Feeling knowledge: how emotion and identity inform student learning

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FEELING KNOWLEDGE:
HOW EMOTION AND IDENTITY INFORM STUDENT LEARNING

By
Rebecca Ossorio

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
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FEELING KNOWLEDGE:
HOW EMOTION AND IDENTITY INFORM STUDENT LEARNING

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Rebecca Ossorio

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ABSTRACT

The exploratory and descriptive purpose of this work is to better understand what might be happening when students have an emotional response to learning in school and to offer a way of conceptualizing emotion, identity and student learning as deeply interrelated. The data for this study comes from four in-depth, phenomenological interviews where contemplative educators were asked to recollect emotional experiences from their formal education and tell the story of how those experiences impacted their learning. Evidence suggests that when students have an emotional response to learning it is like a beacon alerting them to the self-relevance of what they are experiencing. This study raises the possibility that the role of emotion in the learning process has been undervalued and that in order to take right action in the world one needs this vital sensing mechanism, a way of attuning to the relevance of what we know and transforming that knowledge into action that aligns with one’s soul.
CHAPTER 1
Introduction

The story of this dissertation begins with a conversation. On a beach my best friend, Bekah and I were reflecting on how interesting it was that we both found ourselves to be feminist scholars in doctoral programs at the same time. Our friendship had begun as freshmen in college studying psychology and women’s studies together. In thinking about our time in college we realized that the Introduction to Women’s Studies class we took 15 years earlier had had a profound influence on who we became professionally. However, we both remembered the course as being very emotionally challenging. We found ourselves angry, depressed, anxious, hopeless, hopeful, empowered, longing, joyful and more. Neither of us could remember a course ever putting us through the emotional wringer in the same way, yet we also considered it to be the course that impacted our learning and identities as scholars the most. This connection between emotions, identity and learning was intriguing.

Next came a conversation with another friend, Lydia, a yoga student of mine and a professor at the college that all of us attended as well as the incoming head of the Women’s Studies department there. She had noticed while teaching The Introduction to Women’s Studies course that her students also seemed to find it emotionally challenging. She was very interested in our insight and wanted to explore the question of whether there might be ways to alter how the course might be taught in order to better support students and ease the emotional struggle. I was hired as a co-instructor of the course for the next year
with Lydia and we received a grant that paid me to integrate yoga and other contemplative practices into the structure of the class as supports for students’ learning.

Coming from a contemplative orientation, Lydia and I offered students practice in mindful awareness, encouraging student to connect with themselves in the present moment with love and compassion. We did all we could to invite students to be present for their entire experience of learning, including emotions, bodily sensations and intuitions, as witnesses, without judging them to be good or bad. What we found intrigued me even more. We saw evidence that the texts that seemed most relevant to our students’ individual learning were the pieces they responded to emotionally in some way. One student in particular, Jamie, expressed this most dramatically. Jamie came to class attempting to reconcile her identities as both a medical professional and a devoutly religious woman committed to the traditional role that her religion proscribed for women. Her most vital learning throughout the semester surrounded how to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory identities. She would come in to class every so often saying that she was so angry with an author that she could barely get through her text. She would rant and rave and argue vehemently against the ideas expressed by these authors. Then she wrote a beautiful final paper, demonstrating strong conceptual understanding of the ideas of the course as well as being able to tie them into her own personal identity and current global politics. It was strong work AND the authors she used were all the same authors she had felt the most angry
about. This seemed to indicate a connection between her emotional response and the learning that was most significant for her. Recollecting my own learning and then watching this particular student’s learning inspired me to examine more deeply the relationship between emotion, identity and learning.

I began wondering in what ways emotion and identity might be involved in the learning process. I became interested in exploring a new way of conceptualizing emotion as something like a sense (Hochschild, 1983); a way of making meaning of the vast experience we have; a means of detecting what to attend to or what is significant for our identities. I have not seen anyone describe what I feel to be a powerful and beautiful dynamic that occurs between student and subject matter—the magical moment when, through emotional sense a student recognizes an experience to have particular meaning, when a student realizes that for some reason this learning is significant for her identity.

I have felt encouraged to pursue this topic of inquiry by a number of authors. In the field of education scholars, I find myself encouraged by Deborah Ball and Francesca Forzani’s (2009) request that education research needs to pay attention to the dynamic of what happens between the points of the teacher, student, subject matter triangle rather than just at the corners. I also find support from John Dewey (1934) who writes in Art as Experience, “It is not possible to divide in a vital experience the practical, emotional and the intellectual from one another, and to set the properties of one over or against the others” (p. 55).
I believe that I am also responding to Megan Boler’s (1999) request that we, “develop more creative alternatives for emotions’ roles in educational practices” (p.xxvii) and Maxine Greene’s plea for “the necessity of an affirmation of the place of emotion in a fully lived life” (in Boler, 2007. p. xi).

Janet Holland (2007) argues that “emotion has epistemological significance since we can only ‘know’ through our emotions and not simply our cognition or intellect…emotion is essential to the pursuit of knowledge” (p. 198). She agrees with Alison Jaggar (1989) that scholars need to “rethink the relation between knowledge and emotion and construct conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relations between reason and emotions” (p.156-157). I feel this as very strong encouragement for my research.

I believe it is our capacity to think and feel, together that makes us human, therefore it the goal of this project to take back our learning, our wholeness, our humanity and name our human capacity to feel as vital to our human capacity to learn. I agree with Meisenhelder (1982), “A concern with emotion should be central to the human sciences… Like the physical body itself, then, emotionality seems to be a foundational quality within human being. It follows that the study of emotions is significant to any attempt to understand humankind or its social organization” (p. 195).

Illuminating the constructive role emotions play in learning and creating the life we want to live is revolutionary in an academy that privileges rationality.
When we can see our emotions for the vital senses that they are then they can be constructive. While we are avoiding, suppressing or denying them they lose their constructive power and become wild, rogue agents – the hindrances that they are mythologized to be. The discourse about emotions as dangerous or inappropriate may not be naming but may be creating them as such. If we are to reveal emotions’ creative potential it could change how we learn. We might see emotions for the sense that they can make of the complex world we live in as bodies in cultures and environments with thoughts and histories.

Ultimately what I hope to do is begin describing and naming how emotion and identity might function constructively in the learning process. I am deeply concerned for people like me attempting to teach at the college level for the first time without preparation for how to approach emotion in the classroom and without a robust body of scholarship situated in classroom life and connected to the lived experience of students to turn to for support. I am concerned that such teachers are forced to turn to the taboo against emotions becoming fearful that they have done something wrong when emotions surface in the classroom. I am even more concerned for the students in that classroom. I want to see a meaningful body of literature emerge surrounding emotion and learning that resists the false binary between rationality and emotionality as well as the temptation to classify emotions as good or bad. I want a fundamental reorientation of the way we view emotion as part of learning and a new research agenda based on that orientation. I offer the following study as a contribution to this project.
I begin by asking the question: What do students' recollected stories about subject matter that inspired an emotional response in them reveal about the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning?
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

Student Learning:

I see the purpose of student learning through the frameworks offered by the work of bell hooks (1994), Paulo Freire (2000) and other critical theorists, while also borrowing from John Dewey (1916,1933,1934,1938) and the progressive education paradigm. Consistent with Freire’s articulation of the goals and purposes of education, I believe that learning should be a practice of freedom, with the primary goals being humanization, empowerment, and liberation for our students. I also take a progressive stance in that I believe freedom requires student self-realization or students becoming aware and reflective about themselves in order to actualize their unique potential (Ellis, 2003; Dewey, 1933).

I begin with David Hawkins’ “I, Thou and It” framework which describes the relationship between the student and the subject matter as being central to the learning process and in fact to the humanization of students. As Hawkins (1974) puts it, “A human being is a localized physical body, but you can’t see [a student] as a person unless you see him in his working relationships with the world around him. The more you cut off these working relationships…the more you diminish him. (pp. 50-51) In this framework student learning is a matter of students learning about themselves through their relationship with the subject matter. In Hawkins’ (1974) words, the student “is learning about himself through
his joint effects on the non-human and the human world around him” (Hawkins, 1974, p.53).

In a sense student learning can be seen as a matter of making and revealing connections. Education “makes one aware of some of the connections which have been imperceptible” (Dewey, 1916 p.90) and involves connecting with, or what Dewey (1938) calls “interaction” with, the world, with others, with ideas and most of all with one’s self as one becomes increasingly self-aware. It is also a matter of making meaning out of experience and making connections between experiences, or as Dewey (1938) calls it finding “continuity”. T. S. Eliot once said that, “Hell is the place where nothing connects.” I offer that student learning is a form of heaven where existing connections are revealed and new connections are made.

The role of the teacher is to facilitate that interaction between the student and the subject matter by providing feedback. So “the function of the teacher, then is to respond diagnostically and helpfully to a [student’s] behavior to make what he considers to be an appropriate response, a response the [student] needs to complete the process he’s engaged in” (Hawkins, 1974, p.53). This process of education that the student is engaged in is defined by Dewey as “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one’s] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1916 p.90). Students have experiences with subject matter then make meaning out of those experiences so that they inform future
experiences with the teacher facilitating this process. But what is subject matter exactly?

Dewey (1938) defines subject matter as the “objective conditions” that students have experience with in school:

It includes what is done by the educator and the way in which it is done, not only words spoken but the tone of voice in which they are spoken. It includes equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played. It includes the materials with which an individual interacts, and, most important of all, the total social set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged.

(p. 45)

Subject matter includes more than just the material contained in lesson plans or books. It includes the entire context of learning, the manner in which learning takes place and the social conditions of learning. Students are not simply “receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” of disciplinary knowledge (Freire, 2000, p.72). Students are in relationship with all elements of the learning environment as subject matter and they are learning more than neutral facts, they are learning what those experiences mean to them. They are developing habits, attitudes and beliefs about themselves.

The process by which students learn is through having experiences with subject matter and reflecting on the goodness of fit between those objective conditions and the circumstances of their lives and their own souls. In using the term, soul, here I am in agreement with bell hooks “that there is an aspect of our
vocation [as teachers] that is sacred [and] that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students” (hooks, 1994, p.13). In this way education is concerned with our souls and our humanness. I use John Miller’s (2006) definition of soul as, “the vital, mysterious energy that can give meaning and purpose to our lives” (p. 5). To offer subject matter as separate from the lives of students is at best limited and at worst a form of violence that denies students their humanness and even their souls. For, as Rodgers (2002) puts it, “The creation of meaning out of experience is at the very heart of what it means to be human. It is what enables us to make sense of and attribute value to the event of our lives” (p. 848). Dewey (1938) connects this meaning making and humanness to the soul, distinguishing it from rote learning when he asks:

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (pp. 48-49)

I am interested in student learning as offering “ways of knowing that enhance [students’] capacity to live fully and deeply” (hooks, 1994, p. 22) and support their “pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 2000, p. 47).
I am also concerned with how that humanness expresses itself in the world. I start with the assumption that each of us has a unique creative potential to offer the world so one goal of education is finding and developing one’s vocation. I borrow Buechner’s definition of vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (cited in Palmer, 1998, p.30). The project of education is one of facilitating the relationship between students and the world so that both can meet each other and contribute to each other’s development.

Beyond student learning as a matter of making connections and meaning I view it as a practice of freedom. I draw from Dewey who sees freedom as built upon the power to frame and execute one’s own purposes. He asserts (1938) that “[t]he ideal aim of education is creation of the power of self-control, (64)...the power to frame purposes and to execute or carry into effect purposes so framed” (p.67). Having this power to develop and carry out one’s purposes is freedom and should be the goal of learning for all students. However, Dewey (1938) also specifies that “[t]he only freedom that it is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment exercised in behalf of purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile” (p. 61). Student learning must include the development of the powers of observation and judgment as well as an understanding of what is intrinsically worthwhile.
Student learning does not exist in a bubble. We live in a world of unjust and inhumane social structures, which accord the status of person and the rights of humanness to some while denying it to others, distributing the goods of society accordingly. Student learning must serve both liberation from and transformation of social structures. As a society we need individuals who are connected to their creative wisdom, people who are connected to their souls or that “vital, mysterious energy that can give meaning and purpose to [their] lives” (Miller, 2006, p. 5) working towards liberation for all. Schools, as institutions, serve a mediating function connecting the individual level of lived experience with the discursive level of social structures. As such, schools can play a liberating function by naming and revealing the reality of social structures and supporting student inquiry so that both students and society might be transformed. Alternatively, schools can serve to obscure students’ view of social structures so that they reify them and become agents of oppression.

Education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination – denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. (Freire, p.81)

Schools have a unique power both to impact students’ souls and humanity as well as the social structures of society. Schools can serve as agents of social
change, opening up possibilities for fuller humanness, or schools can act as agents of oppression, closing down possibilities for individuals and for society. In bell hooks’ words (1994) “liberatory education… connects the will to know with the will to become” (p.19).

Dewey uses the terms educative and mis-educative to describe the fact that all student learning is not equal. Educative experience opens up possibilities for humanness, connection and freedom. Mis-educative experience shuts down possibilities or “has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). Experience is considered mis-educative when it “engender[s] callousness… land[s] a student in a groove or rut …produce[s] lack of sensitivity…a slack and careless attitude” or if it is “disconnected…[and] foreign to the situations of life outside the school” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 25-27). In order for student learning to be educative it must involve reflective thinking.

I propose that in order to achieve freedom both for individuals and for society students require liberation from their habitual responses, from their very own minds – the place where oppressive social structures exist not in the external form of unequal schools or unjust school systems but where they exert their force inside our own thoughts, in the beliefs we have that we are limited in some way, that freedom or humanness is not for us or a possibility for all. Learning as a practice of connection and a practice of freedom comes in part from reflection. Such reflection is, according to Dewey, and articulated by Rodgers, a rigorous, relational, meaning-making process (Rodgers, 2002).
In order to define reflection I refer to Carol Rodgers’ (2002) articulation of reflection as a four-phase process of: 1) being present to experience, 2) describing experience without judgment, 3) analyzing experience, and 4) taking intelligent action. This process of reflection follows a process of being present to the circumstances of our lives, naming our experience, carefully considering what that experience means, and only then taking a considered best next step. As Freire (2000) states:

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, inpatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other…the point of departure [being] with men and women in the ‘here and now,’ which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation – which determines their perception of it – can they begin to move. (pp. 72, 85)

It is through this cyclical process of action and reflection that we learn.

Reflection is not merely a cognitive process though. I agree with critical theorist Deborah Orr (2002) when she says that “learning takes place not only in the mind … but also on the levels of body, emotion, and spirit” (p.480) and with Rodgers(2002) when she reminds us that reflection begins with “one’s first emotional reaction” (p. 853) and that “[a]wareness of our attitudes and emotions, and the discipline to harness them and use them to our advantage, is part of the
work of a good thinker” (Rodgers, 2002, p.858). With that in mind I proceed with an examination of emotion.

**Emotion:**

I find myself in agreement with sociologist Megan Boler (1999) both as she says, “To theorize emotions is a slippery business” (p. 8) and as she proceeds to commit herself to said slippery business. The definition she begins with follows:

Emotions are in part sensational, or physiological: consisting of the actual feeling—increased heartbeat, adrenaline, etc. Emotions are also “cognitive,” or “conceptual”: shaped by our beliefs and perceptions. There is, as well, a powerful linguistic dimension to our emotional awareness, attributions of meanings, and interpretations” (Boler, 1999, p.xix-xx).

Yet this does not suffice for her, or for me because, “emotions reflect the complex dynamics of one’s lived situation…Emotions are inseparable from actions and relations, from lived experience” (Boler, 1999, p.2). To break up emotions into component parts is to loose the forest for the trees. I find that I am not satisfied with any orientation that reduces emotion to its parts. In Meisenhelder’s (1982) words, “Whether sociological, psychological, or philosophical, each of these approaches distorts the phenomena that are emotional experience. At the least, they dissolve the unity of emotional experiences into separate physical and
spiritual elements” (pp. 197-198). What I am concerned with is the lived experience of emotion and its relationship to identity and the learning process. Thus, my intention is to offer a conceptualization of emotion that is rooted in phenomenology. I agree with Meisenhelder (1982) who comes from a phenomenological perspective:

What is needed is the descriptive study of emotions-in-the-world; that is, research that makes a conscious effort to see emotions as unified experiences encountered as part of one’s natural consciousness of everyday life situations… it would also include a close consideration of body and consciousness but as a natural unity of meaning rather than as analytically separate components in a laboratory experiment. (p.196)

Thus I argue that from a phenomenological perspective emotion functions as a sense. In the words of Arlie Hochschild (1983) emotion “is a biologically given sense, and our most important one. Like other senses—hearing, touch, and smell—it is a means by which we know about our relation to the world” (p. 219). This sense offers us information about the self-relevance of an experience. Emotions serve a signaling function, alerting the self, or the meaning maker, when an experience relates to our identity. “Like hearing or seeing, feeling provides a useful set of clues in figuring out what is real” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 31).
As Ann Game (1997) states, “feeling implies a relationship: one feels ‘in relation to,’ not as a distinct, isolated identity…The key point about affectivity is that it draws attention to the relation between bodies…[it] is the means by which ‘we get in touch with the world,’ and make sense of our relation to beings and things” (pp. 386, 392). Whether emotion is actually connecting, implying connection or drawing attention to a connection, emotion tells us something about our relationships to others, including the world of ideas, things, social structures, communities and culture. Again, Arlie Hochschild (1983) explains:

emotions “signal” messages to the individual. Freud wrote about the “signal function” of anxiety; anxiety, according to Freud, signaled the presence of the danger from within or outside the individual. It was the means by which the individual told of an apprehended danger. Similarly, other emotional states—such as joy, sadness, and jealousy—can be seen as the senders of signals about our way of apprehending the inner and outer environment. (p. 221)

I propose that in a classroom setting a student’s emotional response to subject matter or learning indicates some kind of significant relationship the student is experiencing with the text, author, ideas, instruction, classroom community, etc. Zembylas (2003) quotes Hochschild (1989) as stating that “it is from feelings that we learn the self-relevance of what we see, remember, or imagine” (p.215) and goes on to interpret Hochschild as saying that “[e]motions are the beacons of our
true selves... because they provide us with an inner perspective for interpreting and responding to experience” (p.215). The image of a beacon can work in so far as a beacon is a signal. When students have an emotional response to learning it is like a beacon alerting them to the self-relevance of what they are experiencing. McGinley (2008), writes about crying as one form of emotional response from a phenomenological perspective. He goes so far as to state the following:

Crying is that within that counsels me to take up my ownmost essence, however difficult that may seem; to put to work the essence and the art of being human—to actively take up and take upon myself the understanding of the truth of being as a whole.

Crying tells us who we are—tells me who I am; tells me what is important, what matters to me. (p. 221)

In other words, “Any emotion is, as Sartre (1948, p.61) has argued, a relationship between the embodied spirit and its situation, or its surrounding world” (Meisenhelder, 1982, 206).

