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The sustaining possibilities of service-learning engagements

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In this article, we explore two possibilities which arise from service-learning engagements, both from a narrative perspective. First, we consider the possibility that service-learning may be a sustaining experience for in-service teachers. And, second, we suggest that intentional inquiry into this experience for in-service teachers may foster the experience of sustaining themselves and of being sustained in their professional and personal lives. Through storying and re-storying our experiences during a service-learning engagement in Kenya over seven years ago and through storying the reverberations of these experiences in the intervening seven-plus years, we suggest that when attended to narratively, the interactions and situations encountered in intentional service-learning engagements through narrative inquiry give in-service teachers ways of sustaining themselves and being sustained as teachers.

Keywords: service-learning; narrative inquiry; reflective practice; teacher identity

Introduction: setting the study in context

At the request of a Kenyan school-sponsoring body to a Canadian non-profit partner agency, a professional development program was initiated to offer Kenyan teachers instructional strategies and introductory counseling skills (Nelson, 2003). This project offered support to Kenyan teachers from a large rural area which lacked access to on-going professional learning. The partnership also served to expand the global awareness of Canadian teachers. The two organizations did not act out of an identified service-learning program model. Simply, they developed a program for teachers in which Canadian teachers would share their expertise with Kenyan teachers and the Kenyan teachers would, in turn, share their resourcefulness with the visiting Canadians. The intent was to create a collaborative learning space. Through intentionally telling and re-telling our stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) in relation to the project, we, the Canadian teachers, came to speak of being sustained. We also began to consider the potential of service-learning as a way to sustain teachers in their work (Mitton-Killmer, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2009).

Based on the results of focus group discussions with Kenyan teachers prior to the launch of the program, the structure of the professional development program became a series of 10 courses to be offered in five two-week sessions during Kenyan school

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breaks over two years. Since the inception of the program in 2000, 115 Kenyan teachers have completed the program and 28 Canadian teachers have participated, often more than once.

Canadian teachers and professors of education participate in the project as facilitators, co-learners, and resource personnel. A Canadian academic institution ensures that a qualified professor, with a relevant advanced degree, is available for each course. Professors' expenses are covered by the project budget and volunteer teachers raise the costs required and offer their expertise to the professor in charge. By reflecting on our own experiences in the project and by the intentional telling and re-telling of our stories to live by, we, the Canadian teachers involved, came to notice that service-learning offers a way to sustain and restore ourselves in our teaching lives.

Understanding service-learning narratively

Service-learning is an approach to teaching and learning that blends the two so that both are enriched by each other (Anderson & Hill, 2001). It attempts to encapsulate Dewey's criteria for determining the worth of educative experiences: the individual grows intellectually and morally; the larger community benefits from the learning; and the experience leads to further growth (1938/1963). And, it 'has begun to take on mythic proportions in what educators claim it can accomplish' (Verducci & Pope, 2001, p. 3) regardless of the location – be that in local communities or in international venues.

Researchers identify service-learning's accomplishments as including the following: service-learning is an effective pedagogy for teaching and learning; is a means to foster social understanding, civic participation, and/or social transformation; prepares students for the workforce; can positively affect attitude change; and develops a sensitivity to diversity (Boyle-Baise, 1998; Erickson & Santmire, 2001; Verducci & Pope, 2001).

Verducci and Pope (2001) claim that participants in service-learning have also been provided with civic, social, moral, and personal benefits. In the service-learning literature, the 'participants' to which researchers refer have most often included K-12 students and pre-service teachers. This is consistent with the reality that most service-learning programs are offered for these populations. Faculty involvement with service-learning has been as providers and organizers rather than active participants (Jones, 2001).

In this article, we explore two possibilities which arise from service-learning engagements, both from a narrative perspective. First, we consider the possibility that service-learning may also be a positive experience for another population of participants – in-service teachers. And, second, we wonder if intentional inquiry into this experience for in-service teachers may foster the experience of sustaining themselves and of being sustained in their professional and personal lives.

From a narrative perspective, teachers' experience of sustenance in their professional and personal lives may be connected to the continuity of the unified narrative that constitutes their lives (Macintyre, 1981). The experience of being sustained and sustaining oneself – that is, in the authors' understanding, having courage, developing endurance, holding on to the essential purpose, feeling fulfilled, and staying committed for the long haul – has its possibility in the interactions and situations teachers encounter as they go about living their professional lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

We suggest that when attended to narratively, the interactions and situations encountered in intentional service-learning engagements through narrative inquiry give in-service teachers ways of sustaining themselves and being sustained as teachers. This possibility has surfaced both from a consideration of the literature on service-learning and through a narrative inquiry Carla, one of the co-authors, did in 2001 into the shifting identities of five in-service teachers (Nelson, 2003). We, the five Canadian teachers, did not enter into the service-learning opportunity hoping to gain sustenance. In fact, we expected the opposite. We were concerned that we would use precious vacation time and completely exhaust our already depleted creative energies after a full year of teaching. We were concerned that we would not be able to offer our best to the Kenyan teachers because of being emotionally, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually drained at the end of the school year. And, we were concerned that we would not have the time or energy to navigate the multitude of commitments of family and community we each carry.

