

**THE EDUCATION OF A STAY-AT-HOME DAD AND HIS CHILDREN:
REFLECTIONS ON 20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCES
DOCUMENTED IN A DIARY
AND INTERPRETED FOR EVIDENCE OF EDUCATIONAL WISDOM**

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Abstract

In this case study, I use autoethnographic and diary research methods to explore with three of my adult children the diary I wrote during the 20 years (1995-2015) that I was a stay-at-home dad in the United States. Increasing numbers of men choose to be the primary caregiver of their children and this major change in family structures is frequently interpreted from a perspective which emphasises gender roles and redefining masculinity. Some stay-at-home dads reject gender identity as key to understanding our experiences and instead suggest that education matters more. My diary sheds light on this educational priority in a detailed narrative. At the most fundamental level, I offered my children a reliable adult presence to offer the relationship and ‘serve and return’ interactions necessary to developing brain architecture for learning throughout the life course (Center on the Developing Child, 2009, 2011). Although I had no prior training as a teacher, these interactions retrospectively resemble the listening, documentation, and joy found in Reggio Emilia. They also embody education defined as ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977), especially in connections between my children and my parents, which contributed to a sense of belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023). Joined to the sense of belonging co-created in a home learning environment networked to the children’s school and other learning environments, these experiences confront a discourse of isolation often present in prior research on stay-at-home dads. At a more theoretical level, Bakhtinian dialogism as synthesised by Holquist (2002), the wayfaring way of being in the world theorised by Ingold (2007), and an understanding of study as love (Wison, 2022) helped to make visible our experiences as an enactment of a ‘pedagogy of the event’ as conceived by Biesta (2013). Accordingly, events of subjectivity emerge as a prioritized domain of education. I offer these experiences and their interpretations as an example of our practical, educational wisdom—our ‘virtuosity’—which is marked out as a purpose for life histories in educational research (Biesta, 2013). Finally, I suggest the possibility of a non-teleological turn which invites further dialogue for the possible use of such language to describe education.

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In the poetic word play of metonymy, crown might stand for king and king for the monarchy. It's in the spirit of this play that your names appear here. The irreplaceable uniqueness of your name crowns the conversation we share in eternal, festival responsibility.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this research, my adult children and I look at our experiences as they were documented in my diary during the 20 years I was a stay-at-home dad. Working together, we have found evidence of ‘educational wisdom’ (Biesta, 2013) in our shared experiences and wish to offer these findings as new knowledge to the field of education. However, the field of education has little precedent for the study of stay-at-home dads. So, perhaps the most urgent purpose of this introduction is to imagine first the audience of this work, followed closely by a need to demonstrate its relevance, rigor, and ‘impact’ for said audience.

1.1 Imagining an audience

This research is being presented here as a doctoral thesis. Any doctoral researcher, if they are to produce the utterance of a doctoral thesis, needs to imagine ‘someone who would perfectly understand what they were intending to say – the superaddressee’ (Dobson 2022, p. 999). It might also be helpful for the researcher to imagine the superaddressee as not singular. As a doctoral researcher, I recognise the need for broader research audiences.

It is no longer sufficient for higher education providers to solely focus on fostering academic research communication skills in their doctoral candidates, as a broader skillset is needed to communicate research effectively to diverse audiences. (Merga & Mason 2021, p. 672.)

By holding in mind such ‘diverse audiences,’ I am better prepared to produce a doctoral thesis which emerges as an effective utterance. So, what audiences—what superaddressees—might be imagined in order to make this research impactful?

First, this research addresses an audience of educators, purposefully offering a narrative of a life history with its ‘educational wisdom’ or ‘virtuosity’ (Biesta, 2013) in contexts of the home learning environment, intergenerational learning, and developmental norms and guidance. Pedagogies of listening and of the event come into play here, with dialogism serving to help illuminate these practices in everyday life. Thus examining these experiences through these educational perspectives, I offer educational theory as it has been lived, and only partially understood and only retrospectively, and offer new questions about how we might talk about the purpose of education. Educational researchers might also be interested in the methods used here. Negotiating a rigorous autoethnographic approach to diary research has been a significant source of learning within this project. It might benefit other who want to attempt using their own diary or reflective journal as a data source for creating narrative.

Second, this research addresses an audience of stay-at-home dads and those who research them, often from a gender perspective. This includes members of the international At-Home Dad Network, which provides support to its membership and encourages research (2022). It also includes social researchers Andrea Doucet (2004, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2018) and Catherine Richards Solomon (2017), whose work has been fundamental to the field. I offer to this audience an expansion on previous discoveries which indicate the importance of education in the experiences of stay-at-home dads, and especially the way it created for me opportunities for a sense of belonging and meaning making.

Third, but by no means least important, this research addresses the audience of its participants. In Ellis and Bochner's (2016) *Research Precepts for Interpretive Qualitative Research*, Precept 6 asserts that researchers have 'an ethical obligation to give something important back to the people and communities they study and write about'; similarly, precept 7 states, 'What researchers write should be "for" participants as much as "about" them' (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 56). This case study is most specifically about my family. The participants are three of my adult children and me. We participants might come closest to being the superaddressees who would 'perfectly understand.'



Figure 1. Research participants (left to right): Gus, Tom, Madeleine and Max Troppe (photo 24.12.2021)

So that the audience of my participants might be known, then, I introduce now my adult children, Madeleine, Max and Gus (Figure 1, above). The diary shows how I experienced our lives together when they were very small and in their teenage years. Today, they are 27, 24, and 22 years old,

respectively. When I asked them recently to introduce themselves within this thesis, Madeleine and Max sent me the following sketches.

1.1.1 Madeleine

Madeleine has a B.S. in mathematics, with minors in Spanish and computer science, from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. She used to work in anti-money laundering compliance at a large national bank. In August 2022, she accepted the invitation to make a “super sudden career change” and now teaches math and science at a Catholic middle school (Grades 5, 6, 7 and 8). She enjoys the students and loves integrating math and science with faith. She is eagerly awaiting her consecration as a virgin living in the world (an ancient form of consecrated life dating back to the time of the apostles). She looks forward to a life of spiritual marriage to Jesus, and to being an “undercover nun” — living a life of prayer and service without a convent or habit. A few of the many other things she enjoys include exercise, knitting, and her cat. (WA:28.01.2023)¹

1.1.2 Max

I’m an audio engineer with a focus in mixing records and also a bassist. I love to cook and to drive, and I enjoy working on my car when I’m able. I love my dog, Wally, a great deal. I prefer to surround myself with a deeply connected and small circle of people rather than a loosely related but larger group. I feel very strongly that gratitude and empathy are two of the most important qualities I possess. (IGDM:25.04.2022)

1.1.3 Gus

Gus has not yet responded to my request. I actually celebrate his silence in this matter. To me, it represents an expression of a promise of dialogism (Holquist, 2007) which I have encountered in the course of this research: I know that his situation is his response to me and in this instance the response appears as a silence, a waiting. I don’t think he will mind if I tell you that he is presently wrapping up an undergraduate degree in screenwriting at Point Park University in Pittsburgh. On a recent visit there, he drove me everywhere in his car while we listened together to recordings of my dad’s music and told each other stories of our current lives. I enjoyed taking a pint with him at some of his favourite places and having some laughs with him and his friends.

I also offer a sketch of present-day me. After 20 years as a stay-at-home dad, I returned with difficulty to the paid workforce. Three years ensued of low pay and long hours in jobs which did not match my education: the equivalent of a first place BA from a top US university, and another first for a master’s degree in library science from a top university in that field. In 2018, when all of my children had left home to pursue undergraduate degrees, I chose to pursue a second master’s

¹ Here, as throughout this research, the location of each event within the diary is represented in the format D1:10.04.1994, which indicates the diary volume number (D1) followed by the date represented as day:month:year. Similarly, dialogues are represented by the medium used—email (EM), Instagram Direct Message (IGDM), or WhatsApp (WA) message—followed by date of transmission in like date format.

degree in early childhood education and opted to study in the UK for the practical benefits of a shorter degree course and lower fees. Halfway through that course, I was advised to make application and was awarded a scholarship from the faculty of education at Canterbury Christ Church University to pursue this research as partial fulfilment of a PhD in Education.

The differences between these biographical sketches are an early insight into the differences in my family, and consequently to this research as well. I have four adult children. One has declined to participate in this study. So has their mother. In some ways, this is problematic. It is difficult, for example, to represent the full scope of our activities as a family when the stories of these family members are absent. However, the ethical benefits of this freedom of refusal, to hold one's silence, outweighs what might be perceived as the costs. These silences, too, offer me benefits. Given the superabundance of stories from those years, the number of them was reduced by the need to look away from stories in which those family members played a pivotal role. Similarly, by focusing on my children alone and not the spousal relationship (often cast as a breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy in research on stay-at-home dads), I was better able to hold my attention to educational events. Ultimately, though, these silent family members also form part of the audience for this work, it being never too late to join new utterances to the dialogue.

All of these family are not just audience, however, but co-creators. The ways in which they enact co-creation will be detailed in the chapter on research methods.

1.2 Relevance, rigor, and research contributions

During the past three decades, the number of stay-at-home dads--men who are the primary caregivers of their children (National At-Home Dad Network, 2022)--has increased in both the United States (Livingston, 2014) and England (Rudgard, 2017, Taylor, 2018). Multiple studies (see for example Baker, 2018) have shown that children benefit when their fathers are involved in their lives and that some of the benefit is measured in terms of educational achievement (see especially Hill, 2015; Lamb, 2010). At the same time, recent UK government policy (Department for Education, 2018) has renewed focus on the Home Learning Environment as a site for improving evidence-based academic outcomes. Despite the demographic growth, the educational benefits of father involvement, and the emphasis on the Home Learning Environment, however, there has been little research into stay-at-home dads from an educational perspective.

In the only academic monograph to date which focuses on the experiences of stay-at-home dads in the US, it is argued that

studying stay-at-home fathers will help scholars understand the attitudes and experiences of men who prioritize carework. Understanding their attitudes and experiences could increase societal support for other men who want to leave paid work to care for children. In addition, it may illustrate ways in which the societal meanings of fatherhood are evolving and how fathers take up these meanings. (Solomon, 2017, p. 5.)

I hope by this research to contribute to such understandings and support. However, I resist the use of the word ‘carework,’ which overlooks the self-description of stay-at-home dads as *caregivers*. The gift here is not insignificant, as it ties into theories of education *as gift* (Biesta, 2013). As we learn more about stay-at-home dads, our experiences and the meanings which we ascribe to them, there is something to be learned about education and its place in this ‘evolving’ social structuring of individual, family and community life.

1.2.1 Relevance & Purpose: Literature Review

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 offers a critical review of the research literature on stay-at-home dads as an argument for the relevance of the topic for research from an educational perspective. The argument begins with the definitions, terminology and demographics which shape discussion of this ‘major shift in family arrangements’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1662). I then show how stay-at-home dads have been researched to reveal the experience of their role as gendered work, acknowledging this dominant discourse in this field, with its focus on identity and conclusions about predictable experiences of sanction and isolation. I follow this, though, with an exploration of the ways in which stay-at-home dads have also been shown in prior research to experience education. Although this type of experience re-emerges multiple times across the literature, to my knowledge it has not been a focus of study until now. To begin to fill this research gap is the first purpose of this study: to discover what educational theory might offer stay-at-home dads as an alternative interpretation of their role through these educational experiences; correspondingly, by looking at these educational experiences there is a purpose to discover in them some ‘educational wisdom’ (Biesta, 2013) to offer to the field of education in return. So, the literature review also takes a look at the educational literature which first suggested that a case study of a stay-at-home dad’s experiences might offer something back to education, responding especially to Biesta’s (2013) pedagogy of the event and the ways in which one stay-at-home dad might have in his documented experiences enacted the educational wisdom or ‘virtuosity’ which Biesta claims as a purpose of narrative life history research in education. To this main body of theory, then, contexts of the home learning environment, intergenerational learning, and developmental norms and guidance provide additional opportunities for understanding the interplay of education and the role of a stay-at-home dad.

1.2.2 Rigor: Method, Theory and Data

The purpose of this research could not be narrowed to something more prescriptive from the outset. Rather, this purpose of a mutual exchange of gifts between stay-at-home dads and the field of education, vague as it might seem, was fundamental to the rigor with which the research proceeded. The precise contents of the diary were mostly unknown. It needed to be read with openness to whatever educational events might emerge—as well as to the possibility that educational events would have been documented as having little importance. Not knowing what events might be discovered meant there was no preselected theory for their interpretation; certainly there was no prescribed purpose to prove by means of the data any particular theory. Rather, everything needed to emerge: first the data, then the theory to interpret it. Indeed, even the method for exploring, selecting and interpreting data responded to the text and the research participants' interactions with it.

In order to fill the gap in the research thus exposed, I argue for the rigor of my research methods in Chapter 3. This means beginning from a constructionist ontology with its openness to multiple truths and interpretations, and taking up an epistemology which includes the dialogism of Holquist (2002), the 'wayfaring' described by Ingold (2007) as a way of being in the world, and study as love (Wilson, 2022a). These I apply to defending my research methods, which begin in an exploration of terrains of qualitative research strategies (Holliday, 2016), and proceed to justify my single case study as autoethnographic diary research. Within this section, I give considerable attention to the role of identity and the self in this research. Focusing on my diary as a document allows for a discussion of the benefits and risks of using it as a data source and my adoption of document analysis (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015; McCulloch, 2007) as a way into the data. My children join the process as co-creators, recognizing that 'in each narrative lies our own' (Bainbridge & West, 2012, p. 180), and sharing in the process at multiple stages. As a participant, I also establish my typicality (Ojermark, 2007) in comparison with other stay-at-home dads (Solomon, 2017) as an argument for the reliability of my data. The process of data interpretation is then detailed, from initial data selection, the sharing of data and interpretations with my participant children, and including the data reduction necessary to achieving a narrative interpretation. Finally, rigor is maintained by adhering to general requirements for rigorous research in education, as well as standards established within autoethnography and document analysis, including ethical considerations at all these levels as well. Chapter 4 argues for the theory inspired by the literature review, required by document analysis, and further developed for the interpretation of my diary. In order to achieve this, I show that *The*

Beautiful Risk of Education (Biesta, 2013) begins to offer an initial theoretical response to some aspects of the literature on stay-at-home dads, especially in its pedagogy of the event. I then introduce into dialogue with that theory the ideas of dialogism (Holquist, 2002) and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007), not as an attempt at synthesis, but to show areas of similarity which might provide for ways to see theory acted out in lived experience. To these, I join the surprising understanding of purpose suggested by a recent composition of experimental music (Stone, 2016, 2019) which is harmonious with the pedagogy of the event, dialogism, and wayfaring, to suggest in theory a different way of thinking about and describing the purpose of education.

Anyone wishing to proceed more directly to my experiences as a stay-at-home dad will find them in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. I begin these by arguing for the division of these chapters as based on three distinct periods within the diary. I address the methods responsive to these shifts in the data. I justify the selection of the few diary entries which I have space to share and interpret in this brief thesis. And I share and interpret the diary entries, along with the responses from my participant children responses to them.

Chapter 5 explores Period One of my diary, which includes volumes 1 through 4 of the diary, spans the years 1994-2005, and includes my first ten years as a stay-at-home dad. These are subdivided into three narrative arcs: Preface to Fatherhood (1994-1995), New Responsibilities (1996-1999), and School Begins (1999-2005). During this period, diary entries were few, brief, and often carried something of a literary aspiration as a perpetuation of my undergraduate education in writing poetry. Following the very loose protocol to choose ‘what fascinates’ (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44), I selected and then shared to my participant adult children many of the documented events, co-creating a dialogical process, while still allowing for the selection of events which responded dialogically to prior research on stay-at-home dads and the educational theory emerging contemporaneously with this dialogical process. Findings from this period focus on the appropriateness of the educational perspective to the interpretation of the documented experiences, and particularly in how the pedagogy of the event can be seen in expressions of responsibility, irreplaceability, and the ways in which subjectivity is evidenced in dialogue and wayfaring. The context of developmental norms and guidance reveals a strong interest in language development and particularly in the sort of ‘serve and return’ interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) which contribute to the development of neural networks necessary to all future learning. The home learning environment, meanwhile, is shown to be a place of meaning making networked to other educational environments such as church and school, and rooted in a sense of

belonging (Agnew, 2011) which is also associated with intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023).²

Chapter 6 shows how document analysis demonstrated a shift in the diary's value, purpose and structure starting with volume 4 in 2005 and lasting through volume 14 in 2010. Period Two of the diary, then, is again subdivided into three narrative arcs: my uptake of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (Oct 2005-Jan 2006), School Years (Nov 2005-Oct 2008), and American Football (Nov 2008-Aug 2011). Following the introduction of a therapeutic purpose, the diary documents experiences which contradict earlier research which shows stay-at-home dads experiencing marginalization in school settings (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019), instead demonstrating a strengthening network of meaning making between home learning environment and school and other learning environments. There is also during this period an emphasis on ideas of 'coming into presence' as an expression of subjectivity, while experiences of American football show a rich array of balancing the educational domains of qualification, socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2013).

In Chapter 7, a second shift in the diary's purpose and structure is revealed to have established Period Three, starting with volume 15 in 2011. This change brought an enormous increase in the frequency and duration of diary entries. Of the 9,000 pages of my diary, approximately 6,400 were written in these five final years, which close with volume 47 in 2015, when my time as a stay-at-home dad came to an end. Facing a superabundance of educational experiences, the protocol of 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44) no longer sufficed to select a quantity of data manageable within the confines of Chapter 6. As a result, I needed to set aside many affecting stories of my children and focus on what was unique about this period, which was its reflective content and the ways in which it reveals a search for purpose and meaning. These were expressed partially in drawings unique to this period, of which there are over 1,000. This content, then, I subdivided into two narrative arcs. The first of these, *The Artist's Wayfaring*, shows how I came to this new purpose and structure through *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 1985). The second arc, which I call 'Conversation Between the Generations,' is further subdivided into a First Movement, Interlude, and Second Movement. Insights from this period include a documented understanding of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad as liminal, passionate about the gift in caregiving, and eager for wayfaring into unpredictable dialogues within which unexpected qualifications sometimes emerged. It also documents a disruption to the home learning environment's strong network of meaning making places with the closure of my children's school, exploration of new places, and the trouble of

² There is a wealth of research on the topic of belonging and its importance. See for example Cohen (2022).

my father's final illness. Through all of these, there is a demonstration of the 'serve and return' interactions established from my children's early years, with persistent documented benefit.

1.2.3 Research Contributions: Audiences and interpretations

All of this, then, receives further treatment in Chapter 8. Given what the data has revealed, I return to recommend this study to my audiences, arguing afresh for its demonstrated relevance and rigor. I draw into close proximity the arguments from my each of my diary's three periods, showing how interpretations of unique events build to an argument with contributions to my imagined audiences: to stay-at-home dads and those who study us, to education, to researchers interested in my methods, and to my participant children and myself.

Chief among these are recognising the social role of stay-at-home dads as the first teachers of their children, as we might find a greater sense of purpose and connection here than in a responsibility for redefining masculinity. There also emerges the possibility of offering to stay-at-home dads an alternative to a discourse of isolation and marginalization by means of dialogism and the recounting of lived experience which encounters isolation but chooses to express it in more liberating terms of liminality. For education, this thesis offers an attempt to fulfil the purpose of narrative life history research in education, which is said to offer other educators an example of practical, educational wisdom or 'virtuosity' (Biesta 2013, p. 136). I also reflect on the purposes of education itself and suggest the possibility that the experiences documented in my diary and the theory which I have encountered in my wayfaring point to a way of talking about education as non-teleological which may be beneficial to a pedagogy of the event. For other researchers who may attempt to use their own diary as a data source, I offer my experience in this matter, which has drawn on document analysis and participant co-creation of the diary's events, text, and research to avoid what I perceived as a trap of narcissism in an inquiry into too much identity, preferring a non-egological turn (Biesta 2017, p. 57). Last but not least, I offer to my children what has been a co-creative experience of healing and love, a mitzvah (Paley, 1999), and an expression of the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1971) which is without limit.

1.3 Invitation and risk

This doctoral thesis concerns both stay-at-home dads as a social phenomenon and theories of education which offer a new and alternative way of interpreting the experiences of one stay-at-home dad and his children as documented over the course of twenty years in a diary. As the events, text, and interpretation of the diary have been co-created with my children, the offer of this work to its imagined audiences is an invitation. It holds open for your scrutiny the intimacies of our lives. This

is a risk for all of us. As this research will show, it also offers itself, in other words, as an addressivity to which this same audience has a responsibility, in co-being and as co-subjects with us, to come wayfaring with us,

‘conceived as a co-participant, not a spectator, and given opportunities to think with (not just about) the research story (or findings). (Ellis & Bochner 2016, p. 56.)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In October 2018, I had begun to study for a master's degree in early childhood education. Knowing that I would need to write a research dissertation, I wondered what resources might be available for understanding the educational experiences I had had with my young children when I was a stay-at-home dad. I was surprised that initial searches discovered no academic explorations of the experiences of stay-at-home dads from an educational perspective. Instead, I found these experiences being explored in terms of men doing women's work.

The argument of this chapter is to show that there might be an opportunity to interpret such experiences in another way. While understandings of gendered work respond to theories of hegemonic masculinity and employment statistics, they perhaps do not adequately address the relational aspect of the stay-at-home dad's role: that he is the primary caregiver to his children. This aspect, I will show, might be better explored from an educational perspective.

The resources which I share below will first reveal some of the fundamentals about stay-at-home dads, including definitions, terminology and demographics. Second, I will show how the experiences of stay-at-home dads have been framed as gendered work, which includes two potential problems: one, which I call 'The Isolation Discourse' and another, which I think of in terms of 'Identity and Its Refusal.' Third then, I will proceed to focus on the educational experiences already documented in prior studies and how these might begin to point to the importance of an educational interpretation.

Beyond this, though, there needs to be another section, one which I call 'A stay-at-home dad for education.' It shows how the literature from the field of education helped to inspire this research. Furthermore, because this research sits in the field of education, it begins to argue for the ways in which my experiences as a stay-at-home dad might offer new 'educational wisdom' (Biesta, 2013).

2.2 Stay-at-home dads: Fundamentals

2.2.1 Definitions

The US-based National At-Home Dad Network defines a stay-at-home dad as 'any father who is the regular *primary caregiver* of his children' (2020 n.p., emphasis in original). This is the definition which I prefer, seeing as how it comes from the group which I am studying. The use of 'primary caregiver' as a key descriptor for research on stay-at-home dads was established in the academic literature by Andrea Doucet (2004), who operates primarily from the Canadian context, when she advertised for participants by inviting men who were the primary caregiver for their children. It is

also the definition used by Catherine Richards Solomon (2017) in her unique academic monograph exploring the experiences of stay-at-home dads in the US. However, in the course of her explorations, she shifts to the use of *carework*. This is done, she says, to reflect the ways in which stay-at-home dads use ‘masculinist language’ (Solomon 2017, p. 105) to describe aspects of their roles, such as ‘cooking, cleaning, laundry, paying bills and yard work’ (Solomon 2017, p. 57) as ‘work’ or a ‘job’. The change is not insignificant, however, as it shifts the focus from the children named in the definition above and strips the giving of a gift from the nomenclature.

This caregiving aspect of the role, however, is not always how stay-at-home dads are defined. A study by the Pew Research Center (Livingston, 2014, p. 2), which is based on US Census data, offers a definition of ‘stay-at-home fathers’ as ‘those fathers not employed for pay at all in the prior year and living at home with their children younger than 18.’ A similar definition for stay-at-home dads is offered in a statistical analysis of quantitative data drawn from the US Current Population Survey by Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch (2015, p. 1652), who look at ‘stay-at-home fathers’ (SAHF) as a characteristic of ‘household income structure’ and chart the growth of this trend from 1976 to 2009. In so doing, they draw a distinction between ‘unable-to-work’ and ‘caregiving’ stay-at-home dads, reintroducing this concept of caregiver into their measurements.

Within the UK context, the definition of stay-at-home dads has not to my knowledge been established by any official body or research institute. Stay-at-home dads are not recognized as a subset of the population as measured by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). However, a definition might be constructed from the way it has been reported by news media from the left-leaning *Guardian* (King, 2011) and the more right-wing *Daily Mail* (Taylor, 2018). These both use Office for National Statistics (ONS) data to construct a disputed count of the number of stay-at-home dads in the UK, based on the metric of ‘Economic inactivity by reason: looking after family and home’ and disaggregating for male respondents. Such a constructed definition of stay-at-home dads might therefore read something like: ‘men economically inactive by reason of looking after family and home.’ The Fatherhood Institute, ‘the UK’s fatherhood think-and-do-tank’ which aims to “‘walk the talk” of gender equality’ by ‘advocating for involved fatherhood in the UK since 1999’ (Fatherhood Institute 2013, n.p.), also relies on this definition of stay-at-home dads (Fatherhood Institute, 2023).

2.2.2 Terminology

Terminology has not been standardized in research about stay-at-home dads. The earliest use of 'stay at home dad' which I have been able to discover in the academic literature arises in a court case in the US:

Young argues that the trial court judge was not sympathetic to his position as a stay-at-home dad because the judge insisted he get a job. Young remarks that his job is taking care of his kids and he notes that no judge would ever make that comment to a home-parent who is female. (Young v. Hector, 1999.)

While Solomon (2017) and other academic researchers often prefer to use 'stay-at-home fathers' to describe this group, I deliberately choose to use 'stay-at-home dads.' The use of 'dad' over 'father' has been shown to be preferred by The National At-home Dad Network (2020), with a US-based, private Facebook group membership of 3,500 dads (The National At-Home Dad Network, 2023) and by another private Facebook group, Stay At Home Dad (2023), which has an international membership of 9,000 dads. 'Stay-at-home dad' has also become a part of common speech in mass media (see for example King 2011; Taylor, 2018; Ruggert, 2023). I hope that by using this terminology, I make this study feel more welcoming to the men who choose this description for themselves. For similar reasons, I avoid using either of the abbreviations SAHF or SAHD (for stay-at-home father and stay-at-home dad, respectively). Although SAHD is widely accepted (see, for example, Urban Dictionary, 2022), within the context of academic research, it feels like jargon. It is worth noting that this terminology has evolved and continues to be contested. Earlier appellations carry with them negative connotations. For example, 'house husband' has been used to describe psychological trauma attendant on male unemployment (Tauss, 1976; Penfold, 1985), while others uniquely bring fatherhood into this term (Lutwin & Siperstein, 1985); more recent research claimed that this language is 'used transnationally to represent misplaced masculinity' (Chopra 2009, p. 96). The title of 'Mr. Mom', associated with the incompetence depicted in the film of that title (*Mr. Mom*, 1983), has been shown in recent research to continue to frame negative perceptions of stay-at-home dads (Steinour, 2018). Similarly, stay-at-home dads continue to contest being labelled as 'babysitter' (see for example, Snitker, 2018). During my years as a stay-at-home dad, I most frequently referred to myself as a 'full-time dad,' a title which occurs in some literature contemporaneous with my years in this role (see for example, Hallows, 2004). For income tax purposes, I was directed to list my occupation simply as 'Homemaker,' a title unspecific regarding either gender or caregiving.

2.2.3 Demographics

The increase in the number of stay-at-home dads represents ‘a major shift in family arrangements’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1662) and

the biggest contributor to longterm growth in these “stay-at-home fathers” is the rising number of fathers who are at home primarily to care for their family. (Livingston 2014, p. 5.)

In the US, between 1989 and 2012 there was a near doubling of stay-at-home dads, from 1.1 million to 2.0 million (Livingston, 2014). The majority of these stay-at-home dads are described in terms of their relationship to paid employment: most often they are ill or disabled (35%), unable to find work (23%), or ‘in school/retired/other’ (22%). Those who self-identify as being stay-at-home dads because they are ‘caring for home/family’ is the smallest measured category at 21%. However, this had risen from only 5% in 1989 and so signifies the most rapidly growing group and a shift in how stay-at-home dads are understood.

A similar study by Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch (2015), shows a rise from 2.0% of US households with a stay-at-home dad in 1976 to 3.5% by 2009. Between 1976 and 1979, only 1% of these were ‘caregiving’ fathers; this had risen to 22% in 2000-2009. One questionable feature of this study is the way in which stay-at-home dads are depicted by race: 0% Black and only 3.3% Hispanic shown as ‘caregiving’; in other words, all of the Black stay-at-home dads in this study are represented as ‘unable to work’. While the limits of this study do not allow for a more thorough challenge to such claims, the possibility of racial bias in such findings cannot go unmentioned.

Within the UK context, stay-at-home dads are not officially counted, but men who ‘look after family / home’ have similarly been recorded by the Office for National Statistics as ‘steadily increasing’ from 111,000 in 1993 until reaching a peak of 262,000 in 2017 (Rudgard, 2017), and then declining slightly to 223,000 (Taylor, 2018). More recent data has shown that the number of stay-at-home dads has increased by one third in the UK since before the global covid-19 pandemic (Fatherhood Institute, 2023).

2.3 Stay-at-home dads experience gendered work

2.3.1 Gender and its discontents

Qualitative methods have been used to look beyond these quantifications of growth to study the experiences of stay-at-home dads. Often, these experiences are then interpreted by the ways in which they confront hegemonic masculinity, defined as ‘the culturally idealised form of masculine character’ (Connell 1990, p. 83). This ideal might be expressed in the gender division of labour, or the

social definition of tasks into either 'men's work' or 'women's work' and the definition of some kinds of work as more masculine than others. (Carrigan, et al. 1987, p. 94.)

Caring has been theorized as strongly identified with women, who in contrast with the autonomy and disconnection valued in hegemonic masculinity, are socialized into roles which are relational and require concern for others (Gilligan, 1995). Stay-at-home dads, therefore, are men who cross this divide into 'women's work' which 'is not a fit occupation for men' (Connell, 1987, p. 106 cited by Solomon 2017, p. 42.)

Theory predicts that such behaviour will

incur high social and emotional costs and men can be subjected to a number of othering practices in which their deviation from hegemonic norms is subordinated and pathologized. (Renold 2004, p. 249.)

Studies have repeatedly confirmed these theories. Stay-at-home dads described as performing a 'caring masculinity' (Hunter et al., 2017) have been shown to be socially perceived as deviant, resulting in sanctions or 'stigma' (Ruggert, 2023). This is sometimes cast in terms of being unwelcome in parenting groups run by mothers. For example, Andrea Doucet observed that her husband 'was judged harshly when he tried, in 1991, to join a local "moms and tots" group in England' (Doucet, 2018, p. vii). Part of this judgement lies in the perceived inappropriateness of men working as caregivers. As Doucet (2009, p. 89) quotes a participant stay-at-home dad, who said 'the incompetence thing comes into play,' as everyone including this stay-at-home dad doubted his abilities as a caregiver: 'they don't really believe that men can do this with a baby, especially a really tiny baby.' In a pointed detail from the demographic research above, public opinion was shown to hold that children are far more likely to be 'better off' with a stay-at-home mom (51%) than a stay-at-home dad (8%)' (Livingston 2014, p. 7).

Sometimes this perceived deviance and incompetence is cast more specifically in the social perception that these men should have 'a real job' (Young v. Hector, 1999). Perhaps for this reason, stay-at-home dads have been shown to experience difficulty in surrendering the role of breadwinner, which is frequently set in binary opposition to that of caregiver (Griswold, 1993; Lamb, 2000). Being a stay-at-home dad has also been characterised as not a sustainable role for men, but as only transitional; in this view they might be categorized as 'successful and "taking a break",' 'in transition and "taking a break",' or 'in transition whilst working part time' (Doucet 2004, p. 278). After in-depth conversations with another stay-at-home dad, my master's dissertation suggested the

possibility that being a stay-at-home dad might instead be seen as a calling or a vocation to one's present and future career and livelihood (Troppe, 2019a).

Stay-at-home dads have been found to negotiate their role within this context of a dichotomy between hegemonic masculinity and caregiving, dividing their actions between *enactment of* and *resistance to* socially imposed gender ideals (Medved, 2016; Snitker, 2018). Enactment of masculinity included performing as a protector of children, being paid for labour, and doing household tasks considered more manly, like home and auto repairs. Meanwhile, other behaviours were deemed as resistance to masculine norms, such as being empathetic, nurturing, emotional and intuitive. In these ways, they were 'realising the challenges of conventional female roles', and negotiating their own 'unconventionality' (Medved, 2016, p. 25). The outcome of such negotiations has been described as an 'evolved masculinity,' a kind of identity-making which fuses traditionally feminine traits like caregiving with aspects of hegemonic masculinity 'to create an ideal that makes sense for their everyday lives and choices' (Solomon 2017, p. 104).

Perhaps the greater contribution here is that this is described as the navigation of a discourse. So, we might begin to ask, what is this discourse that needs to be navigated? Is it just our own unconventionality?

2.3.2 The Isolation Discourse

Isolation was identified early by Smith (1998) as one of the 'social and emotional costs' (Renold 2004, p. 249) of defying hegemonic masculinity as a stay-at-home dad. As such, it was tied explicitly to gender: 'Men don't do this sort of thing' was a quote from one of his participants, which gave the study its title. Eighteen years, later, Ammari and Shoenebeck, (2016, p. 1367) still report that stay-at-home dads 'experienced a great deal of isolation from other adults, especially throughout their children's early years.'

These reported experiences of isolation serve as evidence to support the theory that maintaining 'a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2003: 844, cited by Solomon 2017, p. 97). In variations on this theme, stay-at-home dads are reported as experiencing 'isolation' (Solomon 2017, p. 79), 'exclusion' (p. 83), being seen as 'a threat' (p. 85), 'on the fringes' and 'a foreigner' (p. 86), 'creepy' (p. 87), and 'deviant' and 'criminalized' (p. 91). Solomon adds, citing the research of Ammari and Shoenebeck (2016), that 'Luckily, these men had access to online communities; otherwise they would have been extremely socially isolated' (p. 91).

Similarly, Doucet (2018, p. 10) summarizes what she has found in her first 14 years of research on the topic of stay-at-home dads.

A common lament of fathers who had left paid work to care for their children was not connected to the daily stresses and strains of caring for young children but to the loneliness, isolation, and the difficulties of entering into or creating their own parenting networks. Sentiments like ‘loser,’ ‘outcast,’ ‘isolated,’ and ‘trying not to worry about what other blokes think’ abounded in those narratives.

Another contemporaneous summary is offered by Lee & Lee (2018, p. 47), who write of stay-at-home dads experiencing ‘social isolation and mixed reactions from people as the two main challenges against constructing and maintaining their new masculinity.’

And once again, Taylor (2018, p. 1), in a newspaper analysis of recent stay-at-home dad demographics, quotes the psychologist Professor Sir Cary Cooper of Manchester University, whose work has sometimes focused on parenting and flexible working (see Gatrell, et al, 2014) as saying,

Many men who have tried being stay-at-home dads have realised what many women have felt for years – that looking after children as a full-time role is not valued by society. But unlike women, there are few men in that position so there is very little social interaction. The support network is not there for fathers in the same way as it is for mothers, which can be very isolating.

As a result of these societal sanctions, such excluded men are said to ‘experience a high level of psychological distress, loneliness and boredom from people’s responses to them’ (Solomon 2017, p. 90).

As a discourse, then, this becomes particularly troubling. Isolation, as I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, is a state of individual, social and political disempowerment. As such, these theories are not neutral, as ‘language is not neutral’ (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 687), but might become oppressive, demanding from those who fall within these discourses of isolation some welcome relief or emancipation. So, this is a gap represented by existing research—a gap in which the discourse of isolation might be confronted, challenged and its remedies sought. As a researcher, it is my ethical duty to avoid the

danger of cultural chauvinism—reducing people to the definitions we construct for them—just as sexism reduces women to the stereotypes constructed by others. (Holliday 2013, p. 126.)

Instead, I must recognise and challenge discourses which might create or perpetuate a potentially ‘degrading stereotype’ (Holliday 2013, p. 181).

2.3.3 Identity and its refusal

'Identities are the self-meanings given to the role expectations associated with a social status that are reflected in behaviors' (Stryker & Burke, 2000, cited by Pasley et al., 2014). Experiences of othering such as those described within the Isolation Discourse are linked to identity formation (Jensen, 2011), including when othering is based on gender (de Beauvoir, 1997; Hughes & Witz, 1997). Theoretical treatments of fathers' identities, however, have been criticised.

Perhaps as scholars we are guilty of pursuing questions that intrigue us but that may be of little practical value to fathers, children, families, and those serving them through programs and policies. In fact, we believe that few studies have examined what seems to matter most for children. (Pasley et al. 2014, p. 298.)

This observation may be reflected in the views of stay-at-home dads who reject gender as a factor of identity unessential to understanding their experiences. Instead, these stay-at-home dads 'saw parenting as a gender-neutral task' (Solomon, 2017, p. 23) and 'attributed their desires to be stay-at-home parents not only to wanting one parent at home but also to their personalities' (Solomon, 2017, p. 20).

Stay-at-home dads in a variety of studies and contexts have shown reluctance to discuss issues of masculinity, and there has been speculation that it may be 'a sign of those fathers' refusal or difficulty to consider this issue' or 'may indicate that explicit references to gender norms are becoming less legitimate in their cultural context' (Merla, 2008, p. 123). It has also been claimed that

fathers do not think in terms of roles as defined by identity theory but see themselves as fathers whose behaviors reflect nurturing, protecting, *teaching*, and so on. (Futris, 1997 cited in Pasley et al., 2014, pp. 313-314, emphasis mine).

We shall see, just below, what some of those behaviours entail.

2.4 Stay-at-home dads experience education

The motivation for choosing to be a stay-at-home dad, with all the risks of sanction named above, has been described in terms of these dads acting on their

educational values, and more specifically the idea that parents should take care of their children rather than subcontracting or relying on an informal network of relatives and friends. (Merla 2008, p. 118.)

This, which seems to be a choice for 'what seems to matter most for children' (Pasley et al. 2014, p. 298), is echoed in more recent research.

A common refrain I heard during the interviews was not wanting ‘someone else to raise my kids’ (i.e., daycare) and this desire led to an absence from the labor force. (Solomon, 2017, pp. 17-18.)

Despite this, none of the above cited research into the experiences of stay-at-home dads takes an educational perspective or is drawn from publication within the field of education. As these motivations might begin to suggest, the additional examples which follow point to the possibility that just such a perspective might be valuable to understanding these experiences.

2.4.1 Education among the numbers

Education enters the demographic studies of stay-at-home dads as a predictive factor. In the first place, it is asserted that ‘fathers with higher levels of education are... more likely than less educated dads to be living with their kids’ (Livingston, 2014, p. 6). This suggests that the baseline education of stay-at-home dad might be predicted to be higher than average simply by virtue of living with his kids. Findings also indicate that stay-at-home dads ‘are less well-off financially and have lower educational attainment than their working counterparts’ (Livingston, 2014, p. 7), which might suggest that the partners of stay-at-home dads are even more highly educated.

Greater predictive clarity is assigned to the relative quantity of education held by each parent. This is seen as both a possible determinant in assignation of the caregiver role and shifting over time. Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch (2015) discuss these as a factor of ‘Exchange theory’, in which the family is financially better off if the higher earner is designated ‘breadwinner’ and the other the ‘caregiver’. Within this theory, it is predicted that

higher levels of education and income relative to one’s spouse are expected to translate into more power in the relationship. (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1653.)

This power is in turn ‘used to avoid doing housework and caregiving chores’ (p. 1654). But social expectations placed upon women subvert this pure theory, meaning that by virtue of their gender they still often carry the bulk of these chores even when the breadwinner. However, having observed ‘increasing differences between the education of men and women’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1668), they predict that the demographic increase in the number of caregiving stay-at-home dads is likely to continue. More specifically,

Having a wife with a higher education than her husband increases the probability of a family becoming a *caregiving SAHF* household’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1669).

They conclude that

significant changes in societal attitudes and a diminishing gender income gap for women working in high-skilled professions which increase the likelihood that the number of caregiving SAHF households will continue to rise and merits future study' (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1670).

2.4.2 Education among the genders

Among the studies of stay-at-home dads experiencing gendered work, data can be found which suggests that these dads take an active and responsible role in the education of their children. Again, it has been claimed that 'educational values' (Merla 2008, p. 118) are a primary motivation for caregiving stay at home dads. Sometimes the importance of teaching is stated quite strongly.

Joseph, a Belgian father of four children said: 'I teach the boys how to ride a bike, how to swim, I've always done that and I think that it's a man's role. That's the role of the father.' (Doucet & Merla, 2007, p. 467.)

Another stay-at-home dad summarised his role simply as 'I am Justin's teacher' (Mattila 2016, p. 107).

While these suggest the possibility of interpreting a stay-at-home dad's experiences from the educational perspective of acting as a teacher, the work of Solomon (2017) suggests a more complex educational dynamic. First, she notes that 'Participants spoke at length about how their fathering was different from their own fathers' (Solomon, 2017, p. 45). How does this difference emerge? Another clue is soon offered when they claim that 'Women are *natural* parents, but men need to *learn* how to parent' (Solomon, 2017, p. 46). It is then asserted that this learning takes the form of the uptake of caregiving and nurturing skills. And what are the skills her participants name?

The first participant she quotes here speaks of 'sitting down and reading a book with my oldest... the skills of teaching a kid how to read, do math, any of that...' (pp. 47-48). And the next one says, 'it forced me to listen. You have to decipher things because they don't always know what they are asking...' And the third says, 'it's the patience aspect' (p. 48). The fourth says all this:

My son can do division and math, up to double digits. Right now he is six books ahead of his entire class because of his reading proficiency. My daughter, she's the youngest in her class because of the birthday cut-off, yet she can write better than most of the other kids. These are the things that I've worked with my kids. I'm seeing these results. So in a way I'm actually getting that legitimacy through my work. (p. 49.)

And the fifth:

We got a book on baby sign language... she picked it all up so quickly. So I really felt like I was making—you could see immediately the results of your efforts. I'm showing her the little please and thank you and she's picking it up and using it even sometimes when we're not

just playing with it. The immediate gratification of your efforts to help them develop and stuff and then just to be there. When you are at work, half the time you are going to miss their first step. You are going to hear about it when you pick them up from daycare. (pp. 49-50.)

The sixth says, 'Doing this well is honourable' (p. 50). The seventh speaks repeatedly of his own learning:

I got better at learning how to read them... And learning how to react in a way that's appropriate... And learning how to help my children manage their emotions it forced me to learn how to do that myself... Between learning how to manage the household, all the job duties that's entailed, and the kind of emotional work that I don't think fathers are necessarily trained for; those are the two biggest things that I had to learn kind of on the job as I went. (pp. 50-51)

The above list demonstrates quite forcibly that the same stay-at-home dads who 'saw parenting as a gender-neutral task' (Solomon, 2017, p. 23) also claim that the caregiving which defines their role involves the enactment of skills of learning and teaching—educational skills. I realise that this is not a startling claim. What is startling, perhaps, is that this aspect of being a stay-at-home dad has thus far escaped theorization from an educational perspective. Again, I don't even think that a claim needs to be made that something educationally special is happening because these parents happen to be dads instead of moms, or that stay-at-home dads are better somehow than 'breadwinner' dads. But if a 'major shift in family arrangements' is occurring and the subjects of that shift say that gender is not important, but education is, then it might merit exploration from an educational perspective.

2.4.3 The Education of a Stay-at-home Dad

'Stay-at-home fathers are, by definition, "highly involved fathers"' (Solomon, 2017, p. 5). This statement refers to the multidisciplinary study of Father Involvement. Fathers are considered to demonstrate involvement in their children's lives by characteristics of *engagement*, *availability* and *responsibility*, which in practical terms display as 'interacting directly with the child', 'being accessible' and 'providing financial support or making decisions about the child' (Lamb et al., 1985, cited by Roggman et al., 2013, p. 189). These studies emerged from earlier research on absent fathers (Leidy et al, 2013), so it is ironic that stay-at-home dads are absent from the handbook dedicated to this field (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Involved fathers have been found in time use studies (Pleck, 2010) to demonstrate skills and provide benefits which might be considered educational. These include 'play/companionship, teaching, and caregiving'; older studies have been re-examined to include categories of 'helping/teaching, reading/talking, and indoor/outdoor

playing'; within these behaviours, it is claimed that 'fathers' unique communicative styles directly teach children about the linguistic and communicative demands of social exchanges' (Pleck 2010, p. 9). If stay-at-home dads are 'highly involved,' then we might expect to see them exhibiting such behaviours and offering such benefits, as Solomon's (2017) participants testify, above.

Despite this likelihood, the field of education has not produced a body of research literature about stay-at-home dads. Two recent articles (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019) may be the first to directly address the role of stay-at-home dads and their educational involvement. Arising out of the US context, both articles use the same data set to explore the experiences of stay-at-home dads in their interactions with their children's elementary schools. To justify these studies, the authors cite the changing role of fathers, the increased relevance of stay-at-home dads in the lives of their children, and 'a paucity of research' on the experiences of stay-at-home dads in their children's schools (Davis et al., 2019, p. 2).

The first of these two articles, (Davis et al, 2019) looks at stay-at-home dads from the perspective of professional school counsellors, with an eye to inclusion and broader participation of stay-at-home dads and the benefits to a profile of classroom diversity which schools might gain from such participation. It is a call for sensitivity towards what they describe as a marginalized group. In this way, it makes a connection between stay-at-home dads and educational environments which has not previously been a focus of research. Like Solomon (2017), it also asserts that stay-at-home dads are exemplary of father involvement. They do this first by drawing on the work of Jeynes (2015), Mueller & Buckley (2014), Lamb (2010) and McBride et al (2002) to assert a link between stay-at-home dads and father involvement including the educational benefits brought to children by father involvement. However, the benefits of father involvement are claimed for stay-at-home dads simply by citing research on father involvement, not by demonstrating that stay-at-home dads perform the necessary characteristics or achieve the stated benefits.

The second of these articles (Haberlin and Davis, 2019) then uses the interview transcripts to create 'found poetry' with the aim of creating an 'evocative' experience which captures 'the emotionality inherent' to researching stay-at-home dads (2019, p. 252). As such, it makes no claims to interpret these poems from an educational perspective.

Davis et al. (2019) indicate that their professional roles, primarily as school counsellors, influenced their research. They append to the article brief professional biographies of each of the team members. None of them indicated that they had any experience as parents, let alone as stay-at-

home dads, so it was unclear why anything other than a perception of marginalization motivated them to focus on stay-at-home dads or why they felt especially qualified to represent that marginalized community in their research.

The data selection in these articles was based on themes which were 'reflected strongly in the literature' (Davis et al, 2019, p. 11), suggesting a potential for confirmation bias. The literature to which they refer (Heppner and Heppner, 2009; Tinsley, Howell, and Amanatullah, 2015, and others), is acknowledged as having a focus on 'gender-determinism struggles associated with balancing stereotypical male and female roles' (Davis et al, 2019, p. 3). Potentially alternative stories told by their participants, such as that of one with 'a recognized and known professional background in early and elementary education' or that of a school actively 'engaged in efforts to involve fathers and diverse families' (Davis et al, 2019, p. 16), received no further attention beyond these mentions. Instead, extended transcript excerpts were given only to those complaining of marginalization. When such a single story is continually retold, it begins to enter into the ethically problematic territory of perpetuating stereotypes (Adichie, 2009).

For me, the difficulty in reading these two articles was simply this: as a stay-at-home dad, I do not recognize myself in them. This calls to mind the objective that 'Ethnography seeks to represent the realities of participants in a way that the participants would recognise to be true' (Bhatti 2012, pp. 80-81). While I was not a participant in this research, it aims to describe and theorise a social group to which I belong. The experiences they describe are of marginalization and complaint. While I don't doubt that these form a true part of these stay-at-home dads' experiences, to me it seems a long way from being the whole picture. I do not find here anything which mirrors, for example, my own experiences of cooperation with teaching staff and school administrators, or with the simple joys of greeting my children, their classmates, and other parents within the school grounds. This lack of recognition represents an opportunity for a fuller picture to be sought. For me, being a stay-at-home dad was a positive experience, and the joy of it for me is not reflected in either of these articles. While my experience may not have been typical, the introduction of experiences of stay-at-home dads in an educational setting, as accomplished in these two articles, invites dialogue around similar experiences.

Contemporaneous with the publication of these articles, I completed my dissertation (Troppe, 2019b) as a requirement of the degree of Master of Early Childhood Education. Drawing on the work of Sumsion (2000) to legitimize a case study with a single participant, I sat down with 'Brian', a British white male discovered by convenience sampling. He had been a stay-at-home dad for 10

years. I told him of my 20 years in the role. Neither of us had ever met with a stay-at-home dad before. Although I had not yet encountered the work of Solomon (2017), one of my key findings was that, like her participants,

Brian rejects the importance of gender as a lens for understanding his work as a SAHD... (and) talks about his experiences of teaching his children, placing emphasis on his participation in their play, language development and schooling. (Troppe 2019b, p. 44.)

Also described in the research—and still vivid in memory—is the laughter and the sense of nostalgia which characterized the sharing of our stories. We were two men discussing what we felt were the best experiences of our lives.

2.5 A stay-at-home dad for education

I have thus far demonstrated a gap in the academic literature about stay-at-home dads which might begin to be addressed with an educational perspective. That alone might suffice to justify and direct this research. Indeed, this was my starting point. However, as the research has progressed, I began to sense a second gap. If the first suggests that education can offer something to the understanding of stay-at-home dads, the second suggests that stay-at-home dads might, in turn, offer something to education. Can the experiences of a stay-at-home dad tell us something about education itself? In this section, I aim to introduce some of the educational literature which has inspired this research, presenting it again as having something like a gap which might begin to be filled by exploring the experiences of a stay-at-home dad.

2.5.1 Early Childhood Education

‘Nothing without Joy!’ (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12).

I begin this section with the above choice for joy because, as I have already shared from my master’s dissertation, my experiences as a stay-at-home dad were suffused with joy. I do not deny the existence of difficulties, but even these were experienced in an environment of great fun and love. So, the joy in my experiences establishes a common footing with the joy in education, specifically here the joy in early childhood education as expressed by the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach.

I came to work on this research directly following the completion of my studies for an MA in Early Childhood Education. Influences from that course of study persisted as I entered into the interpretation of my diary. Fundamental among these was the idea that childhood is itself a social construction (Aries, 1962; Valkanova, 2014). This prepared me to see how gender, too, is constructed (Connell, 1995) and that there is an opportunity and a need to see such constructions critically as they emerge in society across genres, including film (Troppe, 2019c). These helped me to

recognise the ways in which stay-at-home dads were being socially constructed, recognise the mutability in such constructions, and empower my voice to suggest alternative perspectives. They also helped to prepare me for a critical interpretation of the genre of my own diary, as well as the other genres which it incorporates.

Regarding a diary as a site for career and professional development also arose from my ECE studies, in which we were taught to maintain a reflective journal (Bassot, 2020; Troppe, 2018) as a tool for critically assessing our educational practice. This caused me to question whether the diary which I had written for twenty years might also have within it some educational insights from my practice as a stay-at-home dad.

Pursuing a professional understanding of my practice, I was fascinated by the proposed concept of ‘professional love’ (Page, 2018): love could be a professional attribute, particularly desirable in Early Childhood Education, in which its characteristics could be described and which, as a professional attribute, was sought after by parents seeking educators for their young children. When I began studying stay-at-home dads for my MA dissertation (Troppe, 2019b), this article returned to mind as I discovered that the term ‘primary caregiver,’ which stay-at-home dads use for themselves, is the same terminology that Page uses for those who provide professional love in early childhood settings. Was there something that my diary might contribute to this understanding of professional love? The work of Wilson (2020a, 2020b) reminds us that ‘to study’ and ‘to love’ have the same etymological root; the study of my experiences with my children which forms my diary is also then a love, and joined to the professional development aspects of a reflective journal offered by Bassot (2020), potentially a form of or analogy to professional love.

Early in my studies and quite by chance, I happened on a copy of *The Kindness of Children* (Paley, 1999). I vividly remember that when I was reading it, I wept and exclaimed, ‘this is why!’ I had not known I was looking for a purpose for my studies, but I suddenly had one: to do, as Paley suggests, a kindness—a mitzvah—not just by doing good deeds, but also by doing the kindness of telling and retelling the experience of good deeds. My diary, if memory served me well (and it did), would be full of such good experiences. From Paley’s perspective, researching and sharing the stories of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad became something of an ethical and moral imperative.

What role would my adult children have in such a project? The model which immediately came to mind was that proposed by Clark and Stratham (2005) that children are ‘experts in their own lives’ and that research with children—even very young children—should invite their participation in every

stage of the process (see also Clark and Moss, 2011). While the specific techniques suggested by these models of co-creating research were not appropriate to the diary-based data which already existed—they were not, for the most part, documenting their own experiences; for the most part, that had fallen to me—I still wanted my children to be as engaged in the process as possible. The initial responses of those who chose to participate indicated that they wished to be engaged in it too. Over the years of the research, their engagement waxed and waned, but that freedom was theirs, too, and contributed in its own way to shaping the process, to making it a co-creation. Throughout, they have had the opportunity to be—and to become—expert in their own lives.

These researcher-educators—Clark, Stratham, Moss—are associated with Reggio Emilia, the Italian city renowned for its educational approach. Among the key principles of this educational community is a 'pedagogy of listening' as a way of attending to 'the hundred languages of children' (Edwards et al., 2011). Most of these languages are not audible, so 'listening' comes to represent

a way of thinking and seeing ourselves in relationship with others and the world. Listening is an element that connects and that is part of human biology and is in the concept of life itself... [it] is a right or better it is part of the essence of being human. (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005, p. 6.)

The monograph from which this is taken, *Beyond Listening*, concludes that 'listening is of the utmost importance' (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005, p. 185). Contributing to the argument which leads to this conclusion is another work by Paley (1986), in which she asserts that 'I was truly curious about my role in the classroom' and that the documentation of her classroom, mostly using a tape recorder, was done so 'that I could become my own best witness' (p. 123). But her curiosity was not limited to herself.

The key is curiosity, and it is curiosity, not answers, that we model. As we seek to learn more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child's words and our responses to those words, the child feels respected. The child is respected. "What are these ideas I have that are so interesting to the teacher? I must be somebody with good ideas." Children who know others are listening may begin to listen to themselves... (Paley 1986, p. 127.)

My diary, I think, might offer evidence of a similar curiosity about my role as a stay-at-home dad and a similar listening. This pedagogy of listening, which is at the heart of the educational movement which originates in Reggio Emilia, finds expression in documentation, which is described as 'not just a teaching tool, but a pedagogical philosophy of knowing and valuing children' (Turner and Wilson 2010, p. 5). At the time that I was raising my children and writing my diary, I knew nothing of Reggio

Emilia, so I had no theoretical underpinning for my writing, no manifesto, no explicit educational purpose. However, I did have curiosity and listening. The diary falls short of being Reggio Emilia documentation in that I did not share it with my children until this research project began. It was a diary, not limited to pedagogical observations, so it was not shared with my children's teachers, either. So in this, again, it falls short of being something which increased the knowledge of the whole community of education in which my children were immersed.

The process of collecting, interpreting, reflecting, and reconstructing allows all of the participants involved—teachers, children, community members—to co-construct the meaning of the children's experience.' (Turner and Wilson 2010, p. 8.)

However, there are ways in which the diary might be seen as successful documentation.

These narratives about young children are not singularly about their development, but rather are about the image of children as citizens, as actors in society and co-constructors of culture... it is a way in which children are made visible. (Turner and Wilson 2010, p. 7.)

It is important to the educational theory which follows to elaborate on what this being 'made visible' means. This text goes on to explain.

It is crucial to create social context through which the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the individual can appear. And that's what this approach attempts to achieve. (Turner and Wilson 2010, p. 8.)

And so, in part, this research takes on a purpose of making visible what occurred during those years that I was a stay-at-home dad, and by so doing, to enrich the possibility of co-constructing the meaning of my children's and my experiences. This can be one way of interpreting what I mean when I say that this research is co-created or co-constructed. In this way, it is not just a gift to the field of education, it is also a gift to ourselves.

2.5.2 Beginnings in Biesta

While the above resources certainly laid the foundations for this research, no educationalist has shaped my thinking as much as Gert Biesta. His web site offers a summary of his work which begins to suggest his prominence as an educationalist:

Google scholar lists a total number of citations of around 52,000 (May 2023) of which close to 30,000 since 2018. An analysis published by research.com in 2022 ranked me 18th in the Social Sciences and Humanities in the UK and 124 worldwide. (gertbiesta.com, 2023, home.)

By these figures, it is clear that Biesta's work is the subject of much academic interest. Space simply does not allow for a more thorough exploration of his impact on the field and the critical analysis which attends it, but I encourage the curious reader to explore further his web site as a starting

point for understanding his life work. There, one may also find that, whilst working at a number of academic posts around the globe, he is also presently co-editor of the *British Educational Research Journal*, co-editor of the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, and associate editor of *Educational Theory*. He co-edits two book series with Routledge: *Theorizing Education* and *New Directions in the Philosophy of Education* (gertbiesta.com, 2023).

It was not, however, the prominence of Biesta's work which inspired me to place his work at the centre of my educational perspective for interpreting my diary. There was from my first reading of Biesta's work a deep attraction and sense of self-recognition in his theory: it offered new insights to my experience before I knew that I would be looking at my experiences as doctoral research. By this, I mean that Biesta's work offered me an interpretive framework in which I recognized in retrospect my practice and what he would call my 'virtuosity,' the ways in which I showed educational judgment (Biesta, 2013). Indeed, he claims that a purpose of life history research in education is to discover and share such virtuosity so that others might learn from it.

Biesta's thinking also featured prominently in my MA coursework. At least three of his concepts figured prominently in the teaching I received: his perspectives on 'what works' (Biesta, 2007), his coining of the term 'learnification' (Biesta, 2009), and his proposition that education has three functions (Biesta, 2015).

When Biesta looks at 'what works,' he writes about evidence-based research and practice in education. His conclusions are foreshadowed in the title of the essay: 'Why "what works" won't work' (Biesta, 2007). The flaw in evidence-based research in practice, he argues, is that it severely limits opportunities for educators to make judgements about what works for them and for their students in their particular contexts. In this way, he invites critical consideration of what in evidence-based research and practice is being measured and by whom and for whom, and whether the prescriptions for education which arise from such measurements and their conclusions can be relevant in local contexts. This of course informs my perspective on educational research; it makes it more possible, perhaps, for me to claim some merit to my own research when it has little or no claim to prescriptions for practice. The merit, if it can be claimed, instead arises from my similar preference for professional judgements in local context. There is a resonance for me, too, in my diary, such as in this entry:

Woke up thinking: I am a
Witness to the Unmeasurable. (D9:24.04.2007)

While measurement does enter into my doctoral research, these two brief lines—which with their line break resemble a poetic couplet—argue for a perspective, a ‘witness’, which is not only *not* quantitative, but outstrips even, presumably, any qualitative measure (tending even, perhaps, to a kind of unknowing). So I, like Biesta, do not witness to ‘what works,’ to something prescriptive with its focus on outcomes, but rather to something else, which might be something like judgement. By leaving behind the assurances and certainties of predictable outcomes, Biesta argues that teaching then becomes a pedagogy of empty hands (Biesta, 2008), a gift of openness to the unpredictability and uniqueness of the other.

In an article entitled ‘Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education,’ Biesta first coins the term ‘learnification’—‘the transformation of an educational vocabulary into a language of learning’ (Biesta 2009, p. 37) until ‘the ends and aims of education seem to have disappeared from our horizon’ (Biesta 2015, p. 26), and ‘there is too much talk about learning and too little talk about what learning is *for*’ (Biesta 2015, p. 127). Against learnification, Biesta argues for a different way of understanding education.

The point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn *something*, that they learn this for particular *purposes*, and that they learn this from *someone*. (Biesta 2012, p. 36.)

It is especially the importance of this *someone* which appeals to me in this research. Biesta argues for this someone and against a learnification which ‘appears to reduce teachers to facilitators of learning, competent practioners, or at worst “deliverers” of the curriculum’ (Muniz Solari et al. 2016, p. 48). In some contexts, notably the recent governmental advice on the Home Learning Environment (Department for Education, 2018), the *someone* is rendered altogether absent.

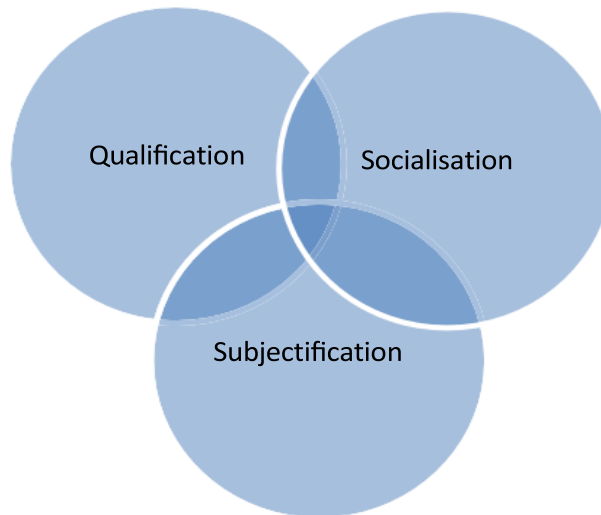


Figure 2. 'The three functions of education and the three domains of educational purpose' (Biesta 2015, p. 78).

Biesta describes education as having at least three domains, which he names Qualification, Socialization, and Subjectification (Figure 2, above). *Qualification*, he says, 'has to do with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions' (Biesta 2013, p. 4). *Socialization* 'has to do with the ways in which... we become part of existing traditions and ways of being and doing' (Biesta 2013, p. 4). *Subjectification*, then, 'has to do with the interest of education in the subjectivity or "subject-ness" of those we educate' (Biesta 2013, p. 4). As a first level of understanding subjectivity, then, we might see it as the concern not of Qualification or Socialization, but of Subjectification, a way of talking about the subject in their moments of responsibility or 'uniqueness-as-irreplaceability' (Biesta 2013, p. 144).

These three ideas, then, of 'what works' (with its corollary of 'empty hands'), 'learnification,' and the three domains or functions of education, will be fundamental to the development of my educational perspective for interpreting my diary. The idea of the three domains, and of subjectification in particular, will receive further treatment in Chapter Three of this thesis, as it is the balancing of these three domains which gives evidence of educational wisdom and the virtuosity for which narrative research in education has its purpose, and the event of subjectification which opens up the possibility of this balance, wisdom, and virtuosity.

This alone might be good enough for achieving a unique contribution to educational knowledge. To this, however, I would add that there is something elusive about Biesta's theory, as elusive as his claim that education is a gift given with empty hands (Biesta, 2008). He does not prescribe practices, but instead considers existential questions specific to education and in pursuit of educational wisdom. Because of this, part of the difficulty in reading Biesta is understanding how his theory

translates into practice, or imagining what his theory looks like in experience. So, by using Biesta's theory, I offer an interpretation not just of the virtuosity of the experiences documented in the diary, but also an opportunity to share what his theory—and specifically his Pedagogy of the Event (Biesta, 2013)—looks like in this one case.

My diary is not limited to the Early Years of my children's lives and education. While it might have been in some respects easier to explore only the earliest volumes of the diary, the longitudinal breadth of the diary seemed a great benefit of the data set; truncating it so radically seemed to do too much violence to the document. Plus, my participant children vary in age. What was I to do when the youngest was still within the ages of early childhood education, but my eldest was not? Was I to make my eldest simply disappear from the narrative? It felt more ethically correct to work with the entirety of the document to which I had gained access. This is another benefit to my choice of Biesta as central to my interpretations, as his theory is not limited to any developmental period, but addresses teaching and learning throughout the life course (see for example Nicoll, Biesta & Morgan-Klein, 2014). This versatility allows me to apply his theories of education not only to my interactions with my children in the sense of *their* education, but also to *my own* education, my own learning and *their* teaching, which not only emerges in my documented experiences but also has been expressed as an important experience of other stay-at-home dads (Solomon, 2017).

2.5.3 Dialogism

While in many respects Biesta would be sufficient for interpreting my experiences, I am not entirely reliant on him, but use other theorists to expand on my understanding of what he offers. While these include the sources already mentioned above, I also found a compatible interpretive richness in the Dialogism of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin as elucidated by the American philosopher Michael Holquist (2002). Dialogism is not educational theory even though it has its own pedagogical imperative. My attraction to it as an interpretive key might best be understood in the way I came to it. Reading a work on 'Education as a Moral Practice,' I was struck by the final paragraph, which quoted a definition of education as 'the conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972 cited by Pring, 2001). While this expression was a largely metaphorical description of knowledge sharing at the university level, I recognised in it a concise summary of what I had experienced more literally with my children when I was a stay-at-home dad. This led me on a search for a more developed theory on this kind of exchange, and I encountered Bakhtin in Kimiagari's (2017) exploration of Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hatches the Egg* (1968) and *Horton Hears a Who* (1954), books which I had shared with my children countless times. Kimiagari cited Holquist's seminal *Dialogism*

(2002) and in this book I found new understandings for passages in my diary which had seemed intractable, and a compatibility with Biesta's own insistence on the importance of dialogue. It also added context to Reggio Emilia's pedagogy of listening.

By including Holquist's dialogism as a way of interpreting my experience, I have not become expert in dialogism. This is a field of educational research in itself, as evidenced by the existence of the international journal, *Dialogic Pedagogy*. Likewise, by using 'the conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) as a starting point for exploring the dialogism in my experiences, I am not claiming to be expert in 'intergenerational learning,' or 'intergenerational family learning,' which are also served by specialist journals. While these often look at institutional provision of conversation between generations (for example Gadsden and Hall, 1996; Kenner et al, 2007) or family characteristics and models of learning (Rabusicova et al, 2016), I am primarily using Oakeshott's metaphorical definition of education as a starting point for interpreting and understanding my experiences and those of my children as educational, and then supporting that further with dialogism and Biesta's theories. However, intergenerational learning does provide further context for our experiences as an affordance for experiencing a sense of belonging in the home learning environment as a place of meaning making, as further detailed below.

Meanwhile, dialogism, as described by Holquist, is like the educational theory of Biesta in that it engages with similar existential questions, not questions of practice or technique. There is, however, arguably more practice in Holquist than in Biesta; it therefore offers what I see in the behaviour of dialogism—particularly the utterance in unavoidable response to the addressivities of environment—a way of seeing the conversations documented in the diary as experiences which begin to answer these existential questions and reveal the practice of educational theory. This description of dialogism is, I realise, quite dense. The bulk of Chapter Three in this thesis engages with picking apart and weaving together these theories, so greater clarity and simplicity is offered in the affordance of greater freedom to expand within that chapter. My use of dialogism as a concept is expressly not the sort of dialogic pedagogy suggested by some (see for example Alexander, 2019), in which listening is reduced to a mechanism which produces abilities for speaking or even for literacy but loses its importance beyond its utility to other ends. Rather, it more closely aligns with descriptions of 'serve and return' interactions described in studies of neurological development (see especially (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) which shapes not only early childhood but all future learning, as will be further considered in the following section. Dialogism also functions in direct opposition to the above described discursive construction of stay-at-home dads as isolated.

Dialogism, by contrast, assumes the impossibility of isolation and asserts that dialogue is endless and always engages with another (Holquist, 2002).

2.5.4 Developmental Stages

In the three preceding sections, I have shown some of the educational literature which has inspired this exploration of my experiences of a stay-at-home dad. I now turn to educational literature which helps to contextualize these experiences, further clarifying expectations and interpretations of the documented events. Specifically, I am including here two sections, first on developmental stages, and second on the home learning environment. The focus on developmental stages helps to contextualise the events documented in my diary within the structures of US educational systems and expectations. The second will revisit the topic of the home learning environment, raised above as relevant to studies of fatherhood, and show how this is conceived as a site of meaning-making, educational affordances, and the developmental benefits associated with it. This latter topic also includes a brief discussion of intergenerational learning and its benefits so as to further contextualise documented experiences between my children and my parents as examples of ‘the conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977).

I will begin with developmental stages.

All children start talking at different times and develop language at different rates. It is important to know what is typical development so that we can identify speech, language and communication difficulties early. (NELFT, 2024.)

The above statement by the North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT), while specific to language development, might be generalized across all areas of child development, which occur at different times and different rates, but are tracked against norms to identify difficulties early.

Such normative assessments are not the focus of this research; indeed, their function of identifying difficulties early is made moot by the time which has passed since the events were documented in my diary. It should also be noted that it is difficult to assess against such norms due to the different times and rates noted above, and, in the US context, that regulatory bodies recognise that social, cultural, and educational differences may cause variance from established norms (NAEYC, 2024). Furthermore, it has recently been shown that many of these developmental standards in the US have been established with little claim to being evidence-based (Zubler et al., 2022). In addition to these practical obstacles to elevating the place of development in this thesis, there are also methodological and theoretical obstacles.

Methodological obstacles to using development here arise principally from the fact that the data does not especially recommend it. The diary which I wrote during the 20 years I was a stay-at-home dad shows little or no evidence that I prioritized knowledge of developmental stages or evaluating my children against such norms. Mentions of ‘the latest cute development’ (D1:03.04.1996) in the diary are merely utterances of a parent aware that a child develops, but without any normative benchmarks of what is ‘developmentally appropriate’ or any indication of measurement against such norms. The only real exception to this might be the early, brief inquiry into ‘giftedness’ which is documented in the diary (D5:22.11.2005). In this instance, the emphasis is not on benchmarks, but on how I explored an educational option and, more important, how listening to my children allowed for their agentic refusal of pursuing ‘gifted’ education. On a more fundamental level, there is no evidence in the diary to suggest that time is organised in terms of developmental stages. This is perhaps due to the fact that I was raising four children at once, so their developmental stages would have been overlapping. Time is instead understood as organised by a daily progression of events— and for this, the Pedagogy of the Event, with its emphasis on the existential emergence of subjectification, is an appropriate framework for interpretation of those events. Time is furthermore structured, as developed and discussed in the thesis, in terms of the diary’s shifting audiences, structures and purposes, as methodologically appropriate to the interpretation of a diary. (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015).

Theoretical obstacles to the use of developmental perspectives in this thesis arise from the possibility of creating an uncritical conflict with the theory of Biesta, who rejects the use of ‘development’ as a way of understanding, representing, or shaping education. He is consistent in this, and so to guard against self-contradiction in my thesis, I will acknowledge his objections and demonstrate that the limits of my application of developmental norms and guidance do not introduce a fracture in my worldview.

Biesta’s first objection to development in education is directed against the work of Arendt, most of whose work receives a sympathetic reading and incorporation into his own thought. However, he draws the line when

Arendt’s arguments... are based on a psychological understanding of education, one that assumes that the only available vocabulary for education is that of development, preparation, identity, and control... (Biesta 2013, p. 8.)

He then proceeds to reject identity, as already noted, and with it, development:

I am, however, avoiding certain other words and concepts, most notably the notion of *identity*... the word I am deliberately avoiding here is *development*, as I do not think that the emergence of subjectivity should be understood in developmental terms. (Biesta 2013, p. 18.)

He next carries this line of thought into his consideration of an essay on democratic education and ‘the pedagogical fiction’—“the representation of inequality as a *retard* in one’s development” (Ranciere, 1991a, p. 119, emphasis in original, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 101).

This “pedagogical fiction” is a manifestation of a much wider problem in educational discourse and practice, which is the tendency to think of education entirely in psychological terms and, more specifically, in terms of psychological *development*.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 101, emphasis in original.)

Such a fiction infantilizes individuals and society, Ranciere claims, and he proceeds to make

an argument that takes the whole question of democratic education away from psychological developmentalism and locates it firmly in the domain of human action... By making the question of democracy existential rather than developmental... makes the connection between education and democracy a weak one, that is, one where the idea is not that education can develop or, even worse, produce democratic persons but where there is an ongoing interest in promoting those situations—those forms of human togetherness in which... freedom can appear. (Biesta 2013, p. 102.)

Elsewhere, Biesta criticizes the designation of the ‘need to have knowledge of human growth and development’ as a ‘key competency,’ referring to this as ‘a functionalist view of education’ and a manifestation of ‘learnification’ (Biesta 2013, pp. 124-126).

More recently, Biesta has reiterated the difference between his existential understanding of education and a more developmental one.

The existential orientation put forward in this book is not meant as a denial of the fact that children develop and learn. But as John Dewey already has helpfully noted, “pure” child-centred education that only takes its direction from how children learn and develop is actually “really stupid.” (Dewey 1984, p. 59 cited by Biesta 2022, p. 3.)

I do not include this quote to rankle developmentalists, but only to show the extent of Biesta’s rejection. It is not tepid. To use Biesta’s existential understandings to interpret my diary and to simultaneously include developmentalism suggests an order of inconsistency difficult to reconcile. As he says, ‘existential questions... are fundamentally different from other ways in which we can look at human beings and their learning and development’ (Biesta 2022, p. 9).

Due to the strength of these obstacles and objections, I limit my engagement with development in this thesis to the ways in which developmental milestones, life stages, and guidance offer context to

the events documented in the diary. This may be particularly useful for understanding developmental norms and expectations as they are constructed within the setting of the United States, as this is where the documented events occurred. Sharing these developmental aspects, then, makes available to international audiences, particularly in the UK where this research is conducted, a fuller understanding of the educational milieu of the findings in this research and their interpretation. Furthermore, an examination of child development offers a useful point of connection between the theory of dialogism (Holquist, 2002) and ‘serve and return’ interactions which develop neural networks necessary for learning throughout the life course (Center on the Developing Child, 2011), as will be discussed below.

In England, where this research is being conducted, educational stages and developmental milestones are standardised by the Department for Education. Educational stages are established as five: early years, primary, secondary, Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) (gov.uk, 2012). The state-funded schools (including faith schools) are further subdivided into Key Stages based on the child’s age, and within these Stages are Years, as Table 1, below, shows.

Key Stages	Child’s Age
Early Years Foundation Stage	3 – 4
Key Stage 1 (Year 1 & Year 2)	5 – 7
Key Stage 2 (Year 3 – Year 6)	7 – 11
Key Stage 3 (Year 7 – Year 9)	11 – 14
Key Stage 4 (Year 10 & Year 11)	14 – 16

Table 1. Educational Key Stages (UK)

The final two years of compulsory education, sometimes called Key Stage 5, offers additional academic advancement in Sixth Form academic studies or in vocational training, which might take the form of apprenticeships. Educational requirements within these key stages are established by a national curriculum (DfE, 2014).

Developmental milestones are typically reserved for exploration within the early years stage, as in the guidance, ‘Development Matters’ (DfE, 2023), which specifies normative expectations for learning across a variety of competencies from birth to age 4 years. The National Health Service offers similar norms through age 5. This focus on the early years is supported by research in the UK such as that by the Centre for Educational Neuroscience (2024), which claims that ‘Most learning happens in the first 3 years.’ However, this same organization cautions that ‘focusing on the first three years exclusively underplays the development that happens right through childhood and adolescence.’

In the US, where the researched educational events occurred and were documented, stages and milestones elude such national establishment as norms. As described by the US Department of State (usinfo.org, 2024), this is largely due to the decentralization of educational control, with limited norms established by the federal government and greater latitude afforded to each of the fifty states, their local municipalities, and their local school districts to shape their own educational standards. These variables include school starting age, availability and requirements of early childhood education, and school leaving age. Stages are at the national level organised into Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and Secondary Education; however, the line between Elementary and Secondary varies by state and local school district, with some lower secondary schools (often called Middle Schools or Junior High Schools) starting as early as 4th grade; High Schools can begin in 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th grade. There are also a variety of schooling options at these later grades, including military boarding schools and so-called ‘magnet schools,’ which attract students with specific subject aims and allow for concentrated study in those fields, most typically STEM or the arts. In addition to complying with state-mandated testing, many state-funded high schools offer a variety of other academic preparation, including access to study at local trade schools and universities, national Advanced Placement testing, and/or an International Baccalaureate track.

My children and I lived in the state of Pennsylvania during the time period included in this research. At the state level, the Pennsylvania Office of Elementary and Secondary Education oversees all grades K – 12, offering a subject-based curriculum to establish ‘core standards’ across elementary (K – 5) and secondary (6 – 12) levels (PDE, 2024). More locally, our home was within the Selinsgrove Area School District. By comparison with the Key Stages in England, this school district’s educational stages are organised as shown below in Table 2.

School	Child’s Age
Elementary (Kindergarten, Grades 1 & 2)	5 – 7
Intermediate (Grades 3 – 5)	8 – 10
Middle (Grades 6 – 8)	11 – 13
High School (Grades 9 – 12)	14 – 17

Table 2. Selinsgrove Area School District (seal-pa.org, 2024).

However, although we resided in that school district, my children began school about 8 miles away, within the Shikellemy School District. It does not designate a separate Intermediate stage, but includes these grades within a single Elementary (K – 5) school (shikbraves.org, 2024). Even though my children’s school was within this district, as a private, Roman Catholic school, it was structured differently. It was but one school, with all grades up to Grade 8, including 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool. So, the organization of their actual schooling was designed to look something like that in

the following table, in which preschool and grades K-8 were all offered by one school, with a planned transition from private, Catholic school to public Selinsgrove Area High School at the beginning of Grade 9.

School	Child's Age
St. Monica's Preschool	3 – 4
St. Monica's School (Grades K – 8)	5 – 13
SA High School (Grades 9 – 12)	14 – 17

Table 3. Madeleine's experience of school stages.

However, St. Monica School closed in 2012, so that only my eldest, Madeleine, achieved this trajectory. Both my sons went to the Selinsgrove Area Middle School after the closure, so their experienced structure looked something like that depicted in the table below, with Max experiencing one year in the public Middle School and Gus two.

School	Child's Age
St. Monica's Preschool	3 – 4
St. Monica's School (Grades K – 8)	5 – 13
SA Middle School (Grades 6 – 8)	11 – 13
SA High School (Grades 9 – 12)	14 – 17

Table 4. Max's and Gus' experience of school stages.

As can be seen even in these locally pertinent examples, due to the political structuring of education in the US and its regulation at federal, state, and local levels, there is no uniform model of educational stages, but the standard stages and the different experiences against them are offered here for context.

Similarly, there is no educationally devised standard of childhood development applied in all states, regions, or schools. At the national level, a variety of medically defined standards of childhood development are available. These are compiled by governmental organizations such as the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2024a-p), and MedlinePlus (2024) Each of these has similarities and differences in comparison with the others, including the range of ages described, the specificity of their language, and the role of adults in helping children to attain these goals. Perhaps the most broadly applied model of childhood development in the US, however, is that published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP; see most recently Zubler et al., 2022). Estimates in the US Department of Health and Human Services publication, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* find a high rate of access to paediatricians who would be applying these standards, noting that ‘the percentage of children aged 0-17 who received a well-child check-ups increased from 75.8% in 2008 to 86.5% in 2018’ (MMWR, 2020, p, 222). Although my diary includes little

comparison of my children to developmental milestones, it does document frequent paediatric check-ups where these standards would have been applied. Of all the childhood development norms, those created by the AAP would have been the ones with which I would have been most familiar when I was a stay-at-home dad. Even AAP standards, however, have been recently revised, with previous developmental lists being called into question for their lack of evidence-based determination of standards and limited usefulness (Zubler et al, 2022).

In relationship to these medical models, a good example of educationally devised developmental milestones can be discovered in the policy statements of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This organization recognises four domains of child development—physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic development—and offers guidance to schools and educators working with children from birth to age eight, helping them to balance these domains in what they call Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): ‘methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning’ (NAEYC, 2024a). To design these methods, they do not establish their own set of milestones, but defer to other bodies, stating that all DAP ‘should be informed by developmental milestones including use of state early learning standards’ (NAEYC, 2024a).

In Pennsylvania, where I raised my children, the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) within the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, establishes one set of state standards for child development. Note that this is not within the Department of Education, but a separate department which addresses issues within Early Childhood Education such as services for children with disabilities or developmental delays, getting help with childcare expenses, finding a child care provider, and sharing provider licensing requirements, reports and ratings. This same governmental body, then, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, creates separate ‘learning standards.’ These are published individually by school stages, including Early Childhood, Infant – Toddler (OCDEL, 2014). Also available separately are Pre-Kindergarten (2014), Kindergarten (2016), First Grade (2016), and Second Grade (2016). They are also published across stages as subject areas: Learning through Play, Creative Thinking and Expression-Communication through the Arts, Language and Literacy, Mathematical Thinking, Scientific Thinking, Social Studies, Social and Emotional. Within the learning standards, then, each of these school stages offers detailed guidance and tools for assessment. For example, the Infant – Toddler manual runs to 142 pages, offering for each of the above subject areas a hierarchy of ability levels (Infant, Young Toddler, Older Toddler) with ‘Concepts and Competencies’ (‘the learner will...’) and ‘Supportive

Practices' ('the adult will...'). Each skill level has two to seven competencies or practices. So, there are a great many standards here which might offer potential context for the events I documented with my children.

However, when I was a stay-at-home dad, I had no awareness of either NAEYC or these OCDEL standards. Due to my greater awareness of AAP standards and their broader application across the US—and hence a greater relevance to a potential audience of stay-at-home dads there—I will primarily refer to developmental standards established by the AAP (Zubler et al., 2022) and the US Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2024a-p), which also offers succinct parental guidance in concert with AAP standards and reveals developmental screening at ages 9 months, 18 months, 2 years, and 33 months. This latter begins its guidance for each age group with a provocation for parents:

Important things to share with the doctor...

- What are some things you and your baby do together?
- What are some things your baby likes to do? (CDC, 2024a)

There is evidence in the diary that I had similar conversations with our paediatrician (D1:13.05.1996). Much of the diary in my children's early years might be interpreted as the answer to these questions.

Perhaps the single most comprehensive, succinct, and authoritative tool is a table of 'Child Development, Parenting Strategies, and Causes for Concern, 0-18 years' (Childwelfare.gov, 2011 cited by Advokids, 2024). It offers eleven developmental stages across the full paediatric age range where other age ranges are significantly limited to early years. It also includes markers of positive parenting strategies and 'causes for concern' in parental behaviour. These could also be used for comparison purposes regarding my behaviours as a stay-at-home dad, offering some grounds for making claims that our shared experiences helped my children develop normally. This tool also offers the benefit of being contemporaneous with the later years of my time as a stay-at-home dad (1995-2015).

2.5.4.1 Developmental stages of my children

Within the framework of developmental stages described by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Zubler et al., 2022), the twenty years documented in my diary (1995 – 2015) bear witness to seven developmental stages of my children as shown in Table 5, below. In this medical construction of childhood and its developmental stages, 'school' shapes the definition of almost half of childhood, the ten years inclusive of Preschool and Gradeschooler stages. So, aside from the fact that these developmental stages are applied widely in the US as standards, there is also here a clear indication

that the medical construction is not merely anatomical and physiological, but places high importance on the development of the child in educational terms as well. This too, then, argues for the appropriateness of these standards as my choice within an educational study. Such a choice is necessary given the multiple understandings of childhood development within the US context. These provide a rudimentary vocabulary for describing my children’s developmental stages across the years of this study.

Stage	Madeleine	Max	Gus
Prenatal	1995	1998	1999 - 2000
Baby (0-12 mo.)	1995 – 1996	1998 – 1999	2000 – 2001
Toddler (1-3 y)	1996 – 1998	1999 – 2001	2001 – 2003
Preschool (3-5)	1988 – 2000	2001 – 2003	2003 – 2005
Gradeschooler (5-12)	2000 – 2007	2003 – 2010	2005 – 2012
Teen (12-18)	2007 – 2013	2010 – 2016	2012 – 2018
Young Adult (18-21)	2013 – 2016	2016 – 2019	2018 – 2021

Table 5. Developmental stages of my children (AAP, 2024).

Organising this data chronologically, then, allows for a more linear representation of how these developmental stages unfold for each of my participant children across the course of the twenty years documented in my diary. This is shown in Table 5, below. Locating my children within these developmental stages contextualizes documented events against norms for better interpretation.

Year	Diary volume(s)	Madeleine	Max	Gus
1994	1			
1995	1	Prenatal Baby (0-12 mo.)		
1996	1	Baby (0-12 mo.) Toddler (1-3 y)		
1997	1			
1998	1	Toddler (1-3 y) Preschool (3-5)	Prenatal Baby (0-12 mo.)	
1999	2		Baby (0-12 mo.) Toddler (1-3 y)	
2000	2 – 3	Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)		Prenatal Baby (0-12 mo.)
2001	3		Toddler (1-3 y) Preschool (3-5)	Baby (0-12 mo.) Toddler (1-3 y)
2002	3			
2003	3		Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)	Toddler (1-3 y) Preschool (3-5)
2004	4			
2005	4 – 5			Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)
2006	5 – 8			
2007	8 – 10	Gradeschooler (5-12) Teen (12-18)		
2008	10 – 12			
2009	12 – 13			
2010	13 – 14		Gradeschooler (5-12) Teen (12-18)	
2011	14 – 24			
2012	24 – 35			Gradeschooler (5-12) Teen (12-18)
2013	35 – 42	Teen (12-18) Young Adult (18-21)		
2014	42 – 46			
2015	47			

Table 6. Chronological presentation of participant children's developmental stages.

2.5.4.2 Early childhood development

Within these stages of development, recent and current research on early childhood development offers context particularly rich for the interpretation of the data in my study. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University has identified three 'core concepts' for understanding the first years of a child's life. These are, first, that 'experiences build brain architecture,' second, that 'serve and return interaction shapes brain circuitry,' and, third, that 'toxic stress derails healthy development' (Center on the Developing Child, 2024).

The first of these contributes to this research as a way of understanding the experiences explored here, casting them as the building blocks of education at a neurological level. The second of these begins to reveal the first: serve and return interactions which shape brain circuitry receives expression and theorization throughout this thesis as the theory and practice of dialogism. This concept of serve and return is analogous to tennis or ping-pong. The child initiates developmental play by the 'serve' of his attention—for example, the child might notice an object. The interested adult offers the return, 'responding in a very directed, meaningful way'—in this example, the adult might name the object, building association between object and signifying sounds. These same actions, which are similarly represented in the addressivity and response of dialogism, shape further language acquisition, including mark-making, word recognition, and writing. These dialogues forge learning at a neurological level.

The interaction between genetics and experience that shapes brain architecture is embedded in the reciprocal relationships that children have with the adults in their lives. (Center on the Developing Child, 2011.)

Corollary, then to this important interaction in the adult/child dyad is the claim that 'the most important experiences come from the environment of relationships that interact with each child.' (Center on the Developing Child, 2009).

The general organization of Pennsylvania's learning standards into childhood competencies and adult practices represents this 'serve and return' of dialogism (OCDEL, 2014). The third of these core concepts raises the spectre of toxic stress and the way it derails healthy development. It proceeds to show, then, that it is precisely these same dialogic actions which are shown to mitigate and relieve stress, creating a healthy environment for establishing foundations for successful learning, behaviour, and mental and physical health.

When this same organization offers '8 Things to Remember about Child Development' (Center on the Developing Child, 2016), they refer not to normative stages, but to understandings 'that can inform and improve existing policy and practice.' Of these eight, four expand on the three core concepts in such a way that could be of particular interest to discussion within this thesis.

The first of these states that 'development is a highly interactive process' and that 'the environment in which one develops before and soon after birth provides powerful experiences' (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 1) which shape our ability to learn essential skills and can even alter genes and our family inheritance. This understanding invites a look at the environment in which my child

learned and which of its affordances in the documented experiences of this research might contribute to the development of such skills.

The second of these understandings asserts that

while attachments to their parents are primary, young children can also benefit significantly from relationships with other responsive caregivers both within and outside the family. (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 2.)

This provides the opportunity to interpret my documented experiences with an awareness of the importance of such relationships, which include documented experiences with teachers, grandparents, and even siblings, aware that ‘multiple caregivers can promote young children’s social and emotional development’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 2).

While the third of these understandings affirms that ‘a great deal of brain architecture is shaped during the first three years after birth’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 3), it also affirms the continuation of such development across the entire course of childhood.

While the regions of the brain dedicated to higher-order functions—which involve most social, emotional, and cognitive capacities, including multiple aspects of executive functioning—are also affected powerfully by early influences, they continue to develop well into adolescence and early adulthood. (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 3.)

This echoes a similar statement, noted above, by the Centre for Educational Neuroscience (2024) and reinforces the idea that beyond the developmental milestones typically associated with early childhood, there might be relevance to seeing how these dialogic events continue to be reinforced and played out into middle childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.

The final ‘thing to remember’ about child development offered by this source is the theory that ‘Resilience requires relationships, not rugged individualism’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 4).

The reliable presence of at least one supportive relationship and multiple opportunities for developing coping skills... are the essential building blocks for strengthening the capacity to do well in the face of significant adversity. (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 4.)

Opportunities for developing coping skills are plentiful; my diary offers witness to this. The key variable, then, seems to be the reliable presence of at least one supportive relationship. The stay-at-home dad, by the choice of becoming the primary caregiver of his children, asserts the possibility, at least, of being that reliable presence and a dialogic partner as an expression of that supportive

relationship. This research then provides an opportunity to look at documented experiences for signs of that reliable presence, what it might have looked like in our one case.

