Teachers Undertaking Narrative Inquiry With Children

JULIA L. ELLIS

There is nothing natural or inevitable about childhood. Childhood is culturally defined and created; it, too, is a matter of human choice. There are as many child- hoods as there are families and cultures, and the consciousness of childhood is as much a cultural datum as patterns of child-rearing and the social role of the child (Nandy, 1987, p. 56).

In the city of Toronto in 1990, I worked with preservice teachers in the context of an educational psychology course entitled "Understanding Children and Youth." I like this title. It means something very different from **"All You Ever Wanted to Know About** Children and Youth" or even **"Explaining** Children and Youth." Understanding, as best I can glean from my hermeneutic readings, means find- ing a fusion of horizons with the other person and in the process becoming more self-conscious about whatever you had previously taken for granted or accepted as given. For adult-child un- derstanding, this entails genuinely attempting to make sense of the child within the child's own terms or frame of reference and becoming more self-reflexive about your role or what you can be **for** that child.

"Adult" and "child" are big words which in Western society are heavily connotative. They are also words which are far apart from each oth- er — considered bipolar. Skolnick (1975, pp. 37- 38) relates the sociologists' view that moderniza- tion accounts for the gulf that separates adults and children:

Sociologists agree that modernization is not merely an economic or technological change, but involves profound social and psychological changes also. It changes all aspects of life — physical environment, the types of communities people live in, the way they view the world, the way they organize their daily lives, and the emo- tional quality of family relationships, down to the most private aspects of indi- vidual psychological experience. Thus children growing up in modern societies face a radically different set of demands from children growing up in more tradi- tional societies. These demands, rather than the inherent psychological differences between children and adults, may account for the gulf that seems to separate children and adults in modern societies.

In the gap created between adult and child, our figurative language shows the child to be the loser as childhood metaphors are used to define

mental illness, primitivism, abnormality, under-development, noncreativity, and traditionalism. Perfect adulthood has become the goal of most over-socialized beings (Nandy, 1987, p. 65). David Kennedy (1986, cited by Smith, 1991a; 1988) suggests that in the modern West the child has become a victim by virtue of his status as an isolable social phenomenon that can be studied and manipulated to serve predetermined definitions of the aims of society. He also speaks of the way in which so much education theory is "adulto-morphic," taking some adult end-state as the norm toward which children should be driven. As a consequence, in Western society in general, and in educational contexts in particular, it is difficult to refrain from perceiving children as inferior or inadequate. Parents and teachers can experience great pressure to attend to children in terms of what they **cannot do** moreso than in terms of what they **do** or **can do**. The pervasive and incessant emphasis on socially, economically, and educationally desired end-points for children can drown out the song of the actual work/play of living in which the child is fully engaged.

VIEWS OF CHILDHOOD

Deiter Misgeld and David Jardine (1989) contrast a "technical" and an "hermeneutic" conception of "adulthood" or "maturity" and the relation between adult and child that these conceptions imply. They call into question the way in which technical knowledge has become a predominant interpretive context that informs theory and practice such that the relationships and transition between child and adult are slowly becoming understandable as little more than a technical problem requiring a technical solution. This conception encourages a pedagogical orientation which recasts the development of children into adults as a "process of methodically replacing one set of objective properties (the competencies typical of childhood) with another (the competencies requisite of adulthood)" (p. 261). The role of the teacher in this orientation is one who inculcates competencies which are achieved once and for all, acquired as new and permanent properties.

Within an hermeneutic conception, adulthood is not a fixed set of properties. Rather, being an adult, being mature, is a matter of self-transcendence; that is, being in a process of self-formation which "requires the unceasing effort to es-tablish for ourselves courses of action, indicating possibilities of self-understanding which are not there as a matter of course" (p. 267). Adults can only be themselves "in the recognition of and struggle with a particular history" (p. 270). Similarly, children are engaged in "the same sort of process of recognition and struggle, in which their understanding of themselves passes through the recognition of others (parents, teachers, siblings, etc.)" (p. 270). Understanding oneself as an adult, understanding the children around one, occurs in the midst of living a life as a particular individual, in community with particular others, within the particular constraints in which you already find yourselves belonging together (Jardine, 1989, cited by Misgeld & Jardine, 1989).

