

# *Becoming the Teacher – An Auto Ethnographical Exploration in Poetry and Prose*

KIMBERLEY HOLMES

*University of Calgary*

**ABSTRACT:** Teacher training traditionally focuses on theories and philosophies of education, the epistemology of the practice. This research focuses on the ontological component of becoming a teacher, focusing on narrative inquiry, specifically storytelling, through the lens of auto ethnographical exploration. Through the professional and personal experiences of the researcher a higher understanding of self, and one's educational philosophy, is reached.

**RESUMÉ:** La formation du personnel enseignant est habituellement orientée vers la théorie et la philosophie, l'épistémologie de la pratique. Cette recherche porte sur les composants ontologiques qui forment un enseignant. L'enquête narrative en est l'axe principal notamment avec les récits qui sont recueillis au fil d'un auto-parcours ethnographique. On atteint une meilleure compréhension de soi-même et de sa philosophie pédagogique grâce aux connaissances professionnelle et personnelle du chercheur.

How does one come to an understanding of one's self and our role in the world? How can we understand our individual stories bringing us to an understanding of our collaborative voices? How does one begin the process of growing, transforming, changing and becoming? How does one begin to tell their story? Perhaps, with a poem...

## **The Chrysalis**

**A small timid creature  
Born unto the earth  
Seeking it's environment  
Slowly and carefully creeping forward**

Nourished by all the elements of nature  
 The trees, the plants, and the glowing sun  
 Wondering at the marvels of the Universe  
 Life has just begun

So begins the journey  
 Common to all mankind  
 The struggle to exist in this world  
 Marching along with the passage of time

Then we reach a turning point  
 An epiphany of sorts  
 When nothing is quite what it seems  
 And the world begins to morph

Life as we have known begins to end  
 The web encircles tighter  
 Silky strands surround our soul  
 The heart seems suddenly lighter

A sudden rush of darkness  
 We know the end is near  
 It is then that we realize  
 There is nothing left to fear

Every end is a new beginning  
 A chance to start anew  
 A whole wide world of wonders  
 So much to see and do

What the caterpillar knows as darkness  
 The butterfly sees as a chance for flight  
 A radiance that surrounds us  
 Embracing us within the light

*First Time Eyes-Through the Eyes of Little Kimberley*

*My name is Kimberley, but sometimes people call me Kim or Kimmy. I don't really like Kimmy but it does not really bother me all that much. Not a lot of things bother me much; generally I am a pretty happy kid. I live with my mom and dad and my brother who is younger than me. I have a dog named Tiny that I really, really love a lot. My mom stays home with us and bakes cookies and my dad goes to work. We play kick the can in the park at night and search*

*for dinosaur bones in the big field across the street. Sometimes we find frogs. We live in a city, but it does not really feel like a city. There are lots of open spaces and we are free to run around and play. One day my mom says that space will be a place called Market Mall where people will go shopping. I hope that does not happen soon because we like to play there and I worry about the dinosaur bones and the frogs.*

If Western industrial society appreciated the Material World, there would be no junkyards, no clear-cut forests, no shoddily designed and manufactured products, no poisoned water sources, no obese, fuel guzzling automobiles, nor any of the other horrors and eyesores that haunt us at every turn. (Hoff, p. 126)

Why would anyone want to build somewhere where there are frogs? Where will the frogs live?

I am going to kindergarten tomorrow. I am very excited! I LOVE school and LOVE learning. It will be so much fun for me. I wonder what I am going to do there. My teacher is a lady named Mrs. Ott and the name of my school is the Cat and the Hat. My mom has read me a book about the Cat in the Hat. He is a crazy guy but he sure has lots of fun.

Mrs. Ott is reading us a story about Winnie the Pooh. He is a chubby little stuffy all stuffed with fluff who likes honey. I love Mrs Ott. She hugs us all good morning and good bye and she smells like sunshine. We all love her and she loves us. I think this is really important to have love. Teachers must learn this in school. "The one question that ought to be asked on a teaching application is; do you love children?" (Collins, 1997 p. 61.) I think this helps us grow and be strong. She is teaching us how to be a community and how to get along. We share our toys and we try really hard not to fight. We sing every day. The song goes like this, "We sing a good good morning to the cat and the hat, the cat and the hat, and we sing a good good morning to every boy and girl." This is how we start our day and it makes us all very happy. We are only 5 but we have big ideas and big energy. We are learning that we are going to change the world one day. "Sensitivity and skill develop together- as one of them increases in the process of learning something, so does the other" (Hoff, p. 184.) Together we are learning how to write and read and help each other.