2.5.4.3 Middle childhood and adolescence

All of the examples of developmental stages cited here, from the UK context and the US context, describe in great number and detail the normative milestones in the first few years of life. The number and detail decrease significantly with school years, shifting away from linguistic measures like numbers of words and sentence length and toward social behaviours like an increase in the importance of friendship in Middle Childhood (CDC, 2024o); in the teen years, focus turns to the physical changes of puberty, the problem of identity, and a drive for independence (CDC, 2024p). The guidance for parents similarly shrinks from instructions for developing very specific motor skills to advice to offer little more than tolerance and availability. To ensure adequate understanding of development unique to older age groups in the face of this shrinking detail, I also turned to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, which offers a Facts for Families Guide (AACAP, 2017) including developmental expectations and guidance for the teenage years. However, the above suggestion that dialogic action between children and adults continues to shape brain architecture beyond the early years and into adolescence makes dialogism, with its habitual ‘serve and return’ interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011), a particularly apt framework for interpreting the events of twenty years with my children.

2.5.5 The Home Learning Environment

Shortly before I began this project, the UK government published educational advice regarding the home learning environment (DfE, 2018) and its importance as ‘the greatest predictor’ of educational outcomes (Melhuish et al., 2008). This document defined the home learning environment (HLE) as ‘the physical home and the interactions in and around the home which implicitly and explicitly support a child’s learning’ (DfE, 2018, p. 9). Linguistic benefits are attributed.

‘The quality of the HLE is a key predictor of a child’s early language ability and future success; positive experiences can have lasting and life changing impacts... early language ability is consistently linked to later outcomes—including school attainment and job prospects’ (DfE, 2018, p. 9).

And largely linguistic goals were set.

We need to drive change...to improve outcomes for children...(so that) by 2028, the percentage of children who do not achieve at least expected levels across all goals in the “communication & language” and “literacy” areas of learning at the end of reception year (EYFSP) is reduced by half. (DfE, 2018, p. 5.)

This government advice has been followed by further studies (notably Parker et al., 2019 and Lehl et al., 2020) which reinforced understandings of the home learning environment as a site for shaping school readiness and educational development.

In the US context, the Department of Education offers research on the home learning environment, including its impact on linguistic ability and its place as a predictor of future educational achievement (Tamis-LeMonda, 2019), but makes no similar policy pronouncements. Instead it gathers and shares more specific applications such as in home schooling (Sabol, 2018) and in experiences of the home learning environment during the covid-19 pandemic (Bhamani, 2020).

Historically, studies of fatherhood have emphasized the absence of fathers from the home learning environment (Stolz, 1954; Landy et al, 1969; Hetherington, 1972; Geller et al, 2012). Associated detriments have led the US Census Bureau to declare a 'father absence crisis in America':

19.7 million children, more than 1 in 4, live without a father in the home. Consequently, there is a 'father factor' in nearly all of the societal ills facing America today. (US Census Bureau, 2017, p. 1.)

As of 2024, these numbers were updated to 24 million children, and 1 in 3.

In the UK, a similar discourse is perhaps best exemplified by then Prime Minister David Cameron's estimation that participants in the London Riots of 2011 'have no father at home' (Cameron, 2011).

The stay-at-home dad is by his title definitively 'at home' and therefore an actor in the Home Learning Environment wherever he represents his role. Despite this, stay-at-home dads have not yet to my knowledge entered into research about the Home Learning Environment. The government report's definition of the home learning environment makes no mention of a parent, suggesting that the Home Learning Environment is envisioned as a site of 'learnification' (Biesta, 2009), where learning can occur without teaching. Parker et al. (2019), however, specifically address the importance of the parent-child relationship, thus offering an opportunity for a closer look at the stay-at-home dad's educational functioning in this environment. The work of Lehl et al.(2020) also suggests a potential contribution of this research to the understandings of the home learning environment, as they acknowledge that 'few studies have examined changes in the HLE over time and its longer term effects on children's outcomes;' and those which have tend to use 'quantitative methodologies and statistical analyses' (Lehl et al., 2020, p. 1). My use of qualitative methods and a narrative approach offers potentially new ways of thinking about the Home Learning Environment over the broad longitudinal aspect of the twenty years documented in my diary.

The Home Learning Environment is also aspirational, presented as an aim to implement ‘what works’ (Biesta, 2007), as the government advice and subsequent research suggest that controlling the home learning environment could allow for predictable outcomes like a dramatic increase in school readiness. Such prediction of outcomes cannot be the aim of a small case study such as mine; furthermore, this study looks more toward the unpredictability of subjectivity and the pedagogy of the event, so ‘what works’ about the home learning environment is not its function here.

Rather, the home learning environment takes on a deeper level of interest in my project when we consider it as a place in which meanings are created. In order to understand how this might occur, I would like to succinctly contextualize my understanding of the home learning environment within broader geographical and psychological designations of place and space.

2.5.5.1 Places and spaces

I claim for this research an understanding of the home learning environment as a place for meaning-making. Such an understanding is already present in dialogism, in which every environment, with its situational affordances, becomes ‘a relation of simultaneity,’ a coming together for the event shared spatially, temporally and axiologically (Holquist 2002, p. 152). In order to see the home learning environment in this way, I will briefly argue for the applicability of three different understandings of place.

The first meanings to establish in this understanding regard its most basic terminology. It has been said that ‘Place is security, space is freedom’ (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). In this seemingly simple dichotomy, the home learning environment is found to be a place in its emphasis on home and the opportunities to be found there for safety. At the same time, however, the limitless reaches of learning suggest the freedom which might render the home learning environment equally a space. This first understanding of place and space finds us then at a boundary between these two realms, requiring an exploration of the ways in which our experience shapes these understandings, from non-human animal behaviours which we replicate (such as nesting) to literary imaginings and associations which vary from person to person. It is also possible to find context for our meaning-making in the ways that sense discovers and the mind extrapolates the freedoms implied in space, and how such abstractions allow for the creation of human-built and interpreted places and spaces.

A second understanding of our home learning environment more specifically as a place makes it possible to construct meanings of the place. These can be built on a triad of self, other, and environment, operable on all scales of place, and given further dimension by the *distinction*,

valuation, continuity, and change associated with the place (Gustafson, 2001). Each of these aspects of meaning-making can be applied to our home learning environment.

The first pole of this triad, construed as the self, engages with 'highly personal meanings' often associated with long and/or important periods of one's 'life path,' including 'childhood, adolescence, parenthood' as well as emotions such as a 'sense of home,' activities of work and/or recreation, and 'self-identification' (Gustafson, 2001, p. 9). So, one can see how the self (within these constructions conceived as singular) of the diarist, the researcher and the self of each of my participant children might see all of these characteristics of the meanings of a place in any study which includes our own home. There might be especially for a stay-at-home dad this characteristic of 'self-identification' in this appellation which constructs the identity of stay-at-home dad with so much attachment to the home.

The second pole In Gustafson's model locates the Other at an extreme position without any relationship to the self. Such an extreme allows generalizations about the demographics of the place in which I raised my children, though I spend little time in this study at this level. However, along the axis between the self and this extreme other lie relational meaning-making: a place has meaning in part because of the relationships forged there, including the ways in which community is fostered and mutual recognition is conferred. We can see this, of course, in the home learning environment's parent-child dyad, but also in relationship with grandparents and, outside the home, with teachers, coaches, clergy, and other parents. This relational axis of meaning-making is of particular importance in this study, with its emphases on dialogism, wayfaring, and study as love.

The third pole in this model, environment, concerns natural and human-built conditions and structures, including physical, historical, and symbolic constructions of the place. This study does not engage with interpretation at this extreme pole. However, operating along a self-environment axis, there are multiple expressions of meaning-making around the relationship of myself to the structure of my house (see for example D15:25.02.2011) or of my children's physical location in garden (D4:n.d.2), pond (D2:13.07.2000), church (D5:03.12.2005), or football field (D14:28.08.2010), and the affordances which each of these environments has in store for each self that encounters it. This self-environment axis is also of great importance to dialogism, as every utterance is seen as a response to one's environment, and this is expressed explicitly in the diary (D35:21.12.2012). There is also educational significance to this axis, as I recognise retrospectively the importance of environments to teaching, not only in the name of the home learning environment, but as it is expressed in an exemplary way within the Reggio Emilia approach, situating the learning triad of

child, parent, and teacher within such a social and cultural environment (Rinaldi, 2000). In terms of scale, meaning-making within this study occurs at a local level, primarily within the home and school, sometimes ranging to the larger local community, such as those designated by the Shikellemy School District or the Selinsgrove Area School District. Beyond these small boundaries, though, meaning-making occurs at state, national, or global scale only very rarely within the diary and occur more prominently as part of this retrospective interpretation and the ways in which I contextualise the events documented in the diary with regard to state and national educational standards for an international audience.

The further attribute of ‘distinction’ qualifies a place as identifiable; in this study, I might point to my home address, or the names of schools and churches as distinct. ‘Valuation’ places this distinct location in comparison with some norm; in my case, our home operated in contrast to societal norms by virtue of the presence of a stay-at-home dad. While I assign to this no simple valuation such as good or bad, the choice to be a stay-at-home dad represents certain values—including a prioritization of education (see Solomon, 2017)—which then infiltrate the meaning of the place. ‘Continuity’ is a temporal dimension of the place, which is represented in the ‘life path’ of the self, but also in the enduring presence of the other and of environmental features. With the attribute of ‘change,’ meanings are created in the changes experienced in the place as well as in the way the place changes. So, in this project, we see continually unfolding the changes in my children as they grow from infancy to adolescence, but we also see change in, for example, the closure of St. Monica School. All of these features, then, as defined by Gustafson, might be considered when understanding the meaning of the home learning environment revealed in this thesis.

A second understanding of our home learning environment as a place for meaning-making builds on Agnew’s (2011) offer of six suggestions for general theorization and particular study of place(s).

First, there must be a careful definition of the place in three ‘dimensions’: the place as a location (‘a site in space’), as a locale (‘where everyday activities take place’) and as a ‘sense of place’ (in which persons situated and acting in that place feel identification with it, a sense of ‘belonging’). This first suggestion is fulfilled in this study by my location of our home learning environment within the school district of Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, and offering it as a locale for all the ‘everyday activities’ documented in the diary. Identification with the home learning environment again might be suggested in the prominence of the word ‘home’ in my title as stay-at-home dad. However, I hesitate at the use of ‘identification’ for its implications of identity and all the trouble which identity causes in studies of stay-at-home dads (see literature review, above) and for me in this study (see

research methods, below). Instead, I prefer to use the word ‘belonging,’ with its implications for studies into social connection (see for example Cohen, 2022). As for my children, it would be difficult to estimate the degree to which they identify with the place now; all of us have moved away. At the time which the diary documents, however, it was very much our home, and this sense of belonging, while not explicitly stated, is evidenced in the events documented there.

Second, the place must be understood as relational, existing within a network of places. Within this study, the network of places most prominently include our schools, our churches, and our local fields for practicing and playing American football, but these places extend to include many other places across space and time, as will be shown. Such a networked understanding of the home learning environment helps to view the meaning-making attendant to educational events as occurring across these various individual places of the network instead of viewing them as occurring at disconnected geographical scales. It also helps to subvert the discourse of isolation associated with stay-at-home dads.

Third, ‘*mobility* is an inherent part of how some places are defined and operate’ (Agnew, 2011, p. 25). There was no school bus offered between our home and St. Monica School, so for the 14 years which my children attended that school (1998 – 2012), there was at least one and often multiple round-trip journeys in the family mini-van between home and school. Similar trips persisted throughout the high school years, as the bussing provided by the school did not accommodate extra-curricular activities before or after normal school hours. The shared experience of these daily journeys, with their educational destinations, purposes, and conversational content, serve as an experiential link of the home learning environment with other networked learning environments. This factor also enters into our meaning making as the diary documents perspectives on ‘my peripatetic ancestry (D15:04.03.2011) and, more broadly, whenever we begin to speak in term of wayfaring, which draws its meaning from movement.

Fourth, there is a suggestion that places are shaped by their unique mixture of various local and regional features. This would include diverse factors, such as how a place incorporates things like organizations or communication networks. For our home learning environment, this can be seen in the way we connected with other family members spread spatially across the US, but also spread temporally across the history of our family and explored in genealogical studies and excursions. It can also be seen in the way we connected—or did not connect—with media. For example, during most of the years documented in the diary, our family by choice had no television. Our children were

late among their peers in acquiring cell phones or using social media. These features shaped the place of our home learning environment, even if not all of them receive treatment within this study.

In a related way, the fifth suggestion allows that technology provides for new ‘place-making projects.’ There is ample evidence for this in the diary. The arrival of various forms of technology shifted experiences of presence and participation at family meals and story times, transforming place into a hand-held portal accessing places shared with schoolmates and teammates.

Finally, and most important to this study,

place is fundamental to understanding knowledge production and dissemination... places really matter for what we think abstractly as well as what we do practically. (Agnew, 2011, p. 27.)

This understanding of place fits neatly with the home learning environment and the way this thesis looks at educational events which were co-created and documented within this place. The orientation toward dialogism, then, as a way of interpreting those events, receives a kind of validation in the summary of this final suggestion as a matter of ‘location and locution’ (Livingstone, 2007, p. 21 cited by Agnew, 2011, p. 27).

These three understandings of place as proposed by Tuan (1977), Gustafson (2001), and Agnew (2011) offer a variety of perspectives for viewing our home learning environment as a place for meaning-making. To these, I would add an awareness that ‘the meaning of place and space will change as the invention, experience, reading and construction of it changes’ (Kemal, 2019, n.p.) These changes in meaning constantly change throughout the diary. The diary itself is transformed in its frontispiece from a tablet to a place of encounter. These places of encounter recur on the pages and open up other spaces: home, school, church, football field. Each documented event, as a dialogical utterance, and each documented utterance within those events are all responses to addressivities, each an occasion of meaning making. Such changes at every stage—invention, experience, reading and construction—suggests not only the endlessness of the line and dialogue, but also the polyvocality of symbiotic autoethnography (Beattie, 2022): that the multiple selves of researcher and researched all bring their different meanings and these, too, differ across time even as the researcher draws them together into a seemingly singular text.

This polyvocality, which I will treat in greater detail in my methodology chapter, also intersects with broader issues of identity and their place in this research. Within this development of the home learning environment as a place for meaning-making, however, we have seen how Gustafson posits

self as one of the three poles of his meaning-making triad and how Agnew has also conceived meaning-making in terms of a person's identification with a place. Such issues regarding the connections between identity and place in the meanings we make have received more recent exploration. Such identification is first described as

those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioural tendencies relevant to a specific environment. (Proshansky, 1978, p. 155 cited by Peng, 2020, pp. 1-2.)

This is further defined by differentiating between two kinds of place identity: identity of a place and people's place identity (Paasi, 1986 cited by Peng, 2020). The former, at the risk of oversimplifying, is more of a socially constructed identity of a place—its history, marketing, governance, etc.—while the latter is 'identification of individuals with a place' (Peng, 2020, p. 2). We might, in other words, search the events in the diary for meaning-making which identifies the home learning environment as such, and the ways in which my children and I take our sense of identity from such meanings, recognising that 'Place and people are interdependent' (Peng, 2020, p. 16). While these understandings might be applied to the home learning environment in which I was a stay-at-home dad, such analysis, both in its psychological foundations and its analytic techniques, is beyond the aims and remit of this research. While such explorations might delve the ways in which my children and I construct our identities in relation to our experienced identity of the home learning environment as a place, such a direction would not follow the data, which contrarily suggests the discovery of meaning not so much in identity, but in subjectivity and responsibility. The differences between these two lines of inquiry will also receive further treatment in Chapter 4, below. However, I recognise that my diary is a rich resource; such interpretations of identity might be deployed and such contexts could inform government and other stakeholders' aims to shape the home learning environment based on the way it is shaped by and shapes place identity. These could be opportunities for future research.

2.5.5.2 Affordances

The above notions of place and space contextualise our home learning environment as a place for meaning-making. To these, I would also add the notion of affordances. By affordances, I refer specifically to its educational meaning, where it is seen as the relationship existing potentially in an environment until it is actualized by a child (Gibson, 1979; Storli & Hagen, 2010).

My data from our home learning environment takes into account the material wealth of our home and the ways in which it provided affordances for learning. Such wealth might be perceived as an unreflective middle-class privilege, as I documented in passing our house, our cars, our excursions and holidays, and our musical instruments. This is an active choice to allow the data to reveal within this documented environment those affordances which are most meaningful, which are not these material goods.

In terms of the 'core concepts' of child development summarized above (Center on the Developing Child, 2024), the environment draws the attention of a child, a first affordance. The children, with the 'serve' of their attention to the environment, offer affordances for a parent's 'return.' By choosing to be a stay-at-home dad, I offered my children the affordance of such interactions, that there would be an adult present and ready to return their serve. Which of these affordances is most important? And how important is it?

Ensuring children have adult caregivers who consistently engage in serve and return interaction... builds a foundation in the brain for all learning, behaviour, and health that follow. (Center on the Developing Child, 2011b.)

Put another way,

All development builds on what comes before. So when children experience stable, nurturing relationships, it fosters the development of healthy circuitry. (Center on the Developing Child, 2007.)

These statements of benefits can also be reframed as an avoidance of the risks of harm to healthy development:

Toxic stress can be avoided if we can ensure that the environment in which children grow and develop are nurturing, stable, and engaging. (Center on the Developing Child, 2011c.)

So, my choice to emphasize the relational affordances of our documented home learning environment provide an opportunity to reveal the ways in which we experienced our attempts to sustain such stability, nurturing and engagement necessary to the benefits described above. I would further emphasize that such neurologically defined developmental benefits also share integrity with an educational philosophy which also emphasizes the importance of a *someone* in a child's learning, as described above.

The point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn *something*, that they learn this for particular *purposes*, and that they learn this from *someone*. (Biesta 2012, p. 36.)

It is also important that I, as a stay-at-home dad, was not the only *someone* to offer these relational affordances to my children. Frequently, my four children offered these relational affordances to each other. The role of the mother of my children in providing such affordances cannot, unfortunately, be explored in this study due to her refusal of consent to participate. However, both my mother and my father played an active role in the lives of my children. Our home learning environment, then, significantly had the opportunity to provide intergenerational learning with its attendant benefits, which will be discussed further below.

2.5.5.3 Intergenerational learning

Intergenerational learning is the way that people of all ages can learn together and from each other. It is an important part of Lifelong Learning, where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge. Beyond the transfer of knowledge it fosters reciprocal learning relationships between different generations and helps develop social capital and social cohesion in our ageing societies.' (Generations Working Together, 2021-2024.)

As suggested by the above definition, much of the interest in intergenerational learning tends toward better understanding and serving 'our ageing societies' and the way such learning has been shown to provide socio-emotional and health benefits to older adults (Barton & Lee, 2023). Studies on the topic are frequently published in academic journals such as *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education* and *Educational Gerontology*, as well as the *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*. However, the benefits of this learning extend to the young as well. Intergenerational learning has proven benefits for children including boosting their social skills, increasing school attendance, accelerated academic learning, improved literacy, a deeper knowledge of cultural history, identity, pride, and a sense of belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023).

Multigenerational households, in which grandparents act frequently as primary caregiver, have been shown to be a growing trend (Cohn et al, 2022). The grandparents of my children lived nearby, not in our household, and only very rarely took on caregiver responsibilities. Still, such geographical proximity has been shown to be a predictor for children and their grandparents sharing a strong relationship (Adcox, 2024). As my diary shows, my children saw their grandparents on average at least once a week, which would place them in a privileged minority: approximately 40% of children in the US see their grandparents with such frequency according to *The American Family Survey* (Deseret News and BYU, 2022). The benefits of such privilege have been shown to be multiple and to accrue to the grandparents and the grandchildren. These include greater health, longevity, and sense of purpose for grandparents, while grandchildren have been shown to reduce at-risk behaviours (Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, 2014), improve school attendance, accelerate academic

performance in literacy and numeracy, and strengthen their feelings of cultural-historical connection, identity, and belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023). Grandparents and grandchildren both benefitted from reduced symptoms of depression (Moorman, 2016).

These specific findings related to intergenerational learning recall developmental guidance, shared above, especially the claim that

while attachments to their parents are primary, young children can also benefit significantly from relationships with other responsive caregivers both within and outside the family. (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 2.)

The responsive presence of my parents, as will be shown in the data, was mattered to my children then because ‘the most important experiences come from the environment of relationships that interact with each child’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2009).

This study does not attempt to prove a correlation between intergenerational learning events documented in the diary and the possible benefits outlined above. However, the context of intergenerational learning and its benefit of a sense of belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023) offers a potential connection to the sense of belonging which can define a place for meaning making (Agnew, 2011). These contexts can provide for a richer understanding of what I initially saw as embodied experiences of the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977) as a definition of education and the possibility of interpreting such experiences through dialogism.

There is also, in the inclusion of these intergenerational interactions, a representation of time which connects past and future, as articulated in the wayfaring which informs my epistemology.

To tell a story, then, is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. But rather as in looping or knitting, the thread being spun now and the thread picked up from the past are both of the same yarn. There is no point at which the story ends and life begins.’ (Ingold 2007, p. 90.)

Put another way, ‘Retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own’ (Ingold 2007, p. 119). This representation of time and our place in it is embodied in the intergenerational learning my children shared with my parents, but this storytelling and recursive telling of past lives, recurs again in this research, is perpetuated by it, and so honours its participants in a way appropriate to the epistemology of study as love (Wilson, 2022).

2.5.6 The Educational Gap

In this section, 'A stay-at-home dad for education,' I have shown how my master's degree in Early Childhood Education helped me to imagine the possibility of this research, having discovered in the process of my master's dissertation a lack of exploration of stay-at-home dads from an educational perspective. Constructionism and its attendant interpretivism, revealed in variable understandings of childhood and gender, offer a means to understand and imagine the reinterpretation and reconstruction of established truths about the experiences of stay-at-home dads. Experiences documented in a diary might be seen in the light of reflective journals as a form of professional development, but also as stories of kindness and virtuosity with the ethical imperative to disseminate these good deeds by their retelling. The professionalization of love in early childhood education and, more broadly, the deep connections between love and study, brought further educational relevance to these experiences. Educational research and practices emerging from Reggio Emilia recommended the participative co-creation of this research based on the expertise in their own lives; I was similarly inspired by Reggio Emilia to see in these experiences the importance of listening, documentation, and joy.

Along with these, I needed to introduce the ways in which the educational philosophy of Gert Biesta has influenced my thinking, particularly around his ideas of 'what works,' 'learnification,' and the three domains of education. Among these domains, subjectification emerged as particularly appropriate to understanding the educational events I experienced as a stay-at-home dad with my children, as it emphasises the responsibility which both characterizes involved fathers and the event of subjectivity.

All of these, but particularly the work of Biesta, will receive further treatment as I argue in Chapter 4 for my educational perspective for interpreting my diary. There also I will expand and further weave into these ideas the dialogism introduced above. Finally, I introduced developmental norms and guidance, the home learning environment as a place for meaning making, and known benefits of intergenerational learning, with the aim of having established an understanding of these areas for their limited use in the interpretation of my data.

Narrative—both that I find within the documentation of events which is my diary as well as that which emerges in this thesis in the presentation and interpretation of those events—has a capacity to reveal the virtuosity of educational judgment (Biesta, 2013). As such, it might begin to reveal what the Pedagogy of the Event (Biesta, 2013) looks like in practice, even if only in this single case. In order to achieve this, the theoretical principles of this pedagogy might first be more concretized by

other theories which link to behaviours but without losing its existential focus or attempting to turn it into a question of 'what works.' Dialogism especially answers this call, providing opportunities to observe dialogue and how it functions within a Pedagogy of the Event. Operational within this dialogism, too, are practical actions of 'serve and return' interactions, listening, and documentation. By showing how these behaviours were evidenced and documented in the lives of one stay-at-home dad and his family, these experiences offer back to education new understandings, becoming something of a gift 'with empty hands' (Biesta, 2008) from one stay-at-home dad for education.

2.6 Conclusion

Following on the above literature, the project which continues in the following chapters will be a study of the experiences of a stay-at-home dad, defined as 'any father who is the regular *primary caregiver* of his children' (National At-Home Dad Network 2020, n.p., emphasis in original). Dramatic increases in the numbers of stay-at-home dads, documented both in the US (Livingston, 2014; Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015) and the UK (Rudgard, 2017; Taylor, 2018), represent 'a major shift in family arrangements' which 'merits future study' (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, pp. 1662, 1670) such as this. A need for further research is also indicated by a need for understandings of this role which offer alternatives to the Isolation Discourse described above. Such alternatives appear all the more necessary as the relevance of Identity Theory has been questioned for research on fatherhood (Pasley et al., 2014) and stay-at-home dads have rejected identification by gender as important to them (Merla, 2008; Solomon, 2017).

An educational perspective offers such an alternative. Evidence for the importance of understanding stay-at-home dads through educational data has emerged in quantitative studies arising out of demographics (Livingston, 2014; Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015). It has also been a recurring theme within studies of stay-at-home dads from a gender perspective (Merla, 2008; Solomon, 2017). These studies indicate the importance which participants place upon educational behaviours. To date, only two articles appear to have been published which focus on the experiences of stay-at-home dads in an educational setting (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019). These studies serve mostly to confirm earlier gender interpretations, showing stay-at-home dads as experiencing marginalization. Finally, I have shared how, in previous research, a stay-at-home dad told me that, like other stay-at-home dads in prior research (Solomon 2017), he did not perceive gender as important to understanding his role, but instead placed importance on educational experiences. He did not complain of isolation or marginalization. Instead, he said, 'I was just having so much fun!' (Troppe 2019b, p. 28.)

All of the above suggests the possibility, even the need, for a different perspective for understanding the growing demographic of stay-at-home dads, and the possibility that an educational perspective might be a suitable starting point. Having further advanced, then, into the educational literature which has brought me into this research, I began to show how the experiences of one stay-at-home dad might also contribute to the field of education, especially in narrative accounts which reveal educational virtuosity, contexts of development, the home learning environment and intergenerational learning, and for the ways in which my own practice helps to illuminate in this single case the theory of Beista's Pedagogy of the Event. In the following chapter, I will continue to argue for and develop the theory which makes such research practicable.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I showed how prior research on stay-at-home dads reveals a growing demographic and ‘a major shift in family arrangements’ which ‘merits future study’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, pp. 1662, 1670). I also showed how education has been previously revealed as important to researched experiences of stay-at-home dads (see especially Solomon, 2017), but there remains a lack of substantive educational interpretation of these experiences, constituting a specific research gap. Furthermore, I showed how the educational literature which I encountered in my studies toward an MA in Early Childhood Education suggested early the possibility of exploring the experiences documented in my diary to both gain such an interpretation and thereby discover some ‘educational wisdom’ (Biesta 2013). These are the study’s first two opportunities for uniqueness and a research contribution.

The methods by which I research a response to those gaps contribute additional uniqueness. First, this is research by a stay-at-home dad, and thus offers a unique insider perspective to this cultural phenomenon; the best-selling work of Smith (2009) is the only near precedent which I have discovered. Second, this research is co-created by the adult children of that same stay-at-home dad; I have discovered no precedent for this. Third, this research discovers the shared experiences of a stay-at-home dad and his children not by interview more typical to research on stay-at-home dads (see for example Doucet, 2004 and Solomon, 2017) but from the unique data source of the diary of a stay-at-home dad. Finally, incumbent upon the ‘insider’ positionality, the co-creation of research with the adult children of a stay-at-home dad, and the use of a diary as data source, there is a need to make rigorous the exploration of a diary by the author of the diary and those whose lives it documents.

While such a wealth of uniqueness holds promise for the discovery of new knowledge, it also poses unique challenges. The general lack of precedent offers no prescribed method. Instead, one needed to be assembled. The recursive progress of research—which in my case took the form of returning repeatedly to literature, to method, to theory, to the diary text—is often mentioned as necessary to the research process despite a representation which is typically linear (for example, Cohen et al. 2018, p. 301). It is in these returns that a research method is allowed to ‘evolve and emerge’ (Cohen et al. 2018, p. 178) and emerge in ways which would best allow the data to speak.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to simplify in retrospect a process in practice necessarily messy and to do so towards repeatability, to make these processes replicable as an aid to future researchers.

This simplification of an assembled method will be offered whilst arguing for it as fit for purpose to respond to the research gaps revealed in the Literature Review. In so doing, this argument will proceed through five necessary steps, which consider in order: ontology and epistemology, qualitative methods, the role of participants, data interpretation, and the conditions for rigor and ethics. Specifically, I argue for the appropriateness of a constructionist ontology, and an epistemology which joins dialogism, love, and wayfaring. Qualitative methods join understandings of autoethnography to proven methods of diary research while engaging in co-creation with my adult children. Guarantees of ethics and rigor are shown to derive from broad research standards as well as the particular methods employed in this study. A summary of these then will conclude this chapter.

3.2 Ontology & Epistemology

A constructionist ontology posits truth as emerging out of the meanings that people make of their lives in the world, interpreting their culturally and contextually bound social situations. Out of this comes multiple possible realities or truths (Cohen et al. 2017, pp. 288-289). I have shown in the introduction how my MA studies on social constructions of childhood (Aries, 1962; Valkanova, 2014) and gender (Connell, 1995) led me to consider the construction of stay-at-home dads, and the opportunity which this ontology offers for constructing new understandings from my experiences, the experiences of my children, and the meanings we assign to them. This same ontology, in its recognition of truths as multiple, rejects the possibility of any truth claims which I might make as a final or ultimate truth, but recognises instead the limited and partial truth which I am able to claim. By so doing, I invite further interpretation and further discovery of truths, first from my participant children, but also from all readers of this research, recognising each reader will produce their own interpretations.

Within such a constructionist understanding of truth, then, an epistemology or way of knowing is associated with these interpretations. Three ways of knowing proved most useful in this study. The first two of these, dialogism (Holquist, 2002) and an understanding of study and love bound intimately to each other (Wilson, 2020a), were introduced in the Literature Review as ways of knowing which helped produce a sense of possibility for this project. I will elaborate on the epistemological content of these briefly below, and introduce the third way, which is wayfaring (Ingold, 2007). Throughout this thesis, I will demonstrate the ways in which these epistemologies are operational not only in this research but also in my documented experiences with my children when I was a stay-at-home dad.

3.2.1 Dialogism

Dialogism (2002) was developed by the American scholar of Slavic Languages, Michael Holquist (1935 – 2016). Based on disparate works by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) and his circle, he specifically calls this set of ideas an epistemology, one which ‘assumes that thought is fundamentally a language activity’ (Holquist 2002, p. 143). This receives particular importance to this project when he describes language as

the means by which parents organize their thoughts about the world, and when they teach their children to talk they pass on such organizational patterns: the process normally described as “learning to talk” is really learning to *think*. (Holquist 2002, pp. 80-81.)

Such an epistemology, which explicitly makes mention of teaching and learning between parent and child, suggests a contribution to my educational perspective which will be more fully explored in the following chapter. Strictly as an epistemology, however, the importance which it gives to language applies not only to ‘talk’ but also to the written word. This way of knowing, then, applies to both the knowledge created in the writing of the diary and the knowledge created in the writing of this thesis. It is by these words that we come to the new knowledge we seek in this research.

In dialogism, life is expression. Expression means to make meaning... This is true at all levels of existence: something *exists* only if it *means*. (Holquist 2002, p. 49.)

3.2.2 Love

A second epistemology, recently made succinctly clear by British philosopher Simon Wilson, makes a claim for the way of knowing available through study.

The primary meaning of study, then, has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another; it has to do with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning. Properly understood, at the heart of study is love. (Wilson 2020a, p. 31.)

He then cites the Orthodox Christian theologian, Pavel Florensky, to make explicit the epistemological claim of this perspective.

[. . .] knowing is not the capturing of a dead object by a predatory subject of knowledge, but a living moral communion of persons, each serving for each as both object and subject. Strictly speaking, only a person is known and only by a person. (Florensky, 1997, pp. 55-56, cited by Wilson 2020a, p. 31.)

The interpersonal essence of knowing claimed here makes sense for my project in my aim of its co-creation with my participant children. Its claim, too, that ‘only a person is known’ lends itself well to a project which will include and produce narratives about people’s lives and shared experiences. This interpersonal essence of knowing is also compatible with dialogism, in which

‘Being’... is not just an event but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always co-being.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 25.)

3.2.3 Wayfaring

In *Lines: A Brief History* (2007), British anthropologist Tim Ingold describes a way of being in the world which he calls wayfaring.

In wayfaring... one follows a path that one has previously travelled in the company of others, or in their footsteps, reconstructing the itinerary as one goes along. (Ingold 2007, p. 15.)

Such a way of being, even at first glance, reveals itself as appropriate to my research. Exploring my diary means ‘following a path that one has previously travelled.’ The experiences documented there are shared experiences, co-created experiences, experiences ‘in the company of others.’ Revisiting along with my participant children this path and its experiences, then becomes ‘reconstructing the itinerary as one goes along.’ By taking up such an approach, I would join those whom Ingold explores, detailing how, across time and various cultures, this wayfaring has been expressed. ‘For the Inuit,’ he says, ‘*as soon as a person moves, he becomes a line*’ (Ingold 2007, p. 75, emphasis in original). And for a Walbiri person from Central Australia, ‘life... is laid out on the ground in the sum of his trails’ (Ingold 2007, p. 100). Such a perception is repeated in genealogy—of which I made a study when I was a stay-at-home dad—where ‘Retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own’ (Ingold 2007, p. 119). While expressions and constructed interpretations of lines and their wayfaring differ across time and place, Ingold points to a sufficient commonality across human cultures that he makes the following claim for their importance.

Wayfaring, I believe, is the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth. By habitation I do not mean taking one’s place in a world that has been prepared in advance for the populations that arrive to reside there. The inhabitant is rather one who participates from within in the very process of the world’s continual coming into being and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture. (Ingold 2007, p. 81.)

As suggested by his evocation of weave and texture, human artefacts and art are primary data in his study. His history of the line begins with music and its notation, which will be important to the diary’s documented experiences and their interpretations, as will be shown. He proceeds to consider writing and the laying down of a line in a manuscript, which is the very action of documenting experiences in my diary. He looks, too, at drawings, which also occur in my diary and become important to its interpretation. Ingold’s work, then, provides a singular way of knowing and interpreting the various genres present in my diary.

Additionally, this emphasis on the arts is useful to understanding the contrast Ingold draws between wayfaring and transport.

Transport is destination-oriented. It is not so much a development along a way of life as a carrying across, from location to location... every destination is a terminus, every port a point of re-entry into a world from which he has been temporarily exiled whilst in transit. This point marks a moment not of tension but of completion. (Ingold 2007, p. 77.)

To clarify this, he refers to the artist Paul Klee, comparing wayfaring to the freely drawn line which Klee said 'goes out for a walk.' Transport is like another kind of line, one which is in a hurry and serves only to connect locations, and so, Klee said, is 'more like a series of appointments than a walk' and might be seen as 'the quintessence of the static' (1961 pp. 105, 109 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 73).

This idea of freedom of movement and the desirable results which it produces has not remained confined to Ingold's anthropological interpretations. Instead, wayfaring has been taken up as an inspiration for music composition (see for example Stone 2016, 2019) and as a research method. This latter has been innovated in the field of engineering education and design (Steinert and Leifer, 2012; Leikanger et al., 2016). However, I have found that understanding my movement into and through my research in terms of wayfaring has been essential to my progress. These parallels between life and the freely moving line are appropriate to approaching the study of a manuscript such as my diary, of which it might be said that

The lines inscribed on the page... were the visible traces of dextrous movements of the hand. And the eye of the reader, roaming over the page like a hunter on the trail, would follow these traces as it would have followed the trajectories of the hand that made them. (Ingold 2007, p. 26.)

Following Ingold's study of the line in all its appropriateness to this research, one might envision the progress of this research not as some tidy schema—which would resemble more a system of transport and 'the quintessence of the static' (Klee 1961, pp. 105 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 73). Rather, the progress of this research might more necessarily resemble something like the image below (Figure 3).

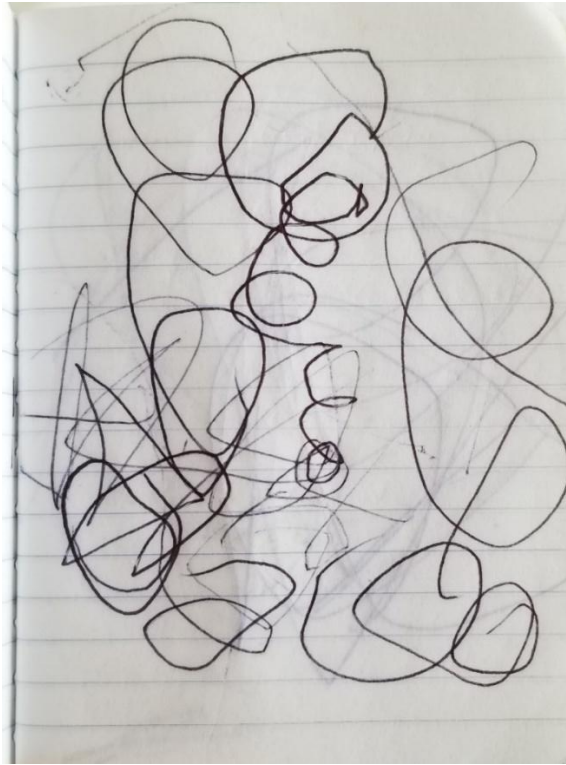


Figure 3. Marks made by Max (D2:n.d.2000).

These marks, made in my diary by my son Max when he was about 2 years old, express the freedom of movement, the unpredictability, the surprise necessary to this research. They also express the degree to which this research is, again, co-constructed and the ways in which it has been necessary to enter into the lives of my participant children in all of these documented experiences. It also draws on an understanding of Method which prizes

suppleness... the matter at hand... an acuity which knows its way about... (and) cannot be laid out beforehand... a way of keeping underway, in motion, even when it seems there is no way to go. (Caputo 1987, p. 213, cited by Cashore 2019, pp. 21-22.)

Such a wayfaring then extends from the study of the page itself to broader, more theoretical aspects of my approach, starting with the idea of qualitative research.

3.3 Research Methods

Having laid the foundations of my methodology in a constructionist ontology and an epistemology of wayfaring, dialogism, and study as love, I will now show that, consistent with these, my research proceeds by using qualitative strategies. This research can be called a case study in autoethnographic diary research. However, in order to arrive at such a summary, greater clarity can be achieved by showing how these methods were understood and chosen. So, in the following

sections I will briefly address in turn what shapes these qualitative, autoethnographic, and diary research strategies.

3.3.1 Qualitative strategies

I entered into this project with an understanding of qualitative research as

a broad ethnographic approach that enables us to explore social phenomena to work out what might be going on and to find new meanings. (Holliday 2019, p. 1.)

The options for proceeding within this broad approach has been described as ‘a terrain of strategies of investigation,’ as in Figure 4, below, with different vantage points of the bounded social group being studied, as though from different mountaintops. ‘In many ways, each strategy necessitates bringing others with it’ (Holliday 2016, p. 14).

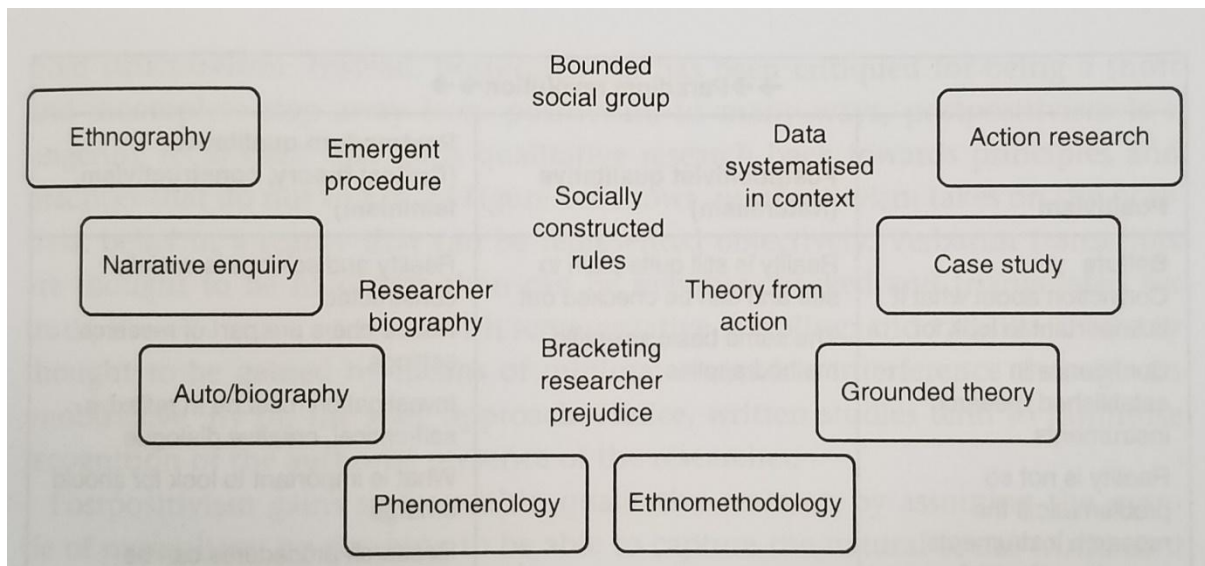


Figure 4. ‘A terrain of strategies of investigation’ (Holliday 2016, p. 15).

The motility inherent to a wayfaring epistemology allows us to enter into this terrain with the freedom of a line ‘going out for a walk’ (Ingold, 2007). These various viewpoints we can then attempt with a desirable suppleness, testing each in turn.

Entering into this terrain, we hold in view a ‘bounded social group’: my family. More precisely, we look at my family as one which had a stay-at-home dad as the primary caregiver to the children, and in a specific place and time: the small, rural town of Selinsgrove in central Pennsylvania, USA, during the years 1995-2015. We look at the experiences of this stay-at-home dad and his children as they were documented in my diary.

I am not solitary in this looking. Instead, I am actively joined in the present by three of my now adult children. They have consented to share our stories and by varying degrees to aid in the co-creation of their interpretation. So, it might be useful to imagine the four of us entering this terrain more or less together, much in the same way that we once hiked sections of the Appalachian Trail together, following our feet and keeping our eyes open for mulberries, blackberries, and raspberries along the way.

Given this description of our bounded social group, the strategy of a case study is a good place to begin our wayfaring in this qualitative terrain. The data of my diary represents a bounded, single case which might be considered both 'unique' and 'not previously investigated' (Yin 2009 pp. 47-9, 52 cited by Ashley 2012, p. 103). There are benefits to studying such a case:

One good case study can, in its luminosity, reveal the self-reflection, decision and action, and/or the ambivalence, pain, loss, messiness and satisfaction in life that has resonance and meaning for us all. (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 167.)

The aim, therefore, is not results which are generalizable, but the discovery of new meanings appropriate to the constructionist ontology and the epistemologies described above.

Beyond this strategy of considering our bounded group from the perspective of a case study, three other strategies from this field came into consideration in this research. These are strategies of ethnography, narrative enquiry, and 'auto/biography.' I will now show how these three joined in this research as a wayfaring towards autoethnography.

3.3.2 Autoethnography

Consistent with my claim of a wayfaring epistemology, it might be helpful to approach an understanding of autoethnography and its application in this project as a story of how I made my way to this method rather than through definitions of it, especially as there continues to be 'no single definition' amid 'ongoing definitional debates' (Beattie, 2022, p. 14).

In prior research (Troppe, 2019b), I interviewed a stay-at-home dad about his experiences. I called it first ethnographic because it made a study of an individual's experiences as a member of a demographic group (Cohen et al., 2018). However, I also identified as a member of this social group—stay-at-home dads—and by this participation and research as an insider, called the project autoethnographic (Cohen et al., 2018). I leaned heavily on the standards established by La Roux (2017) to make claims of rigor appropriate to this method based on the Subjectivity, Self-reflexivity, Resonance, Credibility and Contribution (see Table 9, below) to be found in the presentation and analysis of my findings.

As I took my first steps into this present research, however, I found that such simple understandings were not as readily applicable. I knew that I had a diary to explore; beyond this, I did not know what I was doing. So, it was in an early conversation with my daughter, Madeleine, about this project (RL1:02.11.2019) that I received my first direction for our wayfaring. She recommended a doctoral thesis by Dorothy Cashore (2019), who described her work as an ‘ecopsychological autoethnography.’ Her description of the autoethnographic aspect of her approach captivated me, beginning with a meditation on research method by the philosopher, John Caputo (1987):

the concern with method so characteristic of modern science makes science subservient to method so that method rules instead of serving, constrains instead of liberating and fails conspicuously to let science be... In its best sense...[method] is the suppleness by which thinking is able to pursue the matter at hand; it is an acuity which knows its way about, even and especially when the way cannot be laid out beforehand, when it cannot be formulated in explicit rules. *Meta-odos* is a way of keeping underway, in motion, even when it seems there is no way to go. (Caputo, 1987, p. 213 cited by Cashore, 2018, pp. 21-22.)

Her description of her desires for her research method neatly summarized my intentions for exploring my diary: ‘I wanted to go back in “simply:” open and vulnerable, as the body I am, without a master plan’ (Cashore, 2018, p. 22). Feeling this affinity for Cashore’s approach was more motive than any definition. It was soon seconded in a work recommended by a colleague, in which autoethnography was again offered in metaphors of movement, unpredictability and legitimacy in ‘an endeavour which, by its very nature, is partial, contingent and inconclusive’ (Fraser, 2014, p. 30).

From these statements and their allure, the progress into autoethnography may have been simple and direct, but it was not. In this same conversation with Madeleine, she made another influential statement. She said she was interested in this research project because ‘it will end up being my story too, sort of’ (RL1:02.11.2019). This immediately called to mind the method of auto/biography, in which it is claimed that ‘in each narrative lies our own’ (Bainbridge & West, 2012, p. 180).

Established by Stanley (1992), auto/biography has been described as

the inter-relationship between the construction of our own lives through autobiography and the construction of the others’ lives through biography. (Merrill and West 2009, p. 5.)

This method for fusing ‘my’ story with that of an Other was practiced by my doctoral supervisors and had achieved some prominence at the university where I was conducting this research. So, there was a sociocultural force and a possible imbalance of powers between supervisors and student influencing me and thus in that moment an instantaneous tension between autoethnography and auto/biography. In order to ameliorate these tensions adequately to make this research appear coherent, it might be helpful to reach for a few definitions of autoethnography.

3.3.2.1 Definitions

The field of autoethnographic research encompasses ‘a vast number of different approaches that could be both overwhelming and promising at the same time’ (Beattie, 2022, p. 14). So, it might be helpful to show which of these approaches begin to suggest that the project at hand is autoethnographic.

First, my experience suggested that setting out to explore my own diary becomes autoethnographic because it means researching

‘highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding’ (Sparkes, 2000, p. 31 cited by Wall, 2008, p. 39).

Autoethnography provides a method to achieve such understanding ‘not just through studying others but also through deep reflection of the self as a (social) person,’ drawing on ‘particularity and personal experience’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 351). This approach allows me to ‘function as an insider’ and use my ‘privileged position to uncover the familiar, to understand what a given experience might say about the human condition’ (Pelias 2014, p. 152, cited Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 363). An advantage to this approach is that

researcher and participant are one and the same person... it can be argued that the autoethnographer owns this inscription of the story, the perspective, and the voice, rather than having them filtered through another’s perspectives, agendas, interactions, and interpretations. (Lapadat 2017, p. 593.)

This is far from a perfect and uncontested formulation of the autoethnographer’s role and function. Others, notable Beattie (2022), have argued persuasively that researcher and participant are *never* the same (of which more below). Nonetheless, the definitions above assert the closeness of the authorial voice(s) of the researcher and their subject(s), suggesting that ‘autoethnography combines techniques of doing ethnography and techniques of doing autobiography’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 353). This last formulation offers an opportunity to explore how I have understood the combination of these two techniques in this project.

3.3.2.2 Doing ethnography

The ethnographic research tradition, beginning with *The Sociological Imagination*,

enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society... (and) to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most

intimate features of the human self—and to see the relations between the two. (Mills 1959, p. 6, 7 cited by McCulloch 2004, pp. 8-9.)

This case study, within that tradition, represents an opportunity to recognise the social phenomenon of stay-at-home dads as ‘a major shift in family arrangements’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, pp. 1662, 1670), how this constitutes just such an historical transformation in society, and how the ‘intimate features’ of experiences documented in a diary might enable us to grasp new meanings about society at micro, meso, and macro levels (Stagenborg, 2002). In this case, this would mean looking at the daily behaviour of a stay-at-home dad and other members of the small society of his family, his interaction with medium-size social organizations such as schools, and the construction of stay-at-home dads by society at a larger scale. Because this is a study situated in the field of education, this larger scale would also include consideration of how knowledge gained by a case study about the experiences of one stay-at-home dad and his family might contribute understanding to educational theory more generally, and specifically by observing instances of ‘educational wisdom’ (Biesta, 2013) within these experiences.

Following, then, the traditions of ethnographic research, I use in this research the technique of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). I gather close observations and participant interpretations in a setting natural to the participants and join to these other, unobserved factors. In my case, this means drawing on the observations documented in the diary, the interpretations of my participant children, and the theory which informs my methodology and educational perspective. Gathering such observations requires an unintrusive immersion in the setting—a requirement achieved by a father writing quietly in a diary then and, in the present, in conversation with adult children—and receptiveness to unpredictability. From these thick descriptions, then, like a detective working from clues, the best likely interpretations are attained by abductive reasoning (Steinert and Leifer, 2012).

In this research, I also maintain field notes or a field diary, ‘the bricks and mortar of an ethnographic edifice’ (Fetterman, 1998, p. 114).

A successful ethnographer is one who is self-aware and reflexive, someone who has the capacity for both empathy and distance. The need to nurture these simultaneously brings its own set of contradictions and conflicts which may be written up in field notes. (Bhatti, 2012 p. 82.)

My Research Log, as described in Table 1 below, began ten days after the start of my doctoral studies and concluded with the submission of my thesis for examination. It includes transcriptions of and references to specific diary passages gathered during its first reading, along with first impressions, reflections, and interpretations. It furthermore gathers a history of my attempts to

locate and choose appropriate methods and theories to apply to these readings. It also documents other relevant experiences of learning and teaching, including participation in seminars, workshops, and conferences. Earlier drafts of this thesis are not included in the Research Log. In this process, it attained the length of 3,383 digitally recorded pages containing over 1.3 million words. It has proved an invaluable tool for locating and re-locating experiences of the text and its shifting interpretations.

Research Log volume number (date span)	Number of Words	Number of Pages
1 (10.10.2019-25.04.2020)	180,356	503
2 (25.04.2020-24.07.2020)	232,344	529
3 (27.07.2020-04.02.2021)	221,960	512
4 (01.01.2021-26.05.2021)	225,885	495
5 (01.06.2021-07.01.2022)	155,742	390
6 (07.01.2022-30.06.2022)	147,122	388
7 (01.07.2022-16.04.2023)	205,981	566
TOTAL	1,369,390	3,383

Table 7. The Research Log. Volume numbers, date span, words and pages per volume.

The application of these fundamental tools, then—the use of ‘sociological imagination,’ thick description, and a research log—help to identify the ethnographic character of this work.

3.3.2.3 Doing autobiography

In order to approach the autobiographical aspect of autoethnography, it has been necessary for me to practice some wayfaring first through the strategic terrains of narrative life history and auto/biography.

Narrative Life History

Narrative research is described as a ‘methodological style’ which covers many differently named approaches including ‘narrative inquiry, biographical method, (and) life history research’ (Ojermark 2007, p. 3). It has also been claimed that ‘autoethnography falls under a broad category of narrative research’ (Beattie, 2022, p. 13). Due to this diversity, there are different understandings about what narrative research is and exactly how it might best be conducted. Rather than parse these differences, however, I will begin with what is common across them, which is storying lives, and argue for the appropriateness of such storying to this project.

Narrative in ontology and epistemology

My argument returns first to the level of ontology, where constructivist truth emerges out of the meanings that people make of their lives in the world (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 288). Storytelling is part of this meaning-making, as can be seen clearly in the epistemologies I have already described for this research, being of value within dialogism (Holquist, 2002), study-as-love (Wilson, 2022), and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007).

Dialogism holds narrative in great importance. Within it, dialogue is ‘a *telling*, a narrative, an aspect of the world’s meaning’ (Holquist 2002, p. 29, emphasis in original). As such, it is a sign of the enactment of our responsibility (Holquist 2002, p. 84), translating chaos into meaning as a negotiation between story and plot (Holquist 2002, p. 123), and between our uniqueness and ‘career patterns’ (Holquist 2002, p. 134).

In an epistemology which demonstrates the intimate relationship between study and love, it is the story of the person which emerges as the greatest opportunity for knowledge. The claim made here is that ‘only a person is known and only by a person’ (Florensky, 1997, pp. 55-56, cited by Wilson 2020a, p. 31). This emphasizes again the interpersonal requirement of the knowing and the possibility of a person’s unique subjectivity as the most worthy—and even the only successful—pursuit of knowledge.

Narrative is also seen as essential to wayfaring.

To tell a story, then, is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. But rather as in looping or knitting, the thread being spun now and the thread picked up from the past are both of the same yarn. There is no point at which the story ends and life begins.’ (Ingold 2007, p. 90.)

We have seen above how this statement pertains to experiences of time in intergenerational learning and the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977). I repeat it here to emphasise how life—and the knowledge of it—becomes in Ingold’s telling inseparable from the stories we tell of it. In such narrative interpretations of our experiences in the world, ‘retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own’ (Ingold 2007, p. 119).

Narrative in studies of fatherhood, education, and documentary research

Beyond these ontological and epistemological justifications, narrative can also be shown to have a place within my topic, my field, and my chosen data source. Narrative research is said to have a unique place in the study of fatherhood.

Careful attention to fathers’ meaning making process prioritizes men’s agency to reflect on what is best for their children, which may be best captured with a narrative methodology. (Roy and Smith 2012, p. 330).

As such, it might be recognised as appropriate to the topic of stay-at-home dads.

Similar argument has been made for autoethnography in family research, emphasizing the power of creating narratives about everyday lives.

Autoethnography can allow researchers to offer insider accounts of families; to study everyday, unexpected experiences of families, especially as they encounter unique or difficult situations; to write against limited extant research about families; and to make research more accessible to non-academic audiences. (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 362)

This research proceeds to explore just such insider accounts in the everyday experiences of a family as documented in a diary. These might be called unexpected not only in their daily particularity, but also more generally, as the family structure which includes a stay-at-home dad is itself unexpected, with the difficulties associated with this role well documented in the literature. The uniqueness and situations named here take on theoretical richness in interpretations rooted in dialogism and the pedagogy of the event. To suggest that I write 'against' extant research feels to me combative; rather, I would say that I strive to augment extant research, attempting to enrich the understandings which are developing about stay-at-home dads by offering these educational perspectives. And, as I have said, I aim to share these experiences not just with academics, but with stay-at-home dads as well.

'Given the use of storytelling techniques and personal experience, literate non-academic audiences often appreciate autobiographies and other forms of life writing (e.g., memoirs, diaries)... (Adams & Manning, 2015, pp. 368-369)

The use of my diary as a primary data source offers an opening to these kinds of storytelling techniques and this kind of broader appreciation.

In my literature review I have already shared how my studies in early childhood education brought me to an awareness of children as experts in their own lives (Clark & Statham, 2005) and the power of listening (Clark and Moss, 2011; Paley, 1986). This awareness and skill can be engaged as a research method for understanding the stories people tell of their own lives.

(There is a) Eurocentric tendency to assume that those of us who have been trained to analyse peoples' lives are better able to understand them than the people whose lives they actually are. I have come to have great respect for people's abilities to understand their own lives. And I have learned to listen, not just to what they tell me about the particulars of their lives, but also to the ways in which they define themselves for themselves. (Brown, 1991, p. 90 cited by Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 363)

Again, this is why I refer to 'stay-at-home dads' instead of SAHDs; this is the terminology which we as a group define ourselves for ourselves. At a more particular scale, this respect and this listening open the way, as it were, for my children and I to understand our lives and circumscribe the boundaries to this research and the ways we select, interpret, and theorise the stories which were documented

about us. In this way, we aim to make this research accessible to audiences beyond a narrow academic specialism.

Academic research generally is criticized as being inaccessible to many who would benefit from its findings... much academic writing is simply unreadable to people outside of a highly specialized audience. (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 368.)

By creating in this research such a narrative about our lives, my children and I offer an extended response to this provocation:

What family stories might you tell? In what ways do your experiences of family align with, or contradict, extant research? What insights might these stories and experiences offer others? Begin by thinking about these questions; begin by writing your stories. (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 374.)

This provocation concludes with a promise of research contribution: 'This is how autoethnographic family research can develop' (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 374).

Along with the appropriateness of narrative to studies of fathers and families, it also holds a special place within the field of education. Narrative research has a purpose in the pursuit of educational wisdom, gained in part by the study of life history, where we might learn from the virtuosity of other educators (Biesta 2013, p. 136). Similarly, it is within education that telling the stories of kindness—a good deed, a mitzvah—has been said to become itself a good deed, an ethical imperative (Paley, 1999).

It is from these personal stories—these biographical narratives—that we can begin to make sense of our world and vice versa, 'from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self' (Mills 1959, p. 6, 7 cited by McCulloch 2004, p. 9). McCulloch, who cites here from *The Sociological Imagination*, is an expert in documentary research in education, and a link between the broader educational imperatives of narrative and the specific techniques of applying narrative to the exploration of my data source. The appropriateness of applying narrative research to documents and specifically to a diary will become more evident as I discuss these methods below. For now, however, I will add that from the perspective of using diary research methods: 'a person's story is valued in its own right, not just as a representative sample of a wider category' (Alaszewski 2006, pp. 57-58). This valuing of a person's story in its own right tugs the telling away from the ethnological wider categories and towards the autobiographical.

Auto/biography

Among the many approaches within narrative's 'methodological style' (Ojermark 2007, p. 3), auto/biography merits further discussion here. It is worth noticing that in the qualitative terrains described above by Holliday (2016), it is this terminology and not 'autobiography' which is used. I have introduced it above in the context of my daughter Madeleine's early expression of interest in this research. She said, 'it will end up being my story too, sort of' (RL1:02.11.2019), a near approximation of a more academic definition of auto/biography, where 'in each narrative lies our own' (Bainbridge & West, 2012, p. 180).

This resembles the narrative approach I have taken, as it brings with it an understanding of co-constructed life stories and so offers a precedent for bringing my children into the co-creation of this project. It acknowledges, too, that our lives are changed by our encounter in this research as it proceeds through uncertainties, open to the surprise necessary to rigor, recognising that 'the capacity to tolerate not knowing was vital' (Bainbridge & West, 2012, p. 191). Having achieved this understanding of inter-connected storying of lives and its affirmation by my daughter and its applicability to the ethnological aspect of this project, this was as close as I was able to draw to an understanding of autobiography which would centre the self as the subject of the story.

Beyond this conceptualization of interconnected life stories, however, there have been difficulties in applying this approach to my research. Auto/biography allows for a freedom of approach and representation necessary to the uniqueness of each auto/biography it reveals, but in such freedom, standardized practices grow elusive and difficult to follow as precedent. Auto/biography, too, has only rarely explored diaries as a narrative source (as exceptions, see Hogan 1986a, Hogan 1986b), more frequently using interview as a data gathering technique, during which the co-construction of life histories in real time becomes evident. Conversation with my children would be an essential part of this research. This conversation has been enacted as an expression of the dialogism (Holquist, 2002) I explore in this thesis, the 'conversation between the generations' as a definition of education (Oakeshott, 1972), as a pedagogy of listening (Clark and Moss, 2011; Paley, 1986) and a listening for 'the hundred languages' (Edwards et al., 1998). As antecedent to these conversations, however, the documentary evidence offered by the diary remained a starting point not typically addressed within an auto/biographical approach. So, in this way, the diary itself guided me back from auto/biography to ethnography and autoethnography.

More significant than these procedural obstacles, however, was my discomfort in the foregrounding of the 'auto' in autobiography or auto/biography. I was experiencing a compulsion to retreat from this emphasis on the self. I will now turn my attention to this difficulty and its partial resolution.

3.3.2.4 *Balancing auto/ethno/graphy*

Auto/biography by its very name presents a dichotomy of self and Other. Autoethnography by its name implies greater options.

Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on *auto-* (self), *ethno-* (the sociocultural connection), and *-graphy* (the application of the research process). (Reed-Danahay, 1997 cited by Wall, 2008, p. 39.)

Such variability affords an opportunity to balance these domains and possibly escape from a more limiting understanding that 'Autoethnography places the self—the researcher—at the centre of research about himself/herself in a social context' (Cohen 2017, p. 292). De-centring the researcher somewhat as the privileged interpreter of the truth allows me to proceed with uncertainty, not as a master of my identity, the narrative, or the meanings I find in it (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008), but as an evolving dialogic participant in social contexts and research processes.

This affords, in other words, a focus centred less on myself (auto) and more on the social connections (ethno) and research process (graphy). In the end, this has been achieved by recognising and amplifying my social connections to other stay-at-home dads as described in prior research, to theory and practice of education, and to the co-creative participation of my children in this project. Research process has been brought to the fore and has gained additional rigor by focusing on the diary as an object of document analysis.

This end result, however, begs the question of why I would seek a diminution of the 'auto' whilst still claiming an autoethnographic approach. To understand my stance on this requires a brief exploration of how my working understandings of the self and identity intersect with the idea of the 'auto' in autoethnography.

3.3.2.4.1 'Auto'

The 'auto' or the place of the self in autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997) has been regarded with some scepticism since well before this project. In opening an essay on 'Experience and the "I" in Autoethnography,' Jackson and Mazzei (2008) offer a litany of criticisms of autoethnography, calling it

an abuse of privilege (Delamont, 2007), self-indulgent (Sparkes, 2002), and 'irreverent, self-absorbed, sentimental, and romantic' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008, p. 299.)

All of the above criticisms point to a self-centred approach as lacking the rigor necessary to good research. Each of these accusations has its alibi, which is quickly pointed out:

Autoethnographers have responded to these critiques by claiming to be more embodied (Sparkes, 2002), political (Jones, 2005), truthful (Ellis, 2001; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), experimental (Bochner & Ellis, 1996) and reflexive (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008, p. 299.)

Thus a centring of self is defended.³ Additionally, it might be defended for ways in which a first-hand account can offer the immediacy of experience without the filters of an interlocutor, and that such revelations might be especially important for revealing the social realities of communities typically underserved and/or under-researched. Exemplary of this unique contribution can be found in the work of Ronai (1995), who detailed the lived experiences of a survivor of child sexual abuse and incest. This thesis might claim this same benefit from centring the self, as the documentation of everyday events in my diary reveals the intimate details of lived experience within the social group to which I belong, and claims for the under-researched community of stay-at-home dads a need for fresh voices in the research which concerns us.

Identity

I have shown in my literature review how stay-at-home dads have expressed a refusal of identity—particularly gender identity—as essential to understanding our experiences. My operational understanding of the word 'identity' is described by the educational theorist upon whom I lean most heavily in my interpretations.

When we use identity to articulate our uniqueness, we focus on the ways in which I am *different* from the other. (Biesta 2013, p. 21, emphasis in original.)

For Biesta, the question 'is not about what *makes* each of us unique' (Biesta 2013, p. 21). Instead, it is a question of looking

for situations *in which it matters* that I am unique... situations in which I cannot be replaced or substituted by someone else. These are situations in which someone calls me...' (Biesta 2013, p. 21, emphasis in original.)

³ Similar claims of narcissism have been levelled against auto/biography; these too have been answered (see especially Rügge-meier & Scheurer, 2019).

These situations of being called occur in this research. They were enacted first when I was invited to do this research and awarded a scholarship, not simply because of what makes me different, but because of the situation in which my uniqueness matters. In this research it matters because of the unique access I had to documentary evidence of the experiences of a stay-at-home dad over 20 years. In this, I could not be replaced or substituted by someone else. Similarly—I would say better—my uniqueness matters in my access to my participant children and to their interpretations of the diary, as well as to my own. These can be seen as instances ‘in which someone calls me,’ and to which I respond not out of my difference—my identity as a stay-at-home dad, or as an American, or as a Catholic, or as a heterosexual, ‘non-British white’ and ‘middle-class’ male—but out of my unique situation defined in dialogism as temporal, spatial and axiological, and out of which I have ‘no alibi’ (Holquist, 2002, p. 181) but must respond with my utterance to the call of an addressivity.

This idea of identity, then, operates alongside the role of the ‘auto’ or ‘self’ in this project. Here, the ‘auto’ is vigilantly tested against standards of rigor (see especially Le Roux, 2017 at my Table 9) and negotiated in dialogue with the text of the diary, in the reflexivity of the Research Log, and in conversation with my participant children. Furthermore, the ‘auto’ is viewed as subordinate to epistemological advantages to be gained by working in an ‘ethno’ and ‘graphic’ way in concert with others—in wayfaring, dialogue, and study as love. It is also subordinate to methodological advantages of contextualization within and social connections to stay-at-home dads, the educational community, and my participant children. Additional advantage can be found by leaning on the research methods of document analysis which offer another line of rigor to dispel the charge of narcissism and allow my interpretations to be tested, replicated or disputed by others who might encounter the text of my diary and its story. It is nonetheless a story in which I am embedded; it is my diary. So, the self becomes an inescapable consideration in this research.

Despite this inescapability, I wish to echo a limit for self-knowledge as an accurate rendering of our place in the world: “We don’t know who we are—*that* is who we are” (Caputo, 2003, p. 262 cited by Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 310). Such limits are in a practical way instantiated in the ethics which guide this research, even at the formulaic level, where promises are made not to harm by prying into ‘sensitive issues’ (BERA, 2018). When the diary itself suggests that a narcissistic, autobiographical representation of the diary might ‘goad us all to silence’ (D1:16.05.1994), I as the researcher must consider what such silence might mean, including a possible withdrawal of consent. Ethics, then, require me to negotiate carefully the self-knowledge being sought here and accept the limits of this knowledge.

More anecdotally, I have from the beginning of this project asserted that this research is not about me. I have tried to arrive at acceptable ways to express this. In the interview which resulted in the award of my research scholarship, I remember saying that I did not want to research ‘the gooey insides.’ Rather, I wanted to explore something ‘out here, between us’—and I remember holding my fist about ten centimetres from my heart. It was my first expression of this kind of remove, a distance which still was not distant, but by its distance allowed the possibility of a shared experience. It was an expression, I believe now, of a nascent understanding of my epistemologies, which are all interpersonal even as they lead to a constructed truth for which I am ultimately responsible. And the distance of that fist recalls that ‘a successful ethnographer is one who... has the capacity for both empathy and distance’ (Bhatti, 2012 p. 82). Even this responsibility is not just for me, but necessarily in response to and for the Other as well.

From this interview’s early expression of a decentred self, I found confirmation and consistency in the evolution of my epistemological understanding. I also found validation for my aims of a decentred self, encountering reinforcements of this objective in educational theory and in the data itself. Of these two, the data itself formed the more compelling cause for avoiding self-centredness. The diary, while written by myself, represented a self that is different from who I have been in the researching of the text. The text-located self is trapped in the amber of words, but even there it can be said to differ from one day to the next, one page to the next: a different amber, a different self. In this view, the self which is documented in the diary is innumerable, and yet there is also something elusive which unifies these various iterations of the self, from one page to the next. So, if I were to centre the self, which self would I centre? Given these multitudes, it might then make sense to centre the self as researcher. This, too, was objectionable. First, the multitudes of the self in the diary only underwent fracture and replication and resuscitation of a sort in the Research Log, where I indexed diary passages, rewrote selected others, and became again a diarist, but with a different—now a research—aim, trapping again each day a new self in amber. So, if the researched self was not singular, neither was the researcher self. Centring any one self as the singular, authoritative self was beyond undesirable. It was untenable. The data thus aligns with a rejection of identity as a static fiction of a being ‘same with itself’ (Holquist, 2002, p. 159), which would be contradictory to this multiplicity of selves appearing in the diary and in the Research Log.

The diary itself explicitly rejected a centring of self. This is best exemplified although not limited to the example which informs my ethics as described just above. It deserves a fuller telling here. I discovered this early objection to self-centredness in my first reading of the diary. In the first of the

47 volumes of the diary, shortly before my first child was born, a considerable amount of groundwork is laid in the diary to contextualize its purpose in the years ahead. There, I documented my response to an article which levelled the accusation of narcissism against the writing of autobiography (Gass, 1994). In that diary entry, I so took to heart this accusation that I not only rejected narcissism but the possibility of autobiography as well, forcefully asserting that the document at hand was ‘just a diary, just a diary’ and that without this redoubt of a different genre, the accusation of narcissism was ‘goading us all to silence’ (D1:16.05.1994). Reading such a statement almost 30 years later as a researcher, the last thing I wanted was to cause ethical harm and goad this witness to silence. It made me want to steer as far as possible from the autobiography against which this voice had set a hard boundary. It caused me to question whether the research could proceed at all, especially under the banner of auto/biography. (The slash seemed little sufficient to persuade my primary source that as a method it was something different.)

Had this been an isolated incident in the diary, I might also have had greater manoeuvrability in overlooking it. I might have suggested, perhaps, that over time this view had changed and the diarist no longer feared the autobiographical self-centring. However, this was not to be the case. The diarist continues throughout the 20 years explored here to express a consistently avid distaste for ‘identity’ and ‘ego.’ Aside from the example already offered, another emerges early after the birth of my first child (D1:19.08.1996), when I enthusiastically read St. John of the Cross, who wrote of his desire to go ‘out from myself’ (John of the Cross, St. 1991, p. 52), a desire which finds resonance in my epistemology of study as love, which makes this claim:

The primary meaning of study, then, has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another; it has to do with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning. Properly understood, at the heart of study is love. (Wilson 2020a, p. 31.)

Years later, I again reassert a de-emphasis of the self.

Sometimes I ask myself who I am—qui suis-je!—but most of the time I don’t because the answer doesn’t even interest me. (D4:10.06.2004)

This statement closely parallels one made by the principal educational theorist I employ in this study, who, reflecting on his seminal work, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, similarly declares, ‘I was actually not interested in the question of identity... but much more in the question of *subjectivity*’ (Biesta 2013, p. 142).

The final example I will offer here is from the final years of the diary, when I pursued practices of poetry in which I claimed a goal of moving toward ‘no ego’ and where I might be ‘liberated from the

constant presence of the 'I-me' in poetry' (D35:27.11.2012), again describing such writing as 'saturated with too much I' (D35:20.12.2012). This again invites comparison with educational theory, in which 'the event of teaching' is described as 'non-egological':

an approach that is not aimed at strengthening the ego, but at interrupting the ego-object, at turning it towards the world, so that it can become a self-subject. (Biesta 2017, pp. 56-57.)

These examples from the data and their connection to epistemological and educational theory offer evidence that my desire to de-centre the 'auto' in my autoethnographic approach is not merely a subjective preference. Rather it is an option exercised with the aim of a presentation which is ethically harmonious with the intentions of the self who is located in the diary—my primary witness of the events documented there—and the theory which seems best suited to the interpretation of those experiences. It is also harmonious with an understanding of 'identity and its refusal' already revealed, in the literature review above, to be present in the prior research on stay-at-home dads.

The limits to self-knowledge are sometimes cast as an inevitable failure of knowledge (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). Instead of seeing this as a failure, my epistemology of dialogism and wayfaring, views this, as all inquiry, as a project 'without limit' (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39) or like a line or story that 'has no end' (Ingold 2007, p. 170). Similar expressions of limitlessness also emerge in autoethnographic approaches.

It might be that it is indeed impossible for anyone to ever finalize a perfectly accurate story, but my desire to convey this story in the best possible way leaves me feeling as if it will never be finished and ready for publication. (Wall, 2008, p. 42)

And such experiences of the autoethnographic research process can be directly linked to the limitlessness of dialogism.

Gadamer's (1989) 'fusion of horizons' 'encourages individuals to engage in ongoing dialogue, the purpose of which is not for one person to convince the other, but to mutually explore perceptions and interpretations. Gadamer's point that this dialogue never concludes, but is an 'infinite process', lends itself to family research. (Little & Little, 2022, p. 644)

Therefore, I similarly accept the incompleteness of my knowledge of self, but do so in a way which does not assert failure, but rather hope and a literally endless wayfaring, dialogic and loving study in pursuit of it.

This might be called a pursuit of a researcher identity, but would be more accurately called a pursuit of researcher subjectivity. This is how I would prefer to describe those instances in which I make myself 'visible in the research' while telling noteworthy personal experiences, 'self-consciously

involved in the construction of the narrative' (Le Roux, 2017, p. 204). This is more harmonious with my work as a whole, as it aims not for identity categories which differentiate me from the other, but the events even in the reading of the diary which reveal my unique responsibility: when it matters that 'I am I' (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21). These events of subjectification, as well as the differentiating features which define my identity, are often found to be revealed in moments of reflexivity (both in the Research Log and in the interpretations of my data in this thesis) and in more formal declarations of my research positionality and typicality, which I will now explore.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Limiting the centrality of self, identity, or the 'auto' in autoethnography does not excuse the researcher from revealing with as much transparency possible those characteristics, experiences, social forces, and discourses which might colour the research design and interpretation as biases. Such revelation requires reflexivity:

a process of accounting for personal perspectives and positionalities (e.g. age, race, ability) and engaging in rigorous and honest 'self-critique.' (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 354.)

Such 'reflective researchers,' then

situate themselves in the study by revealing their background and personal perspectives, theoretical stance, style of interaction, political aims, and understandings acquired through the research via ongoing journaling, with participants in dialogue, and in the research write-up. (Lapadat 2017, p. 591.)

As evidence of this practice in my own work, I reveal my background and perspectives not only in generalised statements such as when I introduce my children and myself at the beginning of this work or in the declaration of my typicality shared with other stay-at-home dads, but also in the particular background and perspectives revealed in every event documented in my diary. My theoretical stance, which has already received exposition in the literature review and in this chapter, receives even deeper exploration in the following chapter and as the educational perspective for the interpretation of my data. Political aims, especially a confrontation with the discourse of isolation which limits the interpretation and perceived agency of stay-at-home dads, are spelled out among the contributions of this research. Ongoing journaling has already been described as a function of my Research Log and the co-creative, dialogic role of my participant children, already hinted at, receives a more detailed accounting below. The extended meditation on the role of the 'auto' in this autoethnographic approach, currently presents this 'situation of self' in the research write-up.

As an example of this desirable reflexivity, one work of autoethnographic research into the experiences of adoption finds the researcher reflecting thus, positioning herself in reference to

struggles documented in prior research on her topic: 'As an adoptive mother, academic, and autoethnographer I have experienced the difficulties' (Wall, 2008, p. 40). So too, in this research, I can reflectively say that as a stay-at-home dad, academic, and autoethnographer, I too have 'experienced the difficulties' shown to occur in prior research on stay-at-home dads. I do not skip over experiences of isolation or marginalization documented within my diary, though they are few (see for example D1:12.02.1996 and D29:06.06.2012). Rather, I reveal them as signs of my typicality, my experiential connection to other stay-at-home dads and to the academic literature which concerns us, but also as a way of revealing that the reading of my own diary has been coloured by my awareness of the stories told about stay-at-home dads. More important to this study, however, I also have experienced the education which stay-at-home dads have expressed in prior research (see especially Solomon, 2017) as important to them and validate to some degree their expressed sense of importance by this research.

Wall elaborates further on her experience of this reflexive activity.

During the production of my autoethnographic text, I experienced persistent anxiety about how I was representing myself in it. It was important to me to reflect in my paper the same sense of identity and self-understanding that I had established in my life. This included an understanding of myself as an autonomous social agent, my family as a 'normal' nuclear family, both in appearance and in function, and my son as a resilient and healthy child.' (Wall, 2008, p. 41.)

I have not shared in her experience of anxiety about representation of self. I was far more concerned, first, with the ethical protection of all participants, second, with producing research of sufficient rigor to withstand scrutiny by its audiences, and third, with creating a faithful representation of a large data set which would require significant reduction. I did not feel any sense of importance regarding the presentation of my family as 'normal.' For me, the limits of typicality were enough. Beyond these, there is the exception that being a stay-at-home dad is not normal; neither is it normal for my children to have been raised by one. It was not normal to be a practicing Roman Catholic in their home county (4.8% in 2010 according to City-Data.com, 2024), yet this religious perspective informed and sustained the raising of my children, the creation of the diary, and the production of this research. I am also aware of the layers of privilege which I bring to this research, not least of which is the opportunity to spend the time examining this data and attempting to draw it into academic significance. Lively in my imagination, though, is the privilege beyond the support of my university which is the support of my family, which goes back to the privilege of having spent much time with both my parents when I was a child. My mother was an educator and a

powerful influence: I had my first experience with teaching in an early childhood setting when I was still in elementary school; she was teaching at a preschool, where I helped teach one of my classmate's younger brothers how to draw a giraffe. While both Smith (2009) and Lamb (2010) assert that being a stay-at-home dad was in fact the norm preceding the Industrial Revolution, my father's work as a professional musician and educator meant that I shared far more days with him than might have been normal when I was a child, and which may have dramatically influenced my sense of possibility about becoming a stay-at-home dad myself. In some ways, it is my replication of his example of fatherhood—including his Catholicism and musicianship—which informs my own understand of this this role and the interpretation of the events documented in my diary.

There is yet another relevant aspect of reflexivity.

I was never able to distance myself emotionally from my observations. As well, I continued to work toward my explicit goal of impressing my views on my audience.' (Wall, 2008, p. 44)

Reading my own diary was, of course, an emotional experience. Reliving, as it were, the infancy and childhood of my now grown children through this document at times made progress difficult and at other times inspired progress; my emotional response at the time was likely further complicated by the coincident global Covid-19 pandemic, which limited communication with my children, and which I briefly address in the Discussion chapter. These emotions, however strong as they were at times, carried little worry about achieving an appropriate emotional distance. This was in part due to the fact that I was not directly examining my emotional response to the experiences documented in the text, but in an ethnographer's effort at achieving a balanced 'empathy and distance' (Bhatti, 2012 p. 82), regarded the diary first *as a document*. It was, consequently, this exercise of interpreting the diary as a text which allowed for establishing some emotional distance and self-control. Emotions did hold some sway, however, as I gravitated to the stories in the diary which I enjoyed sharing with my participant children. Such gravitation is, after all, encouraged by document analysis with urges selection of data in terms of choosing 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Mulligan 2015, p. 44). Nevertheless, I also had an abundance of theory to consider when interpreting it, as well as my children's responses; to these and the rigor of surprise, I owed a greater responsibility than to my emotionality and my views. In the final analysis, sharing with my children the enjoyment of memories steeped in joy may have helped to sustain the research and the researcher, but many of these events did not attain to theorization and were omitted from this presentation.

There remained for me still more questions for reflection, such as:

how I was able to see given my proximity to the “field,” how various kinds of data are valued, how others would respond to my story, and how to work ethically within autoethnography. (Wall, 2008, p. 50.)

My proximity to the field, for example, caused me to overlook until quite late into the research what was so normal to me as to not appear at first educational. These included things such as an abundance of outdoor and other play, and showing my children how to cook (which they eagerly took up). This was despite something of an emphasis on play and outdoor play in particular in my Early Childhood Education studies. I was perhaps too influenced by the literature on stay-at-home dads which asserts experiences of marginalization in school settings and responded with a consequent urgency that my experience in that setting was different. But because I did not come to this research with a specific educational theory to prove or disprove, my exploration of the text was one of seeking how or why I experienced my time as a stay-at-home dad as somehow rooted in education. It was the recursive interplay between the text of the diary and my returns to educational theory which shaped my response to the data more than my closeness to it. The evaluation and selection of data, however, remained a struggle and receives fuller treatment in the Data Interpretation section of this chapter, below. The ethics of this process and my place in determining them also receive fuller treatment below.

The self-imposed limits on centring the self still seek to maintain in my reflexivity, as I declared in my successful scholarship interview, an exploration of what’s ‘out here, between us.’ For example, I pay very little attention to my affective response to reading the diary of my children’s first years and youth, despite the fact that I had not read it since it was written, and that there were many surprises, and that most of it was a heart-breaking reminder of how good it had all been and how those times are gone. While such experiences of the text are documented in my Research Log as instances of reflexivity, offering myself occasions to witness possible influences in my data selection and interpretation, they have not for the most part entered into my data, as many of these affective moments fell outside the educational focus of this research. Instead, the process of data selection, detailed below, shows how events from the diary are mostly shared because of the ways they draw connections to the research on stay-at-home dads, to educational theory recursively found to interpret it, and to my participant children who responded to it in varying ways. These are where the foci lie, not on myself, even while I maintain this critical self-awareness.

Again, my chosen emphases on dialogism and wayfaring enter into my processes, aiding in reflexivity too. In this essential aspect of the ‘auto’ on this project, I gain confidence from arguments that ‘dialogical storytelling helps us explore our positionality as a vital path toward the journey of

understanding others' (Little & Little, 2022, p. 643). The 'auto' or 'self' in this research is implicated through these reflexive practices as a dialogic interlocutor who listens and gives utterance in response to my adult children, a wayfarer with them, and a father who loves them at least to the point where I 'go out from myself' or 'abandon and forget myself' in that love and the study which it implies. This love, though, is not limited to them, but extends also to the diary's author and to the many people, both named and unnamed in this research, who appear there. In these functions, the researcher self and the researched self might attain to a kind of sympathetic and intellectual integrity which suggests the possibility of a truthful interpretation of the diarist's experiences.

Within methods of narrative research (Ojermark, 2007) and document analysis (McCulloch, 2004), the techniques of which inform my exploration of my diary, there is a concern similar to researcher reflexivity which is sought in the typicality and biases of a document's author. Such practices offer justification for approaching characteristics of identity which might otherwise transgress a negotiated boundary into undesirable autobiography. Limiting those characteristics of identity to those necessary to establishing a typicality shifts the gaze and the emphasis, however, from the self of the 'auto' to the social connections of the 'ethno' and the research practices of the 'graphy' in autoethnography. The self is thus freed from a narcissistic gaze by its usefulness in establishing some typicality with other stay-at-home dads, so that they might have some ready reference to the potential for similarity between our experiences and the reliability of this research. In my discussions of said typicalities (see Table 8), I correspondingly address my biases within this framework of document analysis, where the focus, again, shifts safely from myself to the document at hand.

I am not, therefore, silent in this research about who I am either in the diary or now as a researcher. One could argue that it is my identity as a stay-at-home dad which made this research possible. This might be particularly true if we consider identity in terms of 'career patterns' (Holquist 2002, p. 134). 'Full-time dad' would have been my answer, during the 20 years documented in the diary, to the identifying request in the question, 'what do you do?' There is furthermore a sense of identity, then, in contextualizing my experiences as a stay-at-home dad in terms of my present career as an educator. Otherwise, I do not label myself within the diary as a stay-at-home dad; identifying thus served little or no purpose outside of this function of naming 'career patterns.' Far more typically, I would have just considered my identifying title as 'dad.' This is, after all, what my children called me, not needing the socially conferred modifiers of either 'full-time' or 'stay-at-home.' This title, instead, transcends 'career patterns' even as it is freighted with too many sociocultural meanings to articulate here: what does 'dad' mean to a Catholic, for example, who routinely prays the 'Our

Father’ and calls his priest ‘Father’? Such questions, I would argue, do not point to ‘the ways in which I am *different* from the other’ (Biesta 2013, p. 21, emphasis in original), but instead suggest another level of shared experience which point to the ‘ethno’ aspect of my autoethnographic approach.

The joy in this research—if any is to be found—is not in the identifying title of stay-at-home dad nor the simplifications of identifying gender roles which accompany it. Rather, it is in the complexities which exist beyond such simplifications; these might be better described not in terms of identity, but as evidence of the event of subjectivity which is revealed in each diary entry, which are constantly shifting and approach the endlessness implied by the inevitable incompleteness of all interpretation. These diary entries, then, beyond explicit attempts to define by positionality through reflexivity (such as the personal biases I claim alongside my typicality), are again justifiable. I reserve for myself and my participants the freedom to limit the extent to which we make explicit our reflexivity, our positionality, our typicality, our biases.

Sometimes autoethnographers use reflexivity to make explicit personal-cultural connections... but sometimes an autoethnographer does not explicitly acknowledge personal-cultural connections, and instead allows readers to make those connections. (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 354)

As such, it is with each diary entry and with each conversation with my adult children shared in this research that I invite the reader to participate in making such connections and hence journey along with my children and me in this dialogic, loving, wayfaring project, casting this becoming as a process which is endless, but still retains the possibility to know and be known in the hope of a ‘homecoming festival’ (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39).

3.3.2.4.2 ‘Ethno’

Beyond these troublings of the ‘auto’ in autoethnography, the other two aspects of this approach—the ‘ethno’ and the ‘graphy’—while attaining to complexity do not pose the same level of ethical dangers in this project. Therefore, I am able to address each of these more succinctly, in review of features already raised or in anticipation of those to be more fully addressed below.

The *ethno*- or the role of sociocultural connection in autoethnographic research (Reed-Danahay, 1997) gives importance to the study of my diary in the way it opens up possibilities for new knowledge about stay-at-home dads and education. It is, in other words, the change in family structures which so many stay-at-home dads are making which brings interest to this study.

As I will make more abundantly clear in the following chapter on the theory which guides this research, I operate under and argue for the understanding that the self is always in relation to another and that isolation of the self is not only undesirable but existentially unrealistic. Such relation is also described above as essential to meaning-making in the home learning environment, in the ‘serve and return’ interactions which foster early and ongoing brain development, and in the co-construction of narratives. Therefore, it is consistent for me to focus less on the self than on my sociocultural connection—my typicality shared with other stay-at-home dads (see Table 8)—and on a research process which maintains with integrity the constructionist truth-making ontology of this research, the epistemologies of dialogism, love and wayfaring which are evidenced in the educational experiences documented in the diary, and the continuing co-creation of knowledge with my participant children.

3.3.2.4.3 ‘Graphy’

Finally, we briefly revisit the importance of the ‘graphy’— the importance of the research process and its application in autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Its importance to rendering a rigorous and ethical exploration of my diary is generally and abundantly apparent first in the amount of exposition being focused on research methods. From Madeleine’s early recommendation of Cashore (2018), with its methodological ‘agility’ (Caputo, 1987), the research process becomes inseparable from an openness to co-creation implied in the receipt of her recommendation. Thus, it quickly, even in its ‘graphy,’ suggests a return to the ‘ethno’ and my connections to others. Beyond this desire for co-creation, however, this research has been characterised by a persistent uncertainty which was necessary to the uncertainties of dialogism, wayfaring, and love.

‘The challenge that faced me as a researcher was to find a methodology that enabled me to explore the potential for ‘a strong sense of an opening out of the mind that transcends detail and skill and whose movement cannot be predicted’ (Abbs, 1994: 15). I chose autoethnography, with a particular emphasis upon the discursive practice known as ‘writing as inquiry’. I needed the legitimacy offered by an endeavour which, by its very nature, is partial, contingent and inconclusive: ‘autoethnography could be likened to an adventure; setting off with a map and compass and some understanding of the territory but not hidebound by expectations or predictability’ (Muncy, 2010: 63).’ (Fraser, p. 30)

Grounding such unpredictability on established research methods within the field of education and, more specifically, in the techniques of document analysis, has paradoxically allowed for greater freedom in allowing the data to speak for itself and reveal what is most meaningful in the data.

To these, I would add the importance of the *graphy* of writing itself. Writing is, of course, the central process in the diary, as well as in the research log which has sustained and located my thinking during the research, in the often text-based communication with my participant children in the course of the research, and, finally, in this thesis, which as a research output aims at representing all these processes with integrity. Writing, then, is the first evidence of the research process, one in which ‘we stress that autoethnography is a process that unfolds through the research and writing process’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 374).

3.3.2.5 *Categories of autoethnography*

Having thus far claimed an autoethnographic approach, I’ll now offer further contextualization within that broad field. This clarification has a purpose:

acknowledging autoethnographic orientations can allow readers to offer more constructive feedback and/or better translate the autoethnography into their own research. (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 371.)

Such a responsibility can be seen as a continuation of the reflection on the relationships between the auto, ethno, and graphy in autoethnography. It is my responsibility, as an autoethnographic researcher, to offer such contextualization as a connection between myself (auto), the social reality of the readers of my research (ethno), and the processes within which I construct my research and dialogue with them (graphy).

The first-person narrator must “establish and maintain an acceptable dialogue with readers about the construction of reality... making decisions about which discursive policy to follow, which ‘regime of truth’ to locate one’s work within, which mask of methodology to assume.” (Lather, 2007, p. 120 cited by Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 307.)

With this aim, it remains prudent to assert that whilst I am attempting to give ample consideration to contextualizing my work within the field of autoethnographic research, I cannot attain to an exhaustive exploration of its breadth or claim expertise of its depths. Beattie (2022), in establishing a new category of autoethnography, has, in her survey of the field in order to make such establishment, recognised ‘a vast number of different approaches that could be both overwhelming and promising at the same time’ (Beattie, 2022, p. 14).

Despite such abundant practices, there have been some attempts to group these into categories. One such grouping (Adams and Manning, 2015) identifies four different kinds of autoethnography:

- ‘social-scientific-oriented autoethnographies’ or ‘analytic autoethnographies’
- ‘interpretive-humanistic autoethnographies’
- ‘critical autoethnographies’

- ‘creative-artistic autoethnographies’

They emphasise that ‘these orientations often overlap in practice’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 357).

While this thesis has in common with social-scientific oriented or analytic autoethnographies a traditional research report format, it contrarily argues against the ‘systematic data collection and coding procedures’ typical to this style (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 355) as undesirable for the document analysis necessary to exploring a diary ((Bartlett and Milligan, 2015). From among the above categories, an interpretive-humanistic ethnographic approach most closely matches this study. This approach tends to

foreground perception and sense making, and use personal experiences as a way to describe, and facilitate understanding of, cultural expectations and experiences... make personal experience and thick description the sole focus of a project... (and) make few, if any, references to systematic data collection. (Adams & Manning, 2015, pp. 355-356.)