In terms of learning, emotion connects the stuff of the outer world with the stuff of our inner world. To be disconnected from emotion is to be disconnected from the self-relevance of learning, “when we do not feel emotion, or disclaim an emotion we lose touch with how we actually link inner to outer reality...Feelings signal not only a newly apprehended reality (outer or inner) but what that reality impinges upon—our prior self and expectations” (Hochschild, 1983, 223). In other words feelings occur when new knowledge or learning impacts our previous
conceptions of the world or ourselves. Transformative learning theorists might call this moment a disorienting dilemma, Dewey might call it unsettledness and Piaget might call it disequilibrium, in any case, it is the moment when prior knowledge is no longer sufficient for some reason, this moment when we are compelled towards learning.

To return to Megan Boler, “Emotions function in part as moral and ethical evaluations; they give us information about what we care about and why…Our emotions help us to envision future horizons of possibilities and who we want to become” (Boler, 1999, p.xviii). Operating from this orientation suggests a need to examine student identity as related to the process of student learning.

Identity:

To begin with, Rodgers and Scott (2008) offer a comprehensive definition of identity. They state:

1) that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which brings social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation; 2) that identity is formed in relationship with others and involves emotions; 3) that identity is shifting, unstable, and multiple; and, 4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories and over time.
Gee (2001) offers what I find to be a simple and very pragmatic definition of identity, “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person,’ in a given context” (p.99). From a phenomenological perspective this definition is useful in that it seems to capture the lived experience of identity. Identity is the kind of person you recognize yourself to be and/or others recognize you to be and varies according to context. It is important to note that for Gee an individual is not a “certain kind of person” but rather is recognized as a “certain kind of person” in a given context. He explains, “all people have multiple identities connected not to their ‘internal states’ but to their performances in society” (p.99). Sfard and Prusak (2005) articulate this same idea when they define identity in terms of the stories others and we tell about ourselves. They define identity as, “a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person…[which], even if individually told, are products of a collective storytelling” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14).

A definition of identity as “stories” resonates with me because I have taken my overall understanding of identity from post-structuralist and feminist theory. As articulated by Judith Butler (1988), identity is not expressive of any natural, internal condition but rather is performative and constituted through “stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding” (p.2) identity with any appearance of substance being “a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors
themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief” (p.3). We perform identity stories or scripts. This understanding of identity allows for identity to be seen simultaneously as, constituted, cultural, temporal, historical, relational, multiple, and ultimately extremely variable while at the same time corporeal and perceived to be fixed and solid in any moment. Zembylas (2003) agrees that “a poststructuralist perspective names simultaneously cultural and discursive dimensions of experience, but does not neglect that these experiences are felt and embodied” (page 223). A key point for me is that the performative nature of identity does not make it feel any less real. In fact, paradoxically, the vulnerability of identity’s reliance on belief as its substance actually makes it more resistant to change. If identity were less tenuously constituted, relying on some absolute form, then it might not be so fraught in constant negotiation. Ultimately, what this view allows for me as researcher is liberation from any positivist need to pin down the “real story” or any “true identity” but rather focus on the acts involved in constituting identity, the dynamics of telling identity stories.

Sfard & Prusak (2005), also working from a poststructuralist perspective, explain that a feature of what makes a story into an identity story is that it is “taken seriously”, “endorsed” and viewed as “significant” (p.14) by an individual. They also articulate that what makes a story “significant” is when it implies exclusion from or membership in a community (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p.17). Identity stories, according to Sfard & Prusak (2005) can be 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person stories – so they can be told by the self to the self or others or told
by others to the self or to others (p.17). Sfard and Prusak (2005) also distinguish
between an “actual identity” which involves the stories told about the present in
terms of who one is right now and a “designated identity” which involves future
stories told about what one will be someday (p.18). In this framework learning
can be defined as negotiating the gap between actual and designated identities.
The process of learning is, in part, a process of reconciling the stories told about
the kind of people we are now with the stories that are told about the kind of
people we might become.

Zembylas (2003) also coming from a post-structuralist perspective
articulates that “[i]dentity formation and emotion are inextricably linked, informing
each other and re-defining interpretations of each other” (p. 223). Then he
reminds us that, “identity is constantly becoming in a context embedded in power
relations, ideology, and culture” (p.213). I propose that the emotional nature of
identity construction (Rodgers and Scott, 2008) relates to the nature of identity
narratives as having to do with “power relations” or as Sfard & Prusak’s (2005)
put it the “significance” of an identity story involving an articulation of exclusion
from or inclusion in a community. If we use Sfard and Prusak’s (2005)
conceptualization of learning as negotiating “the gap between actual and
designated identities” or “who we are” and “who we want to become” then what
emotion might signal could be when a learning is impacting our identities.

What we are learning in school, both explicitly and implicitly, is more than
knowledge about the world. We are also learning ourselves—our place in the
world; what we have to offer the world; who we are in the world and what our future might be in the world. The stories that are told about the communities we are included in and excluded from, the kind of people we are and can be as well as the kind of people we are not and could never be are evolving. A critical, progressive orientation towards education suggests that this is the kind of learning that matters most. But what exactly is happening in this process? What is the process by which some of many possible stories are “taken seriously,” “endorsed,” and viewed as “significant” by an individual so that they become identity stories (Sfard and Prusak, 2005, p.14)? How is it determined that we are the kind of people who know about science, might go into nursing, would make wonderful mothers or could handle medical school, etc.? What might this process look like? I think that our emotions might provide some kind of beacon alerting us when this process is happening, when a story is becoming an identity story, when new knowledge is influencing our identity.

Research Question:
I ask the following question in an attempt to examine this possibility:

What do students’ recollected stories about subject matter that inspired an emotional response in them reveal about the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning?
CHAPTER 3

Study Design

Description of the Study

At the heart of my curiosity has been the lived experience of emotion as part of the learning process. Specifically, I am interested in the kind of learning that puts students in touch with that vital and mysterious energy that can give their lives meaning and purpose and have theorized that emotional response can indicate when such learning might be taking place.

Patton (2002) describes a phenomenological study as “[o]ne that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 107). The focus of phenomenology then is on lived experience. The foundational question phenomenology asks is: “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, 2002, p.104). For this study I looked to gather personal narratives about emotion and learning but it has always been the phenomenon I am interested in exploring through the use of stories rather than the stories themselves or what the stories have to say about the people or culture they come from. Zembylas offers support for the idea that narratives provide “a powerful tool” (p. 214-215) for investigating emotion and identity in particular. I have used narratives in the service of phenomenology insofar as narrative inquiry “honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description
of experience, worthy as narrative documentary of experience (the core of phenomenology)” (Patton, 2002, pp.115-116).

The biggest challenge to gathering data related to emotion is that it can be so intensely personal and interior. Our experience of our emotions is internal and often hidden from external observation. Sometimes it is even hidden from our own consciousness, as we can ignore, dismiss, suppress and disconnect from emotional experience in a culture that has not only created a false dichotomy between the rational and the emotional but also maintains the superiority of the rational over the emotional.

One of my challenges in the beginning was the notion of figuring out how to capture this phenomenon as it is happening in any moment. It would have been ill advised, I think, to stake out classrooms hoping to find evidence of emotions spontaneously erupting for a variety of reasons. Emotion may or may not occur in any particular classroom setting, although it has the possibility of occurring anytime students meet subject matter. However, it would be impossible to judge the significance of any emotion, or even learning for that matter, in the moment. What I have been interested in is actually the learning that endures over time, the learning that was so significant it can actually be recalled years later. I have wanted to document and describe the beauty and magic in how we make sense of the world; therefore I have been interested in listening to people’s stories about the learning that hit them in their hearts and souls. Simply naming and describing examples of the relationship that can occur between emotion,
identity and learning is a way of affirming it and the piece I want to contribute to the existing scholarship.

According to Van Manen, “phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always recollected; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through” (Van Manen, 1990, p.10). This speaks to my inclination to use recollections as my data. Interestingly, when Scanlan, Care and Udod (2002) used qualitative self-study methods to explore the role of reflection in teaching and learning they found a connection between emotion and recollection. They report, “that the experiences most clearly remembered…were those that contain powerful emotions—either positive or negative. These emotions, in part, seem to enable us to remember with greater detail what transpired in the teaching or learning experience” (Scanlan, Care & Udod, 2002, p.142).

Since the purpose of this study is exploratory and descriptive, focusing on recollected stories, I turned to the work of The Prospect Center for Education and Research for their descriptive inquiry orientation and the specific process of “Recollections” presented in their 2002 publication, “Prospect’s Descriptive Processes”. Patricia Carini (2001), one of The Prospect Center’s founders, describes their approach as “descriptive, phenomenological inquiry…root[ed] in…the particularities of the [person]’s lived experience as that is viewable and describable” (p.6) with the aim being “to recognize and remember and revalue the richness and complexity of human beings” (Himley and Carini, 2000, p.129).
The Prospect Center provided particularly appropriate grounding for this study because they offer a collection of concrete inquiry practices and a stance that simultaneously reflect the values of phenomenology and post-structuralism, two schools of thought that are often seen as in conflict with each other. That is, for them, the inquiry process begins with the value of phenomenological inquiry which grounds knowledge in lived experience. However, they maintain a constant understanding consistent with post-structuralism that “knowledge is understood as always unfinished, incomplete, emerging, and partial” (Himley and Carini, 2000, p. 128). Patricia Carini (2001) describes her own experience in using descriptive inquiry processes:

I rely on the animating power of story to connect your story with mine, and both of ours to larger public stories…stories of how humanness happens in the making, unmaking, and remaking of it. I equally rely on story to illuminate the thickness, selectivity, and complexity with which each person (and all persons) craft the stuff of a life into a personal poetic identifiably each person’s own. Weighting story in two directions, I give it prominence of place for its pluralizing and publicizing function and equally for its twining function of connecting both teller and hearer with personal memory and innerness. (p. 2)

Prospect Center’s descriptive inquiry process of “recollections” provided the initial inspiration for my study design. When I first conceived of this research I planned to stay pretty close to the protocol offered by the Prospect Center and conduct a group inquiry in order to gather participant recollections. Since this was a method ordinarily used by teachers in a school setting I was unsure how much of the protocol would be appropriate for this kind of research so I conducted a pilot study. Through the process of piloting with 4 participants I discovered
significant challenges to using a group process to investigate this particular question.

Although the group inquiry protocol offered by the Prospect Center has many benefits, the major drawbacks that I discovered through piloting were that each individual story must be of a limited length and depth and that using a group inquiry process seemed to put an undue burden on participants. I was grateful to be sensitized early on to how vulnerable this topic of emotional learning experience makes people feel. Since my purpose in piloting was to test my methods and find out if what I was asking of participants seemed reasonable and effective I asked them to give me feedback on what it was like to take part in my study. I found that people felt very vulnerable trusting their emotional stories to me and to a group. People were unsure if the content of their stories was what I was looking for and they were hesitant about what was expected of them in terms of analysis. Even though I assured them that all stories no matter how large or small were valuable and interesting to me they seemed to spend an undue amount of time considering what to offer and required many phone conversations with me in order to feel at ease.

From the feedback I received and my own observations of the way that participants seemed to be feeling I determined that the cost of the group inquiry method was too high and the yield of the process too little to make the method worth pursuing. The original procedure left them too exposed and open to judgment from other participants, which impacted their story telling. My way of
looking and valuing these experiences was unique and unfamiliar to people so they needed my reassurance through my presence and attention. I realized that it would be less of a burden on them and yield much richer data if I just conducted in-depth interviews in order to gather people’s recollections. The format of in-depth interviews was familiar to participants, allowed them the comfort of a greater degree of confidentiality and offered them reassurance through my presence that it was safe to share their stories of emotion with me. Using in-depth one-on-one interviews allowed the stories to develop depth and complexity beyond what a group inquiry recollection could realistically allow for. Therefore, I discarded The Prospect Center’s group inquiry process. What I retained was their stance, in order to ground my study, and their guidelines for gathering recollections, in order to develop my interview protocol.

Recruitment

Phenomenological research requires that study participants have intense experience with the phenomenon since examples need to be “of sufficient intensity to elucidate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p.234). Therefore, I used the “logic of intensity sampling” and hoped to recruit participants who could offer “rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases” (Patton, 2002, p.234). Participants who had experienced emotion as part of their learning in school and were also skillful at
describing their lived experience were purposefully selected and invited to participate in the study.

Study participants were drawn from a population of teachers and faculty affiliated with The Association of Contemplative Educators (a pseudonym). The Association includes professors who are interested in the use of contemplative practices in education and vary in gender, ethnicity, race and age though tend to be between the ages of 25 and 65. I was interested in including this group of educators in my study for two reasons: first, for their commitment to learning and second, for their experience as contemplatives or meditators. As Walsh & Shapiro (2006), suggest, “meditators may prove to be uniquely valuable subjects” because “their introspective sensitivity may make them exceptional observers of subjective states and mental processes…they may provide precise phenomenological accounts” (pp.8-9). I was interested in following Walsh & Shapiro’s (2006) hypothesis that contemplatives might be able to provide richer phenomenological accounts because of their heightened awareness of their own lived experience.

I recruited participants by placing an announcement in The Association’s quarterly newsletter describing my study and asking members to email me if they would be willing to participate. I also made the announcement available at their annual conference. When members contacted me I sent them a more detailed description of the study and an informed consent form for them to read so that they could make a more informed decision about whether or not to participate.
Initially I wanted to allow people to define what an emotional experience was for themselves so the criterion for inclusion in the study was having experience with the phenomenon of interest, so having had an experience of emotional response to subject matter in a formal school setting.

Ten people contacted me with interest in participating. After learning more about the specific requirements of the study and considering scheduling logistics eight people agreed to be interviewed. I conducted one semi-structured 60-90 minute interview with each of these eight people in the location of their choice. Four interviews took place in my home, one on a university campus, one at The Association’s annual conference, one in a participant’s office and one via Skype.

I discarded half of the eight interviews I conducted as part of this study for two reasons. As I stated earlier what I was interested in was learning experiences that endured over time, the learning that was so significant it could be recalled years later. In three of the eight interviews participants told stories that were just too recent to meet that criterion. The development of their stories over time simply had not happened at the time of the interviews and so they were missing a vital piece of what I was interested in looking at. I was sorry to let these interviews go for this study but hope to return to them at another time. I chose not to include one other story for a different reason. This story centered around a case of sexual harassment, which made it an example of a different phenomenon than the focus of this study.
In the end I am including data from four participants collected during single semi-structured 60-90 minute interviews I conducted separately with each of them.

Participants

All four participants have been “successful” in academic terms. They graduated from college, two of them have PhD’s and two of them have professional graduate degrees. They have all had “successful” careers as educators of some kind, two in higher education, one in popular education and one in K-12 education. One practiced social work. One did community organizing. They have all been gainfully employed helping people in some way for their work. As their careers have evolved they all continue to make contributions to the world through research, writing books, working with children and work in nonprofit organizations. They are all older than 55, three are white and one is black, three are women and one is a man. As Pat Carini (2001) says, they all experience the status of being human and “to enjoy and suffer that status is to be complex and mingled, pervasively and continuously influenced by other lives and events, near and at a distance, in the immediacy of vivid, present feeling and the ebbs and flows of time and memory” (p.100).

Data Collection Instrument

I used the Prospect Center’s guidelines (Himley, 2002) for gathering recollections to develop my interview protocol (see Appendix A). I asked each
participant to tell me about a time or times when they found themselves emotionally moved by some aspect of their learning in school. I left the invitation very open, asking storytellers to think widely and define emotion broadly including both emotional responses that they understood clearly and responses that might have been unanticipated, in preparation for their interview.

**Data Collection Processes**

Participants were given copies of the interview protocol via e-mail before their interviews, which some of them read and some of them did not. My intention in each interview was to let the participants take the lead in telling their stories. I did offer encouragement and guidance in order to keep the interviews focused on the phenomenon of interest and to encourage participants to say more when they were not certain if what they were saying was relevant. During the interviews participants usually chose to describe one story in greater detail than others but in each case ended up telling a variety of stories that seemed to relate in some way to the main story even though they often could not say how. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Throughout the research process I kept detailed research notes in the form of analytic memos documenting my thinking and insights as I went along. These served as an additional source of data.
Ethics

The University at Albany Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved this study and all recruitment materials (See Appendices B and C). Protecting participant confidentiality was a priority for me. Participants were informed that during their interview I would use only their first names and then before data analysis any personal identifiers would be removed from the study and I would assign them a pseudonym. I used this pseudonym throughout the data analysis and for any reporting such that participants are referred to here by pseudonyms or in general terms. Since the study included some communication conducted using email, participants were made explicitly aware that all of the risks associated with using the internet to transmit information applied to our electronic communication. I informed participants that I would retain any data I collected from them for analysis unless at any point they chose to leave the study or requested that I exclude and/or destroy their data. All information was stored on my computer’s hard drive as well as on an external hard drive. Additionally, I requested a waiver of documentation of signed informed consent so that at the beginning of each interview I read to participants an approved informed consent script and recorded their verbal assent to serve as documentation of participant consent to avoid having a signed consent document that would been a record linking the subject to the research.
Summary of Forms of Data:

Pilot Study Data

Four Participant Recollection Stories Gathered using In-depth interviews

Researcher Journal and Notes

Data Analysis

Analysis of the in-depth interviews was based on The Listening Guide method for data analysis developed by Carol Gilligan and other feminist scholars as a method “designed to open a way to discovery when discovery hinges on coming to know the inner world of another person” (Gilligan, et al, 2003, p.157). The Listening Guide works particularly well because it allows the researcher to see the dynamic of storytelling not just the story itself. The researcher moves from being narrative-focused to being voice-focused or from being orientated towards getting the one “true” story to being oriented towards hearing the multiple, shifting, contextual, relational, sometimes contradictory voices revealed or hidden by the process of storytelling. This is particularly appropriate for investigating complex relational phenomenon such as emotion, identity and learning. It allows for contradictions, multiple voices and multiple narratives to be revealed, in fact looking closely for complexity and depth in the stories people tell.

The process involved doing multiple rounds of analysis, attending or “listening” to different aspects of an interview in each round, while keeping
detailed notes about my own responses to the listening, summarizing at the end of each round and then drawing together a final synthesis for each participant.

According to The Listening Guide (Gilligan, et al., 2003) the first round of analysis is always a listening for the plot as well as for my own response to the interview. In this round I first attended to “what [was] happening, when, where, with whom, and why. Repeated images and metaphors and dominant themes [were] noted as [well as] contradictions and absences, or what [was] not expressed.” (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2003, p.160). This round was where the social and cultural context of both the stories and the research process were noted. During this round I was also naming my own responses to the interview, “identifying, exploring, and making explicit [my] own thoughts and feelings about, and associations with, the narrative being analyzed” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 160).

