptiveness, instead of engaged learning. When students explore, they feel more powerful; it is this powerful knowing that propels students into a world of expectation and excitement. Then we will see vibrancy in our schools and in the lives of our communities and ourselves.

Greene (1995) thinks:

Our classrooms ought to be nurturing and thoughtful and just all at once. They ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive. They ought to resound with the voices of articulate young people in dialogues always incomplete because there is always more to be discovered and more to be said. We must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to wide-awakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility. (p. 45)

In joy, teachers can respond as “co-creators of the world” (Liston, 2001, p. 19) and bring imagination into their own lived experiences and those around them. Perhaps Greene says it best as she encourages imagination, which brings change: “Change, yes, and teach, and awaken” (Greene, 2001, p.103). Joy stimulates change internally. As teachers begin to
see with imagination, they, too, can offer the ultimate response to their
students….Awaken!

*Joy Abounds in the Mystery of Compassion and Caring*

“Joy offers a world in which justice, compassion, and fulfillment are not only
compatible, but also interdependent” (Liston, 2001, p. 198). Likewise, professor and
educational activist, William Ayers has high hopes for teachers as he encourages them to
work for justice. He calls teachers to an important goal: “to provide a generation unfit for
slavery” (Ayers, 2001, p. 201). In accordance with the previous ideas, I propose that if a
world is just, compassionate, and fulfilled, joy will be intertwined within its teachers and
those taught by them. And if a world is full of justice, compassion, and fulfillment,
slavery will not abide within. Again, what greater reason to search for joy is there than a
world unfit for oppression?

How can a teacher abide in this mysterious calling…the calling which leads one
to care whether or not another makes it in the world? What makes some pass by while
others stop to aid those that are oppressed? Why would teachers care if students are
enslaved by the smallness of vision, the prisons of prejudice, the unfairness of poverty,
the dread of unfinished dreams, or the aloneness of schools which opt for standardized
scripts and patterned pathways? What would make teachers offer the possibility of
freedom to students? The mystery of why one individual yearns for the betterment of
another is wrapped in the mystery of joy. Joy is a “powerful and non-dualistic way of
coming to sense phenomena in which and through which broad interpretations of our
worlds are possible” (Liston, 2001, p. 198).
Conceivably, teachers who know the profoundness of joy are able to know the mystery of caring for another. As Ayers reflects on his own teaching experience, he comments that “teaching is much larger and more alive than that (meaning direct delivery of scripted of preplanned curriculum); it contains more pain and conflict, more joy and intelligence, more uncertainty and ambiguity. It requires more judgment and energy and intensity than, on some days, seems humanly possible” (Ayers, 2004, p.119). Yes, teaching is that and more. Joy can enable teachers, from within themselves, to keep going, and I suspect joy does just that on those humanly impossible days.

Joy Reveals Courage from Within

“Joy sustains an independent awareness based in internal self-reflexiveness that is therefore not dependent upon external events. That is Joy is not subject to the ups and downs of happenstance” (Liston, 2001, p.198). Palmer says that “our inner world has a reality and a power that can keep us from being victims of circumstance and compel us to take responsibility for our own lives” (Palmer, 1998, p. 28). Within today’s era of standardization, teachers must recognize such internal power, if, truly, they are going to not only survive, but be the voices of transformation for their students. Here, I put forward the idea that joy can fill the inner world, so that there is a deep reliance on joy and not the things existing in the world, which would have us detour from worthy paths.

Palmer continues by suggesting, as does Ayers, teachers carry who they are into classrooms (Ayers, 2001; Palmer, 1998). If teachers are grounded in joy, I propose that they will be able to bring authenticity into their classrooms, all the while not being pressed down by unreasonable demands of school systems. In other words, they will face the negatives yet will be able to continue positively in their vocations. Reflecting on the
idea that joy sheds light, teachers ought to be able to see what is of worth, even though they find themselves in a technical society which does not readily choose to be cognizant of the possibilities found in joy. Teachers, living and working in joy, may well hold the potential for compassion and caring in our world. Seemingly our society, however, would rather teachers remain complacent workers, quietly continuing to follow closely predetermined questions and answers. In contrast, joy counteracts such educational entrapment and releases teachers to react with courage while offering students pathways toward freedom of thought and being (Ayers, 2004).

“The kind of teaching that transforms people does not happen if the student’s inward teacher is ignored. We can speak within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves,” says Palmer (1998, p. 31). Joy affords us this. As teachers turn to joy and expect the light to be shining in the corners of their hearts and minds, they will be able to connect to their inner worlds and thus to their students. How one turns to joy is a personal venture, but one in which solitude, reflection, meditation, and even journaling might play a part (Palmer, 1998; Liston, 2001, Brookfield, 1995, Cole & Knowles, 2000). When teachers have “life-giving conversations of the soul” (Palmer, 1998, p. 32), joy, I believe, will be there.

Joy Calls Deeply to Moral Awakenings

“Joy exists within a moral framework that resists hierarchy and oppression through connection to caring, compassion, and the possibilities of life-supporting behaviors related to the human spirit” (Liston, 2001, p.198). David Purpel, in his book, The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education (1989) calls for teachers to be prophetic educators. That one statement alone is powerfully significant, especially in comparison to
what frequently we find in today’s teaching profession. We are living in an era of standardization and testing, which, for many people, means the creativity and the promise of today’s teachers have been greatly hindered, if not completely stifled. Purpel believes this hindrance to teachers’ power will have deadly results as teachers and students continue, based on the metaphor of the factory, as workers and products. In addition, Purpel thinks some teachers have become quite docile, complacent, and even lacking in intellectual challenges (1989). However, Purpel calls for teachers to be prophetic voices. So why would Purpel, while admitting limitations of some teachers, continue to suggest teachers should be prophetic educators? And how does joy complete Purpel’s theories?

The hope Purpel has for educators to be prophetic is not based on when teachers are ready or if they are feeling like prophets. Instead, Purpel deems the time is now for teachers to face their inadequacies, but still, and foremost, go forward as the cultural leaders they should be. To flounder in the expectations or critique of a society who, for the most part, wants teachers to remain silent, is a fruitless endeavor. In contrast, to bring social justice, teachers must rise to the role of prophetic educators, wherein voices not fully heard before will begin to counteract the ferociousness of those who would like for teachers to stay clear of cultural issues.

I believe as teachers are engaged in the internal awareness of joy, once again, external controls will grow dim. Therein, is the courage, mystery, and imagination of joy mixed with the moral reckonings of prophetic educators who ought to open wide the doors of freedom of thought and being to themselves and to their students.

Liston says that “if we ground our interpretations in Joy, then the worlds we create will be Joyful” (2001, p. 11). Joy, as explained by Liston’s theory, expounds on the
possibilities for students to grasp the world as interdependent and complex. Liston suggests that the very complexity of the human experience is foundational to students being able to see the possibilities of their own creative potential. She goes on to suggest that we cannot continue to narrow our educational experience, but must offer varied and related complexities (Liston, 2001). Then, and only then, will we see creativity and imagination in our thinking. Both Liston and Purpel concur that the answers to our educational problems are not going to be simple but complex. We cannot, therefore, continue to limit our view, but instead, must open to multifaceted landscapes of interrelatedness (Liston, 2001; Purpel, 1989).

Without the light-energy from joy, one must be satisfied with shadowy paths coupled with oppressive viewpoints as compared to seeing “big” (Greene, 1995, p.10) through moral and spiritual enlightenment found in joy. I believe joy is the central space in which teachers can go to find teaching to be much more than passing along academia. Joy, instead, holds educators true to what they know they ought to offer students as they walk as prophetic educators. Joy enlivens our thinking, our roles as educators, and propels our moral awakenings. Joy as a new metaphor for education offers us all a hope of a compassionate, just, and caring world (Liston, 2001). Joy offers us more than we could ever imagine, ever care for, ever have the courage to do, yet all within the realm of what is morally and spiritually right for all children.

If a nation values anything more than freedom,

It will lose its freedom; and the irony

Of it is that if it is comfort or money
That it values more, it will lose that too.

(Somerset Maugham)

Possibilities for Joyful Teaching

In a letter to a new teacher, National Teacher of the Year for 1999, Andy Baumgartner says:

I would be remiss, however, if I did not acknowledge the fact that this is also one of the most difficult times in history to be a teacher in an American classroom. With our school beginning to emphasize competition over social consciousness, mistrust of authority, mistrust of public servants increasing, and the horror of recurring acts of violence in so many of our communities growing, educators are receiving much misdirected blame. We are often being misrepresented as poorly trained and grossly ineffective and our professional credibility is being challenged. The personal motives behind our action as teachers seem often to be in question, as well!! How does one sort through the many and confusing descriptors of life as an educator in order to plot a successful and rewarding career in teaching? You ask. I can only weigh what I have observed about my colleagues: .....the happy, healthy teacher finds joy in the work.......(http://ccsso.org//projects/National Teacher_of_the_Year/Voices_for-the-Future?)

One letter...one teacher...possibly one difference in the life of a new teacher entering the profession. And that is the message of this study...to find out if good teachers hang on long after others have given up, and if they do, why? Are teachers able
to be courageous because they act from what they believe? Do some teachers
mysteriously care deeply for their students, yearn for morals matched with a sense of
spiritually, and imagine that there is always something more? What will I discover in the
lives of those whose lives I will search? The stories of good teachers, the belief in joy as
a new, and divergent metaphor for education, and maybe, teaching as one ought in hopes
of a compassionate, caring, and just society (Liston, 2001)….all reasons for my search
into joyful teaching.

The poet William Blake (as cited in Borysenko, 1993, p. 152) said, “If doors of
perception were cleansed, man [woman] would see everything as it is, infinite.” I suggest
joy is the magnificent filter teachers need to see the infinite potential for viewing places
of relevant and positive transformation for themselves and other people’s children. My
exciting search for joy waits in the stories of a few teachers.

Let the beauty that we see,

Be what we do.

There are hundreds of ways,

To kneel and kiss the ground.

(Rumi)
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Joy opposes systematization…there are no methods that can be employed to produce joy…one cannot follow any number of steps to joy.”

(Liston, 2001. p. 42)

Writing the Literature Review was similar to the research topic itself; instead of finding obvious categories for comparative study, I discovered that joy is not readily described or defined, nor are studies of joyful teaching found easily and without expanded thinking and language. At first, the task of reviewing previously composed literature resembled a multi-colored, thousand piece puzzle at the initial stages of construction, but as I searched the databases, meaningful documents emerged, and I found ways to assimilate important information gained from my review.

After deciding on the databases to be utilized, I formulated a list of possible categories, starting with the participants themselves and then filtering into categories which possibly held inferences for my search into joy-filled teaching. Working through the research, from the most general topic of award winning teachers to the studies engaged in the inner workings of teachers, enabled me to grasp the importance of my own study, including the qualitative design itself, autoethnography². The categories below follow a path. They will take the reader on a voyage into who my participants might be, where and why they were chosen, and finally why my study will add a depth and freshness to already existing research written on how teachers handle themselves in

²Autoethnography is a term used to describe a “kind of writing that inquires into self as a part of a sociocultural context” (Glesne, 1999, p. 181). This term will be further explained in the Methodology section.
the stressful profession in which they find themselves.

Databases Utilized

I used the following databases to articulate the literature found applicable to my study on possibilities for joyful teaching: JSTOR, Academic Press Journals, ERIC. Social Science Abstracts SIRS Researcher, Conference Papers Index, EBSCO Academic Premier, Sociological Abstracts, ProQuest Research Library for dissertations and multiple Databases, and Papers First.

Teachers and Awards

I reviewed literature involving participants similar to my own: National Teachers of the Year. Since I am using the study design of autoethnography², I wanted to determine what methods of research were used by others to study these teachers. Additionally, what were the objectives of the research? Did any of these studies complement, surpass, or negate my work on joy in teaching?

I began with the keywords National Teachers of the Year and found 130 listings on ProQuest, which, for the most part, provided a predictable listing of articles succinctly written about individual National Teachers of the Year, from 1990 to present. One after another National Teachers of the Year, starting with the 2005 National Teacher of the Year, Jason Kamras, and ending with the 1990 award winner, Janis Gabay, were highlighted in local newspapers, NEA Today, USA Today, Christian Science Monitor, and occasionally in magazines such as Instructor. The greatest benefit from these writings to my own work was the insight into whether or not the teachers were still teaching, a little about where they taught, and a very limited amount of personal information. For example, one story titled, “Desire for a Wider Audience, More Money Draws Teachers of
the Year from Classrooms” (Richardson, 1992, p. 6) hinted at the prospect of National Teachers of the Year having experiences in the teaching profession that were not joyful. In other words, some may have taken on new positions because they were not content as teachers.

EBSCO research Databases offered 22 listings which mirrored Proquest. There was one article in *Teacher Magazine* entitled “Shooting Stars” (Malling, 1999), which discussed what National Teachers of the Year did after their year of being in the spotlight. Subsequently, I used this information to help me decide which National Teachers of the Year might be appropriate participants in my study. Of course, having been written six years ago, the information was somewhat dated but did offer brief statements of subsequent work being done by these teachers. About half have remained in the classroom while the other half has gone to department of education jobs, non-profit organizations, or consulting with schools and or corporations. As of the date of the article, from 1990 to 1999, none of the National Teachers of the Year have taken on positions, however, which were not in some way related to the welfare of children.

In ERIC I discovered one lone study completed in 1992 by Lorraine Shanoski and John Hranitz entitled “Learning from America’s Best Teachers: Building a Foundation for Accountability through Excellence”. Simply put, this short study discussed teacher effectiveness clusters identified by Cruickshank. Shanoski and Hranitz surveyed these teachers within the confines of Cruickshank’s seven clusters: character traits, teacher knowledge, what is taught, expectations, strategies used by the teacher, reactions of the teacher, and classroom management techniques. They used a survey called “Level of Teaching Effectiveness” which used a knowledge base of effective teaching. In reference
to my study, the important conclusion they made is how personal involvement in teaching can be identified. Likewise the personal involvement, such as inner workings of teachers, is central to my research into National Teachers of the Year. Shanoski and Hranitz found that these teachers can serve as models, mentors, and leaders, thus supporting my own idea that National Teachers of the Year do, in truth, represent good teachers.

ProQuest dissertations offered three pertinent citations. One was a study from Columbia University’s Teachers College, which appeared, at least in methodology, to be quite similar to my study into the possibilities of joyful teaching. The title of the above work is “Confirming Testimonies: Conversations with Three Women Educators” (Dickson, 1999). Using life history research as the methodology, this study “addresses ethical issues and dilemmas which arise from life history” (Dickson, 1999, p. 1). Assuredly, my exploration into the lived experiences of National Teachers of the Year did the same. Dickson used letters from former students, articles written by and about her participants, filmstrips made about their classrooms, texts that informed their own learning or teaching, interviews, and field notes compiled at their work sites.

The questions Dickson posed in her research added clarity to what her study included and proved to be helpful for me as I compared mine to hers. Dickson is quoted as saying that “researching and writing narratives of teachers’ lives honors our histories and provides opportunities for reflection on our philosophies and practice” (Dickson, 1999, p. 1). Furthermore, she says she asked initial questions, such as what makes a great teacher, but eventually concluded with questions which grew closer to the essence of my own study of teachers. Dickson’s questions were ones such as “what does it mean to look more deeply into learning, schooling, and teaching?” (Dickson, 1999, p.1) Likewise, I
joined my participants as we examined more closely what it means to teach, especially against the societal and political adversaries of today’s teachers.

Also, knowing that Maxine Greene and Bill Ayers, who are important to my theoretical framework, have taught and/or studied at Teachers College where Dickson did her doctoral work made me wonder if Dickson was influenced herself by their theories, which may have played a part in the research questions she used, thus giving focus to her study and offering similarities to my work. Both Greene and Ayers have written extensively and passionately about the crucial roles teachers play in schools and thus in society (Ayers, 1995, 2004; Greene, 1973, 1978, 1995, 1997, 2001). Dickson and I wrote about the lives three teachers; both of us attempted to clarify the picture of the teaching profession as much bigger and vastly more meaningful than test scores or data, numbered and coded, could ever portray.

Aside from the above findings, there were no examples of studies completed with National Teachers of the Year. I did not find another major research project, article, or even small study completed on these nationally recognized group of teachers. However, while searching National Teachers of the Year, additional teacher awards emerged, thus offering studies completed on teachers who had achieved accolades for excellence in teaching. The Miliken Educator Award, Disney Teacher Award, and National Board Certified Teachers could be used as keywords for further review. Even though I selected National Teachers of the Year as my participants, I realized other researchers

³National Board Certified Teachers may be viewed as award winners. However, National Board certification is a process open to any teacher who has a baccalaureate degree and three years of teaching. Nevertheless NBCT are teachers who have engaged in a complex process of self-examination and are then assessed for certification.
chose to engage teachers who hold different forms of recognition, thus encouraging me to examine their work.

Disney American Teacher Award winners were not found in dissertations, but in one journal article that cited an online survey in which the participants from the last 15 years took part. The results listed two main components that would improve education: greater emphasis on experience-based learning and more parental involvement. Seventy-seven newspaper articles highlighted the winners in a myriad of stories and locations. In LexisNexis Academic Database, there were twenty references made to Disney Teacher Awards, but they were only news briefs about the teachers who won the awards.

The Miliken Award is awarded by the Miliken Family Foundation and presented to principals, teachers, and educators. The references to this award were quite similar to the ones of the Disney American Teacher Award. There were newspaper articles, such as one in Epoch Times which told the story of two Chicago winners. These stories were similar to the reports on the Disney Award and National Teachers of the Year winners as educators who have made a positive difference in their schools. In the LexisNexis Database, there were no entries found for Miliken Award winners. Furthermore, there were no journal articles or dissertations which employed Miliken Award winners as participants.

Under the keywords National Board Certified Teachers there was a total of 54 listings in Proquest (Basic Search), 2 in EBSCO, and 13 in LexisNexis. All of these referred to either the process itself, the impact of the process, or generalized reflections on the process. The greatest gain from reviewing these articles was learning about the
rigors of the application and the amount of information written on National Board
Certified Teachers in comparison to National Teachers of the Year or other award
winners. Consequently, one might conclude the large number of National Board Certified
Teachers (47,510), as compared to the limited number of National Teachers of the Year
(53), increases the availability of National Board Certified Teachers as participants in
studies. The importance of incorporating National Teachers of the Year into my study
became even more valuable to me as a researcher because of the limited number of
teachers gaining such a national recognition.