Sharing and interpreting events documented in my diary follows these tendencies, offering them as an expression of ‘recording cultural experience in comprehensive, concrete and engaging ways’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 355).

There could also be said to be a critical autoethnographic component to this research in that it identifies a discourse of isolation in existing research on stay-at-home dads and offers an alternative perspective to our experience. However, any claims to a critical approach here are limited to an aim to reveal experiences not revealed in previous research; I make no claims that stay-at-home dads are systematically silenced or oppressed. Furthermore, I recognise the problematic nature of establishing rigor in critical research, as it aims at specific ends which might limit the ethical responsibility for allowing surprise to emerge in the research (Gorard & Taylor, 2004).

There is also a creative-artistic aspect to this research, as it shares the drawings, poetry, and other creative writing discovered in my diary. However, the presentation of these creative data again adheres to a more traditional format instead of more ‘creative’ forms. The thesis itself is not presented as poetry or music in order to situate it more firmly as a doctoral thesis in education.

Beyond this helpful classification, there are other autoethnographic styles with which my research might find resonance. A strong candidate among these is evocative ethnography (Bochner, 2016). Sometimes viewed in a dichotomous contrast with analytic autoethnography, this evocative approach ‘encourages others—readers and/or audiences—to enter, dwell in, encounter, and allow themselves to converse with what they hear’ (Bochner & Ellis, 2022, p. 12). Such a dialogic

representation of the relationship between the research and its audience is harmonious with the epistemology I claim for this research.

3.3.2.6 Symbiotic Autoethnography

I will now offer in some detail the possibility of contextualizing my work within the recently defined practice of symbiotic autoethnography (Beattie, 2022). This approach is attractive for the way in which it draws together different and even heretofore conflicting understandings of autoethnography into a system constructed around the concept of mutual benefit between these positions and the possibility of their harmonious integration.

I was not trying to follow this approach. While knowledge of it would have been an invaluable resource at the beginning of this project, its delineation as a new understanding of autoethnography was published only when my project was well underway and, furthermore, I read it only as this project was very near completion. It can only be regarded now retrospectively, without any claims to having used this approach, as a way on reflecting on my approach and its relationship to this one. And so, I need to be careful to make clear that I cannot claim that I have used symbiotic autoethnography. Rather, I can claim that I have used autoethnographic understandings and practices which may seem frictional and transgressive within this approach given the many camps within the field of autoethnography. So, symbiotic autoethnography becomes for me a retrospective lens for seeing my practices and perspectives brought together not in divisive but in a holistic and mutually beneficial way. Symbiotic autoethnography, put another way, offers an organizing principle for presenting a unified approach instead of a conglomerate of paradoxes.

Beattie proposes a new way of understanding autoethnography and, to do so, offers a thoroughgoing reflection on the history of autoethnography, its various manifestations, its criticisms and its defence. All of this would be useful for the early career researcher in autoethnography as a way to locate their own research in this approach. Having laid her foundation, then, Beattie proposes a symbiotic autoethnography, which draws on the biological notion of symbiosis, of separate parts which operate with mutual benefit. Within the ring of associations Beattie draws are seven 'features':

- (1) autoethnographic temporality, (2) researcher's omnipresence, (3) evocative storytelling, (4) interpretive analysis, (5) political (transformative) focus, (6) reflexivity and (7) polyvocality. (Beattie, 2022, p. 32.)

I see benefit particularly in the proposed cooperation of evocative storytelling, interpretive analysis, and a political (transformative) focus, as these have been previously described as separate but

sometimes overlapping practices, as described above. Symbiotic autoethnography offers an opportunity to see these as complementary features of a singular and harmonious approach.

I shall explore each of these seven features in turn, considering both Beattie's theory and the way it was expressed in my methods.

3.3.2.6.1 Autoethnographic temporality

Concerning the temporal aspect of autoethnographic research, Beattie offers not a definition, but a 'loose outline' for approaching 'researchers' subjective perceptions of chronological times as experienced across different localities and captured in the moment of writing' so as to produce a 'symbiotic fusion of past-present-future' (Beattie, 2022, p. 33). I take issue with some of the ways in which time and its place in research is represented here, notably in description of its 'capture,' which to me appears extractive and colonialist, with an aim of fixity instead of an acceptance of motility. Elsewhere, the autoethnographer's writing is regarded as bringing events across time into a

snapshot... caught in their illusory stillness... an attempt to take chronological events and 'hold them still' by the process of writing. (Beattie, 2022, p. 33.)

Even with the qualification of stillness, above, as 'illusory', my experience of this description is one of a fixity at odds with the motility and endlessness implied in wayfaring and dialogue.

Nevertheless, the fundamental claim she makes here is for the necessity for a researcher's reflexive awareness of the function of time in any research:

the ways we write about our life experiences are inseparable from our perceptions of times and locations in the context of our studies and thus, these considerations are critical to the ways that contemporary autoethnographic practices produce knowledge. (Beattie, 2022, p. 37.)

For me, this has meant recognising how time has functioned when using my diary as my primary data source. I was encountering in the diary a specific representation of time which helped to structure my response to the diary in several ways. First, time represented a boundary to my research, as I limited the study of my diary to those years that I was a stay-at-home dad (1995-2015). This boundary in practice softened slightly to include all of the first volume of the diary, which began in 1994 and offered context for understanding the source material and what would follow.

As I began to read the 9,000 pages of the diary, time was experienced primarily as relentlessly linear, moving forward with each newly dated page regardless of the fluidity of reflections across time which might occur within those pages. These reflections—and, further, my reflections on them in the present—afforded something like the fusion of times Beattie proposes except they were never

experienced as 'captured' or static. Instead, they were experienced always as a sense of movement, as 'retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own' (Ingold 2007, p. 119). Reading, revisiting the past was 'a way of keeping underway, in motion, even when it seems there is no way to go. (Caputo 1987, p. 213, cited by Cashore 2019, pp. 21-22). As these were hand-written pages, the movement was inexorable and vital.

The lines inscribed on the page... were the visible traces of dextrous movements of the hand. And the eye of the reader, roaming over the page like a hunter on the trail, would follow these traces as it would have followed the trajectories of the hand that made them. (Ingold 2007, p. 26.)

Such an observation, noted early in the process, was not neutral, but came with consequences for the research approach. It was noted that in diary research, it becomes necessary to give preference to these

narrative threads that run longitudinally through the diary in order to convey the meaning and contextual detail that is important to understanding and explaining the storylines that run through the diary. (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p. 43.)

This strategy carries with it a recommendation to reject thematic analysis in favour of a narrative approach so that

the integrity – the wholeness – of the original context is preserved, rather than the fracturing and regrouping of the data that can occur in a coding exercise. (Cohen 2017, p. 315.)

The original context is preserved in part due to the conception of each event documented in the diary arising as an utterance from my dialogic situation, which is always spatial, temporal and axiological (Holquist 2002, p. 152). Dialogism thus recognises that my utterance always comes from a time. And this becomes especially significant in conjunction with the understanding that subjectivity is itself seen as an event, as something that can *occur* from time to time (Biesta 2013, p. 22). Consequently, it makes some sense to seek examples of subjectivity in a data source as temporally constructed as a diary.

I also became aware, reading, that the documentation which occurs in a diary has a temporal relationship with the events being documented; one might say that 'the narration is fragmented... inserted between various sequences of events' (Prince, 1975, p. 478). This temporal aspect would contribute to the ways in which I would come to interpret the text as a liminal space, occurring in an in-between time.

It was also, for all its occasional regularity, at times sporadic and unpredictable. This temporal aspect aligning its use with understandings of documentation in education, where

...the time lapse between one entry and the next one varies: the diary is not systematic but is compiled when the event is considered to have new significance, when it arouses surprise in its characters and is likely to increase knowledge and problems. (Edwards and Rinaldi 2009, p. 25.)

These temporal tendencies are in many ways repeated within the research log, showing consistent understanding, documentation, and representation of time between the diarist and the researcher. So, in my case—both as diarist and as researcher—it is from these understandings of time that the utterances of both diary and research are offered.

3.3.2.6.2 Researcher's omnipresence

From this 'symbiotic fusion of past-present-future' (Beattie, 2022, p. 33) comes a sense of simultaneity which allows for a similar assertion of a researcher's 'omnipresence.' Together, these offer a way of 'troubling unhelpful dichotomies and blurring lines between space and time, between 'past' and 'present,' between 'here' and 'there'... (Beattie, 2022, p. 41). I understand the theoretical concept offered here: in the language of dialogism, I might say that the temporal, spatial and axial conditions of multiple situations can come together and be experienced as a simultaneity in the text. However, for me, the claim of 'omnipresence' goes too far and for two reasons. As Beattie acknowledges, the origins of this term are rooted in theology as an attribute of God. Although she proceeds to ground 'omnipresence' in more recent theoretical uses to describe a researcher's ability to be unbounded by location, this earlier usage resonates with my biases as a practicing Catholic and inspires a reaction which, although falling short of something as antique as a charge of blasphemy, recoils against this claim as striving and arrogant. Moreover, the term conflicts with my experience as a researcher: I have not in this research felt 'omnipresent.' This is exemplified by my experience, coincidental with this research, of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Separated from my children by thousands of miles and unable to travel, to assign a claim of 'omnipresence' to this research would be absurd. Elsewhere, it is claimed that the 'researcher's presence is ubiquitous' (Beattie, 2022, p. 45). This construction is more easily comprehended and accepted: there is no place in the research where the researcher's presence is not felt.

This being said, I recognise that by using this term and her fusion of times, Beattie 'embraces researchers' movements across spaces and locations;' she even calls the practice 'peripatetic.' (Beattie, 2022, p. 41.) Describing the researcher as a body in motion, especially by using the term peripatetic, returns me to my more modest claim, that I am not omnipresent, but wayfaring. Recall

that in that understanding of being in the world, it can be said that *'as soon as a person moves, he becomes a line'* (Ingold 2007, p. 75, emphasis in original). So, here too is a way of seeing multiple times and locations at once—not as omnipresence, but in the shape of a line, appropriate again to the line of writing inscribed across 9,000 pages of my diary. And so, I avoid this term of omnipresence as one of outsized powers being claimed for the researcher; the cleverness of the terminology oversteps its intent and is for me better served in the concept of wayfaring. Wayfaring can imply the same or to me sufficiently similar transgressive abilities without claiming supernatural powers.

I am also troubled by the implications of my relationships implied in omnipresence: If I am everywhere, what room is left for the Other? This is not problematic, perhaps, if I am God, unbounded by a physical body. As it is, however, as my body becomes omnipresent, I crowd the Other out, there is no room left for them to breathe, to act. By contrast, there is in wayfaring a root assumption that wayfaring occurs, in one way or another, *'in the company of others'* (Ingold 2007, p. 15). This is not, notably, something which Beattie would deny—she places high importance on the presence of the Other in *'polyvocality,'* which will be addressed below. My point here is that in many ways, Beattie and I share our aims but differ in our descriptions of our approaches.

3.3.2.6.3 Evocative storytelling

At the heart of Beattie's symbiotic autoethnography is the assertion that evocative storytelling and interpretive analysis can co-exist and be mutually beneficial, supplanting the established and more divisive view that analytical and evocative ethnographies are separate autoethnographic categories or practices (see for example Adams & Manning, 2015). She introduces first evocative storytelling, exploring emotion as a way of knowing. Evocative storytelling, she says, operates

at the intersection of making emotional connection with the readers and, simultaneously, exploring subjective emotional responses to various social and cultural occurrences. (Beattie, 2022, p. 42.)

Within this feature of symbiotic autethnography,

emotion is seen as a way of knowing about a cultural phenomenon that is expressed in diverse styles of evocative writing and performance... away from the constraints of objectivity and towards a wide range of evocative ways of storytelling... to capture the attention of different audiences. (p. 44).

I can claim this feature of symbiotic autoethnography within this research. In previous research (Troppe, 2019b) and in my initial understandings of autoethnography operational in this research, I have evoked as metrics of autoethnic rigor the subjectivity, resonance, and credibility which places

me as ‘self-consciously involved in the construction of the narrative,’ inviting readers ‘to enter into, engage with, experience or connect with’ the experiences I share directly from my diary and what they offer ‘on an intellectual and emotional level’ as ‘an intertwining of lives’ and to do so with a necessary vulnerability ‘permeated with honesty’ (Le Roux, 2017, p. 204). Evocative storytelling, then, is not new to my practice and appears here in at least three ways. It is present first in the text of the diary, in the poetry and observations which speak directly of emotional affect (for example, D8:24.12.2006) or which carry emotional impact—as I have witnessed in presentations of this research in conference (for example, D40:23.09.2013). Second, emotion has played a part in data selection, as detailed below, and is perhaps best exemplified in the way which my emotional response within a documented event (D9:04.04.2007) inspired the communication of that event to a participant child, who responded with her own, differing, and profoundly meaningful emotional response to the same event. Third, there is in the construction of the narrative arcs which make up the data in this thesis, an awareness of and conscious production of emotional storytelling. The urgency of this is perhaps best summarised in my Literature Review, where I remark on my first encounter with *The Kindness of Children* (Paley, 1999) and how, reading it, I wept and exclaimed, ‘this is why!’ The purpose for this research, then, found a motive and purpose in emotion; in some ways, it is the emotional content of the knowledge here which has sustained it.

3.3.2.6.4 Interpretive analysis

Having clarified this evocative feature of symbiotic autoethnography, Beattie can proceed to claim its relationship to interpretive analysis: ‘a symbiotic approach discards the detachment of evocative writing from analytic work’ (Beattie, 2022, p. 45). Moreover, a claim is made for a symbiotic connection between the two features of autoethnographic research:

‘Interpretive analysis in a symbiotic approach involves autoethnographers’ deep engagement with multifaceted theoretical notions that are critically interpreted with consideration of the researcher’s cultural sensitivity to the phenomenon under study’ and is furthermore ‘inseparable from researcher’s evocative storytelling’ (Beattie, 2022, p. 48.)

In my research, this is expressed in the ways I have not stopped at the relation of evocative storytelling but have, with ‘deep engagement’ connected these emotional events with educational, epistemological, and methodological theory which can then illuminate interpretations of the meanings which might be abducted from these stories. This active research process occurs throughout the data chapters, as each event documented in the diary—and the responses of my adult children to them—are followed by theoretical interpretations. A further benefit of this research action is that it perpetuates by its theorization the distancing of this work from the self-

centring of the 'auto' and its connectivity to and elevation of the 'ethno' and the 'graphy' in autoethnography.

3.3.2.6.5 Political (transformative) focus

Symbiotic autoethnography continues in its project of bringing together as features in one form what have previously been regarded as separate forms of autoethnography. That which has elsewhere been named 'critical autoethnography' (see for example Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 357) is here called the feature of political (transformative) focus. This feature holds a prominent role.

Symbiotic Autoethnography is, principally, concerned with the problematic question of the role of autoethnographic research in stimulating meaningful social change... inherently oriented towards social justice. (Beattie, 2022, p. 50.)

This statement does not emerge without precedent, but builds upon the autoethnographic tradition in which it has been said that

the goal of autoethnographic stories and performance is not to describe and theorize some underlying reality, but rather to elicit ethical action from the self and others... to make 'visible the oppressive structures of a culture' (Denzin, 2013, p. 139 cited by Lapadat 2017, p. 596.)

Such political goals are not limited to autoethnography, but have been said to extend to research more generally, which 'by its very nature is political and it is about the nature of power as well as the access to power' (Mirza 1995, p. 165 cited by Davies & Peterson, 2012, p. 108).

Such objectives for research, however, are not uncontested. The opposing view is that researchers who are committed to political outcomes take sides before the research has begun, diminishing rigor by an inability to fairly collect empirical evidence or communicate anything beyond their own political bias. This has led one of the gatekeepers of research rigor in education to declare that he rejects 'absolutely' any 'principles for researching social justice in education' which advocate for such political ends, arguing 'The researcher cannot afford to take sides with anything but the truth. (Gorard, 2000 cited by Davies & Peterson, 2012, p. 109).

Aware of these objections and already concerned with establishing the rigor of my approach, I have conscientiously avoided making anything more than modest claims about the political aims of my research. I do aim at offering research contributions for stay-at-home dads. These include advancing 'stay-at-home dad' as research terminology aligned with nomenclature preferred by the studied group, critical regard for the primacy of gender in interpretations of our experience, naming the isolation discourse, and building on the established evidence for the importance of education in our

experiences. These, along with research contributions specifically for the audience of my adult participant children, are political and ethical to the extent to which they ethically offer some good to the researched community, some benefit for their participation. This, too, follows a tradition that autoethnographic researchers have an 'ethical obligation to give something important back to the people and communities they study and write about' (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 56). Put another way, 'What researchers write should be "for" participants as much as "about" them' (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 56).

Among these named contributions, the nearest I might come to seeking political outcomes would be to the extent to which I might claim to use

narrative as a source of empowerment and a form of resistance to counter the domination and authority of canonical discourses. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 749 cited by Wall, 2008, pp. 46-47.)

Even so, my claims are modest. My research does not refute the discourse of isolation; it simply offers the possibility of seeing different experiences beyond those identified by this discourse. The political importance of this possibility, as I describe elsewhere, arises from confronting the disempowering effects of isolation. By opening up beyond this 'single story' (Achidie, 2009), there is a suggestion of experiences of greater agency and connection.

There is also in this research an inevitable undercurrent of feminism, as merely being a stay-at-home dad has been called 'a feminist opportunity' (Medved, 2016). This might suggest that even my documented experiences contribute to the pursuit of gender equality set out as one of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations (2012). Similarly, any research in the field of education might claim to aim for quality education, another Sustainable Development Goal. Aware of these and other ways in which this research operates in broad political contexts, including activism, utopianism, and democracy, I do not prescribe or anticipate political ends beyond those modest ones described above. These are coherent within this research, though, when conceived as symbiotic autoethnography, and contribute to its whole.

3.3.2.6.6 Reflexivity

In symbiotic autoethnography, researcher reflexivity is described as a self-awareness of the ways in which 'autoethnographers' beliefs, values and choices shape the ways in which their autoethnographic stories are presented' (Beattie, 2022, p. 55). This ability to examine how one's thinking is shaped by the contexts and environments occurs at every stage of the research and

aims to accept and celebrate the diverse multifaceted and messy nature of researchers' experiences, rejecting clinically neat and tidy methodological frameworks. (Beattie, 2022, p. 54.)

I have attempted to chronicle at every stage of this research these 'intuitive leaps, false starts, mistakes, loose ends, and happy accidents that comprise the investigative experience' (Ronai, 1995, p. 421). However, the vast majority of these reflexive insights, although very much a part of the process, remain hidden in the 3,383 pages of the Research Log.

Nevertheless, my practice of reflexivity is revealed in many ways throughout this thesis. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is the way I have confronted the problem of identity and how it shapes my thinking about nearly every aspect of this research. However, there is also evidence of reflexivity in revealing the ways Catholicism, education (especially poetry), and my upbringing (especially music) in shaping our experiences and interpretations. However, I most enjoy how reflexivity shows that my participant children have helped to shape this research and influence my thinking as co-creators.

My thinking is also shaped by each of the diary entries shared here. Were they the diary entries of someone else, the depth of this reflexivity might be reduced to interpretation alone; but here, I am forced to confront myself, as it were, and the thoughts and motivations which produced all this writing. Some of these entries show reflexivity occurring in the diary antecedent to the research process as well. Reflexivity, in other words, is inevitable to this research, even when I am not explicit about it or conscious of it.

In symbiotic autoethnography, this reflexivity does not occur in isolation. Instead,

our fractured segments of Self are disturbed, managed and shaped by the encounters with the multifaceted Other: the Other as the characters of our stories, the Other as our participants and the Other as our reflexive Selves. In a symbiotic approach, these multiple Other(s) form a polyvocal autoethnographic narrative, where each of these voices has equal significance in representing the mesh of sociocultural connections. (Beattie, 2022, pp. 55-56.)

There is, in this final, polyvocal feature of symbiotic autoethnography, parallels with the dialogism necessary to my interpretations, as I will now show.

3.3.2.6.7 Polyvocality

Polyvocality is here understood as

complex entanglements of autoethnographers' narratives with the Other, where the Other includes the characters from the researchers' stories, their participants and the researchers' multiple Selves. (Beattie, 2022, p. 58.)

Note first here the similarity between this understanding and that of auto/biography as

the inter-relationship between the construction of our own lives through autobiography and the construction of the others' lives through biography. (Merrill and West 2009, p. 5.)

Or, closer to home, my daughter Madeleine's first summation of this research: 'it will end up being my story too, sort of' (RL1:02.11.2019). The concept of polyvocality rescues me from what felt like the confining dichotomy of self and Other in auto/biography, though even auto/biography was a refuge from the even more self-centred autobiography. Autoethnography, then, having afforded further de-centring of the 'auto' and emphasis on 'ethno' and 'graphy', now within symbiotic autoethnography offers this feature of polyvocality, which provides further de-centring in an experience of the world in dialogue.

The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.' (Holquist 2002, p. 30.)

Beattie describes the polyvocal feature as rooted in Bakhtin and the dialogism which arises from his works, so there is an easy affinity between this aspect of her work and my own. She sees this inclusion of multiple voices as a beneficial feature of autoethnography, one which strengthens its reliability and recognises the multiplicity of voices which enter into the research, including those of the researcher, the participants, and the various versions of the 'self' which they represent out of differing times and places. To me, this is not just a feature of research, but is an inescapable feature of existence; adhering to Bakhtin's terminology, I would prefer to use the word 'utterance' over the word 'voice,' as each utterance arises from its situation, which is temporal, spatial and axiological. The multiple selves, in this reading, might be confused with multiple situations, which are themselves events of subjectification. It is a subtle distinction, but I offer it here so as not to confuse 'self' with 'identity' when a consistent application of theory indicates subjectivity instead.

This polyvocality bends toward an understanding of the Other as represented by three categories: the Other as the characters of autoethnographic narratives, the Other as research participants, and the Other as the researcher's multiple selves. In the narratives of this thesis, the Other appears as characters in a multitude of voices, 'fusing their voices' symbiotically with my own (Beattie, 2022, p. 58). This is most frequently represented in the utterances of my children as they were documented in the diary, whether in their first sentences (D1:16.09.1997) or in closely observed conversations transcribed verbatim (D4:n.d.2). Many other characters appear here with their utterances, such as Cyril Stretansky (D24:11.12.2011), for example, or one of the parents at St. Monica School

(D8:24.12.2006), teachers (D10:06.12.2007), my mom (D15:16.03.2011), my dad (D40:23.09.2013), a priest (D1:19.10.1998), a coach (D14:28.08.2010).

My participant children, of course, reappear in a different guise of the Other as research participants. Their present-day interpretations of the events documented in the diary become intertwined with mine, enriching understandings.

Autoethnographers working with their participants symbiotically allow their own stories, narrated from the perspectives of both a subject and object of their study, to be supported, negated, disrupted and upturned by the participants' voices that conjointly construct a complex fabric of social reality through their lived experiences. (Beattie, 2022, p. 60.)

This occurs not only at the levels of story-telling and interpretation, but, as I will show below, occurs in their co-creation of this project at multiple stages. Their polyvocal contribution also occurs, consistent with dialogism, in the silences maintained here, including those of family members who elected not to participate in this study. Between the stories and silences, there are also varying levels of engagement—Madeleine becomes a dominant voice among my participant children, offering far more interpretation than the other participant children. All these variables, however, contribute to the richness of the dialogue and a faithful representation of the polyvocality of my children as participants.

Finally, there is in this conception of polyvocality the opportunity to see the Other in the researcher's multiple Selves. Looking back at the way I have explored the experiences in my diary, I can see

the simultaneity and multiplicity of the voices that emerge from the researchers' engagement with their fragmented Self: Self as researcher, as participant and as a representative of a particular culture, time and locality. Each of these multiple selves produces different voices, where each of these voices is shaped by specific sociocultural vistas, epistemological positionings, political poses and professional practices. (Beattie, 2022, p. 62.)

This aspect of polyvocality allows for what might be understood as my utterances from a variety of dialogic situations and in response to various addressivities which reveal myself as a doctoral researcher, as interlocutor with my participant children, as dad and son and Catholic and poet and musician. Reflexivity, then, returns to an awareness of this multiplicity and the ways in which I am present in the times and places of this research, creating from it evocative stories and interpreting them, as near as possible to always with my participant children, and with the hope of some modest good in the outcome for us all.

'There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contents of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival.'

-- Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (*Estetika*, p. 373, cited by Holquist, 2002, p. 39.)

3.3.2.7 Collaborative autoethnography

Following on Beattie's concept of polyvocality, the role of the voices of the Other as participant, and my corresponding claims of the co-creation of this research with my participant children, questions might be raised about whether I have engaged in collaborative autoethnography. This research approach can most simply be understood as any autoethnographic study 'conducted by two or more researchers' (Chang et al., 2013 cited by Lapadat 2017, p. 598).

Benefits of such an approach would include claims that it is 'more rigorous' than autoethnographic approaches which do not include collaboration (Lapadat 2017, p. 599). This claim for rigor is joined to an ethical advantage in that it purportedly 'flattens power dynamics in the team because all the coresearchers are vulnerable in sharing their stories.' (Lapadat 2017, p. 599.) This kind of sharing and trust has the potential to expand the research focus from a centred self to collective agency (Taylor et al., 2014).

If we briefly examine what constitutes collaborative autoethnography, it can be shown that a definitive answer is elusive; it depends on which characteristics of this approach are deemed essential. A case can be made for this research being collaborative autoethnography, as 'the focus of this work is not the self of the narrator per se' (Lapadat 2017, p. 597), as I aim to de-centre the self. I have also followed the criteria of 'dialogically coconstructing autoethnographic research' (Lapadat 2017, p. 598) with my participant children, the details of the stages of that co-creation being detailed below.

However, certain characteristics of collaborative autoethnography are not present in this research and hence limit any claims I might make to using this style. First, in exemplary uses of this approach, group members participate in 'forming the teams and deciding on the research focus... data collection, analysis and interpretation, writing, and applications' (Lapadat 2017, p. 598). In others' practice of this approach, 'group members analysed and interpreted the group's collection of autobiographical writing as well as their own. (Lapadat 2017, p. 598.) This would have been fulfilled in this research only if we had examined my diary *and the diaries of my children*. Ideally, 'the others

are coresearchers with an equitable voice in the design research process, and authorship' (Lapadat 2017, p. 599). To claim the co-creation of this research with my participant children as 'equitable' would be an exaggeration. This is most clearly seen in the requirement that collaborative autoethnography is 'co-authored by a group of authors' (Lapadat 2017, p. 599). My children, for all their co-creation in this project, are not co-authors; the responsibility for this doctoral thesis, as well as any qualification arising from its completion, rest solely on me.

I have used the word 'co-creators' which I take from my ECE background, in which children are not expected to write research papers, but whose participation is maximized as they are seen as 'experts in their own lives' (Clark & Statham, 2005). This is not said to infantilize my adult children but to recognize and legitimize a participation which is maximized by their expertise while still being realistically limited to something short of co-authoring. This realism returns us in part to the temporal aspect of this research. The time required of this researcher has amounted to a sustained, full-time effort over years. Not all parties could make such a temporal investment.

3.3.2.8 Summary of autoethnographic position

Having weighed various understandings of autoethnography, I now summarise my application of this approach. I recognised reluctantly the need to acknowledge the autoethnographic aspect of this work inherent in a study of my own experiences as a member of a cultural group. Given the definitive centring of the self in autoethnographic research (Cohen et al., 2018), I have been compelled to seek ways to de-centre the self in this research. I recognized an urgent ethical need to avoid charges of narcissism, the risk of which threatened the 'silence'—interpreted as a withdrawal of consent—of the diarist, which could have led to a consequent loss of my primary data source, with catastrophic results for this project. Negotiating this decentering thus proceeded to understandings of autoethnography as a combination of ethnographic and autobiographic approaches (Adams & Manning, 2015). Wayfaring these two techniques led deeper into narrative approaches, including auto/biography. Still dissatisfied with the prominence of the 'auto' in this style, I sought a balancing of the component 'auto' and 'ethno' and 'graphy' in autoethnography which would allow for a further reduction in the importance of the self. Allowing that the 'auto' has important functions with regard to identity and reflexivity, I was able to shift the emphasis to the 'ethno' in my social relationships to studied groups—stay-at-home dads generally and my own family more specifically—and to the 'graphy' of my research processes, especially the co-creative role of my participant children and the techniques of document analysis necessary to exploring my diary. Retroactively, I can see in my research something similar to symbiotic autoethnography

(Beattie, 2022). This approach represents a way to understand the ways in which I joined evocative, analytical and political aims. More especially, I found in polyvocality a research expression of what I had been understanding as dialogism and which situated the self among a multitude of voices which offered perhaps a safe enough redoubt to protect the diarist—and the researcher—from undesirable accusations of self-centredness. Despite the active co-creation of this research at multiple stages, which will be detailed below, I do not claim that it attains to collaborative autoethnography.

Despite this long foray into autoethnography, the research proceeds mainly by adhering to even 'safer' categories, which require no mention of the 'auto' at all, but retreat to the general idea of narrative and its purposes, to document analysis, and to the ways in which my participant children contributed to this entire process. Having already given some consideration to narrative, above, I will now proceed to examine the role of document analysis in this project before exploring more closely the role of my participant children as co-creators of this work.

3.3.3 Diary research

When autoethnography is described as a combination of ethnographic and autobiographical techniques, diaries are, remarkably, said to be appropriate sources for both techniques (Lapadat, 2017). They are also described as 'a key source for historians and social researchers' (McCulloch 2004, p. 103). Others warn against such data, claiming 'the stuff of personal diaries... is narcissistic and self-indulgent, and of little interest to social scientists' (Lapadat 2017, p. 596, citing Atkinson (2006) and Delmont (2009)).

There is the charge of narcissism and self-indulgence again, added to similar charges levelled against autobiography (Gass, 1994) and autoethnography (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008) as detailed above. The use of this source, then, requires a doubling of vigilance against such charges. Rebalancing the 'auto,' 'ethno,' and 'graphy' of this research has allowed me to decentre the self in autoethnography to focus on social connections and research processes. I similarly wished to decentre the self as the focus of the diary. This may seem impossible, but I have attempted to achieve some desirable distance by choosing to focus first on the diary as a document instead of looking at it as a story of my life. 'Diaries... are usually categorised as personal documents' (McCulloch 2004, p. 101). It is this classification as a document which opens up the techniques to explore it.

3.3.3.1 Document analysis

A *document* is 'an artefact which has as its central feature an inscribed text' (Scott, 1990, p. 5 cited by McCulloch 2004, p. 5). While Ingold (2007, p. 127) might dispute the use of the term 'artefact'

here and argue for a diary as a work of art in its manual generation, what matters here is the potential value and relative uniqueness of the data source, as it has been argued that 'Documents are a significant and often underused resource for research in education' (McCulloch 2012, p. 254). It may also be helpful to further make clear the distinction that a *primary* document, furthermore, is 'produced as a direct record of an event or process by a witness or subject involved in it' (McCulloch, 2012 p. 211). Such primary documents are valued for the immediacy of the data they offer, but are also difficult to use (McCulloch 2004, p. 30).

Recognising that my diary is a primary document then allows for its first stage of analysis *as a document*. There is a consensus in the literature of document analysis regarding the characteristics which the researcher should consider. These are summarized by McCulloch (2004, p. 42) as the four 'well-established rules' of Authenticity, Reliability, Meaning and Theorization.

The question of *authenticity* concerns the document itself and the need 'to show that the document is not forged, is correct and complete' (McCulloch 2004, p. 42). The authenticity of my diary has not been validated by any external source, but I am open to such inspection. Instead, this measure of its analysis can be achieved primarily through the corroboration of my adult children in their responses to its documented events, as well as ephemera located in the diary itself (such as receipts) which repeatedly confirm the data of the document itself. Furthermore, the diary appears to be entirely intact, with no signs of any pages having been removed.

Reliability is more a question of the author and their ability to have rendered an account worthy of consideration. Factors considered here include the author's presence and ability to witness the events, the author's mindset, biases and expertise, and the author's promptness in documenting the events. My presence to the events documented in the diary is of utmost importance and enters into consideration and theorisation repeatedly in the chapters to come. This presence and ability are once again corroborated by the witness of the children and accompanying ephemera. The author's mindset might be considered variable but documented both in the diary and in this research with transparency which contributes to its quality as autoethnography (Le Roux, 2017). Biases might be said to include a bias *for* education, which will also receive fuller consideration in later chapters.

The *meaning* of a document 'involves ensuring that the evidence is clear and comprehensible to the researcher (Scott 1990, p. 8); this includes giving 'attention to the context in which the document was produced' (McCulloch 2004, p. 45).

It is necessary to find out as much as possible about the document from internal evidence elicited from the text itself, but it is not less important to discover how and why it was produced and how it was received. Documents are social and historical constructs, and to examine them without considering this simply misses the point. For the same reasons, documents need also to be understood with reference to their *author/s* and to what they were seeking to achieve in so far as this can be known. (McCulloch 2007, p. 6.)

Evidence, in this case, can be said to occur at different stages: first, in the production of the diary, second, in its reception, and third, in its purpose. Note that these are not strictly chronological, that purpose might be antecedent to or concurrent with production, but it also might only be revealed in dialogue, in its reception and whatever response might arise from that reception, and the sense of purpose which is co-created in this dialogic exchange. For me, this produced a freedom to focus on the 'internal evidence' of the text whilst recognising and attempting to make full use of the advantage I have for contextualizing this diary based on my intimate knowledge of its production and its author's life history. Sharing this evidence with my participant children allowed for co-creation of meaning. How it was received is indicated only now, in this research, in their participation.

Lastly, *theorisation* 'entails developing a theoretical framework through which to interpret the document' (McCulloch 2004, p. 46), which will be the focus of the following chapter. Both the meaning and theorization of any document, however, draws much of its relevance from the possibility of *The Sociological Imagination*, which 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (Mills 1959, p. 6, 7 cited by McCulloch pp. 8-9).

These four rules have been expanded and elaborated in a checklist devised by Bryman (2016), which I used early in this project (see Appendix 8). However, for the purposes of interpretation in this thesis I will continue to refer to these four rules.

3.3.3.2 *Diary method*

As a document, a diary has further definitions and characteristics.

Diaries are personal accounts with entries produced on a regular basis, usually soon after the event being described, and so are usually seen as especially reliable sources... It is this immediacy of the record of everyday experience that makes diaries a key source for historians and social researchers. (McCulloch 2004, pp. 102, 103.)

My diary is further distinguishable as *private*—as opposed to a political or official diary—as it was created with the aim 'to record one's own development, for one's own satisfaction' (McCulloch, 2004 p. 105). It can also be called an *unsolicited* diary. This nomenclature arises out of the

emergence in the social sciences of 'diary method' (Alaszewski, 2006; Bartlett & Milligan, 2015), in which two kinds of diaries are identified: *solicited*, or those designed and requested by the researcher, and *unsolicited* diaries; these latter occur when 'no one has asked the diarist to keep the diary' (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015. p. 3).

Three kinds of diary are identified by Bryman (2016, p. 690), who sees them as 'a method of data collection,' as in diary method, as 'a document' which is 'written spontaneously by the diarist' and is therefore comparable to Bartlett & Milligan's unsolicited diaries, and 'the diary as a log of the researcher's activities'; this latter, he says, 'often shades into the writing of field notes by ethnographers' and receives expression in the Research Log which I have used throughout the course of this project. Within these categories, my diary would again be simply a *document*, which again suggests the suitability of document analysis for a first stage for understanding its content.

Diaries are prized in research primarily for the subjective perspective they offer. This aligns well with the aims of qualitative research as described above. Such a social constructivist perspective, in which knowledge 'is actively created or constructed through the processes which individuals use to organise and make sense of everyday life,' finds diaries particularly valuable in their 'natural use of language' and 'in accessing intimate and highly personal issues,' (Alaszewski 2006, pp. 119-121) of which family life might be one. They have been called essential to research on fathers, as studies 'of families in general and fatherhood in particular... rely on primary sources such as diaries' (Mander 2004, p. 62).

Despite these benefits to diary use, there are also risks. Even a proponent of their use in research has stressed that diaries are 'unreliable and biased' (Alaszewski 2006, p. 30). They are

tricky; they tell us what the author wants us to know, which is not necessarily what the researcher is really interested in. (Alaszewski 2006, p. 82.)

Therefore, the diary must be approached with discernment, with criticality.

If diaries are treated as records of a competent and disinterested observer then any distortion or bias is a cause for concern... diaries need to be treated with caution. (Alaszewski 2006, p. 87.)

Among the biases identified by Alaszewski are those of cost and selection. The first of these refers in my case to the costs of travel to retrieve and ship the diary volumes from the US to the UK at my own expense; such a cost might have been prohibitive. Selection bias refers to the way that the 'demanding and skilled activity' of diary keeping creates 'a strong bias towards social elites'

(Alaszewski 2006, p. 114). This potential for bias, as well as my inability as a researcher to control the content of the diary as it is received, are arguments for considering ‘the typicality or representativeness of the diarist(s)’ (Ojermark 2007, p. 57), as I have done (see Table 8).

Beyond their use as source of research data, diaries are also understood as a literary form or genre. As such they have been claimed as a specifically feminine literary form (Lensink, 1987; Hogan, 1991), as auto/biographical literature (Podnieks, 2001), and as ‘serious literature’ (Jokinen, 2004), while Lejeune argues that ‘the diary exists at the margin of literature, and most diarists would not label themselves as authors’ (2009, p. 2). Just the other side of this margin, perhaps, is the diary novel, which might suggest something of the diarist’s production, as ‘the narration is fragmented... inserted between various sequences of events’ (Prince, 1975, p. 478), a reminder that despite the immediacy of the diary’s documentation, the writing still occurs in a liminal space, an in-between time.

Another way of looking at diaries comes from an examination of the diary of Nuha Al-Radi (2003), who wrote in Bagdad in a time of war. While the experiences of a stay-at-home dad bear little in common with hers, I was intrigued that, considering the ways in which stay-at-home dads have been characterised in research as experiencing isolation and marginalization, her diary was interpreted as

reporting from zones of contestation, of articulating a point of view marginalized or otherwise subordinated... an act of survival and defiance. (Cardell 2013, p. 318.)

This idea of ‘zones of contestation’ serves as a reminder that wayfaring, which I describe above as an epistemology used in this research, is not necessarily peaceful. Instead, conflicts are encountered. The diary can be a site of working through these conflicts in ways which can feel like a bid for survival and/or an act of defiance.

Finally, there is another way of viewing diaries which is specific to education and perhaps most relevant to the interpretation of my own. This is the perspective of a diary within the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, where it is a tool of documentation.

The diary at the infant-toddler center is substantially different... It is mainly a collection of signs and moments, a series of gestures and words of the child with the adult, with the children, and with the objects. It is a diary of notes, a diary sketched by the educator, who quickly writes some material in a notebook as soon as possible, material that he or she will later fill in with the aid of memory. The material in the diary comes from an action agreement between the event, the code that records it, and the memory of the person who witnessed it and who now puts it back in his or her circle of thoughts. (Edwards and Rinaldi 2009, p. 23.)

This description of a diary most closely resembles my documentation of events with my children. Note that the measure of quality, frequency of entries, has no rigid requirement of regularity in this documentation, but instead draws on that capacity most necessary to research, being surprise:

...the time lapse between one entry and the next one varies: the diary is not systematic but is compiled when the event is considered to have new significance, when it arouses surprise in its characters and is likely to increase knowledge and problems. (Edwards and Rinaldi 2009, p. 25.)

The audience of the diary is also addressed here: 'Who is the diary for? For the educators... for the parents... for the child...' (Edwards and Rinaldi 2009, pp. 25-27). In my case, this aspect of being for educators and the child has been held in reserve, in potential. It more fully enters into fulfilment of this for-ness by the completion of this research, which reveals it at last to educators and children, superaddressees who, even if not made explicit in the text, might be inferred from its alignment with the pedagogical actions expressed here. These audiences have been held in suspense, but the homecoming festival (Holquist, 2002) draws near. The claim made for the diaries of Reggio Emilia might also be made, on a much humbler scale, of my diaries.

In those pages is the thread of our story, our research, our growth, our pauses, of the evolution of an educational program in a world that is quickly changing... (Edwards and Rinaldi 2009, p. 27.)

3.4 Participants

Selection of participants in this case began with self-selection. By this, I mean that I as a researcher had unique access to a document of interest—my diary—and that in order to explore said diary, I had to recognise in myself—both the diarist self (or selves) and the researcher self (or selves)—a participant who needed to consent to the vulnerabilities inevitable in such research. Similarly, I sought to include the participation of my family. In the Introduction to this research, my participant children—Madeleine, Max and Gus—introduced themselves. They appear there appropriately, always at the forefront of the considerations which have shaped this research. I have wanted them to participate not only to mitigate my aversion to explorations of my identity. As their dad, I enjoy doing things with them. As a researcher, though, my rationale for their inclusion was first an expression of ethics: to tell our story, I needed their consent; their participation meant first their consent but would preferably expand from there to include their participation in helping to interpret our experiences together. We are the co-constructors of my truth, both within and outside of this research. My epistemology, especially the aspect of it which insists on the unity of study and love

(Wilson, 2020), I claim as inseparable here. I desired for my family to join me in what I later recognised as the wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) of this research and to do so within the spirit of what I later came to recognise in dialogism (Holquist, 2002).

Early in this research, my daughter Madeleine recommended a doctoral thesis which she had recently read, in which Method is described as

the suppleness by which thinking is able to pursue the matter at hand; it is an acuity which knows its way about, even and especially when the way cannot be laid out beforehand, when it cannot be formulated in explicit rules. Meta-odos is a way of keeping underway, in motion, even when it seems there is no way to go. (Caputo 1987, p. 213, cited by Cashore 2019, pp. 21-22.)

This offering—this *gift*—anticipated my use of wayfaring, ‘which knows its way about’ and is harmonious with my reliance on Biesta, who opens his *Beautiful Risk of Education* by discussing Caputo’s (2006) *Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. It is one of many instances which render this research a co-creation with my participant children, which I have detailed as process stages, below.

3.4.1 Co-creation: process stages

Co-creation is not just about actions or outcomes, but is, in concert with the rest of this thesis, first an existential concern:

‘Being’ ... is not just an event but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always *co-being*.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 25.)

From this starting point of co-being, this research can only be conceived as co-created, in which my participant children, as ‘experts in their own lives’ (Clark & Statham, 2005) also achieve a theoretically bestowed qualification of research expertise. By joining our individual expertise to each other’s, we establish a corroborative and collaborative expertise of a higher order.

Of course, there are limits to co-creation. I could not expect my children to read all 9,000 pages of the diary, nor be responsible for its retrieval, inventory, or the development of access codes. Nor did I expect them to trouble themselves with the conflicts and resolutions I encountered in developing methods and theories. In all the administrative aspects of my doctoral research, in my seminars, my interactions with my supervisors and examiners, and in presentations of early drafts of this work at conferences, I could only do my best to represent the interests of my participant children; their co-creation in these stages was not visible. Ultimately, the responsibility for this thesis rests on me, as the doctoral qualification which might be its outcome will also only be mine. However, the many

ways in which my children did participate in the research shows a goal of co-creation and, as much as possible, its attainment.

Reflecting back on the research process, there appear to be ten process stages at which co-creation is evident: event, documentation, participant selection, methodology, data selection, data sharing (2 stages), data selection and interpretation, reciprocities, and encouragement as a measure of a co-created research ethic. The following list shares what 'co-creation' looks like at these stages throughout the research project.

Event

In this doctoral thesis, which critically considers the Pedagogy of the Event (Biesta, 2013) as an interpretive perspective for the experiences of my children and me, the word 'event' is freighted with meanings. These meanings can be more fully appreciated in the following chapter. For now, I wish neither to oversimplify nor lose the reader in complexities not yet elucidated. Instead, I ask the reader to temporarily imagine that an 'event' approximates what is typically called one of a diary's 'entries' (McCulloch 2004). Not all diary entries attain to the full theoretical meaning of the word 'event' to be explored below, but even at this imaginary level, one might see how the events documented in my diary were co-created with my children. Absent my children, these events would not have been possible. They would not have existed. This existential fact, though, allows us to proceed to more theoretical understandings of the event, including those which respond to existential questions of subjectivity and dialogism. The important thing about this stage of co-creation, though, is recognizing that most of the events documented in the diary are events co-created with my children. With greater theoretical explanation, this will come to mean that events are documented as the addressivity of my children's 'coming into the world' (Biesta, 2013), to which I have a unique responsibility and consequently give utterance in the documented event and/or in the documentation. Exceptions to their role as co-creators in documented events occur when addressivities other than they enter into our environment, also provoking response. These merit inclusion here despite the reduced input of the children, then, because these events in some way significantly impact the environment which we are co-creating, especially in the ways my diary is purposed and structured to document further events.

Documentation

The children practice making marks and writing letters in my diary, documenting their own learning. Later, other works such as drawings and stories were included not on the pages of the diary itself, but as separate documents given to me and inserted into the diary as 'loose materials.' The vast

majority of the documentation was less co-created and more of my own doing. However, it must be acknowledged that without the co-created event, there would have been no documentation, without the addressivity of my children, there would have been no dialogic response, so they are still inseparable from the documentation, even if it is mostly by my hand.

Participant selection

The ethical approval processes for this research required that I receive informed consent from my participant children. They signed these consent forms and returned them to me with spontaneous remarks, shown immediately below. Their comments reveal eagerness and uniqueness appropriate to co-creators.

From Madeleine:

Congrats on getting your proposal approved! Here's my completed consent form... Love you!
(EM:16.07.2020)

From Gus:

Hi Dad,
Good luck!!! Let me know if I can help or contribute at all. This will be so great!
Love,
Gus (EM:21.07.2020)

From Max:

Hi Dad!
Sorry for taking so long getting this back to you! I'm excited to be a part of your research--I think it's going to be great :)
Love,
Max (EM:30.07.2020)

Refusal of consent by one of my adult children and their mother is also a form of co-creation at the participant selection stage. It shapes the research.

Methodology

I have already mentioned above how Madeleine's recommendation of Cashore's doctoral thesis, with its definition of Method by Caputo, anticipated and supported my research approach. She further influenced my method when she said she was interested in this research because 'it will end up being my story too, sort of,' encouraging an auto/biographical narrative approach. Our conversation continued:

Tom: At some point, you might decide how much you want to co-create this book. Because you're right. It's your story too.'

Madeleine: Oooh that would be cool! If there's some way of contributing to it from where I am in life right now, let me know!

T: Absolutely there is!

M: I think that would be fun :)

T: See! This is what I mean about letting a methodology evolve! You're helping already!
(RL1:02.11.2019)

Here, I explicitly propose that the research will be co-created and her acceptance is enthusiastic. We have in this exchange named the research as co-created.

Max's contribution to my methods was less direct and contemporaneous. His early mark-making in my diary (D2:n.d.2000) became a way of understanding and illustrating my research process (see above).

Gus had an impact on my methods by expressing enthusiasm for the poetry I had written in the diary. This 'fascination' emphasised the importance of exploring it and selecting it for interpretation. Also, by listening in our conversations to his love for the films of Martin Scorsese, I became alert to interpretive perspectives which might align with his preferences, thus expressed, for constructing narrative, of which more below.

Data selection: 'what fascinates,' 'mutual fascination,' and anticipating an academic audience

Data selection, which is more fully described below in the sections below on Data Interpretation, is primarily by 'what fascinates' (Bartlett & Milligan 2015, p. 44) and subsequently by what I came to consider 'mutual fascination.' By this latter, I was looking specifically to include as many responses to the data from my children as possible. There was also an aim to include evidence of the presence and co-creation offered by each individual child at different periods in the diary, so as not to allow any to seem to disappear from importance. However, given a necessary deference to the academic audience of this work as a doctoral thesis, many of the more playful exchanges fell to the wayside so that events more suitable to theoretical interpretation from an educational perspective maintained priority. In other words, my children were not always most fascinated by that which might fascinate the academic audience. Balancing these interests fell entirely to me.

Data sharing: initial and spontaneous

During the first read-through of the diary (27 October 2019 through 23 July 2020), many individual diary entries were, upon discovery, sent digitally to participant children. This was not a planned approach but emerged spontaneously out of a desire to share documented events and my research experience. Mostly, these were sent simply because they were fun: occasions of playfulness,

silliness, joy—or a kindness, a mitzvah (Paley, 1999). In return, I typically received one of three types of response: verbal comment, acknowledgement by emoji, or silence. I have not attempted to quantify the number of entries sent or the number of types of responses received. This is in part due to a porous boundary between communications *as a researcher* with my children and *as their dad*. While I tried to keep a keen eye on aspects of research which entered into our conversations, this line frequently blurred. There were times when I needed to abandon my role as researcher and focus entirely on my more important and irreplaceable responsibility. It is important to remember that during this research, I was living in the UK while my children were living in various cities in the US; great distances and time zones separated us. So, these conversations took place across a variety of digital platforms including email, WhatsApp and Instagram Direct Messaging. Screenshots were sometimes taken, especially of these two latter platforms, in order to capture significant exchanges for any necessary transcription before they were lost.

Examples of these exchanges can be found in Appendix 9, which lists 52 diary entries shared with my participant children and the responses I received. Note that these 52 exchanges are only those which refer specifically to an event documented in the diary. They do not include those exchanges, some of which were also screenshot, which involve other aspects of the research. Their responses to data which I shared with them are also indicated in the table of events which leads into each of the three data chapters. One benefit of their participation at this stage is the validation of the diary's authenticity (McCulloch, 2004) through corroboration of the diary's documented events.

Data sharing: selected diary entries, compiled

After the initial read-through, I attempted to compile collections of diary events. These were then sent to the children in five dispatches: Vol 1 to Kids (selected diary entries D1-D3, 26 pp.), Words at 18 m (1 p.), Letters to Parents (4 pp.), Vol 2 to Kids (selected diary excerpts D4-D5, 25 pp.), and American Football (9 pp.). I received less response to these more formal attempts at data sharing, so aside from the American Football narrative arc, all other arcs were identified and developed by me from a balance of 'mutual fascination' and academic expectations.

These collections received in response summary statements. Madeleine called Vol 1 'Difficult... healing... funny... touching' (EM:24.03.2021). Gus said it was 'Excellent... profound... funny... amazing... specific... universal... balanced' (IGDM:04.04.2021). Madeleine called the Letters to Parents 'sweet... fun... cute... playful...' (EM:27.03.2021). She also requested and subsequently commented on her Words at 18 months, which had been referenced in Vol 1 (D1:22.05.1997) but not listed verbatim.

No similar summary statements occurred in response to Vol 2. Madeleine's responses were all directed toward specific, documented events. Max and Gus did not reply directly to this set of data.

Max had shown interest in a spontaneous remark about his days of playing American football (IGDM:28.03.2020), so I returned to this content to create a verbatim transcript of every entry which mentioned playing the sport. He did not respond to this transcript. Madeleine did, however, saying 'The arc of the overall story really resonates...' (EM:30.01.2022) and providing commentary on individual events within it. 'American Football' is the only narrative arc in this thesis which was identified as such by my participant children.

Data selection and interpretation

In the following statement, Madeleine continues a series of email exchanges between us in response to Vol 2 to Kids, and specifically to an event in which I mention the French surrealist Max Jacob as 'a matter of importance' (D4:26.04.2004). She said it reminded her of *The Little Prince* (St. Exupery, 1943) and I asked for clarification.

Thank you for all your responses to this! I'll just clarify what I was saying about the Little Prince. The phrase "a matter of importance" reminded me of "matters of consequence" as a theme in the book. There's a businessman counting the stars, saying he owns them, and when the Little Prince talks to him, the businessman keeps saying not to interrupt him — he is dealing with "matters of consequence." See chapters 7 and 13 for the most usage of this phrase. Your usage of "a matter of importance" to describe Max Jacob seems like a proper usage, in contrast to the businessman's use of "matters of consequence" regarding owning the stars. (Madeleine, EM:29.03.2021)

Again, this strikes me as commentary not only on the specific passage, but more broadly as a comment on my method—on data selection as 'a matter of importance.'

This shows Madeleine's trust in my discernment of 'matters of importance.' I would not expect my children to have a deep interest in the methodological or theoretical conflicts which I have encountered and tried to resolve in the course of this research. While those have been largely left to me alone, they have surprised me by their interest as well as in their constancy in other matters. Especially their engagement with little parts of their stories and their unwavering encouragement of me have been ways of participation and co-creation more important as sustenance to this project than detailed involvement in those matters—which would perhaps have been burdensome to them.

Listening to Gus' fascination with the films of Martin Scorsese led me to one of that film-maker's maxims: 'Never *explain*' (Horne, 2019, p. 22, emphasis in original). Gus' preference for the creation of narrative from this rule or standard informed how I tried to approach and communicate the

narrative of this research. However, as a doctoral researcher, perhaps I do not have the same remit as a great storyteller like Scorsese. Perhaps our methods are differentiated by our purposes. The purpose of doctoral research, as argued by Åkerlind and McAlpine (2017), is twofold: the personal development of the researcher and the creative contribution to knowledge. Ironically, Scorsese is said to guide his filmmaking with another maxim: ‘The most personal is the most creative’ (Forstadt, 2020). This statement seems to fuse the two goals of doctoral research suggested by Åkerlind and McAlpine. It also seemed to apply to my research, in which the most personal data from my diary is the substantive source for this creative contribution to knowledge. Gus’ contributions toward co-creating our methods set off a tension between the audiences of my participant children—who in this preference rejected explaining the story—and the audience of academia, who, by the need for theorization in doctoral research, required it. Again, balancing these conflicting interests fell entirely to me.

Reciprocities

A feature of the co-creation of this research is that I did not adhere rigidly to my agenda, but engaged actively with the priorities of my participant children. When they invited me to participate in their current educational projects as much as they were participating in mine, I was attentive to their requests, aware that the collaborative ethic we were continuing to develop extended beyond the results and impacts of this research project and into theirs.

Gus was completing an undergraduate degree in screenwriting during this research, so we discussed the films we were watching, interpreting, and recommended; these included student-directed films in which he acted (*COMRADES!*, 2020; *Bowties and Kidney Beans*, 2020). He also sent a completed, feature-length screenplay for me to read.

Max was completing an undergraduate degree in music performance and sound engineering during this research, so we discussed the music and sound arts with which we were engaging, including his performances (*Jewlow – Carelessly Killed*, 2020; *Love Ain’t Blind*, 2019) and mine (Priest et al, 2020; Hall et al, 2020).

Madeleine had already completed her undergraduate degree before this research, so the study we continued to share was more focused on study as love as described by Wilson (2022), particularly in supporting each other in our faith journeys. Her relative freedom from other academic requirements may in part explain why she has provided a greater number of responses to the shared data.

These reciprocities offer evidence of our ongoing relationship as continuing to be rooted in sharing events with each other which might continue to be interpreted as educational and co-created.

Encouragement as a measure of co-created ethics

An 'acid test' for ethical conduct in educational narrative and life history research (Sikes 2010, p. 14) asks how I would feel if my family were treated in the same manner as the research participants. This ethic, too, is something my participant children have co-created by their unsolicited responses to the research experience.

I think our conversations over the course of your research have shown me that you really enjoyed taking care of us and felt called to it too. (Madeleine, EM:24.03.2021)

I love you and I'm so proud that I have a Dad who I really look up to <3 (Max IDGM:01.01.2021)

I can't wait to see more of it! (Gus IDGM:04.04.2021)

In these processes, Madeleine's becomes a dominant voice in the research. This is due in part to her being the first born. The full 20 years of the diary include stories of her. Gus, who is five years younger, is included then in only the last 15 years of the diary. While diary entries from the years before his birth were shared to Gus, I wouldn't expect him to show as great an interest in them as Madeleine did. She was the focus of the diary's first years and of my earliest insights into what it meant to me to be a stay-at-home dad. In part because of this accident of birth order, there is a greater number of Madeleine's responses. Her engagement with the material, however, also includes a greater specificity in her interpretations and a willingness to interpret events within which she was not the central actor, such as in the stories of Max's experiences of playing American football. I placed no restrictions on the responses of my children, however, so this too is evidence of co-creation: whether in Madeleine's abundance of replies or in the fewer and less specific replies of Max and Gus, each gave what they could to shape the research. I consider them all equal participants in the co-creation, as even silence is a legitimate dialogic response, and even a silent companion shares the wayfaring.

Lastly, co-creation is not in this research limited to myself and my participant children, but rather invites the audience in their reading to a participation which is not merely a watching from the sidelines, but rather, compatible with the epistemologies of dialogism and wayfaring described above—and even love—an invitation to journey into the narrative with us and create new interpretations and meanings. This is a precept of evocative autoethnography:

The reader should be conceived as a co-participant, not a spectator, and given opportunities to think with (not just about) the research story (or findings). (Ellis & Bochner 2016, p. 56.)

Nearing the end of this research, I looked back across the many screenshots of conversations between me and my participant children. Among them, there was a still image from a film by Jonas Mekas, shared on Instagram. The image has a subtitle which reads, 'It's you, it's you in every frame of this film' (*As I Was Moving Ahead I Occasionally Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*, 2000 shared by @regardemesfilms, 2021). I responded to seeing this again by writing of it in my research log.

The Mekas quote... was sent uniquely to Gus. His only reply to it was to 'like' it—but that, for me, is enough. I am asserting, by way of Mekas, the presence of Gus, of all my children, in every step of this process and he at least acknowledged that he liked something about this, whether it was Mekas or the sentiment which I was trying to express. (RL7:15.10.2022.)

As co-creators, then, we can return to Biesta, who, exploring the essential role of creation in education, claims,

Creation thus becomes an act of *affirmation* that gives what is there—the “elements”, in the broadest sense of the term—significance and meaning... (Biesta 2013, p. 23).

So, for me the interpretation has been this kind of affirmation in which we have given this gift of significance and meaning to the text, to our dialogue around it, to each other, and to all the audiences who will visit this work we have shared.

3.4.2 Typicality

In diary research, 'chance plays an important role' (Ojermark, p. 48). This research certainly lives up to this expectation. My diary was not written to be the focus of research. So, there is an element of unpredictability to its arrival at this place in this project. If this diary is to be a source of knowledge about the experiences of a stay-at-home dad, it is recommended to establish 'the typicality or representativeness of the diarist(s)' (Ojermark 2007, p. 57).

[T]ypicality is not always required, but... the researcher needs to know how typical the available evidence is in order to be able to assign limits to the application of any conclusions that are drawn from it. (Scott 1990, p. 7 cited by McCulloch 2004, p. 44.)

As a means of establishing some degree of my typicality, I have devised the table below (Table 3), which shows characteristics of the subjects in a study of American stay-at-home dads by Sullivan (2017). As the table suggests, in the period during which I was writing the diary (1994-2015), I might be considered a typical stay-at-home dad, as I am comparable in many of the categories noted by Sullivan (2017) in the description of her participants. While most of these are self-explanatory, some require further comment. 'Middle-class' is not a way in which I would typically describe myself. My family has roots in both the middle class and the working class, and my experience is one of having

always straddled that line. It is unclear what metrics Sullivan was using in making this classification, so I cannot apply them directly to myself. However, considering my education and the home and experiences my children enjoyed, I am willing to accept this label.

Characteristic	Sullivan’s (2017) Participants	Tom Troppe (1994-2015)
Marital status	Married	Married
Sexuality	Heterosexual	Heterosexual
Race	White	White
Age(s)	27 – 51, mean of 33	31 – 52
Number of children	3 or less	4
Ages of children	5 months to 17 years	2 weeks to 20 years
Education	Almost all had college, many had post-graduate education	Post-graduate education
Socioeconomic Class	‘Solidly middle-class’	Middle-class
Privilege	No other discrimination	Anti-Catholic discrimination
Transitions	2	3

Table 8. Typicality of the author compared with the participants of Sullivan (2017).

Regarding privilege, Sullivan notes that her participants did not experience discrimination based on race, class or sexual orientation. Nor did I. I did, however, experience some anti-Catholic discrimination, as this was a minority Christian denomination in the region where I raised my children (4.8% in 2010 according to City-Data.com, 2024). The Transitions which were two for all but one of Sullivan’s participants involved the simultaneous transitions into parenthood with the birth of a first child and the transition into staying at home. In addition to these, I experienced a geographical transition, as my first child was born within a year of relocating from a New York City suburb to a small town in rural Pennsylvania. Despite any claim that I might make for typicality, it must be remembered that in qualitative research, which places great value on subjective experience and interpretations, such typicality is not required. In diary research especially, ‘a person’s story is valued in its own right, not just as a representative sample of a wider category’ (Alaszewski 2006, pp. 57-58).

3.4.3 Researcher positionality and bias

I have shown above how my chosen research methods require reflexivity. Autoethnography demands

a process of accounting for personal perspectives and positionalities (e.g. age, race, ability) and engaging in rigorous and honest ‘self-critique.’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 354.)

Similarly, diary research methods recognise that ‘any distortion or bias is a cause for concern... diaries need to be treated with caution’ (Alaszewski 2006, p. 87). In diaries, these positionalities are established in terms of their author’s typicality (Ojermark, 2007), as I have just shown. Some further

reflexivity, however, is required to briefly reveal four positionalities and biases not necessarily evident as typicality (Table 8).

The first potential bias here seems fairly obvious, but must be acknowledged. As a professional educator, the son of teachers, and now the father of a teacher, I have a bias for education. This bias might produce an exaggerated emphasis on educational aspects of my shared experiences with my children when I was a stay-at-home dad. Coincidentally, 'Brian,' the participant stay-at-home dad in my MA dissertation (Troppe, 2019b), also had parents who were teachers and proceeded in his career from being a stay-at-home dad to being an early childhood educator. So, Brian and I both see plainly the importance of education (and downplay the importance of gender) in the experiences of being a stay-at-home dad. While recognizing this as a bias, it can still be defended as not destructive to the thesis, but beneficial to it. By this, I mean that my unique perspective is legitimized in my ontology and my methods and, furthermore, my bias for education allows for the initiation of the research, its rigor, and its fulfilment. Claiming typicality means I recognize that I establish reliability while recognizing that this research still comes with very limited generalizability. Furthermore, I would point out that the characterization of education within this thesis is not one which emphasizes formal structures of curricula and classroom discipline, but rather the education which is an expectation of parents as developmental standards to be enacted largely in the home learning environment. These are standards which are taken up by involved parents everywhere, passing along to their children their language and culture. As one stay-at-home dad summarized, 'I am Justin's teacher' (Mattila 2016, p. 107).

A second bias is revealed in recognizing that being a stay-at-home dad has been called 'a feminist opportunity' (Medved, 2016). For most of my adult life, I have been a man doing 'women's work' (Carrigan, et al. 1987) and so I have experiential as well as theoretical knowledge of gender as a construct (Connell, 1995). My activism in this regard, however, is not aligned with any particular school of feminism and is enacted primarily through the very quiet example—if it can be called such—of my life and the equality of opportunity which I have pursued. Again, I make limited reference to feminism in this study, but it informs my thinking and may colour this project in ways of which I am not yet aware.

A third and more important bias in this study is that I am a practicing Roman Catholic. While this bias might have been set aside as much as possible to establish an educational perspective and interpretation, I found that the content of the diary frequently foregrounded Christian experience, theology, and tradition in the formation of my motives and reflections. My children's attendance at

a church school also reveals this bias in our understandings of those years and experiences. I appreciate the difficulty which such biases might bring for audiences of this work who do not share similar experiences and traditions, or who may hold grievances against the long history of Catholic religious practice, particularly in education. My aims in including this bias do not include proselytization, but fulfil a commitment to reporting with integrity the content of the experiences in the diary.

Finally, it might be said that the very characteristics which define my typicality—being a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual American male—allow me to see these characteristics as normative (Kimmel, 2015), and therefore allow me to disregard identity as useful or important to interpreting my experiences. This bias might overlook the importance of identity to those stay-at-home dads who are socially confronted by the intersectionality of characteristics which they might experience as placing them outside such constructed norms. I have little means for confronting this bias of mine—as well as my other biases—other than to be self-aware and self-reflective and to invite and welcome alternate perspectives in dialogue.

3.5 Data interpretation

Interpretation of the diary necessarily takes into account all of the methodology thus far described. A constructionist ontology, which posits truth as emerging out of the meanings that people make of their lives in the world (Cohen et al. 2017, pp. 288-289), gives me and my participant children the authority to make truth claims based on the meanings which we make of our lives. Dialogism, wayfaring, and study as love combine in an epistemology which allows for the discovery of these ways of knowing embedded in the text whilst helping to reveal the educational insights there. Adherence to established methods of research in education, and specifically the combination of autoethnography and diary research, enables us to imagine that the truth claims we make might extend fully to all the audiences imagined for this research, including stay-at-home dads, educators, and the participants in this research. Co-creation with those participants helps to avoid the pitfalls of focusing interpretations on identity and to find instead unexpected interpretations which offer the surprise necessary to research. To better understand these interpretations as a process, I will now show them as occurring in initial data selection, data sharing, data reduction, and data interpretation.

3.5.1 Initial data selection

In qualitative research, there is an expectation of ‘justification of the decisions made at every stage’ (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 428) including data selection. This suggests justifying the initial selection of my

diaries as a data source. In the Literature Review, I have shown how my studies for a Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education inspired curiosity about the possibility of discovering in my diary some new knowledge about stay-at-home dads and education. I have further considered, whilst examining diary research methods, some of the perceived benefits of using a diary as a data source. In research with unsolicited diaries, 'chance plays an important role' (Ojermark 2007, p. 48). Data selection is *opportunistic* because I

cannot control either the scope of diary keeping or the survival ... (and) have to make do with what is available. (Ojermark 2007, p. 57.)

At the same time, it has also been claimed that 'access is the key to good ethnography' (Bhatti 2012, p. 81), so recognising the benefits of a diary as a data source and acting on my access to a diary relevant to my topic constitutes a justifiably opportunistic data selection.



Figure 5. The diary.

My diary was selected as a potential data source due to its unique documentation of the experiences of a stay-at-home dad and the longitudinal breadth of those experiences. On 29 April 2019, I was awarded a PhD scholarship by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education at Canterbury Christ Church University based partially on the strength of a research proposal which claimed access to my diary, then estimated to be 5,000 pages long. Returning to the US to retrieve it (19-25 July 2019), I found that I had underestimated the diary's length, which runs closer to 9,000 pages (Figure 5, above). While in the States, I considered including other contemporaneous data sources—photo albums and videos, for example—which might have corroborated, illustrated and enriched the evidence in the diary. I excluded these other documents to focus on the diary and limit the size of the data set. The diary, too, had the advantage of identifiable authorship, a component of establishing its authenticity and reliability (McCulloch 2004, p. 42).

Upon the return of all of the diary volumes in the UK (31 July 2019), I inventoried them with brief descriptive notes (see Appendix 1). This inventory has proved to be an invaluable tool. I have referred to it repeatedly in the course of this research, using it to locate specific events and dated entries within the many volumes. Similarly, I began to prepare a Diary Content Chart (Appendix 2).

At this time, I also developed a location code for entries which is used throughout this thesis. It joins diary volume and the specific date within that volume, so that the first entry in Diary volume 1, on 10 April 1994 is abbreviated D1:10.04.1994. This locational device was further adapted to locations within my Research Log (abbreviated RL), letters to parents (LP), and communications from my children on WhatsApp, Instagram Direct Messaging, and Email (WA, IGDM, and EM, respectively).

The selected volumes span the years between 10 April 1994 and 13 November 2015. These are a subset of the diary I have written from my childhood to the present day. They were selected because they are inclusive of the time during which I was a stay-at-home dad with my four children, beginning in late 1995 with the birth of my first child and ending in October 2015 when I returned to employment outside the home. Earlier volumes were not retrieved, and subsequent volumes will not be considered as they fall outside these limits. Along with these 47 volumes, I also retrieved 7 additional, contemporaneous manuscripts which I refer to as ‘adjunct texts’ as they are for the most part undated and thus do not conform to the definition of a diary. As such, they are not considered key to this research. While they were explored during the reading of the diary for potential relevance, they do not enter in any significant way into the data included in this report.

I early realised—due to data within the diary—that my mother might have letters which would corroborate and expand upon a mention of letters in the diary. I therefore sought and obtained her consent and an ethical amendment which allowed for inclusion of passages from letters which remained in her possession.

3.5.2 Data sharing

Sharing the data with my participant children was an essential part of this research process. As this has already been treated in some detail above in the section on co-creation, I will not repeat here the various stages of sharing. Examples of what was shared to my children and their dialogic responses will be further detailed when the data is more closely examined in following chapters (5, 6, and 7).

3.5.3 Data reduction

The next aspect of data selection which needs justification stems from the fact that 'qualitative research rapidly amasses huge amounts of data' (Cohen 2017, p. 315). In this, certainly, the 9,000 pages of my diary rises to this expectation. In order to manage this, it is recommended that 'that data analysis commences with careful reading and re-reading of the data' with an eye to reducing 'data overload by selecting significant features for future focus' (Cohen 2017, p. 315). Put another way,

this selection and interpretation relies on the questions asked of the material, or the theoretical perspective which is brought to bear. (Cohen 2017, p. 324.)

My reading and re-reading of the diary and my sharing and re-sharing of the data to my children (first spontaneously, in individual entries, and later in compilations) assured a sifting of the data for 'significant features' which emerged as narrative arcs appropriate to our narrative approach. The 'questions asked of the material,' or the addressivities to which this material responds include (1) prior research on experiences of stay-at-home dads and (2) received educational wisdom which might be deployed for the interpretation of these experiences for the discovery of 'educational wisdom' (Biesta, 2013). So necessarily data was selected towards both these aims, whilst remaining open to findings unanticipated by either of those aims in order to (3) avoid confirmation bias and allow for the surprise necessary to research (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p. 163). At the same time, Bartlett and Milligan, from their expertise on diary methods, offer as data reduction guidance only the encouragement to reflect on 'what fascinates you about the data, it is important to note any negative reactions too' (2015, p. 44). This becomes part of the selection process, as well as the shared fascinations which arise out of dialogue with my participant children. Again, there is not more specific guidance for data selection and reduction beyond this. This lack of standardization allows for considerable freedom to develop my own guidelines for data selection and reduction, operating within other standards of rigor named above.

Criteria for selection and reduction of data evolved in the course of this research and varied across the three time periods which I identified within my diary. While these shifts in criteria receive treatment in each of the data chapters, some aspects were general across the research. First, these criteria were not pre-established; I did not know what I was looking for, and this not knowing was deliberate, an effort not to prejudice outcomes by looking for things I wanted to prove, other than perhaps things which responded to the research on stay-at-home dads or hinted at education. I knew that I needed to remain open to the data and what it offered. Consistent with the

methodology I present here now, I can retrospectively confirm that my criteria demanded certain qualities for selection: is it surprising? Does it respond to the research on stay-at-home dads and thus give insight to this societal change? Is it contributing to autoethnographic reliability through subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility, and/or contribution? Does it contribute to the integrity of a narrative arc, or in some way demonstrate the educational judgment or 'virtuosity' which might be the purpose of such narrative? Is it a moment of 'what fascinates' shared with my participant children? Is it an opportunity for evidencing the co-creation in this research? Is it an opportunity for applying the principles of diary research to discover meaning, especially concerning the audience and purpose of the diary? Reading and re-reading, revisiting the text, the events, there were among these also some which achieved a self-reflexivity which approached or entered into theorization. These gifts of meaning-making merited selection as often as possible.

Criteria for reduction of data are more difficult to specify. Much of the diary would meet the criteria for selection. First among these, however, is reduction by reason of ethics. After securing responses from my children and their mother regarding their choices about participation, I was careful to exclude from consideration any accounts of family members who elected not to participate in this research. This allowed for significant reduction. Events which might prove embarrassing or otherwise potentially harmful to any participants were also excluded. The diary documented few such events. Events which featured the names or personal details of others who had not given their consent to participate in this research, such as teachers and other parents at my children's schools, were also deselected if they could not be anonymized.

Another criterion for data reduction would be repetition. In a diary's documentation of everyday life, there is documentation of repetitive events, some of which grow important by their repetition, while others appear merely repetitive, adding little or nothing by their repetition. Discerning the important from the important in repetition is inexact, but was made easier when I could report an early instance and omit subsequent similar occurrences. An example of this is my selection of documenting Madeleine's first spoken sentences (D1:16.09.1997), but not similar lists of first sentences uttered by her younger siblings.

Other data has been reduced by prioritization, being suppressed by other data deemed somehow more valuable. This criterion relies on my expertise and that of my participant children in our own lives, an expertise to determine 'matters of importance' and trust each other's decisions in these matters. This criterion came into play especially late in the diary, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, where many narrative arcs were excluded in favour of data which was unique, including innovations

of poetry and drawings, and what these contributed to the integrity of the narrative presented by the diary.

There is also a criterion of pragmatic data reduction, which would apply primarily to the many entries and narrative arcs, especially later in the diary, which simply became too long to share either to my children or within the prescribed limits of this thesis. There is in this something of a disadvantage, as it elides subtleties and complexities undiscoverable, perhaps, in a brief description of an event or a summary statement. The advantage, however, is an aim for inclusion of particularly succinct, powerful, or evocative events; these might crystalize or sum up a relationship or contemporaneous events, especially if done in a compelling way, showing particular attention to style or detail.

These criteria of data selection and reduction are inexact and therefore prone to error. In hindsight, my closeness to the material may have caused me to see events in our daily lives as 'normal,' causing me to overlook the many instances of just playing and being silly together or cooking meals together, which might have contributed something different to the insights about education which emerge in this thesis. The participation of my children was something of a safeguard against this, such as when I related an event (D9:04.04.2007) to Madeleine which I found merely cute or amusing, but within which she found great significance, meriting its selection for interpretation.

3.5.4 Data interpretation

Established interpretive rules of document analysis and diary methods have maintained us in our wayfaring dialogue toward the creation of meaning and theorization.

Diary methods introduce opportunities for interpretation in the diary's purpose, frequency of entries, and temporality. When interpreting solicited diaries, it has been suggested to first consider 'the purpose for which the diary has been constructed' (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p. 41), as its purpose has been pre-determined by the researcher soliciting the diary. However, it can also be applied when the diary is unsolicited, as mine is. For determining purpose in such a case, Hogan (1986a, 1986b) suggests that identifying the audience of the diary is key. Purpose has also been described by Fothergill (1974) as the *motivation* of the author in producing the diary, whether for the self, for the future, for publication; this again suggests an intended audience as key to understanding a diary's purpose.

'Frequency of entries' (McCulloch 2004 p. 104) is also said to be an interpretive key for diary, as it establishes the value of a diary by the immediacy of entries to the events which they describe, and

the increased likelihood that they capture more vividly the lived experience of the event. As I will describe further below, this measure also contributed to my ability to locate significant changes in the diary's purpose.

The temporality of a diary is essential to its structure by the dating of its entries and its progress linked to an unforeseen unfolding of time (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015). For this reason, diary researchers are cautioned against using

traditional thematic or constant comparative approaches, where the core technique is to examine, compare and categorize data until no new categories emerge. (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p. 43.)

While it can be valid, they said,

it can also result in the loss of the personal story and temporality of that story that is being told through the diary. As a consequence, some researchers choose to adopt a narrative approach to the analysis, where the researcher attempts to make sense of the storylines or narrative threads that run longitudinally through the diary in order to convey the meaning and contextual detail that is important to understanding and explaining the storylines that run through the diary. (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p. 43.)

This strategy recommends using narrative as an alternative to the thematic analysis which might be expected in qualitative research. So, data is explored using

“connecting strategies” such as narrative analysis... such that the integrity – the wholeness – of the original context is preserved, rather than the fracturing and regrouping of the data that can occur in a coding exercise. (Cohen 2017, p. 315.)

I also early rejected the ‘coding exercise’ to be found in the use of data analysis tools like nVivo—which I have used in other research (Bainbridge, Troppe and Bartley, 2022)—recognising their tendency to identify importance of themes by frequency of occurrence. This would not have been appropriate to research which does not aim at thematic analysis. I preferred the expertise, along with the dialogic, loving and wayfaring companionship, of my children in co-creating an interpretation towards narrative. And that narrative, again, within educational research would properly have an aim of discovering the virtuosity of the participants in their life stories, so that others might learn from their educational judgment (Biesta, 2013). It is with this aim in mind that my interpretation of these events will sift them for evidence of balancing the educational domains of qualification, socialization and subjectification, as Biesta suggests.

In the dialogism that informs this research,

to be human is to mean. Human being is the *production* of meaning, where meaning is further understood to come about as the articulation of values. (Holquist 2002, p. 158.)

This production of meaning through the articulation of values is evidenced, for example, in an exchange with Madeleine, my daughter, in which she responds by email (EM:28.03.2021) to my interpretation in the diary of Max Jacob's poetry as 'a matter of importance' (D4:26.04.2004). As she interprets my use of 'a matter of importance,' I in turn interpret her interpretation as an unquantifiable trust in each other's ability to assign meanings to the experiences we have shared. The interpretations we thus co-create arise from those past shared experiences and also, from the perspective of dialogism, anticipate future ones, because

meaning is understood as something still in the process of creation, something still bending toward the future as opposed to that which is already completed. (Holquist 2002, p. 24.)

This theory of meaning-making implies that any interpretation which we might offer could only ever be partial. Such a perspective is essential when considering a work which began as 9,000 pages and has been reduced to the very small fraction which can be shared in the course of this thesis. In dialogism, this is not just a necessity, this is a source of hope.

At the heart of any dialogue is the conviction that what is exchanged has meaning. Poets who feel misunderstood in their lifetimes, martyrs for lost political causes, quite ordinary people caught in lives of quiet desperation—all have been correct to hope that outside the tyranny of the present there is a possible addressee who will understand them. This version of the significant other, "super-addressee," is conceived in different ways at different times and by different persons: as God, as the future triumph of my version of the state, as a future reader.' (Holquist 2002, p. 38.)

Partial as these interpretations may be, they will be founded on the four rules of document analysis (McCulloch, 2004) outlined above, especially its rules on Meaning and Theorization. By relying on these rules, I am claiming for the interpretation of all the diary, regardless of the various genres which might be attempted there, the appropriateness of applying these rules. Poetry and drawings, especially, play an important part in the way this particular diary is written. Poetry, while it represents a literary genre different from the diary itself, is nonetheless part of the diary and is interpreted as such. I do not rely on specialised language or knowledge of the genre, as a practice in comparative literatures, for example. This also holds true when the diary includes a short story or a drawing. All of these genres are interpreted as appearing in the diary to contribute to its narrative arc of the experiences I shared with my children. As such, the expertise that my children and I bring to them come from our being expert in our own lives. We could not apply this same expertise, this same interpretive technique to a diary which didn't concern our experiences. If this practice is

replicable, then, it is only replicable in so far as whatever research someone else may want to do on their own experiences recorded in a diary. I would also add that the freedom of interpretation exemplified in the theorization of wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) allowed there for the interpretation of many genres of art and artefact across many cultures. A similar freedom should be applicable then in the interpretations which my children and I might justifiably make from the expertise of our own lives, regardless of the genre of their documentation. Interpretation, after all, does not seek to be an arrival at a final truth, but an invitation to dialogue and discover the richness of multiple interpretations and multiple truths.

3.6 Rigor & Ethics

I have argued already in this thesis for my vigilance in rigor and ethics. In Chapter 1, I introduced the thesis with a section on how methods, theory and data have all been worked with a concern for rigor. In this present chapter on methodology, I have paid special attention to the ways in which I might use autoethnographic approaches based on standards of rigor, especially those established by Le Roux (2017). Rigor has also featured in my discussions of researcher positionality and bias and in considerations of data reduction. Issues of ethics have similarly been raised repeatedly, beginning in my concerns for the implications of an isolation discourse emerging from studies of stay-at-home dads. Ethical matters have again appeared in the telling of good deeds in narrative research (Paley, 1999), in negotiating the place of identity and the self in this research, in the treatment of my participant children as co-creators, and in data interpretation. I offer this present section on rigor and ethics to both clarify and expand upon these issues and others not yet raised, proceeding by looking at some general requirements and then specific issues arising from methods of autoethnography and diary research.

3.6.1 General requirements

*The first commitment of the researcher is to the quality of the research—for poor research, with findings driven by the desires of the researcher, however worthy, is demonstrably unethical... The chief criterion that identifies research as an enterprise *sui generis* has to be the capacity for surprise. (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p. 163, emphasis in original.)*

I have adhered to this first commitment and capacity for surprise. It originates, in this research, from the fact that the diary was not designed as a research tool, but the use of which has been attained not so much by design as by chance, which has been shown to be a factor in diary research (Ojermark 2007, p. 48). Furthermore, although I was its author, it was largely unknown to me: I had not returned to review its contents, for the most part, since they were written. So, while I had some hunch that education was important to understanding my experiences as a stay-at-home dad and

that, perhaps, gender was less important, I needed to enter into the reading of my diary with the expectation that these priorities might be reversed by the data, or, indeed, that some other documented priorities would eclipse them both. 'The desires of the researcher,' in other words, were subordinate to the data itself. This includes memory, so that I resolved from the beginning to use my own memory as a privileged inside perspective for contextualizing documented events, but never as a data source in itself. Part of the surprise, then, includes the need to exclude from interpretation any events which I remember vividly but which do not appear in the diary. I further wish to emphasise that this first commitment holds integrity with the 'beautiful risk of education' (Biesta, 2013) which is a cornerstone of my theoretical perspective: 'just as every good parent must be ready to risk the unpredictability of their children' (Biesta 2013, pp. 15-16), so must education be open to not knowing outcomes.

From this first commitment, then, it is possible to proceed to other safeguards of quality which I have employed in this research. These include the rigors of warranting claims (Gorard, 2002) and weighing my work in 'the sieve of trustworthiness' (Gorard, See, and Siddiqui 2017, p. 37).

3.6.1.1 Warranting claims

Educational research has, in its attempts at rigor, another need:

an explicit warrant in the form of a logical and persuasive link between the evidence produced and the conclusions drawn (with appropriate qualifications and caveats)... greater transparency, complete specifications of the logic, and the elimination of plausible rival alternative explanations for the evidence are key approaches (and ones that are independent of the method used to derive the evidence). (Gorard, 2002, p. 136.)

Warranting claims is an aspect of research with which I am familiar, having argued that it might be critically applied to policymaking procedures, debates, and decisions (Bainbridge, Troppe & Bartley, 2022). The progress from evidence to conclusions must be made in small increments in this present research, each diary entry receiving its possible interpretation and these developing a cumulative gravity and interpretation at the end of each chapter and again at the end of this thesis. These links, therefore, will receive repeated scrutiny, both at local and summative levels, with rival alternative explanations made possible along the way in the interpretations offered by my participant children. The required transparency, however, is in evidence already, grounded in the literature review and the methodology thus far, and will continue to reveal itself.

3.6.1.2 Sieve of trustworthiness

When the time comes in this thesis for conclusions, they might be called into question by applying this work to a 'sieve of trustworthiness' (Gorard, See, and Siddiqui 2017, p. 37), with its preference

for a 'large number of cases' and 'minimal attrition,' 'standardised data,' and a lack of 'other threats' such as conflict of interest. This present project, of course, might be seen as having 'a trivial scale' if it explores the experiences of only one stay-at-home dad. Also, the 'dropout' rate might be considered high, with two of a possible six participants opting against participation from the beginning and a limited amount of participant response to the data, dwindling to near zero in Period Three. Standardization of data has also been an issue, with little guidance on data selection beyond 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44). This lack of standardization, however, allows for considerable freedom to develop my own guidelines for data selection and reduction, operating within other available standards of rigor, and which I detail below. While there is no conflict of interest in this study, 'other threats' here might include the weaknesses of inexperience and of pressures to conform to expectations of an early career researcher, imposed or imagined.

I warrant my conclusions by this challenge. However, I would also argue that the estimation calculable by this sieve—that my research design is weak and therefore its conclusions questionable—does not account for the peculiarities of this study. A single case study is not a 'trivial scale' but desirable for exploring a case which is 'unique' and 'not previously investigated' (Yin 2009 pp. 47-9, 52 cited by Ashley 2012, p. 103). This might be especially valuable in a case like mine, in which uniqueness is central to the theory being explored (see for example the section on 'Identity and its refusal' in the following chapter). I would also argue that the quantity of data which has been available within this single case, beginning with the 9,000 pages of the diary and expanding to include the conversations with my adult children and the content of my research log, is not trivial. On the contrary, the data is superabundant and rich. It does not offer conclusions generalizable to other stay-at-home dads but offers a possible alternative perspective to existing theory by showing that another possibility exists. and I have established my typicality as a stay-at-home dad to suggest the reliability of these experiences (see table, above). Regarding attrition, the agentic refusal to participate returned by two of my family members is understood within the theory of dialogism and my research ethics as evidence of their freedom and thus a research benefit. While their participation would no doubt have enriched this study, the participation of those of us who did wish to move forward with the study—to whatever degree we have been able—may have proceeded weakened, but due to a research design that is weak only in the same sense that education itself is theorised in this thesis to be weak (Biesta, 2013), allowing for the unpredictable. The same might be said of participant attrition over time, that their declining engagement with the data is only evidence, for me, that they were opening up the research into areas where I had less control, where

they contributed things not of my design—but were nonetheless contributing and the research advancing and to mutual interest.

In addition to these limitations, I have also considered the four following limitations.

First, only a tiny fraction of the raw data is represented here. It is difficult to quantify, but some 9,000 pages of my diary and over 3,000 pages of my Research Log have been reduced to some 230 pages in this thesis. Distortions of the data include the removal of diary entries which expressed playfulness and joy but did not attain readily to more sophisticated educational theory than the mere repetitions of joy.

Second, my memory found that I failed to document in the diary many events and practices which might have made theorising about education easier. However, I tried to adhere as closely to the diary text as possible, not to eliminate the privileged insights that I have as its author, but to avoid any perceptions of falsifying the data which has been received.

Third, I was aware—usually only well after the fact—that I was so close to the material that I was overlooking things which might be of interest but were so *normal* to me as to be invisible. For example, it wasn't until I was well into the diary that it occurred to me to notice 'showing how to cook' as a potential educational event. Similarly, playing—and even outdoor playing, which I had studied on the course for the MA in early childhood education—was overlooked in all its abundance while I looked for things more *educational*.

Finally, this brings me to my greatest limitation: not knowing what I was doing. I don't claim this as a sort of false pride, or to disparage my abilities as a researcher, but to acknowledge that wisdom comes with practice (Biesta 2013, p. 136) and that sifting the data from a diary is time-consuming and difficult (McCulloch 2004, p. 41).

To these standards of rigor already introduced, I will continue to add as I detail my methods below, including standards for autoethnographic rigor as proposed by Le Roux (2017) and standard methods for achieving rigor in documentary and diary research and in narrative life history, including my typicality (Ojermark, 2007) in comparison with other stay-at-home dads studied by Solomon (2017).

3.6.1.3 Ethics

Ethical conduct in this research has been assured at the most fundamental level by following the protocols established by my university and the bodies which govern educational research both in the

UK and in the US, especially the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, 2018), as detailed in Appendix 11.

While I included a need to safeguard myself within these ethical protections, I felt a higher standard of transparency was required of me. So, I did not, for example, fail to note those times when I had documented instances of what might be called less than ideal fatherhood, where I lost my temper, for example. These, I felt, were necessary to show that I did not attempt to idealize what I was doing when the diary was written and neither do I intend to idealize myself now. Although the educational content of such occurrences might not have been sufficiently 'educational' to merit their inclusion in the thesis, the inclusion of them in the Research Logs shows the degree to which I was desiring a full understanding of what happened during those years.

3.6.2 Autoethnography

As I have mentioned above, I brought to this research a basic understanding of autoethnography. This included the five criteria for autoethnographic rigor as proposed by Le Roux (2017). My enactment of these criteria are succinctly described below (Table 9). While my understandings of autoethnography have grown over time to include standards of autoethnographic practice described in detail above, the following was truly an operational checklist which guided this project. Its demand for subjectivity in particular quickly aligned with theoretical explorations of subjectivity and its emergence in the events documented in the diary, while the self-reflexivity demanded here is in evidence throughout the diary, my research log, and this thesis. *As a function of self-reflexivity*, I have above troubled, rebalanced, and de-centred the 'auto' within autoethnography. Resonance is less assured, reliant on reader response, but is openly sought as a function of the dialogism operational throughout the thesis, and is achieved first in my responses and the responses of my participant children to the events in the diary. Our aim then becomes to communicate that resonance further to more readers. Credibility is also first achieved by the participation of my children, as they corroborate the events in the diary, contributing to the reliability of the document (McCulloch, 2004). And while the requirement of rigor which can be found in the contributions of this research is also first to my children as an ethical requirement of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2016), there are multiple contributions which I have detailed elsewhere and which by their contribution add to the rigor of the research. By aligning my work with the enactment of these criteria, I argue for its rigor as autoethnography. I am keen to include such defences, sensitive to criticisms of autoethnography as self-indulgent and lacking rigor (for example, Delmont, 2009; Atkinson, 2006). The Research Log, mentioned above, has been key to this enactment. In it, I have

maintained a consistent practice of self-reflexivity and, as the research has progressed, a documented awareness of the ‘intuitive leaps, false starts, mistakes, loose ends, and happy accidents that comprise the investigative experience’ (Ronai, 1995, p. 421).