In the stories of Pooh, we are meeting many different characters. Mrs. Ott tells us that the characters are people and when we read stories it can help us understand people in our world. Characters are people in our real world. I love storytelling. I can learn a lot by listening to stories. She tells us that if we understand how people think and live we can have harmony in our world. I like the word harmony, it sounds like the river when it babbles in my grandma's back yard in the summer. "Taoism is a way of living in harmony with Tao, the way of the Universe, the character of which is revealed in the workings of the natural world" (Hoff, p. 18). She says there is a book about Piglet and Pooh and

something called Taoism. I might learn about Taoism when I get bigger. My favourite character is Piglet. Piglet is a very small animal. I am a very small animal too. "We might point out here that Taoism has always been found of Very Small Animals." (Hoff, p. 32) The other animals are named Tigger and Eeyore. I feel very sad for Eeyore because he does not seem to be very happy at all. He likes to make others feel small because he thinks that makes him feel big. What it really does it make other people just feel bad.

When one person feels bad, I feel bad too and then the WHOLE class feels really bad....

It contaminates the mind behind the face with its negative energy and spreads outward, like a disease. And then it comes back, projected and reflected by other unhappy minds and faces. And it goes on. (Hoff, 1993, p. 54)

Eeyore makes all the other characters feel like they are powerless. Because they feel like they are powerless, they are. I feel bad for Eeyore but I also don't like him very much. He is just a stubborn old donkey, always complaining and belly aching about nothing much. I am surprised the other animals play with him at all! I am so glad there are not any Eeyores in kindergarten. Maybe if we have kind teachers, like Ms. Ott, and we are all kind than there will be no reason to be unhappy and complain. I think I will try to be kind every single day just like Mrs. Ott. "Kindness is not, after all, an inborn quality, --it has to be cultivated, and this only happens when in demand." (Hoff, p. 80) I am going to practice kindness every day.

My favourite character is Tigger. Tigger is a bouncy tiger who is fun fun fun. He is always bouncing around and doing everything all the time. That is what I like to do! I like to do everything all the time. My mom says that I am a very busy girl. There are lots of busy boys and girls in kindergarten. We are preparing to go to grade 1. We will be very busy there as there is so much to do. It seems like being busy is a very good thing. The more busy you are, the smarter you are!

Alexander Pope described him (Tigger) quite nicely when he wrote; 'Some people never learn anything because they understand everything too quickly.'.... While the teachings of the West tend to encourage Tigger's sort of behaviour, the teachings of the East contain many cautions against it. (Hoff, 1993, p. 89)

It seems like I will do well in school because I learn things quickly just like Tigger! Tiggers are bouncy, bouncy, fun, fun, fun! He thinks he is the only one but really there are lots of us in kindergarten.

*People I Like and Why*

I am meeting lots of new kids every day. Some I like and some I don't. I really like the kids that are happy. We sing songs, pretend to be all sorts of things and just generally use what Ms. Ott calls our imagination. Our imagination is a wonderful thing, as it makes all sorts of things happen. I hope I always have an imagination. My imagination turns the trees by house into a magical forest. Did you know that 3 is a magic number? When I count to three all sorts of wonderful things happen to me! I love to just play for fun!

I don't really like the kids who are like Eeyore. They can be pretty "aggressive." Aggressive means that you are really mean to people so that you can get your way. Sometimes you even hit kids! I hit kids sometimes but only when they are mean to me or my brother. I had to hit a kid, who makes my brother cry. My brother talks funny sometimes because he has something called a lisp. The other kid was making fun of him. It made my brother cry and it made me angry so I pushed the mean kid to the ground. My mom was not happy with me at all! I guess I was wrong to do that but he made my brother cry. My brother is just little. My dad said it was okay because I was sticking up for my brother. I don't know who is right about this, maybe they both are. All I know is that I was angry. I really don't like people who use aggression to make other people feel bad and I don't want to play with them!

The Critics can be pretty intimidating, all right. One can't do or say much of anything without fear of offending this particular-very particular-type of Eeyore. If you do the wrong thing (or the right thing), you may find yourself ostracized. But being ostracized by the Eeyores has its advantages. At least you don't have to associate with--- (Hoff, 1993, p. 69)

I am going to try to use my words and not my fists to solve these problems. Dad says I am a bit of a scrapper and he thinks it is funny because I am a little girl with big blond curls. I am tough!