Additionally, I searched under the Dissertations and Theses of ProQuest for
research conducted using National Board Certified Teachers. I found 70 listings, most of
which dealt with the success or failure of the process itself. However, there was one study
completed at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro which held implications for
my own research. This particular study, *Letting Their Lives Speak: A Case Study of Five
Accomplished Teachers Who Choose to Teach in a Hard-To-Staff Middle School* (Adams,
2005), investigated five teachers in relation to “knowledge, skill, dispositions, and
experiences” (Adams, 2005, p. 1). Of the six themes emerging from the study, one was
seeing “the experience of learning to teach diverse learners as a journey of transformation
including the formation of a circle of critical friends and a call to teach” (Adams, p. 1).
Since teacher reflection and the inner workings of teachers are crucial to my study, I was
encouraged to discover other studies which uncovered themes such as “a journey of
transformation…including a call to teach” (Adams, p. 1). Moreover, the importance of
this study being done at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro holds additional
implications for my study and such implications are covered in the remainder of this Literature Review.

*Teachers and Self-Reflection*

Moving from the participants themselves, I decided to search for ways in which teachers might offer insight into the deep inner workings of their lived experiences. What approaches might National Teachers of the Year use to reflect on their practices? I knew from filling out the teacher of the year application that applicants looked closely at themselves, but what else might they have done to consider their own profession? I was not looking for why they were considered good teachers. I was not seeking effective teaching strategies or outstanding classroom practices, even though similar attributes most likely would be apparent in my participants. Instead, I was looking for the possibilities of joy and what stirs the persistence of teachers.

I sensed that Dickson (1999) suspected teachers had ways of sustaining themselves since she asked her participants to look more deeply into their profession. From my own experience, I recognized that the teacher of the year application requires a high level of introspection. What does introspection translate into? Self-reflection. Therefore, I decided to look for scholarly work done on the subject of teacher self-reflection.

Teacher self-reflection is a present day educational buzz word as witnessed by the literature on teacher reflection. Participants in my study have used reflective practices to

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4 Teacher reflection is described as a way to foster the teaching profession by examining the personhood and practice of oneself as the practitioner (Brookfield, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Howard, 2003; Larrivee, 2000; Schmidt, P. 1997).
uncover their teaching philosophy and practice, because, at the very least, local and National Teachers of the Year have to reframe their feelings, practices, pedagogies, and philosophies as part of the teacher of the year application process. Once again, utilizing the list of databases recorded above, a total of 447 references were examined under the keywords teacher reflection. This search did not reveal what teachers found as they reflected, which would be a goal for the participants in my study, but rather, these documents described either the importance of reflective practice as a tool for teacher improvement or the methods used to describe how teachers reflect. As a result, I was able to identify “methods for capturing teacher reflections” (Christensen, Wilson, Anders, & Dennis, 2001, p. 2) to be used in my research into joyful teaching, such as observation, taping, interviewing, and questioning, but I was not able to find literature which addressed what teachers discovered about themselves.

**Teachers and Wholeness**

Parker Palmer, in his book *A Hidden Wholeness* (2004), says that “the soul wants to tell us the truth about ourselves, our worlds, and the relation between the two, whether the truth is easy or hard to hear” (Palmer, 2004, p. 33). The keywords teachers/wholeness or teachers as whole people were researched because I thought teachers who wanted to hear “the soul speak” (Palmer, p. 3), might indicate personal inner workings. However, there were zero results found in most of the databases used for the search. Out of 157 searched in Proquest Dissertations, only three dissertations gave credence to studies of the inner workings of teachers. One study focused on identifying key characteristics of teachers. Both quantitative and qualitative practices were used (Anderson, 2003, p. 1).
The second study, based on the experiences of two beginning teachers, used narrative inquiry as the method of research (Craig, 1999, p. 1). The final study was an interpretative study into the ideas of Thomas Merton on education (Del Prete, 1987, p. 1). This search proved to be informative only because the literature review showed that the gap in research on the wholeness of teachers is huge, thus encouraging my study to be not only meaningful but imperative.

Since teacher wholeness is related to my understanding of joyful teaching, I decided to search a little closer and find out if joy as a category and a possible component of wholeness, might hold additional studies into joy and teaching. I found dissertations which addressed the subject of the inner workings of teachers, especially from the doctoral students who had David Purpel, Professor at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, as their advisor. Of course, this is quite understandable since Purpel served on Liston’s dissertation committee and wrote the forward in her book, *Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence* (2001). Purpel worked with students whose research came closest to mine, so I examined their research along with others related to teachers and joy.

*Teachers and Joy*

In the ProQuest Dissertation Database, I found 278 dissertations and abstracts listed under teachers and joy. Among those were eight studies which related in some manner to my search for the possibilities of joyful teaching. However, none of the studies were based on the same theoretical framework (Liston, 2001) as mine nor did they include work in the area of joyful teaching as such. The search for joy in teaching was made through nuances of language used to describe how teachers might approach their profession.
One such study, prepared by a student of David Purpel, *Giving Primacy to the Sacred: Some Implications for Teaching* engaged a few ideas from my theoretical prospective. Postlethwaite included in his personal pedagogy of teaching the sacred. In fact, he says his work came full circle back to where it began as a spiritual journey, and he concluded that as a teacher he “plays a pivotal role in the lives of students as mentor, healer, and gardener.” He said, in the end, that “spiritual teaching is about goodness and joy” (Postlethwaite, 2003, p. iii).

I continued to look for additional dissertations chaired by Purpel in hopes of discovering work which might be related to mine. There were 40 dissertations chaired by Purpel and out of those, there were four more, in addition to Postlethwaite’s dissertation, which indicated a resemblance to key issues in my research. Lalor suggested teachers are “critical of current practices in education and believe education should emphasize personal growth and individualism” (Lalor, 1989, p. 1). McLaurin writes about hope and how one, after exhausting the current ideas of what works in schools, needs to ask how “wisdom through transcendent experience manifested in compassionate classroom praxis” might fill the void in a teacher’s pedagogy (McLaurin, 1996). Anderson depicts educating for human dignity and love as a practice which is grounded in education based on spirituality where all are accepted as valuable (Anderson, 1999). Lastly, McLaughlin begins her abstract by saying her work is an outward expression of her inner life (1992, p. 1). She states that in chapter four of her dissertation, she discusses the prophetic tradition and how it works toward consciousness that includes justice and compassion (McLaughlin, 1992).
All of the above dissertations amplified my need to look deeply into the lives of teachers and come away with research aligning closely with what makes teachers who they are. As McLaurin suggested, researchers must move beyond the effectiveness of selected teaching strategies and methods which may or may not work in schools (McLaurin, 1996). In addition to what is considered best teaching practices, researchers must come to know the teachers themselves, if they are to truly understand what will make for better schools. Each of the studies hinted at the possibilities of joy…in hope, in transformation, in spirituality. However, still none worked within and around the theory of joy espoused by Liston (2001).

The Research Gap

Returning to my research questions, I continued to ask what encourages teachers to persevere amidst difficult times. There are many books written about the craft of teaching and some even engage the reader in testimonies concerning the persistence of teachers. In contrast, others criticize the profession and the schools they represent. Examples such as Nieto’s *What Keeps Teachers Going?* (2003), McCourt’s *Teacher Man* (2005), Intrator’s *Stories of The Courage to Teach* (2003), Gatto’s *Dumbing Us Down* (2005), and Kidder’s *Among Schoolchildren* (1989), offer various insights, both positive and negative, into the lives of teachers. While reading these books, mixed with the additional articles and dissertations cited in my study, I discovered that joy may be referred to, but none of the writings fully develops joy as a theory and a possibility for internal light shedding energy, which in turn might sustain the work and personhood of teachers, thus enlarging the possibility for a new metaphor of joy in our schools (Liston, 2001).
The research gap seemed so large that at times I felt doomed in my efforts to find previously written literature related to my study yet at the same time I felt invigorated to continue my search into joyful teaching. The more I looked, the greater the void, and the more committed I became to my search for joy. In the end, I believe my explorations with three National Teachers of the Year offered an important study into what affirms and sustains joy in the lives of teachers. “Indeed, once we embark on the mission to capture Joy, we doom ourselves to failure. Instead, what is required is only the smallest movement; the turning of attention in the direction of Joy,” says Liston (2001, p. 20). I propose my study did, in fact, turn attention in the direction of joy.
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Story Water

A story is like water
That you heat for your bath.
It takes messages between the fire
And your skin. It lets them meet,
And it cleans you!

Very few can sit down
In the middle of the fire itself
Like a salamander or Abraham.

We need intermediaries.
A feeling of fullness comes,
But usually it takes some bread
To bring it.

Beauty surrounds us,
But usually we need to be walking
In a garden to know it.

The body itself is a screen
To shield and partially reveal
The light that’s blazing
Inside your presence.

Water, stories, the body,
All the things we do, are mediums,
That hide and show what’s hidden.

Study them,

And enjoy this being washed

With a secret we sometimes know,

And then not.

(Rumi)

*Telling the Tales*

The methodology I used for my study included the format of autoethnography, based on Mary Catherine Bateson’s book, *Composing a Life* (1989). In Bateson’s book, she captures the lives of three successful women she calls friends. While comparing and contrasting them to each other and then to herself, she presents a synthesis of what she experiences as a participant observer. She pulls themes from interviews, writings, and facts, while she weaves them through her own interpretations and reflections. Subsequently, these themes became the chapters of her book. *Composing a Life* is a powerful rendition of the lives of four women, and Bateson (1989) suggests possible results from reading her book:

Each reading provokes a dialogue of comparison and recognition, a process of memory and articulation that makes one’s own experience available as a lens of empathy. We gain even more from comparing notes and trying to understand the choices of our friends. When one has matured surrounded by implicit disparagement, the undiscovered self is an unexpected resource. Self-knowledge is empowering. (p. 5)
Likewise, I set up the results of my study into chapters based on themes and dilemmas which emerged from the lives of the participants. Consequently, in keeping with Bateson’s layout, I included the actual analysis within the data itself thus enabling me to write fluidly and meaningfully while staying aligned with valid qualitative research procedures.

Three National Teachers of the Year, framed in an educational era of excessive accountability offered spaces for professional sustainability. My own search for an understanding of joy flowed in and out of their stories, as I sought to find answers for myself and maybe even for my colleagues. The stories which were captured in the data collections, coupled with the artifacts gathered, gave substance to the chapters of my autoethnography.

*Study Design: Autoethnography*

Judith Meloy, in her book entitled *Writing the Qualitative Dissertation* (2002), argues that “the end is the beginning” because the process itself inspires the direction and the understanding of the dissertational work. She continues by suggesting that “qualitative researchers are conscious, interactive sense-makers” (Meloy, 2002, p. 13). Autoethnography is described by Glesne as a “kind of writing that inquires into the self as part of a sociocultural context” (Glesne, 1999, p. 181). What made my study autoethnographic was the way in which I recounted my own search for joy mixed with the life experiences of three National Teachers of the Year, all while offering meaning in relation to joy in education.

In today’s world of educational standardization, we need ways of telling and listening to stories which offer contextual details and fresh information coming from
lived experiences expressed by actions, written artifacts, dialoguing, and recounted memories (Meloy, 2002). In many ways, autoethnography seemed to be a place of freedom from the predictable, the tested, and the certain. Ellis says that autoethnography is “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). As my autoethnography was written, the definition by Ellis proved to be true.

My study became a journey through ordinary days. Marathon runner Ann Kiemel, in her book, *I’m Running to Win* (1981), says that “life is not made up of big moments….but ordinary days, when there is no one to pat you on the back or cheer you, or notice.” (p. 156). Similarly, the job of the researcher in qualitative research is to notice ordinary days, and, indeed, it is this observation that makes all the difference. Researchers must pay attention to the emphasis given to certain experiences over others, making sure that the results are presented within the context of the lived experiences and within appropriate priority of importance (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003). Autoethnography provided an excellent research process which captured the ordinary days of three incredible teachers, while revealing the significance of some occasions over others. Indeed, writing in the format of autoethnography demonstrated how the details of our lives amount to great measures after all.

Meloy states that the writings she included in her second edition of *Writing the Qualitative Dissertation* (2002) convinced her that qualitative researchers must be good writers and, also, enjoy the process. Writing stories based on lived experiences was the creative and passionate part of my research. Just as a violin can be the instrument of choice by music majors, writing makes up the instrument of my intellect and study. The
playing of words on a page afforded me the joy of becoming one with my instrument…the written word. Autoethnography was a natural outlet for me, because I was able to express my innermost understandings within the life stories of others.

Behar, noted professor and ethnographer, discusses what is being witnessed in the field of anthropological writing. She says there is a space she describes as the “borderland” (Behar, 1996, p. 174). This so-called borderland is “between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (Behar, 1996, p. 174). I propose that the results of my study were written within the borderland, and in this very place, the lives of three women were exposed for their sustainability and their struggles, all in an effort to find joy.

Madeline L’Engle, Newberry Award winner, says that “when one is pigeon-holed and labeled, we are un-named” (L’Engle, 1980, p.113). Qualitative research offers the researcher and participants a way to counteract labeling. Since an autoethnographer is able to tell contextual stories, one is able to understand research results in a more comprehensive and complete manner. Interestingly enough, when teachers and administrators at our school examine test data, they also ask for explanations of why the results go up and down. They want to know the teacher stories of why. They want to know what is going on in the lives of the teachers and students; they do not want to totally rely on quantitative results.

In a December issue of *Educational Researcher*, Brown, concludes that “school ethnography matters, if not for any other reason than to shed light on the complex web that frames the everyday work of people in schools” (Brown, 2005, p. 33). Actually, I say what Brown reports is an understatement. If we do not understand the everyday work of
people in schools, what do we, as researchers, really understand? I believe the authenticity of good teachers and their students has too long been quieted or ignored; qualitative research, such as autoethnography, can help fill this enormous void.

Participants: Three National Teachers of the Year

For quite a number of years I grappled with how to improve the teaching profession. First I wanted to somehow fix teachers who appeared ineffective at best and downright harmful to children at the worst. I quickly realized identifying poor teachers would be an impossible research tactic and quite unproductive in the end. After all, castigating teachers is not the point, but helping teachers improve their practice is. Finally I decided I would locate excellent examples of the teaching profession and examine their lives in hopes of finding out not only why they were successful but also why they continued to be work toward positive change in the lives of their students.

My choice of National Teachers of the Year as participants began in an effort to gather teachers who were viewed as highly effective teachers and had experienced an application process which entailed a serious amount of self-reflection. Since I have taken part in the Teacher of the Year process, selecting this group as participants seemed to be natural for me. However, asking National Teachers of the Year to participate in my study was far from an adamant allegiance to the idea that Teachers of the Year are the best. In fact, many teachers never gain public accolades, but are deemed as excellent, and most probably the best, by parents, peers, and students.

The National Teacher of the Year website furnishes a list of all winners since 1952. The list includes email addresses, locations, and the name of the director of the national program. Also, as part of this site, is a section in which National Teachers of the
Year celebrated 50 years of the national award by writing letters to teachers who are either new or considering leaving the profession. Through reading these letters and reviewing the web page for National Teachers of the Year, I found some National Teachers of the Year whose outlook seems predisposed toward my understanding of joy. Also, as I conducted Google searches, read newspaper articles, and web pages, I narrowed the research pool of potential participants to six National Teachers of the Year.

Granted, I acknowledge some personal bias here, but since the point is to further my exploration of joy in teaching, then locating National Teachers of the Year who are most likely to elucidate what I understand to be joy was a logical step in the process. Generating a random list of potential participants, selecting participants based on geographic location or personal demographics such as gender or race did not seem to fall in line with the purpose of my research. I decided my study would be best served by consciously selecting participants whose work is interesting and relevant to my research questions.

Some of the National Teachers of the Year have also been asking themselves questions such as: What keeps teachers going? What can I say to encourage and support teachers coming to or staying in the profession? I believe my research will benefit from listening to National Teachers of the Year who are asking themselves and others these kinds of questions. Since some of these questions revolve around issues which can drive one out of the classroom, I decided the participants did not have to still be teaching. In fact, many national Teachers of the Year moved on to new positions but they are still in work which involves students and their learning.
Therefore, I narrowed the list to the following as potential participants in my study.

1. Andy Baumgartner – Kindergarten, A. Brian Merry Elementary School, Augusta, Georgia
2. Janis T. Gabay – English, Junipero Serra High School, San Diego, California
3. Sandra L. McBrayer – Self Contained Classroom, Homeless Outreach School, San Diego, California
5. Michele Forman – Social Studies, Middlebury Union High School, Middlebury, Vermont
6. Kathy Mellor – English as a Second Language, Davisville Middle School; North Kingstown, Rhode Island.

From the above list, I selected: Ms. Janis Gabay, Ms. Sandra McBrayer, and Dr. Betsy Rogers. The selection was based on information I read about them in newspaper articles, letters written by them, my interest in their teaching situations, and brief biographical information. Biographical information is detailed in the introduction to my research findings.

As a state semifinalist, I experienced a somewhat close look at what teachers go through to be awarded National Teacher of the Year. Therefore, the context of my own experiences offered important and helpful understandings into the rigors of the competition. The Teacher of the Year application is a meaningful indicator of teacher philosophy, self-reflection, and pedagogy. Also, the teachers are not only selected by
their peers, they are judged by highly qualified groups of teachers, administrators, and government officials. Their lives as teachers are thoroughly examined through videos, interviews, applications, references, and news print.

I believe my state award encouraged a better sense of communication between the participants and me. I was comfortable talking with them, and they reciprocated with an openness and willingness to dialogue. I had very meaningful rapport with all three participants, and even though we shared only two days together, those days were brimming with communication and interaction. I came away from each visit with a multitude of significant data and a meaningful understanding of the lives lived by each participant.

Research Procedures

The Way It Is

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among

Things that change. But it doesn’t change.

People wonder about what you are pursuing.

You have to explain about the thread.

But it is hard for others to see.

While you hold it you can’t get lost.

Tragedies happen; people get hurt

Or die; and you suffer and get old.

Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding.

You don’t ever let go of the thread.