The surprising result was that service-learning introduced us to a sustaining space that added richness to our personal and professional lives and restored us so that we re-entered our home educational landscapes with shifted perspectives on relationships, purpose, priorities, and ourselves. The experience made us question our quantitative ways of being -how do we keep the number of activities and relationships in our lives manageable – to wondering about a qualitative existence – is the number of activities as important as the kinds when it comes to the question of sustenance. Our service-learning experience started us thinking about the sustaining powers inherent in service-learning for our sustaining space continued well after our experience ended. This article explores this wonder through the re-storying of our experiences during the 2001 service-learning engagement in Kenya and through storying the reverberations of those experiences in the subsequent seven-plus years of our professional lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000):

Ken: This is not supposed be about getting re-energized for another year of teaching. But that's why I go there ... It restores me so I can teach in Canada for another year. (Before the service-learning experience in Kenya.) Note: Ken had been to Kenya to participate in the professional development program prior to the experience which included the 2001 study.

The 2001 study

During the August 2001 session, Carla was committed to studying our experience through narrative inquiry. This inquiry evolved into Carla's doctoral dissertation (Nelson, 2003, 2008). Its intent was to learn how our experience would shift our stories to live by, by telling them to one another as we prepared for the project and by re-telling them as we reflected on it afterwards (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 1999). For a period of nine months, three weeks of which were spent in Kenya, Carla researched the stories to live by of five Canadian teachers (including Carla). She collected data in the form of transcribed conversations and email correspondence as the group prepared for, participated in, and then reflected on their service-learning experience.

The study is positioned within narrative understandings of teacher knowledge, including the view that teachers' and students' lives are central to the curriculum of teacher education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). Three narrative understandings of teacher knowledge are important to this article. First, following Connelly and

master's degree in education. Carla had been a teacher and guidance counselor in both public and private schools for 16 years. She is a chartered psychologist with master's degrees in educational psychology and divinity, and, at the time of the 2001 study, was a doctoral candidate.

The service-learning opportunity in Kenya was the experience that drew us into the space of an intentional knowledge community (Craig, 1995):

Ken: This is why I want my colleagues to come here. I have some colleagues who ... oh Africa is not supposed to be about their learning how to teach (Laughter), but they could learn some things ... Just some excuse to talk about why we do what we do and how we could do it differently. (Before Kenya)

Dana: The teachers at my school ... don't tend to talk about education but they do take a genuine interest in each other. (While in Kenya)

Lany: At teachers' conventions, we usually talk about the shopping. That's what it usually is for me. People steer away from education things. I got to the point where I didn't want to go at all. (While in Kenya)

These quotations reveal delight in working with a small group of colleagues committed to a focused project. Being removed from our home landscapes and from the intensity of schedules, family, and technology, we discovered ways of living centered on conversation and interaction, on living alongside and in relationship with one another. Living this other way – in relationship with each other on this removed landscape – brought remorse over our inattention to the possibilities teaching offers on our home professional landscapes. Ken reflected, while in Kenya, on his learning through having time to talk with colleagues as he noted that he 'would almost rather pay that money (North American conference fees) just to have a conversation ... If I had a day and half of talking with people -this is the way I learn'.

A new sense of learning alongside each other emerged as we entered into a service-learning engagement which provided the space to learn from each other by telling stories of the past and present and to living new stories. Together, we talked through the decisions of lesson design and delivery in a new context and shared stories after the sessions. These interactions gradually shifted into encouraging and being encouraged by one another. In the following interaction in Kenya, Ken assured Dana that her professional knowledge is important and appreciated:

Dana: We want to start off with what do we already know about instructional methods. What do we want to learn? A KWL looking at what is good instruction.

Ken: What does KWL mean?

Dana: What do I know? What do I want to know? And what did I learn?

Ken: Ah. Am I the only one here that doesn't know that?

Dana: That's okay. No one on my staff knew either. It is one of those things.

Ken: My head is just spinning. I think this is going to be like getting a B.Ed. in a week. So right now I feel like I have more revising to do for this coming year than I did this morning at 8 o'clock. I would just like to change everything. (While in Kenya)

Having a safe place to voice that which we do not know, that which we fear, and that which makes us feel inadequate in our professional lives allowed us to open spaces for new learning. Living alongside one another during the service-learning project allowed us to attend differently to those times on our home landscapes wherein these spaces were possible. It allowed us to savor them differently and to realize that these spaces help sustain us. Wendy told of one such learning space with a Grade 1 teacher on her staff:

Wendy: I think he was getting ready to quit or take a leave of absence because he was so burnt out. He had no enjoyment anymore. There were certain workshops that I thought would be really good for him to go to ... I also kept shoving books at him that I thought he would be interested in. It was kind of like a fire got lit under him again. He is just so excited. People kind of get tired of hearing about his stories because he will try a new strategy or a new method and he is always running up to me and telling me what he has tried. He is just so excited about what is happening. For the first time in about twelve years, he feels like he knows how to teach reading. That has been really exciting and it has been quite infectious in some ways. We have met twice already in July to start planning things for September so, it will be good. (While in Kenya)

The service-learning experience helped sustain us by allowing us to shape a knowledge community (Craig, 1995) in which living alongside one another became a source for learning. We see this in the above excerpt as Ken learned from Dana. And, we also became alert to the learning that was being shared among the Kenyan teachers. Wendy was the one who first awakened us to how 'this experience would be giving them a network and that they would be developing friendships this week as well ... It is so good to think that they have colleagues that have experienced the same thing they have and shared that' (while in Kenya).