Criteria	Enactment
Subjectivity	I make myself ‘visible in the research’ while telling noteworthy personal experiences, ‘self-consciously involved in the construction of the narrative’.
Self-reflexivity	I evidence my awareness of my role and the historical and cultural context of my research. Self-reflexivity has been maintained through disciplined maintenance of a Research Log with ‘self-awareness, self-exposure and self-conscious introspection.’
Resonance	I invite the readers of this thesis ‘to enter into, engage with, experience or connect with’ the experiences I share directly from my diary and what they offer ‘on an intellectual and emotional level.’ I hope to offer something here which is recognisable to other parents and educators, that we might share ‘an intertwining of lives.’ Particularly with my participant children.
Credibility	Opening up the diary to other readers requires a certain amount of vulnerability. The immediacy of the diary’s entries, however, offer a unique verisimilitude which even in their occasional awkwardness are ‘permeated with honesty’ which I have tried to preserve in their representation here.
Contribution	I hope to ‘extend knowledge’ about the experiences of stay-at-home dads beyond interpretations offered by a gender perspective by offering interpretations of my documented experiences from an educational perspective. By seeing stay-at-home dads within education, I hope to offer a sense of empowerment to other men who choose to be the primary caregivers to their children, whilst also contributing to understandings of education itself from our role in it. Additionally, there is a contribution to be found in the construction of the methods used in this research.

Table 9. Criteria for and enactment of rigorous autoethnography, based on Le Roux (2017, p. 204).

3.6.2.1 Relational ethics

Autoethnographic methods require ‘relational ethics’ in which the researcher ‘recognises and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness’ (Ellis, 2007, p. 4 cited by Little & Little, 2022, p. 639). In this project, I have aimed for this standard at every level of interaction, including the use of ‘stay-at-home dad’ to describe fathers who are the primary caregivers of their children. This has, of course, particularly extended to my participant children, whose safeguarded dignity is revealed in every stage of their co-creation of this work. The contributions to the audiences imagined for this work furthermore fulfill ‘an ethical obligation to give something important back to the people and communities’ and write “‘for” participants as much as “about” them’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 56). They further reverberate through epistemologies of wayfaring, dialogism and study as love, with all their considerations for the place of the Other which have already been described.

This requirement of relational ethics also recalls discussions above on the relational axis of meaning-making in a place (Gustafson, 2001), suggesting an action on that axis in which I could critically examine the aims, power, and centrality of the authorial voice, an action necessary to autoethnography and ‘particularly in education’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 300). This too, then, is an argument for the extended examination, above, of the decentring of the self which I have attempted to practice in this research.

Lastly, these relational ethics are harmonious with the theoretical foundations of my educational perspective, which place a high importance on the relationship to any Other:

the subject is always *already* engaged in a relationship... an ethical relationship, a relationship of infinite and unconditional responsibility for the Other. (Biesta 2013, p. 19.)

3.6.2.2 Ethics of parent & children

This research involves my children, and so part of the ethical requirements was securing their consent (see also Appendix 11). Beyond this bare minimum, though, there is a recognition that my children are ‘experts in their own lives’ (Clark and Stratham, 2005) and have been since their early years; as such I wanted their collaboration in co-creating an expertise about these experiences. This requires a kind of listening (Clark and Moss, 2011; Paley, 1986) and a listening for ‘the hundred languages’ (Edwards et al., 1998) applicable to both what they are documented to have said in the text and to what they say today. I explore more this relationship of co-creation below, in the section which focuses on the participants in this study.

My ethical treatment of them in this study is aptly described in an essay on ‘The ethics of writing life histories and narratives in educational research’:

My bottom-line, acid test for whether or not I consider my own or other people’s research to be ethical is: how would I feel if I, members of my family or my friends were to be involved and treated and written about in the way the research in question involves or treats or depicts its participants? (Sikes 2010, p. 14.)

This research concerns and involves my children, so this acid test is always before me. There are risks here, of course: ‘a child’s ability to self-express may be tempered by wishing to please or appease the adult in their lives’ (Little & Little, 2022, p. 640). While this is a factor which cannot be perfectly controlled, measured, or eliminated, the range of responses which my children expressed here—including non-participation—offers some evidence of the freedom they had beyond mere appeasement of their father. This mattered to us beyond the bounds of this research: ‘openness and

emotional closeness was important for both the study itself, and for our family relationship.’ (Little & Little, 2022, p. 636).

3.6.3 Diary Research

3.6.3.1 Rigor

To produce rigorous results from the exploration of my own diary, I have leaned heavily on its classification as a document. This begins by weighing it against the four ‘well-established rules’ of document analysis, namely, Authenticity, Reliability, Meaning and Theorization (McCulloch, 2004, p. 42). Key to this has been the corroboration of events by my participant children, which increases the reliability of the source (McCulloch, 2004). Their input on these documented events not only offers a baseline validation of the events as documented, but also contributes reliability as a form of warranting my interpretation by seeking and revealing theirs.

I acknowledge the criticisms and difficulties of using a diary as a data source, but argue for its recognition as an ‘especially reliable’ source based on the ‘immediacy of the record’ (McCulloch 2004, pp. 102, 103) and a growing research legitimacy diary methods (McCulloch, 2004; Alaszewski, 2006; Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). I aim for rigor by adhering to the highest standards of such methods, including establishing my typicality (Ojermark 2007) compared with other stay-at-home dads (Solomon, 2017). Data selection has as its base the principle to reject coding and thematic analysis in favour of choosing ‘what fascinates’ (Bartlett & Milligan 2015, p. 44) and then working with ‘a narrative approach... to make sense of the storylines... that run longitudinally through the diary’ (Thomas 2007, cited by Bartlett and Milligan 2014, p. 43).

3.6.3.2 Ethics

An ethical difficulty arose from the need to represent the complexity of the diary and the wealth of experiences within it whilst balancing against the limitations of a doctoral thesis. These were largely questions of data selection and reduction, which I have addressed above. Much of this choice resides within my responsibilities to my participant children and to the audience of the academic community. However, I also experienced a sense of responsibility to the diary itself. Documented in the diary are experiences of my encounters with the agency of its materiality reminiscent of what has been described in theoretical approaches to sound arts (Birtwistle, 2019). The geographer and sound artist AM Kanngieser (2021) offered me a model of an anti-colonialist and anti-extractionist approach with which I could in good conscience listen respectfully for what the diary was offering.

One of the ethical difficulties of managing a diary as a data source is that it names many individuals and organizations. This leads to a search for a practical balance:

rigorous attempts to protect anonymity can emasculate⁴ the narrative; less rigorous attempts can lead to the possibilities of 'disclosed identities' and 'mistaken identities'... there are possible harms to those involved, the disclosure may result in the accrual of them. Finally, there is the further risk of violating privacy.' (Mellick and Fleming 2010, p. 311.)

In striking this balance, I have avoided naming individuals other than my participant children or choosing events which might allow for their identification. At the other end of the spectrum, I have been able to maintain transparency about my children's school, as it would have been identifiable even if it were not named. Fortunately, the experiences documented there were overwhelmingly positive, so I made the judgment that there was little risk of harm to the school, which closed in 2012, or to its former staff.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for an autoethnographic diary research method for discovering new knowledge about stay-at-home dads and education. I work from a constructionist ontology which views truth as arising out of the sense which people make of their lives in the world, which gives me and my participant children authority to make truth claims about our experiences as 'experts in our own lives' (Clark & Statham, 2005). In order to arrive at these claims, I argue for an interpretivist epistemology to which I have joined theories of knowing from dialogism (Holquist, 2002), study-as-love (Wilson, 2022a), and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) in order to more fully reveal the ways of knowing which make meaning-making available to this research.

I proceed, then, through a qualitative terrain of methods, showing how the 'broad ethnographic strategies' lead from ethnography, with its traditions in *The Sociological Imagination*, field notes and thick description to autoethnographic practices which retrospectively resemble those described as symbiotic autoethnography (Beattie, 2022). By using this approach to creating a narrative life history, I was able to balance its domains of 'auto,' 'ethno,' and 'graphy' to achieve a desirable decentring of identity and the self in this project. This was achieved in part by recognising the importance of my children's participation in the co-creation of this research, and the many stages at which co-creation has shaped this inquiry. Aware also of the unique character and value of a diary as a data source, I use diary research methods grounded in document analysis as a way of focusing on the text and as a first stage of interpreting its value and meaning. This interpretation of my diary

⁴ A curiously gendered and violent verb, 'emasculated' cannot escape comment. I leave it here in part out of respect for the visceral reaction it produced in me: that it presumes the need for a 'masculine' narrative and that a failure to achieve the expectations of an academic audience carries with it associations of great personal destruction. The use of 'violating' suggests a similar violence.

towards its meaning and theorization (McCulloch, 2004) has been an exploration of purpose and audience (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015; Hogan 1986a, 1986b; Fothergill, 1974) which will be fully explored in the data chapters which follow. As noted above, the diary's 'frequency of entries' (McCulloch 2004 p. 104) was useful for identifying shifts in purpose. The diary's temporal organization suggested a choice to reject thematic analysis in favour of a narrative approach (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p. 43). Data was then selected and interpreted using the criteria detailed above, alert to events in the diary which respond to prior research on stay-at-home dads, the possibility of viewing these experiences from an educational perspective, and the perspectives of my participant children. All of this, then, shall be brought together as a representation of the data which can be called a life history, with the aims of providing from this one case history an alternative understanding of the experiences of stay-at-home dads, new insights into the pedagogy of the event, and a story of the educational wisdom or 'virtuosity' which might have occurred along the way.

All of this proceeds with the uniqueness which both recommends and burdens it. As a stay-at-home dad with a unique insider perspective joined to a unique educational perspective, as a researcher working with my own adult children as co-creators of this research, and as a diarist exploring my own diary, the uniqueness we offer has no value without the concerns for rigor with which I introduced this chapter.

So, in keeping with the definition of method which Madeleine early recommended (Cashore, 2017), this research has not been conducted with some foreknowledge of how it would proceed, but has remained open to surprise and the need to respond to the data as it emerged, responding also to the educational theory which was simultaneously being tested as ways to interpret what was being found. The following chapter will now explore that theory, simplifying as this chapter has, what was necessarily a messy process so that future researchers might benefit from what I have learned along the way in this research.

Chapter 4: Theory

4.1 Introduction

‘Theories... explain’ (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 69).

The claim that theory aims at explanation casts it in terms of its purpose or *telos*. Indeed, this same source goes on to say that “Theory is defined by its purposes’ or put another way, ‘definitions of theory are differentiated by its purposes’; in research such as this project, ‘we need theory to understand and interpret experiences, social behaviour, societies, texts and discourses’ (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 69). In order to interpret my diary and the experiences of a stay-at-home dad from an educational perspective, it is necessary first to progress in ‘developing a theoretical framework’ (McCulloch 2004, 46). The opportunity—even the need—for such a perspective arises first in prior research on stay-at-home dads.

Educational data on stay-at-home dads has emerged in quantitative studies arising out of demographics (Livingston, 2014; Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015). It has also been a recurring theme within studies of stay-at-home dads from a gender perspective (Merla, 2008; Solomon, 2017). These studies indicate the importance which participants place upon educational behaviours. Two articles have recently been published which focus on the experiences of stay-at-home dads in an educational setting (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019), but these studies serve mostly to confirm gendered interpretations.

Meanwhile, educational theory made it possible to imagine this research, suggesting areas in which the experiences of a stay-at-home dad might be interpreted in new ways and in turn contribute something to educational theory. As detailed above in the literature review, these theories include those which argue that childhood is a social construction (Aries, 1962; Valkanova, 2014), as is gender (Connell, 1995). Theories of diaries as a site for educational documentation (Turner & Wilson, 2010) and professional development (Bassot, 2020) were joined in my thinking to theories of professional love (Page, 2018) and, later, to study as love (Wilson, 2022a). My interpretations will also be shaped by theories of storytelling (Paley, 1999) and listening to children (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986) as ‘experts in their own lives’ (Clark and Stratham, 2005), with further opportunities for interpretation in contexts of developmental norms and guidance, the home learning environment as a place of meaning making, and the benefits of intergenerational learning.

In this chapter, however, I wish to explore more deeply the core of my educational perspective, which is centred in the work of Gert Biesta and especially *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013) and, within that work, its final chapter on The Pedagogy of the Event. I will show how Biesta’s

thinking offers me a first educational response to the existing research on stay-at-home dads and, further, how joining key concepts from Biesta's thought to the dialogism of Holquist (2002) offers a way of seeing retrospectively The Pedagogy of the Event in the documented experiences of my practice as a stay-at-home dad.

4.2 The Beautiful Risk

When I first read *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta 2013) on a course for a Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education, I found that it evoked new understandings of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad. As I looked to the research on stay-at-home dads and found interpretations of experience from a gender perspective, this work gave me the language to begin to respond from an educational perspective.

4.2.1 Gender and its discontents

Research on stay-at-home dads from a gender perspective (Solomon, 2017) has established that a man who acts as the primary caregiver for his children confronts hegemonic masculinity and therefore, he risks being othered and societally sanctioned (Renold, 2004). This risk is cast into perspective by *The Beautiful Risk of Education* and its progress toward the development of 'a pedagogy of the event' (Biesta 2013, p. 140). In considering the creativity necessary to education, Biesta summons the American philosopher John Caputo, who speaks of

the risk that any parent takes, which is that their offspring will outstrip their intention and spin out of control, and things will not turn out as the parents planned. (Caputo, 2006, p. 71 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 15.)

And again:

any good parent... must learn to deal with the unpredictability and the unforeseeability, the foolishness, and even the destructiveness of his children, in the hope that they will grow up and eventually come around"" (Caputo, 2006, p. 72, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16.)

Parenting—regardless of gender—is *risky*. The risks of parenting include *weakness* in the face of unpredictability (pp. 14-16). But without the risk and the weakness, 'nothing will happen' (Biesta 2013, p. 24). Consequently, the risk and weakness which are being described here are *desirable*, a positive attribute. 'The risk of creation,' which is joined conceptually to 'the risk of parenting' (Caputo, 2006, p. 68, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 14), is thus referred to as 'the beautiful risk of creation' (Caputo, 2006, p. 60, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 14). And it is precisely this beautiful risk which is essential to the pedagogy of the event, in which

we do not produce our students, we are there to teach them—just as we do not make our children; they are born to us. (Biesta 2013, p. 145.)

By casting parenting itself as a weakness and a risk that are desirable, necessary, and even beautiful, the risks specific to stay-at-home dads have the potential to be interpreted as similarly dignified. By characterizing education as analogous to parenting, Biesta invites an exploration of parental experiences using educational theory.

Immediately recognizable, then, within that theory as a point for possible exploration is the idea of *responsibility*. For an understanding of this within education, Biesta turns to the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.

Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse. This charge is a supreme dignity of the unique. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me. (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

While responsibility has a more specific structure and purpose within this philosophical perspective—which will be elaborated below—than in the day-to-day responsibilities of a stay-at-home dad, there is a ‘supreme dignity’ here which does not lie outside of this stay-at-home dad’s experience.

‘In those situations—if the other is after *me*, not after me in my social role (which would be my identity)—we are irreplaceable; or to be more precise, we are irreplaceable in our responsibility for the other.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 144.)

So, it is possible to see how already, in these constructions of parenting and responsibility within this educational theory, the experiences of a stay-at-home dad might begin to reclaim, not despite but because of the risk and weakness of being the primary caregiver for his children, a sense of dignity and irreplaceability.

4.2.2 The Isolation Discourse

This experience of irreplaceability in responsibility contains within it a necessity of the other, and this is a starting point for the ways in which this theory also responds to what I have called The Isolation Discourse about stay-at-home dads by suggesting what is at stake in such a discourse.

When considering the necessity of democracy within education, Biesta summarizes the ideas of the German American philosopher Hannah Arendt on the subject of action.

...we cannot act in isolation. If I were to begin something but no one were to respond, nothing would follow from my initiative and, as a result, my beginnings would not come into the world. *I* would not appear in the world. But if I begin something and others do take up

my beginnings, I *do* come into the world, and in precisely this moment I *am* free. (Biesta 2013, p. 106, emphasis in original.)

This relationship with the Other is key. While not expressed as a response to this risk *per se*, elsewhere Biesta claims that 'Education is precisely concerned with... establishing opportunities for *dialogue* with what or who is other' (Biesta 2013, p. 3). This dialogue operates within an understanding of our responsibility, that we are

always *already* engaged in a relationship... an *ethical* relationship, a relationship of infinite and unconditional responsibility for the Other.' (Biesta 2013, p. 19.)

In fact, he goes so far as to argue that 'I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it' (Levinas 1985, p. 98 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21).

This is a terrible risk, then, to have this eternal and unconditional responsibility which might elicit no response and cost me my freedom. However, 'education is seen as something educators and students do together' (Biesta 2013, p. 32). In the 'dialogical alternative' proposed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, teacher and students are positioned as 'co-subjects' (Freire 1972, p. 135 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 71). So while there remains no guarantee of a response, the joined ideas of dialogue and this 'together' and as co-subjects offer a degree of hope that isolation, within an educational perspective, becomes less predicted or even impossible and instead holds out the possibility that 'in precisely this moment I *am* free' (Biesta 2013, p. 106).

4.2.3 Identity and its refusal

Identity is also a topic within Biesta's educational philosophy. We saw in the literature on stay-at-home dads how some 'saw parenting as a gender-neutral task' (Solomon, 2017, p. 23), and that 'fathers do not think in terms of roles as defined by identity theory' (Futris, 1997 cited in Pasley et al., 2014, pp. 313). These receive something of a response in the statement that 'I was actually not really interested in the question of *identity*' (Biesta 2013, p. 142). It must be acknowledged that this stance is contrary to some educational perspectives, especially those exploring life history (see for example Bathmaker, 2010). Biesta makes clear what he means by this, again referring to Levinas.

When we use identity to articulate our uniqueness, we focus on the ways in which I am *different* from the other... The question for Levinas, however, is not about what *makes* each of us unique. Instead, he looks for situations *in which it matters* that I am unique, that is situations in which I cannot be replaced or substituted by someone else. These are situations in which someone calls me...' (Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

These situations, in which it matters that I am unique, we might again recognise, from the definition above and its insistence on the impossibility of substitution, as a situation of responsibility. It is not

responsibility, though, which holds priority as an interest over identity, but *subjectivity*. In order to say more on that subject, though, I must say a few words on education itself.

4.2.4 Education

Biesta makes several pronouncements about education itself, but none more salient to this topic than that in which he describes it as ‘a process that in some way contributes to the creation of human subjectivity’ (Biesta 2013, p. 11). Summoning Caputo again, he says that such creating,

like procreating, is risky business, and one has to be prepared for a lot of noise, dissent, resistance, and a general disturbance of the peace if one is of a mind to engage in either. (Caputo, 2006, p. 69 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 15.)

If one is to risk all of that—a scenario of managed chaos which might sound familiar to a stay-at-home dad or an educator—what is this subjectivity which is, in our attempt at creating it, entailing this risk?

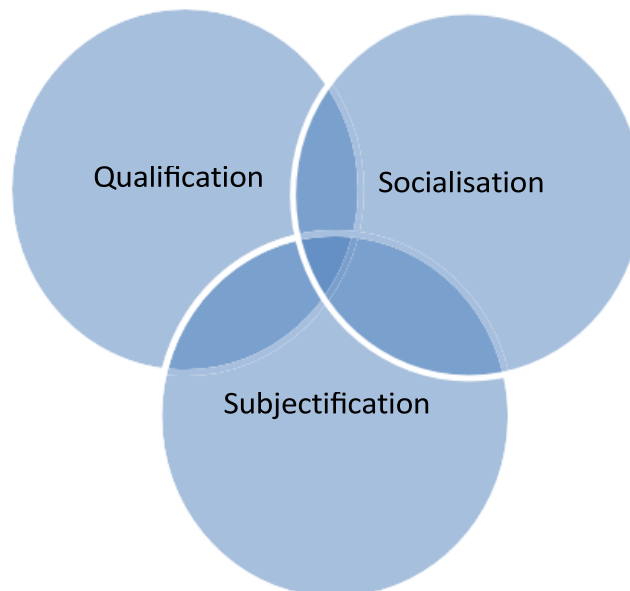


Figure 6. ‘The three functions of education and the three domains of educational purpose’ (Biesta 2015, p. 78).

Biesta describes education as having at least three domains, which he names Qualification, Socialization, and Subjectification (Figure 6, above). *Qualification*, he says, ‘has to do with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions’ (Biesta 2013, p. 4). *Socialization* ‘has to do with the ways in which... we become part of existing traditions and ways of being and doing’ (Biesta 2013, p. 4). *Subjectification*, then, ‘has to do with the interest of education in the subjectivity or “subject-ness” of those we educate’ (Biesta 2013, p. 4). As a first level of understanding subjectivity,

then, we might see it as the concern not of Qualification or Socialization, but of Subjectification.

Another contrastive statement clarifies this further.

‘Socialization has to do with how we become part of existing orders, how we identify with such orders and thus obtain an identity; subjectification, in contrast, is always about how we can exist “outside” of such orders, so to speak.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 129)

This subjectivity is not an essence, but an event (Biesta 2013, p. 5), something that can *occur* from time to time (p. 22). The event of subjectivity, then, is a way of talking about the subject in their moments of responsibility or ‘uniqueness-as-irreplaceability’ (p. 144), with interest in ‘who comes’ to such an encounter (p. 143) and what is calling them (p. 23).

Subjectivity is, in other words, not something we can have or possess, but something that can be realized, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter. (Biesta 2013, p. 12.)

Despite the desirability of achieving the event of subjectivity, Biesta makes clear that it cannot be *produced*, but with the weakness and risk analogous to that known by ‘any good parent,’ must not be *prevented*. Rather, one must ‘create situations... for the call of the other... the risk of being addressed by the other...’ (Biesta 2013, p. 146).

Not preventing the event of subjectivity requires ‘the crucial role of judgment in (these) always new, open, and unpredictable situations’ (Biesta 2013, p. 120). This is also put in terms of the goals of education itself:

because the question of the aim or “telos” of education is a multidimensional question, judgment—judgment about what is educationally *desirable*—turns out to be an absolutely crucial element of what teachers do. (Biesta 2013, p. 130.)

Biesta then goes so far as to say that

The art of teaching... is precisely that of finding the right balance among the three dimensions, and this is an ongoing task, not something that can be pre-programmed or sorted out by research. (Biesta 2013, p. 147.)

Rather,

we can develop our virtuosity for wise educational judgment only by *practicing* judgment, that is, by being engaged in making such judgment in the widest range of educational situations possible. (Biesta 2013, p. 135.)

Additionally, he suggests that one might become an ‘*educationally wise person*’ (Biesta 2013, p. 134, emphasis in original) by exploring the virtuosity—this practical wisdom—of others, through conversation or ‘through life-history’ (Biesta 2013, p. 136).

4.3 Dialogism

Similar to the way in which I found *The Beautiful Risk of Education* to be a possible theoretical foundation for my educational perspective, I found in *Dialogism* (Holquist, 2002) a possible way to see that theory enacted in my experiences. However, I did not come to dialogism in a straightforward manner.

4.3.1 From Conversation to Dialogic Pedagogy

In an article by British educator Richard Pring in which he addresses 'Education as a Moral Practice' (2001), he concludes with these remarks, which feature a statement by the British philosopher Michael Oakeshott.

Oakeshott (1972), in his essay "Education: its engagement and its frustrations", speaks of education as the introduction of young people to a world of ideas which are embodied in the "conversations between the generations of mankind" ... As in all good conversations (especially one where there is such an engagement with ideas and where the spirit of criticism prevails), one cannot define in advance what the end of that conversation or engagement will or should be. Indeed, the end is but the starting point for further conversations. (Pring, 2001, pp. 108-9.)

I recognised in this definition of education, embodied in 'conversations between the generations,' a mirror for my own experiences as a stay-at-home dad. It led me to seek out what these conversations might look like and what makes them educational. Biesta does not speak in terms of conversation, but, with reference to the American philosopher John Dewey, speaks of communication. While this was at times helpful, it also becomes abstract, a discussion of balancing pragmatism and deconstruction. I was looking for an understanding of this kind of educational conversation which might be more recognizable in practice or, more to the purposes of this research, recognizable within the experiences documented in my diary.

Within education, however, I found that what I was looking for was not being discussed in terms of 'conversation' but rather 'dialogue.' Even so, it often proved to be something other than what I desired. For example, claims that 'dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to engage student interest' (Alexander 2019, n.p.) troubled me, as 'harnesses' and 'power' conflict with the ideas of weakness and risk discussed above. Educational thought around dialogue seemed to focus more on the benefits to students of generating classroom 'talk' in which teachers are in control and the requirement of listening was laid upon children alone (see for example, Fisher 2009, p. 22).

I do not wish to oversimplify. *Dialogic Pedagogy*, for example, is an international online journal which takes on this topic with all its complexity.

We loosely define “dialogic pedagogy” as any scholarship and pedagogical practice, from educational researchers, philosophers, and practitioners, which values and gives priority to “dialogue” in learning/teaching/educating across a wide range of institutional and non-institutional learning settings. At this point, a variety of approaches to dialogic pedagogy have emerged. This includes, but is not limited to instrumental, interactional, epistemological, ecological, and ontological approaches to dialogue in education. We embrace diverse perspectives despite their possibly irreconcilable contradictions, disagreements, and dualisms. Juxtaposing conflicting ideologies and practices of dialogic pedagogy provides for authentic questions and tensions to emerge as scholars across various settings for learning, and cultural/historical practices provide rich perspectives on the problematic of dialogue in education. (*Dialogic Pedagogy* 2023, n.p.)

With so much complexity, I cannot claim expertise or even passing familiarity with all the ways in which dialogue is considered within education. However, I experienced a great sense of relief when I encountered dialogism and have continued to find applications of this principle to new layers of my research, including in descriptions of ‘serve and return’ play necessary for early and ongoing brain development (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) and developmental standards both medical (CDC, 2024a-p) and educational (OCDEL, 2014) organized to reveal a dialogic interplay between child and caregiver which bears some similarity to the dialogism described by Holquist.

Mentioned briefly in the preceding chapter as a formative aspect of my epistemology, *Dialogism* (Holquist, 2007) brings together many works by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in a way which is first epistemological. It also describes, though, in great detail how this way of knowing is experienced. And the dialogue it thus describes, I found, was harmonious with *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013).

I am not the first to make the connection between Biesta and Bakhtin. The work of Biesta has before been drawn into comparison or cooperation with that of Bakhtin (see for example Ohman, 2020; Gade, 2016; Ekholm, 2020). However, I would differentiate what follows below from these prior studies and their specific applications (the risk of reading, poesis in practitioner research, and reading and teaching literature as writing, respectively). I aim to briefly draw out parallels between the two theorists so that the *experience* of dialogue in Holquist’s rendering of Bakhtin might, by its comparison to Biesta’s pedagogy of the event, be brought to bear on my experiences as recorded in my diary. These, then, might be fruitfully interpreted from an educational perspective which might be called a dialogic pedagogy of the event.

4.3.2 Biesta and Holquist in Dialogue

I have explored above how *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013) offers a first, theoretical response to the problems of gender, isolation, and identity in the research on stay-at-home dads. I suggested that his ideas on parenting and responsibility begin to answer the problem of gender, that whilst detailing the risk associated with isolation, he defuses it with his ideas on dialogue, and that he answers the problem of identity by focusing instead on the *event* of ‘when it matters that I am I.’ Of these, of course, it is Biesta’s insistence on the importance of dialogue which gives us a first point of contact with dialogism. As Biesta says, ‘Education is precisely concerned with... establishing opportunities for *dialogue* with what or who is other’ (Biesta 2013, p. 3, emphasis mine).

Such an invitation, however, does not permit a facile adoption of dialogism with all of its complexities. Rather than make that mistake, I have drawn together a partial list of points on which these theories show a common interest. This is often revealed in their vocabulary, which seems appropriate to dialogism as an epistemology which ‘assumes that thought is fundamentally a language activity’ (Holquist 2002, p. 143). Some of the key terms which form points of contact between the two thinkers, aside from the obvious ‘dialogue,’ include the role of parents, responsibility, isolation, identity, uniqueness, subjectivity, and the event. Holquist also articulates a Bakhtinian perspective on education. In order to take a look at these, I will first offer a brief explanation of what is meant by dialogue in Holquist. (I will continue to refer to Holquist instead of Bakhtin, acknowledging my distance from the original source material. This distance, however, benefits from Holquist’s expertise, which I cannot in short order attain.) Then I will show how dialogism, too, responds to the problems of stay-at-home dads in prior research before proceeding to the topic of education itself.

Dialogue is defined as ‘the simultaneous unity of differences in the event of utterance’ (Holquist 2002, p. 36). Unfortunately, this is not immediately clear in its meaning but must be explored by breaking it down into its component parts. In dialogism, ‘simultaneity’ or ‘the simultaneous unity of differences’ arises from the concept of a ‘self’ that is always dialogic, always a *relation* shared with an Other in a situation which is temporal, spatial and axiological: ‘self/other is a relation of simultaneity’ (Holquist 2002, p. 19). This is construed by Holquist in a number of ways, and their repetition here might help to clarify.

[R]eality is always experienced, not just perceived, and further... it is experienced from a particular position. Bakhtin conceives that position in kinetic terms as a situation, an event, the event of being a self. (Holquist 2002, p. 21.)

“Being”... is not just an event but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always *co-being*.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 25.)

[W]hat gives dialogue its central place in dialogism is precisely the kind of *relation* conversations manifest, the conditions that must be met if any exchange between speakers is to occur at all. That relation is most economically defined as one in which differences—while still remaining different—serve as the building blocks of simultaneity. (Holquist 2002, p. 40.)

In other words, being is an event shared with an Other in a situation defined by time, space, and values.

‘Sharing existence as an event means among other things that we are—we cannot choose *not* to be—in dialogue, not only with other human beings, but also with the natural and cultural configurations we lump together as “the world.” The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 30.)

Therefore, being is also our reply to *addressivity*. This reply or response is an *utterance*.

[A]n utterance is never itself originary: an utterance is always an answer... making it necessary for me to answer for the particular place I occupy.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 60.)

These are the fundamentals of Holquist’s dialogism, that existence is shared between self and Other, and that existence is also my utterance, in which I answer the addressivity of the Other for the space I occupy. While many nuances emerge from this, this might serve as a starting point. Every utterance is a dialogic event.

Briefly, then, this theory of dialogism, like *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, forms a response to prior research on stay-at-home dads. It diminishes the importance of gender with its gender-free claims that “Family culture is, then, every child’s first culture’ (Holquist 2002, p. 82) and that ‘language is the means by which parents organize their thoughts about the world, and when they teach their children to talk they pass on such organizational patterns’ (Holquist 2002, p. 80). The rejection of even the possibility of isolation is quite forceful here: ‘at no level where communication is possible is the subject ever isolated’ (Holquist 2002, p. 57). And this rejection of isolation contributes to its rejection of identity, which is here couched in terms of its aesthetic application to novels, but might just as well be applied to a co-constructed narrative life history.

Dialogism figures a close relation between bodies and novels because they both militate against monadism, the illusion of closed-off bodies or isolated psyches in bourgeois individualism, and the concept of a pristine, closed-off, static identity and truth wherever it may be found. (Holquist 2002, p. 90.)

Instead of identity, Holquist like Biesta aims for an understanding of the event in which ‘the self’s placement, in his or her own subjectivity’ is created. Again, this event is closely related to responsibility.

What the self is answerable *to* is the environment; what it is responsible *for* is authorship of its responses: it is not the content of a commitment that obliges me, but my signature beneath it. (Holquist 2002, p. 168.)

A parallel might be drawn between this statement and the following one.

Our responsibility is simply “there,” it is given; our subjectivity, in contrast, has to do with what we do with this responsibility. (Biesta 2013, p. 20.)

4.3.3 Education again

In Holquist’s view, education is a response to a child’s world of restricted words and actions, into which adults intervene and ‘those with more consciousness aid those with less consciousness’ (Holquist 2002, p. 83). Following Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky,

Dialogism sees the gap between higher and lower levels of consciousness as a zone of proximal development, a distance that may be traversed (at least partially) *through the pedagogical activity of the parts in a dialogic simultaneity relating to each other in time.* (Holquist 2002, p. 83, emphasis in original.)

There is some potential for friction here between Holquist and Biesta, who sees constructivists such as Vygotsky as having contributed to ‘the shift from teaching to learning—a shift that is part of the wider “learnification” of educational discourse’ (Biesta 2013, p. 45). This discourse includes ‘the disappearance of teaching and the demise of the role of the teacher’ (Biesta 2013, p. 56). Part of Biesta’s argument for the necessity of the teacher, however, is his insistence on ‘a position of transcendence’ (Biesta 2013, p. 56) from which ‘teaching can be understood as a gift or as an act of gift giving’ (Biesta 2013, p. 44) as opposed to a system ‘in which the teacher has nothing to give and is giving nothing’ (Biesta 2013, p. 75).

Holquist appears to be suggesting just such a transcendence in the more or higher consciousness and something of the gift in the idea of aid. And while it’s true that in dialogism the world offers endless addressivity which might inspire learning in the absence of a teacher, Holquist doesn’t appear ready to dispose of the teacher. As shown above, he attaches importance to the role of parent *as teacher* and thus as first source of learning to talk and learning to think. What’s more, Holquist places a high importance, like Biesta, on the role of judgment.

What marks the necessary presence of a human subject in both is the assumption that time and space are never merely temporal or spatial, but *axiological* as well (i.e. they also have *values* attached to them). As experienced by subjects, time and space are always tied up with judgments about whether a particular time or a particular place is good or bad, in all the infinite shadings those terms can comprehend. (Holquist 2002, p. 152)

In a system which describes being as ‘always co-being’ and pedagogical activity above as ‘relating to each other,’ the necessity of the other seems to preclude a judgement for the exclusion of the other, perhaps especially if that other is a teacher.

4.4 An Educational Perspective

In drawing these two sets of ideas together, I do not aim to commit the error of syncretism, of claiming between them a sameness which would deny their uniqueness. Rather, my hope is that I might begin to demonstrate the possibility of articulating an educational perspective from which I might interpret my experiences as a stay-at-home dad.

As shown in the Tables 4 (above) and 5 (below), placing some of these ideas side by side in a simplified way allows for a simplified expression of my educational perspective. The point here, really, is to show the appropriateness of an educational perspective to exploring the experiences of a stay-at-home dad. In a way, then, my claims are not surprising. I am not aiming for an exceptionalism which discovers unique educational benefits in the gender of a person staying home with their children. Nor am I claiming that parents and parenting have never before been studied from an educational perspective. What I am showing here is that I have come to my educational perspective in a peculiar way in order to apply it to my peculiar experiences, the likes of which have not been explored from an educational perspective. So, I do not claim that it is the best way to interpret these experiences, but it is a different way, and it is my way.

As a simplification, this is just a starting point. In the chapters which follow, as the data from my diary is explored, more nuances of this educational perspective will emerge.

Biesta (2013)	Holquist (2002)	Troppe
The beautiful risk of education is comparable with the risk of Parenting (pp. 14-16).	Parents teach their children, in the first culture of family, how to talk and thus how to think (pp. 80-82).	The risk of parenting includes the risk of education. Experiences of parenting can be interpreted educationally.
The question of <i>subjectivity</i> , that is, the question of how we can be or become a subject of action and responsibility ... is the educational question (p. 142). We are irreplaceable in our responsibility for the other (p. 144).	What the self is answerable <i>to</i> is the environment; what it is responsible for is authorship of its responses (p. 168) or utterances (p. 60) in an event that is always co-being with the other (p. 25). In this, we have no alibi . (p. 181)	Responsibility for the other might be seen as evidence of cultivating subjectivity. Joined to this responsibility are signs of irreplaceability and the response or utterance which expresses authorship in co-being.
Education is seen as something educators and students do together ' (p. 32) <i>We cannot act in isolation</i> (p. 106).	At no level where communication is possible is the subject ever isolated (p. 57). Being is always co-being (p. 25).	The Discourse of Isolation is undesirable in its prescription for inaction. Education and dialogism argue against isolation as a possibility.
Socialization has to do with how we become part of existing orders, how we identify with such orders and thus obtain an identity ; subjectification, in contrast, is always about how we can exist "outside" of such orders, so to speak (p. 129). I was actually not really interested in the question of identity ... but much more in the question of <i>subjectivity</i> (p. 142). Subjectivity is an event : something that can <i>occur</i> from time to time (p. 22). It is a way of talking about the subject in their ' uniqueness-as-irreplaceability ' (p. 144), situations <i>in which it matters</i> that I am unique ... in which someone calls me ...' (p. 21)	Identity , after Hume, is a fiction of a being 'same with itself' (p. 159). Existence is the event of being a self (p. 21). The activity of the world comes to each of us as a series of events that uniquely occur in the site that I, and only I, occupy in the world (p. 24), making it necessary for me to answer for the particular place I occupy (p. 60).	Identity, as a static fiction and function of socialization, is rejected as a focus. As the pedagogy of the event risks the weakness necessary to the event of subjectivity and the uniqueness to which the subject is called, so too dialogism takes up the call of addressivity to respond in an utterance for the unique place the subject occupies. The similarities between these systems allow for the possibility of seeing the risk of education in dialogue and the place of dialogue in the risk of education.

Table 10. Key terms from Biesta (2013) and Holquist (2002) with a proposed educational perspective.

Biesta (2013)	Holquist (2002)	Troppe
Education is precisely concerned with establishing opportunities for <i>dialogue</i> with what or who is other (p. 3)—not in the Socratic sense of bringing out the I that is already there (p. 48), but in the Freirean sense, against a ‘banking model’ of truth-telling and for a process of co-subjects discovering an emancipation that ‘restores true human existence... true human praxis’ (pp. 71-72).	<i>Dialogue</i> is defined as the simultaneous unity of differences in the event of utterance’ (p. 36). ‘what gives dialogue its central place in dialogism is precisely the kind of <i>relation</i> conversations manifest... in which differences—while still remaining different—serve as the building blocks of simultaneity. (p. 40)	The dialogue of dialogism might provide us a way to look at the ‘conversation between the generations’—with all their differences—as a relation which restores true human existence.
Education is a creative ‘act’... a process that in some way contributes to the creation of human subjectivity (p. 11) by teaching that comes radically from the outside, as something that transcends the self of the “learner,” transcends the one who is being taught (p. 46), and judgment about what is educationally <i>desirable</i> ... turns out to be an absolutely crucial element of what teachers do.’ (p. 130)	Education is a process of overcoming restrictions in the child through active intervention by adults (p. 82) Dialogism sees the gap between higher and lower levels of consciousness as a zone of proximal development, a distance that may be traversed (at least partially) <i>through the pedagogical activity of the parts in a dialogic simultaneity relating to each other in time.</i> (p. 83). Creating self	Education—and particularly a pedagogy of the event—will necessarily include the interventional presence of a teacher who offers both transcendence and weakness to create an opening for the unpredictable, unlimited event of subjectivity, in which a call or addressivity summons each in their uniqueness to respond with their utterance.

Table 11. A table suggesting the potential importance of dialogism in the pedagogy of the event and vice versa.

4.5 The Possibility of Speaking of Education as Non-teleological

We began this chapter with the idea that ‘Theories... explain’ (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 69). In the preceding chapter, however, we briefly visited the influence which my son Gus had on the interpretation of the diary by pointing to the works of Martin Scorsese as his model for narrative and thence to Scorsese’s filmmaking maxim: ‘Never *explain*’ (Horne, 2019, p. 22, emphasis in original). Balancing this tension, as I said, falls to me. I have perhaps found an opportunity for such balance, with implications for education generally, in listening. While educational techniques arising out Reggio Emilia emphasise a pedagogy of listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986), I now turn to particular experiences of this skill in the course of this research which have shifted my understandings of listening and education.

Amalgamations (2016) is a work of experimental music theorized by its composer, Sophie Stone (2019). The image below (Figure 7), is a reproduction of the score’s second movement. Each of the

letters and numbers shown on the score represents an instruction. For example, 'G' represents the instruction 'No Sound', 'v' represents 'Low notes,' and '5' represents 'One note followed by a second note, release the first and then the second (repeat).' A performer of this piece, then, might start at G by performing no sound for an indeterminate length of time before moving on to play unspecified low notes, and then the pattern of notes represented by 5, which might be a continuation of the low notes or not. In this way, the performer is a wayfarer—Stone refers to Ingold in describing the manner of performance--choosing their path through a series of instructions.

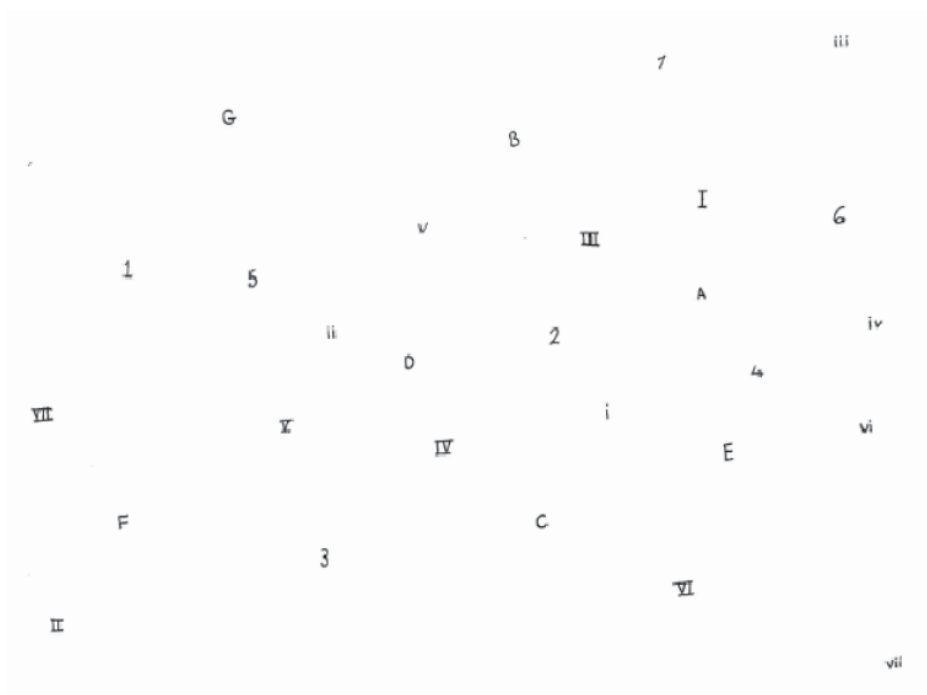


Figure 7. *Amalgamations* (2016), second movement (Stone 2019, p. 157).

Before I saw this score and studied its theory, I had heard it in 2 live performances, first by a solo violist and then by a string quartet, arguing for its versatility and adaptability beyond its original composition for solo organ. The effect, in performance, is one in which I, as part of its audience, followed the wayfaring of the performer(s) with a keen awareness of the unpredictability of its path. The notes emerge only very quietly from the extended silences which sometimes emerge between them, so that particularly in the performance by the quartet, there was a sensation of listening for the listening that they were each doing for each other, to know where and when the wayfaring would take its next step. As each performance ended, then, it did not so much end as enter into a fresh silence anticipated by other silences within the performance; there, a new performance might be awaited from within a silence which was itself a part of a perceptibly unending performance of

Amalgamations. There is something about the performance of this piece which to me feels very near to an experience of love, and in that love very much a sense of the love implied in study:

The primary meaning of study, then, has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another; it has to do with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning. Properly understood, at the heart of study is love. (Wilson 2020, p. 31.)

In *Amalgamations*, the quiet and endless wayfaring of a frontier of silence/not silence produced in me this familiar yearning.

I am particularly interested in the way the composer describes this performance (and, from my perspective, its audience experience) as ‘non-linear and non-teleological in the sense that there is no goal’ (Stone 2019, p. 160). In her composition, this means abandoning Western expectations of ‘linear tonal music: harmonic progressions towards cadences, melodies, phrases, tension and resolution’ (Stone 2019, p. 160). Instead, ‘it is the movement between each instruction and structure that is important and not the destination’ (Stone 2019, p. 161).

There is a sense of this non-teleological progress inherent in wayfaring, in which

the wayfarer has no final destination, for wherever he is, and so long as life goes on, there is somewhere further he can go. (Ingold 2011, p. 150 cited by Stone 2019, p. 160.)

There is a similar thread running through dialogism, for example when the way in which parents teach their children is described as ‘not intentionally directed in any trivial sense toward specific goals’ (Holquist 2002, p. 83), or that history is conceived as ‘a sequence that *has no necessary telos built into it* (Holquist 2002, p. 76, emphasis in original), or, most generally, ‘the contents of dialogue are without limit’ (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39).

The pedagogy of the event appears at first to diverge from this way of thinking. For example, the claim is made that ‘education is always framed by purposes and thus ideas about what good or desirable education is’ (Biesta 2019, p. 119-120). The pedagogy of the event does not try to define what these purposes should be, however, insisting instead that

because the aim or “telos” of education is a multidimensional question, judgment— judgment about what is educationally *desirable*—turns out to be an absolutely crucial element of what teachers do.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 130.)

This then leads to a further claim that

The art of teaching... is precisely that of finding the right balance among the three dimensions, and this is an ongoing task, not something that can be pre-programmed or sorted out by research.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 147.)

This 'finding... among the three dimensions,' this 'ongoing task' and the claim that they cannot be 'pre-programmed' begins to resemble the score of *Amalgamations*. Looking further, then, it might be surprising to see that despite the insistence on purpose, aim and telos, there is a non-teleological aspect in statements such as the claim that the communication necessary to education is 'a process that is radically open and undetermined' (Biesta 2013, p. 26) or that understanding

as distinguished from correct information and scientific knowledge is... an unending activity by which, in constant chance and variation, we come to terms with, reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world. (Foucault 1984, pp. 307-308 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 113.)

This begins to resemble the way in which wayfaring is described as

the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth... The inhabitant... participates from within in the very process of the world's continual coming into being and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture. (Ingold 2007, p. 81.)

It is in this sense, then, of the endless unpredictability in the beautiful risk of education that it, too, like *Amalgamations*, might be seen as 'non-linear and non-teleological in the sense that there is no goal' (Stone 2019, p. 160). There might be a goal or telos in education, then, but it might be just as varied and endless as the performance of *Amalgamations*. Where in *Amalgamations* the performer chooses which instruction will be performed next and how, so in the pedagogy of the event, the teacher makes judgment on what is educationally desirable and makes that their 'ongoing task' (Biesta 2013, p. 147). 'It is the movement between each instruction and structure that is important and not the destination' (Stone 2019, p. 161) and 'listening is of the utmost importance' (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005, p. 185). So, I might suggest that in the event itself, we might not have the assurance of knowing the telos; it might be undesirable to explain. Instead, in the event itself, we have listening, an experience of 'Never *explain*' (Horne, 2019, p. 22, emphasis in original), and a glimpse of the possibility that education, for all of its goals, might in the event itself be experienced as unlimited, unpredictable, and non-teleological in this sense.

4.6 Summary

As a summative statement for this educational perspective, then, I might offer the following. Being a stay-at-home dad has been shown to entail risks associated with gender identity, including the possible experience of isolation. The educational theory I have shared here, Biesta's (2013) pedagogy of the event, recognises education as *risky*, and that this risk is analogous to parenting. It is around this risk, and the *weakness* with which it is associated, which offers a first opening to

consideration of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad from an educational perspective. Into this opening, I drew the possibility of framing my experiences within a definition of education as the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972), which in itself seemed a neat summary of my experiences. Dialogism, then, as constructed by Holquist (2002), provided a framework for exploring my experiences within the context of dialogue harmonious with the pedagogy of the event. By bringing these two frameworks together then, I can explore my experiences as a stay-at-home dad from a perspective in which the event of subjectification in the pedagogy of the event and the event of the creation of a self in the utterance of dialogism reveal responsibility, uniqueness-as-irreplaceability, and the possibility of responding to the transcendent call necessary to education. Within this event, we have listening and the possibility of experiencing education as non-teleological.

Joining this central educational theory, then, to the earlier particularities of social constructions (Aries, 1962; Valkanova, 2014, Connell, 1995), the purposes of diaries in education (Turner & Wilson, 2010; Bassot, 2020), professionalism and love (Page, 2018; Wilson, 2022a), storytelling (Paley, 1999), listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986), and expertise (Clark and Stratham, 2005), plus added contexts of childhood development, the home learning environment, and intergenerational learning, provides a rich beginning for the interpretation of my diary and evidence of ‘developing a theoretical framework’ (McCulloch 2004, 46) necessary to do so.

Chapter 5: Diary Period One: Volumes 1-4 (1994-2005)

5.1 Introduction

I have built a case for why this research is necessary, how it has been conducted, and how I have developed an educational perspective for the interpretation of my data. Now I will begin to reveal and interpret the diary I wrote during the 20 years that I was a stay-at-home dad. In this first of three data chapters, I will introduce this interpretive work by showing that the diary is comprised of three periods. I will then offer an overview of the first of these periods, which will be the focus of this chapter. Within this period, I selected for interpretation three narrative arcs; each of these will then be revealed and interpreted in turn before I conclude the chapter by offering summative insights on the period as a whole.

5.1.1 A Diary of Three Periods

Document analysis will show the diary is comprised of three periods. A diary's value is partially measured in the frequency of its entries (McCulloch 2004, p. 104). An inventory of my diary's 47 volumes showed an 11-year period (1994-2005) of low-frequency entries followed by an increase in entries in late 2005 which lasted five years (2005-2010) followed by a second increase which marked the beginning of another five year period (2011-2015). The values for these measures are shown in Table 12, below, and graphically represented in the following chart at Figure 8, below. While I recognise that 'pages' as a unit of measure is not rigorously identical with 'frequency of entries,' for a document of this size it proved useful for locating changes in production of the diary which, I discovered, coincided with changes in the diary's purpose, which is key to interpreting its meaning (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015).

TIME	PAGES		TIME	PAGES
1994	50		2005	122
1995	16		2006	521
1996	74		2007	400
1997	14		2008	400
1998	16		2009	200
1999	4		2010	300
2000	172		2011	2000
2001	14		2012	2100
2002	20		2013	1300
2003	16		2014	900
2004	39		2015	90

Table 12. Frequency of diary entries, shown as a list of the diary's years as TIME and the number of Pages written.

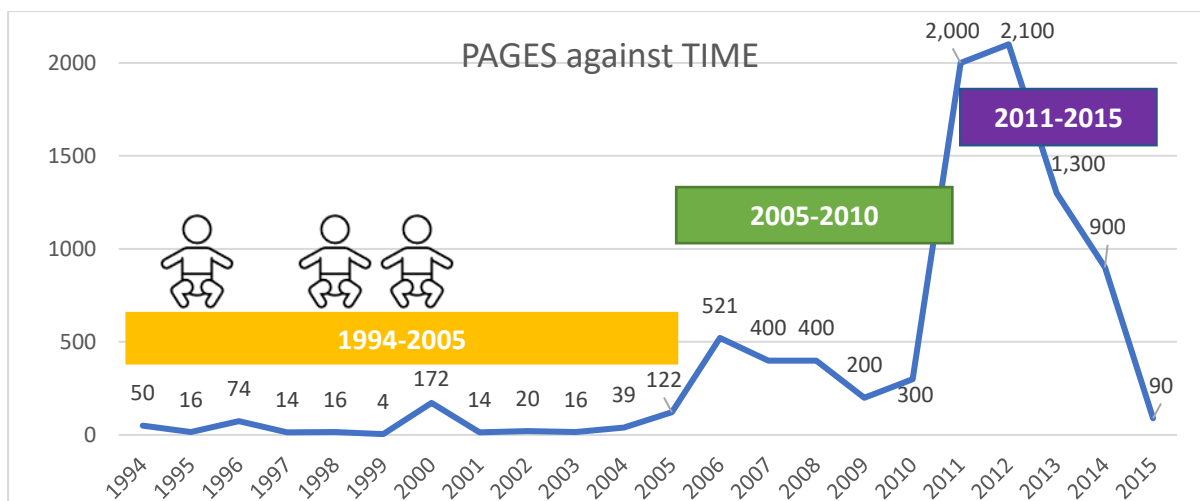


Figure 8. PAGES against TIME. Births of participant children are also shown: Madeleine (1995), Max (1998), and Gus (2000).

As each of these periods is explored in turn, these changes in the frequency of entries and the purposes which inspired them will become clearer. Note, furthermore, that time here is not demarcated in stages of development, but in years—which reflect the quotidian progression of diary entries—and in these diary periods.

5.1.2 Period One Overview

In the chart above, Period One has the lowest ‘value’ of the diary’s three periods. Diary pages in Period One amount to only about 192 over 11 years, including pages of marks made by my children as they experimented with writing of their own. From the first entry, there is evidence of delay between events and their documentation. The relatively low ‘frequency of entries,’ then, also becomes associated with a reduced reliability in terms of the ‘regularity and immediacy’ (McCulloch 2004, p. 102) with which entries document the events described. Such irregularity, however, is not necessarily a drawback in this research if one remembers that in the practice of documentation in Reggio Emilia,

the time lapse between one entry and the next one varies: the diary is not systematic but is compiled when the event is considered to have new significance, when it arouses surprise in its characters and is likely to increase knowledge and problems. (Edwards and Rinaldi 2009, p. 25.)

Hence, we have in these early entries something of the surprise required of good research (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). Nevertheless, to mitigate this potential reduction in reliability, I expanded my data source during this period to include letters to my parents which were mentioned in the diary (D1:03.04.1996). These fill in this gap of immediacy, but only partially. Other entries, particularly

those written in a poetic style with closely observed details also achieve an immediacy which might help to offset a lack of regularity; for this reason—and for Gus’s praise of them (IGDM:04.04.2021)—they were often seen as desirable for selection (see for example D1:13.01.1996; D1:05.12.1996; D1:12.05.1997).

Data selection was somewhat easier for this period. Fewer and shorter diary entries tended to focus more on the extraordinary event and less on the everyday, suggesting a first, contemporaneous, interpretive selection. This made documented events easier to share with my participant children. Passages from the diary were selected spontaneously as I made my way through the diary, in an expression of ‘what fascinates’ (Bartlett & Milligan 2015, p. 44). These were often shared immediately with my participant children, who expressed their own levels of fascination. These often led to sometimes difficult but more often joyful exchanges (see Appendix 9, Table 17) which shaped the co-creation in our research process and the diary’s interpretation. Their responses also corroborated the stories related within the diary and hence contributed to the reliability of the source (McCulloch, 2004). Period One is, in this way, the period most thoroughly represented to my participant children. During Period One, there were 18 events⁵ in the diary which were enough of a ‘fascination’ to draw us into dialogue. Not all of these are included here, but I try to use my dialogue with my participant children to balance the dialogue I am also having with prior research, my own theoretical constructs, and the diary itself. Their higher level of involvement in my interpretation of this period perhaps balances the lower value of this data.

Interpretations of the data from Period One include contexts of childhood development, the home learning environment and intergenerational learning. My children’s progress during this period can be shown with reference to developmental stages as in Table 14 below. During Period One, each of them transitions from Prenatal through Baby, Toddler, and Preschool stages and ends in the Gradeschooler stage. While the diary offers little evidence that I had any awareness of these stages outside of normal paediatric visits, some of the events which I documented in the diary can and will be contextualized against developmental norms and guidance devised in the US, as these are most relevant to the setting in which these events were documented. These include developmental norms and guidelines established by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Zubler et al., 2022), the US Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2024a-p), and a table of the complete paediatric range devised by

⁵ I use the word ‘events’ here advisedly, with its implications of presence and responsibility (Biesta 2013) and the situation in which dialogue occurs (Holquist 2002). I also avoid the word ‘excerpts,’ which for me evidences an extractive mindset, with links to colonialism. (See my statement on ethics in the Methodology chapter, with reference to Kanneiser, 2021.)

the US Child Welfare agency and made available by MedlinePlus (2024), as described in the literature review, above. This Period also discovers some contextual relevance in the guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2024) and the Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood (OCDEL, 2014). Greater detail on these developmental norms are offered in Appendix 3. In particular, we can anticipate prescribed parental use of talking, singing, and reading to develop children’s language development, and how even a gross motor skill like learning to walk is documented in terms of the ‘serve and return’ interactions which resemble dialogism and are essential to developing brain circuitry from infancy through adolescence and beyond (Center on the Developing Child, 2016).

Year	Diary volume(s)	Development Stage: Madeleine	Max	Gus
1994	1			
1995	1	Prenatal Baby (0-12 mo.)		
1996	1	Baby (0-12 mo.) Toddler (1-3 y)		
1997	1			
1998	1	Toddler (1-3 y) Preschool (3-5)	Prenatal Baby (0-12 mo.)	
1999	2		Baby (0-12 mo.) Toddler (1-3 y)	
2000	2 – 3	Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)		Prenatal Baby (0-12 mo.)
2001	3		Toddler (1-3 y) Preschool (3-5)	Baby (0-12 mo.) Toddler (1-3 y)
2002	3			
2003	3		Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)	Toddler (1-3 y) Preschool (3-5)
2004	4			
2005	4 – 5			Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)

Table 13. Period One: Locating my children within developmental stages.

Document analysis specifically recommends ‘a narrative approach... to make sense of the storylines... that run longitudinally through the diary’ (Thomas 2007, cited by Bartlett and Milligan 2014, p. 43). Period One of the diary, which spans almost 11 years, is here subdivided into three narrative arcs:

1. Preface to Fatherhood (1994 – 1995)
2. New Responsibilities (1996 – 1999)
3. School Begins (September 1999 – 2004)

The ‘Preface to Fatherhood’ begins on 10 April 1994, over a year before I became a father. At that time, I was working at The New York Public Library and reading for a Master of Library Science degree at Rutgers University. I left that work to relocate to a small town in central Pennsylvania, became a father for the first time, and began my 20 years as a stay-at-home dad. The degree I pursued to its completion just hours before Madeleine’s birth. These experiences are included despite falling outside the temporal boundaries of the years when I was a stay-at-home dad because they express important insights into what has been called the ‘transitions’ (Solomon, 2017) relevant to understanding the experiences of a stay-at-home dad. They also received response from a participant child which aided aims of co-creation. Plus, they contribute powerfully to the understanding of the purpose of the diary.

‘New Responsibilities’ then offers a narrative of my first experiences as a stay-at-home dad. These focus on the infant years of Madeleine and particularly on the newness of her first days, her first music, her first steps, her first words. Max was born during these years.

During the final years in this period, Gus was born and ‘School Begins’ for all three of my participant children. Table 7, below, shows the ages and school levels of my three participant children during the third of these narrative arcs. All of them entered a half-day, morning preschool programme offered by St. Monica School, a Roman Catholic school, when they were 3 years old. This was followed by a year of half-day 4-year-old preschool, then full-day Kindergarten, Grade 1, and so on.

Child (Year of Birth)	Ages	School Levels
Madeleine (1995)	3 – 9	3-year-old preschool – Grade 4
Max (1998)	0 – 6	3-year-old preschool – Grade 1
Gus (2000)	0 – 4	3-year-old preschool - Kindergarten

*Table 14. Period One: Children’s Ages and School Levels.*⁶

Period One ends with entries which are undated, troubling its classification as a diary. These begin sometime after 25 June 2004 and last until sometime shortly before 7 July 2005, when dates resume, and the classification returns thereafter to being secure. The penultimate entry, titled ‘The Strangely Propped Man’, questions my role and leads to the start of Period Two with a shift in the diary’s purpose and structure.

In addition to sharing the diary entries from this period spontaneously, after reading all of the diary and sifting its many events, I selected and compiled many of them from Period One into two

⁶ I offer again context of these US grades for readers more familiar with UK educational systems: US 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool correspond to UK Nursery and Reception, while US Kindergarten is similar to UK Year 1. US Grade 4, therefore corresponds to UK Year 5. See Tables , above, for comparison of these stages.

collections, which I again shared with my children. After Gus had read the first collection of events which I had selected from Period One of the diary, he responded with the following summary statement.

Gus Responds (IGDM:04.04.2021)

I don't think words can really describe how excellent I thought your writing was. I'm not a fan of poetry, but I'm a fan of your poetry. The journal entries were as profound as they were funny. And I thought it was pretty amazing how even though it's specifically the story of our family, how there is such an undisputed level of universality to it. I also thought there was a great balance of writing about us kids and writing about yourself. I can't wait to see more of it!

In an exemplary moment of the co-creation which has sustained this project, his response influenced my interpretive method, causing me to take a closer look at the poetry across the length of the diary. His enjoyment of it posits it as a place of the resonance, verisimilitude, and credibility (Le Roux, 2017) which contribute to its reliability and rigor.

5.2 Events

Table 16, below, is intended to help the audience of this work anticipate the 33 documented events which I will share in the coming pages, as well as which of them inspired responses from my participant children. I ask that the reader enter into these events in a spirit of wayfaring:

In wayfaring... one follows a path that one has previously travelled in the company of others, or in their footsteps, reconstructing the itinerary as one goes along. (Ingold 2007, pp. 15-16.)

No.	Diary Location	Event	Response
		Preface to Fatherhood	
1	D1: Frontispiece	Frontispiece	
2	D1:10.04.1994	Opening	Madeleine
3	D1:16.05.1994	Just a diary	
4	D1:18.09.1994	Sweet Jesus	
		Early Years	
5	D1:13.01.1996	Icicles	
6	D1:11.02.1996	Breastfeeding: calling	
7	D1:12.02.1996	Isolated (clipping)	
8	D1:13.02.1996	12-pound boss	
9	D1:16.02.1996	Question advert	
10	D1:03.04.1996	Mother's journal	
11	D1:13.05.1996	Paediatric questions	
12	LP:28.07.1996	Musical promise	Madeleine
13	D1:19.04.1996	My story	
14	D1:18.08.1996	St. Anthony	
15	D1:19.08.1996	Catechism	
16	D1:04.12.1996	Irreplaceable	
17	D1:05.12.1996	First steps	
18	D1:11.03.1997	St. Dominic	
19	D1:12.05.1997	Apple blossom	Madeleine
20	D1:16.09.1997	Sentences	
21	D1:07.10.1997	More sentences, Cat & Star	Madeleine
22	D1:19.10.1998	Healthy loner	
23	D1:20.10.1998	Eternal responsibility	
		School Begins	
24	D2:30.09.1999	Firsts at school	
25	D2:01.06.2000	First summer break	
26	D2:n.d.1	Marks	
27	D2:13.07.2000	Canoe	
28	D4:26.04.2004	School parking lot (portrait)	Madeleine
29	D4:n.d.2	Listening	
30	D4:n.d.5	Dear diary	
31	D4:n.d.10	Max plays organ	
32	D4:n.d.11	The Strangely Propped Man	Madeleine
33	D4:n.d.12	Boloney	Madeleine

Table 15. Period One: Events and responses.

5.2.1 Arc 1: Preface to Fatherhood (1994-1995)

This narrative arc offers only four events from my diary. One of them inspired a dialogue with my daughter Madeleine, contributing to the co-creation of this research. As a preface to fatherhood, this arc serves as context for the experiences which follow. It also offers early evidence for assessing the purpose of the diary, responding to the isolation discourse, and introducing responsibility as a fundamental aspect for these interpretations.

D1: Frontispiece

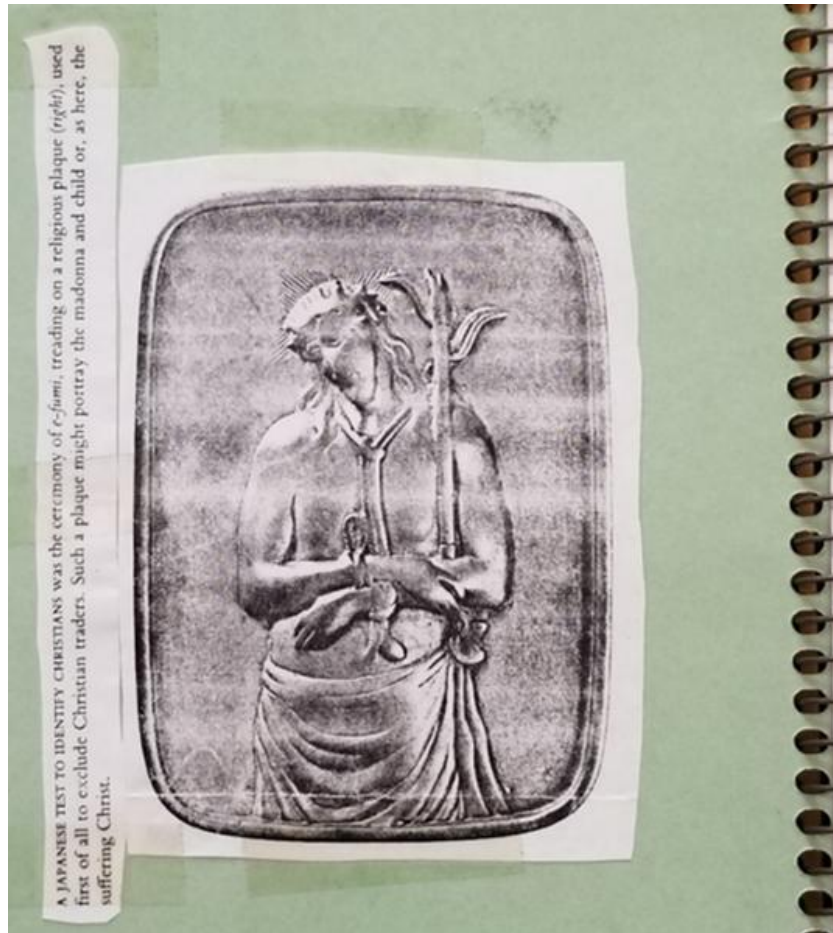


Figure 9. 'A JAPANESE TEST TO IDENTIFY CHRISTIANS was the ceremony of e-fumi, treading on a religious plaque (right), used first of all to exclude Christian traders. Such a plaque might portray the madonna and child or, as here, the suffering Christ.' (McManners, 1990, p. 319.)

The above image (Figure 9) faces the first written entry in the diary. It is attractive for selection as data in part because of its surprise. As 'capacity for surprise' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p. 163) is a measure of rigor which establishes my methodology, and 'unpredictable situations of encounter' (Biesta 2013, p. 12) are central to the educational theory for my interpretations of this text, this image offers itself as an unexpected starting point for a discussion of education. It invites curiosity. What is this image and why is it here?

This image depicts Jesus, and the crown he wears and reed he holds help to match the image to these verses from the Gospel of St. Matthew:

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand and mocked him... and spit upon him and took the reed, and smote him on the head. (Matthew 27:29-30.)

The Gospel according to St. Mark has a similar telling, in which soldiers ‘platted a crown of thorns and put it about his head’ (Mark 15:17) and ‘smote him on the head with a reed’ (Mark 15:19). The Gospel of St. John, though, adds to this crowning with thorns a confrontation with the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, who presents the crowned Jesus to a crowd, introducing the accused by saying, ‘Behold the man!’ (John 19:5).

Recalling the literature on the experiences of stay-at-home dads and the use of a gender perspective to interpret them, that proclamation, ‘Behold the man!’ (John 19:5) might suggest a first interpretation: that the image of a semi-nude god-man offers a hegemonic masculinity, ‘the culturally idealised form of masculine character’ (Connell 1990, p. 83). The fact that his hands are bound recalls that ‘a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men’ (Connell & Messerschmidt 2003, p. 844, cited by Solomon 2017, p. 97) and that some stay-at-home dads have reported feeling ‘criminalized’ (Solomon 2017, p. 91). Perhaps, then, this image reveals an encoded expression of my attempt to negotiate my place between hegemonic masculinity and the vulnerability of caregiving (Medved, 2016; Snitker, 2018) towards an ‘evolved masculinity’ (Solomon 2017, p. 104), or as a participant in the Isolation Discourse.

Diary research methods recognise that ‘any distortion or bias is a cause for concern... diaries need to be treated with caution’ (Alaszewski 2006, p. 87). The placement of this image as a frontispiece is a first indication—which will receive numerous repetitions in other guises—of the diary author’s peculiarly Christian bias in the interpretation of experience.

The image receives no contemporaneous interpretation in the diary. Nor is there a diary entry which indicates when, during the 4 and a half years of this diary volume’s use, it might have been affixed here. The caption, though, helpfully makes the source of the image easy to trace. It also offers further detail about the purpose for this particular rendering of this Biblical scene. The caption informs us that the image served as a test used ‘to identify’ and ‘to exclude,’ verbs which resonate with gender identity and an isolation discourse. Christians being put to such a test would see this image as an icon: treading on it was a test because to do so was not just to disrespect an image, but

Christ himself. The same book from which this image was photocopied offers a summary of this belief.

Standing before Christ's icon, the worshipper is brought face to face with Christ himself. By virtue of the icon, we pass within the dimensions of sacred space and sacred time, entering into a living, effectual contact with the person or mystery depicted. The icon is a way in, a point of meeting, a place of encounter. (McManners 1990, p. 145.)

While this description is particular to icons within the Orthodox Christian tradition, a similar understanding can be gained from the novel *Silence* by Shusaku Endo (1966), the plot of which turns on the use of this test, as does Martin Scorsese's film based on this novel (*Silence*, 2016). From such a perspective, the image transforms the diary into a perceived 'place of encounter' (McManners 1990, p. 145).

If this icon and the diary it opens can be seen each in their own way as an encounter, then both offer in their own way the opportunity, an invitation, for an event of subjectification. In order to see this, it might be helpful to remember that 'subjectivity... can be realized... in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter' (Biesta 2013, p. 12), and furthermore, that it is precisely this 'unique, unrepeatable existence as a particular person in a specific social and historical situation' (Holquist 2002, p. 28) for which I have responsibility, for which *you* have responsibility, too. This is an encounter which, in the depicted weakness of Jesus, reminds us of 'the weakness of education' (Biesta 2013, p. 24) and the origins of that theory in a discussion of 'the event that stirs in the name of God' as a 'weak force' (Caputo, 2006, p. 84 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 17). It is this same force which creates, which 'gives the world significance... a meaning' (Caputo, 2006, p. 75 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16). This is a sacrificial weakness, one which declares, 'I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it' (Levinas 1985, p. 98 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21). It is this expression of *responsibility* which defines Father Involvement (Lamb, 1997), dialogism (Holquist 2002, p. 48), and is core to 'the educational question' of subjectivity, 'the question of how we can be or become a subject of action and responsibility' (Biesta 2013, p. 142). From that educational perspective joined to that Christian bias, this image might also be seen as an expression of 'studying the virtuosity... (of) those who exemplify the very thing you aspire to' (Biesta 2013, p. 136).

Opposite this image is the diary's first hand-written entry.

D1:10.04.1994⁷

The day I bought this—early in January to the best of my recollection—was unseasonably warm, as they say, and bore no resemblance whatsoever to the abundantly snowy weather by which the winter of '93-'94 is bound to be remembered. Sometime around 2 or 3 in the afternoon of that Saturday, I took a few minutes of my break from work to walk up 6th Avenue a couple of blocks to the Stevedan stationery shop. As I searched—in vain, as you can see—for my Mead brand of this exact tablet, I heard one woman suggest to another, “Let’s go to the library.” I turned around and saw a familiar patron a few yards away. “Look,” she said to her friend, “it’s the librarian.” I did that pressing of the lips into a thin smile that so often suffices as a silent hello. “Hi,” she waved, and went out. Unable to find a Mead tablet, I considered making my break from tradition a radical one—I could buy one of those French cahiers with the glossy, brightly colored⁸ covers and the pages all woven with tight little squares. But this one was cheaper. I toyed with a few disposable pens at the counter, paid for the tablet and went out. The sun shone. I wore no coat. Between the noises of traffic there hung the silence of unrelated people moving through a bright-eyed awe. Simply, it was the weather.

Crossing 11th St. on the east side of 6th Avenue, I bumped into, or rather, was just passing, two boys who were about 10 years old. They stopped and looked up at me. “You work at the library, don’t you?” I couldn’t deny it.

So—as I wrote later to a friend—I’m now a celebrity in Greenwich Village.

There is much to recommend this entry for selection, but I will first point to one of its less obvious features. It refers to the diary as ‘this exact tablet’ and ‘the tablet.’ It is not yet a diary. Its thing-ness, its materiality, is all that I can see of it, not its purpose or its audience, which may be uncertain. And yet this first event situates the diary as an utterance in a field of addressivities, a field in which I am listening with a curiosity which might prefigure what I might bring to a pedagogy of listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986), listening not only to the words and gestures of other people and myself, but also to ‘the silence of unrelated people moving through bright-eyed awe.’

Madeleine responded to this event with an interpretation which surprised me.

Madeleine Responds (EM:24.03.2021)

I think that I've often felt a little bit guilty that you gave up your career to take care of me. I know how much you enjoyed being a librarian, and from your 1994 entry, you seemed to enjoy meeting people who recognized you as the librarian. It's easy to imagine that you would have thrived if you had continued that career path, particularly because of your

⁷ Here, as previously noted, the location of each event within the diary is represented in the format D1:10.04.1994, which indicates the diary volume number (D1) followed by the date represented as day.month.year. Similarly, dialogues are represented by the medium used—email (EM), letter to parents (LP), Instagram Direct Message (IGDM), or WhatsApp (WA) message—followed by date of transmission in like date format.

⁸ I have maintained American spelling in diary entries and messages from my participant children to preserve the authenticity of these texts.

intellectual curiosity and enjoyment of being around people. I know that in becoming a stay-at-home dad, you gave up the intellectual stimulation and human interaction that you enjoyed in your career.

Madeleine sees in this first diary entry what might be a parallel to the sacrificial responsibility depicted in the frontispiece: 'you gave up your career to take care of me.' In this, she recognises in this first event what will be a recurring motif throughout the diary, and one which is entirely predicted by dialogism, which sees 'a sign of the enactment of our responsibility' (Holquist 2002, p. 84) in the struggle of narrative to negotiate between our uniqueness and 'career patterns' (Holquist 2002, p. 134). She also points out the enjoyment of 'interaction,' which I also see here and would interpret in the language of dialogism:

The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.' (Holquist 2002, p. 30)

I am indeed alive here, as responses percolate through the text in throwaway phrases—'as they say' and 'as you can see'—locating the author in what appears to be an anonymous crowd of addressivity and response. It continues in conversation with the 'familiar patron' and the 'two boys' and even after the event in a letter to 'a friend.' These are joined by silences—'a silent hello' and 'the silence of unrelated people moving through a bright-eyed awe' and even, silently, the silence of three months between the event and its documentation in the diary—which also have their place in the dialogue. Its conclusion, 'I'm now a celebrity in Greenwich Village,' is, of course, tongue-in-cheek, and might even begin to suggest the limits of reliability to the diary's witness. The claim to 'celebrity,' though, I read as 'the natural use of language' valuable to diaries (McCulloch 2004, p. 120), and in this case, it refers to that key aspect of an event, my uniqueness in my responsibility.

Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse. This charge is a supreme dignity of the unique. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me. (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

I am responsible to all of this, to the patron, to the boys, to the friend, to the 'they' and the 'you' and even to the silences to which the diary responds and is addressed.

All of this suggests that the New York Public Library was a place where I experienced a sense of belonging (Agnew, 2011) and that it was, consequently, a place for meaning making (Gustafson, 2001). This meaning making is in evidence in the dialogic interactions described above. And it is, perhaps, this sense of belonging and its sacrifice which makes Madeleine feel 'a little bit guilty.'

A month—but only a few pages—after this first event, another event inspires a question of purpose.

D1:16.05.1994

So why am I writing? ...Just a diary, just a diary, not the dreaded impossible autobiography reviled so acidly and pseudointellectually in the most recent *Harper's*. Another writing professor goading us all to silence. How self-serving. Gee. How dare I even pick up this pen?

It's difficult to write like this outside of a letter. With whom am I communicating? Myself?

These questions—which appear as rhetorical in the diary as they remain unanswered—are for document analysis as they raise questions of the diary's purpose and audience. Now the diary, formerly just 'a tablet,' is named a diary. By defining the document emphatically as 'just a diary', it is set in contrast and response to 'The Art of Self: Autobiography in the Age of Narcissism' (Gass, 1994), the referenced article from *Harper's*. My response here is the first of many rejections of egocentrism and identity in the diary, another recurring motif which was ethically reconciled only with considerable difficulty, as elaborated in the section on autoethnography in the Methodology chapter, above. This recurring motif finds affirmation in Biesta's claim that he 'was actually not really interested in the question of *identity*' (Biesta 2013, p. 21) and, furthermore, in the claim that dialogism militates

against monadism, the illusion of closed-off bodies or isolated psyches in bourgeois individualism, and the concept of a pristine, closed-off, static identity. (Holquist 2002, p. 90.)

In this entry, the perceived absence of a partner in communication is marked down as a difficulty. Dialogue is sought, and 'myself'—echoing the narcissism and the 'self-serving' which precede it—seems an inadequate, uncertain, or uncomfortable partner.

A perhaps preferable addressee is soon suggested.

D1:18.09.1994

Sweet Jesus, the symphonies you hear
of prayer disguised and not disguised as prayer

This is the first of the poetic constructions—an iambic pentameter couplet—which provided adequate fascination for its inclusion here. It dialogically responds, perhaps unintentionally, to my preceding question, 'with whom am I communicating?' It launches with a direct address, claiming for my audience that same Christ depicted on the diary's first page. And what he hears are even these diary pages, these lines, 'disguised and not disguised as prayer.' While the image above announces the place of encounter, these two lines make an early argument for the whole of the diary as prayer.

Furthermore, it is a prayer heard as music structured in ‘symphonies’—the entanglement of music and prayer will also be a recurring motif.

To what educational purpose does this point? Perhaps a clue lies in the single line which follows immediately after the above couplet.

‘Going back is the quickest way on.’ – *Mere Christianity*, p. 22.

The citation here from C.S. Lewis’ (1952) argument for a modern Christian faith suggests again that I have studied this text, similar to the way in which study must have discovered and reproduced the frontispiece image of Jesus from *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (McManners, 1990). The movement of study in these two events is clearer than in the encounter with Gass, creating here a kind of equation between study and love.

The primary meaning of study, then, has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another; it has to do with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning. Properly understood, at the heart of study is love. (Wilson 2020, p. 31.)

In this same meditation on study in love, poetry is a model for it. Summoning the Biblical story (Gen 2:20) in which Adam names the animals, Adam becomes an idealised man, and his action of seeing, yearning, and naming becomes a gift of poetry steeped in truth:

true poetry is to see with the eyes of Adam: undistracted, yearning, in love. It is to see Creation... as “an endless love poem [. . .] meant for us to read and reread, to heed and treasure”. (Chryssavgis and Foltz, 2013, p. 3 cited by Wilson 2020, p. 37.)

Along with its indication of this kind of loving study, these words of Lewis offered me as a researcher a mysteriously prescient voice of encouragement. They suggested that studying my experiences as a stay-at-home dad might somehow guide me forward, an idea I later found supported in the claim that ‘retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own’ (Ingold 2007, p. 119) and that the virtuosity of educational wisdom can be learned ‘through life-history’, and ‘not only of their virtuosity but perhaps also of their trajectory’ (Biesta 2013, p. 136).

Arc 1 Insights

Drawing primarily on principles of document analysis to interpret the purpose of a document, we can see in this brief arc a bold beginning which, in the representation of Christ as an icon and the frontispiece of the entire work, claims the work as a place of encounter. But this boldness immediately faces the diary’s first event, which with greater uncertainty names the diary only ‘this exact tablet,’ a mere thing, but a thing into which is being documented an utterance in response to listening in a lively field of addressivities. Only later is it given the name of ‘diary’—and this purpose

for the former tablet is named in a rejection of narcissism forceful enough to inform my present research methods. And then its first audience, its superaddressee, is named—‘Sweet Jesus’—and is named in poetry, a theoretically perfect form for expressing the unity of study and love. Into these interpretations found in the text, Madeleine throws the surprise of bringing her attention to the sense of belonging and meaningful work I ‘gave up’ to become a stay-at-home dad and ‘take care of’ her, suggesting a possible interpretation of a gendered division of labour, and an alternative interpretation which includes the responsibility, uniqueness, career patterns, and addressivities of dialogism, as well as the definition of stay-at-home dad as primary caregiver. In terms of documenting a virtuosity of balancing the three domains of education, there is little interest shown here for either qualification or socialization, but an emphasis on the event of subjectivity.

This first narrative arc, in other words, contributes something to each of the imagined audiences for this thesis. My methods engage with the problem of the reliability of a diary as a data source, confronting early the potential accusation of narcissism, revealing the diarist as reflexively self-conscious and vigilant to reject such self-centredness, and taking from the data source inspiration for the methods I have used to defend against this charge. The benefit of co-creating this research with my children is also early evidenced here in the surprise which Madeleine offers in her response to the data. There is no interaction yet with my children in this arc, but there is nevertheless an educational contribution in the demonstrated preference for the domain of subjectivity achieved through a lively dialogic interaction with the environment and practices of listening and documentation. While I am not yet in this arc a stay-at-home dad, it offers to the audience of stay-at-home dads, especially in Madeleine’s response, a preview of our work as gift and responsibility. Finally, this arc offers to my participants some healing clarification about ‘giving up’ a career that I loved in order to be the caregiver for the children I love far more.

5.2.2 Arc 2: New Responsibilities (1996-1999)

This second narrative arc offers 19 brief events. These begin with the first diary entry after my first child was born and consequently offer a glimpse of my first experiences and first attempts to make meaning of my new role as a stay-at-home dad. Over the three years of this arc, I write about things like sleepless nights, isolation, unpredictability, first steps, and first words. Through it all, there are signs that I am making something like a study of what is happening, trying to understand what it means.

I begin, then, with the first words I wrote in my diary after Madeleine was born.

D1:13.01.1996

Icicles lower their bars on our new solitude.
As the light changes—in them and their length—
we listen for their unfluted calliope.

I respond to a new addressivity, aware of the newness of my situation within it: a new parent, newly removed from the workforce, newly surrounded with a landscape to which I had recently relocated, its strangeness exaggerated by a blizzard. Again I respond with poetry, an expression of love as study. Here, love is not *identified* or *explained*; it is *shown*. Whereas the earlier iambic pentameter poem (D1:18.09.1994) is directly addressed to Jesus, this is indirectly addressed to Madeleine. The ‘our’ and ‘we’ indicate a response for my unique situation from which I recognise her as a partner in the event of my being—‘not just an event, but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always *co-being*’ (Holquist 2002, p. 25). It is a response to her, to her *presence*—or her ‘coming into presence’, her ‘coming into the world’, which is ‘an *event* rather than an essence or identity... a new beginning, a newness, a natality, to use Arendt’s term’ (Biesta 2013, p. 143). It is my dialogue with her in this moment—which is embodied, not verbalized, not languaged until the poem—which gives me myself and my situation to the point which urges this response of love for the addressivity of icicles, light, and change.

Each of these three lines has its focus. The first is solitude, which might sound again like the Isolation Discourse, especially with the lowering of bars, which sounds penal, like solitary confinement. But the solitude is ‘ours’ and it is ‘new’. The sharedness of the solitude obliterates the suggestion of isolation and the newness is reminiscent of action itself.

Arendt likens action to the fact of birth, since with each birth something ‘uniquely new’ comes into the world. (Arendt 1958, p. 178 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 105.)

And furthermore:

Action is therefore never possible in isolation. Arendt even goes so far as to argue that ‘to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act’ (Arendt 1958, p. 188 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 106.)

The disempowerment suggested by the Isolation Discourse is undone by the newness of this shared solitude. An inability to act is not in evidence here. It is a scene of changes, the focus of the second line, alluding perhaps to this tripart transition of mine. And in the third line, ‘we listen.’ So, here we have something like a first instance of the Reggio Emilia pedagogy of listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986) with its practice of documentation (Turner and Wilson 2010), though both were unknown to me at the time. Again, as solitude is shared, so is this action shared. It is the

dialogic action of recognizing and responding to addressivity, which gives me my situation in existence and from which I have no alibi in my responsibility to respond. This is ‘a relation of simultaneity,’ a coming together for the event shared spatially, temporally and axiologically (Holquist 2002, p. 152). It is the axiology—the *values* within my situation—which is the basis for my judgment, by which I choose ‘what it is that should have authority in our lives’ (Biesta 2013, p. 57). Although I cannot know Madeleine’s listening, from the perception of sharedness, I claim that what we listen *for* is the ‘unfluted calliope’ suggested by the varied lengths of the icicles outside the window. When I first came to interpret the diary, I referred to these three lines as ‘The Invocation,’ not only for their placement here at the beginning of the long poem of my parenthood, but also for their naming of Calliope, the greatest of the Muses, much as Dante did in the opening of his *Purgatorio*:

Now from the grave wake poetry again,
O sacred Muses I have served so long!
Now let Calliope uplift her strain

And lift my voice up on the mighty song... (Dante 1955, Canto I, lines 7-10.)

It is also helpful to know, contextually, that a calliope is a kind of musical steam organ, distinctly American, gaudy, raucous and out of tune, the stuff of riverboats and carnivals (see for example Royy B, 2017). But as an organ, it participates here in poetic wordplay called metonymy—in which saying ‘the crown’ replaces saying ‘the king’. Here, ‘the calliope’ or ‘the organ’ would stand for ‘the organist,’ which for me could only mean my dad (Figure10, below).



Figure 10. My dad playing an organ in an undated photograph, circa 1951.

He, as a professional musician and teacher, was often at home with us; he was very much my first teacher. Because he was at home with us when we were kids, for me to be a stay-at-home dad felt no great innovation. Using Biesta's language, I was calling on the *virtuosity* of his example. In so doing, I might have served as a connection between my father and Madeleine, anticipating the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1977) as a definition of education and the benefits of intergenerational learning. Among these is a sense of belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023), which is also a key dimension for defining a place so that we can begin to make meaning of it (Agnew, 2011).

D1:11.02.1996

It's some early hour. Madeleine woke at 3:24. An hour later, she went to sleep, but I was wide awake.

Have had lots of strange dreams since Madeleine's been born...

At some point I also dreamed that I had to breastfeed Madeleine, which not only struck me as very strange, but worried me because I knew that if she nursed for a couple of days, my milk would come in and I would have bona fide breasts that I'd be unable to conceal.

Here we have documentation of a responsibility quite likely familiar to any parent of a new baby, in the early hour, the midnight feeding, the sleeplessness. 'Very strange' here, though, is the dream that I will in the enactment of my responsibility begin breastfeeding. Some stay-at-home dads report feeling 'less like a man' (Solomon 2017, p. 31), but I do not claim that here. There is worry and a

desire for concealment, but this is not cast as a loss, but as a new ability, a responsibility, and one that does not come without some risks, unspoken, which might inspire concealment. After writing of this dream, I engage in a brief reflection on my involvement in Madeleine's Prenatal stage, mentioning 'a Lamaze class (in the basement of the CVS), a "baby basics" class (up at the hospital)' (D1:11.02.1996). These classes, evidence for an early interest in understanding and practicing paediatric standards of infant care, may have been fundamental to my education as a stay-at-home dad, but the reflection ends swiftly as the responsibility of the moment returns, and I write of this my new vocation: 'I can only grin—Madeleine's calling.' This is evidence that I am quick to 'learn to notice and respond to your baby's signals' (CDC, 2024a, p. 2) and take up early a key educational objective, though I didn't know it at the time.

When adults are sensitive and respond to an infant's babble, cry, or gesture, they directly support the development of neural connections that lay the foundation for children's communication and social skills, including self-regulation. These 'serve-and-return' interactions shape the brain's architecture. They also help educators and others 'tune it' to the infant and better respond to the infant's wants and needs. (NAEYC, 2024b, n.p.)

The grin is important, too, as a sign of the joy with which I take up the risk and responsibility, a joy essential to 'joyful, engaged learning' (NAEYC, 2024, n.p.), and in which I begin to approximate the goal of 'Nothing without Joy!' (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12).

Her call reveals when it matters that 'I am I' (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21.), which is the event of subjectivity central to the pedagogy of the event. Then it is I, principally, whose subjectivity is being received by her call. This is not the expectation. If it is the role of the teacher to prevent the interruption of the call, then *here is the call*, the call of what in an educational setting is *the call of the student*. This is what, in this moment, gives my subjectivity to me. Though the idea of 'teacher and student... positioned as co-subjects' (Friere 1972, p. 135 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 30) is addressed in *The Beautiful Risk*, it does not receive the treatment made explicit here in this reversal. Madeleine offers me the event of my subjectivity by her calling.

D1:12.02.1996

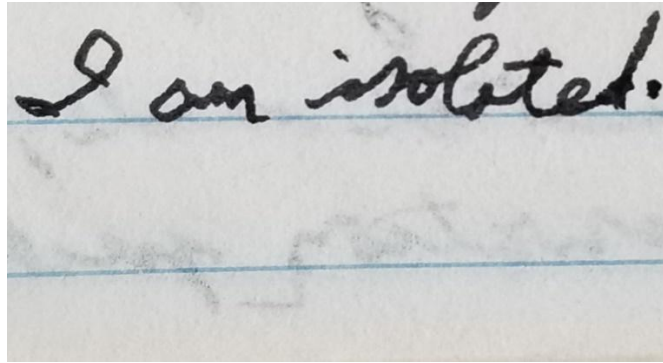
A photograph of a piece of lined paper with the handwritten sentence "I am isolated." written in black ink. The paper has two horizontal blue lines. The handwriting is cursive and somewhat slanted.

Figure 11. 'I am isolated' (D1:12.02.1996).