Skolnick (1975) speaks in another way of the blurring or boundaries between children and adults and of the demise of adulthood. It appears that we are all becoming adolescents. The meaning and implications of this are not inconsistent with Misgeld and Jardine's notions about self-transcendence. Skolnick describes adolescence as spreading at both ends as younger children absorb teenage culture and attitudes and many in their twenties and beyond refuse to progress to "adulthood." Children and adults are no longer distinguished as sharply as they once were by separate status indicators such as dress and amusements. Clothing styles have become not only increasingly unisex but "uni-age" and television is shared by all.

Lifton (1971, cited by Skolnick, 1975) used the term "protean man" (referring to the mythological figure who could take the form of any living thing) to describe the kind of individual produced by the conditions of life in the twentieth century. Not only is this an age of identity crises that may last a lifetime, but settled identities may change to other settled identities and more than once. In other words, adulthood, as a finished product of socialization, as a stable resolution of the tensions between self and society, is never achieved. Instead, the values of "youth" — openness to experience and change, cultivating one's own individual selfhood, and the exploration of inner sensibilities — may persist over a lifetime.

If there is no childhood and no adulthood, what is left? Skolnick advances the hypothesis that there are only two major psychological stages of development — infancy and post-infancy

— with "the great transformation" occurring at the age of five to seven years. The overemphasis on differences between children and adults in developmental psychology has resulted from both an underestimation of children's abilities and an overestimation of adult abilities. The many changes found at the age of five to seven years are explained as resulting from the interiorization of speech as speech becomes the vehicle of thought and the regulator of behavior. Before this age, maturation plays a major role in developmental change, but afterwards, learning and culture are the major forces influencing psychological development. This picture of human development which suggests that there is essentially one step up from the childhood to the adult level is compatible with historians' reports of premodern lifestyles wherein adult work responsibilities were assumed at this age period.

In our modern society, children spend many years in a created habitat called "school." How teachers are to make sense of their role, their purpose for children in this context is a question that has provoked accelerating concern, discussion, research, and writing over the last 40 years. During this time, social and cultural change has been rapid. In fact, as Ashis Nandy (1987, p. 65) reviews, with greater and more intense cross-cultural contacts, childhood has more frequently become a battleground of cultures or the place where bicultural or multicultural spaces are worked out.

Although research and writing have expressed inordinate concern for the child, much of this work has been basically unfriendly towards children (Smith, 1987). As Skolnick (1975) has observed, with the emphasis on laboratory studies, developmental psychology has tended to deal with bits and pieces of the child with the resulting tendency for the bits and peices to be taken for the real things they represent. Within this orientation, a child can become nothing but a particular developmental stage or test performance. In writing about the ways in which children have been marginalized and alienated, David Smith (In Press a) calls our attention to the "poverty of modernism" and the hopeful prospects of the post-modern project and post-modern pedagogy.

> *The poverty of modernism ... is that it operates out of a unique and deep prejudice*

> *in the Western tradition which is the assumption that concepts, formulations, ideas, etc., refer eventually to something fixable, encloseable and nameable once and for all as reality. ... In educational terms, the modernist impulse accounts for the notorious theory/practice split, because modernism always begins with an intellectual cognitive act rather than an attention to life as it is lived. The objectification of others into formalized manipulable, theoretical categories means that any necessary connection between self and other is severed. Others become banished to the service of being examples of something you already know everything about; one is no longer related to others in any deeply human or on-going sense* (pp. 4-5).

> *The post-modern project is not analytical, declarative, war-like, or punitive (wishing things were other than what they are) but rather it is intuitive, interpretive and always open to the play of possibilities inherent in the heart of life. It works from a sense that there is an integrity to life that always and everywhere exists prior to whatever we might say about it ... The pedagogical task involves learning how to live **with** the world instead of trying to force it into an identity we can recognize as conforming to our concepts of it* (p. 6).

What does it mean then to live with children as teachers, adults, or parents? Nandy (1975) challenges us that "the final test of our own skill to live a bicultural or multicultural existence may still be our ability to live with our children in mutuality" (p. 75). Certainly it can be most difficult to accept the "otherness" of those who would seem to be a part of us. Smith (1983, 1984, 1987) clarifies that genuine life together requires an ongoing conversation which is never over (definitive answers to questions may never be achieved) yet which also must be sustained for life together to go on at all. Openness to the "otherness" of children and commitment to searching for mutual understanding with them are requisite for affording children a sense of membership in the human community.