*Problems I See*

There are all kinds of people in our world. I thought everyone was kind and loving but now that I go to school I can see that some kids are not. I wonder if this is going to get worse as I get bigger.... I don't like Eeyore people but I like Tiggers. I wonder if the Eeyore people don't like me. It is starting to be a bit confusing. In kindergarten we shared everything and got along but I can see that this may not be happening now that I am in elementary school. I go to Terrace Road School now and there are kids in grade 1 to 6 here. There are some problems on the playground and some kids are really mean. They are really mean to my friend Cindy. Cindy is beautiful. She has big blue eyes and blond beautiful hair. She wants to be a dancer and I love her. We play all kinds

of games where we are dancers or movie stars at her house. But the kids at school don't like her. I don't know why. I pretend that I don't like her at school because I don't want the kids to not like me. This makes me feel really bad inside. The other day kids wanted to beat up Cindy. It was raining and they were chasing her with worms. One kid held her down and the other kid dropped a worm in her mouth when she screamed. It was terrible but I just did not know what to do! I really wish that I would have done something to help!

Don't deny the validity of your own experience. Stand on your strength, be unmoved either by adulation or denigration. Follow my lead; I am affected by either. I march on alone, undeterred and on my own accord. I am my own guide and witness; I have full faith in this. (Sai Baba, 2009, p. 69)

I am just a kid but I need to figure this out. I need to figure out how to come back to the place where everyone was happy. I need to figure out how to stand up to those mean kids and help my friend. This is a problem that I need to work hard to solve! "Without problems, there can be no personal growth, no group achievement, and no progress for humanity." (Hoff, 1993, p. 58) Hopefully, when I get older I will be better able to solve these problems. I am sure going to try!

### *What I Believe I Can Do*

I am just a kid, a very small animal. In lots of ways I am just like Piglet. I am not smart like Owl but I am not angry like Eeyore. I can be angry though..... and I still have lots of energy and enthusiasm like Tigger! I am young, and I can do things. I know that I can. I can be loving and kind and try to show others to be loving and kind. Remember Ms. Ott and all the things we learned in kindergarten. We can still be like this in all the other grades. All we really needed to know we learned in the Cat in the Hat. I just need to remember that....

Know the masculine, but keep to the feminine...Return to the infant state. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations are more clearly than men, who....think that they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure. Great man retains child's mind. (Hoff, 1993, p. 243)

### **Now I am the Teacher- Eyes Wide Open**

#### *What Does it Mean to Be a Teacher?*

I am almost 22 years old and I am the teacher now. There have been many teachers in between some of them good and some of them not so much. I am really not sure how I ended up here. I never wanted to be a teacher. It was

never even really on my list of things to do. I wanted to be a lawyer and fight for justice. I guess I still can be one day, but for now I am just a teacher.

It is funny, you graduate with your shiny B.Ed. but you really don't have a clue about how to be a teacher or what it even means to be a teacher. What do teachers do? When I remember the good ones, I remember who they were as people. My English teacher who made us laugh over the word titillate and my math teacher who made a hat with arrows through his head so I could understand linear algebra. They were both really happy people and they wanted us to succeed. They truly believed in us. Thank you Mr. Mack and Mr. Sept for loving what you did. We saw that and it inspired us. You made me love English AND Math which made it hard for me to decide what to do with my life because I wanted to do everything.

I always found it hard to answer the question, "What do you want to be?" which was usually followed by, "What are you good at?" I was good at a lot of things. I realize now that was because I had good teachers in those things. The things I was not good at were the teachers who did not care.

It is in the best interest of both the teacher and a student that both will succeed, that both will shine. Yet, how many teachers and students see their purposes that way?  
(Jones, 2005 p. 5)

So I determined that the most important thing about teaching was to love what you do and do it with love. I wondered about rules. What kind of rules would I need? How would I know if I had enough? What would I do if the rules were broken? As I gathered teaching experience I realized that the only rule I needed was Respect. That one word encompassed all that needed to be understood. If I respected my students, they respected each other, and I earned their respect all would be well in the world. Years later I tried to explain this to a student teacher but realized that this is a lesson that one needs to learn in your own way. Some teachers never do and that is why we continue to have breakdowns in our classrooms.

The highest manifestation of power is the deliberate refusal....to abuse it. ....The man of genuine worth and insight wants to be himself; and he wants others to be themselves also. Elbert Hubbard (Jones, 1997 p. 20)

So I think teaching is really about helping people find themselves, or at least teaching English is about that. It is the exploration of the human story, and our role within that story. It is the opening of the mind and the touching of the heart. It is with this touch that we understand our humanity. Yet, it is so incredibly difficult to do. The energy required to be a good teacher is huge. Burnout occurs frequently amongst teachers. I remember being so dam tired that I would just fall asleep on the sofa after a long day. My energy was slowly

draining from my body. Yet, I was a great teacher. My students loved me and grew to great things as a result of what I was doing. What was going on and what was I doing wrong? Why was I so tired?