The image above, Figure 11, shows in my handwriting three words: 'I am isolated.' This is one of only two times in Period One when isolation is named. I cannot quote verbatim the text which precedes this statement due its naming of individuals not participant in this research. The context of the statement, however, was not gender. It was my career. In other words, it is a return of that motif of negotiating uniqueness and 'career patterns' (Holquist 2002, p. 134). There is no statement of gender anywhere within it, of being a man or even a breadwinner. It has more to do with expectations of me living up to my potential—one might even say the potential associated with my education. So, this experience, this statement that 'I am isolated' is not documented as an experience of gender—even if that may have played a role. Is gender something about which I was being silent? That seems doubtful, as the incident is recorded in some detail. Rather, this isolation is due to separation from the workplace and transition to new geography where I knew no one. Significantly, an experience of isolation like this undermines the sense of belonging said to be a necessary dimension for meaning-making in a place (Agnew, 2011).

The second occurrence of 'isolation' is in the form of a newspaper clipping inserted at the end of the first diary volume, as shown below in Figure 12. Again, it acknowledges that my new responsibility is not without risk. Indeed, the collection of this clipping suggests again that isolation was part of my experience, as the above entry shows. The clipping makes the claim, though, that 'good times spent with family... are a tonic', suggesting that the caregiving nature of my responsibility might disarm to some degree the potency of the risk without denying its existence. It suggests that any experience of isolation I might have had due to separation from my work in New York City might have been accompanied by an experience of being healed in my action as the primary caregiver to my children, restoring a sense of belonging and a capacity for making meaning in this place.



Figure 12. Health risk of being isolated—and the tonic of family (D1: Loose materials).

D1:13.02.1996

I have a 12-pound boss.

This brief passage is included here as a response to the claim that such a characterisation of aspects of being a stay-at-home dad

as a ‘job’ reflect men’s use of professionalization, of masculine discourse about men’s contribution to households. Such discourse masculinizes this part of carework. (Solomon 2017, p. 61.)

While she asserts this as an expression of masculinity, I would be more inclined to call my statement here an expression of my *responsibility*. Yes, it is cast in terms of employment, but I had had a career; responsibility to a boss was my paradigm and this my expression of it. Further, I was—here and elsewhere—occasionally told to ‘get a job’, as have other stay-at-home dads (Young v. Hector, 1999). So, it is also a response to that discourse: I *do* have a job. I do not see it as a gendered remark. Dialogism specifically addresses this framing of my responsibility again within the terms of career. In the dialogic event,

the simultaneity of self and other is a contested space, and as such is mediated by politics. In the specific case of life writing, politics will be present as a negotiation between an individual self’s attempt to convey as much of its uniqueness as possible in a narrative whose otherness is constituted by formulaic *career patterns*. (Holquist 2002, p. 134, emphasis mine.)

In other words, since I am writing of my life, it is to be expected that I would write of it in a context which includes my political situation expressed in terms of my career.

A further irony here, as I have noted earlier, is Solomon's use of 'carework' when the definition of a stay-at-home dad uses the word 'caregiver' (National At-Home Dad Network 2020). Stay-at-home dads, in other words, recognise the *gift*, which is inseparable from their care, in a way similar to the way it is inseparable from teaching, 'that teaching can be understood as a gift or as an act of gift giving' (Biesta 2013, p. 44).

D1:16.02.1996

No one questions the implicit goodness of learning Shakespeare and the whole corpus of 'literature.' Perhaps it is high time. None of it applies to me, to raising a child well.

My education suddenly seems to have no application. My context for considering the difficulties of my circumstance were not related to gender but to education. The framing of my position in this way, perhaps, anticipates the assertion that 'the educational "project" always needs to engage with its own impossibility' (Biesta 2013 p. 56). It certainly questions the purpose or telos of education.

D1:03.04.1996

Might seem strange how little I've written here about my little girl, but it just isn't here—it's elsewhere. I've written lots of notes to friends & acquaintances. In all of them I've tried to record the latest cute development. Her mom⁹ was given a "Mother's Journal" for recording the day-to-day. So I figure it's her job, not mine to usurp. I think it's especially important she get to do the recording—I think it makes her feel more involved in the day-to-day memories in which I get to partake more than my fair share.

Most days, the opportunity to even jot a quick note doesn't arise. For our first couple of weeks alone together, Madeleine appeared to have a schedule. Now she's less predictable. Some days I play with her all day. Other days, she'll sleep all afternoon. Sometimes I have too many chores to do and she'll sit and play quietly while I run around. Other days, she'll be calmed by nothing except a display of juggling—other days, she'll sit in my lap while I read to her for hours. There's no predicting...

In the first of these two paragraphs, the assignment of gender roles has a silencing effect. By the gift of a 'Mother's Journal,' the responsibility for documenting 'the latest cute development' and 'day-to-day memories' becomes 'her job.' Had I been my daughter's chronicler, it might have been a usurpation, a taking of 'more than my fair share.' In this gendered context, I explain the paucity of

⁹ This is a departure from my ethical restraint which, as a rule, acknowledges the choice made by my children's mother not to participate in this research and honours it by steering clear of depicting her in any way. In this instance, this entry reveals nothing *of her*, but only gender expectations regarding *her role* and mine. Because these expectations centre on diary-keeping, it seemed too important to omit.

diary entries. In the second paragraph, however, the recording, figuring and thinking of that first paragraph is quickly redirected back to Madeleine, as I turn my attention to her patterns and her playing and my efforts to calm her (with juggling!) and read to her. This suggests to me that while I was not unaware of the risks of my role from a gender perspective, the priority was always to return to the educational. The unpredictability which I stress in this paragraph is prerequisite for the Subjectivity identified as a goal of education:

Subjectivity is, in other words, not something we can have or possess, but something that can be realized, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter. (Biesta 2013, p. 12.)

So, in these two paragraphs, I expose and then subvert the gender requirement of a mother's journal to document in my diary my adaptation to an unfolding opportunity to sacrifice even the 'quick note' for maintaining that unpredictability necessary to the event of subjectivity.

This diary passage is also significant for its passing use of the word 'development,' which might suggest an awareness of developmental norms, though no further evidence is offered for a claim to such knowledge, suggesting perhaps the opposite: that there was little or no specialist knowledge of developmental norms aside from that associated with routine paediatric visits—and even my experience of those de-emphasised such norms (see D1:13.05.1996, below). Remarkable in the above passage, though, are the details which do correspond to developmental markers and the guidance to help children achieve them. For example, when I noted that 'Madeleine appeared to have a schedule,' it suggests a sensitivity to the 'developmentally appropriate behavior' of the child having 'a general routine of sleep/wake times,' (Infokids, 2024), but the twice-emphasized new unpredictability, aside from being a reminder of Biesta's 'always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter' (Biesta 2013, p. 12), also suggests the guidance that 'being responsive to your baby helps him learn and grow' (CDC, 2024a, p. 2) as well as this further advice:

Learn to notice and respond to your baby's signals to know what she's feeling and needs. You will feel good and your baby will feel safe and loved. (CDC, 2024a, p. 2.)

The claims that 'Some days I play with her all day' and 'she'll sit and play quietly' are most closely aligned with developmental guidance at ages 4 months (CDC, 2024a) while she is only 3 months old here. Her ability to be calmed by a display of juggling suggests the development of the problem solving skill of being able to follow 'large, highly contrasting objects' which is normal at 2 months (Zubler et al., 2022, p. 28). The evidence that she would 'sit in my lap while I read to her for hours' simultaneously follows the guidance to 'Talk, read, and sing to your baby to help her develop and

understand language' and the guidance to 'Spend time cuddling and holding your baby. This will help him feel safe and cared for' (CDC, 2024a, p. 2).

I mention in the above passage the letters which I wrote to others as a record of 'development.' I checked with my mother and was able, with her consent, to find and copy a few of these. The following paragraph from one of these letters corroborates that diary record and reveals the detail of my observations and the character of my relationship with Madeleine during this period.

LP:28.07.1996

Madeleine is showing considerable musical promise. She not only whistles and claps her hands and bangs my drums, she's already working on her embouchure. I'll be connecting her mouth to the tuba soon, I predict! We also play piano duets. When she takes the lead, I repeat the notes she plays (Lots of tone clusters) an octave higher or lower. When I lead, she just puts her hands on mine if she's in an obedient mood—if not, she pulls my hands away and takes over, or just adds a lot to whatever I'm playing!

Madeleine Responds (EM:27.03.2021)

I think my favorite parts were about music... it was such a playful description of me banging my hands on the piano and making farting sounds with my mouth! I guess it made meaning of some little actions that could easily be considered meaningless.

This event of sharing music resonates on many levels. First, it would be difficult to overstate the importance of music in the guidance on infant brain development. Parents are specifically advised to sing throughout every developmental stage up to 15 months (CDC, 2024a-f), while developmental screenings by the American Academy of Pediatrics look for a child's ability to attend to music at 7 months, and to bounce to music and vocalize to songs at 11 months (Zubler et al, 2022, pp. 28-29). At 12 months, a child should be encouraged to engage with musical instruments and be encouraged to 'make noise' (CDC, 2024e). Again, it was not through any specialist knowledge of child development that I was providing these experiences to my children. I had other motivations.

Second, this letter to my parents appears as a literal instance of the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) and hence a definitively educational moment. As such, it emphasises musical ability and language, in deference to my father's career as a professional musician. This can be seen as an educational judgment towards socialisation, which 'has to do with how we become part of existing orders' (Biesta 2013, p. 129). By describing Madeleine in such musical terms to my father, I am in effect saying, 'see, she belongs to the order of music as we do; she enters into our shared language and practice.' In this way, I might be said to be acting as an interlocutor, facilitating a first introduction to the intergenerational learning which will occur in the years ahead.

Third, I am impressed by the expression of Madeleine's and my participation at the piano as 'co-subjects' (Freire 1972, p. 135 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 30), in which our

'Being'... is not just an event but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always *co-being*.' (Holquist 2002, p. 25.)

This mutual participation also called to mind Biesta's discussion of communication in the educational event, during which 'all who take part have an interest in the activity and can contribute to decisions about its direction.' (Biesta 2013, pp. 33-4). And Madeleine's response to this diary passage, which emphasises the meaning-making which occurs between us, again took me back to Biesta.

For Dewey the meaning of the world is, after all, not located in the things and events themselves, but in the social practices in which things, gestures, sounds, and events play a role. We might therefore say that because meaning only exists *in* social practices, it is, in a sense, located *in-between* those who constitute the social practice through their interactions. (Biesta 2013, p. 31.)

This is an understanding of meaning-making 'that is radically open and undetermined, and hence weak and risky' (Biesta 2013, p. 26). It is also a judgment not unlike that which 'pronounces all things good (and) gives the world significance... a meaning' (Caputo 2006, p. 75 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16). It is a moment of subjectivity expressed in dialogism as 'the event of being a self' (Holquist 2002, p. 21) responsible for (and to) the unique and constantly changing place I occupy within it, doing the work of responding to all addressivity, all utterance, by ignoring or by making meaning (Holquist 2002, p. 47). It is in all these ways exemplary of how the home learning environment was already becoming for us a place of meaning-making.

[D1:19.04.1996](#)

I am quiet, more or less. My story. Who will hear my story?

This brief entry troubles the claim that this document is 'just a diary' (D1:10.04.1994). Instead, there is a story—my story, which might even be autobiographical—which might be heard. In any case, the naming of such a story suggests the possibility of a different purpose for the diary as a location for that story—or its refusal. As a story, it takes on a different meaning through wayfaring:

To tell a story, then, is to *relate*, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own. But rather as in looping or knitting, the thread being

spun now and the thread picked up from the past are both of the same yarn. There is no point at which the story ends and life begins. (Ingold 2007, p. 90.)

And this action looks back to my earlier citation of Lewis (1952, p. 22), 'Going back is the quickest way on,' to assert that 'Retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own' (Ingold 2007, p. 119).

However, I seem to have perceived a lack of audience for this story, and this has a quieting effect. Presumably, 'Sweet Jesus' still hears this 'prayer disguised and not disguised as prayer' (D1:18.09.1994) and Madeleine, who shared the addressivity of icicles (D1:13.01.1996), also remains. Neither one of these, though, needs the diary to hear my story. So, this entry excuses the infrequency of entries, but with a sense of longing for an audience which will become a recurring motif.

D1:13.05.1996

Adjectives I came up with to answer the doctor's question put to me a couple of months ago: "what kind of personality does Madeleine have?"

curious
communicative
confident
affectionate
gentle
happy!

This response to a paediatric addressivity does not require in-depth interpretation. I include it here as evidence of the paediatric care which was routine for my children and where we would have been offered developmental assessment and guidance. This response calls to mind guidance from the US Center for Disease control which is repeated at every developmental stage:

Important things to share with the doctor...

- What are some things you and your baby do together?
- What are some things your baby likes to do? (CDC, 2024a)

So, while the specific guidance and milestones at each stage accumulate, this general attentiveness recurs across all stages. It allows for the kinds of questions and answers I documented in this paediatric exchange, which fall outside of things which are measurable; instead, words begin to shape an understanding other than norms, something more like narrative. And Madeleine is ultimately 'happy'—a testament again to the joy necessary to education (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013; NAEYC, 2024).

D1:18.08.1996

Madeleine's room is adorned with a portrait of St. Anthony—one of the few male saints (St. Joseph is the only other which springs to mind) to be pictured with a child.

Although this again expresses an awareness of gender and my performance of gender as unusual, it asserts that this performance is not without precedent. Rather, it is again a socialisation, this time asserting a normative Christian identity, as a 'part of existing orders' (Biesta 2013, p. 129). I am not, in other words, performing some 'new, evolved masculinity' (Solomon 2017, p. 104). Furthermore, the image of this caregiving man is not for me, but for Madeleine's room. In that way, it is for both of us, a model for both of us to learn from, an example of 'studying the virtuosity of others is that you focus on those who exemplify the very thing you aspire to' (Biesta 2013, p. 136).

D1:19.08.1996

I have been reading the Catechism and, just now, a randomly selected passage from The Selected (sic) Works of St. John of the Cross. I am so inarticulate! I keep saying to myself, as I read, "that is so cool!" and "cool!" and "that is cool!" and "cool!" again. I want to comment more fully on what I've read, but Madeleine has already been asleep for almost an hour and a half (it is 9:51 am) and I'm sure she'll be waking too soon for me to write much now. So, hopefully, later...

This diary entry continues the Christian theme as a pattern of study—its history, apologetics, and now, in this passage, its catechism and mysticism. The catechism teaches that parents 'educate their children to fulfil God's law' (CCC 2222), that 'Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children' and 'the home is well suited for education' (CCC 2223). Furthermore, 'Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years' (CCC 2226) and 'Children in turn contribute to the growth in holiness of their parents' (CCC 2227). Perhaps these were the passages which I found 'cool' in that they, like the portrait of St. Anthony, offered further socialisation for my role.

The 'randomly selected passage' from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (John of the Cross, Saint, 1991) certainly led to a fascination with two of his poems, 'The Dark Night' (pp. 50-52) and 'Stanzas concerning an ecstasy experienced in high contemplation' (pp. 53-54). (See Appendix 12 for the full text of these poems.) Contemporaneous photocopies of these poems offer evidence that I set both of them to music, rendering them as songs for me to sing. In fact, it is easy for me to call their melodies to mind, and I cannot read the words without hearing the tunes in my head. I was, soon after this diary entry, singing these poems. They include lyrics such as these below, from the final verse of 'The Dark Night', presenting a self-sacrificing love which through an ecstatic transcendence attains to being carefree:

I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself
leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies. (John of the Cross, Saint 1991, p. 52.)

The first line here, I dare say, might inform the theorization of study as love which we use here, as it 'has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another' (Wilson 2020, p. 31). The second of these poems, then, argues that just such an experience makes for the ultimate form of education, a mystical and transcendent instruction, as shown in its fourth stanza.

He who truly arrives there
cuts free from himself;
all that he knew before
now seems worthless,
and his knowledge so soars
that he is left in unknowing
transcending all knowledge. (John of the Cross, Saint 1991, p. 54.)

He describes this knowledge as 'perfect' and yet 'without understanding', occurring 'in profound solitude' and with the possibility of self-mastery leading to a state in which one might '*always be transcending*' (here and above, emphasis as in original). More immediately important, though, than the study of these texts and what they promise, is the responsibility which I express in the moment of that record to be ready for Madeleine's waking. She was, after all, not yet 8 months old. I anticipated that 'she'll be waking too soon for me to write much now. So, hopefully, later...' This current project might be said to take up that hope, that the 'later' I hoped for is now.

D1:04.12.1996

Madeleine, I hope you are not forever chasing in books the irreplaceable human comfort we've shared while reading together.

And here I make the claim of my irreplaceability, a condition of the responsibility which is 'the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity' (Biesta 2013, p. 20):

Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse. This charge is a supreme dignity of the unique. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

So, it is Madeleine, again, who offers me this sense of irreplaceability. She is offering me my subjectivity. At the same time, I am paradoxically hoping that she will continue to share future experiences of such uniqueness, implying that whatever learning she might be gaining from reading together, the *together* is as important as the reading. It anticipates an understanding that

The point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn *something*, that they learn this for particular *purposes*, and that they learn this from *someone*. (Biesta 2012, p. 36.)

It is this relational aspect of education being emphasised in my hope, even if it is not a hope specifically for education. It is a hope for the primacy of relation, and, despite all of our talk of risk, here it is instead a comfort—a feeling which does not receive expression in the pedagogy of the event, or dialogism, or wayfaring, as if comfort were itself a risk.

Comfort, or something like it, does receive expression in theories of place, though. At the most basic level, there is a resemblance here to the idea that ‘Place is security’ (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). However, greater richness arises from understandings of a place as a location for the self in its ‘life path,’ including expressions of childhood and adulthood as we see here, but as I experience and document this meaning for me, I also express a meaning which extends from myself along a relational access to the Other, whose meaning-making I also imagine and which is possible in part because of the relationships forged there, including the ways in which I imagine our mutual recognition in comfort and irreplaceability (Gustafson, 2001). This can also be seen in the context of the developmental domain of social-emotional development (NAEYC, 2024a), as I assert here the importance of relationship in learning.

D1:05.12.1996

To steady yourself,
hand on the bed corner,
hand extended like
Babe Ruth’s home run called.

Launch and
three, four, five, six,
eight steps later land
nose to your father’s heart

Embrace, embraced!
Yays, applause, “good girl!”
Release, in laughter, brief glance,
your fistful of sweatshirt,
turtleneck, teeshirt, lunge
now for your mother’s¹⁰ heart.

¹⁰ This is my second and final departure from my ethical stance of not discussing those members of the family who do not participate in this research. While this again reveals nothing personal of my children’s mother, it does take the risk to invoke her own irreplaceability in the dialogue.

Hard not to wonder how perfect an enterprise
those first few steps are, how
twelve days short of a year...
all that carrying
becomes a space between that steadier object and myself.
What a mystery! No arms, no furniture, just
balance, speed, strength,
dozens of muscle groups
holding the head up, extending the arms, pushing
up, forward, toward

safety, praise, embrace,
the thickness of layered cotton,
the beating heart,
the sounds of joy.

This is at its basest level documentation of Madeleine's first steps, a developmental milestone of the physical domain (NAEYC, 2024a) variously anticipated at ages 8-12 months (Advokids, 2024), 12 and 13 months (Zubler et al., 2022), and 12-15 months (CDC, 2024e-f). It is worth noting that none of these guides to developmental stages offer parental guidance specific to this skill as they do repeatedly for language skills.

Here, too, we see again evidence of 'place is security' in the 'safety' named here; but at the same time, we see 'space is freedom' evoked here, too, in the naming of space: 'all that carrying / becomes a space between that steadier object and myself,' as Madeleine steps into the freedom of no longer needing all that carrying that I have given her from birth, but still it is 'a space between' and thus a liminal space, and one in which she finds her own place on an axis between the poles of self and the environmental affordance of 'that steadier object' and the relational axis between herself and the reliable presence of an Other: myself (Gustafson, 2001).

Madeleine's first steps, as they are documented here, however, might also be an exemplary event of subjectification. Her steps embody the risky, weak and unpredictable nature of such an event, while all my interest is on her 'coming into the world', not on what one ought to become, but on who comes (Biesta 2013, p. 143) with her own 'uniqueness-as-irreplaceability' (Biesta 2013, p. 144), while my role is in 'affirming its goodness' (Biesta 2013, p. 17)—'good girl!'—making a judgment that this learning is, to say the least, desirable.

It is also exemplary in expressing the liminality of such an event, as it occurs in 'a space between that steadier object and myself,' and between 'your father's heart' and 'your mother's heart.' that

meaning only exists *in* social practices, it is, in a sense, located *in-between* those who constitute the social practice through their interactions. (Biesta 2013, p. 31.)

Madeleine becomes an embodiment of the dialogic event of an utterance, her steps the utterance, which can be understood in similar terms:

It is this fated in-between-ness of all utterance which ensures that communication can take place only in society...’ (p. 60)

And furthermore,

dialogue always implies the simultaneous existence of manifold possibilities, a smaller number of values, and the need for choice. At all the possible levels of conflict between stasis and change, there is always a situated subject whose specific place is defined precisely by its inbetween-ness. (Holquist 2002, p. 181.)

It is also an event understandable in terms of wayfaring, in which ‘one follows a path that one has previously travelled in the company of others, or in their footsteps’ (Ingold 2007, p. 15). Here, ‘those few steps’ are what ‘all that carrying / becomes’ and are the first words, if you will, the first utterance, which will become her life story, the sum of her trails (Ingold 2007, p. 100).

For me, too, this is an educational event, not only because I am an irreplaceable I within it, but because it is an occasion of study. This is expressed in the utterance of the poem itself, which, as discussed above, is an exemplary form of loving and creation (Wilson 2020, p. 37). I am making a study, not only of Madeleine, but of this event of her subjectification. One might say that even as she ‘lands / nose to your father’s heart’, so ‘at the heart of study is love’ (Wilson 2020, p. 31).

[D1:11.03.1997](#)

St. Dominic and His Times, M.-H. Vicaire

(p. 182) ‘...loyalty and responsiveness to the promptings of the hierarchy, his keen sense of the needs of the Church, his farsightedness in the presence of men and events, all very characteristic of him.’

(p. 227) ‘One of the characteristics of his temperament that most drew men to him was this gentle confidence which turned him toward the young with their pure hearts and spontaneous generosity. He attracted them without imposing himself in any way, but sharing with them the very high ideal by which he was living himself.’

(p. 234) “‘Leave me alone; I know what I am doing.’”

(p. 235) ‘One has the right to be weak, but not faint-hearted when it is a matter of saving souls.’

(p. 261) ‘To live a godly life, to learn and to teach,’ such was to be for Jordan of Saxony, St. Dominic’s successor, the rule of the Preachers.’

(p. 266) ‘...to be a worthy emulator of the apostles of Christ, to announce the Gospel by example as much as by words, it is necessary to be heroic.’

(p. 280) Pope Honorius, Dec. 1216, re Dominicans: ‘unconquered athletes of Christ.’

These curious instructions, aphorisms, and hagiographic descriptions come from a return to the diary’s purpose of study, of notetaking from another Christian text. They are drawn from an account of the life of St. Dominic (1170 – 1221) and the foundations of the Dominicans, or the Order of Preachers (Vicaire, 1964). There is no interpretation in the diary of what these meant to me at the time.

From a present perspective, however, I might return to the literature on stay-at-home dads and see here first a kind of idealised masculinity in the claims that ‘it is necessary to be heroic’ (Vicaire 1964, p. 266), presumably like these ‘unconquered athletes’ (Vicaire 1964, p. 280). At the same time, this ‘gentle’ and ‘very high ideal’ (Vicaire 1964, p. 227) has ‘the right to be weak’ (Vicaire 1964, p. 235) and ‘turned toward the young... sharing with them’ (Vicaire 1964, p. 227). This might correspond to claims that stay-at-home dads negotiate their masculinity between *enactment* of and *resistance* to socially imposed gender ideals (Medved, 2016; Snitker, 2018), or of an ‘evolved masculinity’, a kind of identity-making which fuses traditionally feminine traits like caregiving with aspects of hegemonic masculinity ‘to create an ideal that makes sense for their everyday lives and choices’ (Solomon 207, p. 104). As with the representation of St. Anthony above (D1:18.08.1996), an idealised masculinity with a precedent 800 years old does not seem to qualify as a ‘new masculinity’ (Lee and Lee, 2018).

Of greater interest to me, from an educational perspective, is the fifth of these seven statements, that ‘To live a godly life, to learn and to teach’ is *the rule*. This places the educational project at the heart of these ideals. As a rule, it locates a source of authority.

The educational question, in other words, is about what it is that we want to give authority to; it is about deciding what it is that we want to have authority in our lives. (Biesta 2013, p. 55.)

While ‘the hierarchy’ and ‘the needs of the church’ here might appear repulsive to some, the ‘loyalty and responsiveness’ and ‘keen sense of... needs’ denote again an awareness of a kind of responsibility. It comes with a judgement of what constitutes a good or ‘godly life’, perhaps

capturing the insight that education is always framed by purposes and thus ideas about what good or desirable education is. (Biesta 2013, p. 119-120).

There is confidence, then, to transcribe ‘Leave me alone. I know what I’m doing’ (Vicaire 1964, p. 234). And yet, at the same time, a different kind of confidence can assert that ‘one has the right to

be weak' (Vicaire 1964, p. 235). It is almost as if I knew that being alone was not isolation, but something else, and that in order to be heroic, 'the weakness of education matters' (Biesta 2013, p. 24).

D1:12.05.1997

from your sleeping hand
I stole an apple blossom:
warm from your hand,
sweetened by your hand

Madeleine Responds (EM:24.03.2021)

Your poem was an epiphany to me the first time I read it (I think in May 2020). In sharing snippets of your joyful diary entries after my arrival, you slowly helped me see how loved and wanted I always was; this poem in particular revealed that... I have struggled with the feeling that the difficulties you have faced since then have been majorly exacerbated by your decision to care for me and my siblings for so many years. I think the fact that I am the oldest makes me feel particularly responsible, since I was the one you actually gave up your job for... Seeing these snippets of joy has helped me heal from those feelings. (Madeleine, EM:24.03.2021)

Madeleine's interpretation of those four lines cannot be surpassed by any theory.

D1:16.09.1997

And now, a day shy of 21 months, you have sentences. Were I more faithful in my recording of your progress, you too might someday marvel at the emergence of words, the joining of adjectives, verbs... Typical examples:

Dada up boden down boden (Make the hobby horse bounce)
Pink doll up boden down boden (Dolly wants to ride the pony)
Want boden duck (Let's go to the playground.)
No climb! (Sounds like "no da-lamb")
Close door! (sounds like "da-lot door")
Bloppity blue doll. (I dropped the blue doll.)

This is, perhaps, an excellent example of how little attuned I was to developmental norms. All I say here is, 'you have sentences,' and I proceed to document them. On this date, I write down 59 sentences. Three days later, there are 4 more; another 9 days adds 26 more sentences; another 9 days adds 28 more; and after 2 more days, I add 3 more before ending the list. So, before she is 22 months old, I have documented her uttering some 120 sentences. Granted, some of these are one-word exclamations or can't technically be called sentences as they lack formal sentence structure. Norms at 2 years, however, look for the ability to say 'at least two words together, like "more milk" (CDC, 2024h), or the ability to use a 'two-word sentence (noun + verb)' and '50+ words.' There is in my documentation no indication that I have any sense of 120 sentences being extraordinary.

When Madeleine was 18 months old (D1:22.05.1997), I had similarly documented a list of 67 words (see Appendix 3), which exceeds developmental expectations for that age. Norms for language ability vary. One suggests that an 18-month-old ‘says “dada” and “mama” and uses exclamations’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 2); another expects ‘three or more words besides “mama” or “dada”’ (CDC, 2024g, p. 1), while another expects that a child of this age ‘uses 10 to 25 words’ (Zubler et al., 2022, p. 30). Years later (D2:10.02.1999), Max also got his turn with similar documentation, a list of his 45 words at 15 months (see Appendix 5), when developmental norms would be ‘uses three words’ (Zubler et al., 2022, p. 30), or ‘tries to say one or two words besides “mama” or “dada”’ (CDC, 2024g). By any of these standards, their vocabulary at these ages were extraordinary.

Whether I had no knowledge of developmental norms or simply chose not to benchmark my children against them, there was apparently something which mattered more to me in the documentation of these words and phrases. The evidence would suggest that what mattered to me—even though I did not have the words to describe it—was this ‘serve and return’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2024) of the children responding to their environment and I, in turn, responding to them. The focus of this interest is further demonstrated in the fact that the diary does not document ‘techniques’ for attaining these ‘results;’ there is no list of educational toys or books; it is instead demonstrated as a dialogic process of careful listening and documentation with joy.

This is revealed in the way that this entry marks something of a departure in its direct address to Madeleine: ‘you have sentences.’ While I also address her above in my hopes for her future reading (D1:04.12.1996), here it feels like her acquisition of language has made greater my responsibility to direct dialogically my written utterance here as a response to her spoken ones. Despite this, she is not a direct addressee, or she would not have read the poem above (D1:12.05.1997) for the first time in 2020. Rather, like my earlier address to ‘sweet Jesus,’ (D1:18.09.1994), she is a ‘super-addressee’:

At the heart of any dialogue is the conviction that what is exchanged has meaning. Poets who feel misunderstood in their lifetimes, martyrs for lost political causes, quite ordinary people caught in lives of quiet desperation—all have been correct to hope that outside the tyranny of the present there is a possible addressee who will understand them. This version of the significant other, “super-addressee,” is conceived in different ways at different times and by different persons: as God, as the future triumph of my version of the state, as a future reader. (Holquist 2002, p. 38.)

Whether Jesus or Madeleine, then, either one cast as the super-addressee for my diary writing becomes essential to the project of my meaning-making in it. For when studying a document, it is

‘important to discover... how it was received’ (McCulloch 2007, p. 6). While we cannot presumably discover how Jesus receives my diary—even in the patient regard of the icon (D1: Frontispiece) as it has faced all these years the diary’s first entry (D1: 10.04.1994)—we can know how Madeleine has received it and thereby judge its reliability and how well it may have fulfilled its purposes.

Like the poem about her first steps, this is a study of her learning. Dialogism offers an interpretation for what is happening here.

Language is the means by which parents organize their thoughts about the world, and when they teach their children to talk they pass on such organizational patterns: the process normally described as “learning to talk” is really learning to *think*. (Holquist 2002, p. 80.)

Further clarification is then offered, claiming that this ‘passing on’ is not ‘a direct relay’, but ‘a complex act of *translation*’ (Holquist 2002, p. 82, emphasis in original). Madeleine uses similar language to describe what she sees happening here.

Madeleine Responds (EM:24.03.2021)

There were some passages of the diary that I simply found funny. I enjoyed the anecdotes of my Big Dog Puff song on 1/30 and 2/15/98. Evidently I really had dogs and puffs on my mind for a long time. I thought the song was funny, too, because there were some words in there that I doubt I knew at 2 years old, like "intestine," "college," "salary" and "dimples". It seems like I was sometimes using words and sometimes using sounds that you translated into the nearest words -- an interesting collaboration.

This interpretation of these events as translation transcends the developmental guidance to ‘have conversations with your baby acting as if you understand each other’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 1). The list above shows how the understanding is no longer a matter of acting, but has become a translation of sounds made by Madeleine into the meanings I take up from them and the words which Madeleine has approximated and I can write down:

Dada up boden down boden (Make the hobby horse bounce).

In others, the translation is so present to my understanding that the sounds she has made are documented only as an afterthought:

No climb! (Sounds like ‘no da-lamb’).

These translations, one might say, are weak. They take up her meanings as they arrive, not to impose on them corrections, but to place side by side the utterance and my interpretation of it. This is compatible with a pedagogy of the event which

expresses an interest in who comes into presence rather than... define what ought to come, or is allowed to come into presence... not what the child is to become, but by articulating an interest in that which announces in itself as a new beginning, a newness, a natality. (Biesta 2013, p. 143.)

Our interactions here also are compatible with a dialogism which sees children as living in a world of restricted words and actions, and that

Education is a process of overcoming both of these restrictions in the child through active intervention by adults who make a 'loan of consciousness' from their 'monopoly of foresight.' (Holquist 2002, p. 82.)

This is, in other words, considered within dialogism to be a 'pedagogical activity' through which parents teach their children:

Dialogism sees the gap between higher and lower levels of consciousness as a zone of proximal development, a distance that may be traversed (at least partially) *through the pedagogical activity of the parts in a dialogic simultaneity relating to each other in time.* (Holquist 2002, p. 83, emphasis in original.)

There is occurring here between us, in her utterances and my responsive translations, a realization of Madeleine's subjectivity in these 'always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter' (Biesta 2013, p. 12). This designation of it as a pedagogical activity helps to see it more clearly as an instance of the pedagogy of the event.

Additions to this list (also included Appendix 4) were added on 19 and 28 September and on 7 and 9 October 1997. The sentences from 7 October, of which I share a portion below, read almost like a poem in the same sense which we have already seen poems, in the love of their study.

D1:07.10.1997

Dada proud of Madeleine. Madeleine proud of Dada.
Dada drinking hot tea again.
Baby bottle cap.
Little brown cat looking at Madeleine.
Icky cat food.
Stars hide in the rain.
Dada find the big bright star.
Stars out at night. Hey you, star!
Stars gone inna day.
Madeleine loves Madeleine.
Big star loves Madeleine.
Little stars loves Madeleine.
Play put away the numbers.

Play put away the letters.
Madeleine's reading red.
Put away the crayons.
Color.
Drawing red cat.

This last phrase might be a reference to what eventually became the work at Figure 13, below. Madeleine drew with her crayons and said it was 'cat and star.' I 'translated' her drawing into knotted yarn so she could keep this image she had made as a rug by her bed.



Figure 13. Cat and Star, by Madeleine and Tom (1997), photograph by Madeleine Troppe (2019).

The line she draws here is exemplary of wayfaring. It 'goes out for a walk' (Klee 1961, p. 105 cited by Ingold, p. 73). And in recreating it, my eyes and then my hand followed the same path as did the hand which first drew it. As such, this represents a departure from the educational view of dialogism, in which the adult has a 'monopoly of foresight' (Holquist 2002, p. 82). It is her foresight which takes the line out for a walk, and her 'loan of consciousness' (Holquist 2002, p. 82) which affords me the opportunity to thus take up her utterance with my own response. It is an occasion of listening for 'the hundred languages' of children (Edwards et al, 1998) and recognizing in her utterance that she, in this event, is the expert (Clark and Statham, 2005). My translation, in other words, is not a superiority, but a difference of the sort proper to dialogism:

What gives dialogue its central place in dialogism is precisely the kind of *relation* conversations manifest, the conditions that must be met if any exchange between speakers is to occur at all. That relation is most economically defined as one in which differences—while still remaining different—serve as the building blocks of simultaneity. (Holquist 2002, p. 40.)

This is exemplary of the Being which ‘is not just an event but an event that is shared. Being is a simultaneity; it is always *co-being*.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 25.)

Two last entries close this section on the Early Years. Both of them are from notes taken at a three-day retreat at my local Roman Catholic Church. A visiting priest, Simeon Gallagher, OFM Cap¹¹, preached. I noted, among other things, the following:

D1:19.10.1998

There's nothing in God's plan to suggest the possibility of a ‘healthy loner’ (Gallagher, 1998).

D1:20.10.1998

Little Prince: ‘every encounter creates an eternal responsibility’ (Gallagher, 1998).

The first of these, again, addresses the possibility of the Isolation Discourse as informing my understanding of being the primary caregiver to my children. I read this note as a rejection of or resistance against such an understanding of my experience in attempt to better align my understanding with ‘God’s plan.’ The second, then, might even be considered the way to this understanding. Rooted in a reference to *The Little Prince*—‘You become responsible forever for what you’ve tamed’ (St. Exupery 1943, p. 64)—Gallagher’s insistence on eternal responsibility and my responsive documentation of it anticipate what I would later learn, when Biesta considers from many perspectives the importance of responsibility and education and arrives at

The question of *subjectivity*, that is, the question of how we can be or become a subject of action and responsibility. For me that is the educational question. (Biesta 2013, p. 142.)

And, furthermore, that in these educational processes, ‘we are irreplaceable in our responsibility’ (Biesta 2013, p. 144).

Two days later, I made the last entry in this volume which had served me for more than four years. Still, only about 80 pages had been written. Less than a month later, Max was born.

¹¹ Order of Friars Minor, Capuchin. In other words, Fr. Simeon is a Capuchin Franciscan priest. As of this writing, he is still actively preaching. A recent example of his work can be found here: <https://youtu.be/ELeRYPY9LvU>.

Arc 2 Insights

I have interpreted, with the help of my participant children, these 18 events across almost 3 years. Along the way, we go from icicles to Eternal Responsibility. In them we see repeatedly the importance of listening and love, as well as confrontations with solitude and isolation. These confrontations reveal limits to my sense of belonging in this new environment, but my relationships with my children and my learning (in the context of church, especially) indicate the work that I was doing to establish the home learning environment as a place of meaning making. There is evidence here that I am finding and situating my uniqueness in education—in ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972), in educational role models from Christianity, and in co-creation. This arc contains the mitzvah of healing, as claimed by Madeleine, certainly a ‘research impact’ that I had not planned for, so it is a surprise which I might claim as evidence for research’s rigor (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). Evidence for educational wisdom again shows a preference for the event of subjectivity, though instances of socialization occurs for the first time here in the language and sharing of music and in the ways my role finds meaning within the social establishments of the Catholic Church. There is a suggestion of first qualification in writing playfully of her ‘considerable musical promise.’

Arc 2 contributes to an audience interested in methods by demonstrating a flexibility to reach outside of the diary for corroborating and expansive evidence in the letters written to my parents. Also, there is continuing evidence here for the benefit of co-creating this research with my children, as Madeleine’s responses corroborate documented events and again offer surprising interpretations. As the diary begins to reveal my experiences as a stay-at-home dad, it offers both practical and philosophical educational contributions. At the most fundamental, developmental level, I am present to my children, offering them a reliable adult presence in which to ground the relational aspect of learning necessary to learning and starting the decades-long process of co-creating a home learning environment with a sense of belonging and ripe for meaning making. From the beginning, there is evidence of listening and documentation, which are in themselves an expression of the serve and return interactions necessary for brain development, and are perhaps most evident here in a demonstrated fascination for language development. More philosophically, the diary shows an abiding preference for subjectification, but with increased evidence that I was offering subjectification—especially in an intergenerational context—and first thoughts of qualification as well. For stay-at-home dads, this arc contributes an acknowledgement of the isolation discourse and its experiential legitimacy in my own life, while overwhelming that discourse

with evidence for greater meanings to be found in experiences of responsibility and education. As in Arc 1, Arc 2 offers to my participant children an unexpected benefit of healing.

5.2.3 Arc 3: School begins (1999-2005)

With Max's birth, I chose a much smaller diary, one that would fit in a pocket. Still, I used it very little. The few events I documented were further examples of language development, which do not bear repeating here, even though I enjoy reading them for their playfulness and sense of discovery. I also wrote about school.

D2:30.09.1999

Lots of firsts today:

Madeleine's 1st day to school without breakfast; (largely due to)

1st time to wake up Madeleine for school;

Madeleine's 1st "snack day" (rainbow vanilla wafers & dinosaur yogurt)

1st parent-teacher "conference" (I asked the teacher to call, just so we could see how Madeleine was doing. "She could teach the class," she said. "I don't need to tell you that she's very intelligent.")

1st trip to the dump (throwing away old toilets and sinks—"BOOM!");

1st time Max took both his naps in the car;

1st appearance of Max's fifth tooth.

Max points.

This diary entry is presented as a list of 'firsts.' None of the events listed here, though, corresponds to any developmental milestone in the standard charts of norms and expectations. On the contrary, the first item on the list documents something of a failure on my part: sending my daughter off to school without breakfast. So, what is happening here? The events listed here can be contextualized as defining our home learning environment as a place for meaning-making. Drawing on Agnew's (2011) conceptions of place, we can see how these firsts shape the place as a 'locale,' 'where everyday activities take place' (Agnew, 2011), then show this place in relation to a network of other places (school and dump), and reveal it again as at least partially defined by our mobility, as evidenced by Max's naps in the car. There is also evidence of Gustafson's (2001) understandings of place here, in the sharing of food at 'snack day' and the carefully documented words of the teacher, evidence of relational meaning-making, in which community is fostered and mutual recognition is conferred. There is also, in the fundamental character of these events' documentation as 'firsts, evidence of the place characteristic of change (Gustafson, 2001). So, there is abundant substance in this entry for meaning-making. The entry suggests finding meaning in the home learning environment and in the way that place of meaning-making is being transformed by new networks, most especially through our involvement with Madeleine's new school, where I am showing interest

in the cognitive development domain (NAEYC, 2024a) by inquiring about her school performance. Madeleine is only 3 years old at this point, remember, so we are well ahead of the developmental guidance for parents of children 6 to 8 years old:

Get involved with your child’s school. Meet the teachers and staff and get to understand their learning goals and how you and the school can work together to help your child do well. (CDC, 2024o, p. 2.)

This is such a key developmental guidance at that age that it is ‘cause for concern’ if a parent ‘is not involved with school or with other parents of children of the same age’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 4). So this first evidence of real involvement with school is an opportunity to reflect on how damaging the Discourse of Isolation is, as its reportage of isolation and marginalization—especially in school environments (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019)—would deny such involvement and networking, disabling stay-at-home dads from practicing their role in a way that is not medically constructed as ‘cause for concern’ and minimizing the capacity for meaning-making in the home learning environment. So, it matters that I do not document my experiences of her school as gendered or as marginalized.

With few diary entries intervening, eight months later I also documented the last day of school.

D2:01.06.2000

What a day! Madeleine’s last day of her first year of school: the first day of her first summer vacation! Went home from school to see all of Madeleine’s schoolwork, play with her new watercolor pencils, and eat a quick snack before noon Mass (the Ascension). Home for lunch, then to the Marina (Where the Ducks Live!). Then DQ where it took them an hour to savor their baby size ice creams, then to the mall. Madeleine got her first bike: Pacific Meteorite, all chrome, very shiny. Madeleine was very excited. She said, “thank you, daddy, for my new bike” and “this bike is my favorite. I want to ride it for a lot of days.” ...Madeleine was riding it on the back porch and repeated... everything I’d told her about how to ride it: pedal backwards to stop, walk it if you need to back it up... After dinner, we all went for a “bike ride”, i.e. Max rode in the red wagon and Madeleine rode her new bike. She did great—rode all the way to the Boden Duck & back (after a break on the swings, etc.).

This entry charms me. Beyond its raw enthusiasm for the end of the school year—and the start of new learning—it cannot document the day without incorporating the language that I have learned from Madeleine. The Marina is now properly called Where the Ducks Live (which was *sung*) and the playground, as noted above (D1:16.09.1997), is still the Boden Duck. And I quote her beautiful sentences, the incorporation of my name, ‘daddy’ in them, a vocation.

Now that I have made a study of stay-at-home dads, it also reminds me of this:

Joseph, a Belgian father of four children said: 'I teach the boys how to ride a bike, how to swim, I've always done that and I think that it's a man's role. That's the role of the father.'
(Doucet & Merla, 2007, p. 467.)

Teaching is 'the role of the father.'

As a norm of healthy child development, specifically of the physical domain (NAEYC, 2024a), it is recommended to parents to 'teach your child... how to be safe... riding a bike' during middle childhood (6-8 years of age) (CDC, 2024o, p. 2). Madeleine was at the time of this entry four-and-a-half years old. We can also contextualize this event as one in which home, school, church, and playground are networked as places of meaning-making (Agnew, 2011).

Apparently, the responsibilities suggested by this documented event began to be prioritized over documentation itself. Diary entries become infrequent and lose the date which would identify the document as a diary. Into this silence, Max comes wayfaring with a pen (Figure 14, below).

D2:n.d.2000

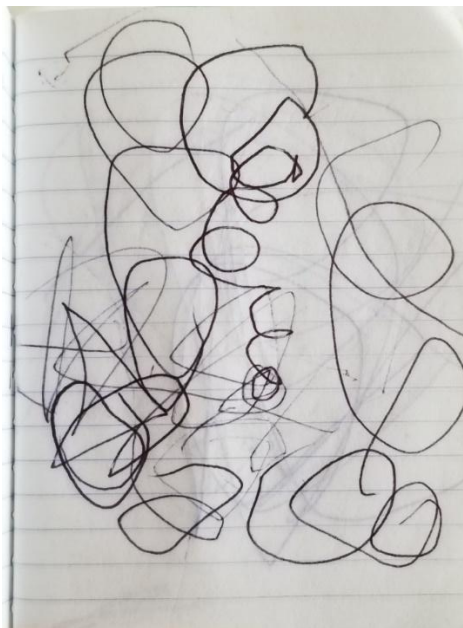


Figure 14. Marks most likely made by Max (2000).

This is, at a first level, a scribble. Naming it thus seems almost pejorative, but much of made of scribbles as a developmental expectation. There are normative scribbles described by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Zubler et al., 2022, pp. 28-32) at 12 months ('scribbles after demonstration'), 14 months ('imitates back and forth scribble'), 16 months ('scribbles spontaneously'), and 22 months

('imitates vertical line, circular scribble'), while the Centers for Disease Control prescribe a developmental screening at 18 months which includes a movement/physical development milestone of 'scribbles' (CDC, 2024g). This entry is undated, so Max's age at the time of this 'scribble' cannot be precisely known; however, surrounding dates suggest that he drew it when he was about 18 months old, contextualizing this as a 'normal' development. Parental guidance around these developments curiously lags behind expectations: parents should offer simple art projects involving crayons at the age of 2 years; and at 30 months there is again a suggestion to 'let your child "draw" with crayons on paper' (CDC, 2024i, p. 2). Though he used a pen here instead of a crayon, against these norms, my diary offered Max an advance affordance for these scribbling skills.

Beyond its contextualization as a developmentally appropriate scribble, I see more meaning here. Like Madeleine's *Cat and Star* (Figure 13), this is a line that goes out for a walk, is free (Ingold 2007, p. 73). Unlike Madeleine's *Cat and Star*, however, this is not a drawing. 'Children do not draw, they indicate, and the pencil merely fixes the indicatory gesture' (Vygotsky 1978, p. 108, cited by Ingold 2007, p. 121). The turning point at which drawing becomes possible, apparently, is when the indicated thing can be named, recognized by the child as a representation, a sign, a *Cat and Star*. So, this is not a drawing, but it is still a line, an indication of the movement of his hand.

The wayfarer is continually on the move. More strictly, he is his movement... The wayfarer is instantiated in the world as a line of travel. (Ingold 2007, pp. 75-76.)

This line is, in dialogic terms, an utterance of Max's responsibility, of his temporal, spatial and axiological situation in the world. It is a sign and event of his subjectivity. If we agree that the life of a person is 'the sum of his trails,' then this mark is a life history. If we study life history to know the virtuosity of the other (Biesta 2013, p. 136), we can see here and admire his freedom. And then what? 'Retracing the lines of past lives is the way we proceed along our own' (Ingold 2007, p. 119). So, as I learn and incorporate Madeleine's language into my writing, there is an opportunity here to learn and incorporate freedom from my study of Max's wayfaring.

D2:13.07.2000

Madeleine's first canoe ride. Damsel flies and dragonflies, their differences learned.

Here is another example of the home learning environment as a place of meaning-making. As above (D2:30.09.1999), this is documentation of change in a place of learning networked with the home (Agnew, 2011). It also demonstrates an understanding of place along the self-environment axis (Gustafson, 2001). So, what is the meaning which emerges in this place?

The above entry, brief as it is, raises an educational concept within dialogism. ‘Family culture is... every child’s first culture’ (Holquist 2002, p. 82). Within it,

the tutoring is not intentionally directed in any trivial sense toward specific goals, beyond that of teaching the world’s difference and diversity. (Holquist 2002, p. 83).

There is no goal here—developmental or otherwise—just the difference between damselflies and dragonflies.

Gus was born shortly after this event. Diary volumes 2 and 3 continued to have dated entries, but rarely. So, I skip ahead four years now, to the first entry in a new volume.

D4:26.04.2004

Here I am in the school parking lot. Monday afternoons Madeleine has her piano lessons, but they don’t start until 3:30, so five of us sit in the car for 45 minutes, then Madeleine is released and four of us sit here for another 30...

This afternoon I was looking at an old paperback I have about Modigliani. His nudes and portraits are in my head now, along with a friend’s testimony who said Modi loathed everyone except Picasso and Max Jacob. Jacob again! Just last week, I stumbled on a book about Picasso that took the time to mention that Pablo went to the circus every day with his friend Max Jacob. Jacob is a friend of mine in much the same manner Edith Stein is. This past lent, as things grew persistently bleak... I could not pray, but I could read Max Jacob’s poetry. So I wrote a little song for him, the first stirrings of creativity in months.

I am tense—can you tell?—self-conscious, I do not know if I can say anything resembling the truth, particularly on matters of importance, like Max Jacob.

Madeleine receives her First Holy Communion in 5 days. I helped her class learn a song—“We Come to Your Feast”—during a little cafeteria retreat this morning. I have some preparations to begin at home, particularly regarding feeding a dozen people three meals. I hope to include potica. I was distracted from any progress last week as I submitted work to, awaited word from, and was accepted to and visited the display of my first juried art show. Three of my portraits were shown.

This entry is reminiscent of the very first one (D1:10.04.1994). Just as when I worked at the New York Public Library, this is lively again with dialogic response. Along with the direct address to an unknown super-addressee (Holquist 2002, p. 38)—‘can you tell?’—it responds to a paperback about Modigliani, a book about Picasso, Max Jacob’s poetry, and the autobiography and phenomenology of Edith Stein. There is also a dialogue with a juried art show. Responses are varied, too: a little song, three portraits (one of which can be seen below, Figure 15, as corroboration of this claim), and potica—a Slovenian pastry my grandmother used to make, which reveals my growing interest in family history and my place in the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977).

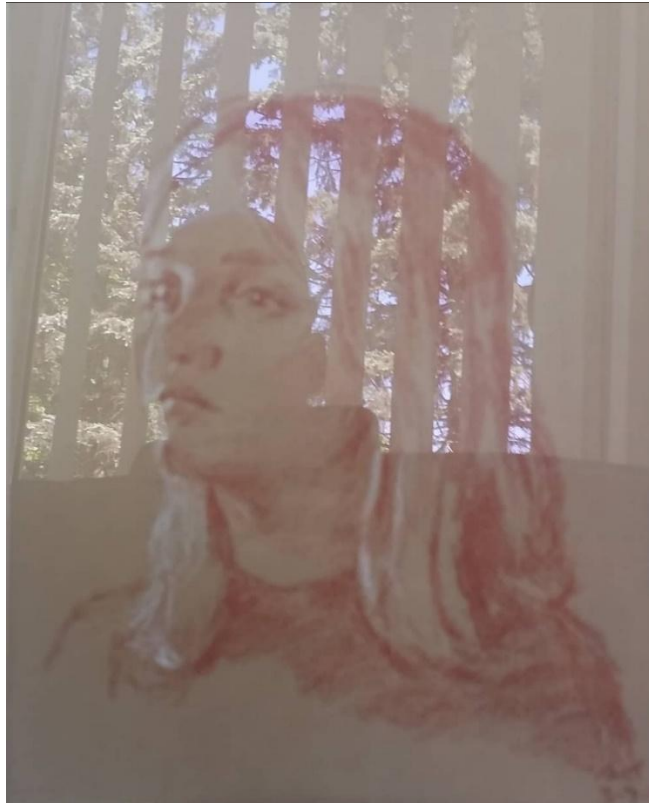


Figure 15. Portrait of a girl, drawn by the author, 2004; photographed by the author with autoportrait reflection, 2018).

We are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.’ (Holquist 2002, p. 30.)

I am alive and human in this event. And my situation from which I make this utterance, spatially, is the parking lot of my children’s school. Temporally, I am in between the school day and the piano lesson. This is not the way I would expect to see a schoolyard experience of a stay-at-home dad depicted, given the literature which sees us in such a setting as a marginalized group (Davis et al, 2019). My only complaint here—I am tense—stems from my uncertainty about whether I can say anything true. But I am taking that risk. Significantly, I am also taking the risk of teaching: ‘I helped her class learn a song.’ This is the first documentation in the diary of my teaching music at St. Monica School, a recurring event which will receive further treatment in the following chapter.

There is little here to contextualize in terms of developmental norms, though it does provide continuity with the earliest advice to offer music as a stimulus for brain development (Advokids, 2024; CDC, 2024a-f; Zubler et al., 2022) and general recommendation for parents of children ages 6-8 to ‘get involved with your child’s school’ (CDC, 2024i, p. 2). Piano lessons specifically call to mind both early guidance for parents of a 12-month-old baby to ‘give your baby pots and pans or a small musical instrument... encourage your baby to make noise’ (CDC, 2024e, p. 2) and our earliest

keyboard experiences together (LP:28.07.1996). We have continued to build on these, adding to them what might fulfil developmental expectations for 11-to-14-year-olds that they have ‘a hobby, sport, or activity’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 5). Madeleine was 8 years old at the time of this diary entry.

Contextualizing this event in terms of the home learning environment as a place of meaning-making, however, offers more substance. ‘Home’ is specifically mentioned here as a place of preparation for the teaching of music at school, which is in turn preparation for the Madeleine’s reception of the Sacrament of First Holy Communion, to be ritually observed at our local Catholic church; there is an implied return to the home then in the preparation of meals. Thus, the definition and meaning-making of these three places are networked (Agnew, 2011). Less explicitly networked here, but evident through other diary entries, are the places of the art gallery where my works were exhibited and the local YMCA, where I accompanied my mother to portraiture classes for adults and where I had secured the models for these portraits and made the drawings. There is also evidence here of the relational aspects of place in the meals I plan to serve to a dozen people in celebration of Madeleine’s communion, her classmates whom I teach, the jury which qualifies my artworks, and the ancestors who inspire me to bake potica. This latter connection to others across time also opens up the place of the home learning environment in its dimension of continuity (Gustafson, 2001), appropriate to the celebration of a Sacrament which has been re-presented ritually since the beginning of Christianity.

Madeleine Responds (EM:28.03.2021)

Your mention of teaching my class a song before First Communion. Those times of singing with you at school are some favorite early memories. Actually, the first time I went to a consecration (Nov 2019) the Mass had both guitar and organ. Hearing the guitar brought me right back to singing together at school. It was like a reminder of who I was and how God has always loved me.

I like that you say Max Jacob is a matter of importance; it reminds me of *The Little Prince*, which is one of my favorite books.

(To Madeleine)

I like the way you bring *The Little Prince* into your response. Could you elaborate a little more on this? Why does my mention of Jacob remind you of *The Little Prince*?

(From Madeleine)

I’ll just clarify what I was saying about the Little Prince. The phrase “a matter of importance” reminded me of “matters of consequence” as a theme in the book. There’s a businessman counting the stars, saying he owns them, and when the Little Prince talks to him, the businessman keeps saying not to interrupt him — he is dealing with “matters of consequence.” See chapters 7 and 13 for the most usage of this phrase. Your usage of “a

matter of importance” to describe Max Jacob seems like a proper usage, in contrast to the businessman’s use of “matters of consequence” regarding owning the stars.

What Madeleine brings into her response is the question of what matters. We have seen a similar question posed in the definition of the event: ‘*when does it matter that I am I?*’ (Biesta 2013, p. 144.) And we have seen that

The weakness of education matters... to the way in which education contributes to the occurrence of the event of subjectivity. (Biesta 2013, p. 24.)

And, by contrast, Biesta presses the same question from a different angle, arguing that the quest for certainty

keeps us away from engaging with life itself—it keeps us away from the things that are right in front of our eyes, the things that really matter and that require our attention, right here and right now. Which brings me to the question of education. (Biesta 2013, p. 17.)

When we talk about what matters, we are talking about judgment:

because the question of the aim or “telos” of education is a multidimensional question, judgment—judgment about what is educationally *desirable*—turns out to be an absolutely crucial element of what teachers do. (Biesta 2013, p. 130.)

This is supported by dialogism as well. I mentioned the spatial and temporal aspects of the position of my utterance in this diary entry. Madeleine is drawing us to the axiological.

As experienced by subjects, time and space are always tied up with judgments about whether a particular time or a particular place is good or bad, in all the infinite shadings those terms can comprehend. Perception is never pure; it is always accomplished in terms of evaluating what is perceived. Dialogism conceives being... as an event... and human being as a project... or a deed... the deed of having constantly to make judgments. (Holquist 2002, p. 152.)

The judgment which Madeleine offers here is that the poetry of Max Jacob matters in a way that a businessman claiming to own the stars does not matter. It is a judgment appropriate to this project from a dialogic perspective.

In the specific case of life writing, politics will be present as a negotiation between an individual self’s attempt to convey as much of its uniqueness as possible in a narrative whose otherness is constituted by formulaic career patterns. (Holquist 2002, p. 134.)

She is favouring the uniqueness of Jacob over the career pattern of the businessman.

Wayfaring, too, finds its way to judgment, but in different terms:

'Try always, whenever you look at a form, to see the lines in it which have had power over its past fate and will have power over its futurity. Those are its *awful* lines; see that you seize on those, whatever else you miss. (Ruskin 1904, p. 91 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 130.)

From Madeleine's response, 'singing together at school' lies in the past of 'favorite early memories,' in the future of her vocation in consecration, and in the always of being loved.

D4:n.d.2

The pieris spreads its hands, mimic
Pater noster rendered vulgar, unsung
the wading pool silts
bushes bloom
high drones the plane, low the road
mourning dove
air conditioner
cicada
swings
"Madeleine, drive off the hand.
"Madeleine, be nice to me and
"Don't
"Gus, I'm too big for
"And besides, I'm too high to get off
The tractor installs new shrubberies
 across the road
Cicada
"No!"
"Gus! Watch me!
"You told us it had nothing to do with legs."
"I meant with how long they are."
"Free swing! Free swing."
"It's free and it's fifty cents."
"Madeleine!"
"Sit down on him and pump and
pump until his daylights are
scared out of him.

The above turns its attention to 'what matters': all addressivity, all dialogic response, all love and its poetry. It is a study of the hundred languages of children, and of their coming into the world. Madeleine and Gus engage in dialogue as they play on the swings. Their serve and return of language roots the home learning environment once again in relationship and in environment (Gustafson, 2001).

We can also contextualize the play on the swings here as developmentally appropriate for 5-year-olds (Advokids, 2024). (Madeleine is 8 years old here, Gus is 4.) It reveals material affordances: a swing set in a garden. More importantly, though, the children have each other as playmates. Developmentally Appropriate Practice is defined with an emphasis on play, as it is described as ‘methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning’ (NAEYC, 2024, n.p.). Subsequent to this definition, it is given further emphasis as to its importance.

Play promotes joyful learning that fosters self-regulation, language, cognitive and social competencies as well as content knowledge across disciplines. Play is essential for all children, birth through age 8. (NAEYC, 2024, n.p.)

Play is encouraged early and often throughout developmental guidance.

Use ‘back and forth’ play with your baby... when he makes sounds, you copy them. This helps him learn to be social. (CDC, 2024c, p. 2.)

This advice for parents of a 6-month-old advocates for the ‘serve and return’ which has been shown to develop neural networks through dialogue (NAEYC, 2024b).

Ensuring children have adult caregivers who consistently engage in serve and return interaction... builds a foundation in the brain for all learning, behaviour, and health that follow. (Center on the Developing Child, 2011b, 1:37.)

While the guidance here relies on adult caregivers, other guidance expands the opportunity to provide this development, asserting more generally that ‘the most important experiences come from the environment of relationships that interact with each child’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2009). The phrase ‘environment of relationships’ is in itself wonderful, conflating the environmental and relational aspects of meaning-making in place (Gustafson, 2001) and summoning in its language the home learning environment and even the role of the environment in situating the triad of child, parent and teacher for all learning. Returning to the diary entry, though, we can see how Madeleine and Gus offer each other this dynamic of serve and return; their back and forth can be imagined as embodied in the back-and-forth of one’s swinging and then the other’s. And from 30 months, there is an emphasis on playing with other children and playing outdoors (CDC, 2024i). There is in this documented event evidence of prioritizing the interplay of Madeleine and Gus in an outdoor environment. I do not intervene. I observe and document, studying with love their learning.

D4:n.d.5

Dear Diary:

Just kidding.

This is the entirety of one diary entry, the rest of the page left blank. It reaffirms the document as diary (D1:16.05.1994), with something of the questions from that earlier classification: ‘So why am I writing?’ and ‘With whom am I communicating?’ (D1:16.05.1994). Now, though, the ‘just kidding’ approaches mockery. I do not think it mocks the diary itself, so much as the idea that the diary could ever in itself be sufficient audience.

D4:n.d.10

I hear the children (Max in particular) playing the organ. He fixes a drone then works his hands. There is no melody, but there is structure. Because he has hands and they are working as his mind wishes, there is structure, as noisy, unmelodic and dissonant as it may be. I am listening for and hearing structure and it makes me smile.
So must God be pleased to make sense of our lives.

Everything I said above about Max’s mark (D2:n.d.2000) applies equally here. There, his hands moved and made a line on a surface, his wayfaring, his freedom, his virtuosity, his life. He does the same here, his hands move, wayfaring the keys of the organ without any ability to name what he is doing. I am surprised by my threefold insistence on *structure*, but then structure is tied to sense in the final line, and not any sense, but the sense that God is pleased to make of our lives. From my current position, it seems a surprisingly direct example of the way Biesta refers back to the Genesis story and the creation of the world in order to argue for the weakness necessary to creation in education. This is the same God, remember, who is ‘like any good parent’ (Caputo, 2006, p. 72, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16). His creation is an event which

helps us to see creation as a confirmation of what is already there as “beautiful and good” (Caputo 2006, p. 86) ... bringing being to life by affirming its goodness. (Biesta 2013, p. 17.)

This, too, is a form of judgment, of saying that my son’s musical wayfaring matters.

And so we can see again here meaning-making in the home learning environment linked to temporal continuity (Gustafson, 2001) and a sense of belonging (Agnew, 2011). My first diary entry as a stay-at-home dad evoked my father as organist (D1:13.01.1996), and a letter to my father and mother documented my first experiences with Madeleine at the piano keyboard (LP:28.07.1996). I had recently purchased from my church a small, redundant, console organ. It becomes in this event an affordance for my son, now, to take up the manual language of the organist, finding our cultural history and sense of belonging, a benefit of intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023). So, while this follows early developmental guidance to provide a musical instrument and allow a child to ‘make noise’ at 12 months (CDC, 2024e, p. 2), there is more meaning here than attaining that norm.

Max is 5 here. There is also guidance to ‘Have conversations with your baby acting as if you understand each other.’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 1). What I document here transcends just ‘acting as if.’ And in my smile, again I document my joy.

Given all this—the dialogical life and humanity in the school parking lot, the addressivity of the children playing in our garden, and the even God-like ability to give the world meaning—the carefully composed story which appears next (slightly abridged here) is surprising in its own right.

D4:n.d.The Strangely Propped Man

Once there was a man called the Strangely Propped Man.
Of course, he had not always been the Strangely Propped Man.
Once he had been a boy, an ordinary boy...
As this boy grew older, he learned that he liked to listen.
Strange stories came to him by listening.
By listening, he entered into the strange world of grown-ups and they seemed not to mind...
Sometimes he would speak. He would say, “no thank you for the candy, it makes my gums recede.” And people would laugh.
Because he was silent so often and listened so well, when he did speak, people were often stunned. Silent for a moment, they heard him.
This served him well.
By simply saying that something was wrong, he could cause the evil to stop...
One day, the man, who was definitely a man now... noticed that the magic, if that’s what it had ever been, had stopped. It no longer worked.
Though he remained silent, though he listened, when he spoke—nothing. As though he had not spoken at all. Worse—as though, when he spoke, he disappeared.
Only when he started listening again would he reappear.
He still liked to listen. Strange stories still came to him.
By listening, he entered into the strange world of children and they seemed not to mind.
But the vanishing bothered him.
He realized that we all must vanish someday, that death, which makes the real presence invisible, naturally grew nearer.
But actuarial tables hinted at some probable distance to that someday.
So he set about to study what went wrong.
Oddly, his study seemed to accelerate his disappearances...
All he could do was... listen.
What troubled him most about these disappearances was that he could no longer cause evil to stop, not even the smallest evil.
All around him, he noticed, evils, many of them great, monstrous evils, began to multiply.
So he could not simply ignore his problem, this vanishing business.
So he waited until he was alone. Then he would will himself to vanish. It was easy. All he needed to do was speak.

Then he found that writing worked as well or even better.

Ah yes, he remembered the notebooks he had carried, the words he had written, the pictures he had drawn.

No one else read them. No one else saw them. They were for him alone. They were, he realized—all those spidery lines—the structure that propped up the emptiness he had become and kept it from imploding.

Madeleine Responds (EM:28.03.2021)

This one made me sad. I wondered if the story was about you, if you felt like you were disappearing.

I responded to Madeleine and told her yes; I even used the word ‘autobiographical’ to describe this narrative. Beyond this, however, I struggled unsuccessfully to explain to her why this narrative matters, even though I had been studying my diary for almost 18 months. It remains mysterious to me.

I think it reveals something about my experience of dialogue, particularly its downside: it is *risky*. It is a story of listening for the addressivity of the world, for ‘Only when he started listening again would he reappear.’ It is as though the addressivity calls to me, offering me my subjectivity. The addressivity continues, as evidenced in the preceding events which offer evidence of careful listening (D4:n.d.2; D4:n.d.10). My utterance, though, once effective (‘they heard him;’ he could cause laughter, or even ‘could cause the evil to stop’) is no longer taken up by the Other. Suddenly, ‘it no longer worked... nothing.’ Study ensues, but not a study with any evidence of being joined to love, but a study of ‘what went wrong’ which only accelerates the disappearances and weakness in the face of evil until vanishing itself becomes the object of study and practice. All of this is rooted, then, in ‘the notebooks he had carried.’ Here, the diary is no longer a diary, but has returned to the thing-ness it had had (D1:10.04.1994) before it had been a place of encounter (D1: Frontispiece). ‘No one else read them. No one else saw them. They were for him alone.’ So the audience of the diary—although it has lost this name—has become only myself, a horror of narcissism. In that sense, it is not myself who has disappeared, but the Other. This lack of uptake is experienced as a disruption to the simultaneity of the dialogic event, of our being co-subjects. This is experienced as such a weakness that it is comparable to disappearance. The diary, with its lack of audience, is suddenly seen as evidence of this disruption. At the same time, it represents, much as Max’s hands did in his wayfaring at the organ (D4:n.d.10), a *structure*. It is a structure strong enough to mitigate against external forces which might cause implosion. It is admittedly an abstract metaphor, but it makes a

claim for my experience of dialogue as a 'weak force' (Caputo 2006, p. 84 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 17) similar to that necessary to the beautiful risk of education.

Any audience for this thesis takes up these utterances in all their weakness. It suggests that by your reading, in some mysterious way, you reverse the possibility of this disappearance. It is like the promise of dialogism, that 'every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival' (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39).

But first, a word from our sponsor.

D4:n.d.12

HAPPY FOOD™ Air Filters
Guaranteed to fill your house
With the smell of boloney
For at least 4 hours!
You'll never lay fresh boloney
On your ordinary filter again!

Madeleine responds (EM:28.03.2021)

I know I said this before, but the baloney-scented air filter thing really cracked me up.

This diary entry documents a dream I had. I know that I risk appearing frivolous by selecting it for interpretation. It appears to offer nothing as a response to the addressivities of prior research on stay-at-home dads or education. However, as an utterance, it undoes the disappearance of The Strangely Propped Man. Madeleine takes up this utterance and offers her own in response. This reveals again the moment of co-creation, of co-being, of what it means to me to be a stay-at-home dad and what it means to be an educator. If that risks rising too swiftly from the frivolous to the grand, then forget the explanation and simply laugh with us. We hold the theory lightly; we must if we are to remain critical, if we are to warrant the claims. It might all be 'baloney.' Or perhaps we already begin to achieve the 'homecoming festival.'

Arc 3 Insights

These ten events, spanning almost 6 years, are noteworthy for their introduction of school as a place of involvement and documentation, and hence a place of meaning making. As such, these are first examples to offer alternatives to claims of stay-at-home dads experiencing marginalization in school settings. Home and garden remain the primary focus, however, from the mark-making of Max to the naming of dragonflies and damselflies, an education 'not intentionally directed in any trivial sense toward specific goals, beyond that of teaching the world's difference and diversity' (Holquist 2002, p.

83). Playing—whether in the garden or at the organ—is joined to listening. As an arc, these events also document a decline in the diary’s perceived function as a place of encounter until it seems to have no audience other than myself, and that perceived lack of dialogic partner appears to reduce my sense of belonging to a kind of invisibility, threatening my effectiveness for meaning making.

Educational wisdom occurs in this arc primarily as an attentiveness to the event of subjectivity revealed by listening. However, there is also evidence of socialization in the introduction of my children to school settings and in my own involvement there, helping Madeleine and her classmates prepare for their First Holy Communion. Qualification holds little interest for me, consistent with the idea of not being directed toward any goals. I still documented the assessment offered by Madeleine’s teacher (D2:30.09.1998) and my own assessment of the bike riding skills I had taught her: ‘she did great’ (D2:01.06.2000).

Arc 3, then, continues to contribute to the audiences imagined for this research. The greatest contribution might be to stay-at-home dads, as for the first time to my knowledge, one is shown in educational research as not marginalized but an active contributor to his children’s schooling. This matters because it strips the isolation discourse of some of its disempowering potential and affirms what stay-at-home dads have claimed in prior research, namely the importance of education in our responsibility. For education, then, Arc 3 continues to show how I acted as an educator, offering the essential adult presence and serve and return interactions as well as more age-appropriate developmental support, co-creating a home learning environment networked with school and other learning environments, and balancing the domains of qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Methods in this arc receive their contribution mostly from the co-creative interpretations offered by Madeleine, who again requires me to confront the autobiographical aspect of this research, while offering her sadness and laughter at my diary as affirmations of an affective power desirable in an autoethnographic narrative. Such dialogues are the ongoing contribution to my participants.

5.3 Period One Insights

This chapter begins with offering an overview of the diary which reveals that it is comprised of three periods. This is argued based on the principle that a diary's value is partially measured in the frequency of its entries (McCulloch 2004, p. 104). An inventory of my diary's 47 volumes showed an 11-year period (1994-2005) of low-frequency entries followed by an increase in entries in late 2005 which lasted five years (2005-2010) followed by a second increase which marked the beginning of another five year period (2011-2015). On closer exploration, I found that these changes reflected changes in the diary's purpose, which is key to interpreting its meaning (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015). I consider this application of these methods to be a contribution to evidencing their efficacy.

Having thus identified the logic for dividing the diary into three periods, I was able to explore the events documented in the first of these. Period One spans 11 years (1994 – 2005), from the year before my first child was born to a time when my three participant children were 9, 6, and 4 years old. This period is remarkable for its low frequency of diary entries, which is mitigated somewhat by the inclusion of letters written to my parents during this period. Brief and infrequent entries made them easier to share spontaneously with my children, allowing for a relatively high amount of sharing to my children and responses from them which contributed to their involvement in the co-creation of this research. Spontaneous sharing of diary events from Period One drew the greatest number of participant responses; later sharing of selected and compiled diary events generated a much lower response. Along with these participant responses, then, three narrative arcs were identified during this period:

Arc 1: Preface to fatherhood (4 events)

Arc 2: New responsibilities (19 events)

Arc 3: School begins (10 events)

As narrative, Arc 1 reveals much about the purpose of the diary. Arc 2 offers my first responses to my new role as a stay-at-home dad. Arc 3 introduces my children to the school setting and reveals the beginning of my engagement with it while documenting a perceived decline in the uptake of my dialogical utterances as a kind of existential crisis.

The case being made during Period One might be summarised in three statements. First, an educational perspective is appropriate to interpreting the experiences of a stay-at-home dad, or even to 'any good parent' (Caputo 2006, p. 72 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16). This is first supported by the evidence in prior research of stay-at-home dads, in which they rejected the importance of

gender and talked about the importance of educational experiences with their children. These few events shared from Period One of my diary echo their testimony. While I include in this chapter events which reveal that I was conscious of gender, I did not perceive myself as enacting a new masculinity but living a version of manhood long established in life stories and the virtuosity of others. At the same time, the focus of the diary—what I chose to document in it—returned repeatedly to the educational event.

Second, Period One shows that even without an articulated educational agenda or goal, the education of a stay-at-home dad can be compared with the pedagogy of the event. My documented experiences favour the educational domain of subjectification and express openness to the unpredictable event which reveals some of the risks taken in being ‘irreplaceable in our responsibility to the other’ (Biesta 2013, p. 144).

Third, I have tried to show in this chapter that dialogism (Holquist, 2002) and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) contribute to understanding the pedagogy of the event. They help to make it visible in the action of day-to-day life.

Additionally, the norms established for early childhood development offer some context for the early language development and mark-making of my children, documented in this period, but more broadly establish a dialogic pattern of the ‘serve and return’ interactions which develop early and lasting neural networks for all learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). Further contextualization of our experiences within the affordances of the home learning environment which we co-created shows how our wayfaring initiated between home and school the construction of a network of places for meaning making (Agnew, 2011). This was made possible in part through experiences of a literal ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977) and a growing sense of belonging which has been shown to be a benefit of intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023). This network, however, at the end of Diary Period 1 remains fragile.

The education of a stay-at-home dad and his children, then, is established here as a dialogic, wayfaring pedagogy of the event. As such, it is an education in which I am offered my subjectivity first by my children and my responsibility to them. The education which I have offered them in return centres on judgments of what matters, and how often ‘matters of importance’ take the risk of negotiating uniqueness and subjectivity against the more predictable career patterns.

A more detailed reflection on the insights gained from Period One will be revealed in Chapter 8, where it is revisited in discussion with literature, method, theory, and the data from Periods Two

and Three. There, we will consider how these interpretations arose from document analysis, for stay-at-home dads, and for education. I will also claim there, with requisite warrants, the contribution that these interpretations offer to methods, for stay-at-home dads, for education, and to the participants in this research.

For now, though, we can conclude this chapter by suggesting the contributions to the imagined audiences for this thesis and which we have considered with each narrative arc. First, Diary Period One offers an application of autoethnographic and diary research methods in co-creation with my participant children to select and interpret our documented, shared experiences in a manner conscious and cautious of the risks of narcissism but achieving an analytical criticality which allows for surprise. The diary shows how a stay-at-home dad contributes to his children's education in developmental ways of offering a reliable adult presence for serve and return interactions, the co-construction of the home learning environment networked to other learning environments and relationships, and the balancing of the domains of qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Showing a stay-at-home dad thus engaged in the prioritization and active education of his children offers to the audience of stay-at-home dads an interpretation of our responsibilities as decentring gender identity and confronting the isolation discourse. These actions, though, also contribute to education in their narrative exploration of the balancing of educational domains and the ways in which dialogism and the pedagogy of the event were documented from our experiences. The participants in this research have benefitted already from revisiting these events and the healing found in their telling and interpretation.

Chapter 6: Diary Period Two: Volumes 4-14 (2005-2010)

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter began to show how my experiences as a stay-at-home dad, as documented in my diary, might be interpreted as a dialogic, wayfaring pedagogy of the event. After eleven years of diary entries occurring at a consistently low frequency, there was a significant increase in 2005, as shown in Figure 16, below. Applying the principle that frequency of entries is a measure of a diary's value (McCulloch 2004, p. 104), I recognised this as a turning point and a new period in the diary.

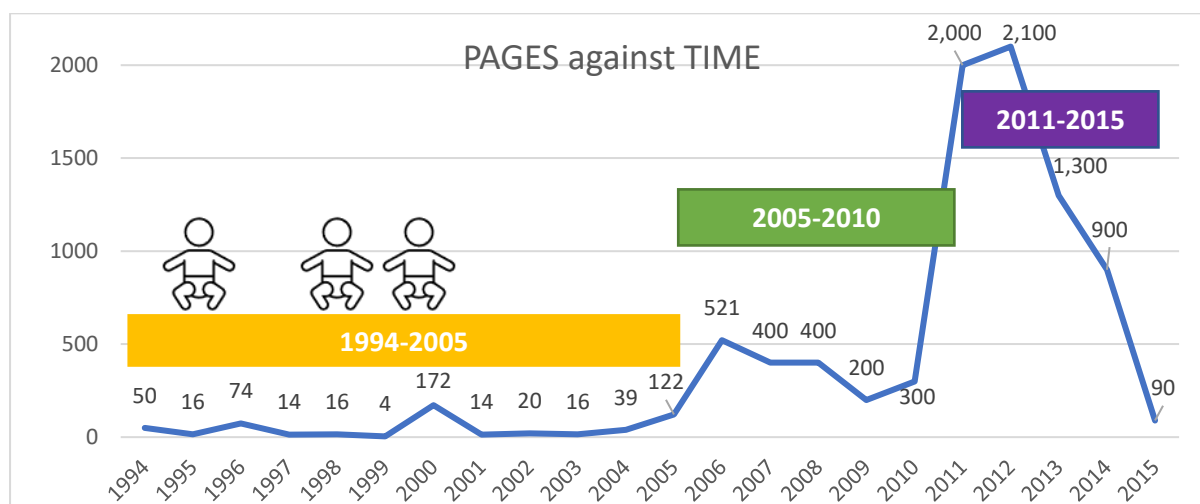


Figure 16. PAGES against TIME. Births of participant children are also shown: Madeleine (1995), Max (1998) and Gus (2000).

Period Two amounts to some 2,000 pages written between 17 July 2005 on 8 January 2011, or about five and half years, from the latter part of the diary's Volume 4 until the end of Volume 14. As in the preceding chapter, I look at this period using a narrative life history approach 'to make sense of the storylines' (Thomas 2007, cited by Bartlett and Milligan 2014, p. 43). So, I have subdivided Period Two into three narrative arcs:

4. CBT (July 2005 – January 2006)
5. School Years (2005 – 2008)
6. American Football (September 2008 – 2011)

The first of these, 'CBT', shows my study of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and the way it shaped the purpose and form of my diary over the next five years. The second, 'School Years' picks up the arc of schooling from the 'School Begins' arc shared in the preceding chapter. During these years, all of my children had started attending full days at St. Monica School, a small, private, Catholic church school, and I grew increasingly involved with the school. Table 9, below, shows the ages and school levels of my participant children during this period. While Madeleine advanced to Grade 9 during Period Two,

beginning her four years at a secular high school, documented experiences related to this transition were too numerous and complex to include in this brief report. The third narrative arc, then, looks at how I experienced Madeleine and Max in their efforts to learn and play American football.

Child	Ages	School Levels
Madeleine	9 – 15	Grade 4 – Grade 9
Max	6 – 12	Grade 1 – Grade 6
Gus	4 - 10	Kindergarten – Grade 5

Table 16. Period Two: Children’s Ages and School Levels.¹²

Looking at their ages and stages again in developmental terms, my children’s progress can be shown through the years of Period Two as in Table below. The bulk of the data from Period Two finds my children as Gradeschoolers. While Gus enters this stage at the beginning of Period Two, Madeleine transitions out of it and into the stage of Teen about halfway through this Period; Max becomes a Teen at its end. I again wish to reiterate that the diary offers little evidence that I had any awareness of these stages, especially as my children grew older and normal paediatric visits with their developmental screenings grew less frequent. Nevertheless, some of the events which I documented in the diary can and will be contextualized against developmental norms associated with these stages. I continue to refer to norms and expectations laid out by the American Academy of Pediatrics (Zubler et al., 2022), the US Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2024j-p), and a table of the complete paediatric range devised by the US Child Welfare agency and made available by MedlinePlus (2024). While these intermediate stages still offer prescribed parental practices to develop children’s language development and ‘scribbling’ (or ‘mark-making’), the most persistent practice remains the serve and return interactions operational in developing brain circuitry from infancy through adolescence and beyond (Center on the Developing Child, 2016).

Year	Diary volume(s)	Madeleine	Max	Gus
2005	4 – 5	Gradeschooler (5-12)	Gradeschooler (5-12)	Preschool (3-5) Gradeschooler (5-12)
2006	5 – 8			
2007	8 – 10	Gradeschooler (5-12) Teen (12-18)		
2008	10 – 12			
2009	12 – 13			
2010	13 – 14		Gradeschooler (5-12) Teen (12-18)	

Table 17. Period Two: Locating my children within developmental stages.

¹² US Kindergarten is similar to UK Year 1. US Grade 9, therefore corresponds to UK Year 10.

My interpretation of the events shared from Period Two will continue to draw on the theories of dialogism (Holquist, 2002), wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) and the pedagogy of the event (Biesta, 2013). From this latter, I am particularly keen in this chapter to explore what I retrospectively interpret as experiences of ‘coming into presence’ and ‘coming into the world,’ which received fuller theoretical exposition in an earlier work (Biesta, 2006). It again has to do with not identity, but with subjectivity, in this case

to shift from the question of *what* the subject is to the question of where the subject, as a unique, singular being, *comes into presence*. (Biesta 2006, p. 41.)

This is further clarified in the following manner:

Coming into presence is not simply a process of presenting oneself to the world. It is about beginning in a world full of other beginners in such a way that the opportunities for others to begin are not obstructed. Coming into presence is, therefore, a presentation to others who are not like us. (Biesta 2006, p. 49.)

This leads us, then, to the differentiation between ‘coming into presence’ and ‘coming into the world’:

it is only when our beginnings are taken up by others—others who are capable of their own actions—that we come into the world. (Biesta 2006, p. 48.)

In my interpretations of experiences during Period One, I made mention of these ideas, but they will receive fuller exploration in the experiences documented during Period Two.

Additionally, this chapter might be read with the anticipation that it provides an alternative story to the one told as the marginalization of stay-at-home dads in the school setting (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019). This is not to discredit that research, but to celebrate the sense of belonging which I experienced, even if it is unique.

6.2 Events

From Period Two, I share 38 events, as shown in Table 10, below.

No.	Diary Location	Event	Response
		CBT	
1	D4:07.07.2005	CBT	
2	D4:17.07.2005	Mood Inventory I	
3	D5:18.09.2005	Creighton retreat	
4	D5:10.10.2005	Mood Inventory II	
		School Years	
5	D5:19.11.2005	Bad news	
6	D5:22.11.2005	Gifted interviews	
7	D5:03.12.2005	Talents & Transcendence	Madeleine
8	D5:24.12.2005	Music/Prayer	
9	D5:10.01.2006	Gus: weird classmate	
10	D5:13.01.2006	Max; Beauty	
11	D5:16.01.2006	Gus interviews Grampa	
12	D5:19.01.2006	'I'm singing!'	
13	D5:20.01.2006	Max & Madeleine at Mass	
14	D6:01.02.2006	18 Mona Lisas	
15	D6:02.02.2006	People, Music, Kids	
16	D8:24.12.2006	I lead the choir	
17	D9:04.04.2007	No emotion contest	Madeleine
18	D10:04.10.2007	O Saving Victim and Froggy	
19	D10:29.11.2007	Abacus	
20	D10:06.12.2007	Santa hat	
21	D11:08.04.2008	They started singing	
22	D11:27.04.2008	School song	
		American Football	Mad, Max
23	D12:07.11.2008	Football at school	Madeleine
24	D12:05.04.2009	Football with Gus	Madeleine
25	D12:29.05.2009	Gus remembers	
26	D13:08.08.2009	Max's gear	Madeleine
27	D13:17.08.2009	Butterflies	Madeleine
28	D13:27.08.2009	First scrimmage	Madeleine
29	D13:05.09.2009	Max shows how	Madeleine
30	D13:20.10.2009	Gus: perfect parents	
31	D14:28.05.2010	School Song	
32	D14:01.06.2010	School Song	
33	D14:10.08.2010	Max chooses 80	Madeleine
34	D14:28.08.2010	Frisson of awe	
35	D14:17.09.2010	Hello Kitty	Madeleine
36	D14:07.11.2010	Return gear	
37	D14:28.03.2011	Flag football	
38	D14:26.08.2011	Moving on	Madeleine

Table 18. Period Two: Events and responses.

6.2.1 Arc 4: CBT (Oct 2005 – Jan 2006)

Period One of my diary closed with the story of *The Strangely Propped Man*, a stylized narrative about the risks of dialogue, in which writing and drawing in ‘notebooks’ served as ‘the structure that propped up the emptiness... and kept it from imploding’ (D4:n.d.11). Soon after writing this, I sought out a book on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) from my local library.

D4:07.07.2005

Found some interesting stuff about CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and ordered some related books from Amazon.

This diary entry contains a detail which might easily be overlooked. The mention here of Amazon as a resource, so commonplace in our lives now, again networks the home learning environment, this time to communication structures beyond the local environment. This offers early evidence of how technology would provide our family with new ‘place-making projects’ (Agnew, 2011). This again strengthens the home learning environment as a place for meaning-making.

The diary does not document why I sought out CBT. It is described by the American Psychological Association in the following way.

CBT is based on several core principles, including:

1. Psychological problems are based, in part, on faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking.
2. Psychological problems are based, in part, on learned patterns of unhelpful behavior.
3. People suffering from psychological problems can learn better ways of coping with them, thereby relieving their symptoms and becoming more effective in their lives. (APA 2023, n.p.)

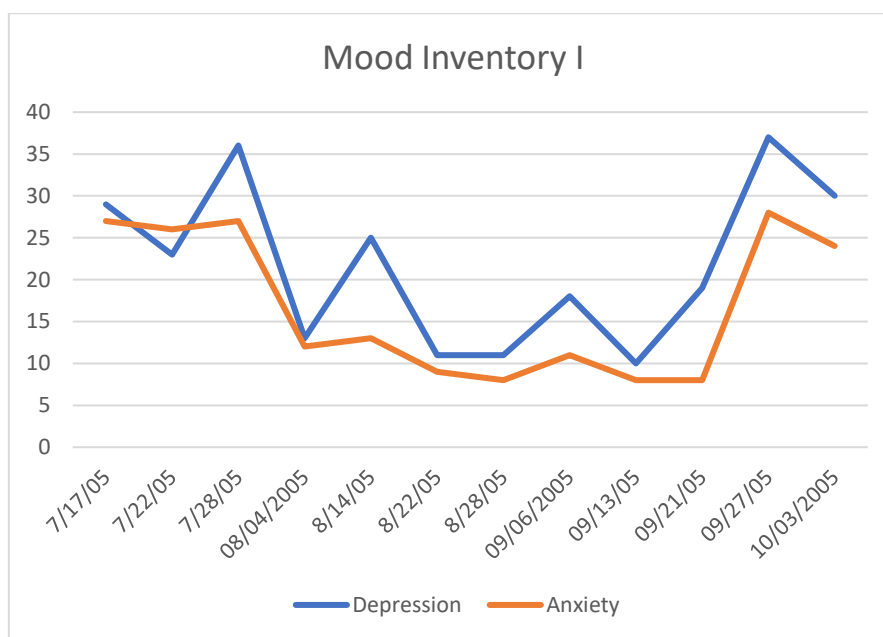
From this description, one might assume that I had begun to experience ‘psychological problems.’ Whether these might have been due to my role as a stay-at-home dad or other causes, the diary does not make clear. Research has delved the psychological experiences of stay-at-home dads (see for example, Colombo, 2008; Rochlen et al, 2008; Delmedico, 2011; Johnson, 2016; Caperton, 2015), but I am neither qualified nor, frankly, interested in comparing my experiences to these analyses. For my purposes, I am more interested in showing how my use of therapeutic practices within my diary appears to have shaped its structure and purpose. For starters, the date of this diary entry, when I first take up the study of CBT, marks a beginning: daily, dated entries start on this day, significantly increasing the ‘value’ of the diary (McCulloch 2004, p. 104). From this day, then, the pattern is set for the increase in diary entries demonstrated in the ‘Pages against Time’ table, above.

D4:17.07.2005 Mood Inventory I

Ten days later in the diary, there begins a series of columns filled with numbers. Their inspiration I was able to trace to one of the books I had ordered about CBT, *Mind Over Mood*. This workbook

teaches methods that have been shown to be helpful with mood problems such as depression, anxiety, anger, panic, jealousy, guilt, and shame... (and) provides structure that can help you proceed efficiently and rapidly in making changes. (Greenberger and Padesky, 1995, p. 1.)

Among the methods it offers are ‘Mood Inventories’ for measuring and tracking depression and anxiety (see Appendix 7). Responses to these inventories formed the columns of numbers in the diary, which I have charted below (Figure 17)¹³.



*Figure 17. Mood Inventory I (based on Greenberger & Padesky, 1995).
Dates are indicated in US format as month/day/year.*

This practice introduces a new, therapeutic purpose to the diary. It enters into our document analysis first at the level of the author’s reliability, where we might question if the diary was written ‘while in a stable and attentive frame of mind’ (Tosh 2002, pp. 92 cited by McCulloch 2004, p. 42). While ‘psychological problems’ (APA 2023, n.p.) might argue against reliability, this might be mitigated by the stability and attentiveness necessary to therapeutically inventory moods.

¹³ This is not a line that is wayfaring, but only serves to connect locations, and as such is rather a form of ‘transport’ or ‘the quintessence of the static’ (Klee 1961, p. 19 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 73). Nevertheless, in this use, such a line helps to demonstrate the distances between such locations when the path between them is unknowable. I deploy it as a sign of my versatility and judgment.

Furthermore, the stated aim that 'cognitive therapy can help you look at all the information available' (Greenberger and Padesky 1995, p. 25) might suggest that a study of this therapeutic approach might improve reliability by the expansive awareness indicated in its aims.