So then how do we listen to children? How do we give ourselves an opportunity to hear their "otherness?" How do we begin our search to discern their horizons of meaning? How do we come to understand what we do not yet understand? As Vivian Gussin Paley (1986) shares with us, the development of our understanding requires a genuine curiosity, a listening between the lines, and a sense of wonder about what the child's ideas really are and what their words really mean. It involves becoming preoccupied with this search rather than being preoccupied with our own agendas or the "right answers" we want the children to have. When our speaking intention is limited to announcing our own point of view, conversation comes to a halt and our teacher's voice drowns out the children's. Paley reminds us that we can never teach children that which they don't already know. In a number of the stories she recounts about her classroom teacher work with Kindergarten and nursery school children, we see that the solution to a child's confusion or difficulty is only found by more fully observing and listening for the meaning that currently exists for the child. Only through that window of shared understanding can we help the child to connect what they already know to what they don't know.

Paley acknowledges that reading between the lines can be easier in a preschool setting because young children rehearse their lines over and over in social play and private monologues, without self-consciousness; they disclose more of themselves as characters in a story than as participants in a discussion. In fact, the acted out stories form the perfect middle ground between the children and teacher as they enable all to speak to one another in the same language. Older children, on the other hand, have already learned to fear exposing their uncommon ideas.

The project of mutuality between teachers and their students is one that is at the heart of Dennis Thiessen's (1990) work with "classroom-based teacher development." This is an orientation which situates the professional growth of teachers within the daily realities of classroom life. It is an orientation which builds on relationships that matter most to teachers in their development, their relationships with their students. As teachers adapt classroom practice and assess the worth of possible changes, they consider the personal and social reference points of the students and the values and norms of the students'

communities. Students are respected and understood as experts on their past and present experiences and their future aspirations.

Within classroom-based teacher development, students can be engaged collaboratively in a variety of fairly direct ways: planning units of study, determining the role of a new textbook in their learning, constructing classroom structures and activities, or evaluating teaching acts. While such collaborative activities can result in student participation in planning and decision-making, these approaches can still have shortcomings in terms of affording understanding. In the "busyness" of co-planning activity, teachers can find themselves in the position of accepting or choosing from among students' suggestions without fully comprehending the meaning of the suggested methods or events to the students. (As a simplistic example, is group work preferred because socializing with peers is appealing or because the students' community prizes collaboration over competition?) The students themselves may lack the self-awareness or verbal ability to explain the meaning even if invited.

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

Teachers can find themselves in need of another mode of accessing their students' realities, discerning their horizons of meaning, or learning their personal and social reference points. This is particularly the case when the children's personal histories are very different from the teacher's own. As a way to take up the project of self-reflexively understanding children, I have been inviting preservice teachers in my courses to undertake narrative inquiry with children in their grades four to eight practicum classrooms (that is, with children nine years of age or older).

Children are not only the experts or authorities on their past, present, and future, but are in fact the authors of these experiences or aspirations. The stories they have formed for themselves about their past and present are in fact the reality they live with (Mitchell, 1981). The interpretive schemes or explanatory frameworks they have evolved for making causal connections in their storying will largely determine the meaning of and their response to future events. Children may not be able to simply tell us the interpretive narrative schemes that operate for themselves or their communities. They can, however, tell us their stories and permit us the opportunity to

discern the operating themes, claimed self-identities, and cultural values that connect these stories (Agar & Hobbs, 1982; Labov, 1982; Mishler, 1986a; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Practitioners such as therapists and counselors routinely work with narrative knowledge (people's stories) to understand why the people they work with behave the way they do (Polkinghorne, 1988). Teachers can also develop more understanding of their students as individuals or as groups (for example, girls, ethnic groups, children of immigrants, and so forth) through engaging in narrative inquiry.

The primacy of narrative in creating identity, community, and knowledge in the workplace is well recognized. As Barthes (1977, p. 79, cited by White, 1981) explains, as narrative arises between our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience in language, it "ceaselessly substitutes meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted." The absence or refusal of narrative would in fact indicate the absence or refusal of meaning itself (White, 1981, p. 2).