For this first round of analysis I would take a clean copy of each interview transcript and read through highlighting sections of text that related to the plot of the story or to my response as described above. I would make notes in the margins as I went along to explain what I thought was present in each highlighted section of text. I would then use voice recognition software to talk out my response to the story attempting to make visible any personal reactions I had to the interview or to the reading. Finally, I would organize, explain and expand on the notes I made in the margins in the form of extensive research memos in order to summarize and synthesize my findings.
The next three rounds of listening connected with my research question. I did a round of listening for identity stories, a round of listening for emotion as a sense and a round of listening for student learning. At the end of each round I summarized what was revealed during that listening in an integrative statement.

When doing a round of listening I would refer to an evolving coding guide based on my theoretical frameworks (See Appendix D). I would listen for emotion, identity, and student learning as I had defined them in Chapter 2 as well as for any related themes that surfaced. The thematic coding guides included the various elements that I had used to define each theme, so what I would consider evidence of emotion, identity or student learning. For example, the student learning guide reminded me to look for moments when participants might have discussed “liberation from habitual response” or “making and revealing connections.” I describe these coding guides as evolving because they were not set in stone. As I went through the process of using them I would sometimes tease apart an idea into two constructs, collapse two codes into one or discover that I was missing something and add it.

I used a new copy of the transcript for each listening, highlighting passages that related to the theme of that round and coding each passage in the margins. I would then use voice recognition software to summarize and synthesize my findings in extensive research memos.

In order to check the trustworthiness of my system of data analysis I asked an experienced qualitative researcher with a PhD in Curriculum and
Instruction to look at my work. This reader code checked for me by engaging in my process of data analysis in an abbreviated: reading a section of one interview three times using one of my three thematic listening guides for each reading. First of all, my code checker was able to affirm that my definitions of emotion, identity and student learning and my listening guides made sense. Secondly she confirmed that the places where I saw evidence of each theme were appropriate. Finally, she expressed that she was able to experience the impact of doing multiple readings of a section of text using different listening guides. She said that her understanding developed and deepened with each new reading in a way that she would not have anticipated until doing the readings herself.

I did a fifth round of listening looking at the areas of the transcript that had been highlighted in all three of these rounds or the places where emotion, identity and student learning seemed to overlap. For this round I sat with the three highlighted copies of the transcript for emotion, identity and student learning. I used a blank copy of the transcript on the computer to select the sections of the interview that had been highlighted in all three rounds of analysis. I cut these sections of the transcript out and listened to them for what might be revealed about the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning. I then used voice recognition software again to write extensive research memos about what I saw as being revealed through this process.

Finally, I listened for the voice of the “I” who is speaking. This round involves identifying all phrases where the pronoun “I” is used or implied as when
“I” sometimes becomes “you” or “we,” connoting distancing or alliance by the participant, then constructing an “I poem” made up of only these phrases. The “I poem” is then analyzed for two purposes: first, “to press the researcher to listen to the participant’s first-person voice…and second, to hear how this person speaks about him- or herself” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p.162). I used this listening to look more closely at the sections of the interviews where the themes of identity, emotion and learning overlapped and bring forth the voice of the “I”. This is one area where I took liberty with The Listening Guide, which suggests that the “I poem” reading should be done as the second reading. However, since “I poems” are usually done for selected areas of the interview determined by the researcher I took the liberty of choosing to do “I poems” for the sections of the interview where emotion, identity and student learning overlapped which required doing the “I poem” reading as the sixth round of listening. After creating and reading through each “I poem” I would use voice recognition software to analyze what new insights the poems offered in the form of research memos. I universally found that centering the voice of the “I” for each participant during this round always brought the stories into much starker relief, presenting them in their most basic form.

After all rounds of listening were completed I wrote an integrative statement of my analysis for each participant. As a form of member checking, I then sent these statements to my participants via email asking them for feedback and to let me know if there were any places where I was missing something or
had something wrong. For me as a researcher, capturing the essence of my participants’ stories in a way that they would not only recognize as accurate but would also be touched by was important so I took great care with writing these integrative statements and with the member checking process. Universally, my participants responded with gratitude for the opportunity to tell their stories, appreciation for the care I gave them and for the insights my statement offered as well as encouragement for my project. Rhonda responded by saying, “This is a wonderful statement! I have never seen my story in print before, and it feels quite deep and powerful”. Ernie expressed, “Overall I am pleased with what you have written here and I [am] totally pleased with your interview and the quality of your project.” Amy shared her gratitude by saying, “thank you for this beautiful presentation of my recognition of myself… Reading what you wrote is a lovely way to start my day, both remembering my long-ago self and remembering our interview.” Suzanne responded by saying, “This is amazing work.” The only changes they asked me to make were a handful of spelling and grammar changes and two clarifying changes to chronological details.

The next phase of data analysis involved summarizing and synthesizing my research memos across participants and across theoretical frameworks. I started by bringing together my research memos from all participants for emotion, identity, student learning, the overlapping parts and the “I poems.” I then analyzed the findings from all participants for each round of listening by theme. So for emotion, I compiled the four participants’ research memos and organized
them by theme. I then compiled all four participants’ research memos from the
listening for identity and synthesized them by theme and so on for student
learning, the overlap and the “I poems”. I then created an organizational grid to
place the themes from each round of listening next to each other in order to
identify themes across theoretical frameworks. My final presentation of findings
and discussion come from synthesizing all rounds of data analysis.

In choosing how to introduce these dynamic people and their emotional
stories I struggled to find a form that might resist the temptation of “scientific
categorization and technological dehumanization” (Glesne, 1997, p.13). One of
the tricks of analytic writing is creating an illusion of proof; a particular fiction that
it is possible to know a participant; to know her story and tell it in words. The
temptation is to stand apart, to intellectualize and operationalize. Although I was
satisfied with the integrative statements that I had written I felt like the emotional
essence of each story was lost in the narrative. The integrative statements
described my participants’ emotions but they did not convey them. In order to
center the emotional core of each story and avoid the sense that these stories,
these people, these lives can be known in any complete sense I decided to do a
seventh reading for the poem contained in each interview.

I began by feeling my way through a process that called to mind how
Michelangelo thought that every block of stone has a statue inside it and that it is
the task of the sculptor to discover it. It felt to me like each interview had a poem
inside it and that it was my job to discover it. After completing two poems I
discovered that another qualitative researcher had also had the same idea. Corrine Glesne (1997) presented her research findings using what she calls poetic transcription and defines as “the creation of poemlike compositions from the words of the interviewees…approximating poetry through the concentrated language of interviewee, shaped by researcher to give pleasure and truth” (p. 1, 12). Glesne (1997) explains that through poetic transcription “readers are invited to join in, not only with critique, but also with their feelings and personal reflections” (p.16). Through poetic transcription we know what we know in feelings and in recognition.

The process I used to create poetic transcriptions of each participant’s story was to do a final round of listening to the full transcript using voice recognition software to select the sections of text that would make up each participant’s poem. I selected text that I found to “tell a story, make a point, or evoke a feeling told, heard, and felt by either or both [my participant] and myself” (Glesne, 1997, p. 13). I used only the participant’s exact words and phrases in order to capture some sense of their voices. I selected and rearranged the text with the hope of expressing some kind of essence of the story they were telling. I did give myself the liberty of rearranging the order of the text, at times, because participants would often circle back to tell different parts of the same story throughout their interview. My intention in using poetic transcription is to “give linguistic expression to some aspect of human experience that cannot be
paraphrased without losing a sense of the vivid truthfulness the lines of the poem are somehow able to communicate” (Van Manen, 1990, p.71).

Limitations of the study

My hope is that by looking closely at these 4 people’s stories we might gain an understanding of the possibilities for what might occur at any time for students emotionally in a classroom. These experiences are unique to these individuals and their particular contexts and as such cannot predict the experiences of other students in any other contexts. As a phenomenological study this work “does not allow for empirical generalizations [or] the production of law-like statements” (van Manen, 1990, p.22). Rather than attempting to make general statements or predictions about when and how students might respond emotionally this study seeks to do the opposite: to create a sense of respect and awe at the complexity of our human experience and to sensitize educators to the essential wonder and mystery contained in the lived experience of this phenomenon. As van Manen puts it, “[g]eneralizations about human experience are almost always of troublesome value” as “the tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience” (p. 22).

I approached these stories with what van Manen calls “the attentive practice of thoughtfulness… a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life” (page 12). My hope is that in looking
closely at these learners' experiences we may become sensitized to the complexity and depth of what can be going on for students when they experience emotions as part of their learning.

My purpose has always been descriptive in order that we might reimagine the role of emotion in the classroom by paying close attention to the recollections or lived experience of emotion that learners report as part of their formal education. In order to do this I have attempted to listen closely rather than broadly, to listen with new ears, to develop new lenses with which to view emotion while simultaneously listening for the voice of the learner in these stories. “The end of human science research for educators is a critical pedagogical competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogical situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness” not on the basis of rules or generalizations (van Manen, 1990, p.8). As such, this study is a practice of becoming “thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted” and offers a space for reflection on the meaning of emotion and identity in the learning process (p. 8). Utilizing these stories “to explicate meanings specific to particular cultures (ethnography), to certain social groups (sociology), to historical periods (history), to mental types (psychology), or to an individual’s personal life history (biography)” (van Manen, p.12) when they were gathered with the purpose “to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our life world” would be inappropriate.
I invite you to keep this in mind as I now present the findings from this study.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

This study is concerned with the kind of learning that puts students in touch with that vital and mysterious energy that can give their lives meaning and purpose. I have theorized that emotional response can indicate when such learning might be taking place. In order to get at the lived experience of emotion as a signal for learning that touches the soul I asked participants to recollect emotional learning experiences from their formal schooling. I selected stories that took place in the more distant past so that the meaning and purpose of those experiences over time could be revealed. What I present here is each participant’s contribution to understanding this particular kind of emotional response to learning.

I begin my description of what the recollections revealed about the phenomenon by presenting the essence of each story using poetic transcription. Following each poem I present an integrative statement. I prepared these statements to be emailed to participants after I had completed my data analysis so that I could check my understanding of each story with the storyteller and get their approval of my interpretations. What I include here is the text approved by each participant. Following each integrative statement I offer discussion of the themes I saw exemplified in each story before moving into discussion of the implications of these findings.
A note on poetic transcription: An invitation

I will attempt to convey the essence of the stories my participants told about times when their learning evoked an emotional response from them using poetic transcription. When I tried to tell these stories in prose it felt like they had been reduced to some smaller part of themselves. Somehow using the concise language of poetry seems to express more of the essence of the stories while maintaining the voice of the teller, connecting the particulars of their lives with the humanness of ours without resorting to generalization. Through reading these poetic transcriptions I invite you into relationship with the participants who shared their stories and with myself as the researcher who selected and arranged each person’s words into poetic transcription. I hope to make my presence and hand in the making of this work more transparent, “the shaping more evident” and tempt you, as readers, “to join in, not only with critique, but also with [your] feelings and personal reflections” (Glesne, 1997, p.13, 16). Through poetry I am attempting to “[present] a spiritual aspect of people researched” and invite you to experience these stories with your emotion as well as cognition (Glesne, 1997, p. 1).
**Amy’s Poem**

I can remember back in high school
how excited I was when
the principles of design
were explained by my art teacher

the setting was just a boring old high school class
with big tables
not a lot of students

he showed how things looked
he pointed out
look at this

I couldn’t tell you what the 7 things were or even if 7 was the number
I don’t remember the artists
but just the fact that he showed a drawing
and another drawing from somebody else

it was just him very calmly pointing out
look at this

these principles
a chord in me
a hot flash
a supernova I saw over and over as time went on
My whole self

when I first got glasses it was a similar kind of experience
I put the glasses on
and looked at the world
it was not how I had seen it before
it was more so with this art experience
everything was just clearer and more important to me

I didn’t say to anybody
I can really see
I never was able to see anything
Now I can
I didn’t say that
but I knew it

It was too precious
if I said it
they would look at me like I was nuts
that kind of thing isn’t important
boys are important
food is important
sports are important
they would not have understood

My father insisted
be practical
get a college education where you’re gonna be able to get a job

I took as many art classes as I possibly could
That’s the closest I could get to an art career

but when Mr. Garfinkel presented that picture
I wasn’t being silly about what I wanted to be when I grew up
It was very clear

this was who I was
right then at 14

I made art

I try to be an artist in everything that I do
based on those old principles
when I’m getting dressed
when I’m putting dinner on the table
whatever I’m doing
it’s worth it
because it’s part of me
and I would feel less if I didn’t
Amy’s Integrative Statement

The basic plot of Amy’s story involves her experiencing a feeling of ecstasy and excitement when the principles of design she learned about in her high school art class created for her a whole new way of seeing the activities of her life as well as herself as an artist.

Amy uses many words related to light and vision in describing her experience of learning art in high school. She stated that she experienced a new way of seeing, like a “light bulb went off,” a revelation, like when she first got glasses such that “everything was just clearer and more important to me.” She said that it was “like a supernova” and that she felt “enlightened.” She described the subject matter as hitting a chord in her and described the feeling as being “super dramatic,” “exciting,” “beautiful,” “ecstasy,” “transporting her to a different plane.” She describes the feeling in her body as being “like a hot flash” and names the “thrill of reaching something through emotion” and a sense of “I want to do this forever.”

Amy describes the context of her learning experience as ordinary but her teacher as “very dynamic,” “a commercial artist himself” who “enjoyed teaching” and “presented in a very adult way” without “talking down to us.” She ponders the idea that although it “touched me, I don’t know that it affected anyone else in the class the same way.”

A sense of “I want to do this forever” can be seen in how she states that this experience “did definitely affect my life from then on” and has had an
enduring impact on her daily activities as in “when I’m getting dressed, when I’m putting dinner on the table, whatever I’m doing, these things are ingrained.” Although she could not name all seven principles of design nor remember the exact artists’ works that were used to represent them she feels this learning as vital for her life in that she saw over and over as time went on how her learning in this our class made things “connected” and “worth doing.”

She felt herself as more “open to learning” because everything was connected and because everything became important. For example, “history became important because it related to painters and what they painted, and how things developed and what was going on to support them or suppress them and math was important because you needed to know ratios for light and shadow.”

Amy describes her learning as “identification for me…as an artist.” She described this learning as impacting her sense of self, identity, and voice as in “how I saw myself,” “who I am in the world,” “it’s part of me and I’d feel less if I didn’t,” “this is who I really am and this is what it means, and this is what I can do with it,” She makes references to a sense of “maturity,” “a coming of age breakthrough kind of thing” and a shift as in “I wasn’t being silly about what I wanted to be when I... grew up. It was very clear: this was not who I was going to be when I grew up, [it was] who I was right then at, whatever, 14.” She describes how she became stronger and more protective where she had felt more like “I was kind of a little mouse before that, I didn’t stand up for anything or
anybody… I didn’t make noise.” Through art Amy had her “own means of being loud.”

She describes the feeling as being “too precious to share.” There was a sense of some kind of separation from her friends and parents as “in the group of friends that I had, they would not have understood,” “they would look at me like I was nuts” and in terms of her parents “I knew what I wanted to do and I in a way had to camouflage that because, otherwise, they might have seen what I was doing as threatening their goals for me.” This led to a sense of “I can be autonomous in what’s important to me.”

**Reflection on Amy’s Story**

**Emotional Sense and Relationship with Subject matter**

In many ways Amy’s story is the most clear and uncomplicated of the four. She feels a pure emotional sense of the subject matter of art as something she cares about and through that caring she finds connection with other things of the world. She also develops a new relationship with herself as well as a sense of meaning and purpose that endures throughout her life. It seems to me that Amy’s story demonstrates the educative power of learning that touches the heart and soul in that this experience, as Dewey (1938) says, opened Amy to having new learning experiences. Her emotional sense allowed for interaction, continuity and horizons of possibilities. A relationship developed between Amy and the subject matter of art such that the principles of design influenced the stories she told about who she was in the world while at the same time she began to make art
and apply the principles of design in her everyday life. This relationship Amy
developed with art also offered a sense of continuity in that she saw over and
over as time went on how her learning in this class made things “connected” and
“worth doing.” As she says, “I had not valued things before” and through this
experience “everything was just clearer and more important to me.”

**The Thread of the Soul**

What seems particularly prominent to me is the idea of the soul, or that
vital and mysterious energy which gives meaning and purpose to our lives. There
are places in the text where the connection between emotion and learning are
clear, which should not be a surprise because that is what I told participants to
tell me about. What is striking in Amy’s story is how clearly those two things are
linked with Amy’s identity as an artist and Amy finding meaning and purpose for
not just her career but for every aspect of her life. I find it particularly beautiful the
way that she describes the impact on the activities of her daily life such as getting
dressed in the morning as well as the impact on her learning of every subject
matter in school. As someone concerned with education that enhances students’
capacity to live fully and deeply, Amy’s description of getting dressed and setting
the table using the principles of design from her high school art class more than
50 years later is deeply affirming. I find it interesting that if I concern myself with
more traditional ideas about education such as the 3Rs, cultural literacy or the
banking model of education Amy’s story still supports the idea that when emotion
and identity are engaged they support student learning. She felt herself as more
“open to learning” because everything was connected and because everything became important. For example, “history became important because it related to painters and what they painted, and how things developed and what was going on to support them or suppress them and math was important because you needed to know ratios for light and shadow…it all became relevant.”

The learning of subject matter, the learning of who we are in the world and what we have to offer the world, as well as the learning about what gives our lives meaning and purpose are all connected with each other and with emotion. The terms Amy uses to describe how powerful this experience was for her are very strong. She is clear that this was a powerful and vital experience and really what learning is all about.

Narrating Identity and Horizons of Possibility

Amy describes her process of self-awareness and reflection as shifting “how I saw myself” and “who I [was] in the world.” This “identification for [her]…as an artist” impacts her willingness to express herself, take intelligent action and make contributions to the world. The realization of herself as an artist gave her the sense of herself as strong and even loud. She reflects that, “I was kind of a little mouse before that, I didn’t stand up for anything or anybody… I didn’t make noise” and through art she found her “own means of being loud.”

Significant narrators in Amy’s story were her art teacher and her parents. It is interesting that her art teacher never told a story about Amy’s identity, he simply presented the material and Amy made the connection for herself. The
significant narrator of her father was much more overt and direct in that he insisted that she had to do something practical and be able to make money and that being an artist was not consistent with that. An interesting part of this is the role of self-authoring and first-person stories. The dominant theme in Amy’s experience of learning really has to do with the change in the story she told herself about the kind of person she was. This points to the idea of self as “meaning maker,” the idea of voice (Rodgers & Scott, 2008) and perhaps something beyond all of that.