The service-learning engagement allowed us both to live our own experience and to witness a similar experience being lived among our Kenyan colleagues. The two experiences overlapped (Bateson, 2000) and each reassured the other of its goodness. Wendy had a glimmer that this would be the case prior to going to Kenya as she spoke of her frustration with her school board and her school and some of her colleagues:

Wendy: I was feeling like the last thing I wanted to do with my summer was spend three more weeks being an on-duty teacher. But you know, today, my heart kicked in. I get to spend time this summer with dedicated teachers who truly want to learn and grow professionally – both in Canada and Africa! I get to hang out with some remarkable friends and participate in a neat program all at the same time. (Before Kenya)

Before, during, and even after the service-learning engagement, we, the five teacher participants experienced the richness of living alongside one another as we intentionally engaged in an educational task. We were sustained by a strengthened and deepened trust in each other, through support in the development of one another's professional skills, and by telling, hearing, and retelling stories of how we lived in our worlds. We learned, as Bateson (2000) observed, that we are not alone even when we are with strangers.

Being sustained through being awakened

Our service-learning experience provided the awakening experience (Greene, 1995) of seeing aspects of the educational landscape that we had not seen before. The possibility that what had often been a source of discouragement on our home landscapes actually held glimmers of hope, and the reality that we do not tend to be grateful for the good that we do have gave us courage. Several interactions during our time in Kenya gave rise to this reflection.

We were awakened to glimmers of hope on our home landscapes through hearing the stories of our Kenyan colleagues on theirs. They told us about their system in which the national body responsible for hiring teachers has the authority to place

teachers in schools with vacancies, often at a great distance from their home area. When this happens, the teacher often goes to the school and leaves the family behind. Larry spoke of this as 'the commitment from the teachers. They are just so hard working and so committed' (while in Kenya).

We heard stories of toxic schools in which colleagues intentionally lied about another colleague, often resulting in the destruction of career and family relationships. Dana retold a story which one of our Kenyan colleagues told her:

Dana: [T]here was this headmaster who used to harass the staff. One day the headmaster was away and they went into the office and typed a letter which said that he had exited service [was resigning]. The teachers signed it and sent it off to the head office. Later, the headmaster couldn't figure out why he wasn't getting paid. (While in Kenya)

We were attuned to the religious language that the Kenyan teachers used. Their frequent references to God jarred our professionally sterile language. Carla helped us puzzle over how an authoritative learning system with scarce resources produced adults with such a keen desire for, and commitment to, life-long learning as she observed, 'these teachers are more engaged and desirous of learning something new than any group of teachers I have ever been with in any workshop' (while in Kenya). And Ken voiced our attempt to comprehend the societal issues present in Kenyan classrooms: 'Very few of our schools would face some of the ... horrendous social pressures that the Kenyan schools are facing' (while in Kenya).

The process of being awakened is one of becoming aware of possibilities – possibilities of new understanding. It seems possible that we were given courage to continue in our own educational projects by having been exposed to projects more troubled than our own: that is, Canadian teachers do not tend to live with the threat of being transferred to a school which would necessitate their living away from their family for a week, a month, or even a term at a time. Canadian teachers do not tend to live with HN/AIDS constantly threatening the health of students and families, let alone ourselves and our own families. The service-learning experience, for a time, lifted us out of cynicism and negativity to the possibility of gratitude. This experience is representative of those encounters that Bateson (2000) describes as helping to compose perspectives in new ways. It is a process of discovering the familiar in the strange, of attending and double attending, of reimagining the future:

Ken: Well, I am always so grateful for the TV and the CD player and the Xerox machine and all the stuff that we have. I go there [to Kenya] and you have this really unmediated experience. If you write with chalk, you write on the wall. If you want to give copies of something to somebody, you hang it on the wall and they copy it. It is all direct experience – the laundry, the dishes, the vegetables, the dirt, the bathroom. It is all unmediated. It is so good for me. It is so inefficient. You get about one third done in a given day but it is so good for you to get reduced to these basic elements of water, fire, air, and dirt. It is good for me to go there and come back and be able to say, it doesn't really matter if I can't show the movie today because somebody else grabbed my TV. (After Kenya)

The stark differences of the Kenyan educational landscape helped to bring to the fore the aspects of our home educational landscape that were either missing or latent or invisible. Given the Kenyan teachers' stories of invasions of privacy and lack of resources, we were awakened to our lack of gratitude for what we had at home.

The service-learning engagement offered possibilities of new perspectives through being awakened. In our experience, we were awakened to the possibility that the content of our lessons was valuable, that some aspects of our home landscapes ought not to be taken for granted, that inefficiency may sometimes be positive, and that not all teachers in the world dislike professional development.

Being sustained through resonances of the familiar on an unknown landscape

One of the evident concerns voiced by all the five Canadian teachers prior to traveling to Kenya was that perhaps the two landscapes were so different that no connections, be it with course content or with professional relationships, would occur. We were mindful of the differences of race, location, economic status, access to formal study, and political systems. However, the stories that emerged as we lived alongside one another allowed resonances to the familiar. Again, as Bateson (2000) reflects, similarities become the links to that which is, at first, strange.