When listening to someone's story we may sometimes find ourselves worrying about what was "invented" or about what was left out. Mitchell (1981, p. viii) argues that while the truthfulness of people's stories may be a practical problem it is not a theoretical problem and it does not cancel out the value of narrativity as a mode of making sense of reality. The reality of events does not consist in the fact that they occurred but that, first of all, they were remembered and, second, they were capable of finding a place in a chronologically ordered system. At the same time, every narrative is constructed on the basis of a set of events which might have been included but were left out. It is the image of reality or the social system which could provide the diacritical markers for ranking the importance of events and this image may be only minimally present to the consciousness of the teller (White, 1981, p. 10).

When stories are obtained in the context of an interview, the role and influence of the interviewer is an important question. Mishler (1986b) argues that the research interview as a speech event is inescapably interactive. It is in fact desirable for the interviewer to invite elaboration that will fill in gaps in stories to render them more complete or coherent. The interview is a conversation. As in any conversation, a genuine curiosity and respect will be perceived and responded to by an interviewee.

As we study the stories that have been shared in an interview, there is much that we can attend to in developing our understanding of how children are making sense of themselves and their world or their experience. Who, we can ask, are the significant others or locally meaningful reference groups for this child? In the stories shared, how does the child place himself or herself in relation to others? What motivations or values are revealed or highlighted by the stories? What metaphors or images are used to explain an interaction or situation? What cause-and-effect themes are explicit or implicit in the stories? We pay attention to what the stories are about (for example, sports, dance, career goals, social or ecological concerns, schoolwork, chores, family activities) but we also ask, in the context of all the stories, what are the topics about? That is, what is the situated meaning of sports for **this** child? What preoccupies the child and what are the situational ambiguities or conflicts that are surfaced in stories related to the preoccupation? Also, as Crites (1986) suggests, we look across all of the stories and consider the extent to which the child is engaged in both appropriating the past (developing one's identity) and anticipating the future (projecting a hopeful story).

When I first introduced preservice teachers to this narrative inquiry activity I was impressed with their work. They were very good interviewers and their interpretations of the interview-narratives were thoughtful and frequently insightful and generative. I was dismayed, however, at their response to their own work. In our classes together they orally expressed concern that their "reading" of the child might not be "the truth." (This concern was in spite of the fact that in their written reports many of them had mentioned that they had "corrected" previous "misreadings" of the child through a new understanding gained in the course of the interview.) They suggested that they would perhaps need to know the child for a whole year first and/or interview the parents before they could produce a "valid" reading. At the time, I stumbled for a response and asked them when they were ever "finished" knowing anyone and whether they had interviewed the parents of their friends and spouses before concluding that they now "knew" these people. Looking back, I can appreciate that the five weeks in the practi-

cum classroom (two days per week for six weeks and then three full weeks) could feel like an inadequate basis for an engagement with any one child. However, without the kind of conversation afforded by the interview, many children can still be mysterious strangers to us at the end of an entire year. Some of the candidates who interviewed a child at the very beginning of the practicum were delighted with the intimacy and friendship that was so quickly established with the child. They were also impressed with the power of just one "now friendly" child to warm the entire class towards them.

It is important to address the difficulty these preservice teachers expressed in accepting or understanding the narrative inquiry activity for what it was and what it was not. Their desire for "truth" or "validity" in any reading of the child for which they take conscious responsibility can perhaps best be answered by an examination of hermeneutic principles.

As David Smith (1991b) writes, "whenever we are engaged in the activity of interpreting our lives and the world around us, we are engaging in what the Greeks called 'practical philosophy' (Gadamer, 1983), an activity linkable to the character of Hermes in the Greek pantheon (Stapleton, 1982)." Hermes, who delivered messages between the gods and from gods to mortals on earth, was known for the qualities of youthfulness, friendliness, prophetic power, and fertility. These qualities are also considered to be characteristic of the hermeneutic endeavour, a mode of inquiry which begins from good will and bears results which are generative, rejuvenating, or fruitful. Smith describes the hermeneutic modus as having more the character of good conversation than that of analysis and trumpeting truth claims.