(William Stafford as cited in Teaching with Fire, 2003)
After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board to do the research and from Glynn County to take days to travel to my participants, I contacted the participants by email with an attachment of my resume and cover letter. Based on the responses, I set up times and locations to visit the participants during the month of June, 2006. I visited Betsy Rogers, June 1-2, 2006, and I visited Jan Gabay and Sandra McBrayer June 12-15, 2006. Dr. Rogers lives in Birmingham, Alabama. Ms. Gabay and Ms. McBrayer live in San Diego, California.

I traveled to the workplaces of the participants, accompanying them as they moved through their days. During that time, I shadowed the participants, meaning I did not just observe them, but put myself into their place and attempted to experience their days as they did. I had a formal interview on the first day and another one near the end of my visits. Each lasted about an hour. I had an informal de-briefing with each participant at the end of each day. The interviews were audio taped for later transcribing. Throughout the observations and interviews, I took field notes. At night I read through the notes to see if, on the following day, I might want to talk to the participant about a particular observed incident or conversation. Additionally, I gathered artifacts, such as publications, letters, and newspaper articles.

The following questions were sent to the participants ahead of my visit, and when we met in the two formal interviews, we discussed their answers. These are the questions:

Tell me your story…how did you become yourself? Paint a verbal picture of your ordinary teaching days as opposed to those which seem especially difficult. If I say the words “inner work” to you, what meaning, if any, do they hold for you? If I tell you that good teachers are like barrier islands, what metaphor would you choose to describe good
teachers and why? If teachers carry who they are into classrooms (Ayers, 2001; Palmer, 1998), then what do you carry?

After returning from my visits, I organized, analyzed, and interpreted the data. Throughout this research process, I answered the questions asked of the participants, gathered personal artifacts, continued to journal, and became both reflective and reflexive as I made meaning from my own search through the gathered data and interrelated findings.

Analyzing, Organizing, and Interpreting the Data

The information from the audio tapings, interviews, newspaper articles, videos, lesson plans, letters to teachers, and Teacher of the Year applications were transcribed if necessary, organized, and sorted by commonalities and themes as compared to the group. The gathering of data was not triangulated as such, but instead was crystallized, so parts reflected wholes and vice versa (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 517). Just as one turns a crystal over and around, while reflecting light from multitudes of sides, qualitative research promotes inward, outward, forward, and backward reflections of the research participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I considered what I saw and what I read, I continually reflected on my practice as a teacher and, at the same time, compared and contrasted their stories with each other’s and with my own, all in an effort to make meaning.

I did not use software to aid in organizing the data. Instead, the human aspect of my autoethnography was carried throughout the research, which means I organized gathered data by way of my own personal indicators, tables, and charts/folders. I limited the number of my participants and so I was able to sort the data into understandable and
meaningful results. I allowed themes and dilemmas to emerge which presented the source of my findings.

Working my way throughout the collected information was crucial to my engagement with each participant. The more I poured over the participant stories, the better I was able to find relationships to joy. In some ways, one might say using software would have stolen some of the important humanness from my research. I was the conduit for my findings, and, therefore, I had to internalize the stories told to me by the study participants.

When all the data was gathered and organized according to each individual teacher’s information, I was able to see how my study needed to be set up. As the themes and commonalities surfaced, I was able to decide if the stories were to be told one teacher at a time or as related stories by themes. I decided the stories would be told according to themes in relation to joy, courage, compassion, caring, mystery, and morality, thus relating back to my theoretical framework. This was one of the exciting and creative parts of using the format of autoethnography as my study design. The patterns were not set beforehand; they were waiting in the tales of those who told them to me and they showed themselves in the data.

Staying focused on my research questions, I told my story amidst the stories of my participants. I looked for joy amidst the edges and rhythms of lives lived in and out of classrooms. The observations and conversations etched the story of my search and ultimately gave me answers to whether or not I found joy in the lives of three National Teachers of the Year. As I looked outward to the lives I explored, I looked inward to my personal findings, then outward again to continue in a circle of learning. Finally I reached
significant conclusions which offered ways of sustainability and affirmation for the teaching profession.

Challenges of the Study

Even though I offered valuable findings, my study into joyful teaching included challenges. Limiting the number of participants to three and limiting the time spent to two days might be seen by some as not having a large enough number of participants or having an adequate amount of time for qualitative research. However, I did not see these challenges as significant limitations. Actually the time proved to be sufficient; I was able to quickly engage in thought provoking conversations and connections. The participants were able to be focused when we talked and were able to take out just enough time from their extremely busy schedules to interact with me. The limited time actually helped us stay focused on the study long enough to warrant sufficient findings. In the end, I was pleased with the closeness I felt to the participants and the depth of knowing we shared.
CHAPTER 5: INTRODUCTIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

Three National Teachers of the Year: Betsy Rogers, Sandra McBrayer, and Janis Gabay

Finding

Where was I going?
I knew the way.
But straight paths
led into circles of life.

So, there,
mixed with the days of others,
I found myself.

(Shirah, 2006)

In her book, Composing a Life (1989), Mary Catherine Bateson discussed how many women proceed through their lives, ever improvising as they go. Planned paths seem to wind into avenues of newness and some find themselves in places in which they never intended nor dreamed. Such seemed to be the lives of the National Teachers of the Year in this study. They were surprised by what life brought their way, surprised by their professional honors, and surprised to be where they were. Not that they were not confident. Quite to the contrary! However, they seemed focused on their work and waves of change took them by surprise. All three women were intriguing with impressive credentials backed by lives which never seemed to dull. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, they forged forward while making some of our most forgotten children better able to make it in an often strange and threatening world.

In keeping with an autoethnographical genre (Behar, 1996), the data from my study was analyzed through a variety of literary formats: dialogues, reflections, descriptions, and personal interludes. An interlude is defined as something that takes up time between two events, such as music between acts in a play (Neufeldt, 1995, p.310).
Interludes were written throughout the descriptions, scenarios, and conversations. They became spaces for respite as I searched deeply for joy within my own research. Interludes became my most important place of personal inquiry, and reflection. They held the threads of my journey as it flowed in and out of the dilemmas faced by each National Teacher of the Year.

The following are brief professional descriptions of each participant. They are introduced in order of the year each became National Teacher of the Year, the one closest to present being first. However, throughout the study, the names vary in order, enabling the author and audience to flow within context, therefore, enhancing meaning. In addition, the names of the participants will be centered in the text, and the interludes will be italicized, thus promoting organization and ease of understanding.

Dr. Betsy Rogers
2003 National Teacher of the Year

Being named the National Teacher of the Year in 2003, Betsy Rogers became America’s 53rd educator to receive this highly respected distinction. Betsy was born in 1952 in Birmingham, Alabama where she grew up and taught school for twenty-two years. Her undergraduate and graduate degrees were accomplished at Samford University. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in 1974, her Masters in 1998, and her Educational Specialist degree in 2000. All three were in the field of Elementary Education. Then in 2002, she was awarded her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, once again from Samford University. During her years in graduate school she was also able to attain National Board Certification.

Betsy started her teaching career in 1974 at Hewitt Elementary School in Jefferson County but by 1976, she decided to stay home raising her two sons, Alan and
Returning to her practice in 1982, Betsy taught in an early learning program at First Baptist Church and returned to public schools in 1984 at Leeds Middle School as a seventh and eight grade math teacher. In 1985 she joined the staff at Leeds Elementary School where she taught first and second grades.

While teaching at Leeds Elementary, she implemented the concept of looping which consists of the teacher moving from one grade to the next grade while keeping the same students. For example, Betsy taught the same students, moving with them from first to second grade. Parents have the option to ask that their students not loop but most of Betsy’s students remained with her. Betsy found this setup to be especially effective with young children and eventually looping became the focus of her doctoral studies.

Before becoming the National Teacher of the Year, Betsy served as Alabama State Teacher of the Year and Federal Programs Coordinator for Jefferson County Schools. Presently Betsy Rogers is a School Improvement Specialist at Brighton Elementary School in Jefferson County.

Betsy’s work speaks well of her dedication to the teaching profession and her constant striving for professional growth. She wrote winning grants, acted as a teaching ambassador to Australia and New Zealand, and presented at reading conferences such as the ones held by the Alabama Reading Association. Additionally she was a grade level unit leader, SACS team member, and a presenter at National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in Washington, D.C. Betsy’s interaction with peers, of which she is especially proud, is indicative of her community involvement and her continued passion for giving back to a community which gave so much to her.
Ms. Sandra McBrayer  
*1994 National Teacher of the Year*

“I never meant to be a teacher. It wasn’t planned,” states Sandra McBrayer in a *Better Homes and Gardens* article (Palar, 1994, p. 48). Obviously personal intentions were put aside and Sandra, called Sandy by most who know her, found herself excelling to the point of becoming the National Teacher of the Year in 1994. Graduating with a B.A. and M.A. from San Diego State University, she founded and developed the first successful school for homeless and unattended youth in the United States, where she served from 1988 until 1996. Presently she is the Chief Executive Officer of The Children’s Initiative in San Diego where she remains “an internationally known advocate for children” (www.thechildrensinitiative.org/sandybio.htm).

Not only was Sandy a National Teacher of the Year, but she is the recipient of many other awards such as Distinguished Alumna of the Year of the San Diego State University College of Education, Outstanding Service Recognition Award from the California State Senate and Assembly, Headliner of the Year from the San Diego Press Club, Women of Vision in Education from the League of Women Voters, Exceptional Service Award for the California State PTA, and Humanitarian award of Youth Advocacy Association and Living Legacy Award from the International Women’s Center. Additionally, Sandy is an adjunct professor in the College of Education at San Diego State University where she teaches classes on multi-cultural education.

Sandy’s life seems as large as her biographical information. Although she left the classroom in 1996 to head a struggling Children’s Initiative, her life remains intertwined with students and those who have power over them. While leading the non-profit organization of The Children’s Initiative to vast influence and success, she still remains
focused on the needs of children. “That is just wrong” is a response Sandy often uses to describe what she sees in San Diego and further into the state of California. She fights for after-school programs and helps establish mentoring programs along with a myriad of social services, all geared to better the life of children. She seems to be the ultimate child advocate.

Ms. Janis Gabay  
*1990 National Teacher of the Year*

Born in 1952 in Honolulu, Hawaii, Jan Gabay wanted to be a tap dancer, a famous pianist, or at the very least the star trooper of her Brownie troop. Playing teacher with her younger sister became prophetic for Jan and eventually she gave into what became her lifetime vocation, teaching. Jan graduated with a BA and MA from San Diego State University. She was teaching at Sierra High School in San Diego when she became the National Teacher of the Year. Presently, she is an AP English teacher at The Preuss School which is located on the campus of the University of California in San Diego. Students must meet a certain criteria to be able to attend The Preuss School; they must be from low-income households, have no parent who holds a college degree and show potential to succeed academically.

Jan is a National Board Certified Teacher who is recognized by her peers for her innovative and creative instruction. As National Teacher of the Year, she spoke of her outlook on education which still seems to stand within her teaching. Jan said, “Education affects me as a whole person and that wholeness includes the spiritual and social”(
[http://www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)).

This is Jan’s thirty-third year in the classroom as an English teacher, and she is an outstanding example of what it means to be a teacher leader. Along with teaching
responsibilities, Jan works as the staff development coordinator for her school. Each week she delivers new teaching strategies to the teachers at The Preuss School. *The Lesson Study*, a process through which teachers examine their instruction, is a major part of the staff development in which Jan provides training (http://www.schoolrenewal.org/feature/lesson-study/ls-people.html).

Being at Jan’s school afforded me a close up view of how highly respected she is by both students and staff. The principal, teachers, and students flowed in and out of her classroom in search of advice, moments of conversation or information. Almost as an excuse for her popularity, Jan told me that she was the elder in the building and felt an obligation to help younger teachers find their way through the newness of the teaching profession. I decided her place of admiration had little to do with how long she had been a teacher, but was a direct result of her incredible teaching expertise and her warm acceptance of others.

*First Impressions*

*Betsy*

The Atlanta airport, though clearly laid out and labeled succinctly, made for a frustrating event when my flight was delayed. Nevertheless, after a two hour delay, I arrived in Birmingham, Alabama at about 7:30 pm and stood in the driveway of Betsy Rogers, 2003 National Teacher of the Year. I was excited to meet her and ready to begin my two day visit. Graciously, Betsy extended an invitation to stay at her home, and I had taken her up on her offer.

Walking from the carport, Betsy Rogers greeted me with a kind smile. As we entered the house, she led me to the guest room where I would be staying. There was a
large four posted bed centered in a long room flanked by a bathroom and a bay window covered with white wooden shutters. Feeling the weariness of the day’s travels, I began to look forward to the time when I would, in fact, crawl into the bed and snuggle underneath the cotton blanket mixed with red and white stripped sheets. However, Betsy had a barbecue dinner waiting along with her own eagerness to begin our conversations, and I was very anxious to begin getting to know her.

While gathering ourselves into the kitchen, I noticed Betsy’s mother, with whom she lived, and we introduced ourselves. Betsy’s dad died about seven months prior to my visit and both women took his death very hard. Often Betsy reminded me that she took after her father, and the more I learned about Betsy and her dad, the more I could see the resemblance. Judging from what I saw, Betsy inherited his ability to reach out to people she did not know well and make them feel comfortable. Also, her energy level seemed touched with what she described as her dad’s endurance.

Betsy’s mom, Eleanor, turned eighty-seven while I was there. Each morning Eleanor would come to the door of the guestroom and ask me if I was ready for breakfast. Thus I started each day with Eleanor who offered insights into why Betsy lives her life as she does. Eleanor was very proud of Betsy’s accomplishments and gladly shared stories about a daughter she loves and appreciates.

While sitting at the breakfast table one morning, Eleanor leaned forward, whispered as though to tell me a secret, and began to talk quietly about the sadness she thinks Betsy carries within. It seemed about eight years ago, Betsy’s husband, at the age of forty-six, the man Betsy herself later described as the love of her life, dropped dead. As Eleanor warned of Betsy’s loss, I began to know a little of the courage which drove
Betsy, a courage very far apart from the excitement and even headiness of being National Teacher of the Year. I knew she seemed extremely focused and tireless in her efforts, but I sensed there was a reason for such an energetic drive. At that moment, with the help of her mother’s softly spoken words, I began to see Betsy as a human being held together by a cause to change a world…a world that had offered her personal experiences labeled by some as the best and the worst. Personal acclaim and individual sorrow mixed into the personhood of Betsy Rogers…I decided each held insight into the woman I was just beginning to know.

Jan

Jan stood outside of The Preuss School. Immediately I recognized her from the pictures I had seen on the internet of her teaching *The Lesson Study*. She saved me a spot in the crowded school parking lot. We shook hands, exchanged smiles, and walked toward the office of the school. As in my own school, visitors have to check in and are given a badge of identification. She introduced me to those around us as we made our way to her classroom.

Upon entering Jan’s classroom, I was impressed with the richness of student work mounted on her walls. I felt hugged by the creativity and personhood of her students. I could sense the essence of Jan’s desire to fill her students with passion for reading and writing. We sat down at a table, and I looked up to see a poem written by a student, Lori Nguyen:
What happens to a dream deferred?

Will it fall on dirty mud?
Like yellow autumn leaves?
Will it run down your cheeks
Like salty drops of tears?
Does it taste like sour milk
Or maybe even rotten bread?
Does it feel like a toothache,
Or is it like broken bones?
Will it fade away,
like forgotten
memories
or will it stay like a
dark ink stain?

The books, the stacks of papers, the boards full of procedures, the quotes, the energy...all enfolded in the world of Jan Gabay. Her classroom provided inspiration to learn, but her little office off to the side of her class made for a nice place for us to talk. The file cabinets and table with chairs pushed to the side next to the wall provided an almost hidden away place to share nuances of one’s life. After all, these details were the very fabric of my inquiry, and I wanted desperately to be able to converse easily with Jan. I believe this tiny space, found amidst a wonderful school, provided a place for Jan to tell me how she became herself.
So there we first began to talk, and Jan commenced to tell me about herself and her work. I asked her questions about the National Teacher of the Year competition and the experience she had traveling and speaking about teaching. Jan is Hawaiian yet mixed with Spanish, Filipino, and French heritage. She explained to me how her outward appearance became a sword for some to try to pierce her being and challenge her fortitude. She told me the truth and at times, the memories retold seemed painful. This is what she said:

It was a rough year. It was utterly frustrating, totally exciting, absolutely exhilarating, and tremendously lonely. It was every emotion that I could have ever experienced and above it all, I knew that this was such an honor, such an honor. To think that I was selected as a representative of teachers….to think that I could represent a kind of teacher who did not fit the perception of what a teacher should be…what I mean by that is I got hate mail because I was a brown person. That was hard, very hard.

Within the first hour or so of meeting Jan, I started to grasp what courage meant in her life. Not only did I hear it in her tales of her year traveling as National Teacher of the Year, but I listened to courage speak in other ways, this being one:

The year before I became National Teacher of the Year, I had a brain aneurysm followed by brain cancer…came right before I became local, state, and then National Teacher of the Year. My words were swallowed up, because they had to take a chunk out of my brain. It was so frustrating…by the time the wound was healing, one of the things I learned was how precious what we say is, and I vowed to see if I could
only say things that were going to contribute, that were going to be for the good when I talked with my kids. That’s been a challenge forever. This week included!

Jan and I had many conversations, over a hurried breakfast, sitting at student desks in the afternoons, in between classes, and even over dinner. Of course those times enabled me to understand Jan on a much deeper level, but I kept my first impression of her, as one who keeps going even when life gets hard, very hard. And in that persistence, lies something very special and I wondered if it could be joy?

Sandy

Sandy McBrayer turned left into a small parking lot on Ingraham Street in Oceanside, one of the coastal beach communities along the Pacific Ocean. I was standing outside and watched her older Mercedes come to a hurried stop and out she jumped, ready to begin the day. Dressed in a tailored suit and carrying a briefcase, Sandy extended her hand, and our conversations began. We climbed the stairs to The Children’s Initiative, a non-profit organization, of which she is the CEO. Later, Sandy would explain to me that it was important for her to look the part of an astute businesswoman as she mixed with high-powered government and business leaders, all in an effort to convince them to fund the projects supported by The Children’s Initiative.

As we entered her office, I could see individual rooms opening to a central meeting place. There were five people, including Sandy, who made up the working components of The Children’s Initiative, which “assists children, youth and families in the fields of health, education, safety and economic security”
Quick introductions were made, and off Sandy and I sped to the office of the police chief of Carlsbad Beach, north of San Diego.