There is a sense of protectiveness that Amy presents in not sharing her story with her classmates or her parents, which seems significant and related to identity here. She says “I knew that if I said it to most of the people that I knew, they would look at me like I was nuts.” This seems to point to the idea of the fragility of our identities and how easily our horizons of possibility can be impacted by the storying of the people around us. Amy talks about camouflage and not telling other people as a way of protecting herself and this new identity. I wonder if silence can be a form of self-authoring, a way that we can protect our identities and sense of self, to hide, to camouflage, to not engage in stories that might threaten a precious deep knowing.
Ernie’s poem

the fact of the matter is
in high school
I was a terrible student
a school dropout

I joined the Navy when I was 17
was going to end up working with my hands
a bricklayer
or factory worker
or something like that

it never dawned on me
to write
what I wanted to do with my life
it wasn’t in my family

a small man
soft-spoken
talking about the aesthetics of art
trilling the R’s in Reina MaRia Rilke
off in another realm

the man captured my imagination
the way he presented himself

I was simply taken
a scholar
dormant in myself
he could make it come alive

nothing specific
the perspective
moved me along
a motivational factor
a connection
a chance
you don’t usually get as a student

I ended up in social work
like a fairy tale
I got my doctorate
taught for thirty years
that sort of thing
but that’s just social status or whatever

a whole important piece bloomed
  satisfaction
  working with people
  learning
  people and their circumstances

thinking of where I began,
I’m very pleased with how my life turned out
  a lucky set of circumstances
  I have
  to remind myself
  what I thought I was going to end up as
and what I actually was able to experience
Ernie’s Integrative Statement

The basic plot of Ernie’s story involves him experiencing feelings of fascination, connection and identification in a Philosophy of Aesthetics class he took as an undergraduate and also, more generally, shifting from the perception of himself as somebody who was a high school dropout expecting to work with his hands towards seeing himself as capable of living a life of the mind and becoming a scholar and professor.

Ernie starts by telling the story of taking “The Philosophy of Aesthetics” in college, which he says “stood out alone by itself, big-time.” He says that he “had never had any instructor or teacher anywhere along the line that had the same effect on [him] as [this professor] did” and describes his professor as, “sort of taking me into another realm and the way he did it…was with his own emotions sort of [carrying] me along with him.” Partly he describes this as being related to the emotional connection he felt when he states, “I think that none of [my other teachers] ever carried the same degree of not only the emotion… that he demonstrated but the kind of psychological connections that were being made there. There were other teachers I had that I admired but emotionally I can’t say that there was a bond.”

He describes the way that his philosophy professor lectured about the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and how “he could make it come alive.” He says “I would get very much caught up in his enthusiasm… you’d sort of soar with him.” When this professor lectured sometimes he would even speak in different
languages yet Ernie would still be able to experience this powerful feeling even, “not having to understand the words really there was enough of the emotion and the feeling that he was providing that made all the difference to me.”

When I asked him why he thinks the story stands out for him over time he said that it is “because there were so many connections,” then goes on to explain that it was “the context, my interests even before I took this course, and the fact that he represented something I was studying and was very interested in, and then, of course…his teaching approach and his personal qualities and characteristics both as a man and as a teacher.”

He felt a connection with what he was studying as an undergraduate modern history major because his professor had lived through the two World Wars and was a German Jewish exile. He explains that, “this man personified, in a sense, what I was studying…historically, you know, it was fascinating to me as a student in history to see his background, where he’d come from and what he’d gone through… he was totally a personification of stuff we were studying.” This connects with what becomes his career in social work as he describes his work as “not only working with people obviously but different kinds of people under different circumstances…and all those experiences have a nice satisfaction in learning people and their circumstances what they’re going through.” So Ernie’s fascination with his professor’s life history was related to his interest in the subject matter of history but also his interest to know people’s stories and what they’d been through.
Ernie describes developing a relationship with the subject matter of philosophy and phenomenology that endured over time. He explains that in his retirement he has been taking philosophy courses and as part of his work “when [he] was doing research in social groups–social research [he] started looking into phenomenological approaches to study because [his philosophy professor] had edited a journal on phenomenological theory and practice.”

A powerful part of Ernie’s story involves how he came to see himself as a competent student. Ernie explains, “the fact of the matter is, I was a terrible student…I was a school dropout…I thought I was gonna end up working with my hands doing some kind of labor work…I had lower expectations for myself all the way through, ever since I dropped out of high school because I’d never been good as a student. Knowing that I could be and that I was, when I did go back to school it made all the difference.” The GI Bill gave him the opportunity to get a high school diploma and to continue on to college while encounters with specific teachers gave him the belief that it was possible. “[I]n that veterans high school I went to there was an English teacher who in a sense was encouraging me to go onto higher education and become a teacher… there was somebody doing it who told me I could to do it–I should do it…[h]e encouraged me, moved me along.”

Ernie also tells the story of being in a sociology class where he describes himself as being quiet and not speaking up in class until the subject matter became something he was very comfortable with. When he spoke up in class this professor encourages him and he felt like he could be successful. He says that
he felt like “finally, I'm getting through to an instructor” and like “it became a whole important piece encouraging” Ernie to value his own understanding and academic skill enough to speak up in class and see himself as capable.

Ernie speaks very directly about how he thinks about his Philosophy of Aesthetics professor in relation to his identity and the possibilities for his own future. He explains, “I was just fascinated with him and it just sort of captured my imagination. So, he became something like what I would call…an Imago, which in Jungian psychology is the idea of an idealized conception or image of another person or yourself. And in a sense what he represented through that image was someone who had characteristics or traits that I would like to incorporate into my own thinking, teaching, and so on.” He goes on to say, “I guess I saw some things in him that I thought might be dormant in myself, in my own personality which, in a sense, he again personified.”

There is an element of professional inspiration where Ernie is connecting with this professor as “kind of an epitome of what I thought a university professor should be” but there is also something about the kind of person he was that is also really important to Ernie as we can see when he says “he was all those things plus a very nice man.” It wasn’t only the way the professor taught or brought the subject matter to life that struck Ernie “I thought it was [his] demeanor—the way he presented himself in the way he lectured would be something I’d want to do if I ever taught.” There seems to be something in this professor’s humanness that is important to Ernie in terms of the power of this
connection. When Ernie briefly describes an economics professor it is clear that what he was inspired by was purely professional in that he was impressed that the man had written two books but Ernie makes it very clear that when this professor was not generous or kind to a student who was late to class “that’s sort of was a turnoff for me.”

Each of the stories Ernie tells in his interview relate in some way to narrating the possibility that he could become someone who writes, someone who is successful in higher education and could have a life of the mind. This is beautiful when understood in terms of the life he did live as a social worker, a professor, a scholar and author. He says, “I would say that thinking of where I began I’m very pleased with how my life turned out. I really wouldn’t have guessed it as a kid, never…I have to remind myself of that. You know, what I thought I was going to end up as and what I actually was able to experience.”
Reflection on Ernie’s Story

Emotional Sense and Relationship with Subject Matter

Ernie’s story is a little more complicated than Amy’s because, “there were so many connections” he felt in his philosophy of aesthetics course. Like Amy’s story Ernie’s emotional sense relates to what he cares about and why in terms of the subject matter of this course while also connecting with his learning in other courses, his relationship with himself and where he finds his own meaning and purpose. In Ernie’s story more than any other I see that the connections he makes were not always obvious or direct in the moment but rather blossomed later on in his life. The connections that Ernie makes with philosophy and between the life experience of his philosophy professor and the coursework he was studying for his major represent the kind of connection that seems very direct and what we hope for in an undergraduate education. Some other connections were not so clear at the moment but rather were revealed throughout Ernie’s life.

Ernie describes developing a relationship with the subject matter of philosophy and phenomenology that endured over time. Ernie explains that he, “would get very much caught up in his [professor’s] enthusiasm” and found that the subject matter “just sort of captured his imagination.” He explains that in his retirement he has been taking philosophy courses and as part of his work “when [he] was doing research in social groups–social research [he] started looking into phenomenological approaches to study because [his philosophy professor] had
edited a journal on phenomenological theory and practice.” Ernie experienced the connection at the time as a resonance or interest and then later on both as a motivating force pushing him to explore phenomenology and as an orientation that he brought to his social work research.

Another example is the connection that Ernie makes between his learning in this philosophy class and his own teaching when he becomes a professor later in life. In social work graduate school Ernie was very critical of his instructors and felt the lack of what he experienced with his philosophy professor. “I thought something’s wrong, [the professor] should be able to teach this didactically better and it shouldn’t be just the field instruction that people learn from but rather that we can make a transference back and forth. So I spent a lot of time trying to work that out… I guess, having had him as a professor as a kind of model, that’s pretty high standards.” Ernie describes how this particular connection was revealed over time when he states, “I was simply taken by him and his teaching at the time. But then, as I began experiencing it, when I was a teacher myself, everything started clicking that hadn’t before. So it was an evolution.”

The Thread of the Soul

The interest Ernie expresses in his professor’s personal history fleeing persecution in Germany is another example of a connection that develops over time. Ernie feels a connection with his major in European History but the resonance that Ernie feels about his professor’s story also relates to his later
interest in social work. He makes his career out of listening to people’s stories and connecting with people’s histories. As Ernie says about his social work, “it just bloomed, not only working with people obviously the different kinds of people under different circumstances” and goes on to say that he found “a nice satisfaction [in] learning people and their circumstances what they were going through.” At the time one might have read Ernie’s interest in his professor’s past as an interest in the discipline of history because that was what was most visible. By taking this longer view and having Ernie recollect his story from the distance that he now has, as a retired professor and researcher in social work, the connections that were previously unseen can now be revealed. He didn’t know the story of what he would do with his life at the time he had this experience he only had a feeling, an interest, an inkling, a resonance, a fascination to follow. At the time many of the connections that we could point to in order to make sense of Ernie’s experience were not visible yet, they had yet to unfold. So what Ernie was experiencing as a student was just a spark, an emotional sense, a feeling.

Narrating Identity and Horizons of Possibility

The stories Ernie tells about his identity all seem to have a relational component of a professor either providing direct encouragement or modeling to move him along on his journey from being somebody who thought he would be a laborer and work with his hands to becoming a social worker, a professor, a researcher and an author. There are times when professors provide direct
encouragement by commenting on Ernie’s abilities and suggesting horizons of possibilities such as when his teacher at the veterans’ high school told him to go to college and become a teacher. However, Ernie’s philosophy of aesthetic professor “stood out big time” and had the biggest impact on Ernie. Yet nowhere does Ernie mention this professor ever speaking directly to him. Ernie becomes aware and reflective about himself and the possibilities for his own future through reflecting on his professor as a role model. This professor captures Ernie’s imagination because he offers “an idealized conception” of himself and simply through his example enables Ernie to see parts of himself that were “dormant” and that would be expressed later in life. The vision his identity that Ernie’s professor offered was by way of modeling.

I think that it is important to point out that for Ernie it wasn’t enough for a professor to be a professional model. It was important to him that his role model was an example of a good person and offered a vision of a whole life he might want to live. Ernie talks about this professor as “an epitome of what I thought a university professor should be” which for Ernie includes being a good teacher and scholar “plus a very nice man.” It wasn’t only the way the professor taught or brought the subject matter to life that struck Ernie “it was [his] demeanor—the way he presented himself” because Ernie was looking for him to represent “something [he’d] want to do.” Ernie goes out of his way to discuss an economics professor as an example of a time when he was disappointed by a professor as a role model because he wasn’t what Ernie might call a “nice man.” He had been
impressed that his economics professor had written two books but then tells the story of how this professor was not generous or kind to a student who was late to class and explains that it was “a turnoff” for him. To make a distinction between a role model as a professional and as a person does not hold up. A professor’s personal life, character and demeanor are all important to the vision of future horizons they offer students.
Suzanne’s Poem
when she walked in I was surprised
it was a graduate class in education
the room had been arranged in a circle
she had a Nehru pantsuit, black
a dream catcher earring
spiked hair
mannish looking boots
I was taken aback
this was not the way women were supposed to look

She had a quiet voice
very calming
she said “I meditate”

I could feel through my whole body
this sense that something earthshaking was happening
like I was really here
feeling this moment as if it had some kind of thickness to it

it was this palpable feeling
people listening to each other
unconditional acceptance
like Jesus
like Mother Teresa
like I’m supposed to be
not somebody that looks like her

all my life I've looked for unconditional acceptance
and here it is
and it's not supposed to be here

Going around the circle
the conflict
like a dialogue
you're seeing it
no you're not
you need to leave
turn away
walk away
protect your mind
you have to protect it

But wait a minute,
this is amazing
this palpable energy of peace
peace that surpasses all understanding

opening this gate
and it shouldn't be opened
I should close it
I should keep it closed

frightening
to think there was this other path

it comes to me
her eyes look right through me
not in a dangerous way
in a really deep peaceful way

The next thing I thought:
I can't do this anymore
I can't keep saying that I don't see what I see
I can't do that anymore
I'm going to stay here and find out what's going on
and so I did
whatever she did on Wednesday night
I would copy her on Thursday morning
her sense of peace
going to this class at night
teaching 1st grade in the day
the intention of being mindful
started a rocket ride of self-examination
meditating
removing layers and layers of baggage that I was carrying
Amazing things happened
Being able to see clearly in a moment changes everything
I found that sense of peace
I could find that still place

I had this vision
words were marching
left to right
saying
pictures are not words
words are not concepts
concepts are not what is real
what is real is what comes before
what's real is what comes before our pictures
and our words and our concepts

you don't have to be a committed Christian Jew Buddhist
the important thing
is to be in the space more often
before you create judgment
trying to rest in that space
the nonjudgmental
the space before pictures, words and concepts
before you're judging

There is peace there
spaciousness
where everything is
we aren't rejecting anything
or pulling anything in
it's all just there
I realized
there's more
there's something much bigger
this space where everything is
before it's a picture
before it's put into words
before it's put into concepts
that's where everything really is
it's all really there
and the rest of it
is what we do
**Suzanne’s Integrative Statement**

Suzanne’s story involves her experiencing an initial feeling of surprise and apprehension followed by curiosity and further unsettledness when her professor in a graduate course demonstrated the qualities of peacefulness and unconditional acceptance that she was drawn to and had been taught to cultivate as a good Christian woman. She experienced conflicting feelings as she felt drawn to follow her interest in developing the qualities of unconditional acceptance and peacefulness she saw in her professor but worried that this interest might be drawing her away from the teachings of her church, her family, her community and even from God. She did end up following her professor’s example and began meditating, studied with her professor’s mentor, completed a dissertation on meditation and teaching then built a career around using mindfulness practices with teachers.

Suzanne describes feeling “surprised,” “really taken aback” and “immediately struck by” her professor in this graduate class who appeared “not the way women were supposed to look.” She also describes feeling both “like, wow, that’s amazing” and at the same time “this disconnect and just being really, really uncomfortable.” She describes feeling worried that she had to be “very careful about what you let into your mind” and thinking, “I don’t know if this is a person I want to take a class from.” There seems to be a sense of genuine fear and discomfort present in the story contained in statements like, “I was very uncomfortable,” “I just felt very disoriented and, like, empty,” “it was a kind of scary sense,” “it was frightening,” and “everything has been shattered.” At the
same time she also describes more agreeable emotions such as when her professor looks at her “in a really deep peaceful way,” or when she senses “a very calming thing” and describes feeling like “I had coming home.”

Suzanne starts off with very clear labels about who she was (a Christian woman) and about who her professor was (“not how women are supposed to look”). Then she describes the experience of this professor “look[ing] right through me” which seems to lead to a questioning of “is that all there is to being who I am?” referring to the labels of mother and teacher. Although at that moment she did not question her identity as a Christian specifically it seems that her identity as a Christian woman was being called into question by this experience of her professor. Suzanne’s experience in this class leads her to a meditation practice, which she describes as feeling “like I had come home” and leads to “a rocket ride of self-examination, removing layers and layers of baggage.” She describes feeling frightened when she realizes that “there was this other, just this other path and... it was there in front of me.”

Suzanne describes very graphically how her habitual response coming from a fundamentalist Christian community, in fact as a model citizen of this community, was to dismiss, avoid, and actively resist anything that didn’t fit the narrow definition of what is Christian. So when she saw a woman who looked like a lesbian or like somebody who was not a good Christian woman her habitual response was to worry that this woman might be a threat to her. Suzanne’s habitual response was to label what this professor had to offer as dangerous,
guard herself and leave the course she was enrolled in. However, she chose to stay in the course and investigate the sense she had that this professor had something valuable to offer her. Her habitual response was to dismiss her own perception of this professor as offering unconditional acceptance and her feeling of interest and curiosity about this professor and this course. But she decided “I can’t do this anymore. I can’t keep saying that I don’t see what I see. I see unconditional acceptance. I cannot say I don’t see that…I can’t do that anymore. I am seeing unconditional acceptance; I’m going to stay here and find out what’s going on.” She explained that she “stayed and it changed [her] life.”

Suzanne shifted her way of teaching from being more of an authoritarian teacher to being more mindful. She describes how her response to difficult students shifted and how they then began to “bring gifts” to class. When Suzanne was able to accept the gifts these students brought it created a cycle where “we began to accept their gifts, you know, as gifts, and with kindliness, and when that happened, everybody was giving each other more gifts than there were problems.”

Suzanne describes her habit, taught to her by her fundamentalist Christian community, of labeling anybody who was not Christian as dangerous. Then, after a period of learning culminating in a dramatic flash of literal enlightenment where she had a vision, Suzanne came to realize “you don’t have to be a committed Christian. You don’t have to be a committed Jew. You don’t have to be a committed Hindu, a committed Buddhist. You can be those, that’s not
excluded, but it is not a must, either.” This shift goes even further when she described how she experienced a sense of her very image of God disappearing and realized that “everything’s a construction.” Suzanne realized that her habitual response, and really everybody’s habitual response, is to label things, to name them, “but the important thing is to be in this space more often, this space before you create judgment.” She became liberated from the habitual response of labeling things as good or bad, as Christian or dangerous, and found instead, “The nonjudgmental…The space before pictures, words and concepts. The space--that spaciousness before you’re judging--the spaciousness of where everything is. Everything is there, you know, we aren’t rejecting anything or pulling anything in, it’s all just there.” This shift could be labeled as the ultimate liberation from habitual response. Within Suzanne’s story there is this profound example of liberation and also contained in that is the liberation from the habitual response in each interaction she has with her professor and with her students. She has this larger existential liberation and also this very immediate liberation from habitual response in her everyday action.

Once free of this habit Suzanne seems to open up to possibilities for humanness, connection and freedom. She opens to the possibility of connecting with her professor, learning from someone who looks different from herself and being influenced by people who are not Christian. She opens to the possibility of unconditional acceptance and deep peace in general and specifically the possibility of those things existing outside of a church context. Suzanne opens up
to the possibility of practicing meditation, using mindfulness techniques in her classroom, and even studying meditation and mindfulness in the classroom as her dissertation topic. Suzanne opens the possibility of trusting herself and her own instincts. In learning from her professor she opened to the possibility of teaching in a less authoritarian and more connected way, finding peace and “that still place” in her 1st grade classroom with her students. She opened up the possibility of being “soft” and the possibility of receiving the gifts that her students brought to school, even her difficult students.