Martin Packer and Richard Addison (1989) in their recent text, *Entering the Circle: Hermeneutic Investigation in Psychology*, attempt to address the practical and methodological aspects of research conducted from the hermeneutic stance. The following are some of the ideas they provide to clarify the nature, the process, and the results of interpretive inquiry. Interpretive inquiry begins with a practical concern: confusion, a question, a breakdown in understanding, a caring. When things go well in the inquiry, an answer with direct implications for practice is "uncovered." While the new insights and ideas generated may serve as solutions, a self-consciously interpretive

approach is not oriented towards closure. Instead, it seeks to keep discussion open and alive and to keep inquiry underway. Truth is not considered to be a matter of correspondence between the insights we acquire and the way things "really are." Instead, truth is a matter of uncovering what we previously did not see or understand. It is also an ongoing, unfolding process wherein each successive interpretation has the possibility of uncovering yet new possibilities. (*Alethia*, the Greek word for truth, is translated as unconcealed, unhidden, or uncovered.) The object of interpretive inquiry is not to describe, or even just understand, human phenomena. Its starting place is concerned engagement. A true interpretive account will help the people we study; it will further our concerns.

The hermeneutic circle symbolizes the essential circularity of understanding. We understand in terms of what we already know. Our preliminary understanding of anything, our fore-structure, is necessarily shaped by expectations, preconceptions, our lifestyle, culture, and tradition. This is our only access or way of initially reading an entity or field of investigation. When we begin interpretive inquiry, we recognize that our pre-understanding will be incomplete and perspectival. We choose among perspectives deliberately in a way that respects our motivating concern or caring. We also realize that much of our pre-understanding or fore-structure will remain largely in the background as taken-for-granted until our attempts at explicit interpretation reveal to us the ways in which we are predisposed to perceiving and making sense of the world. The first and forward arc of the hermeneutic circle, called projection, involves using our pre-understanding to open up possibilities for making sense of the text or text-analog.

In the return arc of the circle, a movement of uncovering, we focus on the problematic, look for disconfirming evidence to our preliminary understanding, consider multiple perspectives, and try to tolerate and sustain ambiguity in order to avoid premature closure while we seek both confirmation and refutation of our initial interpretation. Inadequacies in our pre-understanding are discovered. Themes, arguments, and concerns that were hidden in the text are uncovered.

Finally, we organize our understanding of the participants' understanding of their world into a coherent narrative account. This narrative portrait will not be a simple summary of an inter-

view transcript, but rather a reflection on and renewal of the dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee. As a reconstruction it constitutes an interpretation.

In judging interpretive research, validity is not the issue. A reading or an interpretation cannot be proven true or false, but can only be clarified, made more comprehensive or comprehensible. We ask whether an interpretation is plausible, convincing, fits with other material we know, and has the power to change practice. Has the researcher's understanding been transformed? Has a solution been uncovered? Have new possibilities been opened up for the researcher, research

participants, and the structure of the context?

I am currently in my third year of having pre-service elementary school teachers in my courses undertake narrative inquiry with children. Previously, this was also an assignment I had used in a course on Adolescent Psychology. During the last two years, over 200 of the people in my courses completed this assignment. The semi-structured interview schedule they used is provided in Table 1. The general guidelines that were given for conducting the interview are shown in Table 2.

The interview schedule was one I developed in the context of my doctoral research (Ellis, 1983)

TABLE 1

1. If you only had to go to school three days of the week, what are some of the things you'd like to do with the extra time?
2. Have you ever done anything that other people were surprised you could do?
3. What's the most difficult thing that you've ever had to do — or, is there something you've done that was really hard to do but you really wanted to do it?
4. Some people really believe in the power of wishing. Do you think you do? Has it ever worked?
5. Do you ever get other people to go along with your ideas or what you want to do? (activities with friends; activities or routines at home)
6. Sometimes we like to daydream — about things we'd like to do, or things we'd like to try, or things we'd like to become. Can you remember anything you've ever daydreamed about?
7. Have you ever done anything really different from what most people your age have done — made something, read up on something, planned something, tried something?
8. Some people believe that willpower can take them a long way — do you think that you've ever used willpower?
9. I'm going to ask you some different kinds of questions now — questions on how you see things. For example: Who do you think makes the biggest difference to what happens in the classroom — the principal, the teacher, the students?
10. When people disagree over something, why do you think that usually is?
11. What things would you say are most important in life to most people? What do you think will be most important in life to you?
12. In all of the things that you're interested in or that you've thought about a lot, what has puzzled you the most?
13. What's the best thing about being your age? What's the hardest thing about being your age?
14. What would you like to be really good at doing?