Whilst still compiling the weekly data for the above graph, I also began another study which overlapped it and perhaps contributed to the practice of CBT. Figure 18, below, shows the first entry from Volume 5 of the diary. It reads:

D5:18.09.2005

It's about feelings: see & experience how these pictures tell my story, who I am today.

It's about God's fidelity: imagine God's having been present there w/me—unifying my life.

It's about gratitude: practice saying "thank you" w/every image & feeling. Let gratitude for his loving presence touch & span all my life.

It's about a journey.

Do not expect, look for or demand progress. Enjoy! Live it!

As in the source of the Mood Inventories, the source for this copied text was not noted in the diary¹⁴. After some reflection and exploration of later entries, I remembered participating in and was able to confirm as its source Creighton University's *Online Retreat: A 34-week retreat for Everyday Life* (Creighton University, 2005).

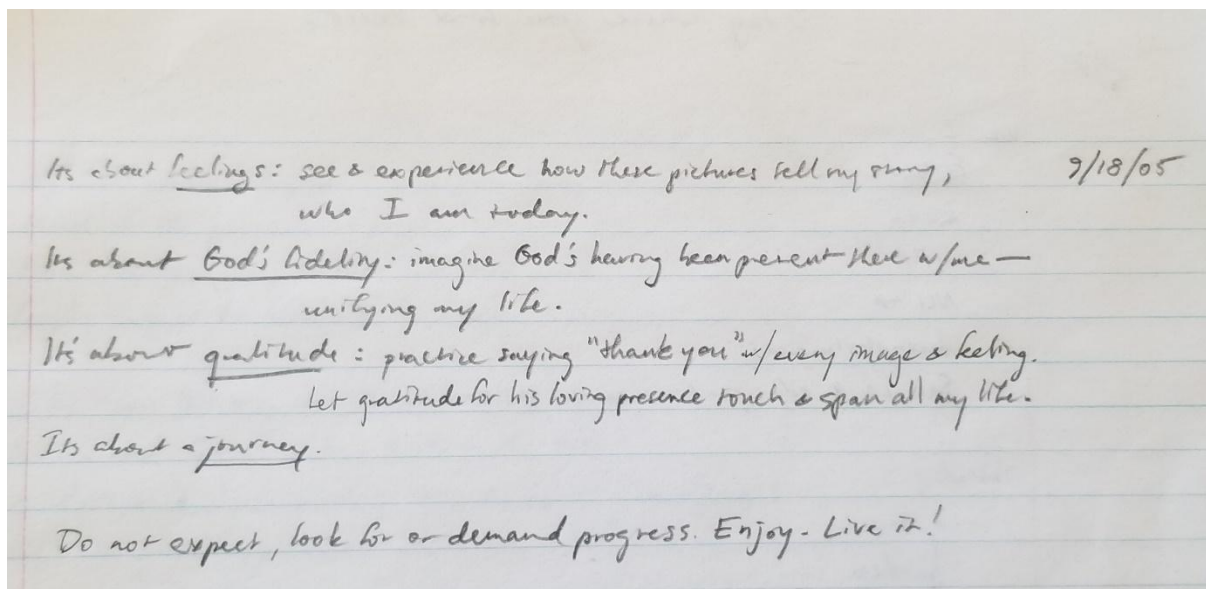


Figure 18. Introduction to an Online Retreat (Creighton University, 2005a) (D5:18.09.2005).

¹⁴ Both of these instances suggest an advantage to researching a diary with an insider perspective. Joined to memory, sources such as these are more readily discoverable and then can be subsequently verified.

So, the 'it' in these sentences refer to that retreat, and this entry is the opening record of that 'journey.' As above (D4:07.07.2005), the wayfaring of this journey takes us online and hence to a technological place which is new and further networking of our meaning-making in the home learning environment (Agnew, 2011).

What is a retreat? Whilst God can be found in all things, sometimes it helps to step out of the noise of the world completely and pray for a while. This experience is often called a retreat, in the sense that it means withdrawing to focus on your relationship with God and consider the deeper things of life. (Jesuits in Britain 2023, n.p.)

Not to dwell on this too much, but there are a few points of interest here. First, the claim that something can 'tell my story' responds to the question posed in the diary many years earlier (D1:19.04.1996): 'My story. Who will hear my story?' In other words, it reintroduces the uniqueness of my situation into dialogue, seeing the uptake of the other, by suggesting that my story is already being told and, significantly, it is being told in the context of prayer, as an encounter with God not unlike that promised in the icon of Jesus which opens the diary (D1: Frontispiece). The presence of both parties in the relationship of retreat recalls the 'coming into presence' necessary to the pedagogy of the event (Biesta 2013). And the suggestion that the story is a journey—shown here even in the tracings of the pencil on the page of the manuscript—recall the wayfaring described by Ingold (2007), with all its implied endlessness which becomes non-teleological in the instruction, 'Do not expect, look for or demand progress. Enjoy! Live it!' Such 'helpful' ways of thinking seem a direct, therapeutic response to the 'faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking' which, as shown above, form the basis of 'psychological problems' within a CBT approach (APA 2023, n.p.).

D5:10.10.2005 Mood Inventory II

After practicing this Mood Inventory for some 12 weeks, my moods began to stabilise as shown in Figure 19, below. In the final three weeks of this second set of data, another pair of lines appears at the top right of the graph. These represent the data from a new pair of mood inventories which I innovated in response to the theory that 'cognitive therapy can help you look at all the information available' (Greenberger and Padesky 1995, p. 25). Instead of only measuring the negative affect of Depression or Anxiety, I might also, in the search for 'all the information available' measure positive affect. I devised my own inventories of happiness and contentment. (See Appendix 7.) As these new measures rated consistently higher than the negative moods, after three weeks I abandoned this numerical measuring for a more verbal application of this learning in the structuring of my diary entries.

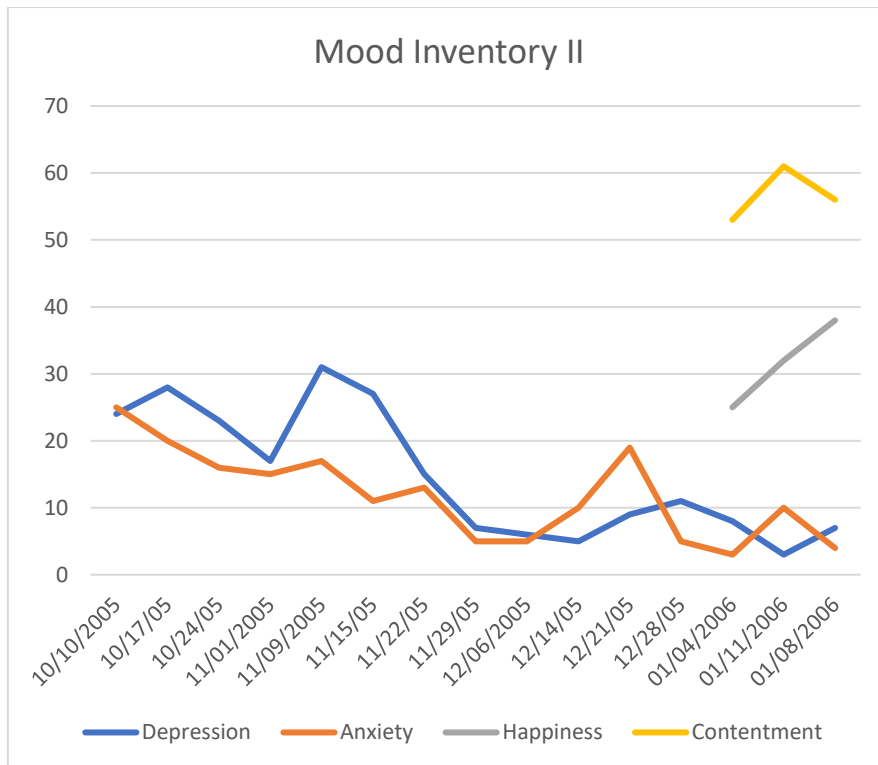


Figure 19. Mood Inventory II (based on Greenberger & Patesky, 1995).
 Dates are indicated in US format as month/day/year.

There is in all this documentation of my moods a deepening understanding of the home learning environment as a place of meaning making, as I encounter emotions which might contribute to a ‘sense of home,’ in daily activities of work and/or recreation (Gustafson, 2001). Choosing happiness and contentment for measures of my day-to-day life—and the swiftness with which I found them—speaks volumes of my ability and striving for the educational maxim with which I was not yet familiar: ‘Nothing without Joy!’ (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12).

So, we can see from this brief narrative arc of four diary entries how they might influence the document analysis of the diary. First, they might call into question the mindset of the author and reliability of the diary. In rapid succession, then, there are shifts in the diary’s purpose as a site for inventorying moods, documenting my participation in a Jesuit university’s online retreat, innovating new inventories, and then abandoning quantitative for qualitative measures. Such rapid changes might argue against a ‘stable’ mindset (Tosh 2002, pp. 92 cited by McCulloch 2004, p. 42). Or it might indicate, more favourably, rapid growth. The following arcs about ‘School Years’ and ‘American Football’ might help to settle the matter.

Arc 4 Insights

Arc 4 emerges from a peculiarity of method in that it contains no evidence of co-creation with participant children. It also emerges from the conflict suggested by the story of The Strangely Propped Man near the end of Arc 3. There is in this arc what appears to be an attempt to reverse the disappearances which were happening in that story, and that this attempt is made in seeking addressivities to which I might respond with effective utterance. These addressivities are found in CBT and the ways in which I am able to adapt its measures to my own ends, using this new knowledge to better understand my experiences. I achieved this in part by seeking new online opportunities for places where meaning making could emerge, to help me find again a 'sense of home' in my daily activities (Gustafson, 2001). All of this is study in the proper sense of love (Wilson, 2022): I go out from myself to attain a perspective of reflection and create documentation—not of my children, but of my moods. The second effective study in love occurring here is found in the Jesuit retreat, which in its references to story and journey anticipate the narrative and wayfaring aspects of my methods in this research, while it advises a preference for the unexpected: 'Do not expect, look for or demand progress. Enjoy! Live it! (Creighton University, 2005.)

This arc, despite its peculiarity, continues to contribute to the audiences imagined for this thesis. The greatest contribution here, perhaps, is to methods. Using diary research methods to identify a pronounced shift in the purpose and practice of the diary establishes a critical framework for the interpretation of all events in this period. Because this arc does not share events which involved my children, it might seem to offer little to education. However, it does offer evidence of my reflexivity as an educator, documenting my own learning and development, and my commitment to the educational project both for myself and for my children. Such a commitment again offers contribution to the existing research on stay-at-home dads, confirming prior knowledge of the importance of education within our responsibilities. It also suggests a potential benefit in a shift in perspective, such as that offered by this research, that by looking for the 'happiness and contentment' in our responsibility, there is much to be found. Documented and even quantified evidence of such happiness and contentment in my experiences is again a gift to the participants in this research.

6.2.2 Arc 5: School Years (Nov 2005 – Oct 2008)

Starting at D5:22.11.2005, the diary shows a structural change. Based on the Happiness and Contentment inventories I had devised, I brought my focus to ‘all the information available’ (Greenberger and Padesky 1995, p. 25), with perhaps a bias for the events which would raise my awareness of and reinforce my experiences of those positive moods. I gathered these together daily by theme, with each theme introduced by its name, and then every experience that fit into that category. From these lists, we can rapidly see what may have contributed to positive moods for me, such as ‘Sleep’, ‘Outdoors/Exercise’, ‘Work’, ‘Prayer’, and ‘Music’. ‘People’ was introduced as a daily theme on 4 December 2005 and becomes one of the most persistent. It routinely mentions simple gestures—even just a wave—which I experienced in the company of others. These occur most frequently at the children’s school, making it a place of meaning making by virtue of this recurring connection along the self/other axis (Gustafson, 2001). Often, the entry for ‘People’ is simply a catalogue of names, which makes it difficult to share here for ethical reasons. It might be seen as a daily argument against the isolation discourse.

Reading the diary these years later, my eye gravitated always, among these lists, to the one headed with the word, ‘Kids.’ It is there almost every day, and this is where the fun is. I can see why I found this an effective measure for maintaining positive moods. In this regard, it becomes a ritualized representation of not just responsibility, but the *joy* in responsibility, similar to that documented in one of my earliest diary entries: ‘I can only grin—Madeleine’s calling’ (D1:11.02.1996).

D5:19.11.2005

Bad news about Fr. Shannon.

Such a bias for the positive might undercut the reliability of the diary as a document, making it seem like I seek a ‘sugar-coated’ version of life. This bias did not prevent documenting this ‘bad news’, however.

This very brief entry is all the heavier for its brevity. Father Shannon was one of three consecutive priests who led the school where my children attended. All three of them were named in the state of Pennsylvania inquiry into child sexual abuse by Catholic priests (PA Grand Jury Report, 2018), which corroborates the subtext of this diary entry. At some point during their careers, all three had been accused of this crime. The Grand Jury Report shows only that the accusations were not proven; this neither exonerates nor convicts but leaves a sickening ambiguity. At the time of this diary entry, I would have had very little information. The brevity of this entry, I think, reflects that lack of information. It would also be weighted with grief. It is not an acquiescent silence.

I include this entry as a fragile and momentary documentation of a significant historical and cultural context for the diary's setting. For me, as a stay-at-home dad, there would have been a risk, documented in research, of feeling 'criminalized' (Solomon 2017, p. 91) for my proximity to young children. It might have been allegations of such criminality which provided the subtext for 'the great evils' before which 'The Strangely Propped Man' felt powerless in his speech, and away from which writing became a structure for self-preservation (D4:n.d.11).

D5:22.11.2005

Within this environment of risk, 'Kids' was established on this day as a category for noticing happiness. In this first instance, it reads:

Kids: Review gifted children websites
Interviewed Gus and Max

So we can see again here the connection of the home learning environment to new places for meaning-making through technology (Agnew, 2011). There is also implied in this idea of 'gifted children' a rare qualification against some kind of norms. Those norms are not here specified, nor is there any indication of what might have inspired such explorations.

The next two pages in the diary are given to my question, 'What do you like to do?' and the responses of Gus and Max, who were at the time 5 and 7 years old, respectively (see Appendix 6). I enjoy reading these, which happily focus on playing (Max, #7: 'Going to a baseball field because we're basically never allowed to hit baseballs with our aluminum bats in the back yard'). Or they happily drift off topic (Gus, #14: 'And also I would like it if my elephant would turn into one that could talk'). This, again, is study, now properly focused again on being 'for another' (Wilson 2020, p. 31). It seems that in the enactment of the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109), I often required learning from my children first, and only then making judgments. This recalls the way in which the 'serve and return' interactions which shape brain circuitry are constructed, with children offering their serve, to which the adult caregiver offers their return (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). These interviews helped me to decide against pursuing 'gifted' education—and not, I should point out, because of lack of gift.

D5:03.12.2005

'It's not about how you USE your talents, it's TO WHOM you entrust them.

Praying the rosary @ St. Monica's, twice now (Nov. 4 before Mass with a few other people and yesterday, Dec. 2, after Mass, alone, during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament) the statue of Mary... changed... It was as though the statue became a veil concealing the reality

it represents. In other words, it seemed I was not so much looking at a statue, but at Mary herself, veiled by the statue, less splendid of course, only as splendid as I am capable of bearing. This was not a change I could summon. Afterwards, I felt joyful, calm, at peace.

The first part of this entry refers to the 'Parable of the Talents' (Matthew 25:14-30). While this story told by Jesus refers to talents as an ancient currency, I hear 'talents' as synonymous with 'gifts.' In this interpretation, offered as a homily at my children's school Mass, the talent is not valued for its utility, but as just such a gift, and 'TO WHOM' it might be entrusted. For me as a stay-at-home dad, the ones 'TO WHOM' my talents were entrusted were my children. This, I am told here, is what matters. It is again an example of how closely networked were the meaning-making places of home learning environment, school, and church.

The second part of this entry documents an experience of encounter with St. Mary. This will, I imagine, immediately raise questions of document reliability based on doubts about whether the author has a sufficiently 'stable' mind (Tosh 2002, pp. 92 cited by McCulloch 2004, p. 42). I would ask the reader, however, to also recall that the criteria of good autoethnography require my self-exposure and vulnerability (Le Roux 2017, p. 204). So, I do not ask you to believe in apparitions of St. Mary—please do if you so wish—but merely to believe in my *experience* as documented in the diary, whether 'stable' or not. Whether you interpret this experience as impossible, pathological, imaginary, or something else, I will proceed now to interpret it educationally.

I see this event as a way to understand 'the question of where the subject, as a unique, singular being, *comes into presence*' (Biesta 2006, p. 41, emphasis in original). First, let's begin with the understanding that 'the educational "project" always needs to engage with its own impossibility' (Biesta 2013, p. 56) and that 'the act of judgment...needs the help of the *imagination*' (Biesta 2013, p. 115). I offer these reminders to confront those objections that this event is impossible or imaginary. Even if it is, the impossible and the imaginary are necessary to the educational project. We then might proceed to consider my experience: St. Mary comes into presence through a dissolution of surface, and I come into presence, too, in a simultaneity of dialogue.

Coming into presence is not simply a process of presenting oneself to the world. It is about beginning in a world full of other beginners in such a way that the opportunities for others to begin are not obstructed. Coming into presence is, therefore, a presentation to others who are not like us. (Biesta 2006, p. 49.)

Within this statement, there are three details to which I'd like to draw attention. First, this 'beginning in a world full of other beginners' offers another way of seeing the privilege of being a stay-at-home dad. In my role as primary caregiver, I was habituated to a practice of beginning, as I

was forever beginning to learn what matters to being a good father—which I have largely contextualized as gift and responsibility. Meanwhile, my children were forever beginning to learn *everything else*. This required an openness so that ‘the opportunities for others’—typically my children—to begin were ‘not obstructed.’

It is this aim to be ‘not obstructed’ which is the second detail to consider here. The materiality of potential obstruction in this experience lies in the surface of the statue of St. Mary. We have already considered in the icon of Jesus which opens the diary (D1: Frontispiece) the theological possibility of an icon as a soluble surface, as a place of genuine encounter. Here, we have a documented experience of such an encounter. While I understand that some readers might have difficulty with any real possibility of a reality beyond such a surface, I can turn to wayfaring for examples of transcultural human experiences of just such a dissolution of surface:

the labyrinthine underworld of the Siberian Chukchi, the painting of ceremonial house facades among the Abelam of New Guinea, and the shamanic healing of the Shipibo-Conibo Indians of eastern Peru... (each of these) dissolves the surfaces of earth, the house and the body respectively. (Ingold 2007, p. 61.)

My point is not to fully explain *how* such an event might be experienced as possible, but rather to show that such experiences *might* occur as part of our wayfaring, in this ‘most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth’ (Ingold 2007, p. 81).

Educationally, it appears that a capacity for seeing a way through obstructions might be advantageous.

Third, I am drawn to the full statement, ‘Coming into presence is, therefore, a presentation to others who are not like us’ (Biesta 2006, p. 49). The difference between the beginners, emphasised here as ‘others who are not like us’, is comparable to the difference necessary to dialogue, which is defined as ‘the simultaneous unity of *differences* in the event of an utterance’ (Holquist 2002, p. 36, emphasis mine). What better example might there be of ‘others who are not like us’ than a saint? In this event, I call upon St. Mary by the rosary, the prayer which calls upon her. But of her coming into presence, I say, ‘This was not a change I could summon.’ I recognise, in other words, the weakness of my call, I assert that the response, the event of coming into presence, is unpredictable. My call, then, is not only ‘interest in who comes’ (Biesta 2013, p. 143), but faith in the possibility that they might come at all, even beyond any expectation or control. I come into presence in response to the addressivity of this presence: ‘it is *me* who is called’ (Biesta 2006, p. 52) by this ‘privilege or an unjustifiable election that chooses me’ (Levinas 1989, p. 116 cited by Biesta 2006, p. 52).

Perhaps this is one aspect of the transcendence which is necessary to teaching, which ‘suggests that teaching can be understood as a gift or as an act of gift giving’ (Biesta 2013, p. 44). It is not just transcendent knowledge of a topic, a ‘loan of greater consciousness’, but a transcendent view of the other which is transcendent by my uniqueness from the other, by my witness of their coming into presence. I am fascinated, too, by the effect here of such an experience: ‘I felt joyful, calm, at peace.’ Surely, this is not always the experience of coming into presence, but it interests me to see it here expressed as a possibility.

D5:24.12.2005

Music/Prayer: Christmas Eve Mass, teacher conducting 34 kids, me accompanying on guitar. Best in years.

At St. Monica School I was a voluntary teacher of music. I have already shared from Period One of the diary that ‘I helped (Madeleine’s) class learn a song’ (D4:26.04.2004) and Madeleine responded that ‘singing with you at school are some favorite early memories’ (EM:28.03.2021). During Period Two, my visits to the school became regular. I went to the school every Thursday afternoon. All of the children from the Kindergarten and Grades 1, 2, and 3—about 60 students—were gathered into one room and I would teach them the hymns for Friday morning’s Mass. Then I would return on Friday mornings for the Mass and in church lead them in those same songs again.

So, weekly in the diary there is a repetitive pattern of entries, almost always as simple as ‘practice at school’ to describe Thursday’s session and ‘Music: Mass’ to describe Friday morning. I also note preparing for these sessions at home in equally simple terms, reinforcing with each passing week the network of meaning-making places in school, church, and home learning environment. My father, as an organist, had often played music professionally in churches and continued to do so up to a few months before his death. Occasionally, as my diary documents, I would join him as his cantor, singing the hymns that he played. Playing and singing, then, for my children and their classmates in their school’s celebration of the Mass, was an enactment of the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977) and an opportunity for the cultural and historical awareness which offers a sense of belonging through intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023). This was not occurring simply through sharing of music, either; my parents frequently attended these Masses, as shared below (D24:11.12.2011).

The above entry describes Christmas Eve Mass as ‘Best in years.’ It is difficult to explain the lack of detail in these entries, by which their importance seems diminished. I had no qualifications in teaching or music. I also lacked authority; I had no say in choosing which hymns would be sung. But I

prepared and showed up and we sang together. The school, in other words, was presenting to me as a stay-at-home dad a new addressivity to which I dialogically and existentially owed a response; I could not escape this responsibility. Out of my response—becoming a teacher to these children—and their response to me—their singing—came a new sense of belonging and joy located in the school setting.

D5:10.01.2006

Gus: “I don’t know why Jesus made my classmate so weird.”

Here, Gus responds to the addressivity of the other and imagines the other as having divine origin, even in their difference, even to the point of being ‘weird.’ It is also a confident statement of ultimately not knowing. This might, in fact, be a child’s expression of the ‘coming into presence’ which is ‘a presentation to others who are not like us’ (Biesta 2006, p. 49). My documentation of it is a study of his wisdom.

It is also funny. There is something unpredictable in this conflation of God’s creation and perceiving a classmate as weird. It recalls a God who accepts ‘the unpredictability and the unforeseeability, the foolishness, and even the destructiveness of his children’ (Caputo, 2006, p. 72, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16) and that this unpredictability is a condition for the event of subjectivity, which occurs in ‘always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter’ (Biesta 2013, p. 12). Perhaps I perceive the statement as funny because it springs up as just such a surprise, announcing Gus’ subjectivity, which I greet with joy.

D5:13.01.2006

Kids: A teacher says Max gets “emotional” when his class prays for Otter.

In this event, our family’s dog, named Otter, had fallen gravely ill and all of Max’s classmates prayed for him. Max was able to express his emotions in this setting and his teacher was also able to make me aware of his capacity for vulnerability and his classmates’ capacity for compassion. As such, it becomes a series of addressivities and utterances exemplary of coming into the world:

it is only when our beginnings are taken up by others—others who are capable of their own actions—that we come into the world. (Biesta 2006, p. 48.)

My utterance, then, in response, is to write of the event in my diary. By my documentation of these educational events, both at home and in school, I was making a study of these comings into being and comings into the world whilst demonstrating the tightening bond of these meaning making places.

D5:16.01.2006

Kids: Gus interviewed Grandpa for school project.

Just as I had interviewed him about his interests (D5:22.11.2005), now Gus interviews my father. The topic of their conversation is not documented. I might speculate from memory that this was one of many instances through the years in which the school actively encouraged children to have knowledge of their family history. However, what the document itself offers is that this particular 'conversation between the generations' originated at the initiative of the school, formalizing the intergenerational learning which was a regular affordance in my children's lives by the proximity and interest of my parents, and again strengthening the networked meaning-making between places of home learning environment and school.

Here in the company of my father, Gus has, in the dialogue of an interview, an opportunity to experience coming into the world and an event of his subjectivity being taken up. Such an event, documented as an embodiment of a 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109) affirms that when my children learned, they learned not just from a learning environment, 'learnification' (Biesta, 2009), or 'what works' (Biesta, 2007), but 'from *someone*' (Biesta 2012, p. 36). It is again justification for my interpretation of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad from a perspective that is not primarily gendered, but educational. Including myself in these conversational opportunities for intergenerational learning, I can decentre myself whilst remaining present and alert to experiences which might show that 'the most important experiences come from the environment of relationships that interact with each child' (Center on the Developing Child, 2009)

D5:19.01.2006

Kids: Gus waved twice at me at school today. "I'm singing!" he said. He also gave me 3 hugs. Very nice.

This simple exclamation by Gus, 'I'm singing!' is an expression of his subjectivity. This, I dare to say, he learned by my teaching, that it is his responsibility to be singing. It is, by the perspective of dialogism,

What the self is answerable *to* is the environment; what it is responsible *for* is authorship of its responses. (Holquist 2002, p. 168.)

A similar distinction is that

Our responsibility is simply "there," it is given; our subjectivity, in contrast, has to do with what we do with this responsibility. (Biesta 2013, p. 20.)

In the risk of entering the classroom to teach music—even without any qualifications—I answered a call of my uniqueness: somehow, the kindergarten teacher thought that I could do this. I did not yet know that the pedagogy of the event advises:

‘do not keep our students away from ... what is calling them... it is only when we are willing to take this risk that the event of subjectivity has a chance to occur.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 23.)

Gus is 5 years old here. Sharing these hugs evidences the developmental guidance for this age to ‘show affection to your child’ (CDC, 2024).

D5:20.01.2006

Kids: Max smiling at me from pew.

Having had all of the children from kindergarten through Grade 3 sharing in my risk in the classroom each Thursday, they shared again in my risk at Friday’s Mass, shooting me conspiratorial glances as they dared to bring the same loudness which they had been able to express unexpectedly in the classroom now unexpectedly in the church.

Max, smiling at me from the pew, is again a sign of his dialogic responsibility, of his answering for his place in the world. It is again evidence of joy.

D6:01.02.2006

Beauty: 18 Mona Lisas surround a print of the original. All 18 by 4th graders, unsigned; each unique, delightful. Also, cleaning the basement, came across this:

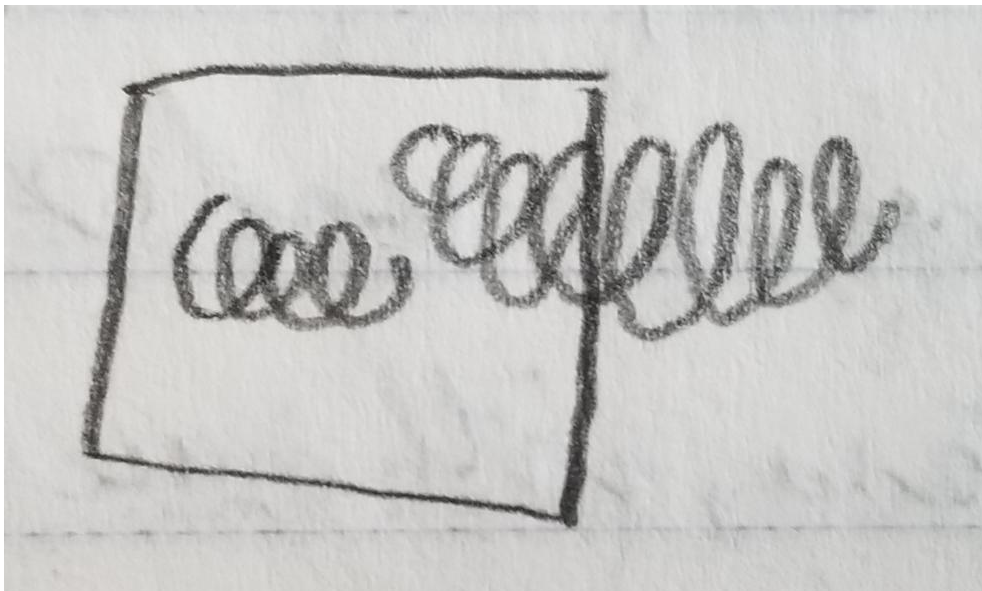


Figure 20. 'by one of the kids. Wonderful!'

What I love about this diary entry and what merits its inclusion here is the way in which it represents an artistic dialogue between Leonardo da Vinci and a bunch of fourth graders in a little Catholic school in central Pennsylvania. The responses, I noted, were ‘each unique,’ an unsurprising claim, but within the pedagogy of the event, a claim on each of these children’s ‘uniqueness-as-irreplaceability’ (Biesta 2013, p. 144). And within dialogism, each of these images is the articulation of a ‘unique, unrepeatable existence as a particular person in a specific social and historical situation’ (Holquist 2002, p. 28). The grouping, then, of so much uniqueness gives us an image of ‘society as a simultaneity of uniqueness’ (Holquist 2002, p. 153). Remarkably, then, I take up my own place in that society, not by making my own copy of the Mona Lisa, but by making a drawing of one of my children’s creations, which I found on the basement floor: a sheet of paper with two long strips of paper, curled into spirals and emerging from it (Figure 20, above). These three-dimensional spirals, I represent as lines that go ‘out for a walk’ (Klee 1961, p. 105 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 73), the larger one seeming to spring out of any sense of the box’s confinement. I judge the Mona Lisas ‘delightful’ and the construction ‘by one of the kids’ is in its own right ‘wonderful!’ These are judgments not only of goodness, but of the uniqueness and subjectivity which brought this newness into presence as a sign of their coming into presence.

D6:02.02.2006

People: Kids at school

Music: practice guitar at home and at school w/kids. Madeleine practices.

Kids: Gus gives me 3 hugs at school.

Madeleine shows me her Mona Lisa.

This entry expresses in the dense brevity characteristic of this period a sense of belonging to a place which differs significantly from stay-at-home dads’ experiences of marginalization in school settings shown in earlier research (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019). The ‘people’ bringing the positive emotions of happiness and contentment which I sought in my experiences were the kids at school—meaning not just my own, but all of the schoolchildren I encountered there. There is temporal continuity (Gustafson, 2001) of the connections between networked places (Agnew, 2011) of meaning-making in home learning environment and school in the practice of music in both places. There is also a continuation of the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) as Madeleine echoes my practice with her own and shows me the uniqueness of her own Mona Lisa. Gus, with his 3 hugs at school, gives me the opportunity to live up to parental guidance to ‘show affection for your child’ (CDC, 2024a, p. 1), even when it confronts the risk of touch which emerged from the ‘bad news about Fr. Shannon’ (D5:19.11.2005), offering me within the context of the school

setting a reminder of my uniqueness, of when it matters that 'I am I' (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21.), and with it a sense of belonging.

D8:24.12.2006

I lead the choir... I am just smiling the whole time.

I overhear one of the parents, who describes me as 'so happy.' Another says, 'He loves working with the kids'

This is the whole of my documentation of another Christmas Eve Mass with the school children. My responsibility has expanded. Instead of accompanying them while the teacher conducts, I lead them. This responsibility is documented as a great happiness, evident not only to me, but to other members of the school community, who by their utterances express a connection along the self/other axis to create a place of meaning making (Gustafson, 2001). It is again a fine example of a pre-theoretical awareness of an educational principle: 'Nothing without Joy!' (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12).

D9:04.04.2007

After Madeleine's play rehearsal, she tells us that she was just standing there and (a boy) said, 'so you want to have a no-emotion contest?' And all the 8th grade boys started making noises so he lost and they did this several times and Madeleine just stood there looking at him and won every time. I found this hilarious.

Madeleine Responds (WA:17.01.2020)

That is so funny to hear that perspective! I remember doing this with him often, just staring into each other's eyes and seeing who laughed first. We did it in the car line too while waiting to be picked up.

It was a deeply meaningful experience for me, somehow.

So, I've had a few images of Jesus in prayer before, and really everything about the way he looks is meaningful (I mean, he can look however he wants, right?). He looks a lot like me, like his hair is basically the same as mine and I love it. But his eyes are this beautiful sea green color that I had only ever seen in one person, and that's (this same boy). So when I saw Jesus' eyes it was like this instant invitation to youthfulness and playfulness and laughter, and also intimacy. I mean, it's pretty intimate to stare into someone's eyes, but I felt comfortable doing that with (this boy) and I just remember laughing a lot. I hardly remember anything else about him but his eyes, and laughing together.

Here is another example of coming into the world.

It is only when our beginnings are taken up by others—others who are capable of their own actions—that we come into the world. (Biesta 2006, p. 48.)

It seems so simple to achieve. And so playful. Madeleine is in this event 11 years old, and yet there is a persistence of the play deemed essential only until age 8 (NAEYC, 2024). The play confers in its relationship to the other a surprising dignity.

Responsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, humanly, I cannot refuse. This charge is a supreme dignity of the unique. I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible, a non-interchangeable I. I can substitute myself for everyone, but no one can substitute himself for me. (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

This supreme dignity seems to be reciprocal, as he, in his eyes, gives her a lasting image—an icon, if you will—of Jesus, and she continues to testify to this gift and her recognition of this dignity in him, by her prayer and her life’s vocation.

In those situations—if the other is after *me*, not after me in my social role (which would be my identity)—we are irreplaceable; or to be more precise, we are irreplaceable in our responsibility for the other. (Biesta 2013, p. 144.)

So, this event and these interpretations would be considered developmentally appropriate behaviour, as a 10-year-old can be expected to express ‘a unique personality when relating to others’ and an 11-year-old ‘has one or more “best friends” and positive relationships with others the same age’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 5).

And yet, look how wide of the mark my interpretation fell. What I was only seeing as ‘hilarious’ and to be shared as a fun memory, suddenly is revealed as ‘a deeply meaningful experience’ and an encounter at least as mysterious as mine with the statue of St. Mary. Here is justification for the decentring of myself as much as possible in this research and the polyvocality (Beattie, 2022) produced here by Madeleine’s co-creative participation. I decentre myself not to deny the importance of my presence to this event, which allowed for the serve and return of our conversation which made the documentation possible in the first place. ‘Talk with your child about school, friends, and things she looks forward to in the future,’ says the developmental guidance (CDC, 2024o, p. 1). Nor do I deny my later presence when I selected the event from the diary and, in offering it to her in our ongoing conversation, made Madeleine’s interpretation available in the present.

D10:04.10.2007

So we sang “O Saving Victim” and then “Froggy Went a-Courtin’.”

This diary entry represents a development of my risk-taking in the classroom. When I had started, the risk was simply in entering the classroom. Now, I was risking deviation from my remit—which was limited to teaching Friday’s hymns—and wayfaring into a folk song about a frog that falls in love with a mouse. A puppet frog, already in the classroom, was donned by one of the children for an

impromptu interpretation. I soon bought a mouse puppet and brought that in, just to accelerate things. In my memory, the risk persisted, it was a risk every week, but it had become joined every week to these unpredictable joys. This might seem like simply opening the door to indiscipline and mayhem in the classroom. Engaging with their joy, though, was producing the desired result of greater participation in the Mass, and my increasing responsibility for maintaining such enthusiasm.

D10:29.11.2007

Gus has trouble with his subtraction homework until I give him an abacus—then he can visualize it and does well and quickly.

There are countless examples in the diary of me helping my children with their homework or suggesting a reference book which might answer a question posed at the dinner table. Gus was in this event 7 years old, so it might be contextualized within the developmentally appropriate behaviour of ‘rapid development of mental skills’ (CDC, 2024o, p. 1) and taking ‘pride and pleasure in mastering new skills’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 4) and my interest in the cognitive domain of his development (NAEYC, 2024a). However, it has the added benefit of revealing, again, the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109). This is only knowable, though, by having inside information on the diarist’s life. My father always had abacuses around the house. He was fascinated by them and at some point he had read that it was a good way for children to learn their counting. So, I had grown up learning to count on one; it was only natural then that I would in turn show this to my children. While this does not represent intergenerational learning as it is typically understood, it calls to mind again the 100 languages of children (Edwards et al., 1998). For me, the language of counting had been embodied in the fingering of an abacus. Sharing an abacus with Gus was sharing a heritage of language which I had learned from my father. So I enjoyed seeing Gus learn to ‘talk’ in this language, as “learning to talk” is really learning to *think*’ (Holquist 2002, pp. 80-81).

D10:06.12.2007

‘Kids earlier, all gathered round, I was wearing the Santa hat and they’re all saying, Mr. Troppe, you look like Santa! and asking me if I was the one who gave them all candy canes earlier. Two teachers were saying that I am the best dad ever.’

This entry alone offers a fair argument that my experience as a stay-at-home dad in the school setting was something other than one of marginalization (Davis et al, 2019; Haberman and Davis, 2019), but one of meaning-making in school as a place strongly networked (Agnew, 2011) to the place of the home learning environment and made possible through strong interpersonal relationships (Gustafson, 2001). Just to be clear, the ‘kids’ of this entry are not just my kids, but the

lot of them. They claim that I 'look like Santa' and the teachers offer their own qualification. If I offer these examples in too great abundance, they still don't begin to touch the quantity of such experiences documented in the diary. Each one of them, though, is another argument against this idea of marginalization. The repetition becomes part of the point. I wish I could share more.

D11:08.04.2008

A mom says that when her kids saw me in the parking lot, they started singing.

These children, who spontaneously sing at the sight of me, offer a dialogical response, as a sign of their subjectivity responding in their responsibility to the addressivity of my presence. I am not marginalized in the school setting, I belong to its students. And in this event, I experience and document the possibility that this belonging, as much as it might help define the school as a place of meaning-making for me (Agnew, 2011), may for them begin in the classroom and the context of learning hymns, but 'the contents of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future' (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39). Or, to put it another way, the singing is like wayfaring, in which 'the line, like life, has no end' (Ingold 2007, p. 170).

D11:27.04.2008

Composing (!) school song for St. Monica's.

The endlessness of that singing took on a new character when, for undocumented reasons, I was apparently surprised to find myself 'composing (!)'. The school song which I wrote (see Appendix 13) was documented in the diary as approved by the pastor (D11:01.05.2008), then scored and copied for others on the music ministry team (D11:08.05.2008). I offer this as another example of how this stay-at-home dad was not marginalized in this school setting but was instead given increasing responsibility within it. Eventually, the entire student body, along with all the staff, would be singing this song as a meditation before every Friday morning Mass.

It is difficult to express the depth of belonging experienced in having something as intimate as a prayer sung by a church full of schoolchildren and using the words and melody which had come from my hand. Like a line, they were taking it up, wayfaring it with me. They had learned it from me and I was learning from their joy.

Arc 5 Insights

This arc, encoded in brevities which make narrative traction elusive and in specificities of names which require elision due to ethical consideration, for all its stylistic challenges nonetheless documents a period of three years in which I experienced a deep and growing connection to the

school which my children attended. This documented evolution of a sense of belonging fully responds to prior research on stay-at-home dads' experiences of marginalization in school settings, offering an alternative perspective. This is not an experience of mandated diversity and inclusion; rather, it shows a home learning environment as a place networked with school and church in a deep and rich experience of subjectivities in dialogue and joy evidenced as an arc especially in the increasing responsibility which I enjoyed as a voluntary music teacher in the school. These are again contextualized in the developmental guidance to offer 'serve and return' interactions which develop neural networks for lifelong learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2011), while guidance to 'Talk with your child about school, friends, and things she looks forward to in the future,' (CDC, 2024o, p. 1) becomes relevant in this period and in our dialogic practices. This 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1977) continued in its relevance to the context of intergenerational learning and the ways in which it contributed to our sense of belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023). On a more theoretical level, experiences within this arc allow for a deepening understanding of the Pedagogy of the Event, particularly the ways in which 'coming into the world' contributes to the event of subjectivity.

Arc 5 contributes to each of the audiences imagined for this research. Stay-at-home dads can see here that I was not marginalized by my children's school but was instead embraced and offered increasing responsibilities and joys. I was contributing to my children's education not only in my involvement there, but in the way I co-created with my children networks of learning which included school of course, but also the home learning environment and ongoing serve and return interactions. These latter receive here increasingly philosophical treatment, which offers ways of seeing in them educational theory and vice versa, and thus making further contribution to an audience of educators who might be seeking evidence of educational wisdom in this narrative. Methods benefit from yet another surprising interpretation from Madeleine in her co-creation of this research. The depth and the joy which she brings to that interpretation offers a benefit beyond those to research method, but speak also to the endlessness of our conversations and the ways in which they continue to benefit us as participants in this research.

6.2.3 Arc 6: American Football (Nov 2008 – Aug 2011)

During my first read-through of the diary, I messaged my son Max, and we had the following exchange.

Max responds (IGDM:28.03.2020)

Tom: I am reading today about your season of playing football on Maroon B lol. Great stuff!

Max: Wow what a totally different phase of my life hahaha

It was a ton of fun though.

Tom: You were really good at it!

Max: I'm glad I did it! I'm also glad I stopped when I did—the risk of injury is so scary.

Tom: Yeah you probably got a mild concussion once at practice. And it was totally part of the ethos to just 'get right back in.'

It seemed like your coaches recognized your ability.

Max: Yeah... that thing about the concussion is scary—I don't remember that at all! Haha

On that first read-through, I had not tried to transcribe all the entries about American football. There were too many. I carefully noted their locations in the diary, though. Almost two years further into this project, his football seasons were still looming large in my imagination, so I went back, transcribed all 84 of them (12 of which are represented below), and sent them to my participant children. Madeleine responded: 'I really enjoyed reading this collection. It was sweet, and I have fond memories of football' (EM:30.01.2022).

Max played two seasons of American football in the autumns of 2009 and 2010, when he was 10 and 11 years old, suiting up with a league designed to be a feeder for the local high school team. The earliest documentation in the diary of him playing football was when he was 7, when 'Max showed me "Quarterback sneak" & I tackled him again & again.' (D5:25.01.2006). Notice that it was Max who showed me and I who responded, modelling again the 'serve and return' interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) we had been practicing since his birth. He wanted to teach me something he had learned from his friends on the playground at school. I must have noticed that he really enjoyed this, taking developmentally appropriate 'pride and pleasure in mastering new skills' (Advokids, 2024, p. 4), because I then immediately noted, 'MAX NEEDS PHYSICAL PLAY/CONTACT' (D5:25.01.2006).

D12:07.11.2008

Kids: Max brought his football to school. Madeleine played with him & other boys.

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

I played a ton of football with the boys at school. I think sometimes I was the only girl; other times (another girl) played too. I don't think any other girls ever joined, but I didn't mind and I loved playing.

Both my diary entry and Madeleine's response to it represent the origins of Max's interest and participation in football as located in St. Monica School. Madeleine notices gender as identity here—it is a sign of what makes her different from the others, not a sign of her uniqueness or irreplaceability (Biesta 2013, p. 21). For her, 13 years old at the time, it was a developmentally appropriate expression of 'her own taste, style, and identity' in 'a hobby, sport, or activity'

(Advokids, 2024, p. 5). What matters, though, is that she ‘loved playing’. In her love for it, she ‘didn’t mind’ about identity; something more important was calling her.

D12:05.04.2009

I really enjoyed watching football with Gus. I don’t think he really knew or cared what was going on—so he talked about things that mattered: like he wished we’d brought some food—some trail mix or pretzels or beef jerky or jelly doughnuts; and “if it were cloudy with a chance of meatballs—wouldn’t that be great? What food would you like it to rain?” I said jelly doughnuts and he said yes, either that or muffins. And I said what if it rained something gloppy like hummus? And he said yuck. And that boy over there—he’s in Saturday Science. And that boy—he was in cub scouts. Elephant sat in his lap the whole time. We saw Madeleine QB (reluctantly but well) and throw a perfect pass for a gain from mid-field to just shy of the goal line (and to a kid not the star player but open). Max never handled the ball, but he enjoyed himself—especially the ‘drop dead’ play.

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

Ha, flag football was great. Especially that first year because my team won all the time. :) It's true that I was in the thick of it and not marginalized for being a girl.

This is yet another diary entry contextualized in joy—it begins and ends in enjoyment. Again, when I write of Gus, ‘he talked’—so again, the initiative of the ‘serve and response’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) resides with the child. And I do respond, playfully, with jelly doughnuts and hummus. He is freely drawing, like a line that goes ‘out for a walk’ (Klee, 1961 p. 105 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 73), networks of places (Agnew, 2011)—Saturday Science and Cub Scouts—recognised in relationships (Gustafson, 2001): that boy over there and that boy. But he is also networking these places to the football field where we sit and to the home where we read our books together, and from there into books, spaces of freedom (Tuan, 1977), extending the boundaries of the place to the limits of his imagination. So Gus creates in dialogue with me a place with great potential for meaning-making: ‘he talked about things that mattered.’ So, what meanings are made here?

Watching football with 8-year-old Gus is a conversation about what matters. And emphatically this is what matters *first to him*. He begins with the foods (which make me perhaps strangely proud of how embodied this first response is), but these quickly turn to the children’s picture book, *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* (Barrett, 2008) and imagining food in its context. Then he mentions Saturday Science, an occasional gathering at the local university for young children to be introduced to scientific topics. And then he names Cub Scouts, where he would learn to carve a racing car out of a block of wood. What matters to him in our conversation is largely contextualized as educational. This is perhaps unsurprising. There’s something about his naming of them, though, which I recognise and then document as good: ‘I really enjoyed watching football with Gus.’ I don’t, however, want to give

the impression that the educational content here was what mattered to me, what caused my enjoyment. Largely, I think, it was simply the shared dialogic presence, each responding to the addressivities of the place and each other, but also there is pride in the choices he makes and in what might be contextualized as his developmentally appropriate ability to express ‘a unique personality when relating to others’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 5).

There is also, at the centre of this, Elephant, a small, plush toy which Gus had received at birth. At 8 years old, he still expressed what I would, without any aim at clinical expertise, call a happy attachment, bringing it with him to places like this. The elephant, seated securely in his lap throughout the conversation, provides a concrete metaphor for the continuity of place (Agnew, 2011) and his ability to render the place of home portable, building networks of places in that relationship as much as in mine, in his siblings on the playing field, and in the boys he knew from other places.

Madeleine’s response is valuable here again, as she claims that she was ‘not marginalized for being a girl’. It is a curious parallel that she claims not to have experienced marginalization for gender identity as a girl playing football while I claim to have not experienced marginalization for gender identity as a man being the primary caregiver for his kids. More than being not marginalized, she said it was ‘great,’ perhaps implying a sense of belonging not unlike what I experienced in my networked community of relationships and places.

D12:29.05.2009

‘I tell Gus, when I tuck him in, that a teacher remembered when I would bring him to Mass and he would lay at my feet while I played and sang and he had his elephant. I asked Gus if he remembered that and he smiled, said “yeah—and I remember taking some of my bendy guys (Bendos? I ask) yes—and I threw Max’s tree and broke it during Mass.” Then he laughed and I kissed him goodnight.

I return again to Gus even though this has nothing to do with American football. It is again a conversation about what matters. This time, however, the ‘serve’ is mine. I share to him a memory of attending Mass at his school before he was old enough for school, a memory offered earlier by one of the teachers there, a story of a good act being repeated, its repetition a good in itself (Paley, 1999). Why do I say it is good when he ‘threw Max’s tree and broke it during Mass’? I suppose I could relate it back to this:

God, “like any good parent, must learn to deal with the unpredictability and the unforeseeability, the foolishness, and even the destructiveness of his children, in the hope

that they will grow up and eventually come around.” (Caputo, 2006, p. 72, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16.)

But neither the teacher’s nor Gus’ memory is one of a parent ‘dealing with’ his children. There is something more delightful happening here. The best way that I can understand it is to suggest that, metaphorically, the teacher’s memory laid down a surface narrative which was in itself happy, and Gus, by the unpredictable utterance of his memory, inscribed upon it his mark. If it is not taking the metaphor too far, the specificity and unpredictability of his memory might even be said to break the surface of the narrative, offering a kind of entry into an encounter with his uniqueness.

D13:08.08.2009

Kids: Max comes home w/his shoulder pads and jersey on—oh, and a big smile, too. He shows me all his gear... Max and I go to Dick’s, buy cleats, mouth guard (and case), cap, and receiver gloves. He’s pretty pumped... Mom & Dad for dinner. They stay later than usual. Max puts on his shoulder pads & jersey for them...

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

I remember how excited Max was about his football gear. He explained what every piece was for. My strongest memory of the gear is that he was so proud of the receiver gloves. That winter after his first season, we had a few inches of snow (I remember it was 12/23, so close to Christmas) and he and I walked to the park with his Bears football. I wore a pair of red Under Armour gloves, not really meant for the snow, but more serviceable than the receiver gloves that Max insisted on wearing. We tossed the ball around a little, but soon we ended up playing 1:1 tackle football. Basically it consisted of the offensive player trying to run past the defense and inevitably getting decked into the snow. Max was telling me about proper tackling form (which of course we were not exactly doing in the absence of pads). We laughed and laughed. Eventually his receiver gloves got soaked with melted snow, but we didn't want to go home yet, so I traded gloves with him. Once my hands were getting numb, we traded again, and we kept going back and forth like that until both of us were too wet and cold to continue. It's one of my favorite memories. I remember that once we got home, it turned out you had been playing some sort of artsy drawing game with the other kids.

Max is here 10 years old. Developmental guidance suggests that he should have ‘a unique personality when relating to others’ and at 11 he should gradually develop his ‘own taste, sense of style, and identity’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 5). His gear is emblematic of this identity, defined as

the ways in which we identify with existing orders and traditions rather than with ways of acting and being that are “outside” of this. (Biesta 2013, p. 18.)

Putting on a uniform announces that ‘I am part of this existing order and tradition’—in this case, Max was a part of his American football team and the whole tradition which that involves. And his happiness in this—both then and now—excites me. There is, then, in this documentation of Max’s donning of his gear, an affirmation of identity. This acknowledges that, within all the talk of

subjectivity, there is still a place for this way of coming into the world which defies the uniqueness of subjectivity and adheres instead to identity and still is to be celebrated.

It is Madeleine's gloss on the event that is again more valuable in some ways than the diary entry itself. Her response goes beyond the enthusiasm which I document to recall him teaching the purpose of the uniform, so that is not only identity which the uniform offers. She then moves on to the receiver gloves, which narrow his identity: he is not just an American football player, he is *a receiver*, and this is his identity-within-identity on the team. It differentiates him from the other players. And yet, it is this very identity-within-identity which he *gives away*, and which Madeleine, *receives*. If it is not a poetic overstatement of the event, one might say that he offers her his receivership, and she receives his receivership into her own hands. This is like a coming into world.

If I were to begin something but no one would respond, nothing would follow from my initiative and, as a result, my beginnings would not come into the world. *I* would not appear in the world. But if I begin something and others do take up my beginnings, *I do* come into the world, and in precisely this moment *I am* free. (Biesta 2013, p. 106.)

This dialogue of the gloves, this simultaneity of utterances and responses in the exchange of gloves, your gloves for mine, the trying on of them, the exchange and return, is a moment of this kind of freedom. They are teaching each other something about identity, I think: that it is something which we try on. That which does the trying on is the subject. Both Madeleine and Max retain their uniqueness—'1:1'—through an understanding which can be described as 'political because it is committed to existing together... and to doing so in a way that maintains *plurality*' (Biesta 2013, p. 113).

If there is anything that needs our attention as educators, it will have to be a concern for opportunities to exist politically, a concern for trying to be at home in the world and bear with strangers. (Biesta 2013, p. 118.)

Of course, this might even hold true if the 'stranger' is just your brother, someone who has a uniform while you have none.

One might ask where my importance lies in this event. What did I, as a stay-at-home dad, contribute to this event? What was my educational *impact*? My contributions were small, but not meaningless. I documented the event, an expression of study as love (Wilson, 2022), especially his expressions of joy—his smile, his being 'pretty pumped.' I bought his gear—in the grand scheme of things, a small gesture, but still a sign of responsibility in studies of father involvement (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). And I have prepared a dinner for Mom and Dad, affording him—and all of us—the benefits of

intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023). My presence matters in his ‘serve’, too: ‘he shows me all his gear.’

Now I will offer you a flurry of three diary entries which inspired two responses from Madeleine.

D13:17.08.2009

Kids: Max to football. (Last Thursday, on the first night of full equipment, when he came over to the fence to get a drink of water, he said, “there are a lot of butterflies on the field tonight.” Indeed, a monarch was fluttering around us. “They’re everywhere.” Then back to hitting.)

D13:27.08.2009

“At football, Max has his first scrimmage against Blue B. The guy who lines up across from him must weigh 50 pounds more than Max—but Max holds him, play after play. Then he switches to defensive line and gets his penetration every time—he even almost makes a tackle... They try him at Safety for a few plays too, but by then he’s pretty worn out. He showers, eats a pile of lasagne and then we read Percy Jackson until he’s falling asleep!”

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

I remember Max really shining in his games. We were proud of him.

D13:05.09.2009

Max shows the other kids football drills (2-, 3-, and 4-point stance, karaoke, side shuffle, sprint, bear crawl) as they go in and out of the water. He enjoys leading them.

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

I remember this too. Fun times.

These first two of these diary entries show a pair of dialogic moments: the addressivity of butterflies and the addressivity of the 50-pounds-heavier lineman. In the former, I am not the source of the addressivity, but it is to me that Max directs his utterance. From his uniformed identity of ‘the first night of full equipment’ comes this unpredictable event in the expression of his uniqueness. ‘Then back to hitting’ as he tries on his identity again. And he excels in that identity; ‘we were proud of him.’ Later, when ‘Max shows the other kids,’ it is not from within his uniform. We are at the beach; it is his uniqueness that matters here with his siblings, that only he can show them these things that he’s learned about his sport, and there is an eagerness that takes up his uniqueness in his beginnings, as his siblings learn his moves.

Again, one might ask what my contribution is as a stay-at-home dad in these events. The event of the butterflies is a replay of the ‘serve and return’ interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) we have practiced Max’s whole life. The environment gives him an affordance of butterflies; from this, he offers me the ‘serve’ of his utterance. There is no verbal ‘return’ from me documented

here, but he begins and I take up his beginning in my listening and in my documentation of his utterance. So my 'return' is the offer of something greater than words:

if I begin something and others do take up my beginnings, I *do* come into the world, and in precisely this moment I *am* free.' (Biesta 2013, p. 106.)

The repetition of such behaviours over the 20 years I was a stay-at-home dad and across multiple places reinforces a sense of continuity to each place and expands the network of places for meaning-making rooted in the home learning environment. 'Place is security, space is freedom' (Tuan, 1977, p. 3), so by taking up Max's beginnings here, I offer him the freedom to take his capacity for meaning-making into the wide open space of the world.

So, do I do or say anything in particular, do I use any teaching technique to encourage Max to then show his siblings his football moves? No, it is not necessary. On the beach and in the company of his siblings, he sees again affordances in the environment and offers to his siblings this time the 'serve' of his utterance, and they give their 'return' as 'they go in and out of the water' and 'he enjoyed leading them,' offering a 'serve' of joy which Madeleine remembers as 'fun times.' They are all, then, in their playing together, offering me—whether they know it or not—the serve of their collective teaching, learning, and joy. I am studying it in love, offering them perhaps just the silent 'return' of my documentation then, and my reflective joy now.

D13:20.10.2009

When a visiting priest asks, "Who here thinks they have perfect parents?" Gus raises his hand.

Among all the football, I offer this diary entry above as evidence again of Gus' unpredictability, especially in church and with authority, where predictability might be entirely expected and encouraged to a fault. I might say that in this event, it is Gus who passes judgment, who uniquely responds to this addressivity as a creator, as 'a gentler breeze that pronounces all things "good"' (Caputo 2006, p. 75 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16). I also think, however, that to interpret it this way feels very much like explaining a joke. I am not, of course, a perfect parent. That's what makes Gus' utterance so delightful: it misses the mark and becomes comedic. It is said, though, with no apparent comedic aim. At the risk of rising again too much to explanation, I think by 'perfect', Gus rightly means 'irreplaceable.' This is my son, in other words, making a declaration of my subjectivity, which is in turn a declaration of his own.

[D14:28.05.2010](#)

The school pastor's last school Mass as our pastor. At the end of all the speeches and tears, the children rise and sing the School Song. Father tells everyone I wrote it. All applaud. I stand and bow and sit.

[D14:01.06.2010](#)

Prayer/Music: The school pastor again introduces me as the composer of School Song after graduation Mass, and a student gives me a hug.

These two diary entries offer further evidence of the sense of the belonging which I experienced as a stay-at-home dad and volunteer at St. Monica School. The School Song which I had composed (D11:27.04.2008) had become a regular school practice and here becomes, to some extent, the voice of the community in an emotional farewell. It is, I think, a fine example of how St. Monica School was a place of my education, of my subjectification, a situation

in which it matters that I am unique... in which I cannot be replaced or substituted by someone else. These are situations in which someone calls me. (Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

[D14:10.08.2010](#)

Kids: Max has a good practice—mostly running evaluation drills, timed. I think he is surprised to find that in this pack of (mostly) older boys, all practiced athletes, and on these short sprints and shuttle runs he comes in firmly in the middle. He is pleased and very talkative after the defensive coach tells Max he'll try to fit him in at Tight End or Split End. Max chooses the jersey number 80. He says he didn't want the number 89 because it's Heinz Ward's number and Max acknowledged that unlike that great receiver, he still has a lot to learn. He chose 80 instead because a player who is very good—but not the best—and someone he likes, Andre Williams, of the Texans, wears that number. He told me he first learned of Andre Williams at the haircutter's, where he saw a picture of him (on the cover of ESPN magazine) with a rosary tattoo on his arm. At home, he uses little Lego men (firemen, Star Wars Stormtroopers, race car drivers, etc.) to show us where he'll line up as tight end or split end.

[Madeleine responds \(EM:30.01.2022\)](#)

Max's humility is striking throughout the entries, but especially here. It's really sweet. I like the part about the rosary tattoo, too. For me sports and faith have been very intertwined, as you know.

As his second season of football began, Max found himself among older boys and more evaluations. There is a sense of an educational shift here from the socialization of having the uniform, with its identity, to the qualification of being allowed to wear it. There is an increased awareness of the stratification of goodness: the great, the 'very good—but not the best' and 'the middle.' Taking from the affordances of the environment and these 'evaluation drills,' though, Max is again keen to teach, to share his knowledge, 'to show us where he'll line up.' So the 'serve and return' interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) persist. He offers us again the serve of his utterance, carrying

with him into these qualifications the security of his socialization into a developing, 11-year-old identity (Advokids, 2024) as tight end or split end, and we offer the return of our attention to his demonstrations. I return, too, the utterance of my documentation. He has, after all, offered me much to document: he is ‘pleased and very talkative;’ ‘he says he didn’t want the number 89;’ ‘he told me he first learned of Andre Williams.’ There are many ‘serves’ here and they are what matter most to me, not my returns, which are not documented, suggesting a prioritization of the Other—of Max—in the polyvocalism (Beattie, 2022) of the diary text.

In Madeleine’s present-day, written response to this event, she notices especially Max’s mention of a football player’s rosary tattoo. ‘For me sports and faith have been very intertwined, as you know,’ she reflects. As I know (and the diary documents), her athleticism first evolved whilst playing football with the boys at St. Monica School (D12:07.11.2008), a place of meaning-making bound up in Catholic traditions like praying the rosary; she continued to grow as an athlete, earning an athletic scholarship at an NCAA Division 1 Catholic university (D41:08.11.2013). So it is to me remarkable that she does not cling to the device of the rosary here as a way to claim a Catholic identity. And by this, I specifically refer to the understanding of identity as ‘the ways in which I am *different* from the other’ (Biesta 2013, p. 21). Instead, she offers it as a metaphor for the possibility of becoming ‘intertwined.’ While this experience is here directly applied to the intertwining of sports and faith, it is also evidenced in the way her life is intertwined with Max’s in his expression here of sports and faith inspiring his choices. It further might be applied to the ever-expanding network of places (Agnew, 2011) where meaning-making occur: here, it is the place of the haircutters, where an image on a magazine connects to football fields, to Catholic church and school, and again to the home learning environment where Max’s identity will be played out in Lego figurines.

D14:28.08.2010

Get Max to football by 4:50 for his official league weigh-in. During practice, he makes a perfect, over-the-right-shoulder catch as he’s running down the left sideline. He pulls it in and 3 defenders dive for him, grab his legs. Coach yells, ‘Keep going, Max!’—and he does, shaking off the tackles and crossing the goal unencumbered. A frisson of awe lights up my body. Later, he says, ‘yeah, that was fun.’ He does his job on every play, blocking, running the pattern. Coach never yells at him.

In the lexicon of embodied experiences of stay-at-home dads (Doucet, 2006b), I would like to see this included: ‘a frisson of awe lights up my body.’

D14:17.09.2010

At home, Max shows us a Hello Kitty necklace that a girl at school gave him. He wears it with his game shirt to Youth Night at the high school stadium—and his teammates tell him it’s

cool. Max takes the field with his teammates before the game to form a welcoming gauntlet for the varsity players... the home team wins, 46-38.”

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

I think it's sweet about the butterflies, and later about the Hello Kitty necklace. In such a typically tough-guy environment as a football team, it's a charming touch of innocence.

It might be difficult to overstate what a powerful event of socialization occurs at a Friday night football game in the US. So, it is instructive to see how Max behaves at Youth Night—a big event, where all the families show up to see the big high school game introduced by their young players.

Socialization has to do with how we become part of existing orders, how we identify with such orders and thus obtain an identity; subjectification, in contrast, is always about how we can exist “outside” of such orders, so to speak. (Biesta 2013, p. 129.)

Into this intense scene of socialization, Max disrupts his uniform with a Hello Kitty necklace, announcing how he exists as a subjectivity outside football. His teammates ‘take up’ (Biesta 2013, p. 106) this serve, this utterance, and return their response that it’s ‘cool.’

Madeleine offers a judgment that what is happening here is ‘sweet... charming’ and innocent. Connecting this event to the earlier event of butterflies (D13:05.09.2009), she teases out of them a binary different from the straightforwardly gendered masculinity and femininity which might be expected from American football. On the one hand, she sees a ‘typically tough-guy environment.’ Granted, this appears to be masculinity by another name, with its male ‘guy’ embedded in a socializing environment of typical toughness. In contrast, however, she sees Max’s expressions of uniqueness, these events of his subjectivity, as ‘innocence’. To put it another way, she sees him as able to ‘exist “outside” of such orders’ (Biesta 2013, p. 129), as if innocent of them. It is a way of talking about these experiences as recognising

an *event* rather than an essence or identity, and one that expresses an interest in who comes into presence rather than that it tries to define what is to come, ought to come, or is allowed to come into presence... not what the child is to become, but by articulating an interest in that which announces in itself as a new beginning. (Biesta 2013, p. 143.)

This is what she is doing: expressing and ‘articulating an interest in that which announces in itself as a new beginning.’ A similar expression and articulation of interest is expressed in every ‘serve and return’ interaction (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) and in every diary entry which documents it.

Sadly, Max's second season of playing American football did not go very well. There were alarming injuries and more than a few of them. Max's team was repeatedly defeated. Max kept at it, but the emphasis on qualification, perhaps, had increased the cost of all the losses.

D14:07.11.2010

Work: return Max's football gear. People: Coaches ask if Max will be back next year, I say, 'We'll see what he wants.' Coach says, 'you know he eats, drinks & breathes football.' And I say, 'you know that's right," but I leave it there. Max has options.

D14:28.03.2011

I took Max to flag football. It was a clear, bright day, but cold and windy. Max caught 3 touchdown passes, one—his favorite—after it had bounced out of a teammate's hands. ...the kids seemed to get along well & enjoy the game. I was relieved because, although Coach had said, 'hey Troppe—you police the game,' I never felt I really needed to intervene.

D14:26.08.2011

Max, without his football, told his coach he was 'moving on to other things'—what has he 'moved on' to? I bought him a new hacksaw yesterday, he'd broken his old one. He's quite the sculptor...

Madeleine responds (EM:30.01.2022)

The arc of the overall story really resonates - excitement, encouragement from coaches, great relationships, pride in a job well done... and later, the mounting pressure coupled with the feeling of never quite measuring up. I'm struck by the last entry about "moving on to other things." I think leaving a high-pressure sports environment gives you more time to be yourself. The hacksaw thing seems very Max.

These brief passages which mark the end of Max's interest in playing football, beyond their poignancy, have educational relevance. They represent, from my perspective now, an educational judgment made jointly, a co-creation if you will, by Max and me. Despite the allures of socialization and qualification—the identity of wearing the uniform and just how *good* Max was as an athlete—there is a judgment here to prioritise his subjectivity. So, this is not a rejection of football, but a recognition of 'options'—that other places, environments, and addressivities are calling, including our garage and a block of wood to which a hacksaw might be applied.

Madeleine's response was methodologically useful. Her naming 'the arc of the overall story' was an encouragement to include it as a narrative arc from this period. I take slight issue with her interpretation of 'the feeling of never quite measuring up.' I do not think that the narrative represents a falling short, but rather, perhaps, a rejection of 'measuring up' as a priority. Again, there is a choice for subjectification over qualification which makes the pursuit of qualification in this case lose its hold. And 'the hacksaw thing was very Max'—this again is an affirmation of that move toward the 'thing', or the *event*, in which Max comes into the world.

So, what is the importance of all of this to the education of a stay-at-home dad? Max's participation in American football was something I observed with great joy. These were the sorts of things I paid attention to and documented in my diary throughout the years we were together: the events in which I saw them growing, flourishing. As a stay-at-home dad, I had the privilege to be present. I was a witness to their education and in some ways participant in it; the witnessing alone was cause for joy, was enough to make me think back on those years as educational. So, when Max caught that over-the-shoulder running pass on the sideline and broke the defenders and ran, I could feel that in my body, that frisson of awe. And what caused that frisson of awe? Was it not that Max, in his uniqueness, took on the risk and the responsibility to respond to the addressivity of the ball coming over his shoulder, and in the utterance of his body to pull it down and make it his own? Is that not a coming into presence? Is that not—even though I was just there on the sidelines—somehow an embodiment of the pedagogy of the event?

Arc 6 Insights

This final arc in Period Two evidences the co-creation in this research, having been named an arc by Madeleine after Max's interest in these events inspired a compilation of them. Furthermore, Madeleine responds directly to more than half (9/16) of these individual events; her voice as co-creator is heard perhaps most clearly in this arc. I also interpret this as a sign of the freedom and equality of co-creation among my participant children, as they were not limited to replying only to events in which they might be seen as the central actor; nor were they compelled to reply to such events, as Max says no more here beyond his initial and inspiring interest. Theory arising from these events include especially the way in which my presence was a kind of getting out of the way, providing the opportunity for the event of subjectification, and the 'frisson of awe' which accompanied its witness and documentation. The network of places for meaning making expands to include practice fields and stadia for playing American football, as well as places (a haircutter's shop, a beach) where these events continued to grow in meaning. Intergenerational learning continues to provide a sense of belonging in these places. Contextualization of these events within developmental norms and guidance, especially the 'serve and return' interactions for building neural networks, continues. In his socialization, qualification, and subjectification, Max was himself balancing the domains of education.

Arc 6, then, contributes to the imagined audiences for this research first by offering by its methods further evidence for the contributions of co-creation of this research by its participants, especially in the naming of the narrative arc and the interpretation of its events. For stay-at-home dads, there is

further evidence to confront the isolation discourse and offer instead our prioritization of educational events in which our responsibility finds belonging and joy. In these events, I was helping my children educationally by achieving a balance wherein I maintained a present involvement vital to serve and return interactions whilst also documenting their increasing independence which allowed for their own expressions of balancing educational domains. The contribution here to education is my witnessing to these experiences of educational wisdom and the more philosophical educational theory which they embody. And again, we see benefit to my participant children in the joy evoked by wayfaring again these experiences.

6.3 Period Two Insights

As in Period One, three narrative arcs were selected for interpretation from Period Two:

Arc 4: CBT (4 events)

Arc 5: School Years (15 events)

Arc 6: American Football (16 events)

In Arc 4, document analysis shows the purpose of the diary changing to a therapeutic aim based on self-study of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), joining these to a Christian interpretation of life events inspired by a Jesuit retreat. Arc 5 then shows a deepening engagement with my children's school as a voluntary teacher of music. In this role, the trouble of a perceived lack of audience which had emerged in Period One as *The Strangely Propped Man* finds first a mystical audience in the dissolution of surface in a visit to a statue of St. Mary and then finds a concrete, recurrent and participative audience in the dialogic partnership of the schoolchildren with whom I sang weekly. Arc 6 was most actively co-created by my participant children, as Max's initial expressed interest inspired its compilation while Madeleine named it an arc and responded to several of its unique events.

The therapeutic emphasis on documenting events of happiness and contentment return repeatedly to educational events. These, then, interpreted from an educational perspective, show a shift. Where earlier events in Period One seemed to emphasise my responsibility, in Period Two, the idea of 'coming into presence' seems to dominate these events, and with it, a greater awareness of the ways in which my children and my students express their own, growing responsibility. This I find most easily represented through the dialogic responsibility of answering for their place and the way they do this in singing, but also in the way Madeleine, Max and Gus make their choices—their judgments—for socialization, qualification and subjectification.

The norms established for middle childhood development continue to offer some context for my children's learning and my contribution to it, but most notable is our continuation of the dialogic pattern of 'serve and return' interactions which develop early and lasting neural networks for all learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). Our deepening involvement in schooling and sport continues to strengthen and broaden networked places of meaning making (Agnew, 2011) enriched by the recurring presence of my parents and the afforded sense of belonging gained through intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023).

As with Period One, Period Two will receive more detailed reflection in Chapter 8, with integrative interpretations, claims for contributions to the audiences imagined for this thesis, and requisite warrants. And similarly, we can conclude this chapter as we concluded Chapter 5, with a summative assessment of the contributions of this research to its imagined audiences as we have considered at the end of each narrative arc. There is a contribution to autoethnographic and diary research methods in this chapter which reinforces those found in Chapter 5, finding that co-creating this research shaped our methods, named a narrative arc, and interpreted events to surprise, delight and benefit participants. There is a contribution to stay-at-home dads, again, in the evidence for the importance of education in our responsibilities, and the many ways in which education provided me with a sense of belonging and joy which supplanted for me any experience akin to those described in the isolation discourse. Education itself is offered some contribution here in the form of the educational wisdom evidenced in these narrative arcs. More specifically, I can be seen here contributing to my own education in my reflexive engagement with CBT and an Ignatian retreat for the betterment of my educational practice by discovering daily the joy in it. I contributed likewise to my children's education in mostly simple ways. I offered my continuing attentive, listening, and joyful presence for serve and return interactions. I participated in their school as is only developmentally appropriate, and by so doing helped to co-create with them networks of educational places and relationships which included the home learning environment and the intergenerational learning afforded by the presence of their grandparents. These experiences, then, interpreted dialogically, show one possible enactment of something like the pedagogy of the event. As always, though, my research participants are my happiest responsibility, and to us there might be in this chapter the continuing benefit of the joy which is found repeatedly in the documented experiences and now in their interpretations.

Chapter 7: Diary Period Three: Volumes 15-47 (2011-2015)



Figure 21. D15 (Cover) with Malevich's 'Mystic Suprematism' (1920-1927), reproduced in Schjeldahl (2011).

7.1 Introduction

As I have demonstrated in the preceding two chapters, this research offers a unique, 'insider' response to prior studies of stay-at-home dads by exploring experiences gathered from a diary as a data source and interpreted from an educational perspective. I have shown how autoethnographic and diary research methods, combined with the participation of my children in co-creation, have helped me to develop an understanding of the educational perspective within which I practiced my role as the primary caregiver to my four children and from which I now interpret these experiences. I have described this perspective as a wayfaring, dialogic pedagogy of the event as an acknowledgement of the theorists I have called upon most frequently in developing this perspective, namely Ingold (2007), Holquist (2002), and Biesta (2013). Developmental norms, the home learning environment, and intergenerational learning have also provided context for these interpretations.

The present chapter is once again informed by document analysis, in which frequency of entries is a determinant of a diary's value (McCulloch 2004, p. 104). By evaluating frequency of entries, which is represented as 'Pages against Time' in the chart below (Figure 22), three distinct periods were discovered. Closer inspection soon revealed that a shift in the diary's purpose, also a key facet of document analysis (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p. 41), could be linked to these turning points.

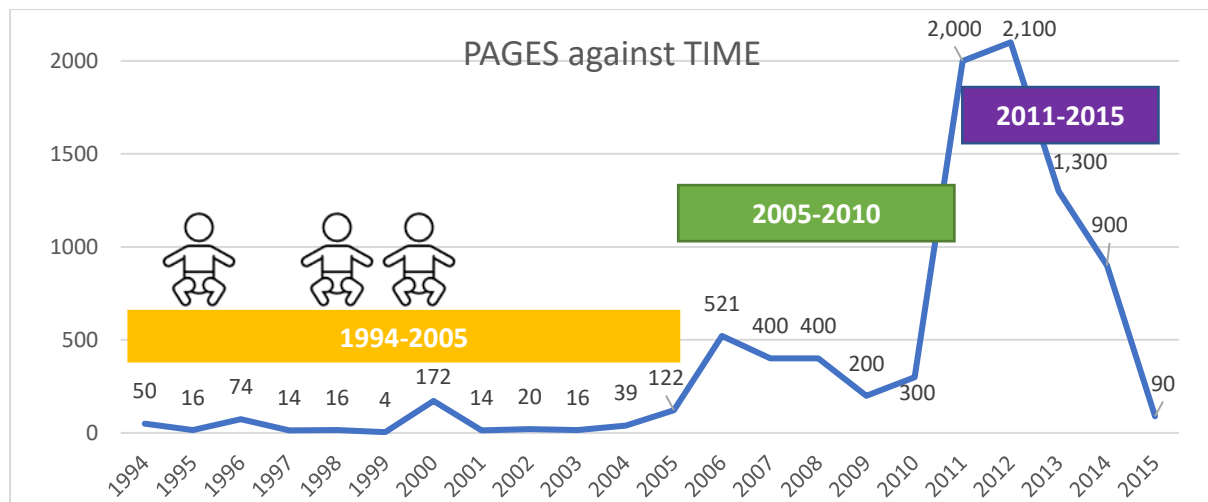


Figure 22. PAGES against TIME.

Period Three spans the final five years (2011-2015) that I was a stay-at-home dad. The period begins with Volumes 15 (cover, Figure 21) and by the end of Volume 47, I had written 6,400 pages of text, including approximately 1,000 drawings. In order to achieve this, I was writing nearly every day. In terms of frequency of entries alone, these might be said to be the most valuable years of the diary.

In terms of developmental stages, my children's progress can be shown as seen in Table 20, below.

Year	Diary volume(s)	Madeleine	Max	Gus
2011	14 – 24	Teen (12-18)	Teen (12-18)	Gradeschooler (5-12)
2012	24 – 35			Gradeschooler (5-12) Teen (12-18)
2013	35 – 42	Teen (12-18) Young Adult (18-21)		
2014	42 – 46			
2015	47			

Table 19. Period Three: Locating my children within developmental stages.

The bulk of the data from Period Three finds my children in the Teen stage. Gus enters this stage near the beginning of Period Three and Madeleine transitions out of it and into the stage of Young Adult about halfway through this Period; Max is a Teen throughout. The published norms and expectations associated with the Teen years in the US largely focus on anatomical changes brought

on with puberty, struggles with identity and relationships, and guidance for parental patience, acceptance, and rules (see especially CDC, 2024p and Medline Plus, 2024). Nevertheless, the developmental relevance persists in ‘serve and return’ interactions operational in developing brain circuitry from infancy through adolescence and beyond (Center on the Developing Child, 2016), and so will continue to be a context for the documented events where it appears.

My children’s progress can also be shown in terms of their ages and school levels, as shown in Table 21, below.

Child	Ages	School Levels
Madeleine	15	Grade 9 – University 2 nd Year
Max	12	Grade 6 – Grade 11
Gus	10	Grade 5 – Grade 10

Table 20. Period Three: Children’s Ages and School Levels.¹⁵

There is a superabundance of educational events in Period Three. Data selection based on ‘what fascinates’ (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44) was insufficient means to reduce the quantity of selected events to an interpretable quantity. This was a struggle which continued into the final days of writing this thesis. I came to the conclusion that in order to best represent the diary as a data source, I needed to select only *the most unique* data from Period Three, which most differentiates Period Three from the two periods which precede it.

Consequently, I set aside many narrative arcs and individual events, some of which are noted in Table 22, below, where each participant is listed alongside events which are representative in their narrative arc, as well as its location in the diary. For Madeleine, a moment of her reading beside me—that physical closeness we shared—was reminiscent of the much earlier claim of something being ‘irreplaceable’ in such reading (D1:04.12.1996). There are also for her the narrative arcs of all of her high school athletic and academic pursuits. For Max, there were many events which demonstrate his confidence in home, church, and school, with a persistent physicality consistent with the whole arc of his American football seasons. His greatest narrative arc in these later years consists in his growing interest and pursuit of educational opportunities in music and performance. For Gus, there are events in which he continues his earlier assertion of a dialogic responsibility (‘I’m singing!’ D5:19.01.2006). His narrative arcs involve the ways he was becoming a storyteller and illustrator, and a social, artistic, and educational critic.

¹⁵ US Grade 5 corresponds to UK Year 6. This US high school included Grades 9-12, similar to Year 10-Year 13.

Some of these omitted arcs also show how I continued into my final five years as a stay-at-home dad, finding new opportunities to become involved in my children's education at home, at school, and in their future educational pursuits at university. As I had found unpredictable qualification to teach music at St. Monica School and unpredictable success in the outcomes of those efforts (D5:24.12.2005; D5:19.01.2006; D10:06.12.2007), so in their new high school I found qualification in sport which I had never played before—basketball, lacrosse, and rowing—but to which I was able to make significant contribution by my involvement and from which I gained again a sense of belonging. At the same time, I extended my skills to teaching adults at my church in their formation towards the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Also, a narrative arc of genealogical research lasting some eight years (first documented here D4:26.04.2004) found fulfilment in the successful qualification of my research by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). These, too, argue for ways in which I was building a sense of belonging antithetical to the isolation discourse associated with research on stay-at-home dads.

Some of the events in this list impacted all of us. The most dramatic of these was the closure of St. Monica School in 2012, which forced transitions to a different, secular school system mentioned above. These years document our search for new places of meaning making and the ways we found a new sense of belonging within this different school system, creating new networks of places with the home learning environment. Additionally, the intrusion of devices—from computers to hand-held gaming devices and smartphones—interrupted our family patterns of dialogue and initiated the late entry of our family into the world of social media, a rapid expansion of the ways in which technology provides for new 'place-making projects (Agnew, 2011). Beyond this, as the children grew older, we all experienced an increase in expectations around grades and other measures of success as qualifications for future education and employment.

As I exclude many events which document the experiences of our family life, it would seem disproportionate to continue to include many events which respond to previous research on stay-at-home dads. So instead, I will mention here that during this period, there were a few entries which might be of interest to a gender perspective interpretation. For example, at one point, I claim that 'I am as isolated as ever' (D29:06.06.2012). This was written the day after St. Monica School closed, after I had lost that community where I had experienced such a profound sense of belonging. It is not documented with any reference to gender. Two similar experiences of isolation occur at D33:12.10.2012 and D35:07.12.2012, the first with immediate reference to the school closure and the second with reference to what I experience as a lack of audience for my creative output. The

only documented experiences within Period Three which make reference to gender were along the lines of being ‘the only male’ at a church meeting for parents (D37:20.03.2013) and in a rowing class for adults (D38:30.05.2013).

Participant	Event	Diary location
Madeleine	Sat by me to read her Tolkien	D25:06.01.2012
	Basketball	D25:24.01.2012
	University search	D26:02.03.2012
	Rowing	D31:22.07.2012
	SAT scores	D34:26.10.2012
	NCAA Division I Scholarship	D41:08.11.2013
	Lacrosse	D44:29.04.2014
Max	‘Max is awesome’	D15:26.02.2011
	Knows ‘the light of Christ’	D16:20.04.2011
	Science Fair experiment	D25:28.01.2012
	Home Economics	D36:24.02.2013
	Field Trip	D38:09.06.2013
	School cabaret performance	D42:22.02.2014
Gus	Waves from the sanctuary	D16:20.04.2011
	Assists Max’s science experiment	D25:07.01.2012
	Writes & illustrates short story	D25:24.01.2012
	Field Trip	D38:09.06.2013
	Wants a career in education	D39:08.07.2013
	Critic of catechesis	D41:18.11.2013
	Studying film	D42:02.02.2014
Tom	Asked to speak at basketball banquet	D15:14.03.2011
	Lacrosse scorekeeper	D27:18.03.2012
	DAR research approved	D35:30.11.2012
	Teaching RCIA	D36:28.02.2013
	Rowing with Madeleine at Stroke	D38:10.06.2013
	Showing Max how to play guitar	D41:29.10.2013
	Celebrating Wes Anderson day w/ Gus	D44:02.05.2014
All	Closure of St. Monica School	D27:10.03.2012
	Grades	D36:30.01.2013
	Devices	D35:26.12.2012
	Social media	D45:07.06.2014

Table 21. Period Three: Some of the stories set aside.

Having reduced all of this, I have retained here from Period Three the data which best expresses its uniqueness. I would like to suggest that the entries from this period might be seen as one narrative arc followed by a second in two movements separated by an interlude:

1. The Artist’s Wayfaring
2. Conversation Between the Generations, First Movement
3. Interlude
4. Conversation Between the Generations, Second Movement

These begin with an arc which introduces a new therapeutic approach to my diary based on *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 1992). The final, musically constructed arc of 'conversation' continues the action and responsibility of this approach, sharing a dialogic events with special reference to the idea of education as a 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109). Along the way, this narrative search for meaning encounters examples from the series of over 1,000 drawings which I came to call 'cloud drawings.' These are included here, but sparingly, and only with a bounded refusal to interpret them individually. As a group, though, I do interpret them with the help of contemporaneous attempts at their interpretation in the diary.

The role of my participant children in selecting this data has been minimized by the quantity of data and my own confusion over what to include. Diary entries, which typically ran to three pages, were not as easy to share spontaneously as the brief poems and thematic entries of Periods One and Two had been. With only two exceptions (WA13.06.2020 and IGDM:18.04.2020), those things from the diary which were shared, such as reminiscences of teaching Madeleine how to drive a car (WA:18.05.2020), fell in among all the other deselected narrative arcs listed above. Our discussions of the diary were also impacted by the Covid-19 global pandemic, the impact of which on this project will receive fuller treatment in the Discussion chapter which follows. All of Period Three was read and shared in periods of government enforced isolation.

This Period Three, then, reveals a more reflective purpose and representation. So, our interpretation of it becomes—more than the other two periods—an opportunity for something like a meta-reflection on the purpose of the diary, of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad, and of education itself.

7.2 Events

From Period Three, I share 28 events, as shown in Table 13, below.

No.	Diary Location	Event	Response
		The Artist's Wayfaring	
1	D15:25.02.2011	Frontiers	
2	D15:04.03.2011	The Artist's Way/Armstrong	
3	D15:07.03.2011	Cloud Drawings begin	
4	D15:16.03.2011	No meaning	
5	D17:10.05.2011	The Blue Line	
6	D17:17.05.2011	Thesis Statement	
		Conversation 1	
7	D24:11.12.2011	Maestro Stretansky	
8	D26:27.02.2012	'Is Grampa about to die?'	
9	D29:10.05.2012	Adoration	
10	D32:09.09.2012	Dad teaches Max	
		Conversation 2	
11	D35:27.11.2012	No ego	
12	D35:21.12.2012	Response to environment	
13	D35:17.01.2013	Delivery	
14	D36:31.01.2013	Numbered Psalms	Madeleine
15	D36:14.02.2013	Vocation	
16	D38:17.04.2013	Finch	
17	D39:21.06.2013	Frontiers & Jesuits	
18	D39:06.07.2013	'Productive'	
		Conversation 3	
19	D40:23.09.2013	Dad: Ecce homo	
20	D41:10.10.2013	Madeleine's call	
21	D42:13.12.2013	Waiting to be called upon	
22	D42:02.02.2014	Dad teaches Gus	
23	D44:13.05.2014	Taxi Driver with Gus	Gus
24	D44:22.05.2014	A big rain	
25	D45:31.08.2014	Dad teaches Gus	
26	D46:31.10.2014	Dad teaches me	
27	D46:07.11.2014	Repetition	
28	D46:23.04.2014	A hidden calling	
29	D47:14.01.2015	Dad learning	

Table 22. Period Three: Events and responses.

7.2.1 Arc 7: The Artist's Wayfaring (Feb-May 2011)

I claim the start of Volume 15 of my diary as a turning point because, aside from the dramatic increase in frequency of entries which it launches, it announces in its first entry a desire 'to do a better job... with this thing' (D15:11.01.2011). There is, in this sense of readiness to begin something new, also a sense of expectant waiting, of not knowing. So, I return to poetry. The subject of my undergraduate degree again becomes a practice for structuring my response to the addressivity of

my present environment. In the following lines, three poetic paragraphs are each headed by the word 'Frontiers', as if each paragraph needed this additional boundary.

D15:25.02.2011

Frontiers

The depth of windows, mostly:
pollen-greied rain dried on the outside
soap scum & food bits this side over the sink.
I measure their distances, I select
sides, I choose sides, I
let them battle it out. Between
lies my beyond.

Frontiers

I live on the edge of nothing—which is to say
My life is mostly nothing, but I have not yet fully
crossed over: the air is nothing and the time
wraps wraithlike round the nothing air,
smothering it. I take in the air unconsciously, these
mysteries of unwilled persistence unfold each
sleeping heartbeat, sleeping breath, sleeping
every system, dreamless, neural, peptic; sense
lies sleeping to sense. These floors I walk are fake-
pergo and polyester. I make the round of windows,
pause now at the door. Stains here on the wall suggest
a tennis ball serially bounced, caught? Not
likely, I see the ball chased by the dog instead

Frontiers

There is no music like the song sung alone:
No ears, no hearing, but that which pushes
the voice, rounds it into its bearing, up, up.
There should be other hearing, there should
be God, and is, but

Here we see one of my most explicit renderings of our home learning environment shaped *as environment*, in its natural and human-built conditions and structures, including physical, historical, and symbolic constructions of the place (Gustafson, 2001). It is also notable for its documentation of the 'distinction' of this place, with all its detail which would render the place identifiable (Gustafson, 2001). This documentation seems to suggest a troubling sense of self-identification (Gustafson, 2001) with the limiting structures of the environment, and so a sense of belonging (Agnew, 2011) in this meaning-making place of frontiers.

The frontiers here are first *surfaces*. This is made most plain in the first stanza, where the frontier is the surface of the window's glass, made all the more visible by the things which adhere to it, inside and outside. These surfaces persist in the second stanza's floors, windows, door, and wall. However, the surfaces which are the frontiers repeatedly suggest a *beyond* which I claim for myself: 'Between / lies my beyond.' The beyond, though, is also a 'nothing' which I 'take in' as breath, becoming myself a frontier through which this nothing enters and exits while I continue to count the surfaces around me and the marks—'stains here on the wall'—which prove the surfaces' reliable resistance. In the third stanza, though, the surfaces disappear and there is music. 'The song sung alone' is heard only by its singer, a taking up of that 'sleeping breath' and that condition wherein 'sense / lies sleeping to sense' so that the song transgresses the frontier of the body when sung and again enters the body in the only hearing—the singer's own—'which pushes / the voice, rounds it into its bearing, up, up.' The final two lines, then, suggest the possibility that such song might dissolve all the surfaces of this container and break some upward plane to be heard by God. 'But'—the word forms a final frontier of uncertainty, of the limits of knowing. But—again—'between / lies my beyond.' This is the place I have staked for myself. It is place where I recognize my own solubility with a claim to my own interiority and that in a kind of dialogue with the outer world, including this unlocatable God.

The location of this beyond as a *between* place suggests that the experience might be interpreted as *liminal* (Van Gennep, 1960), as existing in an in-between place where a rite of passage might occur, and some integration into community might be anticipated. I raised this as a possibility in passing during Period One, in the liminal space across which Madeleine took her first steps (D1:05.12.1996). I return to liminality now not only for this specific event, but as a possible way of describing stay-at-home dads. 'Liminal' seems preferable to 'isolated' or 'marginalized' with their destructive fixity and alienating connotations whereas 'liminal' implies potential *movement* towards integration. This language is not typically applied to stay-at-home dads, even when described as 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1987) patterns of masculine and feminine roles. The titles of two articles by Doucet, 'Do Men Mother?' (2006) and 'It was almost like having a job, except I didn't get paid' (2004), both reveal the construction of stay-at-home dads as liminal, the first in terms of gender performance and the second in terms of work value. Both reveal a neither-here-nor-there situation: the man who is (obviously) not a mother, but acts as one, and the man who occupies a place of work without the compensation which might be described as a just return for labour. If other actors in family and childcare situations such as postnatal homecare workers (Zadorodznj, 2009), babysitters (Easterbrook, Raby, and Lehman, 2020), mothers (Rauktis et al, 2016; Mahon-Daley and Andrews, 2002) and fathers in prison (Bartlett and Eriksson, 2019) can be described as liminal, then thinking

about stay-at-home dads in their liminality instead of in isolation or marginalization, might also give us new ways of seeing and understanding both the role and the opportunities which it affords.