. Wendy resonated with one of the Kenyan teacher's stories of concern for students with special learning needs:

Wendy: Michael and I were talking about how children with special needs fall through the cracks and they are not being serviced and they are not being allowed to reach their potential. And I feel the same way with our funding policy that they have to be two academic years behind and all of those things. I feel like it is the same kind of ethical questions that we are all wrestling with. (While in Kenya)

Larry offered another story of connection. His was with a Kenyan teacher's story of managing Jar::_. age differentials between students in the same classroom:

Larry: I used to be a teacher and administrator in the Arctic, in Aboriginal schools. We had this kind of problem too where you have much older boys in the younger grades and you had to give them opportunities for respected participation in the class even though they were still learning to read. Much older students – one just came to mind. She was an 11-year-old girl in Grade 2 living with her boyfriend in her mother and father's house. He was 25. (While in Kenya)

Both Wendy's and Larry's stories of connection to the Kenyan teachers' experiences helped them bring to the surface a tension they wrestled with in their teaching lives. Wrestling along with a tension may lead a teacher to conclude that the tension is really of his or her own making. However, when the tension is named by a colleague half a world away, both Wendy and Larry were affirmed in their professional knowledge of their home landscape.

Being alert to the resonances of home in the unknown context helped those in the project identify what is core for them in our teaching. Hearing the Kenyan teachers' stories of the impact of societal issues on students' ability to be successful in school connected both Wendy and Larry to the helplessness they have often felt on their home landscapes. Coming to know that this is a reality on landscapes other than their own helped us, as teachers, acknowledge 'the intimate strangeness of the known' (Bateson, 2000, p. 15).

The resonances of familiarity brought comfort. Personally, the resonances soothed the discomfort of being away from family, language, tastes, and rhythms. Professionally, they reassured us by affirming that our professional struggles are not always of our own making. We lived on other teachers' landscapes and discovered familiar

plotlines of frustration and impotence. Living alongside other teachers' stories provided space to re-consider our own stories. We were given the possibility to re-consider the tensions we face in our professional lives in the spaces between who we are and what the landscape asks of us.

It might not just be tensions that live in the spaces between who we are and what the landscape asks of us. Celebrations and affirmations may also live there. Larry, who was living the story of retiring from teaching with a mixed sense of satisfaction with his career, was able to live alongside the Kenyan teachers' satisfaction with their teaching lives:

Larry: I think they felt inspired. My group seemed to feel vindicated – teaching isn't a bad thing after all. It is pretty good. My group, all of them, said that they wanted to continue teaching. They really felt that they were making a difference. That was really good to hear. (While in Kenya)

Living our teacher identities on an unfamiliar landscape provided the resonances of the familiar which echoed comfort and offered grounding in our own stories to live by.

Year 2001: Being sustained through service-learning -immediate learning

The above three threads were pulled across all the five of the Canadian teachers' reflections before, during, and after the 2001 teaching in Kenya. However, narrative inquiry emphasizes the importance of pulling threads from the narrative continuity of a single life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For this reason, the following section offers the individual threads that emerged during the three months immediately after our service-learning experience in Kenya. During those three months, Carla reflected with each teacher on the influence the project had on their teaching lives.

Ken identified how his involvement in the service-learning engagement brought new life to his teaching practice, specifically through having been away from his home landscape and all the distractions it presents. At first, he did not think that being part of the service-learning engagement had changed his practice much. He identified that it was being in the class as a learner that affected his practice. He quickly realized, however, that he would not have been in a class if it had not been for the service-learning opportunity:

Ken: I don't think that my practice is going to be changed much by being in Africa, Carla, as much as by being in the class which, that's the point! It couldn't have happened anywhere else! I have not taken a class in what, ten years? You have to get people who have Ph.D.'s [such as me] to Mitaboni in order to get them to sit down and take a class.

Ken's learning helped the rest of us attend to just how much we each take for granted on our home landscapes and posed the possibility that gratitude may sustain teachers. He recalled being struck by the fact that the Kenyan teachers did not write in the manuals that we had prepared for them:

Ken: I come home kind of rebuked each time because we print up this manual. They won't write in it. Even if we left huge spaces, they won't write in it, so that they can keep it brand new. I think we have so little regard here because we can print it again or run another copy off the computer. They have this regard that just kind

of shocks you for anything new or nice or even a pen, a freebie pen, from your school. We all have a box of pens that we just gather.

Ken's involvement motivated him to try new teaching methods that he saw demonstrated by his fellow participants in the service-learning engagement. He even set himself the goal to implement one new method a week:

Ken: This is the third week and I just did my third new method today. Yea, so my teaching got revolutionized by the second week of my time there ... [I]t has been interesting to see my students respond to what are genuinely better methods than the way I was doing it.

Ken established relationships with the other participants which generated the desire to have similar professional relationships on his home landscape. He felt like he made new friends and was challenged by the conversations and planning:

Ken: It was really a good experience -the kind of thing I wish I had with my colleagues actually. I said that there. I wish we could talk like that at work.

Larry's involvement provided an opportunity to reflect on his career and identify how the restorative features of the experience would have sustained him in his teaching life had they been part of it. Specifically, he identified a sense of calling to the teaching profession and the importance of intentionally attending to experiences on the landscape when they arise:

Larry: In some respects I felt like it was a great shame for me that it was happening now when I was finished my teaching career instead of much earlier – especially in terms of things like the calling to teach which gives a very different dimension to what we get in teachers college and university here. I thought that was very significant because it is a calling and a very important one. As teachers, we do shape the next generation to a very great extent and I do know that very often we are the most positive role models that kids have. It is quite a responsibility.