15. If you could pick one thing that you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would it be? What would be the next thing?
16. In the world of nature or in the world of things, or in the world of people, what is it that surprises you the most, or that you find the most fascinating?
17. Some people really believe in the power of prayer. Do you think that you do?
18. Some people always have lots of ideas at their fingertips, you know, they always have lots of ideas about what to get someone for a present, or they find it really easy to think of things to say in a story they have to write or a letter. Other people have to work really hard to come up with ideas, or they just seem to come more slowly. Which kind of person sounds more like you? Can you think of an example of when you had lots of ideas or when you had trouble thinking of ideas?
19. Can you remember any times when you've run into a difficulty when you were trying to do something or make something — something you needed was missing; something got in the way or slowed things down? What did you do?
20. Can you think of anything that's a constant nuisance or that always annoys you? What are some of the things you've tried to do about it?
21. What do you do when you need a really good idea?
22. If you could spend two weeks with someone who does a special kind of work, what kind of person would that be?
23. In the year ahead, what are some of the things you'd like to accomplish or try for the first time?
24. Is there anyone you see as a kind of hero, someone you look up to and would like to be like?
25. Do you spend very much time writing or drawing? Have you ever been in a play?
26. Is there something that you've always wanted to do but there hasn't been the opportunity (time, materials, resources)?

TABLE 2: Guidelines for Conducting the Interview

Time

Allow approximately one hour for the interview. It may take 10 to 15 minutes to settle in, get set up, and explain the purpose of the interview. The interview itself should not exceed 45 minutes; any more time than this is likely to be exhausting for the child.

Materials

You will need a tape recorder and a 90-minute tape (so that you will have 45 minutes on one side of the tape uninterrupted); a note pad and pen or pencil; and the interview questions. The interview questions should be transferred to 3" x 5" file cards (one question per card) and the file cards should be held together with two rings. (This way you won't lose your place in the interview schedule and the child won't be tempted to read the questions upside-down.)

Introduction

Explain that the purpose of the interview is to help you "understand how people their age see things, what's important to them, what they're interested in, what their opinions or ideas are and so forth." Explain that you would like to tape-record the interview so that you can play it back to yourself later in order to write about the understandings you've gained. Assure the child that no one else will listen to the tape except you. Ask the child if it's okay with him/her if you tape-record the interview. Also advise the child that you'll be jotting down notes during the interview to help you remember what was talked about in case the tape is difficult to hear in places because of other noises, etc.

During the interview

Take notes if you can while still concentrating on the conversation. Use probing (but not prying) questions to encourage the child to either: (a), flesh out more complete stories, or (b), talk at more length about things that are obviously exciting or important to him/her. (Probing question example: "How did you come to be interested in playing the piano?" vs Prying question example: "do either of your parents play a musical instrument?") At the end of the interview ask the child if she/he has any questions she/he would like to ask you.

when I needed to learn about the everyday life behavior of 15 of the grade five children in my study. I field-tested the interview schedule with grade four, five, and six children. I was surprised at just how well these questions worked to "get kids talking" and to an almost-stranger. What struck me most with some of the children I interviewed was that I felt like I was really meeting, really getting to know, people who were totally unlike anyone I had known intimately in my lifetime. I suddenly realized that all of the people who had served as "comfortable companions" for me were hardly representative of the full human community that had been around me. These startlingly novel children certainly reminded me of classmates I had had, but they were the classmates I had never really known or been close to. So I had seen the "corners of the package" before, so to speak, but never before had I understood or appreciated how everything was connected within any of these people.

I have to confess that I wondered if I would find "myself" among the children I interviewed. I had no doubt that I would recognize "me" if in fact I were there. Yet, without finding "me," I could never know how I might have appeared, at the age of ten, to a "gentle reader." I didn't find "me," but I found "Anne," the girl who had been my best friend in grade five. "Anne" talked about "me." I was her best friend who was in another classroom in the school (a class not participating in the study). She said I got on her nerves sometimes, but at least I knew how to play pretend. Yes, that's probably what Anne would have said. Some of my course participants have selected interviewees who reminded them of themselves. In narrative inquiry with children, the search for self-understanding can sometimes be intricately interwoven with the project of understanding an "other." Even wanting to know yourself as you were as a child represents a recognition that children are knowable as full persons.