This poem is also rooted in educational experience, as it points to how much I had been missing teaching at St. Monica School, where the new pastor had reduced school Mass frequency from weekly to biweekly and made known that the music ministry team was less welcome under his watch. When I say, 'there should be other hearing, there should', it is, given these contexts which surround this entry in the diary, a thinly disguised lament for those beautifully integrated experiences with the schoolchildren. The network of places for meaning-making (Agnew, 2011), in other words, was being disrupted. Church and school were no longer places which would reliably 'take up my beginnings' (Biesta 2006, p. 48), so meaning-making in the home learning environment became fraught, recognizing a liminality whilst seeking even in the physical structures of the home signs for a sense of belonging (Agnew, 2011): 'Between / lies my beyond.'

D15:04.03.2011

I.

So. Met with a psychotherapist today. She suggested for 21 days write 3 pp one side—a method for "unblocking" from a book called *The Artist's Way*.

I thought she would have more questions. She had two: "where's home?" and "what are you passionate about?" To the former, I pointed to my peripatetic ancestry, that burial places say something of home, but for now, it's my house. (In hindsight, I could have answered "heaven".) To the latter, I said, as Louis Armstrong said "(a man) wants to give his kids a better life than his."

This diary entry responds to the therapist's suggestion. It begins with a Roman numeral one, indicating the first of the proposed 21 days of applying the structures of *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 1992) to my diary writing. As a sign of my commitment well beyond that limit, I would continue to number my diary entries until I reached CCCLXVI, which somewhat comically occurs at D26:28.02.2012, perhaps exemplary of the fallibility of the documentary record of the diary. Despite that error, for the remainder of Period Three, I continued to write 'the morning pages', described as 'three pages of longhand writing, strictly stream-of-consciousness' (Cameron 1992, p. 10) to be written every morning. This practice, accompanied by exercises and meditations through the book, are intended to move creative practice from a place of being 'blocked' by self-criticism and -censorship and into greater freedom and productivity.

Along with announcing this new therapeutic purpose and structure for my diary, this entry documents two questions for reflection posed by the therapist. First, I am asked, 'Where is home?'

As much as this thesis has already troubled the notion of the home learning environment as a manifoldly networked, meaning-making place (Gustafson, 2001; Agnew, 2011), my answer might come as a surprise. I was not at that time prepared to offer such contexts. I do not mention my role as a stay-at-home dad, perhaps because I rarely used any title other than 'dad,' and in those occasions would have described myself as 'a full-time dad,' leaving the 'home' out the nomenclature and replacing it with time. So, instead of addressing 'home' as perhaps the spatial aspect of my dialogic situation, I offer the temporal aspect, relying on my genealogical research to express my uniqueness as contextualized within the intergenerational connections of a temporal line (Ingold 2007, pp. 110-11). Note that I describe my ancestors as 'peripatetic,' indicating my awareness of their wayfaring before I had the theoretical language for it which I have gained in this research. Their movement, in my brief reverence to them, is all that describes them.

My aside that 'burial places say something of home' is an answer freighted with the meanings of place. Most obviously, it names them as a place and offers this name to graves alone. If we consider the simplest construction of this idea, that 'Place is security, space is freedom' (Tuan, 1977, p. 3), we might see the grave as secure but unfree—and that this says something of home. But it is Gustafson's (2001) triadic construction of place which is more helpful here. If we first consider the self in his construction, a place represents important periods of one's 'life path,' (Gustafson, 2001, p. 9), and this might take on meaning, especially for one who is peripatetic, where that path ends. We can, second, consider the relational axis between self and other, and how these graves locate or give place to much of what can now be known about these ancestors, so my genealogical relationship to them becomes located in geography with the specificity of 'distinction' and the 'continuity' of permanence (Gustafson, 2001). And third, there is the opportunity to imagine these graves at the polar extreme of historical and symbolic constructions of a place, as history is almost exclusively what gives these places meaning for me, with some meaning-making reserved for the relationship between these places and the heaven which I also name.

'But for now,' I said, once again locating myself temporally, 'it's my house.' The 'now' disrupts the 'continuity' of the grave and replaces it with change (Gustafson, 2001). This house is furthermore not 'my home', not 'my home learning environment', and not a place where I find meaning-making in relationship, but only a physical environment, much as that described in the diary entry above (D15:25.02.2011), which, written only one week earlier, may have yet been fresh in my memory.

Outside of these contexts of spatial place, my remembrance of my ancestors situates me in an awareness of my temporal place in the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott 1972 via

Pring 2001, pp. 108-109), learning about and from those who came before me and from those with whom I share the dialogue of daily life. Intergenerational learning is said to improve one's sense of cultural history and belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023); perhaps this is linked to my sense of belonging as an attribute of place (Agnew, 2011) and why, when localized networks of meaning-making places such as church and school diminished significantly in their reliability, this temporal and dialogical aspect continued to shape my meaning-making as educational.

When asked for my passion, my answer is clearer. My passion, quoting Armstrong (1968), is the gift that I give my kids, which in my case is no material thing, but is the gift of a stay-at-home dad as 'the primary caregiver to his children' (At-home Dad Network, 2023). As much as it is the aim of this thesis to answer what the gift of that caregiving looks like, it is here represented simply by its intergenerational character and a unidirectional aspect which is uncharacteristic to the depiction of the gift elsewhere, where it is so often initiated by the children and almost always shared in a co-constructed, dialogic way. There is, nonetheless, in this description of my 'passion' a kind of flawed understanding of my responsibility to my children, a clearer perception of which might have seen 'the question of *subjectivity*, that is, the question of how we can be or become a subject of action and responsibility' (Biesta 2013, p. 142) and, furthermore, how my caregiving might have resembled teaching, 'understood as a gift or as an act of gift giving' (Biesta 2013, p. 44). This centres my motivation in their advancement, which is throughout the thesis shown to be educational, even in our simple, everyday interactions.

D15:07.03.2011

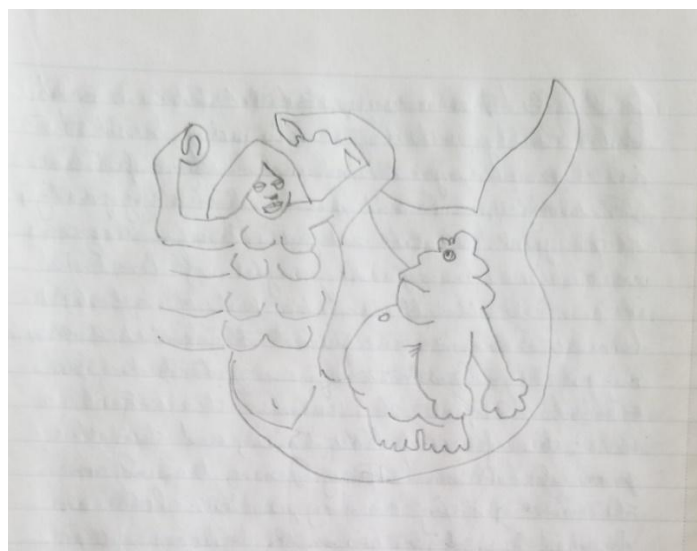


Figure 23. 'Cloud Drawing' #1, D15:07.03.2011.

A few days later, I started a new daily practice which lasted 2 years, regular until D34:30.10.2012 and thereafter intermittent until D37:08.03.2013. During Period Two, I had gone beyond the 'Mood Inventories' of *Mind Over Mood* (Greenberger and Padesky, 1995) to devise inventories which suited me better and then helped me to structure my diary for five years. Now, in Period Three, I went beyond the three 'morning pages', to add a practice of three evening pages. Instead of being filled with words, though, these would have drawings. Figure 23, above, is the first of these drawings.

As mentioned above, I do not offer interpretations for them individually. This reasons for this research boundary (which is also a kind of frontier) shall become clearer at D17:10.05.2011, below.

Meanwhile, in this photograph, the page reveals its own character as a surface, which was essential to my practice in these drawings. You can see here the texture which is inscribed upon the page by my writing on its other side. In a process which I remember calling 'listening to the page' (although I could not find documentation of this usage in the diary), my pencil became an 'indicatory gesture' (Vygotsky 1978, p. 108, cited by Ingold 2007, p. 121) of my movement across the terrains of light and shadow created by this texture. In this sense, these are not properly drawings, but more like the pre-linguistic marks or 'scribbles' drawn by Max in my diary 11 years earlier (see Period One, Figure 14). They were not drawings with a desired outcome, but a practice of entering into a dialogue with the page to see what would emerge whilst wayfaring its terrain.

The duration of this practice was troubled by a sense of having no idea what I was doing or why. This led to many entries in the diary which, in the deselection of data, I gathered into an 8,953-word document called 'Cloud Theory' after my designation of them as 'cloud drawings' (D15:11.03.2011). These made a running series of reflective and inconclusive commentaries on the drawings. Central among these was a reflection called The Blue Line, which I share below (D17:10.05.2011), along with the best I can offer of a present understanding of the purpose of these drawings in the diary and the reason for their inclusion in this research.

D15:16.03.2011

Practice of Poetry #1.

I remember my mother singing,

"too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra,
too-ra-loo-ra-loo-rai,
too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra,
hush now don't you cry;

too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra,
too-ra-loo-ra-loo-rai,
too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra—
it's an Irish lullaby.”

In those sounds was a comfort, sure, but also a question—they had to mean something, hadn't they? Could she sing all that and it had no meaning? Of course, I was too young to ask that way and this is just a memory I remember at your asking not of my own will, as it were, not as if I often pondered that scene and wondered. I would have been very small, though, for her to be singing to me, and I do remember it—she was proud of her voice and happy to be using it. She liked the song, as it was Irish, or mock-Irish anyway, and she was the greater part Irish herself. Her hair was black then and she smiled as she sang... Why I imagine it struck me—aside from its delivery and its deliverer—was that meaning/not meaning. Imagine the young mind! Trying to sort out all these sounds the grown ones say like “toe” and “eat” and “love” and to what does each sound point? And along comes “too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra”, pointing at nothing visible while its singer fills your vision, fills your senses—no meaning, no meaning—and contented by this, you sleep.

In order to speed the ‘unblocking’ suggested by my therapist and *The Artist's Way*, I also began to study *Practice of Poetry* (Behn & Twichell, 1992). In the first of its writing exercises, it asked for my earliest memory of poetry. As shown above, my response was to offer the lyrics of a song by Shannon (1913) made popular by Bing Crosby (1944) and sung to me as a lullaby by my mother. Following those lyrics, I reflect on language acquisition and semiotics, to narratively arrive at a suggestion that ‘no meaning, no meaning’ is a place of contentment and sleep. The addressivities of Behn & Twichell in the text and of my mother's song in memory call me to a response which summons the unknowing (John of the Cross, Saint, 1991) which I had studied and sung when Madeleine was an infant (D1:19.08.1996), recalling a contentment in which

all things ceased; I went out from myself
leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies. (John of the Cross, Saint 1991, p. 52.)

Or, as the case might be, among the apple blossoms:

from your sleeping hand
I stole an apple blossom:
warm from your hand,
sweetened by your hand (D1:12.05.1997.)

In my struggle to understand what is happening in this reflection, I erroneously use the words ‘delivery’ and ‘deliverer’, which runs counter to an understanding of communication which

is not a process of transportation of information from one mind to another, but is rather to be understood as a process of meaning and interpretation. It is a process that is radically open and undetermined, and hence weak and risky. (Biesta 2013, p. 26.)

One might then ask, as I do in the diary entry's reflection, how that process of meaning and interpretation might work. Biesta looks back to Dewey when he claims that 'the meaning of the world is, after all, not located in the things and events themselves'—the progressively more abstract concepts of 'toe' and 'eat' and 'love' in my reflection—'but in the social practices in which things, gestures, sounds, and events play a role' (Biesta 2013, p. 31). Biesta continues:

We might therefore say that because meaning only exists *in* social practices, it is, in a sense, located *in-between* those who constitute the social practice through their interactions. (Biesta 2013, p. 31.)

This statement finds its parallel in dialogism, where

a dialogue is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is most important of the three, for without it the other two would have no meaning. (Holquist 2002, p. 38.)

Both of these give new contextualization to my poetic claim that 'between / lies my beyond' (D15:25.02.2011), suggesting that it is perhaps this between—where meaning is made within dialogue—which I am claiming as my beyond, my transcendence. As such, it might be an expression of how much I was missing my educational place at St. Monica School and wanting again to know that gift.

To think about teaching in terms of transcendence suggests that teaching can be understood as a gift or as an act of gift giving. (Biesta 2013, p. 44).

What I think I was trying to say here, but with the inaccuracies of an unedited philosophical struggle, would not be 'delivery' and 'deliverer', but the same 'gift' and 'giver' implied in my citation of another song just above (D15:25.02.2011): '(a man) wants to give his kids a better life than his' (Armstrong, 1968). This is a gift which, by the way, might be gendered as a man's in this song, but was clearly the gift of my mother in this memory, unbounded by such issues of identity. Rather, we are once again into the topic of subjectivity, which begins with dialogue.

To exist as subject, in and with the world, thus means trying to come into dialogue with the world, where dialogue is not to be understood as conversation¹⁶ but as what I have called an existential form. (Biesta 2017, p. 83.)

This again runs parallel to dialogism.

The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.' (Holquist 2002, p. 30.)

And this addressivity is linked directly to our ability to be taught.

our human subjectiveness may not be located in our capacity to learn, to make sense, to give meaning, and so forth, but is first and foremost to be found in our "ability" to be addressed, to be spoken to, to be taught. (Biesta 2017, p.4.)

So, while the problem of the song lyric at first appears as a problem of semiotics, I rightfully return my focus to how the 'singer fills your vision, fills your senses.' Biesta, referring again to Levinas, writes of how 'Signification thus derives its sense from this particular "event" or "encounter" with another being,' in which, he says, 'the face speaks to me' and that this is the event in which 'signification introduces itself into being, that it becomes real' (Biesta 2017, p. 52).

Among the features of a place of meaning-making, then, this experience suggests my prioritization of the relational axis between self and other (Gustafson, 2001). There, the face of the other has the possibility of becoming the ultimate place of belonging (Agnew, 2011), where not only is meaning-making possible, but we encounter the frontier of meaning/not meaning without fear—indeed, with contentment. And this relational importance draws us back again to the developmental guidance on serve and return interactions, in which the parent's 'return' constitutes 'responding in a very directed, meaningful way' (Center on the Developing Child, 2024), as my mother has done here. My 'serve,' though, from my infancy, appears here only as a silence and a gaze. It is evidence of my awareness, though, of how 'development is a highly interactive process' and that 'the environment in which one develops before and soon after birth provides powerful experiences' (Center on the Developing Child, 2016, p. 1).

¹⁶ The differentiation insisted upon here by Biesta, to be clear, does not exclude conversation from the existential form of dialogue, but allows for the dialogic event in addressivities and responses outside of conversation.



Figure 24. My mother's face.

Finally, the affective character of this event, its sense of joy and comfort, cannot be overlooked. As we have seen, such positive emotional content to some extent drove the collection of events in my diary during Period Two and repeatedly found them in educational events, especially in my children's school. Here again is an example of the epistemology of love, in which

The primary meaning of study... has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another; it has to do with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning. Properly understood, at the heart of study is love. (Wilson 2020, p. 31.)

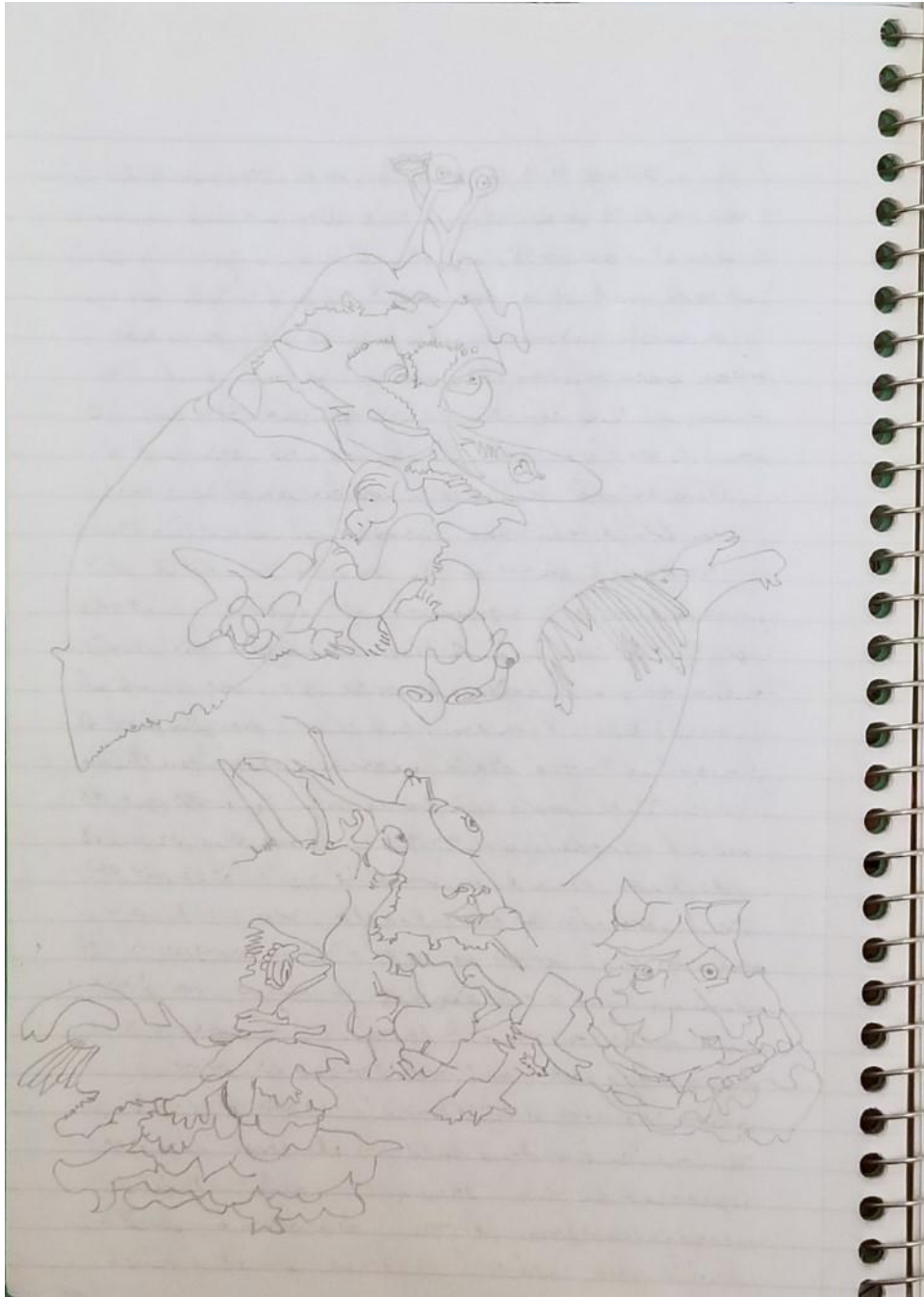


Figure 25. Cloud drawing.

I went down to the Blue Line—a café? a river? I didn't know. It told me its name and I was there. Others were there too—that's what attracted me, what called me back. And I went back, I went forward, I went back, time meaning nothing there, as if God's embrace, God's eternity, had taken hold.

The others there, all unfamiliar, did not speak. They made no noise. They kept their silence. But they looked and they knew and their silence deadened not the bright glances, their silence shook with eagerness, waiting. They shared their place like strangers in a café, or, some of them, like intimates—not with me, but with each other. And there was no knowing them other to look on their faces and see there the hiddenness that ballooned behind them, within them, worlds tethered to their forms, but invisible.

No narrative suggested itself in this space, no explanation. Description alone remained—no dialog, remember? Was it all with their eyes, all with their bodies, their postures, their distances that communicated whatever relationships caused them to share this space?

Each day I went there, not always long, but always I ate of its white food, like Eric Satie and his diet of egg whites, bread and marrow. Each day, the crowd was different, only I seemed to be returning, everyone else moving on. Where were they going? Why was I staying? Was this a purgatory and only I its greatest, most unrequited sinner?

I lifted the veil on the scene again and again. Each day had its new faces, none of them the same as one ever seen before. But I could, while there, simply turn away from that day and find, ah! Here's the crowd from 20 days ago or 17! Here's that face I loved when first I saw it, that face I resented, that face I forgave, that face from which I begged forgiveness. Most of them not that dramatic! Most mere recognition, mere memory—I would say as unassuming as recognizing a letter of an alphabet, but with less meaning, less overt meaning, more mystery—and an alphabet as yet unlearned, an alphabet with uncountable letters. Still, they seemed to be spelling out something.

And of course, on turning away, returning, going back, I often found faces among the familiar, faces I had never seen before, or perhaps a gesture of a hand or the angle of an unwell tooth. I have meant today to go back, to begin. To begin what? I do not know... What then? Wasn't there something that drew me out, nearer them, caused me to speak, to begin the interview?

And so I've thought, could I not go back and find them, the faces, the forms—some of them truly monstrous—that most intrigued me. Couldn't I speak with them? Or could I overhear their silent—as of yet—conversations? Why could I not tease them out of their silence? Is their very essence the avoidance of narrative? Does something prevent me from knowing their stories? Or would knowing their stories somehow disenfranchise them? Would it strip them of their dignity? Would it make them more real? Is mystery dignity and familiarity base? Or do they point me to a different language, one that I have not discovered yet, one that they are already speaking but I have not heard? So this is my project. To return, to interview, to discover. I want to go down to the Blue Line again. In doing so, I hope that I don't destroy the place.

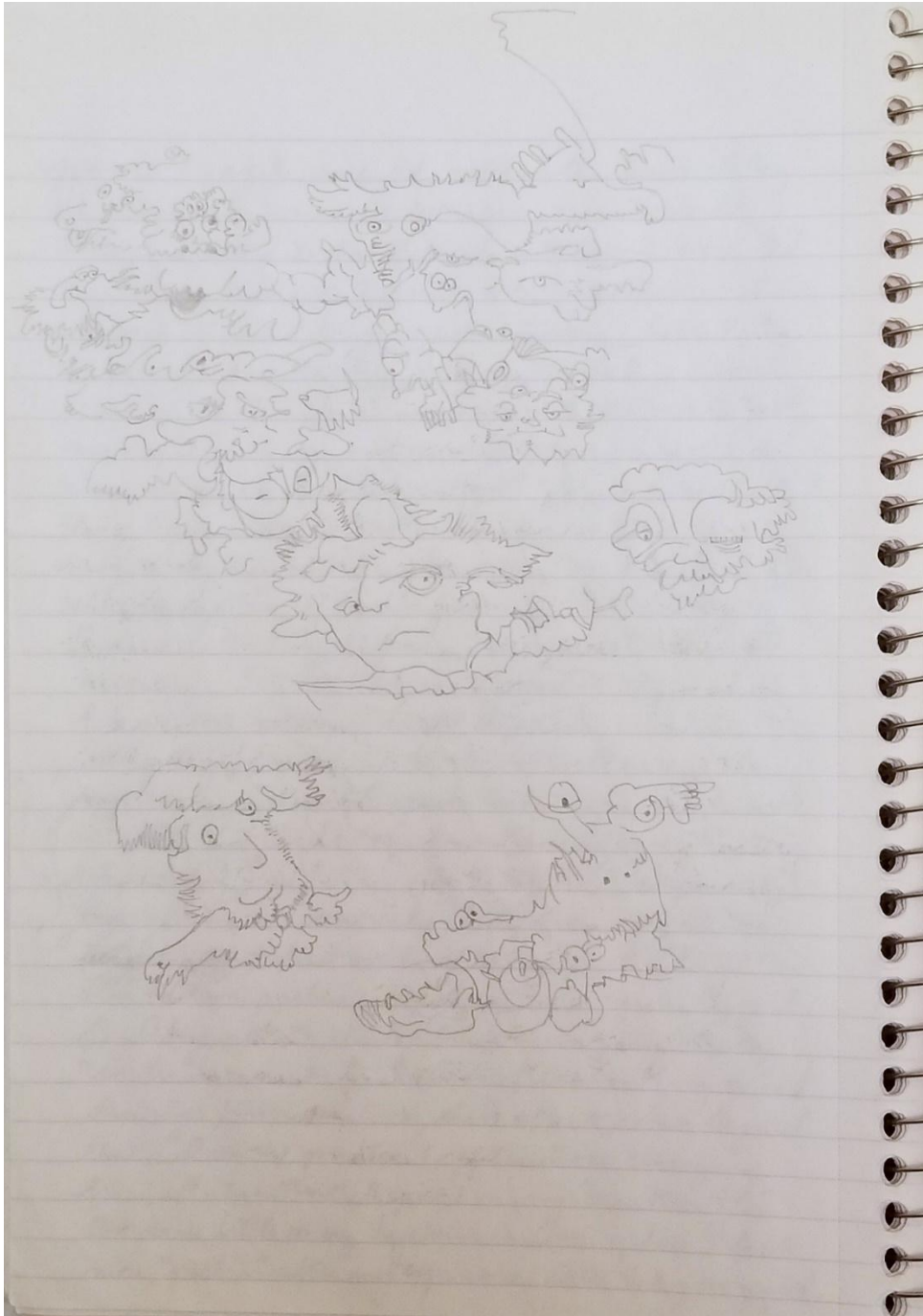


Figure 26. Cloud Drawing (D16:22.04.2011).

It would perhaps seem easiest to interpret this diary entry in the context of its final word, 'place.' As we have considered the home learning environment as a place for meaning-making, so is the diary such a place, entering my hands as a thing with printed blue lines, and into which I entered the written line of my life, a place for meaning making. It is from its opening icon of the suffering Christ (D1:Frontispiece) a place of encounter, and now in this meandering and mysterious meditation on this place called The Blue Line, it becomes a place where too much revisiting might amount to its

destruction, an iconoclast violence. The frontispiece, as an icon, had suggested and continues to suggest the endless possibility of which St. John of the Cross wrote:

I entered into unknowing,
yet when I found myself there,
without knowing where I was,
I understood great things...’ (John of the Cross, 1991, pp. 53-54; see Appendix)

The Blue Line suggests a completely different possibility and outcome: this encounter, if improperly managed, might disenfranchise, strip dignity, and destroy—a confession of sensitivity of and a forceful argument for the practice of relational ethics associated with autoethnography. It recognizes the danger in this becoming too much ‘my project’ and hence anticipates, perhaps, the necessary decentring of the self and the rebalancing of the ‘auto’ and ‘ethno’ and ‘graphy’ in my methods. This destruction is not inevitable, however. Another outcome from taking this risk might be the new knowledge associated with research—it might expand reality *in learning a new language*.

This speaks to my powerful experiential association between learning and language. It also reveals, though, my sensitivity to the dignity and power of the teacher. On the one hand, it appears that I am eager to recognise the ‘coming into presence’ of these inhabitants of The Blue Line.

Coming into presence is not simply a process of presenting oneself to the world. It is about beginning in a world full of other beginners in such a way that the opportunities for others to begin are not obstructed. Coming into presence is, therefore, a presentation to others who are not like us. (Biesta 2006, p. 49.)

At the same time, I am recognizing their agency, that they are experts in their own lives (Clark & Statham, 2005), where, for me, ‘there was no knowing them other to look on their faces and see there the hiddenness that ballooned behind them, within them, worlds tethered to their forms, but invisible.’ They have not yet, in other words, given me authority.

The educational question, in other words, is about what it is that we want to give authority to; it is about deciding what it is that we want to have authority in our lives. (Biesta 2013, p. 55.)

It is an expression of how

The weakness of education matters... to the way in which education contributes to the occurrence of the event of subjectivity. (Biesta 2013, p. 24.)

Despite my curiosity and my desire, I cannot seize the subjectivity of these faces. I cannot simply assign to them the identity of their socialization or a narrative arc that ends in qualification. Instead,

I am listening, almost as in a pedagogy of listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986), and listening for their language, almost as if it were one of the hundred (Edwards et al, 1998). I am trying to discover in these faces at The Blue Line, some 'serve' that I might 'return' (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). This is my habit. This is where I begin to look for their coming into the world, and to balance the educational domains of subjectification, socialization, and qualification.

This critical balancing of the three domains of education is reminiscent of the similarly delicate and ethically informed balancing of the three domains of autoethnography. Just as I feared in any self-centred research method the possibility of eclipsing the truths of social structures and research methods with an outsized ego, here again, I want to get out of the way, so that 'the opportunities for others to begin are not obstructed' (Biesta 2006, p. 49), so that all of the other's subjectivity and their capacity for their own meaning-making become subsumed in my techniques and practices of 'what works' (Biesta, 2007). This other option is to embrace the 'innocence' (to use Madeleine's word) and regard the incomprehensible mystery of so many others (and our attempts to write them) with a gaze not unlike that of a child on the face of their singing mother, comfortable in a place of 'no meaning, no meaning' which begins again to resemble the secure *and* free place *and* space (Tuan, 1977), unknowing, and the desirable unpredictability of education (Biesta, 2013). So, The Blue Line, thus interpreted as an expression of these risks and possibilities, might suggest in part why I was so drawn to interpreting all of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad as an embodiment of 'the beautiful risk of education' (Biesta, 2013).

More immediately, however, 'The Blue Line' aimed to interpret the Cloud Drawings which populate Diary Period 3. If meaning making or signification 'becomes real' when 'the face speaks to me' (Biesta 2017, p. 52), then the wayfaring, indicatory gestures of my cloud drawings are a documented search for such meaning making. The word 'face' is repeated 9 times in 'The Blue Line' as I try to understand the significance of these drawings.

Heedful of the danger announced by the diarist and the ethical problems it suggests for exploring this place as a place, I reframe its interpretation as a close reading of a dialogic situation which is temporal, spatial, and axiological (Holquist 2002, p. 152). Instead of this danger, then, the text offers an addressivity which 'called me' and 'told me its name' and, responsibly, 'I went' and 'I was there.' But 'I didn't know' the spatial aspect of the situation—'a café? A river?'—and, as for the temporal aspect, 'time meant nothing.' It is only in the axiological aspect of the situation which I express most confidence and that as a possibility of being in 'God's embrace, God's eternity', but this also might be a purgatory, an enduring liminality. Repetitions of silence dominate the space, and faces conjure

up only a ‘hiddenness that ballooned behind them.’ It is a space of no narrative, no explanation, ‘no dialog.’ Clearly, by this latter I do not refer to the dialogue of dialogism—because I make clear the addressivity and my attempt to respond both in the creation of the drawings and in the attempt to interpret them here—but to the kind of dialog which might liven a narrative. It is a space of no narrative because the drawings do not represent any knowable story arc. And it is a place of no explanation as it defies theorization, even now.

All of this describes the page and my interaction with its surface—coincidentally ruled by blue lines—and my encounter with the results of my wayfaring upon it. Although I first encountered Ingold’s theories of wayfaring in the context of experimental music, the cloud drawings persuaded me of the necessity of the application of this theory to the interpretation of my diary. It was particularly in Ingold’s discussion of ‘apotropaic patterns’ (Ingold 2007, pp. 53-57) that I recognized in my creation of such drawings an action which is fundamentally a human activity, spanning cultures. The image below (Figure 26), which Ingold uses to demonstrate ‘the generality’ (Ingold 2007, p. 53) of this kind of wayfaring, is a drawing of the underworld drawn by a man from the Chukchi people of Siberia, but he also refers here to Greek mythology, Celtic knotwork, drawings from South India, and Paul Klee. I recognized in it an experience of the line which I had encountered in making the cloud drawings. What interests me most about Ingold’s claims about such patterns is that across cultures such drawings have the effect of ‘dissolving the very surface upon which it is drawn’ (Ingold 2007, p. 57).



Figure 27. 'Chukchee sketch representing paths in the world of the dead. Reproduced from Bogoras (1904-09, p. 335)' (Ingold 2007, p. 55).

It is also relevant to note here that such drawings dissolve a surface between the world of the living and the world of the dead, so my sense of not knowing time, place, or my place within God's eternity were all appropriate questions to ask at The Blue Line. And the dissolution of the surface renders apt my concern that I might 'destroy the place.'

Given these interpretive insights and the ethical questions raised in The Blue Line, I needed to consider whether I could include these drawings at all and, if so, how to protect the integrity of these images and what they implied for the diary as a whole. I discovered guidance on this from the work of Kanneiser (2021), a sound artist who gathers field recordings from indigenous sites with a

careful ethics rooted in an anticolonialism which eschews an extractionist mentality. Her descriptions of asking permission of a terrain before gathering any data from it helped me to treat my cloud drawings similarly. I felt comfortable in negotiating a limited representation from their numbers given the condition of only a general interpretation, subjecting no individual image to further theorization.

The insight of these drawings as a means of dissolving the surface recall earlier examples in the diary of such dissolutions, most notably in the potential dissolution of surface in the representation of the icon of Jesus which opens the diary as a place of encounter (D1: Frontispiece) and in my later experience of the dissolution of the surface of a statue of St. Mary (D5:03.12.2005). Something about this—even if you can only bear to see these events as imaginary—has to do with the way I have experienced the ‘coming into presence’ (Biesta 2013, p. 143) posited as a sign of the subjectification which comprises the pedagogy of the event. Furthermore, my hunger for the dialogic event which reveals itself both in *The Strangely Propped Man* and *The Blue Line*, and which seemed to find fulfilment in the singing of *The School Song* with the children of St. Monica’s, is ultimately a hunger for meaning and the education which makes such meaning making ‘real’ when ‘the face speaks to me’ (Biesta 2017, p. 52).

‘The point of education is that students learn *something*, that they learn it for a *reason*, and that they learn it *from someone*.’ (Biesta 2015, p. 76.)

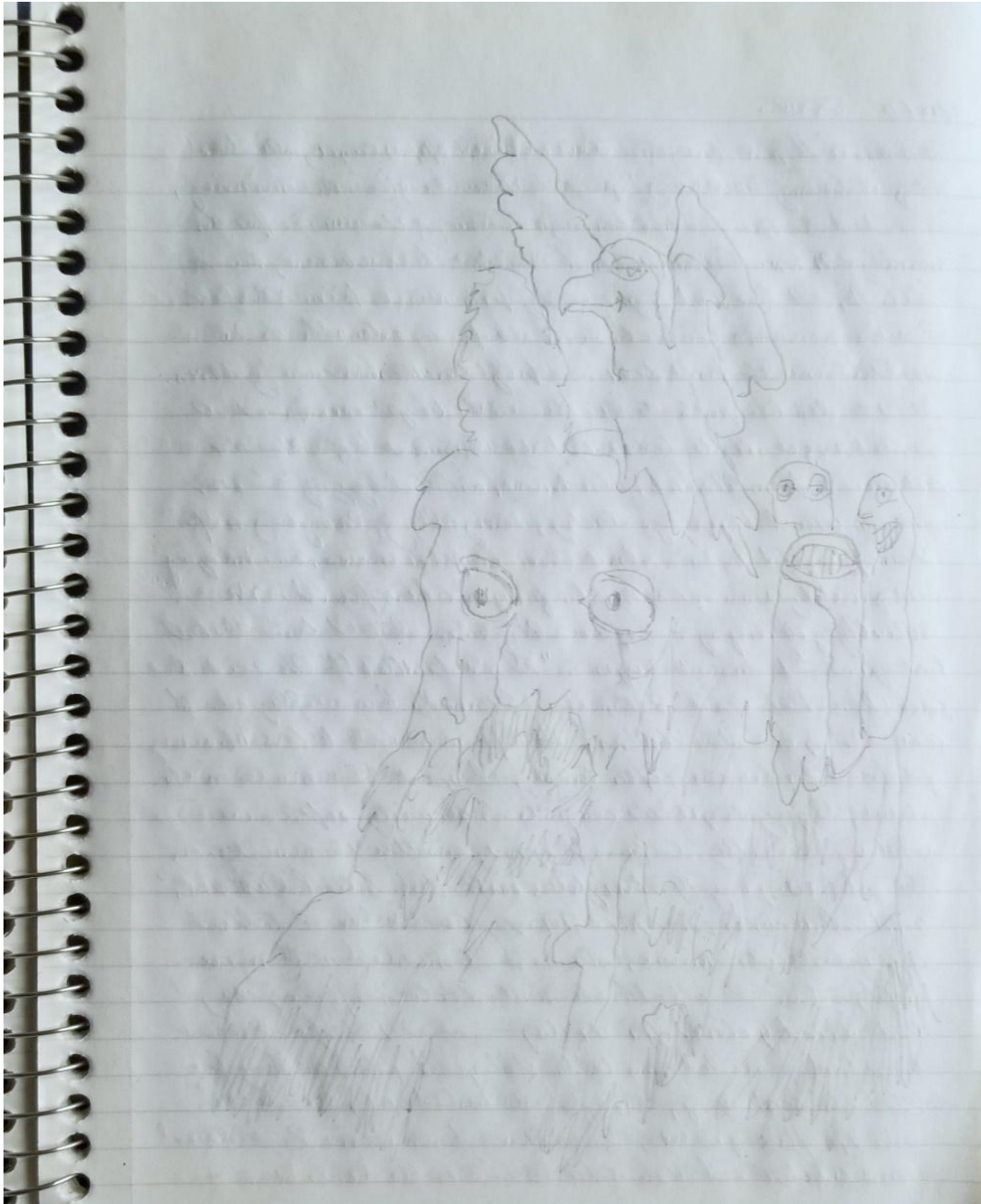


Figure 28. Cloud Drawing (D17:17.05.2011).

D17:17.05.2011

The most revelatory piece of writing from these past few months was not even from *Artist's Way*. It was from *Practice of Poetry*—the “earliest memory” exercise. Meaning/not meaning. It's like a thesis statement for the rest of this.

The Artist's Way prescribes a weekly 'Check-In,' not for revisiting the week's writing, but for reflecting on the experience (Cameron 1995, p. 40). This diary entry comes from one such 'Check-In' after a prescribed ban on looking back at earlier entries was lifted. Reflecting, then, it is not The Blue Line which I found most significant, but my memory of my mother's singing an Irish lullaby (D15:16.03.2011).

Unfortunately, I wrote no further about why 'meaning/not meaning' was at the time 'like a thesis statement for the rest of this.' There is evidence in the diary that I was contemporaneously discussing with my children the essays they were writing for their high school classes, reviewing with them and helping them to refine their thesis statements. In this way, I am expressing my own learning in context of theirs, my utterance revealing that my situation is intertwined (to use Madeleine's word) with theirs, taking up the utterances of their essays as an addressivity to which I offer my response in my own way here. Unfortunately, no essay follows my thesis statement, arguing for it or proving it. It is but a beginning, and a beginning until now not 'taken up' (Biesta 2013, p. 106). Or, perhaps it is not just a beginning, as it is described as not just a thesis statement, but a thesis statement *for the rest of this*. So, perhaps 'the rest of' the essay exists, and research not being linear but recursive, this is a thesis statement uttered in the process of my wayfaring and not antecedent to it. If this is the case, we might consider what surrounds it, what ways have been fared up to the point of this proclamation.

Contextualized within the narrative arc which begins this chapter, 'the rest of this' might recognise 'meaning/not meaning' as another one of the 'frontiers' (D15:25.02.2011) which encloses my liminality. As such, the stroke between meaning and not meaning, though thinner than a pane of glass, might be seen as similarly two-sided, where 'between / lies my beyond.' In other words, I might be claiming here for my own the liminal space between meaning and not meaning, that the wayfaring of this space—or the dissolution of this surface—might be where I find my transcendence, my freedom, in concert with the conception that 'space is freedom' (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). Identifying thus with such a space, however, asserts my sense of belonging there, rendering it to some degree a place (Agnew, 2011), and hence a place for meaning-making (Gustafson, 2001), which is precisely the action suggested in the tension of meaning/not meaning. It is, other words, aptly expressed as a frontier, with the 'distinction' of its place (Gustafson, 2001) situated with all its meaning-making capacities whilst opening onto expansive vistas of space. This frontier position might have been particularly attractive to me as an inheritance of my 'peripatetic ancestors' (D15:04.03.2011), who left

frontier lands in their Old Country to take up frontier positions in the New World, moving, always moving.

This frontier of meaning/not meaning, then, is first applied to a question of semiotics, of learning language through progressively more abstract levels of 'toe' and 'eat' and 'love' until nonsense is attained. Nonsense is attained, and yet made sensible, experienced as comfort, question, and contentment when 'the face speaks to me' and makes the significance 'real' (Biesta 2017, p. 52) Perhaps I claim as 'thesis statement for the rest of this' the dialogic exchange of the role of 'the face' which inhabits it. At a more immediate level, I think that 'the rest of this' surely includes the experience of 'meaning/not meaning' in the Cloud Drawings, recognising that they exist on, express, or even dissolve the surface which forms that frontier.

However, the vagueness of the statement, which instantiates its own frontier of meaning/not meaning by its lack of clarity, might be more broadly interpreted to mean quite literally 'the rest of this.' So, perhaps in this thesis statement I am claiming for myself, as I claimed the frontier, the action of the serve and return interaction (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) as the centrepiece of all my parenting. As a student writing a doctoral thesis, it feels quite marvellous to come across a 'thesis statement' pre-established in the data. Whether or not it is that broadly applicable becomes another frontier. For now, however, I can certainly say that the meaning/not meaning, and the play along that frontier, certainly was a feature of the Early Years of my children and the enjoyment I took in observing their language acquisition (for example, D1:16.09.1997) and mark-making (Chapter 4, Figure 14), as well as later forms of apparent nonsense which brought us joy (D9:01.09.2007). At the time of this diary entry, the meaning/not meaning was multiplying daily in the Cloud Drawings. My children, meanwhile, now ages 10, 12, and 15, were at a developmental stage where parental guidance leaves behind play and linguistic development and suggests instead encouraging 'goals for the future' and 'systems for time and task management' (Advokids, 2024, p. 5), representing frontiers as very much inscribed on time, and arousing this place's meaning-making associated with change (Gustafson, 2001).

Arc 7 Insights

Like Arcs 1 and 4, Arc 7 returns to dialogue with the text of the diary as it changes purpose and structure. The co-creative voices of my participant children once again fall into the background so that these keys to interpretation of the text can be revealed.

Whilst my children and I were still enjoying a home learning environment rich with affordances for meaning making (Gustafson, 2001; Agnew, 2011), the closure of St. Monica School sent shock waves

through our strongly networked places, positioning us at a frontier where meaning making became more tenuous and uncertain. The therapeutic purpose established in CBT (Chapter 6, Arc 4) expanded and with different theoretical foundations became a practice toward a predictive outcome of artistic productivity. Out of this practice come poetry, drawings, and reflections which argue for the interpretation of my experiences as occurring in a liminal state. An expression of this liminality is named as 'the thesis statement,' certainly a surprise for this research, and it points to the centrality of learning, language, and subjectification to interpreting all of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad. By this, I do not wish to suggest that linguistic development was the only developmental domain (NAEYC, 2024a) which mattered to me as a stay-at-home dad. I watched for physical development in first steps or bike riding (D1:05.12.1996; D2:01.06.2000) or the whole of Arc 6 with its focus on American football. I showed interest in their cognitive development as evidenced by their performance in school (D2:30.09.1999; D10:29.11.2007) and social emotional development from my early assertion of the irreplaceability of relationship in learning (D1:04.12.1996) or again in Arc 6 as Max became socialized to his teams. It is all here. If I claim an event from the linguistic developmental domain as 'thesis for the rest of this,' it is perhaps only because my diary works mostly with words. So while all developmental domains can and have been evidenced in serve and return interactions and dialogic addressivities and utterances throughout the diary, it is in the dialogue of language where I first recognise them.

So this is, like Arcs 1 and 4, an arc whose contribution might first be to methods, as it again reveals how approaching the text using techniques from diary methods provided insights which contextualized the interpretations for the balance of the diary. Evidence of co-creation is absent here, but even this can be said to be a contribution, as it demonstrates the flexibility of my methods to adapt to the demands of the received text. This arc also contributes to stay-at-home dads by again returning to the isolation discourse and offering another alternative, namely the possibility of describing our experiences as liminal instead of isolated, with the hope of integration that liminality offers. Mostly, though, this arc offers a contribution to education by seeing the core of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad in a reflexive event which contextualizes all learning in an exemplary dialogic event and a radical preference for the educational domain of subjectification. Ironically, the methods, reflexivity, and theory leave little room for my participants in this arc. Of all the arcs, it is most difficult for finding a contribution to us beyond the declared passion that '(a man) wants to give his kids a better life than his' (Armstrong, 1968).

7.2.2 Arc 8.1: Conversation Between the Generations, First Movement (Dec 2011-Sep 2012)

I offer this final section with some explanation of its peculiar title. I frame it in musical terms—first movement, interlude, second movement, because of the place of my father in it. The first and the second movement both begin and end with him. He, as a source and embodiment of the conversation between the generations, gives shape to this final narrative arc. Intervening, though, there is a series of events which concern my own narrative, and my attempts to shape it and its meaning in writing.

Because this final music is named with conversation, we begin with conversation.

To exist as subject, in and with the world... means trying to come into dialogue with the world, where dialogue is not to be understood as conversation but as what I have called an existential form. (Biesta 2017, p. 83.)

Dialogue is a way of being in the world, and conversation has its place in this way of being.

Oakeshott (1972), in his essay “Education: its engagement and its frustrations”, speaks of education as the introduction of young people to a world of ideas which are embodied in the “conversations between the generations of mankind” ... As in all good conversations (especially one where there is such an engagement with ideas and where the spirit of criticism prevails), one cannot define in advance what the end of that conversation or engagement will or should be. Indeed, the end is but the starting point for further conversations. (Pring, 2001, pp. 108-9.)

The unpredictability and endlessness of conversation which Pring suggests here draws it into a close relationship with dialogism, the contents of which are ‘without limit’ (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39) and wayfaring, in which ‘the line, like life, has no end’ (Ingold 2007, p. 170). So, I do not wish to over-emphasize the differences between dialogue and conversation. I am calling these last three portions of my data ‘conversations’ because for me ‘dialogue’ has taken on such a theoretical flavour and the conversations which follow are much more of the everyday sort, as one might find documented in a diary, inscriptions of the ‘life path’ which give meaning to a place (Gustafson, 2001).

D24:11.12.2011

Cyril Stretansky to Mom and Dad: “Your son is a fine musician.”

Cyril Stretansky was Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities at Susquehanna University, where he enjoyed a 36-year tenure and an international reputation. The university’s music performance space, Stretansky Concert Hall, bears his name (Susquehanna University, 2022). Maestro Stretansky would often attend the Friday morning Mass at St. Monica School, as did my parents. Mom and Dad would always come up to say a few words to me afterwards, consistently

proving the mutual privilege of their proximity as an affordance for intergenerational learning and its benefits. The event documented in this diary entry is one of four (the others at 24.05.2009, 13.05.2010, and 10.03.2011) in which Stretansky offered his generous praise. I mention it as a measure of the education I received at St. Monica School as a stay-at-home dad. Although I began teaching the students there without any qualification to do so, by my weekly practices with them and our 'coming into the world' together, we had learned enough to come to Mass and together raise up sufficient musical praise to receive praise. This—the praise of Maestro Stretansky—was a totally unexpected qualification, one which could not have been predicted. There is, too, in the address of this praise to my parents, a conversation which takes our literal 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) to a different level. The influence of my mother's singing, which forms my earliest memory of poetry (D15:16.03.2011) and inspires 'a thesis statement for the rest of this' (D17:17.05.2011), joins to the professional stature of my father and Maestro Stretansky, and by the latter's praise beckons me by this conversation from my liminality towards a kind of integration. In so doing they offer evidence of contributing to me the sense of belonging as a benefit of intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023) and strong relations along the self-other axis which helps to define a place of meaning-making (Gustafson, 2001).



Figure 29. 'Out of a landscape that does not truck with gravity it trucks with sound' (D24:01.01.2012).

D26:27.02.2012

I try to follow the pediatric idiom that their questions illuminate the threshold of their need to know. Gus stood in the doorway. 'Is Grampa about to die?' I told him to come in and sit on the bed. I told him I was glad he asked.

Here we see again the long-practiced ‘serve and return’ interaction (Center on the Developing Child, 2011), as Gus confronts a fact of his environment which is well-documented in the diary: I was spending more and more time with Grampa—my dad—taking him to medical appointments, and to the hospital, and rushing to his house whenever my mom rang with news of another medical emergency. In the diary, nearly all of each day’s three ‘morning pages’ were increasingly being written about him, my children sometimes barely getting a mention. This was a significant change, and consequently a feature shaping the meaning-making of our home learning environment. So, Gus serves this to me. He is 11, and I couch my return in the paediatrics which informed my understanding of child development: let their questions lead the way. Or, in language available to me now: let their serves receive my returns. I cannot know for sure what Gus needed from me in that moment other than a return. However, I think that to some degree, I was being for him ‘the face’ who could ‘make real’ the significance (Biesta 2017, p. 52) at this frontier of meaning/not meaning, the frontier of life/death.

D29:10.05.2012

I volunteered to take over a vacancy in the Eucharistic Adoration schedule on Thursday mornings from 5-6.

The Diocese of Harrisburg announced (D27:10.03.2012) that St. Monica School would be closed at the end of the school year, in June. Counsellors made a visit to the school to console staff and students (D27:12.03.2012). At the school’s final Mass, the new pastor forbade the singing of the School Song. I sang it anyway and all the children and teachers sang too (D29:04.06.2012). There were a lot of tears.

The closure of St. Monica School ruptured the networked places where I had experienced a sense of belonging as a stay-at-home dad. It had afforded me with opportunities to contextualize my experiences as educational, actively participate in my children’s education, and practice my educational calling with the whole student body, their teachers, and their parents. The meaning-making which occurred in this place, both for me (e.g., D5:03.05.2005) and my children (e.g., D9:04.04.2007; D12:25.09.2005) helped to shape our home learning environment and other local sites as places where meaning-making was possible. So, as change is identified as a feature of a place (Gustafson, 3002), this change, as significant as it was, marked a change in how the networked places were experienced and interpreted as meaningful.

Between the announcement and the school’s closing, the diary entry above marks a change in my weekly routines which was perhaps responsive to these other changes, seeking new places for

meaning making which would be relevant after the loss of St. Monica School. On Thursday mornings, I would rise at 4:30 am to be at my local church by 5 am, where I would sit in silence for an hour with Jesus. By this, I mean that I would sit in the chapel where the flat disc of bread which had been consecrated at Mass stood exposed on the altar in a splendid monstrance, as shown in Figure 29, below.



Figure 30. Adoration chapel, St. Pius X Catholic Church, Selinsgrove (photo by author, 24.12.2021).

Saying that I was ‘with Jesus,’ is a confession of the Catholic faith that ‘he is present... most especially in the Eucharistic species’ (CCC 1373), that is, the consecrated host.

This presence is called ‘real’... because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present. (CCC 1374.)

This was a new responsibility, an answer to the call to ‘go to meet him in adoration’ (CCC 1379), and a different ‘coming into presence.’

I would take my diary to the chapel and would often write my ‘morning pages’ there. The content of the diary from my first attendance (D29:07.06.2012) does not suddenly shift to holy things. The ordinary things were good enough. There is a subtle change, though. After about nine months of this practice of prayer, I began to add at the beginning of the diary entries written in the chapel, an invocation of the saint whose feast was being celebrated that day on the liturgical calendar: ‘St.

Casimir. Pray for us' (D37:01.03.2013). It is a little thing, but as we have looked from the beginning of this study at the question of the diary's audience, this sets many a Thursday's entry at the feet of a specific 'super-addressee' (Holquist 2002, p. 38) and renews my claim that the diary has a purpose of prayer. (See Appendix 14 for 'The Litany of the Diary'.) This was a practice which I maintained then, along with the morning pages, for the rest of the time that I was a stay-at-home dad.

If the closure of St. Monica School represented yet another frontier—one of ending/beginning, as they would all be entering different schools in the autumn of 2012—then the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist offered me 'the face' that I needed to make the significance of this frontier 'real' (Biesta 2017, p. 52). It was in this place that I worked to patch the networked places of meaning-making as my children began their years in the state-run schools.

D32:09.09.2012

Dad enjoyed giving Max a pointer or two with his sax. I think they both did.

This is exemplary of what I mean by the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109). My dad's musical virtuosity as an organist had given me a metaphor for my first experiences as a stay-at-home dad, listening with infant Madeleine for the silent icicles shaped like organ pipes (D1:13.01.1996). Later, Max took up the manual language of the organist (D4:n.d.10), finding our cultural history and sense of belonging which is a benefit of intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023). In this diary entry, Max was 13 years old, an age when children can be expected to develop their 'own taste, sense of style, and identity' and have 'a hobby, sport, or activity' (Advokids, 2024, p. 5). For Max, music was increasingly answering much of these developmental needs, a narrative arc which begins here, in the wake of his American football arc, would later carry him through his studies at the Berklee College of Music, and continues in his career as a professional musician. My father's undergraduate degree had been in music performance and education, so he had taught music for many years to children and adults, and he had many musical instruments. He gave Max his saxophone and began to teach him, reinforcing among all of the recent changes—themselves a dimension of a place—a welcome sense of the dimension of continuity again in our home learning environment (Gustafson, 2001).

So, this is a grandfather sharing his musical and educational virtuosity with his grandson. The uniqueness and irreplaceability—the event of 'when it matters that I am I'—is mutual to both of them, a mutual gift. Key to this event is that 'it matters.' It is, in other words, a sharing of meanings which are only documented as joy.

And where am I, the stay-at-home dad, in this? I am, by my documentation of it, a student of the virtuosity, the practical wisdom and the choices it brings.

7.2.3 Arc 8.2: Interlude (Nov 2012-Jul 2013)

D35:27.11.2012

I had gone through my old journal, typing up none of what I (in my teens) used to call 'reflective poetry', but only the new forms, the ones which require, which include, no reflection, only generation. No ego other than that which chooses the form and sets the mechanics in motion. Sort of a deistic approach, perhaps? I don't think of it that way. I just find it very freeing, liberated from the constant presence of the 'I-me' in poetry.

The irony in the above diary passage is that even as it eschews the 'reflective', it is reflective about it. And even as it expresses freedom from the 'I-me' in poetry, it begins with and repeats that same 'I'. If we can forgive this bit of foolishness, then it might be possible to appreciate the aim here, even if it falls well short of achievement, which would bring to my poetic practice the same quality which describes 'the event of teaching' (Biesta 2017, p. 56) as 'non-egological':

an approach that is not aimed at strengthening the ego, but at interrupting the ego-object, at turning it towards the world, so that it can become a self-subject. (Biesta 2017, p. 57.)

It echoes my rejection of autobiography in response to the accusation by Gass (1994) of the narcissism of the genre. 'Just a diary,' I said, 'just a diary' (D1:16.05.1994), I had claimed, attempting a rejection of identity or a focus on the self despite all appearances to the contrary in these thousands of pages. The strong stance taken by the diarist in these passages was influential in my choice, described above, to limit the self-centredness of the autoethnographic methods used in this study, and the rebalancing of the 'auto,' 'ethno,' and 'graphic' aspects of these methods which I performed in order to achieve this.

D35:21.12.2012

I don't know the point of any of this. It strikes me as adolescent, another doodler's folly. But it also strikes me, as I stated above, as a "response to environment"—an environment that constantly bombards us with messages... or other symbolic forms... while providing no medium for reply, no opportunity for dialogue, so that the whole environment becomes oppressively one-way, a directive, a message that communicates overwhelmingly and primarily... the muteness of the rest of us. Yeah. That's my theory, anyway.

I find this diary entry to be a surprisingly intuitive expression of dialogism, particularly in its phrase 'response to environment' and its underscored use of the word 'dialogue.' Even as I assert a rejection of ego, it is not at the expense of dialogic responsibility. After writing a series of poems based on words found on paper restaurant placemats and the letters on license plates in a parking lot, I reflected on these free associations from found texts and declared them to be a 'response to environment.' As we have seen both in scarcity (The Strangely Propped Man and The Blue Line) and

in abundance (the first entry and the St. Monica years), my experiences were like a proof of the dialogic theory that

The world addresses us and we are alive and human to the degree that we are answerable, i.e. to the degree that we can respond to addressivity.' (Holquist 2002, p. 30.)

From the reflective practice of reflexivity inspired by *The Artist's Way* (Cameron 1992), I was becoming aware of the opportunity for this kind of subjectification present in the dialogic event even as it had become less available to me by the dissolution of St. Monica School and the opportunities I had had there for teaching as a pedagogy of the event. In addition, it shows how even in that dissolution of a place so influential in my networked sense of place, I was seeking new meanings in new places by means of a dialogic responsiveness to my environment, a meaning-making of place situated along the axis between self and environment (Gustafson, 2001).

D35:17.01.2013

6 round trips to the school yesterday. At 10 minutes each way, that adds up to 2 hours of driving!

Part of the transition to the new school system included an increase in opportunities for my children to participate in extracurricular sports and other activities, including marching band, jazz band, musical theatre, and choral music (both Madeleine and Max enjoyed the opportunity to perform under the direction of Sir John Rutter at New York's Carnegie Hall). It is only developmentally appropriate that children, beginning at ages 11 to 14, have 'a hobby, sport, or activity' and that I, correspondingly, 'provide opportunities for new, challenging experiences' (Advokids, 2024, p. 5). In the rural area where we lived, however, there was no public transportation to provide access to these events. So, I took them to and from schools for before- and after-school activities.

Unfortunately, this began to make my experience of their new school environments increasingly not one of wayfaring, but literally one of 'transport', which is 'destination-oriented' and where

every destination is a terminus, every port a point of re-entry into a world from which he has been temporarily exiled whilst in transit. (Ingold 2007, p. 77.)

This is made all the more evident by my awareness of time, for 'the wayfarer... moves *with* time, the transported traveller races *against* it' (Ingold 2007, p. 102). Nevertheless, it was my responsibility—one might say that the addressivity of their need to participate in these educational events was such that I had no alibi (Holquist 2002, p. 181)—but it was a responsibility different from what we have been discussing. My responsibility had become one of delivering them to the events of their subjectification, not 'coming into the world' together in a mutual subjectification. There were

exceptions to this, of course, but this was a unique feature of Period Three. This is considered normal behaviour, as my children were now 12 (in 'early adolescence'), 14, and 17 (in 'middle adolescence') and could be expected to have increasing desire for privacy, independence and distance from parents (AACAP, 2017). However, these developmental features of this age brought another category of change to the home learning environment and its meaning making, diminishing the reach of the self on the self-other axis (Gustafson, 2001).

Nevertheless, I continued in my role as a stay-at-home dad to offer them the affordance of my presence—of 'the face,' as it were (Biesta 2017, p. 52)—to help them to make real the significances in their lives when they should occur and should they offer up a 'serve' to me from their environment (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). Sometimes during these car rides, guidance appropriate to the earlier stage of middle childhood (ages 6-8) could still be successfully displayed: 'Talk with your child about school, friends, and things she looks forward to in the future' (CDC, 2024o, p. 1) and 'Share feelings and stories about how to deal with problems and face fears' (Advokids, 2024, p. 4). Often, though, their only serve was silence, these hours in the car passing without a word. This, too, however, was an expression of dialogism, each of us offering an utterance of silence as response to the addressivities of our environment, including each other's silence. So, it was not devoid of meaning, these silent times together, but the meanings we were making were kept mostly to ourselves. The developmental guidance would say that I was operating from a healthy parenting strategy of simply being 'available for help and advice when needed,' even if this need was only to 'tolerate...(my) teen's developing likes and dislikes' (Advokids, 2024, p. 6).

D36:31.01.2013

Unable to sleep last night, I got up early. Stalling before coming here (my adoration predecessor still remarked how early I was), I thought about how "Happy" is the first word of the Psalms.

In order to properly address what follows from these few words, it is necessary to look at the process which began on this date, 31 January, and was completed on 5 March. It represents a continuation of my university education in writing poetry and my interest in some of the modern French poets like Max Jacob, who is mentioned in the diary as a 'friend' and a 'matter of importance' (D4:26.04.2004). *The Artist's Way* had inspired a renewal of these interests, as noted above with my exploration of *Practice of Poetry* and the way it inspired 'a thesis statement for the rest of this' (D17:17.05.2011). This 'thesis statement,' you will recall, shudders along the boundary of 'meaning/not meaning' and into 'no meaning, no meaning.'

Even when I wrote that, however, I was engaged in a poetic process of attempted meaning-making. The Great East Japan Earthquake, with its resultant tsunami which engulfed the Fukushima nuclear power plant, had occurred on 11 March 2011, while I was with my parents in the Philadelphia Museum of Art enjoying a display of Japanese poetry in the form of Hyakunin Isshu (see for example Fujiwara and Hishikawa, 1680). The disaster, joined to the coincidence of my presence at this exhibition, was an addressivity too great for me to ignore. My response was to write, following the form of Hyakunin Isshu, one hundred poems under the pseudonym of 'so,' which I then had printed, hand bound, and delivered to the Japanese Ambassador to the United States on the anniversary of the disaster. All of this is documented in the diary, which became a place of practicing the verses which joined that collection, titled 'hi' (so, 2012). It is not insignificant to the meaning of that text or the process of this research that the 100 poems in a collection of Hyakunin Isshu traditionally comes from 100 different poets. Not having such a community to summon for my memorial work, I took on, myself, the role of each poem emanating from a different 'voice,' anticipating the polyvocality which can be seen in this research.

Subsequent to these verses, however, there was an increasing desire to go 'out from myself' (John of the Cross, St. 1991, p. 52), which is shown above as a desire for 'no ego' and liberation from 'the "I-me" in poetry' (D35:27.11.2012) and feelings of being 'saturated with too much I' (D35:20.12.2012). In pursuit of these aims, I took up a playful practice of 'N + 7', a constrained poetic technique devised by the French poets and mathematicians known as OULIPO, in which each of the nouns (N) in an existent poem is replaced by the seventh noun which follows it (+7) in the dictionary (poets.org, 2004). The formal structures of Hyakunin Isshu, followed by this practice of 'N + 7', was also joined by a study of *Exaltation of Forms* (Finch and Varnes, 2002), which celebrates poetic structure.

The cumulative effect then, of these studies and practices, was to see that first word of the Psalms, 'Happy,' in a certain way. It begins with an appreciation that the one word can be the play of metonymy, a poetic device in which one word stands for something associated with it, such as to say 'the crown' to imply 'the king.' 'Happy' then might represent the whole of Psalm 1. However, because my poetic practice had become one of *counting* through Hyakunin Isshu and 'N + 7', the sufficiency of the solitary word and its position as first in the first psalm suggested a replicable form which might be applied across all 150 Psalms. 'Psalm 1, one word, first word' led me to look at Psalm 2, two words—not the first two words, though, but the second word followed by the word two

words later. Then onwards: Psalm 3, three words, the third, sixth and ninth. And so it continued. To give you an idea how this played out, the following are the first six of *The Numbered Psalms*.

1.
Happy
2.
do nations
3.
how my rise
4.
answer just relieve am
5.
O sighing.
help, God!
O
6.
in in me,
languishing;
my soul,

This too is a wayfaring. I do not know where I am going, I only know that I am following in the footsteps of the psalmist, reconstructing the itinerary, counting my steps. They do not arrive at words so much as find them along the way—a finger, tracing the text to carefully count each word along the way--and invite recollection or imagination of the terrain from which they emerged. The psalms, after all, are familiar terrain. They sound a meaning, then retreat, elusive, proclaiming deconstructively what is there by its absence, by what is not there. The silences it offers, though, are all the words not spoken, which become, in a way, all the more silent by the removal of their silences. It asks, perhaps, what it means to come into presence and answers for enigma, unpredictability: you know the psalms and the algorithm is simple enough—can you foresee the outcome?

And where is the subject(ivity) in this? What happens when the shepherd of Psalm 23 gets lost in that terrain and the ‘restful waters’ are nowhere to be found?

23.
he fear before all my

He you sight my not right side
You and come.
he fear before all my
He you sight

Does the ego do a violence to the Word of God? Or does it respond to the addressivity of the text with a uniqueness which answers for my place, my situation? Nervous of the former, I proceeded in the hope of the latter, aware of the risk and uncertainty. I was hoping, perhaps, without the words for it at the time, that, again,

God, 'like any good parent, must learn to deal with the unpredictability and the unforeseeability, the foolishness, and even the destructiveness of his children, in the hope that they will grow up and eventually come around.' (Caputo, 2006, p. 72, cited by Biesta 2013, p. 16.)

Madeleine and I enjoyed a dialogue about these poems (WA:12.06.2020) after I posted an audio recording of them to Soundcloud (Troppe, 2020). After listening, she said that 'it's cool how it captures the essence of the Psalm while also being a bit whimsy and nonsensical.' She added, 'I really enjoyed your reading of it too.' Her statement is an expression of experiencing that frontier of 'meaning/not meaning', of the meaning in 'the essence of the Psalm' and the 'not meaning' of the 'nonsensical.' Along with this, happily, is the enjoyment, the experience of positive affect, which I have noted as a possibility within that liminality. From this first word of 'happy,' then, despite all the changes in our places of meaning making, we can return again to a reliable continuity (Gustafson, 2001): 'Nothing without Joy!' (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12). The place of the diary, in the face of change and increasing silence, increasingly grows, through these poems, as a place for meaning making within the place for meaning making that is the home learning environment.

D36:14.02.2013

I think much about the writing as I'm doing it... And I think how only I could be doing this, initiating this right now. Perhaps. But it is that "only I" that makes it feel like a vocation, like a real form of worship, that it reveals in some small way some small part of who I am specifically called to be.

About two weeks after beginning The Numbered Psalms, I made this brief reflection on my experience of this practice. If the diary entry above about 'dialogue' and a 'response to the environment' was a surprisingly intuitive utterance of dialogism, then this statement of vocation is a similarly surprising intuitive utterance of the event of subjectivity described in the pedagogy of the event. I am looking

for situations *in which it matters* that I am unique, that is situations in which I cannot be replaced or substituted by someone else. These are situations in which someone calls me. (Biesta 2013, p. 21.)

Discovering in my writing such a vocation does not mean that I see in it an educational event, but rather a humanizing event, an event of subjectification, and one to which I have been sensitized by my years of experience as a stay-at-home dad, as a teacher, and now as a poet reflecting on my artistic practice.

D38:17.04.2013

A postcard from Annie Finch, the poet. It says:

Thank you for
The Numbered Psalms
A fine accomplishment
and I'm glad EOF
helped to inspire you!

This brief entry, similar to the comment from Cyril Stretansky that I was 'a fine musician' (D24:11.12.2011), enters into the diary like another qualification. This postcard message (Finch, 2013) was from the co-editor of *An Exaltation of Forms* (Finch and Varnes, 2002) which she references here in her abbreviation, EOF. I had sent her a hand-bound edition of *The Numbered Psalms* to express my gratitude for the inspiration I had found in her work. I had not expected a response at all, let alone for it to qualify as 'a fine accomplishment.' There was, in these brief interactions with Stretansky and Finch, a sense that I was again 'coming into the world' (Biesta 2006, p. 48) that others were making the choice, among all the addressivities, to 'take up my beginnings' (Biesta 2006, p. 48). Stretansky and Finch are both educators; in a sense, they were my teachers. I was their student. From their responses, I experienced that

if I begin something and others do take up my beginnings, I *do* come into the world, and in precisely this moment I *am* free.' (Biesta 2013, p. 106.)

This claim for my freedom recalls the dichotomy, 'Place is security, space is freedom' (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). So, even as I find a growing sense of the home learning environment as a strongly networked place of meaning making (Agnew, 2011), here made stronger by this new and generously qualifying connection on the self-other axis (Gustafson, 2001), there is a sense that within this place, I experience a frontier and beyond this some new freedom, some new space.

D39:21.06.2013

“Your proper place is the frontiers.
This is the place of Jesuits.”

- Pope Francis

Having thus come into the world and experienced this freedom, then, allows me to re-encounter in the world, and specifically here, in a pronouncement by Pope Francis (2014, p. 70) the frontiers which had troubled me. Now ‘there should be other hearing’ (D15:25.02.2011) and there is. While I had already claimed the liminality of frontiers as my own—that ‘between / lies my beyond’ (D15:25.02.2011)—I see that confirmed ‘in the world’ in this statement that ‘your proper place is the frontiers.’ While I, obviously, am not a Jesuit, that *identity*—‘the ways in which I am *different* from the other’ (Biesta 2013, p. 21, emphasis in original)—is not what matters here. It is again the call and the subjectivity which I find in the call and my responsible response to it. In other words, I again find a sense of belonging (Agnew, 2011) in the place of the frontier, and in the pope’s words I experienced again my beginnings taken up (Biesta, 2013) in a ‘homecoming festival’ of dialogism (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39), and I am free (Biesta, 2013).

D39:06.07.2013

‘When everyone is around, I feel it’s harder to be “productive”. But I vastly prefer the unproductivity to their absence.’

Productivity emerges as a measure for meaning-making during Diary Period 3, inspired by the use of *The Artist’s Way*, with its aim of helping its reader from a situation of being ‘blocked’ to one of greater freedom and productivity (Cameron, 1992). This emphasis on productivity, however, might come at a cost, especially when attempting meaning making from a perspective of dialogism, where it might be helpful to recall that dialogue is ‘a *telling*, a narrative, an aspect of the world’s meaning’ (Holquist 2002, p. 29, emphasis in original), a sign of the enactment of our responsibility (Holquist 2002, p. 84). It is in this enactment of our responsibility that it is possible for us to translate chaos into meaning as a negotiation between our uniqueness and ‘career patterns’ (Holquist 2002, pp. 123, 134). This tension between uniqueness and career patterns is in evidence here, as I pit presence against productivity.

It is responsibility which I continue to choose. So, despite the desirable outcome of productivity, however it might be measured and qualified, and the developmentally normal distancing from parents and desire for independence (AACAP, 2017) which I experience as my children’s absence, I continue to choose first my children and ‘be available for help and advice when needed’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 6). Despite my perceptions, in other words, of reduced opportunities for meaning making in

the home learning environment along the self-other axis (Gustafson, 2001), I continue in my passion as confessed earlier (D15:04.03.2011): 'a man wants to give his kids a better life than his' (Armstrong, 1968).

7.2.4 Arc 8.3: Second Movement (Sep 2013-Jan 2015)

D40:23.09.2013

Dad's been in the hospital a full week as of today. After he fell, he tried to walk, but could not. I carried him back to the bed and as I carried him, he said, 'Jesus help me.' Then he said to me, 'You remind me of Jesus.' And I said, 'Thank you...'. And then I added, 'You remind me of Jesus, too.' And then he passed out—while I was still carrying him.

This documented event arrives with a unique power which makes it difficult to theorise, to render as a suitably simple and abstract theorization. 'Theories... explain' (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 69). So how can this experience be explained? Is this a place where I belong? Is this a place to which I am called, where there is no substitute for me? Is this an event of my subjectification? Is it an event of my father's subjectification? Is this simply exemplary of the benefits of intergenerational learning, of the conversation between generations?

It is, I suppose, an educational event, though not perhaps education as normally imagined, as this event is intensely private, vulnerable, emotive, and mystical. Can I parse out here education's domains? Am I socialized here in a Christian tradition and in the existing orders of family? Am I qualified to be a reminder of Jesus?

Of all the events in the diary, this most reminds me of my son, Gus, and his interest in the films of Martin Scorsese, and the maxim of that storyteller: 'Never *explain*' (Horne, 2019, p. 22, emphasis in original). But I am, in my attempt to explain, socialized into the order of academia, of doctoral researchers, and press on to the qualification of the PhD degree, even as, by doing so, I experience the compromise of my subjectivity and the relationship I have with my children to tell this story in a way which they would recognise and we all desire. So, this too becomes a balancing of the domains of education. Whether in this instance it attains to wisdom is too difficult for me to assess.

So, in this tension, I limit my theorizations of this event. Instead, I invite the reader: Look again at the icon--the encounter—which begins this diary. Look at Jesus. That's the face. The face that makes the significance real. Dad saw that face in mine; I saw that face in Dad.

Explain?

I entered into unknowing.

D41:10.10.2013

Dad was cheered by a call I received from Madeleine. She called to tell me she'd received an email from the Coach at Duquesne, offering her both academic and athletic scholarships... I returned home and found Madeleine trying to concentrate on her calculus homework, a bowl of red & blue (Duquesne colors) Lindt chocolate balls in front of her. We read the email together.

The home learning environment is theorized as a predictor for academic achievement (Melhuish et al., 2008; DfE 2018; Parker et al., 2019; Lehl et al., 2020). It is also a place of belonging and a place for meaning making. Despite what I offered to my children by choosing to be their primary caregiver as a stay-at-home dad, including the affordance of a consistent adult presence to engage in serve and return interactions, I can make no strong claims that any of my children achieved what they have on account of me.

Madeleine achieved awards of academic and athletic scholarships from the university of her choice. I was with Dad in the hospital when Madeleine rang me. Her achievement cheered my father when he was in pain.

Dad was the one who had first seen in the local post office an advertisement that the local rowing club was starting a program for youth. Dad suggested that Madeleine might want to give it a try. The arc of that narrative has been omitted here, but Dad was its beginning and here he was at this achievement of its aspirational ends. In the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972), the benefits of intergenerational learning often accrue to all parties (Barton & Lee, 2023). His gift to her was that utterance, that suggestion, made from a temporal, spatial and axiological situation—that moment in the post office, where he imagined, probably without any specific outcome, that she might enjoy this sport. And she responded with her body, pulling the oars and learning to love the smell of the Susquehanna River on a summer morning. The river, the boathouse, the boat, all became places of meaning for her to the point where this meaning making shaped her future education. In this news—and the joy that it brought to him—she returned the gift with interest. 'It's not about how you USE your talents, it's TO WHOM you entrust them' (D5:03.12.2005).

D42:13.12.2013

'The alone time really just a waiting to be called upon again'

Responsibility—and the subjectivity which arises from it—occurs, you will recall, in

situations *in which it matters* that I am unique... situations in which I cannot be replaced or substituted by someone else. These are situations in which someone calls me...' (Biesta 2013, p. 21, emphasis in original.)

This diary entry echoes one from my earliest days with Madeleine, when I would write until she was done napping: ‘I can only grin—Madeleine’s calling’ (D1:11.02.1996). Now, amid my children’s expressions of developmentally appropriate independence (AACAP, 2017), such calls were more likely to be from my mother, asking for help in caring for Dad. The diary retains, through all these years, this place for dialogic meaning making between such calls as documentation of them. The time which is joined to that space here has an emphasis on solitude—it is called ‘alone time.’ It is not, significantly, called isolation. There is, instead, in the waiting, a readiness to ‘be available for help and advice when needed’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 6), a sense of assurance that there will be a future call, and with it, future dialogue, future subjectivity, and future meaning making.

D42:02.02.2014

Dad asked Gus if he might like to learn how to play the accordion. Gus said yes. And after Dad had gotten in his car, he summoned me back to his door. “Gus made me very happy,” he said.

Gus, like Max earlier (D32:09.09.2012), had his moment of learning music from Dad. There is added significance here, though, in the instrument being shared. While Dad had earned his master’s degree in music performance on the organ, that was his academic instrument. His familial instrument, which he had learnt from his father, was the accordion. This is what he shares with his grandson, a continuation of the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1977). Gus might have, in a teen’s developmentally appropriate independence (AACAP, 2017), said no to being taught. But he said yes, occasioning again a sense of belonging associated with intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023) and co-creating our home learning environment a place of meaning making (Agnew, 2011). And again we see this benefit as a gift returned with interest to my father: ‘Gus made me very happy.’

D44:13.05.2014

Yesterday afternoon I watched *Taxi Driver* with Gus. Ouch. Rough movie. Rough sexually. And violent, too. Gus rated it 5 stars.

Gus was only 13 years old when he first asked to watch *Taxi Driver* (1976). This was his ‘serve,’ if you will, and for my ‘return’ (Center on the Developing Child, 2011), I hesitated before letting him watch a bloody film involving child prostitution and a plot to assassinate a presidential candidate. I think I was still struggling with this—evidenced by the ‘ouch’—when I documented the event. I had studied this film at university in the context of modern American literature and film (Appel, 1983), so I was prepared to be ‘available for help and advice when needed,’ even if this need was only to ‘tolerate... (my) teen’s developing likes and dislikes’ (Advokids, 2024, p. 6).

As it turned out, Gus was more than capable of appreciating the mastery of the storytelling here. His utterance in response to the film—rating it 5 stars—shows his confidence for making such an utterance, that a 13-year-old boy in rural Pennsylvania can qualify a work by Scorsese. As I have worked with him on this research, he has returned repeatedly to this event (for example at IGDM:29.03.2020) as seminal to the higher educational track he chose and the career in screenwriting he now pursues, thanking me for being the kind of dad who would take this kind of risk and trust him with early exposure to such power. He expresses it better in a direct message he sent recently on the Instagram app, when he and his brother visited a place where Scorsese had shot a scene in one of his films (see Figure 31, below). His message is a ‘serve,’ responding to his an environment which he visits for the first time, but which becomes a place for meaning making, extending again the network of places which we began in the home learning environment.



Figure 31. The ‘serve’: Gus remembers *Taxi Driver* (IGDM:26.12.2023).

His study of Scorsese is a study proper to love (Wilson, 2022), as he says, ‘my love of Scorsese all stems from you sharing *Taxi Driver* with me.’ And to this serve, I offer my ‘return,’ which translates his study-as-love into its place in the study-as-love which is this thesis (Figure 32, below). This opens the way for further dialogue. Significantly, he says that he loved seeing in this thesis my inclusion of this event. My paternal response here, my love and joy, still allow for my awareness as a researcher

that his love offers evidence of the resonance, credibility, and contribution of my work, and that he helps me to demonstrate in his words that it attains to criteria necessary for rigorous autoethnography (Le Roux, 2017). And I give to him a summary of my methods as a stay-at-home dad and as a researcher: 'You just talked about what you love... and I just listened.'

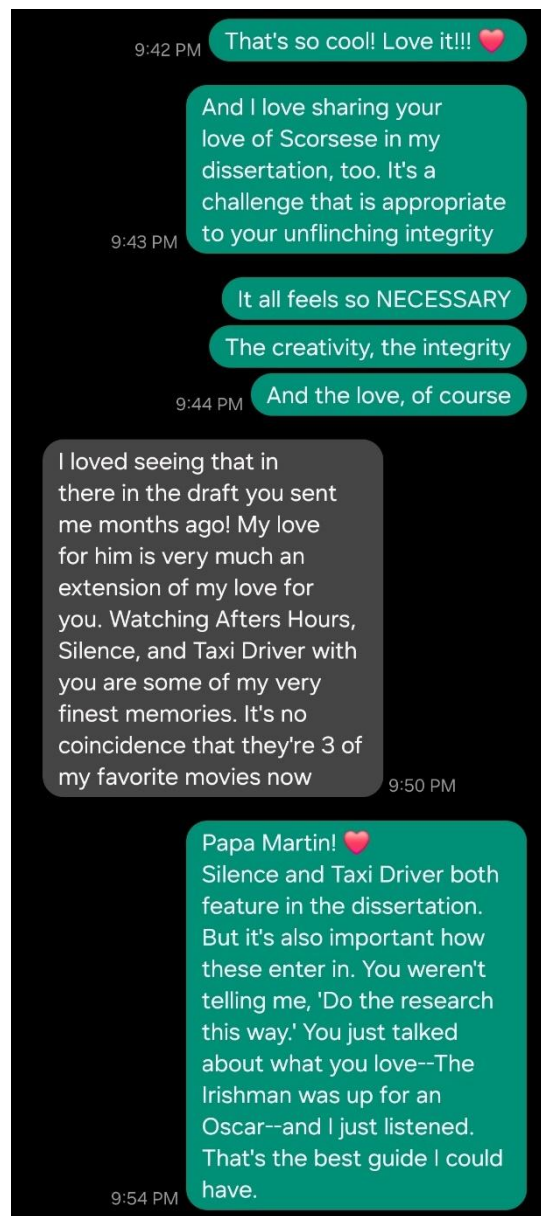


Figure 32. The 'return' and further dialogue with Gus (IGDM:26.12.2023).

D44:22.05.2014

Gus was funny, describing what he would say to a teacher who hates his job and has been pretty irresponsible and nasty lately, hurting Madeleine's feelings. He ended his tirade by saying, 'one of these days a big rain is gonna come and wash all the scum from this city.'

Gus' ability to wield this line of dialogue from *Taxi Driver* (1976) and apply it to this educational context is diminished if I try too hard to *explain*. It was funny.

This was also the night of Madeleine's graduation from high school. In the diary, I wrote praise for the 'hopeful, solemn, joyful occasion, a real rite of passage,' curious now that I would use this description, as it indicates an end to the liminality described by Van Gennep (1960). She gave, of course, 'the best speech of the night. I was very proud of her.'

Dad, meanwhile 'pointed out more than once' Madeleine's 'beautifully rich voice.'

After it was all over,

I cleaned up the dinner and dessert dishes. Madeleine went up. But first I asked her how she felt. At first, she hadn't been sure, she said, it had been such a busy day, so many emotions, but now, after it all... "happy," she said.

It was the first word of *The Numbered Psalms*, a beginning, a metonymy.

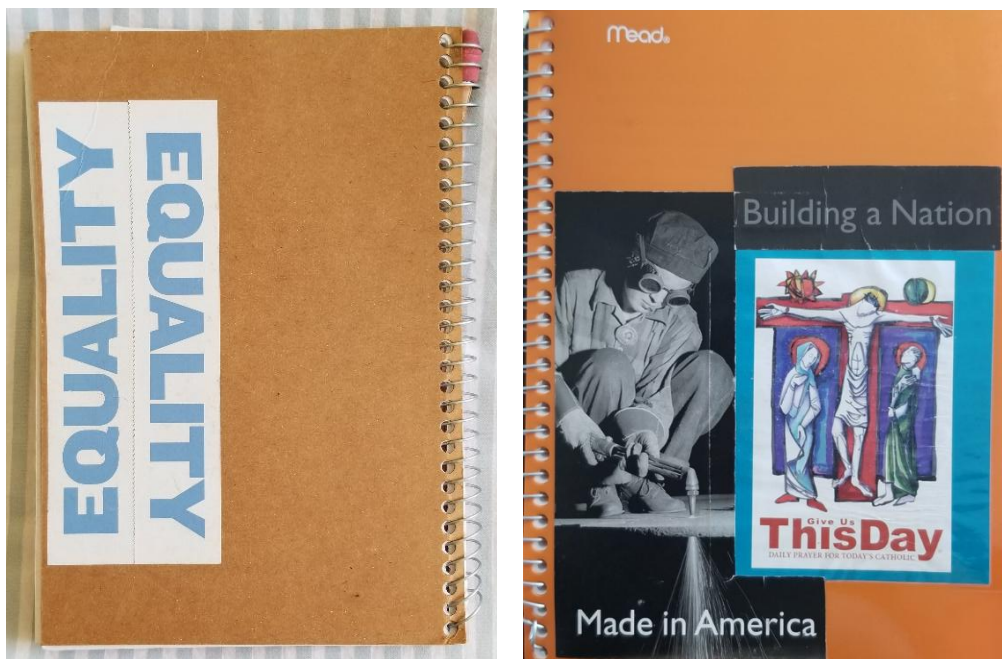


Figure 33. D45 Cover back (left) with 'EQUALITY' and front (right) a woman using a blowtorch juxtaposed with a depiction of the crucifixion of Christ.

D45:31.08.2014

'Grampa taught Gus how to finger the bass buttons on the accordion. He learned quickly. I think both enjoyed it.'

The 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) continued, exemplary of intergenerational learning with mutual benefit (Barton & Lee, 2023), but reminding me again now of

that early childhood education pedagogy which proclaims, ‘Nothing without Joy!’ (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12).

D46:31.10.2014

After lunch, Dad insisted I come in for a moment. He took me to their spare bedroom, where he had his super-heavy DuoVox accordion out. He couldn’t lift it. But then he showed me again the trick to playing a scale on the left hand 3-2 (slide) 3, 4-2, 4-2, 3. After I got it right, he was delighted.

Dad would not leave me out of this intergenerational learning. His urgency was to instil in Gus this language of fingering the accordion buttons, but he was now including me, sharing his virtuosity. I was taking notes, studying with a study proper to love (Wilson, 2022), taking up his beginnings and his endings. The same sequence of numbers appears again a week later.

D46:07.11.2014

3-2-3-4-2-4-2-3

D46:23.04.2014

I spent most of the afternoon up in the attic... I came across my journals, of course—the thousands of pages I have written! For what? For whom? I avoided looking at any of my drawings or paintings, also stacked up there. Sitting there, with my feet dangling down through its hole in the ceiling, I felt “my whole life is up here.” The writing, the artwork, the hundreds of books I used to read aloud to the kids. I marvelled, as I sat there, at a stiff cardboard papered with 10 pages of sheet music so that I could read them without page turns—a Christmas hymn I accompanied on guitar one Christmas Eve many years ago at St. Monica’s, with the children’s choir... Ten pages! And two key signature changes, I remember. Quite a piece. I have held onto it, ready to perform it again—as if that opportunity could ever be possible again. So there was an air of remorse—but also an air of accomplishment. All these things may be hidden, but at least I’ve done something. And not all of it bad... And I thought: how long I have written! How long and how consistently it has consumed me, this desire to write! And yet—what comes of it? Pages and pages filled, sure, but beyond that? I think if there were ever a sign of calling, the sheer accretion of the work in the attic might be one—but again, I have only quantity. I hesitate to say there is no quality, but it lacks some aspect of quality. It lacks an audience for sure... By the time Gus got home, I was basically done in the attic...

The above entry offers an image which serves to begin to close this project, as it documents a moment when, getting ready for a ‘Spring Clean-up,’ I was up in my attic and came upon the volumes of my diary in their boxes. This is a place ready for meaning making, a location of my ‘life path’ (Gustafson, 2001): ‘My whole life is up here.’

Twenty years had passed since that first diary entry (D1:10.04.1994) documenting my purchase of a notebook at Stevedan stationery shop in Manhattan. Encountering this documentary residue of those twenty years alongside other now useless artefacts, I felt ‘an air of remorse—but also an air of

accomplishment.’ What, exactly, was accomplished? ‘All these things may be hidden.’ Yes, like the cloud drawings remain hidden or, perhaps more important, like St. John of the Cross waits for his beloved, ‘My house being now all stilled’ (John of the Cross, St. 1991, p. 50).

‘At least I’ve done something. And not all of it bad.’ That’s good enough for me, I guess, that judgement. And the calling? The writing, I claim, ‘the sheer accretion of work’ might be ‘a sign of calling,’ though ‘it lacks an audience for sure...’ Until now, I suppose.

Gus got home. There was that calling then, that responsibility. And down from the attic I came.

Nine months later, Madeleine was away at university when I made the last record of my dad while he was alive. She told me about an essay she was writing.

D47:14.01.2015

I sang and even played harmonica for him, but he didn’t seem to enjoy any of that at all... none of my usual sharing amused him at all. He showed some interest when I told him about Madeleine’s research paper, how the breathing that accompanies the praying of the rosary is a rate & depth the body uses for healing.

Dying, my father could not be amused, but he was still interested in learning. As during all those years at St. Monica School, it is again a learning integrated in faith—and now with added hope of healing. Faith, hope and love, these three things endure (Cor 13:13). And so right to the end, we continued the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972). And so we continue to do.

The last of the volumes shared in this research, Volume 47, has as its last date 13.11.2015. The diary omits important events: my father’s death, burial, and the ending of my life as a stay-at-home dad. When this volume was closed, it was less than 50% filled. See above at Figure 22, in the graph of ‘Pages against Time,’ how the line plummets at the end. While the data may seem to end abruptly, this is something over which I have no control. It may be helpful to recall that in diary research, ‘chance plays an important role’ (Ojermark 2007, p. 48) and that I

cannot control either the scope of diary keeping or the survival ... (and) have to make do with what is available. (Ojermark 2007, p. 57.)

I had started paid work outside the home in October. From this frontier, a silence space opens.

Arc 8 Insights

This final arc is peculiar in that it required recognition of its different structure. The arc which begins in its First Movement is incomplete and only finds some fulfilment in the Second Movement. These two movements, however, are interrupted by an Intermezzo which refers back more to the content of Arc 7 than to the events which precede and follow it within Arc 8. The choice of musical terms in

naming these portions of the arc is intentional, as the teaching of music which informed so much of Arc 5 returns here within a ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) that has my late father as a principal participant. The first lines I wrote as a stay-at-home dad (D1:13.01.1996) made reference to him as what I and Madeleine might have been listening for, and here his virtuosity comes to the fore. The ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) here offers again an occasion for considering the benefits of intergenerational learning, but is also shown as exemplary of the conversation which brought me to the study of dialogism and of the parenting skills which I tried to emulate as a stay-at-home dad. As such, the experiences with my father in this arc offer deep insights into the event of subjectification.

Arc 8.1: The Conversation between the Generations, First Movement

The First Movement, then, in its four brief events, begins with my work teaching music to young children and a surprise: qualification as a ‘fine musician’ which establishes me in a kind of equality with my father. The second event finds Gus sensing my father’s illness, asking questions, and my response which points to some awareness of paediatric developmental guidance and, more theoretically, liminality and irreplaceability. The third event necessarily points to a new audience for the diary in the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus, but also reveals something of my dexterity in creating new places for meaning making after the closure of St. Monica School. The final event here returns to my father and his enjoyment of teaching music to my son, Max, prefiguring similar events of intergeneration learning in the Second Movement.