It also seems that Suzanne opened to the possibilities of framing her own purposes and executing or carrying into effect those purposes so framed. She framed her own purposes when she noticed the quality of peacefulness in her professor’s teaching and chose to try and emulate her in her own classroom. She also frames her own purposes when she looks up this professor’s dissertation to read, then pursued graduate work with her teacher’s advisor, took him on as her own advisor and designed her dissertation study around researching the impact of mindfulness practice in the classroom.

In this story she mentions feeling “curious” many times and follows that curiosity towards the next right thing for her learning, as in “I just became more and more curious about her and why she was like she was. So, I decided to order her dissertation” or “I became curious: would this happen for other teachers, you know, if other teachers meditated, had the intention of being mindful in the
classroom, would that make a difference to them? So, that became my dissertation topic.”

She seems to name a vital and mysterious energy when she questions why this life-changing experience happened when it did as in, “What I have never been able to explain is why at that moment, you know… I don’t know that we can ever explain why.” When Suzanne responds to my request to say more about her visceral response it becomes clearer just how vital and mysterious the experience was for her. She said, “I could feel through my whole body the sense that something earth shaking was happening… it was just a whole body, it was like I was really here in this moment. I was feeling this moment as if it had some kind of thickness to it, and that was different. I mean, usually I’m just sitting there in class, you know, I hear things, I see things but I didn’t feel… I had never felt that… I don’t remember ever feeling that embodied as a response.” Finally, she describes a vital and mysterious energy when she names “that spaciousness that Buddhism talks about, you know the spaciousness of where everything is.”
Reflection on Suzanne's Story

Emotional Sense and Relationship with Subject Matter

Suzanne did not experience the feeling of connection, the inkling of curiosity, the recognition that something important might be happening for her in her graduate class as entirely agreeable. She describes herself as being “surprised” and “just being really, really uncomfortable” about her first encounter with her professor. The sense of unconditional acceptance and peacefulness that she perceives in her professor is compelling but creates a disorienting dilemma for her because her church says that women like her are not to be trusted. So her experience of this emotional sense in her heart and soul causes an immediate sense of unsettledness and disequilibrium for her.

The Thread of the Soul

In order for participants to transform an emotional sense into lives of meaning and purpose and actualize their unique potential they needed to engage in a process that began with self-awareness and reflection. Suzanne says that she felt frightened when she realized that “there was this other, just this other path and… it was there in front of me”. In order for her to be able to move forward on the new path that was in front of her she needed to become self-aware and reflective.

Dewey identifies self-control or the ability to frame and execute one’s own purposes as the “ideal aim of education” (Dewey, 1938, p.64). This requires
reflection because framing one's purposes involves being present to experience, describing that experience while withholding automatic or habitual judgments, considering the best next step and then taking intelligent action (Rodgers, 2002).

Suzanne begins framing her own purposes when she notices the quality of peacefulness in her professor's teaching, puts aside her judgments about her as “not the way women are supposed to look” and chooses to try and emulate her in her own classroom. She also frames her own purposes when she seeks out this professor's dissertation to read and then pursues graduate work with her professor’s advisor and even takes him on as her own advisor and designs her dissertation study around researching the impact of mindfulness practice in the classroom. The connection between the will to know and the will to become can be seen in the way Suzanne wants to know how her professor creates the sense of peace and unconditional acceptance in her course so that she can become more like her in her own teaching. It can also be seen in her will to become a doctoral student and a professor herself.

It was through reflection and self-control that Suzanne does finds herself able following the inkling she has and begins the self-authoring that “changed [her] whole life.” I wonder if this shift comes involves a moving beyond identity. After she introduces herself to her class as “I'm a first grade teacher, I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm a writing instructor in the summer” she has what she calls an “epiphany moment” where she questions “oh my God, is that what I am? Is that who I am?” And then she describes herself as feeling “very disoriented and, like,
empty, like, is that all there is to being who I am?” Her meditation practice leads her to identify that “there’s something much bigger and it’s over here, this space where everything is before it’s a picture, before it’s put into words, before it’s put into concepts, you know that’s where everything really is.” What she finds through her meditation practice is this place where identity doesn’t matter. “You don’t have to be a committed Christian. You don’t have to be a committed Jew. You don’t have to be a committed Buddhist. You can be those, that’s not excluded but it’s not a must, either…. The important thing is to be in the space more often, this space before you create judgment…trying to rest in that space.”

So part of what Suzanne is drawn to in her professor is this sense of “unconditional acceptance” which could be interpreted as seeing beyond identity stories. Suzanne describes her professor as “passing her authority to [the person speaking]” such that “the authority of the class now belonged to this person” and describes that when this professor looked at her “it was like her eyes looked right through me but not in a dangerous way but just in a really deep peaceful way and there is nobody else in the world but you.” This seems in contrast with the way that, as a fundamentalist Christian, Suzanne was trained to evaluate people based on their identity as Christian or not.

**Narrating Identity and Horizons of Possibility**

The ability to frame and execute one’s own purposes implies a degree of self-authoring of one’s designated identity. Self-authoring is really challenging
though because identity stories, “even if individually told, are products of a collective storytelling” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14). This is made clear in Suzanne’s story where the church’s narrative is very strong for her. Suzanne’s identity was very much connected with her church. Though she ultimately shifts towards “self-authoring,” it does cost her her connection with her family and community. She describes herself as, “a very strong fundamentalist, intellectually committed, Christian…[who] went around speaking to women’s groups around the United States…taught Sunday school classes [and] was really considered to be as strong a member of the church community.” She had this very clear sense that the way that her professor dressed and looked was “not the way women were supposed to look,” according to her church community. This narrative of the Church and her church community was so strong that Suzanne doubted her own embodied and felt sense of seeing something in her professor that she had been looking for and was compelled by.

This story reminds me of how Sfard and Prusak articulate that what makes a story “significant” is when it implies exclusion from or membership in a community. In her story Suzanne understands that to align herself and model herself after her professor or even to just accept her own experience of her professor means that she will be excluded from her Christian community. This is not an imaginary or idle fear. After choosing to stay in the class, modeling her own teaching after this professor’s and beginning to practice meditation Suzanne finds that she can no longer remain part of her church community. As she says, “I
left my fundamentalist community I wasn’t able to stay. Some people could, I think you could stay there, and be a meditator. I think it’s probably possible for some people… I couldn’t stay in mine.” This connects with Amy’s instinct to camouflage the depth of her experience, I think for fear of having to give up either her new-found meaning and purpose or inclusion in her community.
Rhonda's Poem

I remember sitting
in those old-time desks
next to the window
the third seat on the left
repulsed
knowing we’re about to have class
I want to run away
just kill me
I didn't do the reading
I didn't do the homework
I don't want to do this
I hate this
the burden of being
forced to endure
my brain just shut down at the thought of catechism
painful
boring
so immensely boring
Catholic instruction
I just never learned it
to this day
it makes absolutely little sense to me
despite the fact that my life was cocooned
dominated by this tradition
absolutely nothing was coming into my consciousness

At one point I convinced myself that I was going to be an accounting major
the feeling
the taste
was similar to catechism
there was not a harmonious connection
similar to many experiences
employment
people
even books
it’s chemistry
there’s nothing you can do
to force it
to make it happen
like two ships
sailing
in the night
in opposite directions
little places of connection

I switched majors to
where I needed to be
in anthropology
I found my place
or it found me
we found each other

hence
the rest of my life

I don't think of myself as an anthropologist
I just know that I have this love of people
how people do things
different ways that people perceive
rituals that people use
to achieve oneness with the cosmos
connection with the earth
spirituality
and all matter of thinking about those things
anthropology allows me
it's my life
how I live
how I interact with the world
it's through that lens

So it's very odd
almost like a contradiction
that I didn't find joy in the Catholic experience
I'm excited about Christ
I think he's a great revolutionary
but there's a point at which
I grew to understand
injustices were done
under the cover of the church
the Inquisition for example
and the stories I heard from my grandmother
how in this rural part of the island where they grew up
there was this effort to insist that villagers became Catholics
people would be whipped by the priest
if they did not come to church
didn't sign on to the Catholic faith
maybe that was percolating in my consciousness
because my grandmother used to always tell the stories
about her life
that might've been there
in terms of my sense of resistance and injustice

maybe in my little self
I had this awareness
somehow in my little head
unconsciously

something bigger

My dad would take us back to where he grew up
after Sunday meal
all of us in the car
sitting in the middle back
between my brothers
noticing
off in the distance
they're beginning to clear a big patch of land
removing all the trees
this bulldozer pushing all the trees
the foliage away

all I remember feeling
I feel right now
this deep sense of sadness
why are they doing that?
why are they removing all the trees?
why are they messing up the land?

I remember it
some connection to Earth and land
and cosmos
that I wouldn't know how to explain
but remember feeling
talking about in the car
no one really paying attention
my brothers playing with toys
my parents talking
everybody in their own little place
but I remember looking
and thinking
they're doing such a bad thing
Why would a 5-year-old feel that way? unless they have a deep connection with place with land and earth that feeling of love maybe that's the biggerness my life connected to the land planting harvesting preserving

I found the path that I didn't know my grandmother practiced an earth-based spiritual tradition I didn't know at the same time she had this Catholic persona went to church did all these things she also practiced African traditional religion as it's practiced in the Caribbean that is my life my primary spiritual practice

That experience at school in my early years could have impacted my connection with spirit my own allowing of this to belong in myself but it didn't
Rhonda’s Integrative Statement

This is the story of a young girl hating to go to catechism class. Rhonda came from a Catholic family who attended church every week and sent her to a Catholic school where she was required to take catechism class approximately once a week from 6th grade to graduation. Rhonda describes finding catechism “immensely boring” and feeling that she “had absolutely no interest” in catechism. She describes the feeling as “repulsion,” “hate,” and “distain” then states that she felt as if she “wanted to run away” when she “felt the stress in [her] body… from the top of [her] head to the sole of [her] feet” in catechism class.

Rhonda describes what it meant not to learn catechism. Rhonda describes no connection with the subject matter of catechism, no connection between catechism and other subjects and no connection with herself or self-reflection connected with catechism. She explains that, “absolutely nothing was coming into my consciousness, I mean, I wasn’t learning. I wasn’t learning it, and so it was painful for me to have to do this exercise.” In terms of student learning Rhonda describes her experience with catechism class as miseducative. She says “my brain would just shut down at the thought of catechism.” She describes a cycle of developing callousness when she says, “the more I… was forced to endure another catechism class the more I felt… distance from it.” She talks about having no self-control or freedom to frame her own purposes when she describes “the intensity of having to bear the burden of this awful piece of
learning that I just didn't care about and I didn't feel that I should be forced to do it if I didn't like it.”

Rhonda talks about her lack of self-control or freedom to frame and execute her own purposes when she describes her school context as, “a very controlled environment [where] everything was about discipline and fear” and says “I had a very little box that I was contained in.” Rhonda specifically talks about her lack of voice as a child in the community she was growing up in when she says “fear was huge in my experience… my parents would be at the school in a flash and I don't know… how believable my stories could be. I don't think I had a side. I didn't have a voice. The nuns and the priests, in my home, they were always right”. She goes on to describe her school as a “humiliating environment” where “sitting in the corner on your knees or… hitting your knuckles for talking in class with a ruler” or “fear of that” were all part of her experience in school. In terms of horizons of possibility Rhonda describes her school experience as “a very little box that I was contained in.”

Rhonda explains that connection and interest are important to her saying, “if I'm interested in something, then my capacity to learn it is even more expanded” and attempts to describe what it feels like to have a connection with subject matter and what it feels like when there is a disconnection. Rhonda points to feelings she had when she attempted to study business and accounting in college. She mentions this as an example that paralleled her experience of catechism. She says, “the feeling was similar. The taste was similar. I couldn't
find myself in it. It was not in me and I was not in it. There was not a harmonious connection with it.” She draws a parallel between her experiences with different disciplines and her experience with different people. She says, “I think that happens with people…The resonance was not there, the chemistry wasn't there. It was just two ships… sailing in opposite directions in the night. There were very little places of connection. So I've had that same experience with people, very similar to catechism.”

There are several places where Rhonda identifies what she cares about and why as the Earth and land. The first time she does this is when she describes how in high school she took physics but found that it was “not a good choice for me” because it “just didn't connect.” She contrasts this with a feeling of connection with biology which “was a much better experience” because she “had an interest” and “could connect more.” She says “I don't know if it's because I grew up on a farm…maybe that was the reason I had a resonance with the subject growing up as a child.” Rhonda describes the community she grew up in and the kind of person she is as “liv[ing] close to the earth” and “very connected to the land.”

Rhonda describes this connection to land as being connected to something vital and mysterious, to some “bigness.” Rhonda tells the story of a time when she was a small child and she had a visceral, emotional reaction to seeing a part of the island she grew up on being cleared for building. She was taking a day trip with her family to visit the part of the island where her father
grew up when she remembers, “noticing off in the distance that they're beginning to clear a big patch of land. They're removing all of the trees and there's this bulldozer that's just pushing all the trees and all the foliage away.” She explains that “all I remember feeling is this deep sense of sadness…I wouldn't know how to explain as a child, but I remember feeling this sadness [and thinking] they're doing such a bad thing…They're clearing the land they're destroying it.” She points to how vital and mysterious her response was when she asks, “why would a 5-year-old feel that way? Not unless they have a deep connection with land in place and earth and mother earth and that feeling of love for the earth and the environment” then explains, “that's the biggerness that sort of impacted me.”

When Rhonda describes anthropology, her chosen subject area there is a sense of a vital and mysterious energy that gives her life meaning and purpose as in, “it was as if I found my place. I found my niche. I found my space. Or it found me. We found each other.” In anthropology she found a way to have self-control, to frame and execute her own purposes in alignment with what she found meaningful. She talks about anthropology as “a discipline where I could pursue my interests” and describes herself as an anthropologist only in so much as the title allows her to frame her own purposes and pursue her “love of people,” “all aspects of culture,” “why they think the way they do and their view of the world,” “different ways that people perceive the cosmos, that connection with the earth and the planet and the universe and spirituality in all matter of thinking about those things.” In terms of identity Rhonda clearly articulates that the identity of
anthropologist matters to her only in so much as it allows her to frame her own purposes. She explains “I don't think of myself as an anthropologist... I just know that I have this love...of people and culture [and anthropology] allows me to pursue that.” For Rhonda this is more than an academic interest, “it's my life. It's how I live and how I interact with the world—it's through that lens”. So here the ultimate form of self-control is not framing just any purpose but specifically the purposes that give her life meaning and connect her with a fuller humanity.

Rhonda names a disconnection between her love of rituals and how people connect with the cosmos that she describes as part of her love for anthropology and her disdain for catechism. She says “I've always been interested in religion and religious practices...It's almost like a contradiction but I didn't find joy in the Catholic experience.”

Rhonda describes how part of her hesitation about the Catholic Church has to do with a general sense of historic injustice perpetrated by the Catholic Church and also a very specific understanding of how her grandmother and other people in her community were treated when Catholicism was forced on them. She explains, “as I grew to understand the Catholic Church and grew to understand the injustices that were done under the cover of the church and the justification for it...I [also] heard from my grandmother about how in this rural part of the island where they grew up there was this effort to... insist that villagers become Catholics. And my grandmother would tell us the story of how people, family, parents, or villagers would be whipped by the priest if they did not come to
church, or if they didn't sign on to the Catholic faith.” She wonders if even in grade school, “maybe that was also percolating in my consciousness because my grandmother used to always tell the stories about her life. That might have been in there to in terms of my resistance, and how I felt like that was absolutely wrong for that to happen.”

Rhonda describes her current spiritual practice as a traditional African, “earth-based spiritual tradition.” She goes on to explain, “I found the path that I didn't know my grandmother practiced.” Rhonda had been unaware that her grandmother was practicing both the Catholic faith and traditional African religion until later in life after she herself had begun to practice that traditional African religion. She says “I didn't know that she did that… at the same time she had this Catholic persona that she went to church and did all these things…she also practiced, you know, African traditional religion, as it's practiced in the Caribbean.” She says, “I think that all of those factors contributed to this sense of resistance and injustice that somehow my little head had put together unconsciously." In this part of the story the power of social structures and colonialism as narrators becomes prominent. Rhonda seems to experience the same sense of fear of not just inclusion or exclusion from community but actual fear of punishment that mirrors her grandmother's stories about her community members being beaten for not performing the identity of Catholic.

At this point in her life Rhonda explains that her Earth-based traditional African faith, “is my practice. That is my life. It's my life.” However, at the time she
was taking catechism class her resistance was only a whisper, an inkling she had about her grandmother’s stories and what would become “her life.” She says “I know that it was unconscious, because I’m going back to grade school, kindergarten, and those years I didn't have any consciousness really around religion per se.” In the end, Rhonda remarks on how her spiritual life developed in spite of the time she spent at Catholic school. She says “that [catechism] experience at that school and my early years could have impacted my connection with spirit or my own allowing of this to belong and myself. But it didn’t.”

**Reflection on Rhonda’s Story**

**Emotional Sense and Relationship with Subject Matter**

When Rhonda begins describing catechism she states that she was “indifferent,” "had absolutely no interest," and "didn't care about" the subject matter. She uses the term boring, in fact “immensely boring” a couple of times to indicate a lack of connection with the subject matter. However, as she continues it seems that she had more than “no interest” in catechism class. Rhonda goes on to actually describe feeling, “pain,” “disdain,” “repulsion,” and "hate." She says that she “wanted to run away” when she “felt this stress in [her] body… from [her] head to the soul of [her] feet.” The language that Rhonda uses to describe exactly how strongly she felt about catechism raises the question of what exactly was going on to make her feel such profound repulsion. This is not the story of a student who is simply bored. Although she uses that term she quickly describes
feeling much more strongly than just bored. It makes sense to me that being forced to learn something and feeling trapped without being able to express your feelings of dislike for subject matter might make a feeling of disconnection turn into stronger feelings of hatred. However, I suspect that this kind of disdain comes from something larger—some sort of violation of what you care about and why.

The Thread of the Soul

It is clear that Rhonda is somebody who feels deeply and has a strong sense of the vital and mysterious energy that gives her life meaning and purpose. The richness of her descriptions of the things that do align with her soul creates a stark contrast against her experience of catechism where she felt such misery and disdain. Looking at the description of what gives her life meaning and purpose can help us understand the discomfort, the pain that she felt in catechism class. Even though she was just a child and the rest of her story had yet to be told, the meaning and purpose to her life had yet to be articulated and expressed, that little child in catechism class seemed to have enough of an inkling, enough emotional sense of that vital and mysterious energy to be offended by catechism class.