As part of the doctoral research I wrote narrative portraits of the children I interviewed. I shared some of these portraits with practising teachers in a large number of courses I taught. Consistently and spontaneously they told me

that they didn't know any child in their class-room so well after an entire year. This persuaded me that perhaps the interview process did bring forth insights and awarenesses that did not surface as a matter of course during a year of life together in the classroom.

My initial motivation for introducing preservice teachers to narrative inquiry with children was to encourage them to **know** children rather than to **know about** them. Even when we are being humanistically disposed towards children, for example, "I know that nine-year-old Maria comes to school 'to rest' because she spends her evenings cooking and caring for her younger siblings and so I modify her day at school," we can be unfriendly towards them. If we are simply **knowing about** Maria instead of **knowing** Maria, then we may reduce Maria to someone who is "nothing-but" a person with a strenuous life. Maria may also have hopes, dreams, ways of understanding her labour, interests, and other gifts. If we come to **know** Maria, if we speak with her instead of to her, if we give her a space to speak in genuine, agenda-free conversation, then we can go beyond sympathizing for her. We could validate her; we might help her name or creatively reinterpret her trouble; we could learn about and take seriously her interests, desires, or gifts and thereby support her in taking them more seriously also. If Maria's self-understanding passes through our recognition, then what a responsibility it is to care over how our recognition is constructed.

Many of my course participants are nervous about doing the interview. They're delighted and relieved when, after the first couple of question, the child seems to have "sized up the situation" or "gotten the hang of it," relaxes, and begins to speak at length, freely, in response to the questions. Some confess afterwards that they hadn't really believed that they could carry on a conversation with a child. Some, whose preference was to teach primary children (four years to eight years of age) were surprised to learn that intermediate grade children (nine years to eleven years) were such interesting people. A large number of course participants wrote that the child they interviewed was exceptional for having such "adult-level" concerns and ideas. Other children, they suggested, would of course be more typically carefree.

I have often been asked "Why **these** questions?" for the interview schedule. I acknowledge that my initial writing of them was largely intuitive, with my perspective at the time being greatly influenced by creativity literature. As I examine them now I can see that they work by tapping into common elements of human experience: desire, irritation, disappointment, fear, joy, curiosity, confusion, aspiration, making sense of others' intentions and motivations. Not all the questions "work" for every child, that is, some of the questions may not help a child to remember an experience or idea to share. A response of "I don't know" probably means "that question doesn't make anything come to mind for me."

In our course time together, we do a number of things in preparation for and as an extension of the narrative inquiry. Before the interview we spend time on the topics of gender issues, multiculturalism, and identity development. This serves to extend perspectives available for interpretation or at least provide us with a more common language for talking together about these aspects of people's lives. We have two major follow-up activities after the transcriptions, narrative portraits, and reflections have been written. The first is to form groups according to the characteristics of the children interviewed and through dialogue to identify questions, issues, themes, or surprises. These discoveries are then shared with the class as a whole. Which characteristics of children will be used for forming groups depends upon the concerns of the course participants, (for example, children of immigrants, children of low-income families, preadolescent girls, and so forth). As a second follow-up activity, partners exchange written submissions (transcript, narrative portrait, and reflections), study each other's work, and then meet to dialogue and extend interpretation. The ideas generated in this discussion are also written and submitted.

MASTER PATTERNS

In a recent television documentary about a highly regarded business administration program, the program instructors declared that while their graduates might not remember facts or particulars from courses, what they would have learned was a way of being, operating, or thinking. As Pierre Bourdieu (1975) has explicated, only the school system is capable of establishing and developing, through practice, habits of thought. All teaching practices implicitly provide

a model of the "right" mode of intellectual activity. Scholastic and intellectual training introduce "master-patterns" which become second-nature and which may govern and regulate mental processes without being consciously apprehended and controlled. The habits or "master-patterns" formed by school are not so much particularized patterns of thought as they are general dispositions to generate particular patterns that can be applied to different areas of thought and action. It is my hope that by somehow being incorporated within a set of "master-patterns," the narrative inquiry with children experience contributes to a more friendly, connected, and self-reflexive way of being oriented to children.

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Julia L. Ellis, Ph.D., is a member of the Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.