There can be another source of energy loss, related to your own enthusiasm, strangely enough. Everyone around you has felt your exuberance. It is your gift to them. ... On seeing you, the dispirited and the depressed instinctively know that is how to live.... They want your energy, and they draw it from you, and the drainage tires you.  
(Jones, 2005 p. 10)

Teaching is the most powerful profession in the world but also the most draining. I need to learn somehow to protect my energy. Oh why did I just not get through the dull and boring Economics course and write ad copy or work in an office downtown. Life would have been so much easier.

*What are the Roadblocks?*

I still don't like Eeyores. I can work with them as students because there always seems to be a way to reach them but it is the dam Eeyore teachers that throw me over the edge. The Eeyore educational system is a soul sucking institution that is draining the very life force out of our children. I think back to this past September when I took my own happy and excited children back to school. The oldest emerged in a state of terror vowing never to return. They bored the hell out of the little guy who had been just running free in a summer breeze; they overwhelmed, under stimulated and under loved him which resulted in his running screaming from the institution. We did get him back eventually but it took some work and long discussion on all sides. I have learned, working in many classrooms, that my child is far from alone in his feelings about school. I am shocked and dismayed at the number of children who hate school. They arrive at the place all filled with love and then the soul sucking takes over. This may not be the fault of the teachers, who are no longer allowed to teach but are busy managing. There is a huge difference between teaching and managing. If we teach with love there is no need to manage. We need to have the courage to teach and we need to teach the things that children love to learn!

The Eeyores are eliminating what they consider unnecessary classes—Art, Creative Writing, Drama and so on—classes that will help students observe, reason and communicate, as well as keep their spirits and the right side of their brain alive.  
(Hoff, 1993, p. 72)

A child comes to the school full of love and eager to explore. That learning needs to happen in a joyful, natural way that inspires the child and helps them realize who they are and what they are to become. Yet, school has



become a competitive process. There are more and more private schools, charter schools, and traditional learning schools that want to cookie cut our children and get them out there competing in the real world. I remember being a young teacher and discussing leadership with a fellow teacher. My wise mentor was advising me to help the students find their own passion and direction. I wanted to instruct them and to get going on the project because in the "real world" we needed to get things done and get them done quickly. My naive Tigger tendency was shining brightly at this time. Her wise reply was that schools had no desire to be like the "real world", in fact that was the one thing that we tried the most not to be. Schools should be a safe and caring place where we are free to grow and explore. I did not understand then but I do now. Yet, we still push forward to train children younger and younger and as a result more and more children are fading away into nothingness and the more problems develop. We need to let children enjoy the magic of childhood instead of forcing them into the adult world!

Put children in school at the earliest age possible; load them down with homework; take away their time, their creativity, their play, their power, and plug them into machines. That will whip them into shape. Well, it will whip them, anyway. (Hoff, 1993, p. 73)

Yet for some odd reason these Eeyore educators cannot see the damage that they are doing. They defeat the children and they defeat my energy. If I was not a grown up I might smash their fingers with a rock. But I cannot do this for I am the teacher. I am the teacher. Remember way back in kindergarten I actually felt sorry for Eeyore. What a sad character to never see happiness in the world. What an incredible sad existence. I am sure that no one would want to be that way or feel that way. Why would anyone want to be that unhappy? Maybe these teachers need help in finding some happiness.

You say the Eeyore teachers, the black cloud critics, the doomsayers, appear to enjoy their suffering, and you ask how anyone could enjoy their suffering.... It is rather like gloating after losing your arm, after you told everyone that the machinery was more dangerous than they thought. (Jones, 2005 p. 33)

Maybe instead of hating these Eeyore teachers, which I do and would still like to make them go away, I need to find some way to reach these teachers. Is it possible? It seems so overwhelming but what is the alternative. To let the soul sucking continue, and watch yet another generation wither under the guise of learning. I think not. If one is a teacher, you have many students and not all of them are on your class list. Maybe I needed to try to teach the teachers how to be loving and kind. Can I be loving and kind to them? The Masters say this

is what is needed. “Whatever you want from others—love, support, loyalty—you be the first to give. J. Donald Walters (Jones, 1997 p.36). It is so hard when they just make me so angry with their ignorance. Sometimes, this work is just so incredibly difficult that I just want to give up and do something else, something much easier. I wonder if West Jet is still hiring?