Larry's experience echoes Bateson's (2000) notion of teachers learning and learning as teachers. He experienced this by being requested to teach several sessions on classroom management during the service-learning engagement. The opportunity to articulate his embodied personal practical knowledge allowed his identity as a learner to surface:

Larry: In terms of professional development, it was excellent because we had to focus on what is significant if we are going to teach it. There is nothing like teaching something to make you attend to it in a different way. That helped a lot because I had never paid that close attention to those topics that I taught as I did for this.

Dana's involvement in the project sustains her moment by moment during her teaching day, providing her with a new perspective on her teaching context:

Dana: I was pushing my cart the other day and I found myself complaining about having to move my cart full of books and resources from room to room and then I found myself thinking, 'well, at least I have an overhead. This room has an overhead! At least I can bring my overheads. I can teach with my overheads. At least I have books to push from room to room.' I think I will be constantly

framing or re-framing things relative to what our colleagues in Kenya would have or what they would be thinking.

Dana also developed a new appreciation for professional relationships that continue to be a source of support and inspiration for her. She intentionally stayed connected to the participants in the service-learning engagement and she wondered about how to pursue developing these kinds of relationships on her home landscape. Specifically, she voiced her professional and personal appreciation of who Wendy has become in her life:

Dana: I had never seen Wendy teach. We have talked about teaching but just to watch her teach and to see the thoroughness with which she goes through her planning. I realized I need to put a little bit more effort in what I do. That was really wonderful. I have already used a couple things from her in my classroom these past couple of weeks. It was just a wonderful enriching experience as friends. With Wendy, we call each other -'just need to hear your voice'. That is wonderful.

Dana experienced affirmation from the group, something she had not typically received on her home landscape and it translated into new confidence upon her return:

Dana: You and Ken kept going on about - 'oh, this is going to revolutionize my teaching'. (Laughter) It was almost like a confidence shot and an affirmation so I feel like I am a more confident person ... even in the staff room, just in conversation with other people. I am a little more willing to ask them about them. I have noticed, maybe not a huge change, but a slight movement in another direction. It is a movement in the degree of confidence and affirmation in what I do. I think I really needed it. It doesn't necessarily mean that I want to change my teaching but it was a good affirmation of what I do and that what I do is valuable and that it is okay to be there and that this is maybe where I am supposed to be.

And Dana was impacted by the intentionality with which some of our group members engaged on-going professional learning:

Dana: Another part of it for me was watching all of you continue to read and to think in the field. Wendy asked me to find some articles so I went through the pile of articles I got last year and I realized - I hadn't read them ... I realized the value of having discussions. Wendy is talking about doing a professional development group in her school - reading articles and coming together to discuss them. I'm thinking, 'well, would that work at my school'?

Wendy's involvement in the service-learning project affirmed that which she had already come to value in her teaching life. She had valued professional relationships prior to being in Kenya, and the project strengthened and deepened this commitment:

Wendy: I wonder about the importance of relationship in professional development. There have been times when I have gone to a conference and I have been one of 200 or 1000 people and there have been inspiring things. But there is something about sharing a similar story whether that is of faith or friendship or learning. If you have relationship, if you have someone who has been along side you and experienced the same thing, just how much richer that is ... [B]eing able to do that in a learning community is much more powerful than doing that in isolation.

The relationships formed in Kenya have encouraged Wendy to continue living her identity as a resource both with her service-learning colleagues and with her colleagues on her school landscape:

Wendy: Ken called the other night and was telling me that he has committed himself to implement one new method a week this year. Silly man! (Laughter) But, he is doing it! He said that he was struggling with this one method and he just picked up the phone and phoned for clarification. It felt like Mitaboni all over again. (Laughter) ... I think there are teachers on my staff who are just coasting. They are just burying their head and saying, 'I am just going to get through this. I am going to do what I have always done'. I thought it was really exciting for someone to say, 'I am going to do this and my students are going to benefit and I am going to benefit from new learning'.

Wendy: Our evening time in the cottage [in Mitaboni] felt like family. It was safe and caring and a place where you could take lots of risks ... I think that is the kind of thing we all wish for in our school environments is to have colleagues with whom we can be open and plan and work things out together rather than feel we have to be the expert and hide behind our closed doors. We could be very open and share things openly about what we know and what we think works and where we feel like our failures are and get input from other people. Those two weeks felt like that was that kind of environment. These were people that we could trust and learn and grow with and just be open with. That was really refreshing.

The five of us returned from Kenya to our home landscapes, arriving just a few days prior to the launch of another school year in our Canadian schools. Our pre-experience anticipation of an intense, tiring time of teaching and learning while other colleagues were holidaying on familiar territory had proven accurate. However, we had not anticipated encountering gifts of learning that would help sustain our on-going teaching lives.

Year 2009: participant reflections -long-term learning

It has been more than seven years since the five Canadians in the 2001 study participated in the service-learning experience in Kenya. Four are still working in education (Carla, Dana, Ken, and Wendy) and one has retired (Lairy). While the above reflections were made during and within three months after the project, the following reflections came more than seven years later. The four team members still working in education began to reflect specifically on how we have been sustained in the profession over these past seven years because of our involvement in the experience.