One theme for Rhonda is her intrigue at how a young child could have known so viscerally with her emotions that there was something about catechism class that was not a fit for her even though many of the reasons why as an adult she might say that is the case could not have been known by her 11-year-old
self. There are a number of places where Rhonda seems surprised by how much her younger self seemed to know by emotional sense that she could not really have understood consciously. She says “I know that it was unconscious because I'm going back to grade school, kindergarten and those years I didn't have any consciousness really around religion per se.” She talks about how “maybe in my little self I had this awareness… somehow unconsciously,” when she talks about how unjust she feels the Catholic church was in general and in her family's history in particular. She says that there were many factors which “contributed to this sense of resistance and injustice” that she felt with regards to her experience of catechism class, “that somehow in my little head I had put together.”

I am deeply moved by the image of this young girl sitting in catechism class knowing that something about it did not feel right to her and feeling strong enough to resist in every way she possibly could even though she had yet to discover the language to name exactly what she was sensing with her emotions. As somebody who's worked with young children it makes sense to me that even our young selves are connected with that vital and mysterious energy that gives our lives meaning and purpose although of course we are that much further away from knowing how that vital and mysterious energy will express itself throughout our lives. The story is dramatic because it shows how little credit we give children for being connected with their souls.
Narrating Identity

In particular there is a connection with her grandmother that Rhonda feels is very clear but seems surprised that her younger self understood. Rhonda knew in her heart even before she knew in her consciousness what her spiritual path would be and was able to “[find] the path that [she] didn't know [her] grandmother practiced”. The way that Rhonda talks about her spiritual practice seems to be beyond identity in that it seems to emphasize that it's more than the stories she tells about who she is, rather “it is [her] life”. It seems striking that she has a very strong voice here and has clearly been able to self-author a spiritual identity for herself. She says “that experience at that school and my early years could've impacted my connection with spirit or my allowing of this to belong in myself, but it didn't”. I wonder if perhaps all of the disdain that Rhonda felt for catechism was her way of protecting her relationship with spirit and all of the things that she cares about on a deep level, the things that give her life meaning and purpose that she couldn't even name at the time. It really strikes me that her resistance to catechism could have been resisting the risk of the institutional narrators of school and church damaging her own connection with spirit and with her self with what she calls her life. I wonder if those strong feelings of resistance were a form of protection. This connects for me to all of the students in schools being forced to endure something that they feel a deep resistance to. I wonder if the students who feel most repulsed by being forced to practice, for example, phonics drills
over and over are actually the students who have a deep connection with language, protecting their sense of what reading could be.

Knowing that Rhonda would become somebody who deeply values and respects the ways that different cultures connect with the cosmos and that her own spiritual tradition that would become, “her life” is the traditional African Earth-based religion that her grandmother and community were forced to give up in favor of Catholicism gives new meaning to her fierce resistance to catechism class. At the time a teacher might have labeled Rhonda “a slow learner,” "behaviorally challenged," “making trouble,” or "lazy" because she didn't do her catechism work. Taking a stance that views emotions, be they agreeable or disagreeable, as signaling some kind of connection with one’s soul might shift how we perceive student resistance in all subject matter. Rather than immediately pathologizing a resistant child we might approach her with curiosity and wonder about exactly what "bignerness" might be connected with this small resistance.

**What Remains Mysterious and Ineffable**

All of the participants in this study were very articulate, well-spoken people with extensive vocabularies, yet throughout the interviews I had the feeling that they were having difficulty finding words to describe their experiences completely, as though words were not adequate to describe what they felt. My sense of this is that there is an element to these experiences that is ineffable.
Ernie uses the idea of being taken to another realm to describe his experience though throughout there is a sense that he’s not quite able to capture what it was he learned from this philosophy professor. When he talks about his professor discussing Rainer Maria Rilke he says, “It would be almost like he was… sort of taking me into another realm …[and I would] sort of soar with him.” He tries to explain that this professor inspired him not only in the particulars of what he offered but in a more vital and mysterious way. He says “not specifically in a methodological sense but rather in bringing in—what can I say?—a broader perspective, giving it an additional kind of dimension.”

Amy uses many words related to light and vision in describing her experience of learning art in high school. She states that she experienced a new way of seeing, like a “light bulb went off”, a “revelation”, like when she “first got glasses” such that “everything was just clearer and more important to me.” She says that it was “like a supernova” and that she felt “enlightened.” She describes the subject matter as hitting a chord in her and describes the feeling as being “super dramatic,” “exciting,” “beautiful,” “ecstasy,” and “transporting her to a different plane of who [she was] in the world.”

When Suzanne tries to put her experience into words she states: “I could feel through my whole body the sense that something earth shaking was happening… it was just a whole body [experience]. It was like I was really here in this moment. I was feeling this moment as if it had some kind of thickness to it,
and that was different… I don’t remember ever feeling that embodied as a response."

This idea of the experience going beyond what can be understood as the mind or cognition can be seen in all of the stories. Rhonda uses the term “bigness” to describe what seems beyond what she could really know consciously. People indicate that the emotional sense they were having was something different than a mental experience or an experience that just engages the mind. Ernie explains that often his professor would actually switch from speaking in English to lecturing in other languages and says, “not having to understand the words really, there was enough of the emotion and the feeling that he was providing that made all the difference to me… although I couldn’t understand everything he was talking about, the feeling at the time was such that I could experience what he was experiencing aesthetically and he was able to communicate that in verbal and nonverbal ways very effectively… so, in some respects, he was taking me into a realm I didn’t understand cognitively, okay, but rather, gave me more of a feeling, which was more emotional in tone than it was cognitive.” Ernie seems quite clear that what he was able to experience through his emotions was something different, though not disconnected, from what he was experiencing mentally, that is, in his mind.

An element of mystery related to the vitality of these experiences can be seen in the way that participants seem to wonder at both the power of their experience and why they were struck so deeply at a particular time and place.
Ernie articulates this when he first states, “I never had an instructor or teacher anywhere along the line [who] had the same effect on me as he did” and emphasizes that this experience “stood out alone by itself, big-time.” He then goes on to wonder about why this was when he says, “There were some teachers, of course, who were much better teachers at bringing their subject matter alive, but I think none of them ever carried the same degree of not only the emotion that they—that he demonstrated, but the kind of psychological connections that were being made there.” Amy expressed this same sort of wonder at the mystery of how powerful her experience was at the time when she states, “I don’t know if anybody else had the same response” to the principles of design that struck her so deeply. Suzanne is the one who seems to most directly name the mystery of this when she questions why this life-changing experience happened for her when it did as in, “what I have never been able to explain is why at that moment, you know… I don’t know that we can ever explain why.”

It is important to point out how mysterious the feelings were at the time they had them. Ernie describes powerful but a little bit vague feelings of “fascination” and “identification” at the time when he took The Philosophy of Aesthetics. Looking at the life he led and what he became, the power of those moments becomes more vibrant and the direct relationship to what was important to Ernie throughout his life is revealed. He had a strong feeling of fascination but it was mysterious at the time because he had not had the experiences in his life that it would relate to yet. It was as though his emotions foretold or intuited what
would happen in the future but it required the future unfolding in order for many of the connections to be revealed.

It seems that there is a vital and mysterious power pointing towards meaning and purpose contained in the experience of feeling fascination or curiosity. Suzanne describes feeling “curious” many times and following that curiosity towards the next right thing for her learning, as in “I just became more and more curious about [my professor] and why she was like she was. So, I decided to order her dissertation” or “I became curious: would this happen for other teachers, you know, if other teachers meditated, had the intention of being mindful in the classroom, would that make a difference to them? So, that became my dissertation topic.” Where this curiosity is leading may not be in view at the time of the initial experience of fascination. What we can perceive with our emotional sense may remain cloaked in mystery for our rational minds and out of the reach of language—ineffable—for much of our lives. Amy explains in a number of places that she wasn’t able to put words on her experience when she says, “I don’t think I named it at the time but that was how I felt…I don’t think I was specific in my mind of what [the feeling] meant but I just felt different…I didn’t say that but I knew it and I was excited about it.” These quotes seem to indicate that something was going on that was beyond the rational or other than the rational. She was sensing something through emotion that she did not have the thoughts or words for at the time which points to the idea of emotions offering a sense of something that complements our conscious thoughts but is different.
One thing that’s interesting is that when Suzanne follows her curiosity about her professor she ends up following a path towards a meditation practice that she describes as being most profoundly about moving beyond labels that words can describe. When she begins to meditate Suzanne develops an understanding that “there’s something much bigger and it’s over here, this space where everything is before it’s a picture, before it’s put into words, before it’s put into concepts, you know that’s where everything really is.” What she finds through her meditation practice is this place beyond words and labels, what she attempts to describe as “that spaciousness that Buddhism talks about, you know the spaciousness of where everything is” which felt to her “like I had come home.”

Though Suzanne is very articulate in describing this experience it is actually quite ineffable. When Suzanne talked about “this space” she would gesture with her arms towards the space next to her almost as if she was attempting to use the space to describe rather than words. As well as she and the other participants attempted to name their experiences and as diligently as I have attempted to relay their stories it is clear to me that there is an element of what we are attempting to say that is ineffable and therefore beyond any words that could be offered here and perhaps even beyond what can be understood by our rational minds. It is that which might be sensed with our emotions and known by our souls.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion

My intention when I began this project was to describe how emotion and identity might function constructively in the learning process, and then to create a conceptual model that might inspire a fundamental reorientation of the way we view emotion as part of learning. I began by asking: What might students’ recollected stories about subject matter that inspired an emotional response in them reveal about the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning?

What I will do in this chapter is analyze and discuss my developing lens for viewing emotion as it relates to the learning process and describe what the data from this study exemplifies about the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning. I will begin with the idea of emotional sense pointing to a student’s relationship with subject matter and how emotion can also indicate when learning is connecting with what I have been calling the thread of the soul for a student. I will then discuss the need for students to engage in a process of reflection and framing their own purposes as the process of narrating identity unfolds through interaction between the learner and the subject matter. I will also discuss how negotiating community, social structures and material consequences through a dialog with different contexts can be seen as allowing horizons of possibilities or what kind of future actions come to be possible. Finally, I will present the model that I have developed working with the data from this study, as
a beginning point intended to inspire further discussion and investigation.

**Emotional Sense of Relationship with Subject Matter:**

I begin by discussing how, for my participants, an emotional sense indicated the existence of a significant and previously unrecognized relationship with subject matter that would endure across contexts and over time. I discuss how emotions can be confusing and require reflection in order for participants to understand them. I discuss the role that teachers play in this learning process, as both host and model. Finally, I discuss how there is a relationship between the soul of the student and the soul of subject matter where it is through interaction between the two that the particular meaning and purpose of subject matter for an individual can be revealed.

**Emotional Sense**

I began by asking my participants to tell a story about a time when they experienced emotion as part of their formal schooling. Although I suspected that any story they would be able to recollect years later would be significant I didn’t ask them to tell me a story about a particularly important experience or one that has had an enduring impact on their lives but those were the stories they gave me. I asked about emotion and they told me about what I came to think of as the thread of their souls. The initial emotion that my participants described turned out to be only a small part, the beginning, of a more substantial story about the connection between subject matter and the soul of the learner that endured for
years. In each story it was emotion that was the signal that began the story but it was not the whole story. Emotion is what is visible in the beginning but in these stories it points to something much bigger: a resonance with the soul.

Each of these stories begins with what I am calling the student’s emotional sense of relationship between subject matter and the thread of their souls. Amy’s ecstasy was just the beginning of a lifelong story about finding meaning and purpose through art. Amy states that the principles of design “hit a chord [or cord] in [her],” which captures how the principles of design both touched the “cord” or thread of Amy’s soul and struck a “chord” or harmony in her heart. Those principles would continue to impact Amy for more than fifty years as the mundane gestures of life become daily opportunities to make art.

In Suzanne’s story her emotional sense of connection with the subject matter of unconditional acceptance was the beginning of a much larger story of her coming to cultivate unconditional acceptance and peace in her life. Her simultaneous curiosity and fear in her graduate class led Suzanne to take up a meditation practice herself, pursue her doctorate and build a career around the impact of mindfulness practices for teachers. Even Rhonda’s disdain for catechism was an early signal of what she would describe as becoming her “life.” The discomfort Rhonda felt with catechism pointed to what would become her interest in understanding “different ways that people perceive the cosmos,” which she would pursue as an anthropologist, as well as her connection with the traditional African religion, which become her personal spiritual practice. When
these participants had an emotional response to subject matter, their emotional sense was pointing to, illuminating, making visible, whispering of a relationship between the thread of their soul and that subject matter.

The Need for Reflection

Emotional sense can be confusing though. What my participants felt as an emotional sense with their hearts offered knowledge that preceded what they would understand later with their minds. It was only a whisper of what was not necessarily even knowable intellectually so they were involved in a process of trying to understand the meaning and purpose of what they felt. In Suzanne’s case her feeling of discomfort indicated some misalignment with her soul but it wasn’t clear to her at first whether that misalignment was with the subject matter or with her fundamentalist Christian community. Her emotional sense could have been suggesting that she should leave her graduate class or it could have been suggesting that she disconnect from the values of her community. For Rhonda it wasn’t clear that her disdain for catechism indicated a violation of the thread of her anthropologist’s soul, or a violation of her grandmother’s legacy and a deep connection with the Earth-based religion she would come to know as her “life.” It would take many years of life experience and reflection in order to understand more fully the sense that her emotions made.

In these stories my participants had to engage in a process of reflection in order to understand the sense that their emotions were making. Additionally, they needed what Dewey (1938) calls “self-control” and describes as “the power to
frame purposes and to execute or carry into effect purposes so framed” (p.67). By self-control neither Dewey, nor I am suggesting self-discipline but rather the ability to discern one’s own purposes and act on them. In order to transform their emotional sense into action that was in alignment with their souls my participants needed the power to frame their own purposes, and not just any purposes, but the purposes that would give their lives meaning; their emotions offered guidance for the process of developing their purposes. When Amy learned about the principles of design it wasn’t to impress her teacher, to pass a test, to fulfill a requirement or to graduate—it was to satisfy her own purposes, those in alignment with her own soul. Suzanne had no clear purpose or reason in mind when she chose to stay in her graduate class except to satisfy her own curiosity, her own fascination with the feeling of unconditional acceptance she experienced as somehow resonant for her. Suzanne’s purposes in taking this graduate class were wholly her own, born of an inner calling. Rhonda in fact risked disappointing her parents and failing catechism in order to resist what she felt as a violation of her soul.

This reflection and framing of purposes that my participants engaged in was rigorous but it was not necessarily an intellectual process. Every day Amy chooses her clothes and sets the table using the principles of design. However, that is not an intellectual process of thinking through how to put herself together, going through each principle like a check list. It comes from a felt sense of who she is and a sense that “I would feel less if I didn’t.”
It was through a process of reflection that Suzanne knew she needed to stay in her graduate class rather than flee but she did not know why. She only knew that she had an emotional sense of unconditional acceptance and chose to follow that feeling towards what would become her dissertation and her career. Suzanne engaged in a cycle of reflection initiated by her emotional sense and sustained by her desire to know more – her curiosity. In Suzanne’s story her curiosity is more than an intellectual interest. At the heart of her curiosity was a new feeling of satisfaction with the experience of unconditional acceptance that she had been seeking for much of her life. There was a feeling of contentment, “like coming home,” that was the basis for her curiosity, her desire to know: would this happen again?

The process of reflection began with being present to her emotional sense of satisfaction and her intertwined desire to know more, which I am calling curiosity. It then entailed framing her purposes, taking action, experiencing a new emotional sense of curiosity, and framing her next purposes. For example, while in class Suzanne developed a desire to know more about her professor as a person so she ordered her professor’s dissertation. In reading the dissertation Suzanne again found a feeling of satisfaction and became curious to meet her professor’s advisor and so sought him out. This cycle of reflection including framing her own purposes repeated in order to get her from her emotional sense of the thread of her soul to horizons of possibilities for her actions.

Rhonda described how she used a similar process of reflection to find her
way towards anthropology in college. She described what it felt like to have an emotional sense of “little places of connection” in the subjects of accounting and physics, which she contrasted with her emotional sense of “resonance” with the subjects of biology and anthropology. Rhonda described how she paid attention to her emotional sense and took action such that she left the field of accounting and switched to anthropology, which she describes as becoming “her life.”

The reflection process has no specific time frame. Sometimes it does seem immediately clear what an emotion is indicating, as in Amy’s situation, where she felt almost instantly transformed into an artist when the principles of design struck that chord in her. Sometimes it becomes clearer through a short period of reflection, as in Suzanne’s case where “for a year…it was a rocket ride of self-examination, removing layers and layers of baggage that I was carrying.” Sometimes, as in Rhonda’s case, it requires decades of time’s unfolding or even a lifetime to be able to see the connection between the glimmer of emotion and the thread of the soul.

The Role of the Teacher

In Amy, Ernie and Suzanne’s stories the teacher was present and even vital but s/he was not framing the learner’s purposes. The teacher functioned primarily in two ways: as a host and as a model. When the teacher functioned as a host s/he introduced the student to the subject matter, provided a space for and invited the learner into relationship with the subject matter. Like a good host of
any event, the teacher prepared the space to welcome guests, set a tone of hospitality and offered her own sense of comfort to others so that they would feel at home. He introduced guests to each other and guided them through the space so that they could find what they needed. In Amy’s story her teacher served as a host introducing her to the principles of design and offering his own comfort as a professional artist to his high school students. As Amy puts it, “he presented in a very adult way. He was not talking down to us at all, which in itself made us feel good.” This hospitality had the effect of inviting Amy into the world of art.

Suzanne remarked extensively on the hospitality that her professor offered to her students on the first night of class. She described how her professor had prepared the space, “the room had been arranged in a circle of chairs” and how she offered her own careful attention and authority to the class such that, “the authority of the class now belonged to [each] person” and “people were listening to each other.”

As a host, Ernie’s professor introduced him to The Philosophy of Aesthetics then brought Ernie with him into “another realm,” offering his own emotional sense of the material for Ernie to try on. The way Ernie explains it, the professor “was sort of taking me into another realm, and the way he did it…was with his own emotions [which] carried me along with him…[so] I could experience what he was experiencing aesthetically.”

Ernie’s professor also served the role of model to Ernie. As a host he set the “objective conditions” of the classroom, choosing what subject matter to offer his students and how to invite them into relationship with that subject matter. At
the same time he was also developing a relationship with students of his own as a model or as an embodiment of subject matter himself. This professor created the space for subject matter and was the subject matter. As a model, Ernie's professor offered him a vision of the horizons of possibilities for his life. He modeled that it would be possible to be a scholar and live the life of the mind while also being “a nice man.” Amy’s teacher modeled being a professional artist and Suzanne’s professor also offered herself as a model of unconditional acceptance and mindful attention. In this way they were not only hosting or introducing students to subject matter and creating a hospitable space for that relationship, they were also modeling or being the subject matter.