### **How can I touch the heart?**

A revolution –more powerful and persuasive than any that man has undergone so far.... It is the Spiritual Revolution; the revolution that has love as both it’s means and ends. (Sai Baba, 2009 p. 79)

How can one make change in a world that seems so aggressive and competitive? How can we make change in a world where eighty percent of the population is functioning on a lower level of consciousness? As Hawkins (2006) reflects, “There is still the persistence of the primitive ego in man, this narcissistic core of self-interest, disregard for the rights of others, and seeing others as enemies and competitors rather than allies” (p. 30). How can we bring humanity to a higher level, a deeper place where life has more meaning and the constant rat race comes to a halt? These are very difficult questions that have been asked throughout human history and the answer always comes back to the matters of the heart. We need to be supportive of each other. “What is there, that a teacher does, that can not be related to love? If you are loving, you will treat students and colleagues with respect.” (Jones, 2005 p. 104)

It all comes back to my basic rule for classroom management this overriding concept of respect. What I had missed is that this respect was grounded in the concept of LOVE! Is this why I was drawn to teaching? I thought I wanted to study law, to fight for justice and sort out who was right. Was I still fighting to save Cindy from the worm and the tiny tormentors? I think perhaps I am, but this was not a battle to be fought in the court room but in the classroom. It was to be a battle for the soul and spirit of humanity to be challenged one child, one teacher at a time. Taking little steps and slowly expanding the consciousness of others, and most importantly my own higher consciousness, was the realization that I had been seeking. The Holy Grail has always been right here at my fingertips, taught to me by my very first teacher, Ms. Ott. “We sing a good good morning to the Cat in the hat, the cat in the hat. We sing a good good morning to every boy and girl.” It was the harmony of children’s voices mingling with the voice of their teacher working to change the vibrational patterns of the Universe, working together to make it a good good morning each and every day. Our positive energy can change ourselves and our world.

### **Lessons in Leadership-Through the Eyes of Others**

*What Does it Mean to Be a Leader?*

So now I am 43 years old and I am the leader. I don't really know what that is or how I ended up here either. This was another thing not on the list of things I want to be when I grow up as I am a rule breaker not a rule maker. Sigh. Sure, I have a Masters degree in Organizational Learning, and Leadership and yes I have been in a variety of leadership positions. But I am still tired and there is still something missing in all of this, and I have come to the conclusion that what I am missing is a connection with my higher self. I have read the literature from Machiavelli and the classics through to the current corporate dumb downed model. Regardless of the era or the genre the message is the same. We need to come back to some fundamental human principals, some basic concepts of kindness, compassion and being able to see the bigger picture beyond the here and now. It is about developing character, and in spite of the fact that our current educational model is attempting to teach citizenship and character they are missing a critical link.

Perhaps a more poetic way of saying it is that in the inner, inner, heart of character is heart. When you get that deep, or high, there's light—it's an experience of brightness. That light grants power to character. (Hawley, 1996, p. 150)

What it really means to be a leader is to find the light in times of dark. It is the classic literary motif that I have been teaching for twenty years, the quintessential battle of humanity. Good versus evil, light versus dark. Our whole goal as leaders is to step into the light and let our light shine.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (Williamson, 1992, p. 190)

Now that I am beginning to talk to my higher self I can really understand Williamson's message. Once we let OUR light shine all the other things fall into place. We realize we are only a part of the whole system and not the system. We accept things and people for who they are. That does not mean

you always have to be “nice” “Trying to be ‘nice’ probably won’t work. As leaders, working in complex interconnected systems we need to be authentic and speak from our heart and sometimes others don’t really like what we have to say. When this happens we need to listen carefully to the voice of our higher self who will guide us with regards what is the right thing to do when facing adversity. We need to consider all the perspectives and possibilities being mindful of all the parts that make up the whole system. As Hawley (1993) reflects on this process of leadership, “Just do those boss things from inner truth; do them in a dharmic way, with integrity. (p. 152.) I have realized this in my role working with teachers and trying to authentically lead the way. I could not be nice to the Eeyore teachers sometimes but I did work to try to bring them into the light. This is how I came to discover this concept of mindfulness and the impact of mindfulness in both our personal and professional lives.

The king should not be too mild or he will then be disregarded. The people will not have enough respect for him and his words. He must also avoid the other extreme, being too fierce, for then the people will be afraid of him, which is not a happy state of affairs. (Hawley, 1993, p. 182)

The key is to find the balance between the hard and the soft, the yin and the yang, the masculine and the feminine. It seems to always come back to a question of balance in leadership and how can we obtain that balance in leadership? This is the question I find myself asking again and again.