Ken articulated three dimensions of his teaching life that were developed through involvement in the project in Kenya: a deep sense of gratitude, the discovery of his 'core teacher program', and the value of rich collegial conversation about teaching. The deep gratitude came from recognizing the resources available in Canada. Negatively, gratitude might become a kind of 'aren't we lucky' nationalism where 'I'm glad I teach here and not there'. He reflected that Canadians, such as we five, visit Kenya and compare Kenyan school resources with Canadian ones. But, for Ken, this gratitude also found other expressions. Post-Kenya, Ken found himself complaining less about such everyday inconveniences as dead remote-control batteries or the photocopier being on another floor of his school. He found that his cognitive category, 'old edition of a textbook', needed revision. Four months before one of Ken's later trips to Kenya, Alberta teachers went on strike for higher pay. As unpopular as such an admission is in some

circles, he started to think that he might actually have enough. After five trips to work alongside Kenyan teachers, gratitude has become part of Ken's identity as a teacher.

Ken's second shift in identity related to his discovery of what he now calls his core teaching program. This discovery came from his reflections on teaching in a setting with too few print materials, no electronic equipment, and no photocopying. As do many social studies teachers, Ken stocks his Canadian classroom with maps, books, DVDs, stationery, posters, and other materials to enhance student-learning. Because he taught 15 steps from the school photocopier, he could decide on the spur of the moment to photocopy from a magazine and produce an instant class. In Kenya, even though the context was that of adult professional development and not a high school social studies class, he discovered that he could teach without doing so. In fact, he found himself stripped of almost all the resources he typically uses. The Kenyan classroom in which he found himself during the service-learning project contained a blackboard painted on the concrete wall, 40 Kenyan teachers, and intermittent electricity.

As volunteer instructors, we produced in advance a course manual of 50-150 pages, which we distributed on the first day of the course. Aside from the manual, we usually had no photocopying available during the weeks of our teaching. With no computer equipment, no overhead projector, and no video or audio, Ken felt cast upon his own resources. We recognized two advantages -that the Kenyan colleagues in the program are masterful oral learners and that they dearly wanted the material brought to them. Kenyan hunger for learning, notwithstanding, in these circumstances, Ken discovered his core teaching program: the students, the printed material, the chalkboard, and his repertoire of teaching skills:

Ken: My discovery of what I really could do as a teacher did not mean that I went back to Canada and stopped photocopying, or stopped using computers, or stopped using video and audio equipment. But ... I went back with a new understanding of my own identity as a teacher and a deeply visceral grasp of what I now call the core fact of teaching which is that the students and I need to tangle with some material so that they and I come away from the class with new learning. I also went back with joy and with pride. I knew that ... I had the chutzpah to stand up in a room in another country and start a class. Knowing I could do this changed my image of myself - my identity - as a teacher deeply and powerfully.

The third discovery Ken made about his teacher identity connects to his relationships with his colleagues. During the years spanning his five involvements in the project in Kenya, his teaching responsibilities in Canada included part-time teaching in a secondary school and part-time college teaching. In both of those contexts, Ken valued his colleagues and even periodically socialized with some of them. But in retrospect, he confessed that he did not have much conversation with them about the fundamental questions of curriculum and teaching, except perhaps on professional days or periodically over a coffee. For the most part, his relationships with those with whom he taught were congenial or convivial but not collegial:

Ken: When I reflect on my involvement in nine different courses in Kenya over five summers, one of my outstanding memories is of earnest conversation about education most evenings after dinner. Some obvious conditions enabled or induced such conversations: complete darkness by 6:00 pm, lack of transport, some concerns about personal safety, lack of electricity, staying in a village that offered nothing to the visitor, lack of a library, television, or computer. Some of these conditions I don't want to reproduce where I now live, but I would like to know how to structure my life and time and the hallways in which I work so that I have to engage

habitually in those conversations. I cannot find such conversations without flying 9000 miles and living in straightened conditions, then I have too many 'ironies' in the fire. But there is more about identity here than discovering colleagues. I also discovered that teachers, I among them, like to talk about education, beyond complaining about students or administrators.

Repeated trips to Kenya convinced Ken that most teachers, when offered the right circumstances, become quite passionate and articulate about the philosophical and social aspects of their work. His sense of his own identity as a teacher and of other teachers' identities changed as he watched successive groups reflect deeply about teaching.

Dana continued to be sustained by involvement in the service-learning experience in moment-by-moment ways, by being reminded that her knowledge is valued, that she still has more to learn, and by the value of relationships whether professional or not.

The service-learning experience seven summers ago provided an opportunity for meaningful conversation about education that has stayed with her. Those conversations – hearing the ideas of those gathered, sharing learning and planning, and problem-solving collaboratively – affirmed many of her teaching practices and challenged others. There was an opportunity for critical thinking that engaged her and added value to the experience. This possibility presented itself from the outset when the Edmonton-based team members gathered to plan and to dream. She remembered sitting around the living room, chart paper ready, mapping out an instructional methods and classroom management course. 'There were many ideas, not just about what to include, but also about what instructional methods actually were. We brainstormed and recorded. We scratched out, added, and revised'. Dana remembered the energy and excitement in the room, a sense of purpose, a confidence that the group would make a difference. That purpose and excitement remained strong for her as the planning continued in both face-to-face meetings and through email and long-distance phone conversations. That excitement and purpose sustained her through the challenge of leaving her family for three weeks and it sustained her husband as he shared this experience with her from home.