Sandy had a mission in mind, and she was determined to be on time to this most important meeting. She wanted the officers, summoned to 911 domestic violence calls, to use newer forms which included the number of children actually present in the home. In other words, how many children were actually present when domestic violence is taking place? Statistics were not accurate enough for Sandy, and she was determined to convince police chiefs to add a question which would make it mandatory to report such information. Thus this meeting in Carlsbad was a contact with yet another police chief. However, the traffic gnarled, and Sandy began to pick up one of three cell phones and call her office. “Give me Lyn! What is the traffic report? No, there must be something ahead. We are at a dead stop! OK, let me know!” The later it became, the more intense Sandy grew and the more determined she was to find an alternate way to reach Carlsbad Beach. I watched and I listened, interjecting comments from time to time.

Looking back, I decided the tenacity with which Sandy moved through the traffic was much the way she moved through life. Never really caring that Lyn told her there was no way to move forward quickly, she became more determined than ever to do find another route. Likewise, it seemed to me that Sandy listened to her own voice and moved ahead, regardless of what many told her would not work, in traffic, in schools, and in the streets of San Diego. In fact, the first thing Sandy’s administrative assistant told me about her was that “Sandy doesn’t take no for an answer and will not give up.” I witnessed her untiring determination and grew to appreciate the fervor with which she attacked problems, conflicting situations, and endless pulls at her time.
Beginnings of Making Meaning

My first impressions of three women, initially tied together by the title of National Teacher of the Year, enabled me to catch a glimpse of what made them who they are. Almost immediately, and with each one, I became acutely aware of their strength as individuals. Why? They seemed to have four attributes in common: candidness in what they said, assertiveness in their mannerisms, doggedness to stick things out, and a re-occurring passion when describing their personhood. Intuitively, I knew I was on a journey into lives which had not settled for despair, but instead found ways to persist, but how? Palmer (2000) says:

Rosa Parks took her stand with clarity and courage. I took mine by diversion and default. Some journeys are direct, and some are circuitous; some are heroic, and some are fearful and muddled. But every journey, honestly undertaken, stands a chance of taking us toward the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need. (p. 36)

Whether death, personal sickness, or relentless neglect of children filled the early days of their journeys toward strong lives, these women all found paths grounded in something more than living reactively to life experiences. Certainly the happenings, which made up their days, contributed to their fortitude, but there was so much more to these women. Liston says that “joy is a powerful and non-dualistic way of coming to sense phenomena in which and through which broad interpretations of our worlds are possible” (Liston, 2001, p.198). Was joy the source for persistence? Did these three women know how to interpret what they experienced through a lens of joy? In other
words, did their internal makeup change the way they made meaning out of their experiences?

At the onset of my study, as I searched for meaning, I made suggestions to myself about joy. My first impressions left me knowing that these women managed to rescue themselves from becoming victims of the negativity I had seen in the teaching profession. I was intrigued by their lived experiences and drawn to the mystery of why they cared, why they persisted, and why they had courage to stand up for what they believed served children well. I knew my original impressions were ones of good teachers finding ways to continue to offer meaningful ways to help children. Concurrently, I continued to ask why.

Metaphors of Good Teachers

Written on the board in Jan’s room was this poem for her senior English class:

“This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
As I walk through the universe in my sneakers,
It is time to say goodbye to my imaginary friends....”

The above poem was written by Bill Collins. “This is you,” Jan told her seniors as she walked to the windows and pulled the blinds up, letting the sunshine fill the spaces within the cracks on the wall. “This poem is about you. This is what is happening in your life, right now!” She was eloquent and real at the same time. Jan reminded her seniors of the importance of the present moment. She asked them to walk with her as they ended a
series of years culminating in graduation. They had come to a place of good-byes and she
did not want them to miss anything about the event.

How perfect, I thought. A metaphor for Jan’s life work, right in front of me!
Opening blinds and allowing light to come in resembled the way Jan opened the minds of
her students. Just as visitors told her principal, “There is something wonderful happening
in that classroom,” I, too, felt the same way. It was hard to describe and difficult to name,
but it was there. Again, mystery grabbed me. Indeed, if it is a mystery, then I just might not
ever be able to name it, but, without a doubt, I could see Jan’s caring and compassion
radiating within her classroom. My metaphor for her seemed accurate and indeed, I
suspected joy rooted itself in the personhood of Jan Gabay.

Actually, I asked all participants to provide metaphors for good teachers. Palmer
says that “most of us use metaphors to name our experiences” (Palmer, 2000). That being
ture, then perhaps their metaphors would inform my understanding of how they saw good
teachers and perhaps, hidden amidst such metaphors, I might uncover the mystery of why
they care and are compassionate. Moreover, I might hear the language of joy. So I
listened and I reflected as they talked to me about their metaphors for good teachers.

Sandy

One afternoon, while sitting in Sandy’s office, I asked her to tell me about the
metaphor she would suggest for a good teacher. She told me teachers were like butterflies,
because teachers, as do butterflies, brighten our worlds and touch souls deep inside. I liked
the metaphor and agreed with her thoughts on good teachers, but my mind quickly
wandered to a different metaphor for Sandy.
Instead, I likened her to the runner she became when she ran the streets of San Diego and cried for the homeless children she taught. As a runner she remained on a chosen path, tired but kept going, was lost in the present moment, focused on completing her run, felt the emotion of seeing the finish line, and finally won or lost the race set before her. The point of the exercise was to keep getting stronger and stay the course. However, there was one glitch: The Sandy I came to know would not run the race for herself, but for the faces set before her. She would run for the hundreds of children who could not run the race for themselves. She would run, but she would do so for the ones who had given up, because they could not pace themselves or maybe, they did not think they were capable of running at all. Nevertheless, Sandy would keep running because Sandy does not know how to stop, not when it comes to doing what is best for children.

Betsy

What is Betsy’s metaphor for good teachers? Wind. The kind that lifts us to higher places and carries us to places we never dreamed. Teachers do not hold students, instead they support them. And when the wind seems to stop in Betsy’s life, she says she goes home and walks. Similar to Sandy’s running, Betsy walks and looks at the woods surrounding her home. There she convinces herself to go back. Back to Brighton where life is messy and in her face day after day. Back to teachers whom the principal once told her even hated her. Back to the place she says she is determined to change. Back…yes, she must go back. Why? “Because there is no way in my heart a child enters this school to fail and you will never convince me of that. Just because you are a kid from poverty and you have never seen a lot of success, that doesn’t mean you don’t want it,” says Betsy.
We sat one afternoon in Jan’s room, quiet and still except for the occasional interruptions by hurried students. We talked and talked, and I began to put pieces from her classroom instruction together with pieces of our conversation into a real knowing of Jan, the teacher. There were actually times when I thought Maxine Greene herself was there talking to me instead of Jan as she shared her knowledge of literature, spoke as someone who has studied the work of acclaimed authors, and stressed the continual tie-ins to helping students see possibilities in their lives. The similarities between these two women helped me understand the verbal picture Jan painted of her work and philosophy as an educator.

“So what is your metaphor for a good teacher?” I asked Jan as we began one of our taped interviews. “Even as a young child, I always knew there was some way one saw oneself in the world…for me that was metaphor. It’s kind of a Hawaiian thing, but it’s a shepherd…and that’s always served me as a teacher,” answered Jan as she went on to tell me why:

As they (students) are going forward, you are…there to make sure they don’t fall off the cliff or whatever…you are using all kinds of knowledge…You would have to be absolutely compassionate and patient because it’s…a tough, dusty world, but…that was always my metaphor… I’m fascinated by that question because I hear people talking about being a conductor or a director…I think those are very apt metaphors, but somehow to me, they still connote that the light is on you
and you’re doing for the students… I don’t think I could do that… to keep
me grounded, to quiet me, I love the idea of shepherds.

Interlude

Previously, I posited that teachers were like barrier islands, ever changing,
ergetic, and providing protection for our most important natural resource, our
children. Did that metaphor actually fit me? I wondered. I had easily visualized a
different metaphor for Sandy yet felt Betsy and Jan’s were accurate analogies for them.
However, barrier island? Me?

If I am like a barrier island, then from what am I protecting children? I can see
myself as a barrier, set against low expectations, limited cultural and self-awareness,
decreased motivation, negated visions of positive futures, and wilted dreams. However, in
that protection, I run the risk of over-emphasizing my role as a teacher/administrator and
inflicting personal expectations on the lives of others instead of providing space for
individual growth. I run the risk of seeing myself as one who holds all the answers, thus
inhibiting the thoughts and ideas of others (Freire, 2003). Freire says that “the
oppressed are emotionally dependent on the oppressor” (Freire, 2003, p. 65). Therefore,
my actions may appear to me as right, but if I hinder the personhood of my students, I
will in turn become the oppressor, thus making them dependent on me. There is a very
fine line between helping and hindering students.

Barriers do not come ashore. They remain out to sea and literally remain
steadfast in their purpose. They do not become part of the shoreline, nor do they change
the mainland. They keep a space in between… the ocean itself fills the space. With that in
mind, hopefully, I can remain true to the essence of a barrier island as I protect without
smothering, encourage without forcing yet still remain steadfast in my protection. Buber offers a description of such a freeing space when he describes the I-Thou relationship, in which one is in relationship with another without taking away any part of the personhood of each. Thus each remains in relationship but very much still themselves (Buber, 1958).

For me, joy provides insight because it sheds light within so I can see and know how to internalize the personhood of the children with whom I work. Huebner (1999) says that as educators, we are constantly called on to decide what is truly loving and caring in comparison to what is a manifestation of power over others. He goes on to suggest a community of faith, no matter “what specific tradition makes this difficult task easier” (p. 368). I believe, joy, transmitted through my understanding of its light (Liston, 2001), will help me remain, as a barrier island...standing amidst the oceans of life, but remaining as a guard against what is harmful to school children.

We Become Our Metaphors

Palmer tells us that we should be careful about the metaphors we choose (Palmer, 2000). He says that “often our metaphors are much more than language; they are reality, transmuting ourselves from language into the living of our lives” (2000, p. 96). I decided that wind, butterflies, and shepherds offered visuals for how the participants saw teachers and possibly themselves. Greene posits that metaphors are crucial to bringing change to attitudes and understanding (Greene, 2001, p. 102). As I began my search for joy in the lives of these three women, I wondered if my question about metaphors was an apt one to use. Maybe I would find them true to their metaphors or maybe I would find they improvised along the way (Bateson, 1989).
Already I described a different metaphor for Sandy. Perhaps their lives held true to their metaphors; perhaps they did not. At the very least, I listened intently as they imagined teachers, and I began to see positive attributes within their metaphors indicative of what I had seen in them: supportive, compassionate, inspirational, and intuitive.

However, as I reflected on their metaphors, I began to think about potential for difficulties inherent in the metaphors they chose to describe good teachers. I thought about how wind can cause harm, how shepherds become weary, and finally, how butterflies, though pretty and magical, do not stay long enough for us to touch them. Perhaps, they had indeed lived from their metaphors, whether planned or not. I decided their lived experiences would tell me.

The following chapters offer more stories, metaphors, and insights. Throughout my research I came to know the participants and decided they lived metaphors which were much broader than the ones they offered in response to my question. Indeed, chapters ahead will expose lives lived large in what Greene describes as the as ifs perspective, where alternative realities are lived” (Greene, 2001, p. 65). Final metaphors for Sandy, Betsy, and Jan are yet to be totally written and truly, they will be the authors.
CHAPTER 6: JOY IN COURAGE, IMAGINATION, AND MORALITY

You ask me why I see injustice... simply spoken, I am willing to see.

Wishing

I wish I had seen what you were able to see.
I wish I had been able to give as you did.

I wish I had known what I know now.

I wish I could go back,
to those years I feel lost.

But would I really see,
if only wishing remains my quest?

Indeed, the loss might be within my own wishing.

(Shirah, 2006)

“Through Joy, we remain aware that when we harm another, or behave unjustly, we harm ourselves. Thus, Joy reveals the beauty and ethics of our existence – our Being – our essence” (Liston, 2001, p. 21). In joy one can both see the injustice in the world and at the same time, imagine how different lives can be (Liston, 2001). However, as one comes to imagine life differently and sees injustice, then courage is needed. What we see can be painful and we often want to hide from ourselves and our realities. Sometimes the less we see, the less we think we will be required to do. Joy knocks at the door of our awareness and bids come... come and see the possibilities. Then we must have the courage to offer goodness.

Greene tells us that “teachers have multiple powers to create order, to provoke authentic vision, and to surprise” (Greene, 2001, p. 83). However, to create without degeneration (Liston, 2001), requires joy. Creation from imaginative possibilities can be
seen in the light shed by joy. Our worlds change from the inside out. What we imagine is what we will create (Liston, 2001, Greene, 2001, Palmer, 2000). Courage is required to see and to create. In joy, both courage and imagination are enabled in the shedding of light, thus promoting sight which can see within confounds of morality (Liston, 2001).

Purpel says, “Educators themselves need to be prophets and speak in the prophetic voice that celebrates joy, love, justice, and abundance and cries out in anguish in the presence of oppression and misery” (Purpel, 1989, p. 110). The participants in this study have done that very thing. They have spoken out against harm being done to children and have had the courage to do something about the oppression they have witnessed. Their reactions have been, at times, coupled with complexity and oversight. Nevertheless, what these pages confirm are lives lived in courage, morality, and imagination. Thus children are provided opportunities to live in a space which affirms their beings and even celebrates their differences.

*Betsy*

“My whole issue is equity in education,” says Betsy Rogers. “I really wish we had a country where there was no need for legislation because we took care of our children. It’s unthinkable some children would not have the best facilities and a nurturing, safe environment. All children should have a quality education.”

Included in the equity of which Betsy spoke is her belief that the strongest teachers should go to the weakest schools. Therefore, after returning from her travels as National Teacher of the Year, Betsy was transferred to Brighton Elementary, a school Betsy visited as state teacher of the year. Brighton is a Title I school and has a student
population of 394, all from minority and/or low income families. Furthermore, Brighton has remained for seven years on Alabama’s list of failing schools.

As Betsy describes it, she arrived at Brighton with high hopes of making a difference. (http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/brogers/archives/2005/05/). However, her enthusiasm was questioned and she herself was found suspect by some of the Brighton teachers. Additionally, peers who joined her online in a year long Ed Week blog questioned if she was being critical and/or prideful. For example, Joe, a New York City teacher of thirty years, wrote these comments:

Isn’t part of what makes a teacher good is the sense of mission, the desire to grow, the love of the students, the respect for the subject matter, the comfort with the setting, the understanding of the local culture, the vision of a better future for their kids that many of the teachers in your school had before you ever thought of going there? I see no understanding on your part in the blog entries I have read your “let’s whip this place into shape” attitude, along with your seemingly boundless energy will do much for your school. But beware of the damage your arrogance might be doing under the surface…absorb as much of their (students’) brilliance as you can. But I strongly suggest that on this blog – open to all of them and all the world – you talk a bit more about their brilliance (http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/brogers/archives/2005/05/).

Even though Betsy wanted to make a difference in the lives of the students at Brighton, she first had to get through personal battles. Some of the difficulty was
increased by the National Teacher of the Year award, because her title brought excessive attention to Brighton. According to Betsy, even wearing the Brighton tee shirt for the first time was difficult. The staff was apprehensive about her coming to their school, and she feared just wearing their shirt would be an affront to them. Yet for Betsy, the shirt became an outward expression of an inward determination to identify with a school which had become the focus of her passion. She had taken the step and for Betsy, from what I could tell, once that happens, there is no turning back.

Betsy had an upward battle as she tried to work alongside other Brighton teachers without condoning the wrong she witnessed. Furthermore, she had no idea of the amount of stress she would undergo; fever blisters were only one sign of the internal battles she fought to keep going. Greene says that “one must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face” (Greene, 1995, p. 10).

Possibly Betsy made too many observations before becoming a real part of the Brighton staff. Whatever the reason, the results were costly for Betsy and for the teachers. As a matter of fact, she wrote in her February, 2005 blog about lessons she learned in her first year there:

I started my first day at Brighton full of high hopes and lots of positive energy…I am sure I totally irritated the teachers as I gave the morning inspiration about how happy I was to a part of their school and how I had made a special trip to the Shrine of the Sacred Hearts in Hanceville, Alabama to pray for our year. It is not that prayer is not valued, but this is really the last thing you want a pious newcomer to say to you when
you have been trying to survive in a school labeled failure. …the afternoon of the first day, I began to understand how little I knew (http://blogs.edweek.org./teachers/brogers/archives/2005/05/).

In the face of Betsy’s battle and the teachers’ negative perception of her, Brighton remained charged by the state of Alabama and the No Child Left Behind legislation to drastically improve both teaching and learning. Educational consultants from Alabama’s State Department of Education were called in, and Betsy herself was named as a school improvement specialist. About eighty students per year were pulling out to go to other schools which were not labeled failing. The teachers knew they had to come up with ways to improve or outside control of their school would only increase.

Eventually, as they witnessed Betsy’s efforts, though awkward at times, begin to make a difference, they decided they just might listen and learn from her. They could not argue with her mastery as a teacher, and they did not question her determination to help Brighton become a more effective school. Instead, they were threatened by her direct mannerisms and what she describes, as pushiness.

This story of Betsy going to Brighton as an expert teacher and consultant is an example of what is happening in many schools when they become identified as failing. Max Thompson, international researcher of effective schools, says that indeed, twenty-three states are calling in outside consultants to reconstruct their failing schools (M. Thompson, personal communication, July 27, 2006). Having consultants offer change sets up a difficult, at best, situation for both the specialist and the staff. However, what is one to do? Let a school remain a failure while students continue to fill the classrooms steeped in negativity?
I went to Brighton with Betsy and saw the dismal facility which stood as an outward picture of the ugliness Betsy described to be going on in the inside. The middle school sat on a hill while the elementary school remained in a flat below, both being served by the same principal. The land on which both schools are situated is remarkably beautiful. However, one gets an immediate feeling that this K-8 school has been forgotten. It sits way out, at the end of a long driveway. The old cliché comes to mind…out of sight, out of mind. Indeed, Brighton seemed forgotten.

One might say Betsy put a spotlight on a school which was forgotten. The staff was not totally to blame nor was the community of poverty surrounding the school. A bright, new principal was brought aboard to help turn the school around. Regardless, Brighton was not offering an adequate education to its children. In fact, the entire community seemed trapped with not only a failing school, but an apparent harmful place for children. In spite of who might be responsible, things had to change for the better and quickly.