The way to survive is to turn inward and look to your own self and determine what you believe.

His message: win. Be true to yourself. He is also saying we need a toughness to match the roughness of our world....that in the end we’ve got to be our own person, alone. That’s all we’ve got. (Hawley, 1993, p. 185)

This is the hardest work of being a leader. It all really comes down to what I have been teaching in English 30. Polonius’ advice to his son still applies today, “This above all else, to thine ownself be true” because if you are not true to yourself you will never discover your higher self. So I guess if I want to live the dream I need to make a choice. Choice is what it really comes down to. I can create my own reality of bliss, or I can choose to be unhappy with what is around me. It is one thing to be an academic and cite things from an educated perspective and something entirely different to live the reality and truly walk the talk of your beliefs. Choices shape the direction of our lives, and in the end we need to make choices not only that we can live with but also that make a difference to the bigger picture. This does not come without a complex set of challenges.

*What Are the Personal Challenges?*

The biggest personal challenge I have faced in leadership is the current state of education and general humanity in today's technological and work oriented world. It seems so many are driven by the ego and personal needs with a lack of regard for the deeper issues of authentic intellectual work (Eisner, 2002). It is all about "making the grade" instead of "making a difference" and the perceived goal of our current educational context appears to be "getting into University" instead of preparing to lead a happy and fulfilling life. We have lost sight of the fundamental purpose of holistic education and replaced it with Fraser reports and statistical averages. Our classrooms today are filled with anxiety and stress ridden individuals, consisting of both students and teachers, who all perceive the educational process as some type of threat to their very survival! An intense challenge is trying to create collaborative teams in a culture that is based on competition and survival of the fittest individual. It is a nasty oxymoron that is not at all conducive to the wellness of either the individual or society, and speaks to the persistence of the primitive ego that is still present. Hawkins (2006) supports the idea that 80 percent of humanity is functioning below a consciousness level of 200, or simply stated a very primitive level. This is a number correlated to the calibrated consciousness level of human beings which Hawkins (2006) hopes will slowly evolve overtime to higher levels. He states the consciousness level of the majority of the world is still below 200 and therefore dominated by primitive animal instincts, motivations and behaviors which are in sharp contrast to the higher thinking level concepts of peace, self-realization and enlightenment. To add to Hawkins (2006) theory of transcending levels of consciousness, current brain research has shown the actual neural pathways in the brain, a concept called neuroplasticity (Davidson et al, 2012) also change as we move from primitive thinking to more advanced ways of being in the world. So not only are we transforming into better people, we are physically creating high evolved brains.

From conscious level 200 up, the nature of life becomes more harmonious maternal caring appears, along with concern for others, pack loyalty, Identification with others and the beginning of what is later expressed in human nature as relatedness. (Hawkins, 2006, p. 28)

The key challenge of a leader is to try to bring others with her into this higher level of consciousness. We know from recent brain research (Davidson, et al 2012) that the development of the prefrontal cortex is connected to this type of thinking. We are now looking at meditation, focused breathing and the use of narrative to increase the prefrontal cortex and expand our ability for empathy and compassion. We are looking at the possibilities of mindfulness to bring us to higher levels of human consciousness. I believe that the ability to increase empathy and compassion is the holy grail of this educational process and what is needed to heal the many fractures of this wounded world of today.

This will be the focus of my journey now as I undertake my own hero's quest to discover the possibilities and face the obstacles thrown before me. As any good English teacher knows, we often use story to juxtapose light and darkness and to emphasize the transformational power of the light. These reoccurring motifs in literature are stories of self-realization and leadership, stories designed to bring us into the age of enlightenment. We need to have the courage not only to teach this, but to live it each and every day. Leaders need courage to stand up to those who are unwilling to see the light and continue to live in the shadows. Leaders need to seek wisdom, to work towards self-realization and enlightenment.

This I believe strongly. Yet sometimes I still find myself tired, angry and overwhelmed. The Eeyores still get to me, they still drive me crazy and their negativity erodes away at my spirit and energy. "That is a key element in leadership; being able to hold out against society's tendency to eat you up." (Hawley, 1993, p. 180) Then I look for the light and it calms and warms my soul. I find someone, or groups of people, who see the world in the radiance and believe like I do then I connect with that person and then maybe slowly and carefully, working together we can begin to convince Eeyores. We change the world one spirit at a time and together we are constantly evolving to a collective higher level of human consciousness. I have found light shining through the cracks in our schools and systems and can feel the energy synthesizing, building and becoming. I am working to make the choice to see the light in everything, to be surrounded by the light and to be the light myself.