During the 2001 project, Dana was sustained by the rich conversations we shared as a group. She remembered being cognizant of being recorded as we sat together each evening reviewing, planning, and sharing our observations, challenges, successes, and dreams. But Dana was convinced that the conversations would have been just as rich without the tape recorder. The teachers who came together in Mitaboni in August 2001 were people who, like her, valued dialogue as a way of 'thinking about what they think', working through ideas, validating ways of thinking about teaching, coming together to create something deeper and clearer than it was before. Dialogue was, and continues to be, a way to gain clarity and be challenged to think of things in new ways and from new perspectives. While she did not always agree with what her colleagues and friends said, she did become a better listener and learned not only from those with whom she disagreed but also from observing how others entered into the conversations and honored what was said.

Remembering those conversations has sustained her in the years since the project. They motivate her to take the initiative for those kinds of conversations in her life and work at home. This has not always been an easy task for Dana: life is full and there is much to do, so sometimes the interaction gets passed by. At work, she tries to make room for conversation among her staff as a way to build their capacity and challenge them to think about their work as it connects to a bigger picture.

Dana still has the welded sign, a gift Ken and Carla had made for Dana (as well as one for Wendy and Larry) of the letters WWDD standing for 'What Would Dana Do?':

Dana: WWDD hangs on the wall of my office at work. It reminds me that what I have to contribute to my work and the conversations I have in that context are worthwhile. It reminds me that there are people who value my expertise, and it helps me to remember that I need to value the expertise of others as well. I have caught myself wondering more than once, what would I do? (insert the name of a friend or colleague who I know would handle a particular situation far better than I would). It works! Finally, WWDD reminds me to be humble, not boastful or arrogant, about what I know, because it also reminds me that there is so much more learning to be done. The quote by Nieto (2003, p. 125) struck me: '[Teachers] need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for through their dialogue and collaboration with peers, through ongoing and consistent study, and through deep reflection about their craft'.

Dana is sustained by memories of singing, eating, laughing, and learning together with her amazing Kenyan colleagues. Their commitment to learning and to making a difference in the lives of their students is admirable. She learned and is sustained by the knowledge that we share similar challenges and opportunities in our education systems: meeting the needs of all learners in our classrooms, including those with special education needs; accountability pillars, including standardized testing; and opening the doors of our classrooms, including a willingness to share with and learn from our colleagues.

Dana continues to find ways to make the most of the expertise and knowledge in her district. She tucks away new ideas and methods that she might one day include a new resource that her department produces or share with Kenyan teachers in hopes of introducing something fresh and new into their repertoire.

The experience of Kenya returns to Dana in many ways, like overlapping circles (Bateson, 2000), and introduces connections in her life that might not have been formed otherwise. Riding the bus to work one morning, she connected with a single mother, whose son is in her son's school and out-of-school care. They both were a bit shy but, one day, there was an empty seat beside this mother and Dana asked if she might sit down. They talked about the approaching winter and Dana asked her about her home country. She told Dana that she is from Kenya and that this was their first winter in Canada. Dana was able to tell her that she had traveled to Kenya and that she loves her country and its people very much. A connection was formed and their shyness gone. Two weeks later, the mother and her son returned to Kenya. Dana is still in Canada wishing she had made the connection sooner.

Another new connection formed because of the on-going presence of the learning Kenya offered her:

Dana: Last week, I received a call from a woman whose company is providing a writing workshop that I am organizing. When I see her name on the call display, I almost don't pick up because she has been a bit persistent about some workshop details we have chosen not to go with. I take a deep breath and answer. She is calling to ask if a potential instructor may join the participants in our course to find out more about what a two-day workshop involves. She tells me he is from Kenya, and my eyes immediately travel to the photos I have hanging in my office. I tell her I have been to Kenya and would be happy to have him join us, if only so I can meet him. It turns out that the woman I am speaking with taught in Kenya for three years, at the time of Kenya's independence: suddenly we have connected on another level and we talk for fifteen minutes about places to eat great African

food, a new coffee shop opened by a Kenyan woman here in Edmonton, and an organization in British Columbia, called Harambe, that she plans to volunteer with when she retires. We share a knowledge of what Harambe means and the importance of 'coming together' in the Kenyan culture. Kenya sustains me, by providing opportunities for Harambe, for coming together, with others here in Edmonton. And for that I am blessed and I am thankful.

Wendy's reflections on being sustained because of involvement in the service-learning experience revealed a growing clarity of purpose in her teacher identity. Her educational life exemplifies a narrative perspective of the interwoven nature of context, knowledge, and identity. For the past 11 years, Wendy has worked in a city that has one of the highest child poverty rates per capita in Ontario, as well as an alarmingly high functional illiteracy rate among its adult population. Because many children in her schools grow up in the households figuring in these statistics, Wendy looks to schools to help children make different choices about their futures:

Wendy: Many years ago, I heard Miriam Trehearne, an international literacy expert who hails from Calgary, give a presentation at a teachers' conference and at one point, she used the word 'gaps'. This word has stuck with me. If we understand gaps to be about inequities, then it strikes me that education is about closing the gaps. This is true from the individual level to the larger community level. There are gaps not only between have and have-not schools and between supported and less-supported students, but also between skilled and less-skilled teachers.