No one could argue with the fact that something had to be done, but was Betsy’s approach effective or oppressive? Palmer says that “if we fail to look at our shadows, we feed a dangerous delusion that leaders too often indulge: that efforts are always well intended, our power is always benign, and the problem is always in those difficult people whom we are trying to lead” (Palmer, 2000, p. 79). I could see Betsy’s risk of not seeing the shadows. However, I, also, knew that many states are calling in consultants to presumably get schools back on track. Whether one thinks that is possible or not, we can all agree that if children are not safe or cared for, then change must occur. How this change occurs, then, becomes the complicated part.
The problems faced in today’s schools do, in fact, include morality, and good teachers are those that possibly can offer hope in a society becoming more and more indifferent to the ethical actions required to teach the world’s children (Ayers, 2001, Purpel, 1989). However, being able to say when something is harmful to children is not as easy as one might think, especially when it involves the personhood of others. Betsy had to find her own way at Brighton as did the teachers with whom she worked. She knew what she saw was wrong, but, at the same time, she was not always sure about how to go about helping to solve the problems. In a letter written April 3, 2005, Betsy offered apologies to her colleagues at Brighton. This is how it read:

If any of you are of my generation and remember the cartoon Mighty Mouse, you will understand I came to my school with the Mighty Mouse attitude, “Here I come to save the day!” This created much resentment for my being there in spite of what I could bring to the school because I really did not have a clue about what it meant to work in a school labeled failure and the teachers knew it. My first reality check came the day I had to attend a meeting of schools labeled Tier I. Previously this label had been High Priority School and before that Low Performing. When I was sitting in this room with the others from the area schools, I had several reactions. First, I was embarrassed to be there. I wanted to stand up and say, “This is my first year at this school, and I did not do this!” Then I felt this great sense of frustration and I realized how the teachers in my school have felt for so long. I don’t know how they have survived. I felt ashamed of what I expected from the teachers because I do not
know if I could have continued to work with this burden on me. Labeling a school as failing is devastating to one’s soul and creates such a depressed climate that I began to feel like I was drowning. I realized this is the culture the students and teachers at Brighton have worked in while trying to make significant gains in achievement. Daily, I question myself, “Am I the right person to work at this school? Can I really help and have impact? Do I have what it takes? I do not know the answers to the questions, I just know that I want to be in this school. I want to help create a positive culture that will enable the students and teachers to overcome this label of failure. I also have learned the key to this change of climate lies within the teachers at my school, not me.

Whether perfectly shaped by the right actions or not, Betsy did, and still does, have an excellent understanding of the teaching and learning needed for schools to be effective. In many ways, she too was set up by a society that demands a quick and easy answer to complex problems. How she went about trying to insure Brighton’s improvement was awkward and unwelcome at times. Nevertheless, Betsy remained courageous in her intentions to return to a place where she saw children who were forgotten by a school system which would not correct the facilities or the failure to offer students an equitable means of teaching and learning.

Betsy learned hard lessons along the way about herself, and situated in difficult reflection, she became an agent for positive influence. I witnessed the relationships which were being built between Betsy and the staff. While I was with her, Betsy interacted with many teachers and administrators. Mutual respect was apparent. She seemed a natural
part of the school, and I could see the pride in her eyes when she introduced me to her community. Yes, change had come to Brighton and change had come to Betsy.

Interlude

I wish I could forego this interlude of painful honesty. Oh, how I would love to scratch this page not only from my memory, but from my lived experience. You see, I, too, have tried to save the world in a school of dismal failure, only I never admitted my arrogance nor did I have the courage to stay. I arrived in a new school system with my Teacher of the Year award in hand, considering myself to be one of the best of the best. Shortly, I was sent to a school in which children were deprived adequate teaching and so they, of course, found themselves struggling to learn. What I saw was alarming and yes, changes were necessary, in fact, imperative. (This school is one Sandy and I discussed as we sat, eating lunch along the shores of Mission Bay in San Diego.) Indeed, positive changes finally came to the school and the climate is different today, but, at that time, in that school, I struggled to find an ounce of affirmation in a place where children were demoralized by actions and words. I was horrified by the negativity I witnessed. I cried, I complained, I tried to cope. But I failed, in my heart, deep and hidden away, I knew I failed myself and the children, because I left. I gave up and transferred to another school, after one year. Just one year. I had high hopes, just like Betsy. I thought I was the best. I thought I had good answers for everything, but I was wrong.

In stark contrast, Betsy is staying. She told me. She will be at Brighton for four more years until she retires from the classroom. I will most probably be an administrator for at least as long. I have promised myself, quietly, when I think of the children...the ones I left...those who still email me...those whose father stops me to say his daughter is
doing well in 7th grade, but says I am still her very favorite teacher...those children...the ones I gave up on...I promised myself that if I ever get the chance to make it up, I will. I promised myself.

“Sometimes, things become what they are not because we name them” (Liston, 2001, p. 59). I named the school impossible and a failure. I named the teachers as such. I forgot to name myself...arrogant and even haughty. Since that year, I have begun the tedious journey into an awareness of myself. I believe light from joy sheds itself in our dark places and enables us to see with reality and, at the same time, with an imagination for possibilities. I cannot go back and hold the past, but I can promise... next time...to see and to stay until I have named my world as joyful.

Jan

Becoming the National Teacher of the Year was a very proud moment for Jan and, also, for her extended family of thirty, who traveled to the White House to see her receive the prestigious award, handed to her by First Lady, Barbara Bush. She is proud of her family and speaks of them often with much admiration. Jan’s parents were not well to do, and she was a first generation college graduate, much like the students she teaches at The Preuss School. She told me she found it hard to look into the eyes of her students, because often they mirrored her own. Perhaps, I thought, memories might be difficult to explain to oneself after years of personal transformation.

“When it’s hard, can I be a good teacher?” Jan reflected as she conversed with me about the difficulties of teaching children who were coming from low socio-economic backgrounds and marginalized cultural groups. When Jan became National Teacher of the Year, she was teaching in a middle class high school, but upon returning, she decided
to join the staff of the Preuss School, where low income children are given an educational opportunity that most students would envy. She doubted herself and her ability to reach these children who were actually so much like her. According to her own words, she recognized this move to Preuss as an inner challenge.

Jan understood the prejudice pointed at them, because she recognized the ugliness of prejudice and superiority which had been aimed at her. While National Teacher of the Year, often she was questioned about her ethnicity. Once, students from diverse racial backgrounds went with her to a morning news show. Apparently, a teacher from Iowa was in the television audience and responded in a letter to Jan, “I saw you on Good Morning, America, and you use a lot of educational talk. We don’t do that out here. We are dedicated teachers who stay late and you teach students who are not the students the rest of American teaches and you do not look like an American teacher.”

In addition to this letter, Jan told me about more hate mail sent to her, accusing her of not being able to teach English, because of one fact: she was brown. At that point in the interview, I stopped Jan and asked, “How did you keep going?” She was thirty-seven, small of stature, and unmarried, traveling alone across the United States to carry her National Teacher of the Year message, one that encouraged teachers to consider the whole child when teaching. However, here she was, being accosted with hate mail and accusations, based on the color of her skin, rejected by some strangers because her skin did not match theirs. Ironically, she was giving speeches on how her philosophy is one of teaching the whole child, while considering all parts of what makes up the student. Yet, as she spoke, it seems some who were listening could not hear, because they only saw a part of her, certainly not the whole, and that part, her ethnicity, was not acceptable to
them. Therefore, even as Jan spoke of wholeness, separation and disdain were being thrown back at her.

Jan was mugged in Atlanta, attacked by two women masked in ski caps in the Oakland airport, and many times over required to be diplomatic about what she saw in schools, while her misleading words almost stained her tongue. When she showed up at a university to speak to education classes, and they asked her who she was and why in the world was she talking to them, she said she felt embarrassed and just plain weird. In contrast, “other times were absolutely glorious!” quips Jan as she conveyed to me how she loved the wonderful people she met and the incredible places to which she traveled.

Interlude

That was another moment of insight into Jan. I could see her travels as National Teacher of the Year as a metaphor for the life she has lived. She took the bad with the good and went on. She was not always sure where she might end up, but she showed up, ready to be herself. Insults stung, and admittedly, she cried, but she knew herself well enough to depend on her strength to counteract the ravages of attack, whether physical or mental. Somewhere within this woman lived courage…the kind that really matters when one is battling to stand for what one considers right.

I asked myself how would I fare in the same situation as Jan. Quickly I recognized how fruitless my questions were. I was raised White, in an upper class home surrounded by wealth and affluence. What was I thinking? How could I even begin to know the life lessons learned by Jan? I looked at her and I looked within...in many ways I felt ashamed. I grew up thinking I was lucky to be so privileged. However, with joy shining its light within, I eventually saw the reality of my upbringing and privilege. Ironically,
Jan’s brown skin seemed to feed courage within her; I was envious of Jan…I would never, ever have what she had.

Jan

I was convinced Jan could tell me more about what fueled the determination and the intensity with which she journeyed. I listened as she began to open up, in beautiful terms of speech, brought alive by her kind eyes and passionate voice.

After being named National Teacher of the Year, Jan remained steadfast in the teaching profession and, from my viewpoint, continued to be resilient, not only as an individual, but as a teacher who stayed constant in her concern for the whole child. I asked her how, and she began to talk to me of her inner work. I wondered as she began to speak, can one see without the courage and the imagination to see? I doubted the possibility and stayed anxious to hear Jan’s explanation of how she attended to her internal resources.

Jan was raised as a Catholic, but in her twenties, she began to see her faith as something meaningful to her. She was apprehensive to share this part of herself, and added quickly that her form of Catholicism was Southern California style, meaning, just about anything goes. Aside from her religious preference, however, Jan shared with me how she reflects on herself:

Well, I look often, and I think often about what I’m doing in the world…the quality of my actions, my speech, my thoughts, my beingness, my doingness, and the inner work for me is…reflection. …reconnecting with whatever that source is that gives the gift to be teachers…for me, it’s questioning…it’s doubting…it’s finding inspiration…refilling that well. I
have colleagues who don’t believe I really do this, but at the end of the
day, sometimes, I will sit and will read poetry…I will think about
something I heard in church…I will think about a child…I will think about
the people in my life. I think about what’s going on in the world…there is
life beyond high school! Classrooms are wonderful places but we have to
be vigilant that we are not closed off by our walls…There is an Emerson
quote…I tell my seniors…it goes like this… “To affect the quality of the
day, that is the highest of arts”…so for me, inner work is reflecting on the
quality of the day that I have been a part of…everything…from road rage,
flipping somebody off…to being successful with a child or genuinely
uplifting a colleague…it’s that sitting with myself and sitting …there is
community within me…almost intangible but becomes the most tangible,
the quality of our lives, the quality of the person I am, the quality of mind
I have, from my intellect to my openness, to my questioning, to my
doubting, and sometimes it’s not pleasant …it is real easy, if I think about
the stuff in the world, to say, “Oh, my God, there is no hope.” Yet I think
the very nature of teaching is hope. …Being able to sit with oneself…My
inner work…it’s a great joy.

I was almost speechless listening to Jan talk of her reflection as a teacher and the
ways in which she attends to her inner work. There, sitting in a high school classroom
with a steady flow of students walking by and peering into the window, I heard joy speak
to me. I could hear it just as I knew I had seen it in her personhood. Jan, of course, was
the spokesperson, but I knew she had experienced that of which Liston wrote in her
book…Joy (2001). I remembered Liston saying that “joy comes to be in the pause between the breaths” (2001, p. 77). I could picture Jan there, in her reflections, her being between her doing. I envisioned her sitting in her times of reflection, a “quiet space of infinite potential that cannot be attained through force, but must be allowed space in which to exist” (2001, p. 77). She even said she felt great joy, and I believe she was naming her internal source of strength.

Being an English teacher and a student herself of myriad literature, Jan’s words were almost prosaic, and I listened, while the rhythm of her thoughts lulled me into personal reflection.

Interlude

*What did I do as a teacher to insure my own being and not just doing? And what was I doing now, as an administrator? As the school year begins once more, and the almost panic rush starts to run within, I return to the above questions…for myself. Can one see without having courage? No, courage is necessary to see…courage to see and courage to do something about what one sees. Where does one get such courage? Jan said she sat with herself. Do I know how? Liston says “she meditates” (2001, p. 190). Will I take the time? I asked the question about inner work…as slippery a term as that might be…I asked the question, and now I must answer the same question…for myself.*

*I believe joy is the source. I proposed that in the beginning of this study and, subsequently, set out to find out if joy fed the persistence of good teachers, known in this study as National Teachers of the Year. I believe, even more, joy resides in one’s internal strength, holding when what is known of life, fails. Joy has even been my own source of perseverance and has offered me ways to get through days seen as impossible.*
However, I now see joy in a bigger way. I see it as a new way of greeting each day, each child, each moment. I am starting to know joy as a source which can offer me a whole new way of seeing. Yes, I need the courage to see, and I think joy will give me the courage and the light, all at the same time. Talking to Jan helped me realize the beauty of a life content to be and, in that being, one can bring others into the light of knowing oneself. The light is joy.

I have practiced yoga and am aware of the importance of the breath. The in and out, the deep inhale, the long exhale, the timing, the posture. Yoga is a good metaphor for being with oneself...it is rich in solitude and awareness. Perhaps, as August brings the beginnings of school, I will return to the practice of yoga. I think I will get up earlier, maybe I will walk to the pier and back. I could pray as I walk. I know I can breathe when I reach the ocean. Yes, I will begin, again, to know who I am in joy. It will take time, solitude, reflecting, but most of all, being... being in the moment, and letting joy shed its light in my soul. I could see it in Jan, and I will know it again, in myself.

Sandy

In 1993, before Sandy was named National Teacher of the Year, she spoke to a group of men, gathered in a restaurant, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. I watched this video of her, as she speaks honestly about what life is like for youth on the streets. The ocean hit against the windows of the room where Sandy stood to tell these men what she needed and what she would like to see happen for the children in her school for the homeless. Almost like the waves behind her, she recognized the savage realities that hit the kids in her school. Bluntly she created for her audience the realness of what she saw each and every day as she worked as a teacher.
These young people, referred to by Sandy, as throwaways, had reasons to be where they were. They were pregnant, gay, or fat. They may have come home one day to find their parents were gone. The descriptions she told were vivid and as varied as the multitude of problems faced by youth left to the street. The stories were horrid. Yet Sandy pressed on with the truth. She smiled, grimaced, and looked her audience in the eyes with a direct message of tragedy and hope.

After she told the men about the children, she began to speak about what they needed. They needed food, clothes, shelter, protection, but above all else, they needed love and acceptance. They needed that big vision of which Greene speaks …they needed someone to imagine a future which is better than the ones they know (Greene, 1995). Their lives were battered and their self-esteems were tormented. Sandy almost pleaded with the staid group of elderly businessmen, to respond. The group remained focused, but expressionless and sedate.

Even though the response from the listeners appeared flat, Sandy continued to tell what she knows best…how to really help children. After her speech ended, Sandy fielded questions. Someone asked if doctors and dentists have come to help. Sandy, almost laughing, told of the medical professionals who had come so far. She, also, told them that they stopped coming because they felt the kids were unappreciative. “Unappreciative?” Sandy questioned. “These young people do not know how to be appreciative. No one does things for them. They have to be taught to be appreciative. Once, I asked a young girl to pick out a dress, and she could not. She had never been able to choose her clothing…she simply put on what she found or gathered from the Salvation Army.”
Sandy was persistent in her passion for these children. She talked about the obligation we have as human beings to do something about these kids left to the streets. One of her final thoughts was made as she spoke of how the students must have someone who believes in them. She discussed how there had to be someone to help her students see their own potential. Sandy spoke with authority and she spoke courageously.

This video showed me so much about Sandy as a teacher. One could see the determination to try and get others to join her in caring. She wanted others to envision what she could in her students. Imagination for seeing goodness in children seemed to echo in almost everything she said. However, I wondered if she really influenced this rather expressionless group of men, cloistered away in their wealthy La Jolla community. Then I thought back to a luncheon I attended in the same restaurant in which this video was produced.

There a woman talked to me about Sandy and the influence she now has. However, she began her accolades with a very revealing comment. She sat back in her seat, looked me straight in the eyes, and with what seemed like smugness, began to tell me how she first met Sandy. “Well, I was on my way to our meeting, and I heard we were going to have the National Teacher of the Year speak. I said to myself, Oh, my god, slit my throat! The National Teacher of the Year…but then I heard her speak and it all changed.”

Is it the stories Sandy tells? Yes, they are heart-wrenching. Is it the great personality she seems to possess? Absolutely, her charisma grabs the audience. However, after I traveled with her and watched her speech and interactions, I began to see something more in Sandy. She seemed to be able to imagine things as they could be and
in so doing, helped others to see, too. Not only did she give vivid descriptions of what was going on in the lives of children, whether homeless or trapped in domestic violence, Sandy was relentless in her ability to see life as something big. Her openness to seeing possibilities intertwined itself with the courage it took to stand and tell others what she saw. In fact, as National Teacher of the Year, she was given a body guard because she continually told people how no one should be discriminated against...gays, blacks, women, etc. She was bold in her speech and non-stop in her pleas for doing the right thing for all children.

*Interlude*

*As we spent time together, Sandy and I talked a lot about status, prejudice, and racial issues. She teaches a multicultural class at San Diego State University. Her husband is Black, of both Native American and African American heritage. She is White. She talked to me about the awkward times at social events when her husband was mistaken for a waiter because he was the only Black man at the party. We talked of the functions she now attended, all in an effort to gain monies for The Children’s Initiative. We talked of falseness, hers in some of the social circles she now moves, and mine, having grown up in a prestigious and wealthy community, located in Atlanta. We talked about life and how some people have the ability to move through it, able to recognize what is of worth and what is not. We discussed the importance of staying connected to what brings goodness to oneself and to those around us.*

*I thought about how I had worked at moving out of the midst of what I perceived to be artificial circumstances and how I felt crippled and isolated by my private primary and secondary education. She, on the other hand, had been raised by military parents,*
and was used to a world she describes as modest. Now she travels amidst the very kinds of environments from which I ran. We seemed to be traveling from different worlds yet meeting in a space of understanding. Why? The lessons seemed similar. Our paths were not the same, but, in many ways, we had reached similar conclusions about life, children, and what matters.