If I were beginning my teaching career over again, I would watch for things that are inherently unsupportive or disconnected things I often missed when I was teaching.....

In a word, I would be more supportive. (Jones, 2005, p. 91)

For me, the support required would also be for myself. I would be wary of my Tigger tendency that drives me to the breaking point resulting in a bedridden state, victim of a throbbing migraine headache that painfully persists until I finally take rest. I have learned through mistakes that everything does not need to be perfect for perfection is unobtainable and undesirable and often downright painful. Life is a process which requires us to make mistakes in order to grow and without mistakes there is no authentic learning. I do not feel the need to save the entire world anymore, but perhaps just save myself and by saving myself I might save all the others with me simply by savouring my own light and power. I can be the lamp of love and light the way without losing all my energy. I can be the light.

### *Inspiration and Reawakening the Self*

The key to all of this is to learn who I am and how to be comfortable with my own self. That is the beauty of being middle aged is that you no longer care what others think of you and you learn to think for yourself. "As a leader,

you have to be your own person-to have lived your own life to the extent that you can show others the way.” (Hawley,1993, pg. 180) In many ways it is becoming the Diva, and recognizing the goddess that lives within my physical shell. For years, I thought to recognize yourself was vanity and arrogance but now I realize that it is how you recognize yourself and then how you take that into your work with others. As an undergraduate I was drawn to the works of Joseph Campbell and I know realize it was because I identified with the warrior within and was working towards the discovery of that warrior.

This is the inner warrior, the dharmic warrior, not the destructive battler the world sometimes conjures. ... This is the warrior as personal power, as staunch hero, the inner loner, the person of action; the warrior as free spirit in the true, untethered sense of the term, both free and spirit. (Hawley,1993, p. 180)

Have I found her yet? Not exactly, but I have seen glimpses and I know am coming into my own personal power, slowly undertaking the transformation that will bring me fully into my final state of being. This journey is far from over, and there is so much more to learn but I need to take my time, exploring mindfully each moment the possibilities that are presented daily before me. My grandmother is 98 so I have good genes and possible time to kill. So I need to master this call for Spirit, through deep and focused breathing, through the passion of poetry, through narrative stories and through the mastery of the body and the mind. There are 3 requirements for my mastery, the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. This trinity needs to be to grow and evolve together into a complete whole of my entire being. This is my inspiration and my dream for a better tomorrow which starts right here, right now, in this present moment. Procrastination is poison and I am making a choice.

The call of the Spirit isn't only for individuals. It's ringing up entire organizations, professions, even the whole planet. Not only poets and philosophers but also hard scientists and hard-nosed business people are learning that their life queries are, in the upper reaches spiritual. (Hawley, 1993, pg. 3)

If I listen to my higher self I can create the reality that will bring me inspiration and happiness. I realize now that the world has come full circle and I am where I am supposed to be at this time and at this moment. All the complex interactions of who I am have merged to become what I am, and how I perceive the world. I have experienced the rainbow of emotions from the anger, to the passion and the sadness, and finally the bliss. Shakespeare said it best,

The lunatic , the lover and the poet



Are of imagination compact.

I hope I always have an imagination. My imagination turns trees into magical forests. My imagination gives me the ability to form mental images, sensations and concepts. My imagination is the work of my mind that helps create, provide meaning to experience, and understanding to knowledge. It is critical to my learning process and my evolution. It is the natural world of the child who is filled with love. It is the world of kimberley. According to Taoist principle, the coming age will be the age of the healer but prior to that will be purification. The purification is required before we can undertake the process of healing, and becoming all that we are destined to be. We need to break the chains of our adult learning and return to the pure and authentic world of the child. Through our first time eyes we will see again that there are lots of open spaces and we are free to run around and play. I am very excited! I LOVE school and I LOVE learning. As adults we will be once again to be filled with wonder and joy as we are learning we are going to change the world one day. One day, when we are ready to embrace it all again, imagination and magic will return to us. "For when the necessary cleansing is over, we will witness magical transformation of the world around us by the forces of the earth. And we will see for ourselves what the ancient Taoists meant by the Age of Perfect Virtue. (Hoff, 1993, pg. 251) I have made the choice to become one working towards the Age of Perfect Virtue, towards the age of Enlightenment. Plato in *The Allegory of the Cave*, speaks of unchaining and turning our face towards the light to perceive reality for what it truly is. I am learning to recognize the shadows, the illusions for what they really are. We have created this current educational paradigm, this factory model of education that is void of engagement and relevancy. We have created this system that is a shadow of the past that we need to bring into the light. I am turning my face to the light and emerging from the murky shadows of the past. I am learning to be present and pay attention and while all this learning is occurring I am also unlearning many of the lessons of my past.