While most of Wendy's previous academic studies had been aimed at closing the gaps in her own personal knowledge and effective instructional practices, a shift began in 1999-2001 when she was first asked to teach a few sessions each term in an additional qualifications course for those wanting to work as teacher librarians. The next stage in this shift came with our first trip to be with Kenyan teachers in 2001. That trip remains a significant touchstone for her because it offered two communities of teachers an opportunity to meet and share their commitment to addressing their students' gaps by developing their skills as teachers. However, the time in Mitaboni also marks a transition in her life. Before Kenya, she had not been thinking about shifting from teaching children to teaching adults, but from that time onward, she took the path toward teaching teachers. This new path led Wendy to a master's program in 2003 and from there to working as an elementary language arts consultant for her school board:

Wendy: So, how has Mitaboni sustained me? In my master's studies I came across Richard Allington's ...[conclusion] that 'effective teachers manage to produce better achievement regardless of which curriculum materials, pedagogical approach, or reading program they use'. Allington's words, among many others I read on educational leadership that year, confirmed how I'd begun to see my role as an educator shift in focus – from working on personal change in pedagogy to systemic changes in pedagogy. When I think back to the teachers I met in Kenya, I am struck by how much they were able to accomplish with very little material or curricular support. What they needed was time to reflect together on the profession of teaching, try out new instructional practices together, and to be re-inspired by being in each other's company. While they needed time away from their classrooms to do this, their enthusiasm and new knowledge transferred directly back to the kids. Don't we all want to make a difference in our world in some small way? What sustains me or gives my working days life is a commitment to making schools better places to learn, where all children can achieve. My work now as an educator is about narrowing the gap for children

by assisting teachers to shift their instructional practices to ones that make them effective practitioners in the classroom.

Wendy went to Kenya a second time to be part of the service-learning session in 2006. These two experiences to Kenya connected her to other teachers who have the same commitment to kids and teaching as she does. She continued to be struck by how our lives are so different and, yet, not. She realized that she sustains her own energy and focus for being a teacher by being challenged to prepare and present materials that she thinks will be helpful and energizing to others. The whole process of professional learning – selecting new teaching ideas, thinking about how to present materials and to assess student-learning, is how she sustains herself. She considers herself fortunate to have names and faces and stories about Kenyan colleagues and their teaching lives that have become part of her teacher identity:

Wendy: Several years ago, my church anointed my palms with oil when they 'missioned' me for my work as an educator. Systemic change is ever so slow and many days it does not feel like I am making any difference at all. There are days when I miss classroom life with children, but I believe that by playing a role in helping teachers shift to more effective practices, that more children will have a choice out of poverty, family dysfunction, illiteracy, or general disengagement in school.

Conclusion: the sustaining possibilities of service-learning

Service-learning engagements in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions offer many documented benefits to students and pre-service teachers (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001; Verducci & Pope, 2001). The narrative inquiry set in a service-learning context with Canadian teachers in Kenya and its follow-up study described in this article, proposes that in-service teachers also benefit from service-learning involvement especially when the learning is attended to within a narrative inquiry framework (Mitton-Killmer, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2009). Narrative inquiry helps facilitate the participants of service-learning engagements to create new understandings of their contexts, their work projects and their lives – new spaces in which to consider the landscape of their teaching lives:

The contribution of narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field. Furthermore, many narrative studies are judged to be important when they become literary texts to be read by others not so much for the knowledge they contain but for the vicarious testing of life possibilities by readers of the research that they permit (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

Not all teachers will have the opportunity to be involved in an international service-learning engagement like the one described in this article. However, all teachers are invited to lay their current teaching lives alongside the lives of those of us who have lived the experiences presented in this article and of those of us who are living alongside others on their professional landscapes hoping, as well, for the creation of a sustaining space. Formal service-learning opportunities are readily available in most communities and informal intentional learning opportunities exist for all teachers. All of these have the potential to help us attend to the experiences of our teaching lives so that 'a new sense of meaning and significance' may surface in our every day lives.

The narrative inquiry into the service-learning space that was created by our experience in Kenya revealed that, over the span of more than seven years after the service-learning engagement, we were being sustained by being part of an intentional knowledge community. Our rich conversations about education generally and the complexity of teaching and learning specifically sustained us by giving us the opportunity to learn from and teach one another. We were sustained by reconnecting with the value of relationships and by being awakened to unattended aspects of one's home educational landscape. We were sustained by being invited to try new pedagogical practices in context, by being exposed to never-before-seen aspects of the educational landscape, and by recognizing similarities on unfamiliar educational landscapes. The experience both forced us to and invited us to evaluate our core identities as teachers and encouraged us to develop a new sense of gratitude for certain aspects of our home educational landscape. We were sustained by living alongside teachers who live differently on their educational landscapes, by seeing oneself as one who can initiate an improved home educational landscape, and, by being challenged to hone a perspective of gratitude to both work and life.

Our sustaining space happened to be created through a service-learning opportunity in Kenya. However, the nature of the space, as described above, is not geographically dependent. It is the participation in service-learning engagements specifically, and intentional learning engagements generally, which create spaces which have the possibility to develop ways to sustain in-service teachers in their teaching lives.

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