Here, in the world of the wealthy, lessons must be learned and learned well. As in lives caught in poverty, messages of control are sent and received, if one is not on guard. I was engulfed in standards, early on, not of my own choosing, but of my parents, and of a society which catapults status to the top of meaningful living. Years turned into decades before I was able to rest from the struggle of finally seeing the wrong being done to others and to me. But here is the dilemma...I fought against the paralyzing ideals with which I had been raised, such as entitlement and superiority, but, I still used my past as a badge of recognition, when needed. Just as in the description I wrote of my upbringing...Buckhead...yes, I still suffer from the ugliness of arrogance and pride.

Hence, I worry, to some degree about Sandy. Not because I think she is trapped in the world of the wealthy, but because, at times, I worry that she will be. Her personhood seems so strong and she is real, but just as that infamous Velveteen rabbit...one must be well-worn to become real. Christopher, the child in the story, held the rabbit and then threw it away...forgotten. Therein was the life though, because in the life well spent, true living emerges. The personhood of the rabbit came alive and likewise, Sandy came alive, so to speak, in the realness of the streets of San Diego with the ones who were lost. In finding them, she seemed to find herself.
So I ask, will Sandy continue to run the race, within the path of a successful corporation and still keep the tears of the homeless in her heart? Will she walk with the wealthy yet not be with them? Can she hold an apparent internal strength that has caused her to see when others did not? Sandy’s life holds great opportunity for good in the lives of children, but I believe Sandy must make sure she remains in places where she will be used deeply. By deeply, I mean in those places which will offer to Sandy a deep knowing that she remains as herself…changing yes, but remaining in that which has called to her and to that which she has answered, with her life.

I wonder about myself. Will I continue to fight against a background of privilege and status? I have spent a lifetime trying to overcome what I consider to be one of the most deceiving and powerful traps in which one can fall. I was born into a family who valued wealth and status above compassion and goodness. Just as teachers and students think there must be something more to schools than present day examples, even as a young child, I had an inner awareness that something was very wrong. I knew the emptiness offered to me as gain, lacked the realness of life and only skimmed the top of my personhood. I have been on a lifetime journey to counteract my upbringing and enter into an authentic life. I must keep traveling. With joy, I can know where to go.

Imaginings of the Divine

Sandy has a way with words, and those words are spiked with imagination that offers hope. She tells it in her description of how she sees her own humanness and her need to be connected to imagination…that awareness of what one can become. Also, she tells it in her stories of what did not become.
… once, I kicked a kid out of class just because I couldn't -- I couldn't handle it anymore. That was after so many months and months. The next time I saw him, he sold his shoes for a hit on a crack pipe, and then he was found dead in a dumpster. The lesson for me was *fuck you* really isn't that bad. I actually say it, too. So…those words gave me a different perspective on what I was willing to tolerate. You know, if I failed, kids died. There was a bit of a difference there for me. And I don't think teachers take their impact seriously enough…that when they physically fail, they might not physically die, but part of them could die or part of their possibility could be diminished or teachers can actually close a door that can never be opened again for a field of study. It's like, who told them they weren't good in science? They might never excel. I mean it -- there is so much stuff that your attitude can actually affect… mine was a reality, so final. I don't think others take theirs as seriously, so they don’t recognize that it's just as deep.

Teachers must remain faithful to themselves and to their students. In such faithfulness, they need to see with the eyes of the divine. Joy affords teachers that possibility. As teachers validate their students as human beings, while offering possibilities for growth, they become the cultural leaders Purpel calls teachers to be (Purpel, 1989). In joy, imagination provides the possibilities, courage supports the reaction, and actions are born out of goodness.
CHAPTER 7: JOY IN THE MYSTERY OF CARING AND COMPASSION

You ask me why... I tell you because it is the only way I know to be in the world.

Asking

Why can’t I tell you?
Why can’t I answer your questions?

I know what I know,
and I know what I do.

But why can’t I describe,
the feelings, the reasons,
the only way I know to be in the world?

Why can’t I solve the mystery of my life?

Perhaps, if mystery ends,
caring, compassion, and justice,
will cease to be.

I will leave these questions for another day.

(Shirah, 2006)

Ayers, in To Teach (2001), spoke of the mystery involved in the teaching profession: The work of a teacher – exhausting, complex, idiosyncratic, never twice the same – is, at its heart, an intellectual and ethical enterprise. Teaching is the vocation of vocations, a calling that shepherds multitudes of other callings. It is an activity that is intensely practical and yet transcendent, brutally matter-of-fact, and yet fundamentally a creative act. Teaching begins in challenge and is never far from mystery.

(p.122)

I agree that mystery wraps itself in the responses teachers make each and every day. Why do some teachers react with care and compassion while others do not? In
particular, why did Betsy, Jan, and Sandy respond with care and compassion? Sandy McBrayer, participant in this study on the possibilities of joyful teaching, says that one must, first, be willing to see the ways children are being abused, neglected, or betrayed before one will help them. I concur, but how does one find the will to see? Does joy hold an answer here?

If joy sheds light, as Liston theorizes (2001), then it can enable teachers to see the reality of their own life situations and those of the children they teach. Like a light turned on in a dark room, internal light can afford one the ability to see things actually as they are and not as we think they might be (Liston, 2001). Therefore, if light allows us to see, how, still does one become caring and compassionate?

Liston (2001) reminds us that joy is mysterious and that there is more to joy than we can dismantle and/or reconstruct. What's more, Liston (2001) suggests that joy makes life appear as it is. With joy, we do not exist in a euphoric state of happiness. Instead, we are able to see what is happening around and within us. As joy makes us more aware, we cannot always explain why this is so. Joy can be the source of seeing and the source of the reaction to what one sees. Joy appears to be “outside the bounds of our ordinary experience while establishing the present in our everyday experiences” (Liston, 2001, p. 42). Thus this mystery found in joy portrays the world to us which in return causes us to be connected to the world. I believe in this connection, care and compassion evolve from joy.

Within the following stories, three teachers, depicted within the context of what I observed, read, or heard, revealed a deep sense of caring and compassion. The stories are powerful, and they represent Jan, Betsy, and Sandy well. However, as I ventured into
their lives, I could not pinpoint the answers to why these women reacted to the world around them as they did. In other words, I could not, nor could they express the reasons why they were caring and compassionate. They indicated possibilities, but not absolute reasons for their caring and compassion. However, I saw joy at work within the realness of their lives. I saw caring, compassion, and the remarkable mysterious ways in which these women walked amidst the world, seemingly carrying a lantern to help them see the needs before them. I have come to believe the lantern is joy.

*Sandy*

The day seemed perfect. The sky was incredibly blue and shining at us as we sat under an umbrella at the plush Paradise Point Resort Spa Bar and Grill. Sitting along the famous Mission Bay in San Diego, Paradise Point offers serenity and luxury to its guests. Sailboats rest along side the beach waiting for takers as the waters provided tranquility. Sandy took me there for lunch on my first day of research. I was glad for the scenery and for the relaxation, admittedly needed after my beginning hours of keeping up with Sandy, who only knows fast forward as a way of moving through her days.

At first, Paradise Point pulled me into its magical rhythm. Indeed, there were moments when I forgot why I was there and even drifted into a place where girlfriends go when they just want to chat. But quickly, as I pulled out my notebook, I was returned to the moment and, somewhat awkwardly, began the arduous avenue of inquiry one does as an ethnographer.

I had been watching and taking notes throughout business meetings all morning, but I wanted to simply listen for awhile. I recorded a few remarks, but for the most part, I sat back and listened intently while entering into the remarkable world of Sandra
McBrayer, founder of the first school for the homeless in the United States. Her hands were a natural part of her speaking and her eyes danced with excitement as she told the tales of herself as a teacher and lover of the “throwaways” as she referred to the students who attended her school on the corner of 13th and Market in San Diego, California.

Presently, Sandy is the CEO of a major non-profit organization, but, as we talked, she quickly and effortlessly, returned us to the place where she seemed to start to give her soul to children…the place where she was called teacher. Likewise, I dropped the image before me of a sharp looking businesswoman dressed in a St. John’s suit who exudes confidence and expertise. Instead I had a glimpse of the teacher, described by some as almost a hippie type, who became encompassed with caring and compassion for youth left to the streets of San Diego. I could see her there. Her words transplanted both of us to twenty or so years before when she began to care more for others than she even seemed to care for herself. The conversation was riveting, and I was transfixed by her passion and hope for children labeled as homeless.

Sandy told me she meant to be a coach. She was and still is an accomplished athlete. Tennis, basketball, and running are just of a few of the activities of which she has been a part. Yes, she was to be a coach…that was her plan, but life, as one might say, got in the way. After finishing college, she needed a job and so, at the age of twenty-two, she went to work as a teaching assistant in a group home for children ages eight to ten years old. From there she obtained emergency teaching credentials and went to work in a maximum lock up facility for youth. There, in this dismal place of confinement, Sandy witnessed children being put in bags as a means of keeping them restrained. “I blew the whistle on that”, Sandy told me. At that moment, as she retold this story of horror, I could
see, in my mind’s eye, a relentless fervor for doing the right thing for children forming within Sandy.

Our conversation continued as gourmet salads and sandwiches were brought along with iced tea and cloth napkins. We looked so relaxed and like we were enjoying a delightful time of friendship and conversation. However, the reality of what we were discussing pierced even the most pleasant surroundings. I found myself swept into the stories of a life, which at times seemed greater than pages could ever contain, and this same life, the one Sandy lived made a deep impression on my search for joy in teaching.

Sandy’s renditions of her life as a teacher of the homeless granted me glimpses into her endless energy for doing the right thing for children. She spoke of the children and the fears with which they lived. As Sandy explained, these children were unattended or put upon for a multitude of reasons. They feared adults because those were the ones who brought them harm in the form of abandonment, physical abuse, mental anguish, and/or violence. These children were not looking for adults. They were looking for safety in the most basic ways. Sandy provided a safe place first and then began to provide the education. She went into the streets and convinced these students to come to the school which was fondly called by some, Sandy’s School.

As Sandy described her experiences as a teacher, I realized I had found a person who nodded in understanding as I told her bits of the harm I, too, had seen in schools. She did not question or argue when I spoke of my first year as a teacher when a kindergarten teacher down the hall directed her kindergarten students not to cry when she stuck their small hands with straight pins. She did not flinch when I spoke of the yelling, demeaning, and screaming I had witnessed for one year in a school in which I once
taught. She did not try to change the subject or suggest teachers are doing the best they can amidst their stressful teaching situations. She listened and seemed to understand what I had seen. There was no doubt, just belief; terrible things are done to children, sometimes in our schools. In fact, the worst in schools seemed to sit on the table in front of us, and we looked the ugliness square in the face.

Sandy told me about injustices done to children somewhat similar to ones I had seen. She did not restrain herself nor did she try to hide from the realness of her experiences. I asked myself why her stories brought almost a relief to me. Then I knew; finally, someone, whom I considered to be a good teacher, would admit to what goes on in some schools. She did not hold back on the negative but, and perhaps this it the most important part, she did not give up on schools or herself as a teacher and now as a child advocate. She stayed the course. This was an intensifying moment for me. Behar, in reference to telling the brutal truth, says, “But if you cannot stop the horror, shouldn’t you at least document it?” (Behar, 1996, p. 4). I suppose I needed someone else to document along with me. Sandy became a much appreciated, honest collaborator, and in return, I felt validated.

More than that, as Sandy and I discussed the disturbing things we had seen, we moved into a place of serious reflection and sorrow, but, just as quickly, we moved into a huge space for hope, caring, and a strong belief that life can be made better, even if some are doing horrible damage. A gathering of caring and compassion seemed to fill a huge opening of despair and at that moment, I believed joy was present. Why? Because, as Liston remarks, “Joy does not pull us out of the world, but instead grounds us more
firmly within the everyday world” (2001, p. 42). Certainly we were grounded yet full of hope.

Now Sandy seems far away from the school once named as hers. She is an executive, working out of an office and dealing with public officials with whom she must lobby for the rights of children. I asked myself if she had changed from the person who used to fend for the children coming to her from the streets. I supposed, by her enthusiasm while retelling tales of the classroom, she missed her teaching days, but she did not actually express that to me. I wondered if I was putting my occasional longings to return to the classroom on her.

When I saw her in meetings representing The Children’s Initiative as opposed to the times I heard her talk of days as a teacher, I did not perceive a difference in the inner workings of Sandy. I saw the same passion only more mature and broader in scope. I saw the same boldness to do what she considered was right for the betterment of children. Most certainly, I witnessed almost endless energy and straightforward plans to bring about meaningful change. All of my observations told me that Sandy still worked tirelessly for what she knew would make the lives of children safer and more successful. I believe she left the classroom, as many of us do, unwittingly, and in the end, discovered she might have to work at ensuring she carried the passion with her and continually check herself along the way.

Interlude

There are those who would question the motives of anyone who moves to a seemingly higher place of authority, especially when one gives up a loved profession. I have asked myself the same question about why I did not choose to stay put in the
classroom as a teacher. I love teaching and love my students. They in return loved me. So why did I leave what appeared to be my calling? Did I leave it or did it leave me? I asked the same of Sandy.

I do not remember waking up one day and thinking that I wanted to be an administrator. Life just seemed to move me into where I am. I cannot recall the exact day I knew I would move on, I just did. Likewise, I know from my discussions with Sandy, she was approached by The Children’s Initiative to lead them. She did not seek the job. She committed to one year which moved into eight. I believe her life has remained connected to the early convictions she had as a teacher. Similarly, I know my passion for bringing transformation to the lives of children is still at the heart of what I do as an administrator. I have been told I now have the opportunity to affect the lives of many more children, and I would think others had made similar comments to her.

A key for both of us might be to constantly reflect, making sure we are being true to ourselves, as we remember the spirit of our first love, that of teaching children. Maybe we will influence more children for the better, but maybe we have let go of the most meaningful moments in our lives. Only time will tell.

Betsy

The life and work of Betsy Rogers only continued to intensify my inquiry into the mystery of care and compassion. A widow, and the mother of two grown sons, Betsy learned to search for reasons to continue. She recognized the frailty of life after her then forty-six year old husband had a massive heart attack and suddenly died. Undoubtedly, Betsy was forced to face what it meant to have one person you love harshly taken away,
and she explained to me how she came to understand the way it feels to be lonely and frightened. Life had taught her well, probably, at times, too well.

One night Betsy took me to dinner at Birmingham’s famous Whistle Stop Café, where the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes* was filmed. There we feasted on fried chicken, greens, cornbread, and of course, fried green tomatoes. The night was almost festive, and we seemed to enjoy being there together. We had had a long day, and both of us seemed glad to relax. Cloths covered the tables with splashes of white and red. Iced tea was served and the minutes turned into hours as we began to talk of marriage, sons, and work. There within our somewhat personal conversation, Betsy told me about her husband’s death.

Eight years had passed, but, as Betsy talked, one could still see the anguish in her face and hear the hurt in her words. She talked of how restless she felt even now, and how she thought she might never have grieved. Her sons suggested she take a trip, go away and just cry, but two weeks after her husband’s death, she returned to her master’s program at Samford University and continued on until she received her doctorate. “I was sort of a zombie for two years,” Betsy told me, “but I had to go on.” Watching her as I had for two days, I understood. She did have to go on, because Betsy knew her life had to hold meaning beyond the loss of a good marriage. There were things she had to do and no one could do them for her. Yes, Betsy had to go on.

*Interlude*

*In early June, 2006, when I visited Betsy, I was still somewhat raw from the experience of my own husband’s battle with cancer. When Betsy talked of her zombie state and her restlessness after the death of her husband, I understood. I even grasped*
how she just might have chosen to go on without stopping to grieve. Death brings out a
variety of reactions in people, and I had become aware of how I just might deal with the
loss of my husband.

In the early days of my husband’s prognosis, there were meetings with doctors
which lay out in direct and alarming terms the possible outcomes of prostate cancer.
Those were the days of endless terror. When the urologist first told us of the diagnosis, I
went into a mode that surprised even me. I began to take notes, just as I did as an
administrator in a parent meeting. I stared ahead and wrote. Then, when we headed
home in separate cars, I yelled. I yelled at the cancer; I yelled at the unfairness; I yelled
at the horror which had come to live with us. I found it hard to breathe.

Curiously, as days passed, I faced the possible death of my husband in a way I
would not have thought. I began to methodically plan. I decided that I would close the
doors on relationships from that point on. If the love of my life was leaving, then I would
close the door...literally and figuratively. What would I do then? I told my sister, in
private. I would continue to live my years dedicated to what I felt called to do. I would be
completely consumed with teaching children and/or adults. I reminded myself that I was
not needy and did not need a man to make me complete. I would go on and would be very
deliberate in my direction.

Did that sound like a person striving to become a saint or realistically
considering one’s life? I had had thirty-eight years of marriage to a man who fathered
my four sons. We had a deep and meaningful relationship based on growth, change, and
fostered understanding. Was it perfect? Of course not but worth the effort and years put
into it. Throughout I had continued to grow and progress into a strong individual made
even stronger by living in relationship with another, this man who was now sick and possibly dying.

Therefore, when Betsy talked of the years following the death of her husband, I could see myself in her. I thought about how her boys suggested she go away and cry and I had empathy for her feelings. I remember thinking that I might just break into a million tiny pieces and never be put back together, if I fully internalized the totality of my husband’s illness. One thing I did find out fairly quickly was that as much as family and friends comforted me, they did not have to be the one to go on, at least not in the same way I did. The experience was lonely and glared with a frightening solitude.

It is easy for others to say cry and it seems logical for the ones left after death. However, logic does not always play a part in death. The reasons for death defy logic and the results are often beyond our finite minds to even begin to understand. Betsy said she was restless, and she convinced me she had truly lost a husband she greatly loved and appreciated. She told me she had no intentions of dating. I understood. I had not walked completely down her path, but I had gone far enough to find similarities between our reactions.

No, I did not think Betsy was engaged in a road to sainthood nor did I want to see her in that role. I decided she was a woman who had been dealt a hand in life with which she had to work. I saw her as determined to let sorrow deepen her care and compassion for others instead of embittering her. I respected her personal dealings with death, and I suspected one day, maybe when she least expects it, she will cry, but she will know she has gone on. Perhaps, Betsy had to know she was going to be able to go on before she could face the overwhelming shock of the death of her husband.
As for me, I am able to leave the horror of death for awhile. I have been given a respite because my husband’s surgery was a success. Nevertheless, our lives have been altered forever and when I hear one speak of loss, as did Betsy, I return to the place of tears and the caveat of despair. I know that my faith, which I consider to be Christian, was a mainstay for me, but I certainly did not feel happy. So was joy present? I believe so because, as Liston says, “Joy sustains an independent awareness based in internal self-reflexiveness that is therefore not dependent upon external events” (2001, p. 198).