I did not choose to be a teacher, the path has chosen me. I am what I was destined to become as these are my gifts and I must not only recognize them but honor them. Hawley (1993) reflects on the concept of dharma, "The word dharma is Sanskrit for deep, deep, integrity-living by your inner truth." (p. 1) I am seeking the exquisite balance between the child and the adult that will allow me to exist in perfect harmony and live by my inner truth just like the river when in babbles in my Grandma's backyard in the summer flowing along to where it needs to go. Bubble, gurgle, splash!

### **Becoming the Butterfly (Epilogue)**

The light is powerful and brilliant  
And I am afraid of it



My wings are wet and sticky  
And I am not ready to take flight

Yet the light whispers to me  
Calling my name  
Calling me home  
Can you see it, can you hear it, can you touch it?

I think that we can all reach it  
Perhaps I can reach it if I believe that I can  
Maybe I always could...  
I just needed to recognize that I can

I believe I can fly and then we can fly  
Strongly and steadily into the brilliant light  
I can spread my wings and let my spirit soar  
Into the heavens.....

### *Conclusions*

Auto ethnographic narrative inquiry has the ability to tap into the intuitive wisdom of teachers to help them identify themselves and their teaching philosophy. It aids in the exploration of ontology with can then be cross referenced with epistemological theories to build a holistic understanding of teaching practice. This research was birthed out of my own story as a teacher and a mother. My need to understand my own story, and the complexity that surrounded it was a critical catalyst to this inquiry as "narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographical narrative associated with the research puzzle." (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.40) In the support role for the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement I saw both teachers and students struggling and flourishing, and I began to contemplate what was happening in these different contexts. I began to think about what it was that worked in my own classroom, the reflective exploration of my own process and understanding of pedagogy and this was the first piece of the puzzle. I believe before undertaking the process of researching others around a particular phenomenology, specifically contemplative pedagogy, one needs to understand your personal ontology and epistemology around the research question. My version of the story is one of the interconnected pieces for I am part of this story as, "I, too, lead a storied life and the research relationship is part of my experimental text." (Winkler, 2003, p. 399) It was my own stress and frustration with the complexities of teaching within a broader system that brought me to this place. It was my own children's tears over schooling that made me consider the pedagogy and process to which education commonly subscribes to one often void of free spaces and learning to live well. I needed to understand my own voice, reflect on who I was as a child, and be heard in the

process. Jardine (2012) reflects, "Education's only prospect is that we might have some hand, some however small say in the setting right of the world and the shape of our learning to live therein."(p. 6) It was my desire to set right the shape of world that originally drew me to narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) as a way to find teacher and student wellness in a rapidly eroding system. This system that feels if we can just find the one right answer we can solve all our problems as, "such systems are bent on the belief that if we only select the right standardized procedures, enacted from the right institutional structures, get the right funding forms and assessment regimes, and so on, teachers and students' futures will be finally secured and assured and peace will reign." (Jardine, 2012, p. 3) Working teacher education, forced me to realize that there are multiple perspectives and solutions depending on the context. Each story is different and needed to find a way to be told and shared for the system as a whole to find wellness. Our personal stories are our own historical texts, the history of our lives and the experiences encountered within the process of living that life, which allow us to co-exist together. As Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) reflect on their process of autobiographical life writing;

In a similar way, as life writers, we are seeking to locate ourselves in a rapidly growing network of contexts, including family, neighborhood, community, profession, school and society, by sending out resonances that we can hear when, in the way of echolocation, we seek to know our locations in connection with the past, the future, and others, as well as with our unfolding sense of self-identities. So our narrative, poems and meditations are echoes whose vibrations are lines of connection that guide our practice. (p. 4)

It is these lines of connection, through the process of uncovering and sharing our stories, which will build strong and authentic learning communities within which all shall live, learn, grow and become.

How does one begin the process of growing, transforming, changing and becoming? How does one begin to tell their story....

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About the Author:

Kimberley Holmes – University of Calgary  
 2112 Chicoutimi Drive N.W.  
 Calgary, Alberta. T2L 0V7  
 (403) 585-3209

k.holmes@shaw.ca  
kaholmes@ucalgary.ca