In Amy, Ernie and Suzanne’s stories the teacher was vital and intimately responsible but ultimately not in control of these learners’ relationship with subject matter. That connection came from the soul of each learner and it was unique to each student. For example, Amy says that she doesn’t think that anybody else in her art class had the same response that she did to the principles of design showing us that no matter how skillful a teacher is the connection depends on the soul of the student and is not predictable. Suzanne also indicates this when she says that she will never be able to understand why the connection she felt happened at that moment in time. So in these examples the teachers were in the position of preparing for the unpredictable and unique, for some “biggerness,” to use Rhonda’s word, which was outside of their control without being able to count on it in any way.
Interestingly, Rhonda said that she does not remember her catechism teacher at all. She can remember the classroom and her feelings very clearly but the teacher was completely absent from her story. I suspect that this indicates that s/he was not serving either role of host or model for Rhonda. I wonder if the teacher’s absence from Rhonda’s memory indicates an absence or lack of presence of the teacher in the classroom and I wonder if this is related to the absence of connection that Rhonda felt with catechism.

The Soul of Subject Matter

In these stories the teachers created a space in their classroom for the learners to develop a relationship with subject matter that imbued it with soul. By “soul” I mean the vital and mysterious energy that gives subject matter meaning and purpose for a particular person. Ultimately what I think the students in these stories were sensing emotionally and connecting with was the unique significance that the subject matter had for them and what they could make of it in their lives, which I am calling the soul of subject matter. Amy was moved by the meaning and purpose of the principles of design. The exact list of principles is not what she remembers today, it is how those principles allowed her to make art and to express an artist’s vision. The resonance Amy felt in her soul and her relationship with the principles of design imbued them with soul. Suzanne was responding to the meaning and purpose of the techniques her professor used as well as her professor’s demeanor. Suzanne doesn’t even mention what the specifics of the course were; what she was responding to was the unconditional
acceptance and peace that were the soul of the techniques and mundane
gestures of her professor. Ernie was responding to the meaning and purpose of
the philosophy of aesthetics, which for him was to explore what makes a life
come alive and what has moved human beings over time. Even Rhonda was
responding to the meaning and purpose of catechism class. The same facts
about the rituals and core beliefs of Catholicism might have been fascinating to
Rhonda if she learned them in an anthropology class where the meaning and
purpose of examining them might have been to better understand how different
people connect with the cosmos. However, in the context of catechism class
where Rhonda found the meaning and purpose of learning about Catholic
practices was for indoctrination, she felt disdain and resistance.

Summary

I return to Buechner’s (1993) definition of vocation as “the place where
your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (cited in Palmer, 1998,
p.30). Before the world’s hunger or the particular function the world was calling
them to perform could meet Amy, Ernie, Suzanne and Ronda’s deep gladness
their souls needed to be introduced to the subject matter that would make them
glad for the first time. Emotional sense was the first indication of a vital and
enduring relationship between subject matter and the thread of my participants’
souls. Teachers took on the role of host, introducing students to subject matter
and creating a hospitable space for a relationship to develop. They also
functioned as models, at times becoming the subject matter themselves. For
these learners making practical sense of their emotional sense and figuring out how to frame and execute purposes that would give their lives meaning required a process of reflection. This process was both emotional and intellectual as participants came to develop the power of self-control through a felt sense of goodness of fit between subject matter and their own souls. Through relationship with subject matter the thread of my participants’ souls became illuminated. Through that relationship the soul, or the meaning and purpose of the subject matter, was revealed and made available to them setting the stage for their vocation to develop.

**Thread of the Soul:**

In these stories it is impossible to separate the learning that endures over time and deeply impacted these students’ lives from the thread of their soul. What I would call their learning was what gave their lives meaning and purpose. I might even go so far as to say that what students were learning was less subject matter than it was the thread of their souls. Inspired by William Stafford’s poem *The Way It Is,* I use the term thread of the soul to describe the continuous, unique, vital and mysterious energy that can give each of our lives meaning and purpose. Although Stafford does not use the word soul, the way that he describes the thread names how the soul functioned in my participants’ stories.

**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

Continuous and Unique

As Stafford describes it, the thread is unique to each person, even difficult for others to understand, and moves through time’s unfolding. Dewey (2002) refers to the consistency and unity that endures for students across experiences and contexts as continuity. Although she also does not use the term soul, Pat Carini builds on Dewey’s (1902; 1938) notion of continuity referring to continuousness. In their work, Carini and her colleagues (in Himley, 2002) attempted to document the unique, enduring threads that are visible in children's works as they grow from even tiny children through adolescence into adulthood. Carini (in Himley, 2002) explains that in looking closely at students’ work over time she noticed, “a continuousness in each individual child’s collection…a kind of personal signature that remained amidst all the changes in a collection associated with age and expanding influences, and that was also visible across media” (p.19). The thread of the soul is what I would call this continuousness that can be seen in students’ collected works over time and that can be seen in my participants’ stories. By looking at stories that my participants recollected
from years earlier it became possible to see how the learning experiences that they responded to emotionally revealed a connection with the thread of their souls, and endured over time.

The threads of the soul in my participants’ stories could be seen connecting their learning experience in a particular moment with their past and even with ancestors, as in Rhonda’s story. At the same time evidence of the same thread of their souls could be seen continuing forward into their future. For example Amy expressed a desire to “do this forever” and talked about how learning the principles of design “did definitely affect my life from then on.” We can see how she used the principles of design in her daily life for more than 50 years and how Ernie still studies philosophy in his retirement. In Rhonda’s story the thread of her soul indicated by her discomfort with catechism connected with her grandmother’s experience in the past as well as her own spiritual future. The thread of the soul can be seen moving not just forward in time into the future but also back in time to a past that my participants might not even have been aware of.

The thread of the soul is also continuous between “life” and school (Dewey, 1902). The relationship with subject matter and the thread of the soul have meaning beyond the classroom. For example, Amy uses the principles of design in her home life when she is getting dressed and setting the table. For Ernie it was important that he was not only learning how to be a professional and scholar, he was learning how to be a good person and live a life of meaning.
Rhonda is very clear that anthropology and her interest in exploring different cultures is not just an academic pursuit when she says: “it’s my life. It’s how I live and how I interact with the world.” In Suzanne’s case the choice to follow her interest in studying unconditional acceptance “changed [her] whole life” not just her academic path. Suzanne uses Rhonda's term "bigger" when she says “there's something much bigger.” Her learning and the thread of her soul were not restricted to the classroom—they were continuous.

**Hidden from View**

Learning your own soul may be vital but it is also difficult. The challenge is that the soul is usually hidden and obscured from our vision. As Parker Palmer (2003) says, “the soul despite its toughness, is also essentially shy—just like a wild animal. It will flee from the noisy crowd and seek safety in the deep underbrush” (p. 382). What I saw in these stories is how hidden from view the sense that the thread of the soul is making can be in any moment. It was difficult for Suzanne, Ernie and Rhonda to put into words and to perceive intellectually in any one moment in time. At the point in time when Suzanne took that first graduate class she had no way of knowing that she would develop a deep meditation practice that would inform her entire career trajectory, all she had to go on was a feeling of disequilibrium and a desire to know more. Ernie didn’t know that his fascination with his professor would endure in the form of a career listening to people’s stories and that he would end up a professor and author as well. Rhonda did not yet know herself to be an anthropologist nor did she know
what her spiritual tradition would be, all she knew was that she had a feeling of repulsion at being told that the Catholic tradition was the only option. What they were given were whispers, inklings of the soul’s calling in the form of their emotional sense of relationship with subject matter.

Summary

The thread of the soul is difficult to perceive in any one moment in time and, as Stafford says, the thread is “difficult for others to see.” The continuousness of the soul is only visible from the outside by looking at a collection of moments, as captured in students’ works in the Prospect Center’s Archives or as described by my participants in the stories they told from the course of their lives. What can be perceived in a particular moment from the inside is a feeling of resonance, an emotional response that is unique, that gives a particular moment vibrancy, which suggests a connection with the thread of the soul.

Identity and Horizons of Possibilities:

Horizons of Possibility

For each of these participants the thread of the soul remained constant throughout their lives and proved itself to be durable. However, taking emotional sense and making something of the relationship between subject matter and the thread of their souls required a process of reflection in order to narrate their identities and negotiate their relationships with community and social structures.
In addition to learning the thread of their souls my participants were also learning stories about what was possible for them in the future, or what I have been calling their horizons of possibilities.

According to Meagan Boler (1999), “Our emotions help us to envision future horizons of possibilities and who we want to become” (p.xviii). The emotional sense that my participants felt gave them an inkling of what they wanted to become and what they wanted to do during the course of their lives. Identity stories allowed those horizons of possibilities or shut them down. The kind of person my participants recognized themselves to be, and/or others recognized them to be, in a given context (Gee, 2001) offered or limited opportunities to manifest the thread of their souls.

Narrating Identity

Sfard and Prusak (2005) define learning as negotiating the gap between the stories told about who one is in a given moment and the stories told about what one will be someday in the future. The process of learning is, in part, a process of reconciling the stories told about the kind of people we are now with the stories that are told about the kind of people we might become. This narrating of identity allows for horizons of possibility or shuts them down. For example, in order for Amy to be able to make art she needed to tell the story of her identity as an artist. She shifted from focusing on what she would be when she grew up to narrating, “this is who I really am” right now. She began telling the story of herself
as an artist which allowed her to make art in that moment and throughout her life, rather than waiting to become something in the future that might allow her to act on her emotional sense. She says, “This was not what I was going to be when I grew up, [it was] who I was right then.” Rhonda was not taking classes in anthropology so that she could one day become an anthropologist. Rather, it was telling the story of her identity as an anthropologist that allowed her to pursue her interests, study what resonated with her soul and ultimately travel and do the work that became her life.

As a model or to use Ernie's term, Imago, his professor told the story of one possible identity for Ernie and showed him what he could do in the world with it. He offered a model of a kind of person, telling the story of what he could do or “what one should do if one becomes a scholar” and also offering “personal qualities and characteristics…[of] a very nice man.” As Ernie says “the way [my professor] presented himself… would be something I'd want to do.” By telling the story of the kind of person he could become, Ernie allowed possibilities for what he could do and experience. He was narrating his horizons of possibility for expressing the thread of his soul: allowing for the opportunity to write books and use philosophy in his research, to work with people's stories and histories, and to teach.

Performing Identity

Identity is both narrative and performative. As Judith Butler (1988) puts it, identity is not expressive of any natural, internal condition but rather is
performative and constituted through “stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding” (p.2) identity. Identity stories need to be told in order to allow certain actions to be performed, while at the same time those stories need to be performed in order to be constituted. Identity is created by narration and constituted by performance. Stories must be told and performed in order to construct an identity.

Amy connects telling the story of her identity as an artist with performing the gestures of an artist when she says, “this is who I really am and this is what it means and this is what I can do with it.” By recognizing herself to be an artist, Amy was able to make every routine activity of her teenage life, both at home and at school, an opportunity to express the thread of her soul by making art. She told the story of and also performed the identity of artist. When Amy enacts setting the table and getting dressed every day of her life using the principles of design she is constituting her identity as an artist. It is through performance that her identity is constituted and endorsed each day.

Rhonda explains very clearly that narrating the identity of being an anthropologist allowed her to pursue things, to take action. By declaring herself to be an anthropology major, telling the story of being an anthropologist it allowed horizons of possibility, “where I could pursue my interests.” At the same time it is performing those actions, “how [she] live[s] and how [she] interact[s] with the world” that makes her an anthropologist. In this way narration and performance,
telling and doing are mutually dependant parts of the identity building process. Telling the story allows the doing and the doing reifies the telling. For Rhonda as a child in the context of catechism class, she didn’t have the words to tell the story of herself as an anthropologist nor was she able to perform the gestures of an anthropologist, picking up and looking at the rituals and beliefs of Catholicism through a comparative lens instead of a dogmatic lens. The identity that would allow her to manifest the thread of her soul took years to develop.

Similar to Amy and Rhonda, Ernie needed to take on the identity of a competent student in order for him to envision the possibility of going to college, becoming a practicing social worker then going on to get his PhD, becoming a professor himself and writing books. Ernie came to school with an identity of somebody who would work with his hands. It required both narrating and performing his identity as a successful student in order for his identity as a social worker, professor, researcher and author to become possible. He needed to tell the story of himself as a successful student and perform the actions of one in order to be a scholar.

For Suzanne the gesture of studying in class or choosing to stop judging as dangerous a woman who looked like a lesbian constituted an end to her identity as a fundamentalist Christian. The identity of fundamentalist Christian required the mundane gestures of “protect[ing]ing your mind,” “being careful about what you let in” and avoiding women who don’t “look the way women are supposed to look.” The identity of fundamentalist Christian required her to walk
out of class, change classes and avoid that professor. It was the mundane
gesture of staying, sitting in class, participating, that constituted an identity shift
for Suzanne. This allowed her to perform new gestures of unconditional
acceptance and meditation.

Communities and Social Structures

These stories exemplify how identity is constructed not only by individuals,
but also by communities and social structures. Social structures and communities
can influence both the narrating and the performing of identity. Suzanne’s story
demonstrates Sfard and Prusak’s idea that what makes an identity story
significant is when it involves inclusion or exclusion from a community. For
Suzanne maintaining her identity as a member of her fundamentalist Christian
community required that she act in a particular way. Inclusion in her church
community required that she remain vigilant, guarding herself against people
outside of the community, especially people who appeared like they "weren't
supposed to look," in other words, like lesbians. The homophobia of her church
community limited the possibilities for Suzanne if she maintained her identity as a
fundamentalist Christian. The conflict between Suzanne’s own emotional sense
of the thread of her soul and the values of her community meant that she needed
to negotiate that identity and her relationship with her community in order to
follow her emotional sense. In order for her to take action on her emotional sense
of desire to follow her professor’s example, Suzanne needed to reconcile her
identity as a member of her church community. Ultimately she had to choose
between her own emotional sense of the thread of her soul and her identity as a fundamentalist Christian as well as her connection with her community. In choosing to follow the thread of her soul she relinquished her identity as a Fundamentalist Christian and gave up her connection with her community.

For Suzanne, acting on her emotional sense and the thread of her soul wasn’t simply a matter of choosing to take a particular class in graduate school. In Suzanne’s case she needed to leave her church in order to study mindfulness and unconditional acceptance with somebody perceived to be a lesbian. The material results of exclusion from this community meant divorcing her husband as well as separating from her family and all of the emotional and economic consequences that went along with that. Suzanne’s story demonstrates how social structures and inclusion or exclusion from particular communities of identity create real material consequences for individuals.

If there is a conflict between one’s community of identity and the thread of one’s soul, one option is to do what Amy did, which was to hide the soul's resonance in order to protect it. “I in a way had to camouflage that because otherwise they might have seen what I was doing as threatening their goals for me.” As a teenage girl, if Amy’s parents saw art as threatening their goals for Amy and the future they were narrating for her they might have tried to stop her from making art. As a significant narrator in Amy’s life her father wanted her to get a practical job so she could support herself after college. His voice was strong enough to prevent Amy from pursuing an art career and expressing her
artist’s soul in the form of her paid work. My sense is that she feared telling her parents about her newfound identity as an artist because she feared that they might threaten her ability to make art in her everyday life, so she camouflaged herself. As a teenager she relied on her parents for all of her physical needs, so forcing an overt conflict with her parents might have created very real material consequences for Amy.

Rhonda’s story begins immersed in community, the community of the Catholic Church. The emotional sense that she has in catechism class indicates a conflict between the thread of Rhonda’s soul and the dogma of the Catholic Church. As a child, Rhonda responded to the conflict between the thread of her own soul and her identity as a member of her family and her Catholic community by taking the same route that Amy did: she hid her emotional sense from her family. Her identity and inclusion in this community shut down the possibilities for her actions. In her words, her stories were less “believable” and “the nuns and priests were always right.” The horizons of possibilities would take time before they could become available. As a child there was “a very little box that [Rhonda] was contained in.”

In Rhonda’s story we can also see how social structures can intervene and prevent action. The legacy of colonialism had a huge impact on whether Rhonda or her ancestors had the freedom to resist Catholicism. There was a conflict between this thread of Rhonda’s soul and her Catholic community as well as social structures which Rhonda responded to by camouflaging her self.
Ernie’s story presents an example of how social structures (in his case, the identity of being working-class) can allow for or shut down particular horizons of possibilities. Coming from his family background, Ernie had only imagined possibilities for himself as a laborer who worked with his hands. As he puts it, being a scholar and an author, “It wasn’t in my family.” It required significant alternative narrators in the form of his teachers and professors to recognize and tell the story of Ernie as a capable student who could succeed in higher education, teach, and live a life of the mind. What allowed him to take action and follow his emotional sense and the thread of his soul was that, “there was somebody doing it who told [him he] could to do it – [he] should do it.”

Summary

In order for my participants to act on their emotional sense and manifest the thread of their soul they needed to narrate and perform their identity stories while simultaneously negotiating them through the context of community and social structures. When there was a conflict between the thread of their souls and their identity as members of a particular community, participants had to choose between hiding the thread of their souls or facing exclusion from their communities and the material consequences of that separation. The complex process of negotiating identity allowed horizons of possibilities to emerge with time’s unfolding.
Conclusion

The soul of these learners was a powerful force longing to be manifested in the world through meaningful work. Emotions offered an illumination of the soul, and sometimes, with the help of a teacher acting as a host or model, made visible the connection between subject matter and the soul. In order for my participants to manifest their unique purposes they had to use the clues found in their hearts, and come to action that was in alignment with the threads of their souls. This required a rigorous process of reflection, including framing their own purposes, narrating identity and negotiating community and social structures. These learners took an emotional sense of connection between subject matter and the thread of their souls and revealed the horizons of possibility that ultimately helped them find their vocations or, “the place where [their] deep gladness and the world's deep hunger [met]” (Buechner cited in Palmer, 1998, p.30).
What I present now is a model that attempts to represent what the data from this study reveals about the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning.

The model begins with student emotions and ends with horizons of possibilities.

At the center of the model is the relationship between the learner and subject matter. When a student experiences emotions as part of her learning, those
feelings can be providing a glimpse of the soul of that learner and an indication of resonance with subject matter. The emotions are what is visible, providing an emotional sense of what is more difficult to perceive: the thread of the soul and its relationship to the stuff of the world. When the learner interacts with subject matter that connects with the thread of their soul the soul of the subject matter is revealed. The teacher can play a vital role in the learning process both by offering subject matter to students as a host and by serving as subject matter or a model herself. The glimmer of emotion that might be visible in a particular moment in the classroom gives us only a partial view of the thread of a learner’s soul that will continue to reveal itself over the course of a lifetime. Taking that emotional sense of resonance between the thread of the soul and the soul of subject matter and making it into horizons of possibilities for action in the world requires a rigorous process of reflection and framing of one’s own purposes. It also requires that learners narrate identity while negotiating social structures and their relationship with their communities. Identity stories that allow for the expression of the thread of the soul are created through a cyclical process of narration and performance where the telling of stories allows for the performance of actions and the performance of those actions reifies the stories being told. This process occurs in the context of different communities and under the influence of social structures that can impose material consequences on an individual. Learners engage in a lifelong process of narrating identity and negotiating
community, social structures and material consequences in order to manifest the horizons of possibilities that become their vocations.
Coda

When I first began this project I set out to name what might be going on when students have an emotional response to subject matter. Drawing on my own experience, both with my own learning and watching my students, I had an inkling that emotions and student learning might be connected with identity and the stories told about the kind of people we are and can become. By looking closely at four stories of student emotional response to learning and formal schooling recollected years later, what has become clear to me is the role of the soul. I began with a vague sense that emotions signal that something is going on that related to student identity. Now I’ve come to understand that an emotional response can signal something even more than a connection with identity; it can signal alignment with or violation of our souls.