Furthermore, and maybe most interestingly enough, there was a deep awareness of the meaning of my marriage and the relationship sustained over years. Joy was abiding there, not necessarily in the feelings I felt. I could think of my life as it had been and as it might be. I was able to go on within my mind. Could that be what happened to Betsy? Was she stuffing her grief deep inside or was she succumbing to an internal strength which offered her avenues of life-sustaining possibilities? From what I could see and tell, Betsy was relying on an internal strength to counsel her through life. I recognized it as joy.

Betsy

Betsy did move on in her career and in 2003 she became National Teacher of the Year. However, before the day when President George W. Bush named her America’s number one teacher, Betsy had seen what the remaining years of her career as a teacher would be. Her passion was already set into motion when she witnessed for herself children who were not getting the same chance as others. As State Teacher of the Year, she spent some time at Brighton Elementary School and was there to witness snakes curled up in a corner of a kindergarten classroom. The prestige of her national title
brought attention to the situation and authorities finally removed the snakes, but Betsy could not remove her steadfast determination to right the wrongs she witnessed at Brighton. The snakes were just an indication of how the county was ignoring the school. She could not turn her back and pretend she did not see the children who were not, as she describes the situation, getting equal opportunities to become well educated.

Brighton earned the worst academic ranking in the state seven of the past eight years. Betsy vowed to herself she would return to the school where she saw how children were forgotten just as snakes were allowed to crawl, ignored and unattended, through holes in walls. Remembering her own words as National Teacher of the Year, that the most effective teachers need to be placed at the most at risk schools, Betsy felt she had to return to Brighton and begin the exhausting task of helping a school rid itself of failure.

“…But when you see the kids, you just have this panic for them. You think, ‘They can’t wait five years to see change. They’ll be lost!’ ” says Betsy (Gouban, n.d.). So on August 4, 2004, Betsy began at Brighton. “It has been said that children are the messages sent to a time we will never see,” she states in her National Teacher of the Year application. Betsy may not witness the future, but in her dreams she sees a chance to influence the future for children.

Why Betsy sees the inequality and the disgraceful situations of many of America’s children, and in particular those in her home state of Alabama, is because Betsy has chosen to see what is real in the world. From the time she and her husband chose to move away from a more affluent home in the city to a country farm so their sons could grow up among children who were not engulfed in the ways of the wealthy until the present when she anguishes to find ways to change a once failing school, Betsy
recognizes what needs to be done and does it. Perhaps she is restless because of her personal loss, but maybe her restlessness is actually a sign of her disquieted compassion for the needs of children.

I felt tears when I first heard Betsy tell about her involvement with the children of Brighton and there were a number of times when Sandy talked, and I could feel tears welling up. In the same manner, tears surfaced when Jan’s students, one Vietnamese and the other Afghan, presented senior projects and told about their incredible journeys to their last year of high school and onward to colleges. The stories of all three women, Betsy, Sandy and Jan, were ones that would bring most of us to tears, but I knew, deep inside, that I had found something greater than emotional responses to moving remarks.

Sure, the emotion was there, but the depth was far greater and more transcendent than surface tears. I knew I was seeing something yet not seeing at all. I could not decipher what one thing would make three women care for other people’s children. That is exactly when the searching stirred within me again…Why did they care? Many of us barely care enough to share with our own families, much less with strangers. So again, why did they care?

I could not answer the question. I even asked each teacher the question directly and never could get a clear answer. Therein is the mystery. Perhaps none of us could, and never would be, able to tell each other why we cared while others did not. Liston says that there is more to joy than we can take apart and put together (2001), and likewise, I believe there is definitely more to caring and compassion than just the outward sign of seemingly good deeds. My observations confirmed signs of joy and the mystery within
the lives I had come to observe. Eventually I did not care if reasons were named because I saw in the lives of my participants the results of joy, and I knew it was present.

Jan

The Preuss School on the University of California campus in San Diego is a grades 6-12 school where children of low income families are prepared to become the first college graduates in their families. It is a college preparatory school where all seniors go on to colleges. Some go to Ivy League schools such as Harvard, Brown, Yale, and MIT while others go to local colleges and universities. The majority of the students represent minority populations in the United States. Being at The Preuss School is a life changing experience and one in which Jan has helped to create.

The streets of La Jolla were amazingly gorgeous and the campus of the UCSD is beautiful. The Preuss School sits proudly on the campus where it awaits busses which pour into the front driveway with students, dressed in uniforms, and representing a lovely array of skin color—brown, golden, yellowish tan, etc. The students laughed, said hello, seemed so glad to be there, and walked directly to their classes. There seemed to be a pervading calmness and maturity. Education seemed to be taken very seriously by students and staff. Over the door in the library words were painted. “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” (Eleanor Roosevelt) I could feel those dreams and the more I learned about Jan, the more I understood why.

Sitting down in her class, I began to absorb my surroundings. Soulong Nghyen arrived at Jan’s class. An exuberant cry came forth from him as he entered his twelfth grade AP English class. He had just presented his year long senior project and had passed with Ms. Gabay being one of his judges. “I did it with Ms. Gabay! I did it with Ms.
Gabay!” “Yea, and you did it with your clothes on,” replies Jan. Her dry wit came fast, students laughed, and she did not stop for even a second. It was 2:15 in the afternoon, and she had Chaucer’s *The Prologue to Canterbury Tales* to teach this group of seniors. They were days away from graduation, but she reminded them she was just days away from not being able to teach them *Canterbury Tales* and that would not work for her.

The class began to pick up on the rhythm of Jan’s voice as she almost hummed the strange sounding words of Middle English. The cadence was apparent and the students began to recite, along with Jan, *The Prologue*. There I was sitting in a senior English class pouring over *Canterbury Tales* just days from graduation yet still I observed seniors who actually seemed focused on the lesson. They were caught up in the rhythm, and Jan, who was lost in her art, took her much-loved seniors with her. Indeed, she seemed to be the consummate English teacher.

Soon I began to quietly recite along with them and as I whispered the words, I watched. I saw a small Hawaiian woman who marched up and down the rows as if transfixed by the magic of the words she spoke, yet remaining engrossed in her students. They had her full attention and she had theirs. “Hold on, I want to hear the cadence!” Jan demanded. And as she walked, she talked, and she kept them holding onto the sound of language. “Language evolves,” she told them. “It changes.”

So that is how I came to know Jan, this incredible teacher who personifies for me the best in the true art of teaching. Her classroom brims with books, writings, posters, and Gatsby projects. There are boxes, papers, book racks, and a bulletin board which reads *Congrats to Graduates*. Her desk was full with a computer and loads of memos, notes,
and print outs. Her classroom gave me a sense of the personhood of Jan Gabay…full to overflowing with knowledge, creativity, diversity, and openness.

We took breaks between classes, and Jan described for me her life as National Teacher of the Year, but, also, about the days she now spends doing what she loves most…teaching. We huddled in her office which connects her classroom to the neighboring class. Abraham came up behind her, and she was not aware of his presence. “Hi, do you need something?” I asked the seemingly shy young man. Jan turned around and rather curtly responded, “Abraham, you cannot just stand there. We did not hear you. We did not notice you. You must make yourself known to others. You cannot let yourself be ignored.”

That’s when I saw it…one of Jan’s definite missions in life…for students, as with herself, to not be ignored. She was passionate when she talked with Abraham, and I realized quickly she was not just giving him a lesson in manners, but a life lesson in how to be in the world. She was offering him a lesson in freedom…to be counted, noticed, and acknowledged as a human being of worth and respect. She did not baby him and she did not back down from being painfully truthful with him. He might have been a tad embarrassed but I knew, and he knew, Jan offered him “teaching toward freedom” (Ayers, 2004, p. 161).

My own moments of reflection with Jan were many because she evoked a deep sense of what it meant to be a good teacher. I watched and listened as she helped young colleagues sort out concerns, organized the end of year faculty party, listened compassionately to her principal, reminded seniors of all the things they had to take care of before graduation, and continuously replied to the questions from her students. At
times I envied the richness of her vocation, and I yearned for the moments when teaching is just so, so good. She was engrossed in the livelihood of good teaching and compassion that comes with caring the way she does for students and colleagues. Jan’s life seemed full and real.

One of my most important perceptions about Jan was the relationships she developed with both students and peers. Even though I was all but a stranger to her, still Jan was open, appreciative of our communication, and respectful. Within my observations and conversations, I understood Jan to be a person who was not just accepting, but in a much larger and more important way, she responded with sincerity and empathy. I could see it in her facial expressions, her validation of others, and her continuous interest in what was needed to make her school, her students, her colleagues, and herself open to change and positive progression. Her bright-eyed expressions and her comfortable and intelligent demeanor made one want to stay and talk with her. People seemed to be pulled toward her, and she in return responded with kindness and interest.

Jan’s apparent connection to her students reminded me of just how vital relationships are to caring and compassion. Sidorkin says that “one can only learn to love something from someone they love” (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 111). Liston perpetuates such an understanding of the importance of relationships when she describes the importance of how one connects to another. Liston proposes that one cannot become human until we enter into relation (2001). In Buber’s terms, Liston reminds us to keep the space between student and teacher, therein entering into authentic and meaningful relationships which both affirm and recognize our personhoods (Liston, 2001). In relationships, both teacher and student are affirmed. Neither should be diminished.
Ayers says that great teachers “engage youngsters, interact with them, draw energy and direction from them, and find ways to give them a reason to follow along” (Ayers, 2001, p. 124). The words of Ayers describe the magic of Jan and the realness with which she interacted with her students. She had found the space in between, and she made sure not to fill it with herself, but left the space open so she would really know her students, and they, like Abraham, would recognize themselves. Therein is Jan’s wisdom and her joy as a teacher.

Interlude

I feel I have grounded my teaching in relationships and now work as an administrator in the same manner. Being privy to a couple of days with Jan reminded me of the vast importance of good relationships in a school and caused me to examine more closely who I am as a leader. I thought about the positive comments made by visitors to Jan’s room. I am sure they saw excellent teaching, as did I, but I am also confident they saw relationships between teacher and students which are beyond what one sees in most classrooms. There is an intangible quality to Jan’s teaching, and I believe this quality resides in the relationships she builds with people. Her classroom rang true to the descriptions of Maxine Greene, as she proposes that classrooms should be “nurturing, thoughtful and just all at once” (Greene, 1995, p. 45).

Had I held tight to the firm belief that everything we do as human beings hinges on how well we are connected to one another? I thought about the changes that had taken place in my career in the last three years. I had moved from being a fourth grade teacher to an instructional coach and now to an administrator. Was I true to what I believed about relationships? I tell others that teaching cannot take place without good
relationships between teachers and their students. Can effective leadership take place without meaningful relationships? Can I lead without care and thoughtfulness? Of course not. I knew the answer just as well as I knew the importance of the student-teacher relationship, but was I walking it out in my life?

Sometimes life seemed much simpler when I was a classroom teacher. There I had a group of students who were with me most of the day. We grew easily in our relationships and respect for each other. When the school year ended, I was filled with regret...not because I hated to see the students move onto another class, but because I knew our relationships would never be the same. Our closeness would be altered, yet isn’t that the point? Shouldn’t we want those we teach to move beyond us? Is that the price paid as one teaches and cares for another? Most likely, but how else can one teach, if not with the care and compassion that relationships offer?

Likewise, how can one lead if not through relationships? Having close relationships with teachers at my school becomes difficult because I am also one who evaluates them. Therein is the delicate place where joy must offer me insights into how to care and be compassionate. My past history as a teacher and my belief that teachers should offer goodness and freedom to children guides my interpretation of what I see happening with teachers and students in my school. However, my desire for positive influence cannot over-ride my compassion for all of us as human beings. Said another way, I cannot let my drive for doing what is right for children cause me to run over the personhood of the teachers with whom I work.

Years have taken me through many personal mistakes, and I have come to recognize the shadow side of my zeal for helping children. At times I am very impatient to
see things being done effectively and meaningfully for children. I am quick to respond and have to watch myself in my relationships. My tolerance for ineffective teachers is low and rightly so, but intolerance for teachers as human beings is far from being right. So what can I do to help insure that I am seeing things as they are and then offer help coupled with care and compassion? How can I keep my arrogance from stifling my positive influence?

I have learned as an instructional coach and now as an assistant principal that I best rely on something besides my natural tendencies or the results will be harmful. The busyness of my days and the pressure of helping to run a school easily carve out my activities, leaving little time to be reflective, prayerful, or meditative. However, I see I cannot be as I ought in the world without an internal source which reckons my being with the world around me, and as Liston (2001) suggests, I can turn in the direction of that source...joy. Is that seeing with the eyes of the divine...seeing injustice without judgment and offering goodness without bringing harm? My search has widened my heart and hopefully I will fill it with joy so that the relationships I build will be those which offer connectedness and meaningful purpose. In so doing, hopefully my drive for doing what is right for children will be joined with doing what is right for teachers.

Jan

Jan shared openly with me about the prejudice she had grown up with and how she wanted so much for these students who were so much like her. She talked of how she included ethnic literature and authors such as Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston, but, also, required all of her students to study the work of “the dead white males”. She encouraged her students to write from their own perspectives, and she reiterated the
importance of their homes, families, and native languages. However, her job was to prepare these students for colleges, and she took that charge seriously. She wanted them to be able to shine in the world in which they were about to find themselves. Likewise, Delpit said that it is our duty to explain, while keeping cultural boundaries intact, to children of poverty and/or color what they are expected to do to function in our world of standards and protocols (Delpit, 1995). Throughout my observations and interactions with Jan, I felt she held the highest respect for the diversified body and as a reflection of such respect, she expected the highest level of academic rigor possible.

I thought about the problems inherent in starting a college prep school for students whose parents had not gone to college. I wondered about the relationships of these children to their parents after they graduated from The Preuss School and went on to college and beyond. This seemed hard to sort out in my mind yet I could not contain the excitement I felt in the midst of this incredible school. Also, I reminded myself of the two young men who presented their senior projects.

One was from Afghanistan and he was quite an impressive young man. I sat and listened as Jamir described his research, his internship at USCD, and finally about his community project. He worked in an after school program created for Afghan students. There is a community of about 40,000 Afghans living in San Diego and so there is a huge need to reach the children for various reasons. One was that the children, who now speak English, are not able to communicate with their parents who only speak Farsi. Jamir would teach his native language to the children. In addition, he would translate parent notes into Farsi for the teenagers who wanted to ask questions of their parents and could not find a way to communicate.
Jamir’s senior project was judged according to a rubric and set up in accordance with the same scoring sheet used to score all projects. Likewise, all students who graduate from The Preuss School must go through this process. This was just one example of the global thinking and acceptance perpetuated at The Preuss School. Cultural differences were all around the school from the students themselves to the myriad of student work. One student, whose parents came from Vietnam, talked of how he would miss the huge racial diversity he had experienced at school and wished he could carry it with him. I watched and listened to these students and finally decided, maybe, they were on the cutting edge of not only cultural understanding, but celebratory acceptance. I have never seen a school so dedicated to helping students retain their cultural identities while, at the same time, encouraging them to regard themselves as vital members of a democracy. Actually, the entire environment was amazing, to me, a middle class, white woman from the southern tip of an island off the coast of Georgia who lives amongst diversity, but certainly not amidst celebratory acceptance.

Interlude

After being with Jan, I decided that possibly there was a shred of hope for cultural understanding and acceptance in our world. Most probably, the students at The Pruess School could teach us a lot. Additionally, I believed an intelligent and winsome Hawaiian woman, once named as America’s best teacher, knew well the lessons. What could I learn from what they knew?

I am in a school known by many as the island school. Such a connotation is made in reference to the comparison of our school to schools on the mainland which are not populated by as many wealthy or white students. The title of island school sickens me and
continues to increase the divide between our school and the ones in Brunswick. Some of us have tried to counteract the label, but a perception of such ingrained prejudice and envy makes changing such thinking very difficult if not impossible.

However, this year, because of AYP results, our school is a designated school of choice. Students from a Brunswick school, which did not make what the state describes as adequate yearly progress, are choosing to come to our school. Our racial and economic diversity is increasing as we are joined by children from a mainland school. I am rejoicing!

Can I, being White, female, and middle class, reach these children and their families? My principal and I have designated part of my job description to include outreach to our Brunswick families and their children. In this role, I will use many avenues to help mainland families become a significant and respected part of our school community. This will be done through a myriad of ways such as home visits, onsite conferencing, parent information sessions, and volunteer training. Relationships will be at the center of my work.

For years the physical divide known as the Torras Causeway Bridge has kept the island separate from the rest of Glynn County. Sadly, this bridge has become a metaphor for a much broader divide; there is a huge gap in understanding and acceptance. Needless to say, celebratory acceptance, as witnessed at The Preuss School, is far, far away.

Now we have families, many who are Hispanic, joining our school community. Can these new families really experience a feeling of community in a place so far removed from where they live? Parents have chosen to send their children to our school
because they believe they will gain an education which is better than what they would get in their neighborhood school. Will they? How do children feel who ride miles on a bus, over several bridges, through wealthy neighborhoods and shopping, unlike where they live, to a beautiful school nestled in the woods and wetlands of an island? Do they feel out of place, negative about themselves, or excited to be joining a school which provides academic excellence? Maybe they feel some of both.

I am thrilled the families are joining us. After all, I am one who has spent a lifetime fighting against what I perceive to be negative results from a personal background of privacy, affluence, and snobbery. I know how desperately our school needs to be joined by others who are unlike existing families. However, I also am very much aware of how difficult days may grow for the children who are coming and for their families who most likely do not feel a part of our school community.

I wish I could transplant the awareness and acceptance prevalent at Preuss to our school. I wish we could celebrate our differences, but all my wishes will not hold the reality of prejudice from our day to day experiences. There is one significant lesson I learned at Preuss and that is the importance of the relationships built between families, students, and staff. Liston says that “the act of oppression denies the humanity for both the oppressor and oppressed. Compassion, equity, and respect are thus all prerequisite for Joyful creations of our worlds” (Liston, 2001, p. 172).