Through this work I have been sensitized to the presence of the soul, both that part of each of us that makes us human, and that spark of connection with subject matter that gives it life. I believe that we need human beings connected with our souls contributing to our shared world in order to make it a better place and see this as the moral end in view of education. I take Dewey’s (1938) position that “[t]he ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control” and agree that the ultimate form of self-control is not just framing any purposes but
specifically the purposes that give our lives meaning and connect us with a fuller humanity.

Conceptualizing student emotional response as signaling a connection with what gives their lives meaning and purpose might change many things about classroom practice. It might impact the objective conditions we choose to create in our classrooms. Instead of setting up classrooms, assignments, discussions, and interactions with students in a way that discourages, avoids or merely tolerates student emotion, we might in fact design instruction with the intent to engage students' emotions and souls in addition to their cognition.

Schools as institutions can invite student's souls in or they can leave the soul waiting outside. Most of the time there is just simply no connection between what happens in classrooms and the thread of one’s life. The connection with one’s own soul is not engaged. Souls sit outside of school waiting for their brains to escape work and come out and play. Students are expected to find meaning and purpose on their own time in dance class, exploring science at a summer camp, or in the books they choose to read “for pleasure.” A line is drawn between what is personal work to be done at home and what is academic work to be addressed at school. It is our public responsibility to offer our children basic skills that can be measured on a test, not fulfillment.

Conceptualizing learning as what can be measured in a test becomes a reduction of education. Academic and job skills might not matter if we are missing the meaning and purpose of those skills and their relation to the stuff of the world.
I return to Dewey’s (1938) question:

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (pp. 48-49)

The identity story that is told when a student resists learning is one of individual pathology and deficit: that student is bad at reading so of course she hates doing phonics work. Rhonda’s story opens up a different possibility that seems worth exploring. Perhaps being forced to endure additional basic skills lessons is actually creating disdain for those skills. Perhaps, as in Rhonda’s story, there is more to this disdain than meets the teacher’s eye. Perhaps what we are witnessing is a student who resists the reduction of subject matter and herself to what can be measured in a test, resists the denial of his soul.

As I try to understand the meaning of this work, Philip Pullman's writing comes to mind. I have always been moved by the way that his allegorical young adult novels attempt to describe the particular form that the vital and mysterious energy of the universe takes for each person. In his work each person’s soul manifests in the form of an animal companion, as a “daemon.” Since each person's soul is unique, each daemon takes a unique animal form. In the novels, daemons are visible and can speak, serving as guardian angels that provide comfort, companionship, and guidance throughout a person’s life. We come to understand daemons as the very essence of what makes each person human.
In third act of Pullman’s novel, *The Golden Compass* a particularly heart-wrenching scene unfolds. Children of working-class families who “will not be missed” are snatched off the streets and taken to a facility where powerful people are severing children from their daemons. The image is of whole children with passions, interests, cares, and sorrows placed in a machine where this most intimate part of themselves is cut off from their selves. They come out more than wounded; they become the walking dead, missing any spark of life and humanness. I daresay that this is not too far off from what is happening in some schools today. Students are being severed from their souls and, as a result, the subject matter they are studying is denied the vital and mysterious energy that can give it meaning and purpose.

It seems important, when thinking about how to work with students’ emotional resonance, to remember how much is unknowable, how much of their story is unwritten and unforeseeable from our vantage point as teachers in a particular moment. It seems vital to hold this space of possibility and keep a sense of humility about our position in the lives of students. We don’t know, we can’t know, what they will make of their time with us and their learning, but we can take a hint from what they respond to emotionally and give students the space to follow those emotional resonances, those feelings, to see where they might be leading.

My hope is that this work shifts the reader's vision, offers a new set of glasses, like Amy’s. With an increased awareness of the soul, we might make
different choices in terms of research, practice, and policy. I would love to see further work articulating our human ontology as soul bound, naming our emotions as vital senses and exploring what that stance looks like in the classroom, and in the field of education. When we are inspired to follow the thread of our lives and attune to our own souls we become inspired to nurture that attunement in others. We see a student’s emotional response as an opportunity. We pause to notice it, to name it. We give it the space that the soul needs.
References


APPENDIX A
Interview protocol

This interview is intended to be semi-structured. The questions below represent an outline of the intended interview. The actual interview may include specific follow-up questions that arise in response to participants’ particular answers.

1. Have you gotten a chance to think about times when you have felt some kind of emotion as part of your learning in school?
2. What story rises to the top and seems like it is the most important to tell?
3. What happened?
4. Can you describe how you were feeling?
5. How did it feel in your body?
6. When did this occur? Is your memory of a particular moment or did your feelings take place over a period of time?
7. What were the circumstances surrounding your experience?
8. Can you recollect the space you remember having this feeling in?
9. How did you become conscious of this feeling?
10. Was the emotion expressed in any way to others?
11. How did the context you were in relate to your emotion?
12. How did other people react or not react?
13. Did it impact how you interacted with people?
14. Did you take any actions in response to this emotion?
15. How did the emotion impact you’re learning?
16. Did the emotion release or open further doors? Bring to the surface other emotions?
17. Did it impact how you interacted with particular subject matter at the time or in the future?
18. How did the recognition of the emotion influence your choices, your perception of yourself or your capacities?
19. How has your understanding of this experience changed over time?
20. Do you think this story relates to any other experiences in your life?
21. Are there any other experiences you would like to share with me?
22. Is there anything else you feel is important to add?
23. Do you have any questions for me?
APPENDIX B
Institutional Review Board Documents

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS

University at Albany
State University of New York

Institutional Review Board: DHHS FWA00001970
Notice of Approval
IRB Protocol Number: 11-176

Date: November 16, 2011
Principal Investigator: Rebecca Ossorio
Title: Feeling Knowledge: How Emotion and Identity Inform Student Learning
Review Type: ☐ Full Committee ☒ Expedited  IRB Board0000558
Approval Type: ☐ Modification

Approval Date: November 10, 2011  Expiration Date: September 8, 2012

1. Summary of Modifications: The revised consent forms for Bennington College participants; revise original consent form for corrections; introduce study at conference to recruit additional participants.

2. Provisions of Approval: n/a

3. Consent Forms: All subjects must receive a copy of the consent form as approved with the University at Albany Institutional Review Board stamp unless a waiver has been granted. Copies of the signed consent form must be kept on file.

4. Adverse Events: Any adverse event(s) or unexpected event(s) that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance within 10 calendar days of the occurrence.

5. Research Records: Accurate and detailed research records must be maintained. All research records (including all IRB correspondence) must be kept for a minimum of 3 years after the completion of the research. This research is subject to an audit under the terms of the IRB's Quality Improvement Program.

6. Changes: No changes in the above referenced study may be initiated without prior IRB review and approval. Changes include (but are not limited to) study personnel, consent forms, protocol procedures, addition of funding source.

7. Lapse of Approval: If approval for this project lapses, all research must stop IMMEDIATELY until continuation approval is granted. If approval lapses for longer than 30 days, your project must be resubmitted as a new protocol.

8. Yearly IRB Approval Continuation: Approval is valid until the expiration date above. You are required to obtain annual IRB approval continuations prior to your expiration date for as long as the study is active. An annual continuation reminder will be sent to you, but it is your responsibility to ensure that you submit and receive the yearly approval in a timely manner.

9. Funded Research: If your research is funded, you must also submit sponsor information and two copies of the grant/funding application for the year the research was conducted.

10. University Permissions: a) Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (IRPE) permission may be required if your research participants are recruited from the UAlbany Campus. It is the responsibility of the investigator to contact IRPE at (518) 437-4791 for a determination. b) All UAlbany permissions (e.g., classroom, team or organization permissions) must be kept on file with your research records.

11. Posters or Flyers: All flyers posted to recruit participants must have the IRB stamp. If posters or flyers are to be posted on the UAlbany campus, they must be registered with the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership in the Campus Center 130 prior to posting on the academic Poculum.

12. External Permissions: All external permissions (e.g., schools, businesses, organizations, etc.) must be kept on file with your research records.

The IRB wishes you success with your research.

Mark Muraven, Ph.D.
IRB Chairperson
On behalf of the Institutional Review Board

Co: Carol Rodgers

Office of Regulatory Research Compliance, LCB 238
110 Washington Ave, Albany, NY 12222
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UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Institutional Review Board: DHHS FWA00001970
Notice of Approval
IRB Protocol Number: 11-176

Date: September 17, 2012
Incentive? □ Yes □ No
n/a

Principal Investigator: Rebecca Osorio

Title: Feeling Knowledge: How Emotion and Identity Inform Student Learning

Review Type: □ Full Committee □ Expedited
Expedited Review Category #7 IRB00000589

Approver Type: □ Yearly Approval Continuation □ without Modification Continuation #1

Approval Term: September 8, 2012 through September 7, 2013
Review Cycle: 1 Year

1. Provisions of Approval: n/a
2. Consent Forms: All subjects must receive a copy of the consent form as approved with the University at Albany Institutional Review Board stamp unless a waiver has been granted. Copies of the signed consent form must be kept on file.
3. Adverse Events: Any adverse event(s) or unexpected event(s) that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance within 10 calendar days of the occurrence.
4. Research Records: Accurate and detailed research records must be maintained. All research records (including all IRB correspondence) must be kept for a minimum of 3 years after the completion of the research. This research is subject to an audit under the terms of the IRB’s Quality Improvement Program.
5. Changes: No changes in the above referenced study may be initiated without prior IRB review and approval. Changes include (but are not limited to) study personnel, consent forms, protocol, procedures, addition of funding source.
6. Lapse of Approval: If approval for this project lapses all research must stop immediately until continuation approval is granted. If approval lapses for longer than 30 days, your project must be resubmitted as a new protocol.
7. Yearly IRB Approval Continuation: Approval is valid until the expiration date above. You are required to obtain annual IRB approval continuations prior to your expiration date for as long as the study is active. An annual continuation reminder will be sent to you, but it is your responsibility to ensure that you submit and receive the yearly approval in a timely manner.
8. Funded Research: If your research is funded, you must also submit sponsor information and two copies of the grant/funding application for IRB review with the human subjects section(s) highlighted. This is true whether the source of funding is internal or external.
9. University Permissions: A) Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (IRPE) permission may be required if your research participants are recruited from the UAlbany Campus. It is the responsibility of the investigator to contact IRPE at (518) 457-4791 for a determination. B) All UAlbany permissions (e.g., classroom, team or organization permissions) must be kept on file with your research records.
10. Posters or Flyers: All flyers posted to recruit participants must have the IRB stamp. If posters or flyers are to be posted on the UAlbany campus, they must be registered with the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership in Campus Center 130 prior to posting on the academic poster.
11. External Permissions: All external permissions (e.g., schools, businesses, organizations, etc.) must be kept on file with your research records.

The IRB wishes you success with your research.

Cc: Carol Rodgers

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Feeling knowledge: How emotion and identity inform student learning

By Rebecca Ossorio

Advisor: Carol Rodgers, Department of Educational Theory and Practice

Informed Consent Form without signature to be read to participants at the beginning of interview and recorded to serve as documentation of informed consent:

Thank you for considering participation in my dissertation research study entitled Feeling knowledge. How emotion and identity inform student learning. I am going to read you a statement describing the study and then ask you if you give your consent to participate. My name is Rebecca Ossorio and I am the sole researcher for this project. I am affiliated with the University at Albany where I am working on my doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction and with Bennington College where I am a visiting instructor. The goal of my research is to better understand the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning. By better understanding your learning experiences what I hope to do is begin describing and naming how emotion and identity might function constructively in the learning process. You may receive the benefit of having an opportunity to reflect on your past experiences and others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research.

My study will include two parts:
1. Participating in a 30-60 minute interview which will be audio recorded
2. Approving a written synthesis that I draft as an account of your interview and send you for review 3-6 weeks after your interview.

In addition to the interview and synthesis process described above, I may have to email you from time to time to ask clarifying questions. I anticipate that this may occur 0-3 times within 2-6 weeks of your initial interview.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. I do not foresee any risks to you in this study other than you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions. If this happens know that you can choose to skip any question or to end your participation at any time for any reason. I am taking measures to keep your information strictly confidential. During your interview I will only use your first name. Then any personal identifiers will be removed from the study and I will assign you a pseudonym for use throughout data analysis and for any reporting.

You may end your participation in the study at any time. You may choose not to participate in particular aspects of the study or chose not to answer any
questions at any time. I will retain any data I may have collected from you for analysis up until the point you choose to leave the study unless you request that I exclude and/or destroy the data.

Questions about the study may be directed to my faculty advisor: Professor Carol Rodgers at (518) 442-5024. I may be contacted at any time throughout your participation in this study via email at rebeccaovoga@gmail.com or by phone at (614) 469-5467. The project will have the approval of the University at Albany Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University at Albany Office of Regulatory Research Compliance at 518-442-9050 (toll free 800-365-9139) or orrc@albany.edu.

Researcher: Do you have any questions I can answer for you?
Participant Response: Yes or No

Researcher: Do you feel you understand the information I have just given you and the information contained in the documents I sent you describing the study such that you know what you are getting into?
Participant response: Yes or No

Researcher: Do you consent to participate in the study including the provision of participating in a 60-minute interview, approving a researcher synthesis of your interview and email communication with the researcher?
Participant response: Yes or No

Researcher: Do you also give your consent to have your interview audio recorded?
Participant response: Yes or No

Thank you
Recruitment announcement for members of “The Contemplative Association”

Dear Contemplative Association,

I am writing to ask if you might consider participating in a 30-60 minute interview for a study I am conducting entitled, “Feeling knowledge: How emotion and identity inform student learning.” I am currently a Doctoral Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at The University at Albany and am conducting this phenomenological study as part of my dissertation research.

The goal of my project is to better understand the relationship between emotion, identity and student learning. In order to do this I am asking people to tell me about times when your learning in school inspired some kind of an emotional response in you. By better understanding these emotional learning experiences what I hope to do is begin describing and naming how emotion and identity might function in the learning process.

I as a member of The Association myself I am interested in including you in my study for two reasons: first, because of your demonstrated commitment to learning and second, because of your experience as contemplatives or meditators. I have been inspired by Walsh & Shapiro’s (2006), suggestion that, “meditators may prove to be uniquely valuable [research] subjects” because “their introspective sensitivity may make them exceptional observers of subjective states and mental processes...[and because] they may provide precise phenomenological accounts” (pp.8-9). In asking for your participation I am following Walsh & Shapiro’s (2006) hypothesis that as contemplatives you might be able to provide richer descriptions of your learning experiences because of a possible heightened awareness of your own lived experience.

If participating in this study sounds like something you would be interested in then please let me know via email at rebeccayoga@gmail.com. I will then send along some more detailed information for you to look over in order for you to make a more informed decision about whether or not you would like to participate.

I thank you for your time and consideration,
Rebecca Ossorio
Follow-up email for Association members who respond to announcement:

Dear ……,

Thank you for considering participation in my research. I know that your time is valuable and appreciate that you would consider giving my project your attention. I am attaching two documents that will provide you with more detailed information about what my study entails. Please read the attached Study Description, which describes the research process and the attached Informed Consent Form, which outlines your rights as a participant and the (minimal) risks that might be involved in participation. If you are no longer interested or available then just ignore this message. If you think you are still interested and willing to participate then send me a reply email letting me know. I will then be in contact to set up a time to meet for the interview.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration,

Rebecca Ossorio
**Listening for Identity**

Sfard and Prusak (2005) define identity as, “a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person…[which], even if individually told, are products of a collective storytelling” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14).

**1st, 2nd, 3rd person identity stories**

Identity stories, according to Sfard & Prusak (2005) can be 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person stories – so they can be told by the self to the self or others or told by others to the self or to others (p.17).

**actual/designated identities**

Sfard and Prusak (2005) also distinguish between an “actual identity” which involves the stories told about the present in terms of who one is right now and a “designated identity” which involves future stories told about what one will be someday (p.18).

**inclusion/exclusion from community**

A story becomes “significant” when it implies exclusion from or membership in a community (Sfard and Prusak, 2005)

**significant narrators**

The owners of the most influential voices, are carriers of those cultural messages that will have the greatest impact on one’s actions; whether a story told by somebody else does or does not make it into one’s own designated identity depends, among other things, on how significant the storyteller is in the eyes of the identified person.

**institutional narrators**

The narrator who has the power to tell “Institutional narratives” such as diagnoses, certificates, nominations, diplomas, and licenses which have particular capacities to supplant stories that have been a part of one’s designated identity.

**being recognized as a “kind of person”**----- Gee (2001) Identity is “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person,’ in a given context” (p.99). Identity is the kind of person you recognize yourself to be and/or others recognize you to be and varies according to context.

**self-authoring**
Listening for Emotion
emotion functions as a sense. In the words of Arlie Hochschild (1983) emotion “is a biologically given sense, and our most important one. Like other senses—hearing, touch, and smell—it is a means by which we know about our relation to the world

self-relevance
This sense offers us information about the self-relevance of an experience

relationships/significant relationships
emotion tells us something about our relationships to others, including the world of ideas, things, social structures, communities and culture

unsettledness/disequilibrium/disorienting dilemma
when new knowledge or learning impacts our previous conceptions of the world or ourselves

moral and ethical evaluations
Emotions function in part as moral and ethical evaluations

what we care about and why
they give us information about what we care about and why

horizons of possibilities
Our emotions help us to envision future horizons of possibilities and who we want to become

No thoughts/no words
**Listening for Student Learning**

**Educative experience**
opens up possibilities for humanness or humanization, connection and freedom

**Mis-educative experience**
shuts down possibilities

**practice of freedom**
liberation from habitual response

**student self-realization**
students becoming aware and reflective about themselves in order to actualize their unique potential

**power of self-control**
The ideal aim of education is creation of the power of self-control, (Dewey, 1938, 64)...the power to frame purposes and to execute or carry into effect purposes so framed”

empowerment
connects the will to know with the will to become

**making and revealing connections**
continuity

**the soul**
“the vital, mysterious energy that can give meaning and purpose to our lives”
“ways of knowing that enhance [students’] capacity to live fully and deeply”
(hooks, 1994, p. 22) and support their “pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 2000, p. 47).

**quality of experience**
“The quality of any experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence upon later experiences.”
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