I believe joy helps us create relationships which are built on mutual respect. In joy, our creations are good (Liston, 2001). The goodness of acceptance thus is perpetuated in the relationships we build. This school year, as we attempt to connect families, perhaps we will start to understand how to celebrate our differences and enter
into community together. I have a lot to do, and I feel very inadequate, but at least I am at a starting point, with the memory of a fine school and a good teacher which aid in my awareness of how a celebration of diversity can look. The bridge, which so long has been a great divide, might become, instead, a road leading from one culture to another, while offering spaces for understanding. In the meantime, some of us will continue to cross over, encouraging others to do the same.

Questions Remain

“Why? Why do you care for the children of others?” Quickly, Jan responded. “I don’t know…it sounds a bit pat…perhaps that each child really is all our children. That came home to me in Boulder, Colorado, when a previous student recognized me and asked if I wanted a beer. I thought, geez, I’m walking across to give a speech and he is at the bar offering me a drink. I see them {students} everywhere, and you know, you recognize them, and they are part of you. We must care as humans, we must care.”

Sandy and Betsy attempted to answer the same question as to why one cares to teach the children of others. However, the answers to the question remained incomplete. None could completely put into words why they cared so passionately for other people’s children. Mounted amidst pictures on the wall in Sandy’s home is a plaque holding her thoughts, “We are not the parents, but we are the adults, and we have an obligation to take care of all children.” Likewise Jan told me, “I suppose, but I don’t know. …isn’t it an obligation? We as humans, we as a society, we as people, how could I not love another person’s child?” Betsy’s words reflected the feelings of both Jan and Sandy. She said, “I just felt such joy in the kids, and I guess it’s a talent, a gift you have. Everybody doesn’t have it…but most of the teachers I work with at least feel that way about kids and are
very, very strongly committed to the betterment of children, making a better world {for them}…”

Perhaps, I could not completely solve the mystery of why these women cared and had compassion for the children of others, but I knew I had seen caring and compassion in action. A story told to me by Betsy became a metaphorical representation of why I think I see care and compassion in these women. The story went like this:

One day Betsy was driving during rush hour traffic to Brighton Elementary, and she noticed she was heading in an opposite direction from most of the traffic. Then, deep from within, Betsy experienced a huge reality check. She asked herself why she was going in a different direction from most people? Why was she doing this? Her life could be so much simpler and far easier. She did not have to go to Brighton, but she had actually chosen to do this. “Why?” Betsy asked herself. The answer came quietly, from within: “The kids… I can’t leave them. I can’t hide their faces from me. I always see the faces of the kids; it breaks me, because they haunt me, because we have let it happen to our children. The adults in charge have failed them so miserably.”

The adults have failed and we are, indeed, those adults…all of us, not just the parents… often, not even the parents, but certainly adults, encompassed in a society, somewhere, somehow, who have failed the children they are charged to protect. Seeing harm done to children, whether the harmful acts surface as neglect, abuse, or just circumstance, is a painful picture to paint, and more than that, fighting the woes of society is a grueling experience for teachers, especially if they do not carry something which enables them to work against visions of failure, poverty, and plain old-fashioned
neglect. In fact, I agree with Palmer (1998), who suggests that teachers must gather from within to fight what stands without.

Is that what I have observed in these three women? Have I come to know three women who have chosen to travel different routes from the masses? It appears to me that they have chosen paths not commonly traveled by a world set into a motion by competition, scientific methods, and grueling standardization. Instead, their lives seem to be ones of kindness, hope, and ultimate transformation. The relationships they have built have offered them authentic connections to the worlds in which they live.

Joy, according to Liston (2001), crowds out oppression and offers a new metaphor for how one ought to be in the world. Liston goes on to say that “as we ground our interpretations in Joy, then the worlds we create will be Joyful” (2001, p. 11). I believe, Betsy, Sandy, and Jan have created worlds that are joyful…far from perfect, but full of care and compassion. They are indeed grounding themselves in something we cannot see inwardly but can witness outwardly.

Betsy, Sandy, and Jan have a mystery lying within, and part of the mystery is manifested in caring and compassion. Subsequently, I believe joy resides within the personhood of each of these women, who are dedicated to offering hope to children. Finally, they found ways of counteracting negativity and instead, perpetuated caring and compassion in places others might deflect.

Perhaps, this story of Sandy’s will help us identify with the depth of compassion she felt for her students. Maybe we will see more clearly what makes Sandy, Jan, and Betsy travel in opposite directions from so many others. Possibly, we will be close to the mystery of teaching and an awareness of joy. Listen while she speaks:
I was a runner, and I cried when I ran because it was the only time I was allowed, and it was a time when I cried over the anguish of my kids. I cried over living and not dying sometimes... having to continue in this life was worse than death for so many of them (students). Some were sold into prostitution and used in so many different ways. I cried because I couldn't solve whatever the problems were. I cried because I thought I wasn't good enough...I really didn't know all the geometry I should have known, and I couldn’t help this kid with his work and he needed to get credit. I used to run in the same area, and finally, one day this man came out and said, “You know, if you don't like running, you don't have to do it.” I ran and I cried. Eventually, I had to switch my routes because that's why he (the man) continued to see me crying.

Revolutionary thinker and activist Grace Lee Boggs says that “people who live hopefully do so because it’s a more joyful, powerful way to live” (Ayers, 2004, p.159). In contrast, I say if people live hopefully, they do so because they are filled with joy. In joy, we have the resource to overcome negativity and the ability to reach out to others, always protecting the space in between. Joy reveals our humanity but, at the same time, places our knowing in the context of our beings and the being of others. Mystery resides in how one cares and reacts with compassion. Joy holds the mystery and the source of hope.
CHAPTER 8: REFLECTIONS OF JOY

You asked me to explain...I answered you with my life.

Living

Where do you think I live?
In my voice, speaking among others,
Or here, in the writings of my soul?

Where do you think I live?
Running in restless rhythms of day,
Or hidden in the solace of quiet?

Where do you think I live?
The answer stretches far,
Yet still so close.

I live inside of myself,
When moments, so dear, let me stay,
And cherish how,
I have come to live in the world.

(Shirah, 2006)

I am a Teacher

Teachers at the elementary school where I am the assistant principal asked me to share the results of my search into joy. At the end of the year, one teacher, in particular, shared how tough the year had been for her. I listened, but, more than that, I heard what her weariness told me. She was disheartened, and we talked for awhile. In our conversation, she questioned her own sustainability. I told her I would be doing some research on what keeps good teachers going and would be traveling to several places. She looked at me with a simple expression of acknowledgement, but, at the same time, seemed to be longing to know…what does keep good teachers going? As we finished
talking, I began to walk back to my office, but she stopped me and asked if I would share my results with her in the fall. I told her I would.

Actually, the findings of my study, in keeping with the general format of *Composing a Life* (Bateson, 1989), are interspersed within the stories of the participants, Betsy, Sandy, and Jan. Therefore, the following remarks are in addition to previous chapters and may, in part, overlap. This reflection is not meant as a summary of my study; in contrast, it is intended as another expression of how I have come to know joy through the lives of three National Teachers of the Year.

Thus my final thoughts are presented not only to my committee but to the teachers at my school. After all, teachers are my authentic audience… the one I interact with each school day. Teachers are some of the most important persons holding me accountable for my being. They are ones who can make me laugh and make me cry. They honor me with their support and frustrate me with their cynicism. They are the people of my profession. They are the ones I have come to know and respect. They are the ones who have come to know me, first as a teacher and now as one of their administrators. With them, I cannot hide or pretend to be who I am not, so I take what I give to them very seriously…they know me as teacher.

Palmer (1993) says:

*We may bring truth to light by finding it and speaking its name – but truth also brings us to life by finding and naming us…The knower who advances most rapidly toward the heart of truth is one who not only asks “What is out there?” in each encounter with the world, but one who also asks “What does this encounter reveal about me?” …When we allow*
ourselves to be known in truth, we are able to see and hear and feel more of the world’s reality than we could before we were known. (p. 60)

Therefore, what does my search for joy reveal about me? Returning to the research questions, I wonder what I can infer about joy in others and in me. Did I find out what teachers do to persist in an era of excessive accountability, strict standardization, and nearly humanly impossible days? Did joy (Liston, 2001) contribute to this persistence? How did the lives of three National Teachers of the Year inform my inquiry into joy? The answers are found within stories and inferences made from lives lived not only as teachers but as ones in search of how to make a world for children open to transformation and freedom.

Inferences

Those who teach reading know the importance of students’ understanding how to infer. In fact, inference is a fundamental reading skill stressed in the research of most effective schools (M. Thompson, personal communication, July 27, 2006). In Metacognition in Educational Theory and Practice, Hacker talks about how failing to comprehend a text can produce “illusions of knowing” (Hacker, Dunlosky and Graesser, 1998, p. 179). Successful inference, therefore, helps to counteract misunderstandings of what is being read. Often answers to questions are not easily found and demand a higher level of analyzing and synthesizing. Readers are required to think broadly and reflect on possibilities within the context of what is being read mixed with what is already known to the reader. At times the process of inferring is tedious, and, based on my experience as a teacher, many students find it extremely challenging. Locating obvious details in a story is a much easier task and one that does not challenge the use of more complicated
metacognitive strategies such as inference. Often, students prefer to locate clearly defined
details, yet when inference is not required of the reader, much of the meaning in a text is
lost to a lower level of thinking.

Likewise, if one wants to see things not easily seen, and understand ideas that are complex, one must learn to infer. Otherwise, just the top layer of learning will be apparent and deeper meanings, no matter how important, will be left buried. One of the easiest ways to teach inference is found in the instructions to bring what you know, join it with what you read, and you will have the answer. In a most elementary terminology, that is how one infers.

The art of inference became a mainstay in my search for joy. Bringing what I knew of joy, reading the world of three teachers, and then putting it all together offered meaning to me, even though, at times I felt like my students. For example, students often want teachers to give them easy answers. At other times, they argue that the question was not written correctly. Sometimes, they get so frustrated they make wild guesses, fill in the blank, and move along to other questions, all without meaningful thinking.

Similarly, I got frustrated looking for joy. At times, I expected the participants in my study to simply name joy as their source of sustainability. I wondered if I selected alternate questions, the answers would come more readily. Sometimes, I grew impatient while putting the pieces of the data together, but finally, the obvious became the most meaningful. I realized the folly of my thinking. How could something as infinite and transcendent as joy be contained in one word or a simple verbal response? In fact, Liston says that “the more we analyze joy, the less we know joy…we cannot eliminate the mystery” (Liston, 2001, p. 42). Accordingly, I knew my search for joy would be found in
the inferences I made throughout my study into joyful teaching. The realness of joy and
the magnitude of its worth could only be found in the authenticity of lives lived. Easy
answers were not available; I had to think deeply and insightfully, to find evidence of joy.
I had to let the lives of the participants speak. I had to let my own life speak, too. I had to
listen.

*Joy*

“Joy, a quiet space of infinite potential that cannot be attained through force, but
must be allowed space in which to exist (Liston, 2001, p. 77).

“Allowed space to exist?” That is exactly what I had to do in my study of joy. I
had to allow for space in my thinking so I could read the world lived by three teachers
and find the inferences for joy. I could not force joy with direct questions being asked or
hint at its reality without losing the path of my methodology. I had to sit quietly and wait
for the glimpses of joy to appear. So I lingered, there amidst classrooms, meetings,
dinners, and lectures. I sat and I watched. At times, I talked, then, I listened. I listened to
the stories of three good teachers. Frequently, I reflected. Inside of myself, I knew I was
watching joy, and I knew I would leave, changed, after my journey into the lives of three
National Teachers of the Year.

Here, amidst the pages of my study, lives emerged, not only the lives of my
participants, but mine, too. Lived experiences brought meaning and insight into Liston’s
theory of joy (Liston, 2001)…the theory that I had studied, picked apart, and analyzed
intently. I understood the theory, but the realities of joy in lives lived was the verification
I wanted to carry with me from my study.

The methodology of my research required me to listen not only to words but to
sights…to sounds…to others. The nuances of the lives of my participants became indicators for joy. The interludes of my study placed me within the dilemmas of their lives and at the same time offered intervals for meaningful reflection. Therefore, here are the findings of my research, the inferences I have made about joy as lived by three National Teachers of the Year. Liston reminds us of the basis for the inferences I make:

…I seek to recreate its original and ontological Greek meaning; its logos and world-making power…Joy’s logos…an inner and profound light radiated from the human spirit. It is within this light that joy empowers us to imagine and create our worlds (Liston, 2001, p. 9).

As a result of my study, I offer joy, known to me through the work of Liston (2001) but now joined with lived experiences immersed in the mystery and the transcendence of joyful teaching…lives lived when joy from within sheds light on the what is possible, right, just, caring, courageous, and compassionate. The following quotations from Joy as a Metaphor of Convergence (2001) recollect Liston’s theory of joy. Following each quotation, I have made the connection between what I experienced as participant-observer in my study and what I have come to know as joy in the lives of my participants. I reiterate the findings as Liston’s theory (2001) becomes a living, breathing reality discovered in the lives of three teachers recognized for depth of being and excellence in their profession. Moreover, joy becomes a predictable source of internal strength for teachers. As teachers view a world of possibilities through imagination (Greene, 1995), have courage to be as they ought (Palmer, 2000), mysteriously care with compassion (Ayers, 1995), and speak with a cultural awareness of their students and themselves (Purpel, 1989), then they walk in joy. Henceforth, teachers
offer freedom of thought and being to strangers known to them as students (Greene, 1973). Teachers and students can become intertwined in transformation, destined for voyages joined with freedom (Ayers, 2004).

**Joyful Meaning**

“*Joy generates an awareness of the possibilities available to us* (Liston, 2001, p. 198).” According to my research, when joy is present, teachers are surprised by the realities of life yet sustained by seeing the possibilities of what can be. Amidst bureaucracies, legislations, and personal hardships, they struggle to find meaning. They may go on long walks, cry as they run, or sit reflectively in the hours after teaching; they may find ways of solitude. Apologies might be offered along with humility. Eventually, however, they will see the possibilities available to them. Theirs is eyesight divinely inspired. The potential for possibilities remains within, not without. The strength is internal and they have learned to stand on ground not “riddled with a fault line of fear” (Palmer, 2000, p. 94). They will go on, and they will continue to open spaces for themselves and those they teach as they imagine things as big and unfinished (Greene, 2001). They will name their worlds as joyful (Liston, 2001).

“Joy offers a world in which justice, compassion, and fulfillment are not only compatible but also interdependent” (Liston, 2001, p. 198). When joy is present, teachers see injustice and respond with care. The realities of the harm being done to children is not only witnessed but seen. The mystery of responding with compassion overtakes apathy and denial. Shocked by death, neglect of children and/or racial prejudice, teachers, existing in joy, find internal fortitude to persist. They do not forego the pain and lack of care existing in their worlds. They strive to find answers. They experience heart
wrenching situations, but are able to react, not as victims, but as ones who carry light and hope. They are restless, thoughtful, and open to the world which does, in truth, break one’s heart. The dilemmas in their lives are real; their relationships are authentic. “Joy becomes the source and the result” (Liston, 2001, p.144).

Lives lived as teachers…lives lived as human beings…lives lived strong…lives lived with vulnerability but coupled with life supporting imagination…lives understood by me as lives lived in joy. Thus my study into the lived experiences of three incredible National Teachers of the Year comes to an end, but the essence of their beings remains within me. As my final thoughts fell on this page, I wondered what I would have to say to the teacher who ended last year in a conversation with me about how teachers keep going. Quickly I realized the answer to her question is found in the answers I have given myself. Joy is needed in my school and in schools across our nation. Teachers must know how to persist and live through those humanly impossible days with strength and goodness. Joy holds answers.

*Life Lessons in Joy*

As previously mentioned, the teachers at my school are those to whom I feel the most responsible as an educator. So it is to my staff that I offer my findings wrapped in a personally sought after search for joy. These are the lessons I have learned…lessons only possible through joy which radiates from the human spirit while shedding light so we can see and live in goodness (Liston, 2001). These are the lessons I offer as a channel of persistence:

Give up any thought of a society, given to rank and status, offering you allegiance and honored recognition. Find your worth within yourself. Decide that children are made
differently, not to frustrate you, but to create a world apart from sameness. Reach within to celebrate the wonder of diversity. Know that potential in children is not seen naturally and easily. Depend on your imagination to see it. When negative voices begin to overtake your melody, sing from a soul of courage. As days crowd your being, breathe, and practice silence. Remain in quietness until joy supplies an awareness of what to do. Stay connected to others and to the universe which holds us all. Live in the mystery of caring and compassion. Do not try to name it; instead, let your life speak. Foster goodness in the complexities of living. Make time for reflection, walking, running, meditating, praying, journaling, solitude, quietly communing with yourself and your source of being. Know joy from within. Experience the light. Thrive in the energy of joy. Turn but slightly, and begin to see with the eyes of the divine. The answer to persistence in teaching, as in living, lies within each of us…springing from a source known to me as joy.

Take your practiced powers and stretch them out

Until they span the chasm between two

Contradictions…For the god

Wants to know himself {herself} in you.

(Rilke)

Final Interlude

Best selling author, Anne Lamott, says it takes courage sometimes to just know when to walk: “Faith, also, means reaching deeply within, for the sense one was born with, the sense, for example, to go for a walk” (Lamott, 2005, p.257). So, I did just that…I went back to the sea, where I live, and where I can think. I walked along the shoreline of the Atlantic, where gray seas capture my imaginings and calm my
restlessness. I contemplated my journey into joy. I pondered the days, turned to years, of study, of journeying, of searching.

My journey, though personal, was not taken alone. I have taken authors, participants, and readers with me, on my travels into joy. I have come to the end and yet to the beginning...the end which is the beginning...an end of my study, but the beginning of my living out deep nuggets of knowing found in my search for joy.

I sat in a chair in view of the St. Simons pier, where my dad would take me to watch the sunset. I promised myself at the end of this study, I would return to this place of solitude and reflection. Once again, I sat watching the orange ball in the sky slowly move close to the horizon, then quickly, within moments, descend out of sight. The sight was magnificent and glorious, all at the same time. My journey into joy has been just that...there in front of me, brilliant, shining, calling, then instantly gone, finished. Yes, I had come to the end of a journey... a journey of the intellect and a journey of the spirit. The convergence was there within me. Joy had become for me a metaphor, too, for how one ought to live in the world.

Many years ago, I heard this question asked: “How then shall we live?”

I say, “We shall live in Joy.”
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