Arc 8.2: Intermezzo (8 events)

The Intermezzo of this arc arises out of the artistic productivity designed into the purpose of Period Three. Co-creation occurs here by virtue of Gus’ earlier expressed love for my poetry (IGDM:04.04.2021), which raised my estimation of their value to this study. The poems and my thinking about them make surprising claims for a practice which is ‘non-egological’ (Biesta, 2017), dialogical, and liminal, with an expressed preference for a wayfaring presence despite an environment increasingly oriented towards productivity and systems of transit, though these changes are shown to occur within developmental norms and guidance for teens and their parents. Here, too, occurs another surprise qualification, that of the poet, Annie Finch, connecting the workings of my diary to a new audience out in the world, expanding my sense of belonging in a network of meaning making places.

Arc 8.3: The Conversation between the Generations, Second Movement (11 events)

This final movement of the final arc begins as the diary begins: in an encounter with Jesus. This encounter, though, is not in a photocopied icon, but in dialogue with my father. The experience and the retelling of it, mitzvah that it is, defies explanation.

Following this, however, the diary bears witness to endings inseparable from their educational content. Madeleine graduates from High School. My father, facing the end of his life, is eager to teach the fundamentals of his virtuosity to his grandchildren and me, and he remains eager to learn and eager for the mitzvah of healing. Surrounded by such endings, I anticipate the end of the diary and reflect on its purpose and audience. Buried among these endings, Gus and I watch *Taxi Driver* (1976) together, an inspiration for his future storytelling and, because of Gus, mine.

Arc 8 offers its contributions, too. Much of what is offered here contributes to stay-at-home dads in the way that my experiences, shown to be liminal in Arc 7, strive towards new integration and a new sense of belonging in new educational environments after the closure of my children's school. I fall briefly into the use of the term 'isolated,' but show that something more complex is happening here, something more empowered than isolation. New networks form, new qualifications emerge. And what did I do as a stay-at-home dad that helped my children during this period? I continued to do what I had always done, offering presence, listening, readiness for the next serve and return interaction even as their development insisted on their growing independence. My documentation of it continued to be a study in love. Most important, perhaps, I offered the affordance of the intergenerational learning they experienced with their grandfather, with the joy it provided us all. Some of the educational contribution from this arc might remain concealed, as some of its events defy easy theorization and aim perhaps for something else. The audience for this arc then shifts beyond the academic to the place of encounter which opens the diary at its frontispiece and recurs at my father's falling. It becomes a responsibility which answers to that superaddressee and, from 'transcending all knowledge,' returns to the contribution easiest to this research, that to my children, that of love.

7.3 Period Three Insights

In Period Three, there is a dramatic increase in the frequency of diary entries and a shift in the diary's purpose. A high number of relevant narrative arcs calls for a new standard for data reduction which emphasizes uniqueness, so as not to replicate with variation similar arcs from previous diary periods. This was undertaken despite the possible relevance of such repetition to a sense of continuity in establishing the home learning environment as a place for meaning making (Gustafson, 2001). The arcs thus reduced, though not represented in detail here, offer evidence of a persistent, wayfaring, dialogic pedagogy of the event, and the agility of my participant children and myself in continuing to build networks of places and relationships to support the home learning environment as a place for meaning making.

Period Three having thus been reduced, the diary's new purpose finds fulfilment across two narrative arcs described in the following manner:

Arc 7: The Artist's Wayfaring (6 events)

Arc 8.1: The Conversation between the Generations, First Movement (4 events)

Arc 8.2: Intermezzo (8 events)

Arc 8.3: Second Movement (11 events)

The Artist's Wayfaring opens with an experience of liminality which troubles the meaning making place of the home learning environment. Documented in poetry which names 'frontiers,' I claim the liminality for myself, writing that 'between/lies my beyond.' This is followed by a shift in the diary's purpose inspired by *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 1992) and the prescription to write three 'morning pages' daily. To these, I added a practice of evening drawings which I came to call 'Cloud Drawings.' These mysterious drawings generated a body of attempts to theorize them, crystallized in a narrative describing a place of encounter. This place, 'The Blue Line,' confronts the place of encounter which was the diary's initial icon, where exploration encounters an iconoclast threat on the one hand and, on the other, learning and language. This admittedly strange narrative is followed then by a memory of my mother singing a lullaby, from which emerges 'a thesis statement for the rest of this' and a semantically inspired frontier of 'meaning/not meaning.' This is the frontier which I claim for myself and in which I have the opportunity to find meaning, whether in the face of the other or in being that face for the other.

Out of the density of so much reflective content, then, there was an opportunity within Period Three to return to The Conversation between the Generations as an expression of the everydayness of the

dialogic event focused on the role of my father and structured in musical terms. In its two movements and interlude, I showed how conversations with Stretansky and Finch provided unexpected experiences of qualification and coming into the world which readied me for a return to the frontiers with a renewed and confident claim, inspired by Pope Francis, that they were my 'proper place.' Despite the great number of events which were necessarily deselected to conform to the limits of this research, I tried to demonstrate that my priority, 'my passion', remained the choice to be present to my children as the gift of my vocation. As they, in a developmentally appropriate way, increasingly seek their independence, my availability comes to be experienced sometimes as a waiting. Nevertheless, the 'serve and return' interactions, established in practice since their birth, continue and with meaningful results which have no conclusive finality even though the diary ends.

Finally, we saw how surfaces became soluble under the cloud drawings and how Jesus became a 'real presence' both in the Eucharist and in the event of my father and I becoming for each other a place of encounter reminiscent of the Frontispiece icon of Jesus which opens the diary. These events trouble the frontier of meaning/not meaning, and of the dichotomy that 'theories... explain' (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 69) and that a great narrative should 'never *explain*' (Horne, 2019, p. 22).

The developmental norms established for adolescents and the guidance offered to their parents, though limited, still offer some context for my children's learning and my contribution to it, especially regarding their growing independence and the guidance than I continue to offer my presence. We continued to practice the dialogic pattern of 'serve and return' interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) as much as possible. The closure of St. Monica School and my father's final illness disrupted our networked places of meaning making (Agnew, 2011), but all of us showed resilience for establishing a sense of belonging in new places with new possibilities for meaning making. The sense of belonging gained through intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023) endures.

I have so recently offered the contributions of Arcs 7 and 8 that they seem to bear little repeating here. However, for the sake of consistent form, I will try to show how these two arcs, joined, offer insight greater than their parts. Arc 7, absent my children's visible participation or co-creation, is answered by their return in the events of Arc 8, but aside from Gus' recent recollection of watching *Taxi Driver* (1976), remain absent from interpretations. This representation of Period Three again recommends itself as a contribution to methods, as it retains a flexible responsibility to the selection of unique, unanticipated data and to the research participants' ability and desire to respond to it. The contribution to stay-at-home dads here is, as noted at the Insights for Arc 8, a contextualization

of my experience as liminal, not isolated, and the way in which that liminality shows progress toward re-established networks of educational places after the closure of my children's school, with new and surprising possibilities for experiences of belonging. And while Arc 7 proposed a 'thesis for the rest of this,' Arc 8 showed how that thesis, conceived in reflexion, joined the earliest educational experiences of my children and myself in language acquisition to educational experiences of their adolescence in the continuation of dialogue and the pedagogy of the event. How did I effect such a pedagogy? The answer is that I did not. We did. The educational events I shared with my children—or for my father, or with my mother, for that matter—were rooted in listening and joy and were done with and for each other. And the documentation which has accompanied it—the diary—is more a co-creation, then, than it might at first appear. It is as much their gift to me as it is my gift to them.

7.4 Silence

The importance of silences in and surrounding the performance of *Amalgamations* (Stone, 2016, 2019) enriches my understanding of the dialogic silences inscribed on the surface of the diary. They are abundant. They begin, appropriately, with the silence of Jesus as depicted in the icon which opens the diary (D1: Frontispiece). As noted in Chapter Four, silences precede the first diary entry in the delay between the event and its documentation, and then emerge within as 'a silent hello' and 'the silence of unrelated people moving through a bright-eyed awe' (D1:10.04.1994). Between diary entries, then, further silences, then further returns. These returns, too, contain their own silence, though. They remained unread as a function of my disappearance in *The Strangely Propped Man* (D4:n.d.11), and figuring into my evaluation of them in the penultimate diary entry shared in the preceding chapter:

'My whole life is up here'... All these things may be hidden... how long I have written!... what comes of it?... it lacks an audience...' (D46:23.04.2014.)

The endlessness of *Amalgamations*, like the endlessness of wayfaring, in which 'the line, like life, has no end' (Ingold 2007, p. 169), brings to the cycle of silences and returns in my diary a sense of its own endlessness, and, from the added perspective of dialogism, the hope of an inevitable return, in which this frontier of silence/not silence is taken up along with the frontier of meaning/not meaning into something which sounds unavoidably like a celebration:

At the heart of any dialogue is the conviction that what is exchanged has meaning. Poets who feel misunderstood in their lifetimes, martyrs for lost political causes, quite ordinary people caught in lives of quiet desperation—all have been correct to hope that outside the tyranny of the present there is a possible addressee who will understand them. This version

of the significant other, “super-addressee,” is conceived in different ways at different times and by different persons: as God, as the future triumph of my version of the state, as a future reader.’ (p. 38)

In 2016, coincidentally, a year after my tenure as a stay-at-home dad had come to an end, Martin Scorsese made his film, *Silence* (2016). Based on the novel by Shusaku Endo (1966), it depicts (see Figure 35, below) the same ‘test to identify Christians’ (McManners 1990, p. 319) which I chose as the opening image for my diary (D1: Frontispiece) in the year before I became a stay-at-home dad. As a stay-at-home dad and as an educator, theory and its explanatory powers have less guided me than the event of subjectivity, with just such ‘unpredictable situations of encounter’ (Biesta 2013, p. 12).

It is with a lasting desire for such openness, and the study of it, that I will in my wayfaring of this frontier always prefer the option to ‘Never *explain*’ (Horne, 2019, p. 22).



Figure 34. laubredelcosmos (2017) *Silence / Rodrigues Steps on Christ* [subtitulado] (1:10). More properly, *Silence* (2016), (image lightened and filtered from colour to greyscale for clarity of reproduction here).

Chapter 8: Discussion

In this chapter, I will recommend this research to the field of education and the audiences which I imagined in the introduction to this thesis. These audiences include educators, of course, but also stay-at-home dads and those who research us, any researcher who wishes to explore the uniqueness of my research methods, and my participants—that is, my children and me. With these audiences in mind, I will revisit each chapter which has preceded this one, beginning with arguments for the relevance of this research demonstrated by my literature review, and for the rigor in my methods and theory. I will then gather into close proximity the data, interpretations, and insights gained from each of the three periods of my diary, so that I might warrant my claims and argue conclusively for the integrity of the process and the contributions which this research offers its audiences.

8.1 Recommendation to the Field

This research has been conducted within the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education at Canterbury Christ Church University, where I hope to achieve the qualification of a PhD in Education. Consequently, the first audience for this work is educators. Within the field of education, a case study such as this, which explores the experiences of a stay-at-home dad and his children as documented in his diary, achieves relevance first by literature which shows the importance of education to the ways in which stay-at-home dads are described in prior research. From such literature emerges a research gap: a paucity of educational research explores the experiences of stay-at-home dads despite the educational aspects of their role as primary caregiver to their children, including expectations established in developmental guidance for parental involvement in a child's learning both in the home learning environment and at school. Further educational relevance is gained from the ways in which educational theory and research from my early childhood education studies revealed the applicability of my learning to the further exploration of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad and those of my children. Research methods which have been established within the field of education are here deployed in fresh ways, bringing together autoethnographic and diary research methods with participant co-creation. At the theoretical level, the work of educationalist Gert Biesta here receives a close reading with insights gleaned from the interpretation of my experiences in light of his theory, especially the pedagogy of the event, and its interaction with other theory, especially dialogism. The data shows a stay-at-home dad who was motivated by, contributed to, and drew meaning from the education of his children in many ways, including but not limited to listening, being present to and participative in 'serve and return' interactions across developmental domains which build neural networks, involvement in the schools and other educational activities of his children, co-constructing with them places for meaning

making networked to the home learning environment, providing opportunities for intergenerational learning with grandparents, and, last but not least, by reflecting on and documenting it all with a preference for joy. The data also shows the stay-at-home dad and his children co-creating a balancing of the domains of education—qualification, socialization, and subjectification—as described by Biesta (2015), with a preference for the subjectification appropriate to a pedagogy of the event (Biesta, 2013). The impact of this research on the educational field is difficult to predict. This, too, is appropriate to Biesta’s theory, which prefers what is unpredictable to ‘what works’ (Biesta, 2007). Instead, the impact which might be most anticipated from this research is the discovery here of what Biesta refers to as virtuosity or educational wisdom, which educators might gain from narrative life histories such as that offered by this research.

Beyond this recommendation of my research to the educational community, it exists also for at least three audiences, as noted above: stay-at-home dads (and those who research them), researchers who might be interested in my unique methods, and my research participants. To each of these, this research has aimed to make some contribution, as shall be detailed below, in line with the need for doctoral research ‘to communicate research effectively to diverse audiences’ (Merga & Mason 2021, p. 672). To argue for these contributions, I will begin by drawing together the relevance, rigor, and method demonstrated across this thesis.

8.1.1 Relevance: Literature

This research has been a case study of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad. As someone who has an insider perspective on this social group, I hope by this research to offer something of relevance and benefit to this group as an audience—not as a ‘how-to’ guide, but by offering new perspectives on our experiences, especially in ways of seeing our experiences as not limited to questions of masculinities and a discourse of isolation, but focused on educational provision for our children in a home learning environment networked to other learning environments and relationships, especially schools and teachers. This hope extends to the community of researchers who explore the experiences of stay-at-home dads and the ways in which they shape academic understandings and social discourses about our lives.

The members of this social group define a stay-at-home dad as ‘the primary caregiver for his children’ (National At-Home Dad Network, 2020). It is this sense of purpose *as caregiver* which sets this definition apart from others, which focus only on lack of employment whilst living at home with children (Livingston, 2014) or as a particular ‘household income structure’ which ‘merits future study’ (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, pp. 1652, 670). Furthermore, it has been shown that this

caregiving as a sense of purpose drives the increase in stay-at-home dads (Livingston 2014) and this 'major shift in family arrangements' (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch 2015, p. 1662). The participation of stay-at-home dads in qualitative studies has resulted in repeated evidence that this caregiving purpose has an educational aspect (for example, Doucet and Merla, 2007; Merla, 2008; Pasley et al., 2014) which was emphasized by participants in the work of Solomon (2017, pp. 45-51). Instead of focusing on these self-proclaimed goals, however, research has instead described purposes of negotiating enactments of hegemonic masculinity and caregiving as acts of resistance (Medved, 2016; Snitker, 2018). In this, there is a suggestion that stay-at-home dads have a gender-focused purpose 'to create an ideal that makes sense for their everyday lives and choices' (Solomon 2017, p. 104), despite their claims that 'explicit references to gender norms are becoming less legitimate in their cultural context' (Merla, 2008, p. 123) and that they 'saw parenting as a gender-neutral task' (Solomon, 2017, p. 23). This body of research, then, which tends to separate stay-at-home dads from their self-described purpose, tends to draw conclusions, perhaps not surprisingly, around experiences of isolation (Smith, 1998; Solomon, 2017; Doucet, 2018) and, in the only research to look at stay-at-home dads in a school environment, marginalization (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019). In all of this research, looking for something that might more fully represent my experiences as a stay-at-home dad, I found the addressivity of a silence, a gap in the research which I experienced as a dialogic responsibility 'to answer for the particular place I occupy' (Holquist 2002, p. 60).

In research for my dissertation on a course for an MA in early childhood education, I found a different story, one which started to respond to this gap. When I interviewed a stay-at-home dad for that case study, he said he did not perceive gender as important to understanding his role, but instead placed importance on educational experiences. He did not complain of isolation or marginalization. Instead, he said, 'I was just having so much fun!' (Troppe 2019b, p. 28.)

Out of that master's dissertation and the course teaching which fed it came a different kind of gap in the educational research, where I found educational relevance in my practice as a stay-at-home dad and inspiration for making inquiry into the documented experiences in my diary. This relevance begins in understanding that childhood is itself a construction (Aries, 1962; Valkanova, 2014), as is gender (Connell, 1995) and that there is an opportunity, even a responsibility, to contribute to a construction of stay-at-home dads which offers an alternative to a discourse of isolation. It extends to a recognition of professional love as a desirable skill set of the primary caregiver in an early childhood education setting (Page, 2018), and to aspects of professional development in journaling

(Bassot, 2020) and practices resonant with the pedagogy of listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986), documentation (Turner and Wilson 2010), and joy (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013) in Reggio Emilia. At a theoretical level, I recognised in *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013) something like an explanation of my educational practice as a stay-at-home dad and a responsibility to offering back to the theory my experiences as a way to see it evidenced in practice.

These invitations from relevant literature only grew as the research progressed. As I explored the text of the diary, I needed to remain open to what it documented as most important among twenty years of our experiences. When I encountered a definition of education as a metaphorical ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109), it struck me as something which we had experienced not metaphorically, but literally, in an embodied way. Seeking greater understanding of our experiences in this context, then, led me to dialogism (Holquist, 2002), which I then found harmonious with Biesta, as I shall revisit below. I also found dialogism to be harmonious with developmental guidance for serve and return interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) and a greater awareness of the place of childhood development norms (NAEYC, 2024a) in my practice as a stay-at-home dad. I also found that contexts of place and space (Tuan, 1977; Gustafson, 2001; Agnew, 2011) contributed to my understanding of the home learning environment as a place for meaning making, particularly in the ways which we co-created networks of educational places and relationships, the latter of which included intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023), and how these contributed to a sense of belonging which further challenges the discourse of isolation seen in research on stay-at-home dads.

8.1.2 Rigor: Method

My method for discovering new knowledge about stay-at-home dads and education begins from a constructionist ontology which views truth as arising out of the sense which people make of their lives in the world. This gives me and my participant children authority to make truth claims about our experiences as ‘experts in our own lives’ (Clark & Statham, 2005). In order to arrive at these claims, I argue for an interpretivist epistemology to which I have joined theories of knowing from dialogism (Holquist, 2002), study-as-love (Wilson, 2022a), and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) in order to more fully reveal the ways of knowing which make meaning-making available to this research.

I proceed, then, through a qualitative terrain of methods, showing how ‘broad ethnographic strategies’ (Holliday, 2016) led me into ethnography, with its traditions in *The Sociological Imagination* (Wright Mills, 1959), field notes and thick description (Geertz, 1973), and then to narrative life history (Ojermark, 2007), and autoethnography.

The role of the self and identity have been a source of trouble in this research. Exploring social groups of which I am a member (Cohen et al., 2018)—whether specifically the bounded group of my family or more generally my identification as a stay-at-home dad—is one way of defining autoethnographic research. However, such research is also described relatively neutrally as placing the self ‘at the centre’ (Cohen 2017, p. 292), which leads to less neutral descriptions as self-centred and narcissistic (Gass, 1994; Lapadat 2017, p. 596, citing Atkinson, 2006 and Delmont, 2009). Stay-at-home dads have in research rejected identity as an important way to understand our experiences (Merla, 2008; Futris, 1997 cited in Pasley et al., 2014) and research on fathers has suggested that identity does not lead to what’s most important to us or our children (Pasley et al., 2014). Similarly, Biesta (2013) asserts a lack of interest in identity, choosing instead a focus on subjectivity as a way to understand our place in the world. These objections to identity as a focus, arising from relevant literature, were then in exploration of the diary joined by similar objections made by the diarist. All of these suggested a rejection of identity and I was happy to have subjectivity as a way to understand the self in this research. However, the use of autoethnographic methods seemed to present a danger of falling into the trap of centring the self and returning to an undesirable focus on identity. Consequently, the place of the ‘auto’ in autoethnography needed to be explored and bounded. This was first achieved by considering autoethnography as ‘doing ethnography and... doing autobiography’ (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 353) and, having established ethnographic credentials, shifting the autobiographical to the auto/biographical (Stanley, 1992; Merrill & West, 2009; Bainbridge & West, 2016) with a declared aim of deemphasizing the auto of auto/biography to the preference of the biography of the Other. In this way, I hoped to recognize my own participation in the storying of other’s lives and their participation in storying my own, as my daughter had spontaneously expressed as a goal of this research (RL1:02.11.2019).

Continuing to wayfare in search of the best method, my explorations of autoethnography and auto/biography were interrupted by a need to also confront challenges to the rigor of my methods which might arise from the use of my diary as my primary data source. Diary research thus became the operational method for approaching the text. Aware also of the unique character and value of a diary as a data source, I use document analysis as a way of focusing on the diary and as a first stage of interpreting its value and meaning. This interpretation of my diary towards its meaning and theorization (McCulloch, 2004) has been an exploration of purpose and audience (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015; Hogan 1986a, 1986b; Fothergill, 1974). The diary’s ‘frequency of entries’ (McCulloch 2004 p. 104) was useful for identifying shifts in purpose. The diary’s temporal organization suggested a choice to reject thematic analysis in favour of a narrative approach (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015, p.

43). Data was then selected and interpreted using the criteria detailed above, alert to events in the diary which respond to prior research on stay-at-home dads, the possibility of viewing these experiences from an educational perspective, and the perspectives of my participant children.

Key to this project has been its rigorous data selection, reduction, and interpretation. This has been achieved by adherence to approved methods of diary research, especially the principle of data selection by 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44). With recognition of the importance of my participant children in this project, this led to the minor innovation of selection by what mutually fascinates, reflecting as it does our epistemic wayfaring 'in the company of others' (Ingold 2007, p. 15). In concert with dialogism as epistemology, some data was also chosen in response to prior research on stay-at-home dads and my responsibility 'to answer for the particular place I occupy' (Holquist 2002, p. 60). While data reduction was necessarily practiced throughout the selection of events for interpretation, Diary Period Three was exemplary of the 'huge amounts of data' (Cohen 2017, p. 315) often encountered in qualitative research. Consequently, it best exemplifies how 'careful reading and re-reading of the data' aimed to reduce 'data overload by selecting significant features' (Cohen 2017, p. 315) and relied on 'the questions asked of the material, or the theoretical perspective which is brought to bear' (Cohen 2017, p. 324). By these means, and the importance of surprise to research (Gorard and Taylor, 2004), the 9,000 pages of my diary were reduced to what is shared here. Data interpretation proceeded throughout this process first at the scale of the diary as a document and then, at the level of the individual documented event, in techniques traceable to our epistemology with its emphasis on attaining knowledge through dialogism, wayfaring, and study as love. These approaches demonstrated their versatility and responsiveness to the demonstrated changes in the diary as well as to variability in participants' willingness or ability to respond. Any truth claims made from these interpretations arise within a constructionist ontology and an awareness of the limits of such claims, whilst also recognizing always in my children that they are expert in their own lives (Clark & Statham, 2005). Warrants in response to these claims and necessary to educational research (Gorard, 2002) follow, below.

Returning then to autoethnography, I retrospectively understood how I had been rebalancing the 'auto' and 'ethno' and 'graphy' in my autoethnographic approach (Reed-Danahay, 1997 cited by Wall, 2008, p. 39). I also came to see how my work could retrospectively be better understood as symbiotic autoethnography (Beattie, 2022), as I have show that it symbiotically joins different autoethnographic practices into a harmoniously functioning whole. Perhaps the greatest benefit from a retrospective understanding of symbiotic autoethnography has been in the ways it allowed

me to address polyvocality in this research, both in the text and in its interpretations with my participant children. Recognising again the importance of my children as experts in their own lives (Clark & Statham, 2005) and their participation in the co-creation of this research, I detailed the ten stages at which co-creation has shaped this inquiry.

All of this proceeds with the uniqueness which both recommends and burdens it. As a stay-at-home dad with a unique insider perspective joined to a unique educational perspective, as a researcher working with my own adult children as co-creators of this research, and as a diarist exploring my own diary, the uniqueness we offer has no value without the concerns for rigor with which I introduced this chapter.

So, in keeping with the definition of method which Madeleine recommended (Cashore, 2017), this research has not been conducted with some foreknowledge of how it would proceed, but has remained open to surprise and the need to respond to the data as it emerged, responding also to the educational theory which was simultaneously being tested as ways to interpret what was being found. This resulted in adaptive shifts in method from one diary period to another, as is detailed in the insights for each period, below.

All of this, then, has been brought together as a representation of the data which can be called a life history, with the aims of providing from this one case history an alternative understanding of the experiences of stay-at-home dads, new insights into the pedagogy of the event, and a story of the educational wisdom or 'virtuosity' which might have occurred along the way.

8.1.3 Rigor: Theory

As a summative statement for this educational perspective, then, I might offer the following. Being a stay-at-home dad has been shown to entail risks associated with gender identity, including the possible experience of isolation. The educational theory I have shared here, Biesta's (2013) pedagogy of the event, recognises education as *risky*, and that this risk is analogous to parenting. It is around this risk, and the *weakness* with which it is associated, which offers a first opening to consideration of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad from an educational perspective. Into this opening, I drew the possibility of framing my experiences within a definition of education as the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972), which at first seemed a neat summary of my experiences, but opened up a way of seeing my experiences in terms of dialogism and the serve and return interactions which develop neural networks for learning throughout the life course (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). Dialogism, then, as constructed by Holquist (2002), provided a framework for exploring my experiences within the context of dialogue harmonious with a

pedagogy of the event. By bringing these two frameworks together then (see Tables 10 and 11), I can explore my experiences as a stay-at-home dad from a perspective in which the event of subjectification in the pedagogy of the event and the event of the creation of a self in the utterance of dialogism reveal responsibility, uniqueness-as-irreplaceability, and the possibility of responding to the transcendent call necessary to education. Joining this central educational theory, then, to the earlier particularities of social constructions (Aries, 1962; Valkanova, 2014, Connell, 1995), the purposes of diaries in education (Turner & Wilson, 2010; Bassot, 2020), professionalism and love (Page, 2018; Wilson, 2022a), storytelling (Paley, 1999), listening (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Paley, 1986), and expertise (Clark and Stratham, 2005) provides a rich beginning for the interpretation of my diary and evidence of ‘developing a theoretical framework’ (McCulloch 2004, 46) necessary to do so.

My educational perspective also stakes its claim for an understanding of purpose, which I have held mostly in suspense, though whenever in the path of this thesis I have mentioned judgment, the question of purpose is the underlying assumption. As I have detailed earlier,

‘because the question of the aim or “telos” of education is a multidimensional question, judgment—judgment about what is educationally *desirable*—turns out to be an absolutely crucial element of what teachers do.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 130.)

These dimensions, you will recall, were described above as Qualification, Socialisation and Subjectification (Figure 32, below).

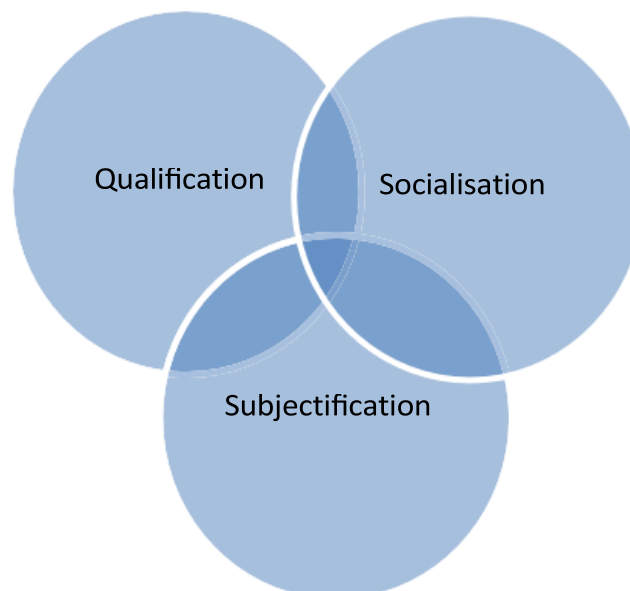


Figure 35. ‘The three functions of education and the three domains of educational purpose’ (Biesta 2015, p. 78).

This representation of the purpose of education, like the qualitative ‘terrain of strategies’ (Holliday 2016, p. 15) and with its multiplicity of frontiers, might be a terrain for wayfaring (Ingold, 2007). In order to approach what this might mean, I have found it helpful to think of the purpose of education through the experience and theoretical underpinnings of a recent musical composition.

‘Amalgamations’ (Stone, 2016, 2019) offers a perspective on wayfaring which suggests that the event of subjectivity in pedagogies of listening and of the event has the potential to be described as having a non-teleological aspect and that by theorizing such an event as non-teleological might free it for the openness to the unpredictable and unique necessary to these pedagogies.

8.2 Period One Insights

8.2.1 Methods

Methods for exploring Period One serve as a baseline for the variations which became necessary to exploring later periods. This baseline establishes the criteria for data selection after the established standard of ‘what fascinates’ (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44) whilst adding to this the fascination of my children through spontaneous sharing of discovered events and more reflective sharing of compiled events. However, methods responded to this period and some were thus unique to it. Data from letters to my parents were sought, found, and included here to corroborate the claim in the diary (D1:03.04.1996) that most of my documentation of this period was elsewhere, namely, in letters to friends and family. This brief foray outside of the diary also helps to address the ‘low value’ of infrequent diary entries during this period. The events documented in the letters are valuable in their immediacy and the educational content they document. The responsiveness of my method to the data is also demonstrated in the core ways it has been influenced by the diary. This is perhaps most evident in this first period, as the entry which names the data source ‘just a diary’ (D1:16.05.1994) persuaded a shift away from approaches which might place emphasis on autobiography and toward a decentering of the self in my autoethnographic approach, with increased attention on my social connections to other stay-at-home dads by virtue of my typicality (see Table 8) and to my children by their co-creation of this research. Diary methods with a core of document analysis also helped to shift this away from being a study of myself and towards the study of a text. Similarly, my narrative approach was encouraged by the diary’s (D1:19.04.1996) rhetorical question, ‘who will hear my story?’ Benefits of these methods demonstrated in this research: capacity for surprise, ethical treatment of participants, and discovery of educational wisdom.

8.2.2 Three periods

A first look at an inventory of the diary allowed for identification of three periods based on the principle that frequency of entries is a determinant of the diary's value (McCulloch, 2004). These changes in frequency of entries, were subsequently discovered to be associated with shifts in the diary's purpose, a key to interpreting its meaning (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). In Period One (Volumes 1-4, 1994-2005), the purpose of the diary is defined as 'a diary, just a diary' (D1:16.05.1994) as an apparent rejection of autobiography as narcissism (Gass, 1994) which later becomes ambiguous, as I ask, 'who will hear my story?' (D1:19.04.1996.) In practice, its purpose as a diary achieves what might be called low value (McCulloch, 2004), as diary entries are low frequency, sometimes lack immediacy, and fall into periods where the entries are undated. Meanwhile, the diary maintains another, unarticulated purpose as a site for the practice of literary and specifically poetic writing as a continuation of my undergraduate education.

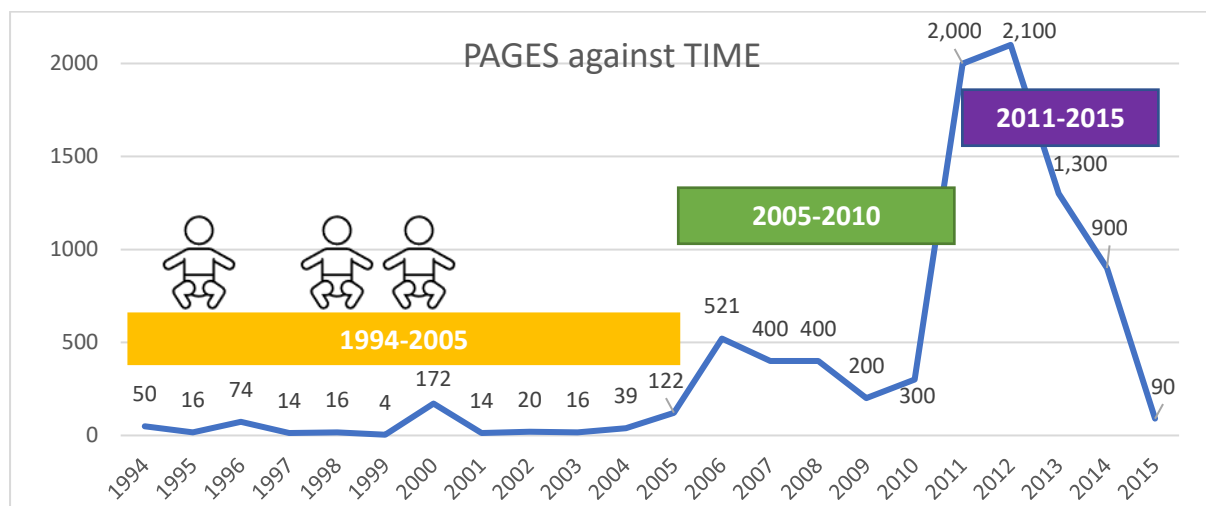


Figure 36. Pages against time.

Also, forms of direct address within the diary point to its purpose with an intended audience within a place of sacred encounter (D1: Frontispiece) and prayer (D1:18.09.1994), and also as a memento for the future enjoyment of my children (D1:04.12.1996; D1:16.09.1997).

8.2.3 Period one: Three arcs

After identifying the three periods in the diary, it became necessary to seek the diary's narrative storylines (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015), connecting events to preserve the integrity and context of the diary (Cohen, 2017). Selection of the events which comprised these arcs was based on criteria which responded to the changes of each diary period, but remained consistent in their responsiveness to my children as co-creators in this research, the research on stay-at-home dads, and the educational

theory which was evolving in the course of this research. In Period One, the three arcs which were identified were a Preface to Fatherhood, New Responsibilities, and School Begins.

Arc 1: Preface to fatherhood (4 events)

We can see in this brief arc a bold beginning which, in the representation of Christ as an icon and the frontispiece of the entire work, claims the work as a place of encounter. But this boldness immediately faces the diary's first event, which with greater uncertainty names the diary only 'this exact tablet,' a mere thing, but a thing into which is being documented an utterance in response to a lively field of addressivities. Only later is it given the name of 'diary'—and this purpose for the former tablet is named in rejection of narcissism. And then its first audience, its superaddressee, is named—'Sweet Jesus'—and is named in poetry, a theoretically perfect form for expressing the unity of study and love (Wilson, 2022a). Into these interpretations found in the text, Madeleine throws the surprise of bringing her attention to the things I 'gave up' to become a stay-at-home dad and 'take care of' her, including my sense of belonging and meaningful career, suggesting the responsibility, uniqueness, career patterns, and addressivities of dialogism, as well as the definition of stay-at-home dad as primary caregiver. This arc answers questions about the purpose of the diary and finds it transformed from its thing-ness into a place of encounter which begins and ends with Jesus as superaddressee, listening.

Arc 2: New responsibilities (18 events)

This second arc spans about two years, beginning with the first lines I wrote after my daughter Madeleine was born. These lines in their poetic shape again remind us of that poetry is theorized as the perfect form for study as love (Wilson, 2022a). They emphasise in their content change, listening, and an experience shared with each other and, subconsciously perhaps, with my father as a model for my new fatherhood. From these earliest documented experiences as a stay-at-home dad, there is evidence then of intergenerational learning's mutually beneficial sense of belonging (Barton & Lee, 2023), which then operates as a key dimension for defining a place so that we can begin to make meaning of it (Agnew, 2011). Here and elsewhere in this arc, the diary confronts the ideas of solitude and isolation, but asserts a confident sense of belonging in educational rule and models from Christianity, as well as in experiences of co-created educational events with my daughter shared in 'a conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) with my parents. Out of this arc, Madeleine expresses a mitzvah of healing, co-creating a claim for research impact by changing for the better the lives of its participant(s). My children are documented as achieving developmental milestones in language, mark-making, and the gross motor skills of first steps. I have

also documented ways in which I helped them to achieve these norms, most notably through the 'serve and return' interactions (Center on the Developing Child, 2011) which promote the growth of neural networks which shape all learning. There are repeated references to experiences of joy (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013, p. 12).

Arc 3: School begins (10 events)

In this third arc, my three participant children each in turn are enrolled in a 3-year-old preschool programme which feeds into a Roman Catholic school serving children in kindergarten through eighth grade. As such, school is introduced as a place of involvement and documentation networked to a home learning environment with a great sense of freedom and no educational goals. There is naming and playing and listening. Into this idyll, then, comes a story of a 'strangely propped man,' which I interpret as an experience of the disappearance of identity and the appearance of subjectivity, which occurs by means of writing in the diary. Madeleine receives this story with sadness. So, it is followed by something like a necessary antidote to such a tale, a silly dream which she finds hilarious; it also suggests that we do not take ourselves too seriously, that I am trying to hold my theory lightly.

8.2.4 Across the period

8.2.4.1 Interpretations from Document analysis

Document analysis allows us to see in this first period of the diary a set of purposes and possible intended audiences.

I see here as operational five purposes. First, as announced by the Frontispiece, it is a place of encounter. Second, it is 'just a diary' and as such a rejection of the narcissism of autobiography. Third, it is documentation of my learning and the environment within which I learn, with its addressivities and my responsible utterances. Fourth, it operates with a purpose which comingles study, poetry, and prayer as harmonious ways of responding to the addressivities of the environment. And fifth, there is a perhaps unintentional purpose in that it has captured the early mark-making of my children, revealing an openness even at such an early time for co-creation of the text.

The intended audience of the diary as revealed in this period helps to confirm these purposes. In particular, the naming of 'Sweet Jesus' (D1:18.09.1994) in poetry supports the first, third and fourth purposes above, while the naming of Madeleine as a superaddressee (D1:04.12.1996) supports this final purpose of imagining my children as dialogical partners in the co-creation of the text. A final

superaddressee here is a vague 'you' in the very first diary entry (D1:10.04.1994). This opens the text, perhaps, to a wider audience beyond the intimacies suggested by family and prayer.

8.2.4.2 *Interpretations for stay-at-home dads*

Research on the experiences of stay-at-home dads led me to see and respond to other aspects of the diary.

Madeleine's response to the diary's first entry (D1:10.04.1994) surprised me by her focus on the things I 'gave up,' especially my sense of belonging in a meaningful career, to become a stay-at-home dad and 'take care of' her (EM:24.03.2021). This recalls the breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy with its socially constructed, gendered division of labour ((Carrigan, et al. 1987) and the trouble of masculinity in performing what is seen as the feminine role of childcare. However, it also helps to corroborate the evidence that this was a choice for me and that I am consequently part of the growing demographic of men (Livingston 2014) who actively make the choice to be 'the regular *primary caregiver* of his children' (National At-home Dad Network, 2020 n.p., emphasis in original).

This period offered an opportunity to reconsider the discourse of isolation as a way of understanding some of my experience, but it also confronted this discourse. An early summary statement that 'I am isolated' (D1:12.02.1996), finds in the event it summarizes no reference to gender other than perhaps a veiled breadwinner/caregiver division of labour as I transitioned out of the paid workforce; more operative in this summary seem to be my transition to a new geographical location where I am a stranger and familial pressures to live up to the potential suggested by my education. I also collected around this time a clipping which announces the health risks of isolation whilst asserting that time shared with family is a tonic, suggesting an awareness of both the risks and the benefits of my new role. This shared nature of my new role, though, is emphasized in the three lines of poetry which make up my first diary entry as a stay-at-home dad (D1:13.01.1996), in which I recognise that it is 'our solitude' within which 'we listen.' The loss of a sense of belonging which Madeleine notices in the first diary entry, begins to be rebuilt in this sharing and in the communication of such shared events through letters to my parents in a 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972)—an early taste of the sense of belonging associated with intergenerational learning (Barton & Lee, 2023), though it remains fragile at the end of Period One, as *The Strangely Propped Man* (D4:n.d.) shows.

This first period also offers to stay-at-home dads a first set of experiences which might be interpreted from an educational perspective. As an alternative way of understanding our experience,

these interpretations recognise events of embodiment, risk and responsibility (D1:11.02.1996), of unpredictability (D1:03.04.1996) and irreplaceability (D1:04.12.1996), and of teaching and learning together. These examples of educational experiences, from riding bikes (D2:01.06.2000) to naming the world (D2:13.07.2000), confirm previous research in which such experiences are claimed by stay-at-home dads as important (Doucet & Merla, 2007; Merla, 2008; Mattila, 2016; Solomon, 2017), and merit exposition here so that stay-at-home dads can recognise it in their own practice. Furthermore, such direct evidence of 'father involvement' (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013) argues for the inclusion of stay-at-home dads in the interdisciplinary research into the ways in which we experience and enact such involvement and might benefit our children, recognizing that 'the most important experiences come from the environment of relationships that interact with each child' (Center on the Developing Child, 2009) and that the reliable presence of a stay-at-home dad is an affordance for the serve and return interactions necessary for healthy brain development and all future learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2011). By recognising within this period the example of my father (D1:13.01.1996; LP:28.07.1996; D4:n.d.10) and other role models (D1:Frontispiece; D1:18.08.1996; D1:11.03.1997), the responsibility of creating 'new masculinities' is perhaps diminished in favour of learning what some stay-at-home dads have said amounts to a new way of fathering (Solomon, 2017), but which is not without precedent or example (Smith, 2009). The earliest experiences within a school setting which emerge from this period offer evidence of a positive and engaging level of involvement and sense of belonging as an alternative to the marginalization claimed elsewhere (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019). More generally, these interpretations of the experiences of a stay-at-home dad present documentation of the role as an opportunity to love, study, and transcend.

8.2.4.3 Interpretations for education

This study has aimed to explore 'what seems to matter most for children' (Pasley et al. 2014, p. 298), which might be less about the gender identity of a stay-at-home dad and its performance and more about education. This begins in the fact of the presence of the stay-at-home dad in the home learning environment and the affordances he offers by his presence for the relationship and serve and return interactions essential to all future learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2009, 2011). The experiences documented in this period begin in and sustain practices of listening (Edwards et al., 2011; Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005), documentation (Turner and Wilson, 2010), and joy (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013) which, although not informed at the time by the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, find a kind of primordial fulfilment in my practice which suggests both the wisdom of such

approaches and the origins of my present day appreciation for them. Other developmentally appropriate practice is also shown here for context.

Madeleine again helps to shape this discussion. In her response to a diary entry in which I mention ‘matters of importance, like Max Jacob’ (D4:26.04.2004), she says that it reminds her of *The Little Prince* (St. Exupery, 1943).

Your usage of “a matter of importance” to describe Max Jacob seems like a proper usage, in contrast to the businessman’s use of “matters of consequence” regarding owning the stars. (EM:28.03.2021.)

A proper usage of ‘a matter of importance,’ along with implying trustworthy interpretation, here points to an agreement that poetry, with its implications of study and love (Wilson, 2022a), matters. This her vote of trust follows on her statement that the times when I taught music at her school ‘are some favorite early memories’ and that a recent event had refreshed these memories ‘like a reminder of who I was and how God has always loved me’ (EM:28.03.2021).

These might not be what matters most for all children, but these matter to her. It is somewhat ironic, then, that in an earlier diary entry I appear to be reject the study of literature, claiming that ‘none of it applies to me, to raising a child well’ (D1:16.02.1996). Rather than a rejection of a literary education, however, this is more a question of the purpose of education, and more specifically a purpose of education which prioritizes ‘raising a child well.’ The diary in many ways becomes a working out of this question. This matters to me.

Where does the diary suggest that I have sought the answer to such a question? I would argue that the search for a purpose for education begins in the listening which awakens me to the serve and return interactions characteristic of many events in the diary, which is often a listening shared, and which receives in the diary the dialogical response of my utterance in its documentation. While such listening, in the event, might have as its purpose the sort of non-teleological listening implied in the theory and performance of *Amalgamations* (Stone, 2016, 2019), it shares with that kind of listening the unpredictability and the endlessness implied in that theory and performance as well as the unpredictability necessary for subjectification (Biesta, 2013) and the endlessness of all conversation (Pring, 2001), dialogism (Holquist, 2002), wayfaring (Ingold, 2007), and love (Cor 13:13).

Opportunities for meaning making, for figuring out ‘what matters,’ occurred in a home learning environment as a place for meaning making linked to other educational places which only begin to show themselves in Period One. They are there, however, especially in our first interactions with the school which my children would attend for eleven years, and the sense of belonging it offered us all.

When I was a stay-at-home dad, I also sought the answer in an educational practice which has only in the course of this research been possible for me to understand as documentation of virtuosity in the pedagogy of the event. By 'documentation,' I mean 'a pedagogical philosophy of knowing and valuing children' (Turner and Wilson 2010, p. 5) in which the aim is 'to co-construct the meaning of the children's experience' (Turner and Wilson 2010, p. 8) and, I would argue, as it is a co-construction, the meaning of my experiences as well, as we are 'co-subjects' (Freire 1972, p. 135 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 71) in co-being (Holquist 2002, p. 25). By virtuosity, I refer to the ability to find 'the right balance' (Biesta 2013, p. 147) between the educational domains of qualification, socialization and subjectification (Biesta, 2015), and that this is achieved 'only by *practicing* judgment... in the widest range of educational situations possible' (Biesta 2013, p. 135) and by studying the virtuosity of others through conversation or 'through life-history' (Biesta 2013, p. 136). The pedagogy of the event, then, refers to the event of subjectivity (Biesta 2013, p. 22) and the educational wisdom which allows for the weakness in education necessary to its occurrence (Biesta 2013, p. 24) so that the three domains might be in balance.

Documentation of virtuosity in the pedagogy of the event, then, begins in events of subjectivity. Many of the events selected from this diary period were selected for evidence as events of subjectivity. These are frequently manifested as expressions of dialogism, utterances which respond to addressivities and so answer for the subjectivity of the subject, for their place in the world. And so, within this period, we see subjectivity first in events of listening (D1:10.04.1994; D1:13.01.1996; D4:n.d.2) and the responses they evoke. Subjectivity is seen repeatedly, however, and in many ways, including reading together (D1:04.12.1996), first uses of verbal language (D1:16.09.1997; D1:07.10.1997) and mark-making (D2:n.d.1) as expressions of 'uniqueness-as-irreplaceability' (Biesta 2013, p. 144), of when it matters that I am I.

There is such a strongly expressed preference for subjectification that it becomes necessary to provide evidence for a balance with socialization and qualification. Socialization, then, is seen to enter into the pedagogy of the event during this period in at least seven ways. First, there is the socialization of my daughter Madeleine into the practice of listening as co-subjects when in my first diary entry as a stay-at-home dad, we listen together (D1:13.01.1996). Second, there is evidence of socialization of my children into the musical customs and language of our family (LP:28.07.1996; D4:n.d.10). Third, there is socialization into Christian traditions including iconography (D1:18.08.1996), mutual catechesis (D1:19.08.1996), and my socialization into the Dominican rule (D1:11.03.1997). There is socialization into the diary as its audience (D1:12.05.1997; D1:16.09.1997)

and into the school ritual of 'snack day' (D2:30.09.1999), as well as into the religious ritual of First Holy Communion (D4:26.04.2004).

The educational domain of qualification is documented the least. We are learning to do things: most notably, to walk (D1:05.12.1996) and to talk (D1:16.09.1997; D1:07.10.1997). Once school begins, there is the opportunity for a teacher's qualifying assessment of Madeleine's ability (D2:30.09.1999) and when she begins to learn to ride her bike, I qualify this new knowledge: 'she did great' (D2:01.06.2000).

The goal for education, then, which seems to apply 'to me, to raising a child well' is achieving the educational wisdom for balancing these domains. Aside from these, what more is there to education? 'Damselies and dragonflies, their differences learned' (D2:13.07.2000). Here, in the family culture that is 'every child's first culture' (Holquist 2002, p. 82),

the tutoring is not intentionally directed in any trivial sense toward specific goals, beyond that of teaching the world's difference and diversity. (Holquist 2002, p. 83.)

There is no goal here, just the difference between damselflies and dragonflies. We are wayfaring together.

8.3 Period Two Insights

Period Two (Volumes 4-14, 2005-2010) then begins with a change in purpose as an uptake of therapeutic aims associated with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Greenberger and Padesky, 1995). As a result, diary entries increase in frequency and immediacy, with thematized, often list-like entries which focus on events which brought me happiness and contentment. This purpose helps to reveal the interpretive meaning of my educational experiences, particularly in the context of my children's school, as they consistently recur as documented events of the desired positive affect. Of the three diary periods, this is the most focused in its purpose. While it maintains a practice of poetry, this is subordinated to the CBT-structured diary entries; the audience, then, might be said to be myself, with a purpose of 'personal development and fulfilment' (Aspin and Chapman 2001, pp. 39-40 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 64).

8.3.1 Methods

Period Two again draws on the measure of 'frequency of entries' (McCulloch, 2004) to help identify a change in the diary's purpose as a key to interpretation (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015; Hogan 1986a, 1986b; Fothergill, 1974) and 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44) as a guide to data selection with the help of my participant children as co-creators and 'experts in their own lives'

(Clark and Stratham, 2005). Responding to changes in the diary, the first of the three narrative arcs which emerges shows little or no evidence of co-creation, while the third of these is developed as a narrative arc in response to participant expressions of interest, of which more below.

8.3.2 Three arcs

Arc 4: CBT (4 events)

This first arc in Period Two, like the first arc in Period One, seems to offer no evidence of co-creation with my participant children. While in Arc 1 this was due to its occurrence before they were born, here their voices retreat into a kind of silence while the focus of my dialogue, study, and documentation seems to turn inward, to explore moods and the texts which might not *explain* them, but expose them more truthfully. It also suggests that this search may have been at least partially inspired by a tenuous sense of belonging found in *The Strangely Propped Man* (D4:n.d.), and that engaging with online places helped me find again a ‘sense of home’ in my daily activities (Gustafson, 2001). There is some methodological foreshadowing here, especially in the event of the Jesuit retreat, with its leaning into the interpretivism possible within image and text, its description of the process as a journey not unlike wayfaring, and its insistence on a lack of expectations and a preference for joy. While there is evidence of learning and even some small innovation between the two mood inventories shared here, this arc is more significant in the way it shapes the purpose and structure of the diary for this period, choosing to seek and respond to addressivities which promote positive affect, and thus creating a new documentation style which I would then apply to experiences with my children.

Arc 5: School Years (15 events)

This next arc, encoded in brevities which make narrative traction elusive and in specificities of names which require elision due to ethical consideration, for all its stylistic challenges nonetheless documents a period of three years in which I experienced a deep and growing sense of belonging as the networks of educational places for meaning making, which started in the home learning environment, now extended powerfully to the school which my children attended. A sense of belonging is also in evidence through opportunities for intergenerational learning my children experienced with my parents. This chapter, then, fully responds to prior research on stay-at-home dads’ experiences of marginalization in school settings and isolation more generally, offering an alternative perspective. This is not an experience of mandated diversity and inclusion; rather, it shows a deep and rich experience of subjectivities in dialogue and joy. This is evidenced especially in those events within this arc which reveal the increasing responsibility I enjoyed as a voluntary music

teacher in the school. On a more theoretical level, experiences within this arc allow for a deepening understanding of the Pedagogy of the Event, particularly the ways in which 'coming into the world' contributes to the event of subjectivity.

Arc 6: American Football (16 events)

This final arc in Period Two evidences the co-creation in this research, having been named an arc by Madeleine after Max's interest in these events inspired a compilation of them. Furthermore, Madeleine responds directly to more than half (9/16) of these individual events; her voice as co-creator is heard perhaps most clearly in this arc. I also interpret this as a sign of the freedom and equality of co-creation among my participant children, as they were not limited to replying only to events in which they might be seen as the central actor; nor were they compelled to reply to such events, as Max says no more here beyond his initial and inspiring interest. Theory arising from these events include especially the way in which my presence balanced established practices for listening and serve and return interactions against a new kind of getting out of the way which was both developmentally appropriate to the children's growing independence and also acted to not obstruct (Biesta 2006) the event of subjectification. These educational provisions were joined to developmentally appropriate involvement with their school and other educational activities, and the ways in which we continued to co-create networks of belonging from the home learning environment and into other educational places for meaning making. The best evidence, perhaps, for such meaning making was the 'frisson of awe' which accompanied its witness and documentation. This period also shows how Max, expert in his own life, was himself balancing the domains of education.

8.3.3 Across the period

8.3.3.1 Interpretations from Document analysis

The purpose of the diary in Period Two is announced as therapeutic by the uptake of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Significant in this is its resultant regularization in documentation, and that the documentation shows an interest in noticing the fullness of experience with a possible bias for events which inspire feelings of happiness or contentment. This is further relevant in that the focus of these documented events frequently turns to educational experiences in the home and in the school setting. This purpose joined to these outcomes suggest that educational events in the home and the school setting may have been experienced as having therapeutic benefit; at the very least, they confront the idea of the school setting as a site of experiencing marginalization and

suggest by the preponderance of positive experiences documented there the possibility of fulfilling father involvement and engagement with school aims.

The audience of the diary, which also illuminates its purpose and interpretation, is in Period Two significantly changed from in Period One. In Period One, we found examples of diary entries in which a superaddressee was named, such as 'Sweet Jesus' (D1:18.09.1994) and 'Madeleine' (D1:04.12.1996), but that period, drew to a close with a statement which suggests the unread entries of the diary: 'No one else read them. No one else saw them. They were for him alone' (D4:n.d.The Strangely Propped Man). So it is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Period Two does not evidence the same kind of directly addressed superaddressee. While not eliminating the possibility that 'Sweet Jesus' and 'Madeleine' (and all of my children) are still an intended audience, the emphasis in Period Two seems to be towards writing for myself in the moment, for my own immediate therapeutic benefit. While the audience of the diary may narrow in this fashion during Period Two, it also documents vividly an audience outside of the diary, whether in an experience of encounter with St. Mary (D5:03.12.2005) or in my growing responsibility for rehearsing and leading the children at school in the singing of hymns (for example, D5:24.12.2005). These very real experiences of having an audience in dialogue suggests a strong experiential argument against isolation as a dominating my experiences as a stay-at-home dad, and that, again, these audiences are located largely in the school setting.

8.3.3.2 Interpretations for stay-at-home dads

During Period Two, there is not only an absence of documentation of experiences of isolation, there is a consistent documentation of increasing integration into my children's school community and a resultant sense of belonging. This not only offers an alternative to the isolation discourse in gendered interpretations of the experiences of stay-at-home dads, it also argues for an alternative to limited research on stay-at-home dads in school settings, which describes experiences of marginalization (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019). As such, it also provides evidence for the kind of father involvement which might merit the inclusion of stay-at-home dads in that multi-disciplinary field of study (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). As education has repeatedly been shown to be of importance to stay-at-home dads (see especially Solomon, 2017), this period alone offers a powerful argument that we might see our primary caregiving as bound up with other educational structures and that we are not as isolated as prior research might suggest.

8.3.3.3 Interpretations for education

At the most fundamental level, Period Two again demonstrates that I offered my children a reliable adult presence for the relationship and serve and return interactions necessary for neural development and all future learning (Center on the Developing Child, 2009, 2011). This continues to be evidenced as a practice of listening and documentation which, despite a lack of any contemporaneous knowledge of Reggio Emilia, corresponds to its pedagogy of listening (Edwards et al., 2011; Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005), its documentation (Turner and Wilson 2010), and its joy (Malaguzzi cited in Rinaldi 2013). I suggest that these practices might begin to resemble a loving and curious inquiry into discovering how my children were living as ‘experts in their own lives’ (Clark and Stratham, 2005), evidencing and being encouraged in developmentally appropriate behaviours as I acted as their translator and co-creator of a home learning environment networked to other educational environments and enhanced by the sense of belonging afforded by intergenerational learning between my parents and children.

During this period, educational wisdom or ‘virtuosity’ as described by Biesta (2013) can be seen once again as a preference for the event of subjectivity as experienced frequently as an event of dialogism. Despite this preference, balance is achieved with the educational domains of socialization and qualification. While singing is interpreted as occasions for the event of subjectivity, they are also socialization of the children and myself into the school community and into the cultural expression of the Roman Catholic Mass. Even as I give them the means to participate in this ritual, the children and their teachers give me a place within their school. Qualification persists as the domain of least importance during this period, exemplified by my lack of formal qualification to be teaching and my informal qualification as ‘the best dad ever’ (D10:06.12.2007). A virtuosic balance of the domains of education is expressed by Max in his exploration of learning American football and the ways he experiences his uniform, his teammates, and his abilities; my role in this was primarily its documentation, an example of the practice of that weak force in which educators

do not keep our students away from... what is calling them... it is only when we are willing to take this risk that the event of subjectivity has a chance to occur.’ (Biesta 2013, p. 23.)

Finally, this period documents a particular awareness of experiences of coming into presence and taking up presence as events of subjectivity.

8.4 Period Three Insights

Period Three (Volumes 15-47, 2011-2015) also begins with a change in purpose, this time inspired by *The Artist’s Way* (Cameron, 1995), which has both a therapeutic aim and an aim of artistic

productivity. While the achievement of the therapeutic purpose is difficult to measure, the new purpose structured a more reflective practice; artistic productivity is achieved in the increase in diary entry frequency, immediacy and length, with three daily 'morning pages' of writing and three daily evening pages of drawings. The purpose of these latter, despite efforts to reflect on them and find their meaning, remained enigmatic. In addition to these, two books of poetry (so, 2012; so, 2013) were written pseudonymously during this period, contributing to the increase in page count and shifting the audience of the diary to a more public one. At the same time, there is a refreshed emphasis on the diary's purpose as a place of sacred encounter as it accompanied me to Eucharistic Adoration (D29:10.05.2012) and many saints were addressed in its pages.

8.4.1 Methods

Period Three again draws on the measure of 'frequency of entries' (McCulloch, 2004) to help identify a change in the diary's purpose as a key to interpretation (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015; Hogan 1986a, 1986b; Fothergill, 1974) Responding to changes in the diary this time requires a concerted effort at data reduction. The choice is made then, to de-emphasise the selection criterion of 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44) and even the role of my participant children as co-creators and 'experts in their own lives' (Clark and Stratham, 2005) in order to focus on the material which makes this period of the diary unique. This choice, while difficult, remains consistent with the theoretical emphasis on uniqueness as an indicative of the event of subjectivity. Selection of the narrative arcs from this period may have been influenced by the coincidence of the global Covid-19 pandemic. This will receive further consideration below.

8.4.2 Narrative arcs

Arc 7: The Artist's Wayfaring (6 events)

Like Arcs 1 and 4, Arc 7 returns to dialogue with the text of the diary as it changes purpose and structure. The co-creative voices of my participant children once again fall into the background so that these keys to interpretation of the text can be revealed. The therapeutic purpose established in Arc 4 is now expanded and with different theoretical foundations to include aims for artistic productivity. Out of this new artistic productivity come poetry, drawings, and reflections which make a strong statement for the interpretation of my experiences as occurring in a liminal state, which again confronts prior research on stay-at-home dads which sees us as isolated or marginalized. This liminality occurs not on account of gender, but due to the closure of my children's school and the shock waves which this event sent through our strongly networked places for meaning making. An expression of this liminality is named as 'the thesis statement,' certainly a surprise for this research.

Arc 8: The Conversation between the Generations, First Movement (4 events)

This final arc is peculiar in that it required recognition of its different structure. The arc which begins in its First Movement is incomplete and only finds some fulfilment in the Second Movement. These two movements, however, are interrupted by an Intermezzo which refers back more to the content of Arc 7 than to the events which precede and follow it within Arc 8. The choice of musical terms in naming these portions of the arc is intentional, as the teaching of music which informed so much of Arc 5 returns here within a ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) that has my late father as a principal participant. As the first lines I wrote as a stay-at-home dad in Arc 2 made reference to him as what I and Madeleine might have been listening for, here his virtuosity comes to the fore. The ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) here does not become an occasion for considering the effectiveness of inter-generational learning as an institutional practice with predictable outcomes, but instead it is shown as exemplary of the conversation which brought me to the study of dialogism and of the parenting skills which I tried to emulate as a stay-at-home dad. As such, the experiences with my father in this arc offer deep insights into the event of subjectification.

The First Movement, then, in its four brief events, begins with a surprise: my qualification as a ‘fine musician’ which establishes me in a kind of equality with my father. The second event finds Gus sensing my father’s illness, offering the serve of his questions, and my listening, and my return which again points to liminality and irreplaceability. While the third event necessarily points to a new audience for the diary in the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus, the final event here returns to my father and his enjoyment of teaching music to my son, Max. These four events represent an arc which begins in a meaningful experience enacted in my children’s school after Mass and with my parents, a fine example of the interconnectedness of those places and relationships for meaning making and belonging. Then St. Monica School closes, suggesting our liminality, from which we progress to new meaning making places and intergenerational learning.

Arc 8: Intermezzo (8 events)

The Intermezzo of this arc arises out of the artistic productivity designed into the purpose of Period Three. Co-creation occurs here by virtue of Gus’ earlier expressed love for my poetry, which makes surprising claims for a practice which is ‘non-egological’ (Biesta, 2017), dialogical, and liminal, with an expressed preference for a wayfaring presence despite an environment increasingly oriented towards my children’s developmentally appropriate independence, my productivity and our shared systems of transit. Even in the silences, I remained available, as developmental guidance

recommends and as my careful documentation continues to reveal. Here, too, occurs another surprise qualification, connecting the workings of my diary to a new audience, a new place for belonging, out in the world.

Arc 8: The Conversation between the Generations, Second Movement (11 events)

This final movement of the final arc begins as the diary begins: in an encounter with Jesus. This encounter, though, is not in a photocopied icon, but in dialogue with my father. The experience and the retelling of it, mitzvah that it is, defies explanation.

Following this, however, the diary bears witness to endings inseparable from their educational content. Madeleine graduates from High School. My father, facing the end of his life, is eager to teach the fundamentals of his virtuosity to his grandchildren and me, and eager to learn and eager for the mitzvah of healing. Surrounded by such endings, I anticipate the end of the diary and reflect on its purpose and audience. Buried among these endings, Gus and I watch *Taxi Driver* (1976) together, an inspiration for his future storytelling and, because of Gus, mine.

8.4.3 Across the period

8.4.3.1 Interpretations from Document analysis

Document analysis, having revealed Period Three, also reveals its purpose as therapeutic with an additional aim of artistic productivity based in *The Artist's Way* (Cameron1995) with its Morning Pages and weekly 'check-in.' The cloud drawings, as I named them, which emerge during this period are an extension of these writing practices, a form of reflection and a sign of the necessity for a wayfaring method. They draw a liminal space between life and death, creating an apotropaic sign of a soluble surface by making use of the diary's materiality as dialogic addressivity. They contribute, then, to this thesis by this insistence on a way of seeing the world, on its epistemology, but also in the way it illuminates my own experiences as liminal and dialogical, not isolated, and how answering for my place in the universe—temporally, spatially, and axiologically—brought me to a deepening awareness of my own subjectivity and the subjectivity of others. Meanwhile, the diary retains its persistent purposes as a site of documentation, study, poetry, and prayer.

The audience of diary in this period expands well beyond that of the self which was suggested in Period Two. Here, diary content is shared to the Japanese Ambassador to the United States, the American poet Annie Finch, and is addressed to many named Saints in a context of the Eucharistic Presence.

8.4.3.2 Interpretations for stay-at-home dads

This period of the diary makes a case that, for me, being a stay-at-home dad might be described as a liminal experience, as I claim ‘frontiers’ (D15:25.02.2011) and ‘meaning / not meaning’ (D15:16.03.2011) as ‘a thesis statement for the rest of this’ (D17:17.05.2011). While this case is made as a matter of reflection involving some poetry, it is also expressed in the tension of ‘transport’ (D35:17.01.2013) as my life becomes less an experience of wayfaring and instead ‘more like a series of appointments than a walk... the quintessence of the static’ (Klee 1961, pp. 105, 109 cited by Ingold 2007, p. 73). A similar tension is expressed in between ‘unproductivity’ (D39:06.07.2013) and ‘waiting to be called upon again’ (D42:13.12.2013). While such a liminal state is experienced as conflictive, it remains a place for dialogism which occurs between subjects in co-being (Holquist, 2002). Such a construction for stay-at-home dads recognises the difficulty of liminality while not consigning the stay-at-home dad to a position of isolation or marginalization. At the same time, whilst claiming these frontiers as my own, my children and I show agility in responding to the loss of a key educational place for meaning making by networking new places and strengthening old relationships for belonging and meaning making.

8.4.3.3 Interpretations for education

Period Three again gives evidence of the virtuosity or educational wisdom which is said to be the purpose of narrative research in education (Biesta, 2013). The educational domain of subjectivity is again shown to be given precedence, primarily through documentation of listening and in literal expression of a ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) in which the participants experience their uniqueness and irreplaceability. This is perhaps most poignantly represented here in the moment of healing—a mitzvah (Paley, 1999)—in which my father and I recognise in each other a place of encounter similar to that offered by the icon of Jesus which opens the first page of the diary (D1: Frontispiece). Similarly, my daughter Madeleine offers my father ‘breathing... the body uses for healing’ (D47:14.01.2015). And a clearly expressed experience of the addressivity and responsibility for my utterance is documented without any contemporaneous knowledge of dialogism. These events of subjectivity, however, are balanced by an awareness of socialization in all of us learning to play the accordion, and an awareness of unexpected qualification in the praise of Stretansky (D24:11.12.2011) and Finch (D38:17.04.2013).

Further insights to the pedagogy of the event emerge here in the reiteration of the non-egological as a lack of interest in identity and the need to focus away from identity in this research to preserve the integrity of the diary’s expressed purposes and audiences. We also see here the diary giving witness

to the idea that ‘the face speaks to me’ and that this is the event in which ‘signification introduces itself into being, that it becomes real’ (Biesta 2017, p. 52).

If such insights appear too theoretical, it is easy enough to return such significance to the level of practice. For the event in which ‘the face’ spoke to me was a memory of my mother singing to me in my early childhood—a practice serially recommended in developmental guidance—and the way in which that memory made sense of all the rest of this. Her interaction with me in that memory was another serve and return interaction, just as I have shown recurring between my children and me throughout the twenty years of this diary. This appears as the fundamental educational action, whether characterized as a serve and return interaction or dialogism or the pedagogy of listening or the pedagogy of the event. For me, documentation has brought reflexivity to this listening, an opportunity to learn from it and continue to learn from it. Being ‘the face’ for each other in such events, witnessing the subjectification which offers balance to the other domains of education, is importantly an occasion for joy.

8.5 Warranting claims

The claims of this research are modest, but still they require their warrant.

In this project, I have researched my diary, looking at my experiences as a stay-at-home dad. But in this data, what have I been looking *for*? What has been my *telos*? What has prevented me from just getting lost in my wayfaring?

I might say that I looked at my diary with a bias for these two things: evidence which might respond to a gender perspective or help to establish an educational perspective. This would also be a more limiting purpose than I had, in fact, undertaken. I wished to include as much as possible my children’s perspectives about ‘what matters’, and which might relate to neither gender nor education. I also needed to remain open to the possibility that neither gender nor education might immediately be ‘what matters’ in key events of the diary, that possibly employability or religion or music might be a metaphorical side path necessary to better understand the hoped-for educational terrain I had entered and was, hopefully, within it wayfaring toward some uncertain, unpredictable goal.

This has been a risky way to proceed. It can be seen as the kind of risk necessary to the pedagogy of the event, the beautiful risk of education (Biesta, 2013), as I weighed the importance of the qualification and socialisation of earning a PhD against the subjectification of choosing again and again the uniqueness in the wayfaring.

Looking back, however, I now have something which approaches being a work of educational research. As educational research, it has

the need for an explicit warrant in the form of a logical and persuasive link between the evidence produced and the conclusions drawn (with appropriate qualifications and caveats)... greater transparency, complete specifications of the logic, and the elimination of plausible rival alternative explanations for the evidence are key approaches (and ones that are independent of the method used to derive the evidence). (Gorard, 2002, p. 136.)

In Chapter 3, I laid out the logic of my methods. Specifically, I showed how this work might attain to autoethnographic standards of rigour (Le Roux, 2017). The step which would still be missing at this point, though, would be to consider the ‘conclusions’ I have attempted to draw from my evidence, to consider their falsification and other explanations for the experiences I have explored (Siddiqui, 2021).

The simplest way to imagine the falsification of any conclusions here is by the limitations of this project. For starters, conclusions might be called into question by applying this work to a ‘sieve of trustworthiness’ (Gorard, See, and Siddiqui 2017, p. 37), with its preference for a ‘large number of cases’ and ‘minimal attrition,’ ‘standardised data,’ and a lack of ‘other threats’ such as conflict of interest. This present project, of course, might be seen as having ‘a trivial scale’ if it explores the experiences of only one stay-at-home dad. Also, the ‘dropout’ rate might be considered high, with two of a possible six participants opting against participation from the beginning and a limited amount of participant response to the data, dwindling to near zero in Period Three. Standardization of data has also been an issue, with little guidance on data selection beyond ‘what fascinates’ (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44). While there is no conflict of interest in this study, ‘other threats’ here might include the weaknesses of inexperience and of pressures to conform to expectations of an ‘early career researcher,’ imposed or imagined. While I accept this challenge, I would argue that the estimation calculable by this sieve—that my research design is weak and therefore its conclusions questionable—does not account for the peculiarities of this study. A single case study is not a ‘trivial scale’ but desirable for exploring a case which is ‘unique’ and ‘not previously investigated’ (Yin 2009 pp. 47-9, 52 cited by Ashley 2012, p. 103). This might be especially valuable in a case like mine, in which uniqueness is central to the theory being explored. I would also argue that the quantity of data which has been available within this single case, beginning with the 9,000 pages of the diary and expanding to include the conversations with my adult children and the content of my research log, is not trivial. On the contrary, the data is superabundant and rich. It does not offer conclusions generalisable to other stay-at-home dads but offers a possible alternative

perspective to existing theory by showing that another possibility exists. I have already argued for the benefit of the agentic refusal to participate returned by two of my family members as understood within the theory of dialogism and my research ethics. While their participation would no doubt have enriched this study, the participation of those of us who did wish to move forward with the study—to whatever degree we have been able—should be sufficient to prevent its abandonment as a weak research design. While its true that data selection from a diary is not strictly standardised, I have tried in this study to be transparent and methodical in my selection processes, of which more below. Finally, yes, weakness is a part of my stance. It is a part of education and necessarily so.

In addition to these limitations, I have also considered the four following. First, only a tiny fraction of the raw data is represented here. Distortions of the data include the underrepresentation of delight, a category of experience which does not receive emphasis in much of the theory used here for interpretation and thus not attain readily to theorisation. Second, my memory found that I failed to document in the diary many events and practices which might have made theorising about education easier. However, I tried to adhere as closely to the diary text as possible, not to eliminate the privileged insights that I have as its author, but to eliminate any perceptions of falsifying the data which has been received. Third, I was aware—usually only well after the fact—that I was so close to the material that I was overlooking things which might be of interest but were so *normal* to me as to be invisible. While frequent returns to the diary, reading and rereading it, and the compilations of selected events for my children helped to mitigate these oversights, the first reading was a powerful one which influenced subsequent readings. It wasn't until I was well into the diary that it occurred to me to notice 'showing how to cook' as a potential educational event. Similarly, playing—and even outdoor playing, which I had studied on the course for the MA in early childhood education—was overlooked in all its abundance while I looked for things more *educational*. This brings me to my greatest limitation: not knowing what I was doing. I don't claim this as a sort of false pride, or to disparage my abilities as a researcher, but to acknowledge that, beyond the innovation necessary to a lack of precedent for this project, wisdom comes with practice (Biesta 2013, p. 136) and that sifting the data from a diary is time-consuming and difficult (McCulloch 2004, p. 41).

There might be the suggestion from this research that experiences of stay-at-home dads, beyond my own, might more generally be interpreted from an educational perspective. While the non-generalizability of a case study such as this is a safe redoubt, I have shown that prior research into the experiences of stay-at-home dads does suggest similar experiences to the point of my sharing in

a kind of typicality (Solomon, 2017) and therefore the possibility of similar interpretation. It is also an argument simply for the possibility of looking for experiences beyond isolation and marginalization and identity, to listen to stay-at-home dads when they suggest that gender might not matter to them, and to look more carefully at the caregiving which defines the role.

I am aware that these conclusions might be challenged. Alternative interpretations for my data include at least the following three. First, it is possible that I and other stay-at-home dads who claim to regard 'parenting as a gender-neutral task' (Solomon, 2017, p. 23) or who 'reject the importance of gender' (Troppe 2019b, p. 44) are unable to see the importance of gender because men see themselves as normative of all humanity (Kimmel, 2015). It might further be argued that this assertion of neutrality from a normative stance is part of broader negotiations of enactment and resistance to hegemonic masculinities (Medved, 2016; Snitker, 2018). Another alternative perspective has found 'the baby's father and the medical practitioner... guilty of threatening to steal the woman's limelight' which is rightfully hers alone in childbearing and caregiving (Mander 2004, p. 1). It is difficult to defend against such charges, other than to reply that to me such perspectives feel imposed, not chosen, and therefore oppressive.

Second, It is possible that education is uniquely important to me due to my family, educational and professional history and that this exaggerated importance offers a distorted representation of what it is like to be a stay-at-home dad. While I cannot argue against my uniqueness, I can offer again the possibility of my typicality as a stay-at-home dad against the participants in Solomon's (2017) study in the US context, which I shared in the Methodology chapter. This possibility of a bias *for education* is also part of the reason that I have established from the beginning evidence of educational behaviours in the literature on stay-at-home dads.

Third and conversely, I can imagine disappointment that this research does not go further in making claims for the unique educational benefits I may have provided as a stay-at-home dad for my children—and even the students at St. Monica School—arising from the privilege of presence and its affordances. This, however, would miss the point that such a claim would be a return to identity, to a uniqueness discoverable only by difference instead of in the event of being called to 'uniqueness-as-irreplaceability' (Biesta 2013, p. 144). Finally, the enactment of many of the events shared here, such as the simple naming of differences between damselfly and dragonfly (D2:13.07.2000) or the singing of a lullaby (D15:16.03.2011) attain to the dialogism which is ultimately about how 'we are alive and human' (Holquist 2002, p. 30) and to an idea of education which includes the responsibility that 'humanly, I cannot refuse' (Levinas, 1985, p. 101 cited by Biesta 2013, p. 21), and that I have come to

make these claims by wayfaring, 'the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth' (Ingold 2007, p. 81).

All of the foregoing limitations and alternative interpretations have to do with my conclusions about my experiences as a stay-at-home dad. They don't begin to address the conclusions I draw from those experiences about education itself. The conclusions I draw about education itself, however, do not arise from experience but rather arise from theory to interpret experience. Therefore, disagreements with my comparisons between *The Pedagogy of the Event* (Biesta, 2013), *Dialogism* (Holquist, 2002) and *Wayfaring* (Ingold, 2007) would not rely on number of cases, attrition rates, or standardization of data, but only on a different reading of these texts. In all these alternative interpretations, furthermore, I recognise the fact that interpretivism allows for and asserts the necessity of a variety of interpretations, that no one interpretation is complete and final. I therefore share my interpretations of my experiences from an educational perspective in this confidence and invite further dialogue.

8.5.1 Surprises

Beyond the aspects of uniqueness which this research offered from its proposal, there has been additional and unexpected uniqueness encountered along the way.

The first commitment of the researcher is to the quality of the research—for poor research, with findings driven by the desires of the researcher, however worthy, is demonstrably unethical... The chief criterion that identifies research as an enterprise sui generis has to be the capacity for surprise. (Gorard and Taylor, 2004, p. 163, emphasis in original.)

To be thus surprised, as I laid out in Chapter 3, was built into my research design. While not every surprise was good—those brought by the Covid-19 pandemic being the obvious example—it is not so much the good or bad character of the surprise which matters so much as the researcher's agile response to it. Having established methods conceived as 'a way of keeping underway, in motion, even when it seems there is no way to go' (Caputo, 1987, p. 213 cited by Cashore, 2018, p. 22) allowed me to recognise in these surprises their potential contribution to the new knowledge which is a purpose of doctoral research (Åkerlind and McAlpine, 2017).

As evidence for this chief criterion for educational research, I offer a brief catalogue of surprises which have attended this project. They begin with the award of the doctoral scholarship, which I did not anticipate winning; my application was more of a courtesy to those who recommended it even though I very much desired to continue my studies. With its award, then, I was confronted by the surprise of using my diary as a data source. Something which had never been intended for

research—made clear by the purposes and audiences for the diary revealed within its pages—now took on surprising new purpose. It surprised me that the events which were documented there might be worthy of research or might reveal something more than the fun that we had in those years. I didn't know what I sought in the diary, so in a sense everything it revealed was at some level a surprise. I also did not remember its contents, having reviewed very little of it since writing it, but the intersection of the diary and memory created a surprising tension: the presence of things unremembered and the absence of things remembered. These discrepancies inspired me to cling in my methods all the more to the text and its interpretation as a document so as not to confuse the data of what had been documented in the immediacy of the event with things which may have only been imagined in memory. There was also surprise in the selection of data. Whilst adhering to the standard to select 'what fascinates' (Bartlett and Milligan 2015, p. 44), it was not always clear *why* one diary entry or another fascinated and others did not. This was especially true in Diary Period Three. There, I encountered the surprise of needing to acknowledge and select for interpretation not the safer narrative arcs of school achievements, but the very difficult arcs of cloud drawings and The Blue Line and my father's final illness. Not including these would have been far easier, and it would have been easy enough to claim that they were less relevant than another narrative arc about schooling or creating a sense of belonging with, say, the high school lacrosse team. But the data was strong in these strange areas and I didn't know what it meant, so delving it became all the more important even though it fell into no predictable way for discussing education. Given Biesta's penchant for the unpredictable, though, perhaps the disturbances of these drawings and end-of-life events were all the more indicative of my adaptability as an educator and of the adaptability of my methods to garner some relevant meaning from them.

Subjectivity is, in other words, not something we can have or possess, but something that can be realized, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter. (Biesta 2013, p. 12.)

Encountering the text without a clear plan of how to proceed meant letting the method evolve alongside the reading of the diary. This adaptability of methods to the shifts of the diary extended to adapting to the varying participation of my children and enacted an unexpected perpetuation of the very preference for the educational domain of subjectivity which emerges throughout the diary and its interpretations.

Entering the text without a clear theoretical programme to prove or disprove required a wayfaring into theory. My research log testifies to these 'intuitive leaps, false starts, mistakes, loose ends, and happy accidents that comprise the investigative experience' (Ronai, 1995, p. 421) encountered in an

attempt to find my way from the data into theory and back again. Even with the sympathetic understandings of my experience found within *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013) and other works from my early childhood education studies, I did not know when I started this research that it might lead into wayfaring, dialogism, serve and return interactions, meanings of place and space, or intergenerational learning. Nor did I anticipate the framing of the diary by the e-fumi at its start from McManners (1990) and at its end from *Silence* (2016), or the importance of Christian iconography in the diary and its interpretation in between. The evocation of my father’s music in my first diary entry as a stay-at-home dad also surprised me, but he, like the Christ in the e-fumi, frames this work, and *Amalgamations* (Stone, 2016, 2019), an experimental music composition, comes to a surprising prominence in my understanding of the purpose of education.

To these surprises, I would add those contributed by my participant children. I have described them throughout this research as its co-creators. This may seem a surprising overstatement, as this is not collaborative autoethnography; my participant children are not co-authors of the thesis nor co-recipients of the qualification toward which it aims. They have surprised me, though, in their interest in and contribution to the shaping of the methods in this research, the naming of one of the narrative arcs which shapes this research, and their interpretations of individual events and their silence on others. While I have not been surprised by the deep affection these interactions have sustained, I was surprised that this experience with them might be a standard, an ethical ‘acid test’ (Sikes 2010, p. 14), for my treatment of all future research participants.

8.5.2 Covid-19 global pandemic

This research coincided with the global coronavirus pandemic, which included the lockdowns and restrictions as recorded by the Institute for Government (2022), and shown alongside the dates of my Research Log in Table 23, below.

Research Log volume number (date span)	Covid-19 Restrictions
1 (10.10.2019-25.04.2020)	Lockdown 1: Begins 23.03.2020
2 (25.04.2020-24.07.2020)	Lockdown 1: Ends 23.06.2020
3 (27.07.2020-04.02.2021)	Lockdown 2: 05.11.2020-02.12.2020 Lockdown 3: Begins 06.01.2021
4 (01.01.2021-26.05.2021)	Lockdown 3: 06.01.2021-29.03.2021
5 (01.06.2021-07.01.2022)	‘Plan B measures’: Begins 08.12.2021
6 (07.01.2022-30.06.2022)	‘Plan B measures’: Ends 27.01.2022 ‘Living with Covid’ published: 29.03.2022
7 (01.07.2022-14.01.2023)	Test positive: 02.09.2022-12.09.2022

Table 23. Comparison of research dates and Covid-19 Restrictions (Institute for Government, 2022).

I voluntarily self-isolated after singing at what would later be categorized as a potential ‘super-spreader’ event (Geggel, 2020; Tsioulcas, 2020); the government subsequently imposed restrictions on public singing (Gov.uk, 2020). I took the initiative to self-isolate as *responsible action*, evidence perhaps, of the subjectivity I have been educated *for*.

A week into my isolation, my Research Log documents that I ‘START D10’ (RL1:20.03.2020). This means that diary volumes D10 – D47 were read during the pandemic and that my interpretations of them, including the first interpretations of data selection, may have been influenced by conditions of work. My housemates were gone. I would not see my children face-to-face for nearly two years. For the three months of Lockdown 1, I was totally alone. There was no access to university facilities. My teaching responsibilities were suspended, and all other meetings moved online. Consequently, the pandemic may have heightened my responsiveness to the concepts of dialogue and conversation, as these both became experienced as scarcities. These circumstances may have also influenced my response to the concept of isolation as established in the literature regarding stay-at-home dads, which differed from my lived experience of isolation during a global pandemic. It may have also affected my ability to gather more focused and co-creative conversations with my participant children. During the pandemic, Max and Gus were at different universities with differing health and safety protocols; both were trying to cope with their own shifts to online learning. My daughter Madeleine was working from home and adjusting to a different kind of online environment. Care and concern for each other’s safety in pandemic circumstances interfered with easy reminiscences about stories from my diary.

In the self-portrait below (Figure 37), my image is absorbed into a poster of pandemic instructions. I found the pairing of ‘Isolate yourself’ and ‘Stay at home’ particularly compelling to me as a conflation of ‘isolation’ and ‘home.’ This was the discourse which was encoded into lockdown restrictions, even as I tried to pry it as a gender perspective interpretation from the construct of stay-at-home dads.

At the same time, the pandemic caused a crisis in childcare (see for example Naumann and Sakali, 2022). The negative perceptions of being at home with children which were being published in popular media contrasted to the experiences at home with my children which I was studying in my diary every day. A colleague and I felt a need to respond to media coverage of this phenomenon in an ‘expert comment’ blog which asserted ‘an understanding of children not as burdens, but as collaborators who unite schools and parents in the building of a better future’ (Cobb and Troppe,

2020). Recent data has shown that the number of stay-at-home dads increased by one third since the beginning of the pandemic (Fatherhood Institute, 2023).



Figure 37. Self-portrait taken the day before Lockdown 2 began (RL3:05.11.2020).

Opportunities to escape isolation emerged through participation in music. On 15 November 2019, I had heard ‘amalgamations for viola’ (Stone, 2019) performed on campus by violist and composer Leilehua Lanzilotti. A year later, on 11 November 2020, I performed Lanzilotti’s (2019) ‘beyond the accident of time’ for inclusion in the international online exhibition, *Acts of Air: Reshaping the Urban Sonic*, sponsored by the University of Arts London in their centre for Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice (CRISAP, 2020). From this community, I was drawn further into sound arts by Auraldiversities, a research project looking at differing experiences of listening, silences and sound, including how these had changed during the pandemic (CHASE, 2020). These collaborations influenced my research process, making me keenly aware of named and other silences in my diary, as in its first entry (D1: D1:10.04.1994), and how I was wayfaring in continuations of those same silences, with a style of listening informed by ‘amalgamations’ (2016) and enforced by the Lockdowns of the pandemic.

8.5.3 Emotions

I have documented above, in the section on the research contribution to my participants, the healing and the love which has arisen out of this project. In order to achieve this, certain risk was taken safeguarded by ethical provisions built into the process. Nevertheless, specific events from the diary were sometimes received as 'difficult' (EM:24.03.2021) or 'sad' (EM:28.03.2021).

At the start of my doctoral research, I learned that PhD students frequently experience poor mental health (Nature, 2019). During the pandemic, new research showed that this frequency had increased (Hazell, 2021). It would be emotional work to read the diary I had written during the 20 years I was a stay-at-home dad, so safeguarding my mental wellbeing was part of my research ethics and needed to be documented as a measure of transparency (Le Roux, 2017). This became an important function of the Research Log. It might also be seen as a matter of importance due to the way in which the mindset of a diary's author is said to impact the reliability of a diary's reliability (McCulloch 2004). So, too, might the mindset of its researcher impact the reliability of its interpretation. As this project drew to a close, I looked back at the narrative arc of my emotions documented there and was pleased to see that positive feelings appear to have been experienced with greater frequency than more difficult ones (see Appendix 10).

8.6 Research contributions

By gathering together into this chapter this summary of the thesis, I offer a reiteration of its wayfaring, of 'following a path that one has previously travelled in the company of others' (Ingold 2007, p. 15). While this path has included my children as its co-creators and 'experts in their own lives,' (Clark & Statham, 2005), it now includes the reader:

The reader should be conceived as a co-participant, not a spectator, and given opportunities to think with (not just about) the research story (or findings). (Ellis & Bochner 2016, p. 56.)

Having imagined this reader or audience thus communicates an esteem harmonious to that understanding which sees the audience of a diary as key to its interpretation (Bartlett and Milligan, 2015; Edwards and Rinaldi, 2009; Hogan, 1986a, 1986b; Fothergill, 1974). Consequently, it is fitting to consider what has been given to these audiences, especially since such contribution is a criterion for rigorous autoethnographic research (Le Roux, 2017)..

This research has been conceived and conducted under a premise of education as weak (Biesta, 2013), and as a gift given with empty hands (Biesta, 2008) harmonious with the caregiving which defines the role of the stay-at-home dad (National At-Home Dad Network, 2020). For this reason, I consider this return to my audiences not as a research impact, which might imply a predictability

contradictory to the openness to unpredictability necessary to the pedagogy of the event. Instead, it is a contribution, a continuation of the gift which this research attempts to reveal in theory and in practice.

The contributions this research makes, then, will now be detailed according to its audiences. These are, again, stay-at-home dads and those who research them, the field of education, those who might be interested in the uniqueness of my methods or wish to research their own diaries, and my research participants.

8.6.1 Contribution for stay-at-home dads

The first contribution of this research for stay-at-home dads is a modest one. My use of 'stay-at-home dad' emerges from the definitions, terminology, and demographics which describe our experiences in research. My adherence to the use of this term instead of 'stay-at-home father,' 'SAHF,' or 'SAHD' is an expression of respect for the group and the name it gives to itself, holding preference to this self-naming over names assigned by academic researchers. I might claim some sensitivity to such naming, as this research has been conducted from an inside perspective.

However, as I more frequently described myself as a 'full-time dad' when I was in this role, it is more a measure of a researched understanding of the preference of the social group than of any personal preference. It might even be recognised as a humble acceptance of the flaws in my own self-description.

The second such contribution is a critical regard for the primacy of gender in interpreting the experiences of our familial role. While not denying that it has a place in such interpretations, I am again listening to those voices within the researched community of stay-at-home dads who suggest that it might not be what matters most. This allows the possibility of listening for what might matter more to stay-at-home dads and their children. This also makes contribution by de-emphasising what might feel like an imposed responsibility to redefine, reinvent, or negotiate a new masculinity.

The third contribution is to name the isolation discourse as a way of constructing stay-at-home dads. Recognising it and its destructive potential adds urgency to the possibility of seeking other perspectives on our experiences. This includes the possibility of describing our experiences as liminal instead of isolated or marginalised, a description which recognises difficulty but allows for the construction of stay-at-home dads as actors in their social setting, where

meaning only exists *in* social practices, it is, in a sense, located *in-between* those who constitute the social practice through their interactions. (Biesta 2013, p. 31.)

And that, furthermore,

It is this fated in-between-ness of all utterance which ensures that communication can take place only in society...' (p. 60)

So that, by recognising stay-at-home dads as occupying this in-between place, we are empowered in a place of dialogue.

A fourth contribution to stay-at-home dads, then, is to build on the established evidence of education in the experiences of stay-at-home dads as something which they have sometimes indicated matters more in their lives. By doing so, I am also offering an alternative to the discourse of experiencing isolation and marginalization by demonstrating instead a life of belonging and meaning making, beginning in the home learning environment where we offer a reliable adult presence for the relationship and serve and return interactions necessary for all learning, and extending out into the community. Empowered in the knowledge of our contribution to the education of our children, we can continue to expand with them our networks for belonging and meaning making by developmentally recommended involvement in schools and other learning environments, and continuing availability as they grow older and more independent.

In these contributions, I have been mindful of the stay-at-home dads I see regularly on Facebook as a member of their groups (National At-Home Dad Network, 2023; Stay At Home Dads, 2023). As I have witnessed their privately shared good work as the primary caregivers of their children, I have hoped that this research might be beneficial to them. I have also been mindful of researchers such as Andrea Doucet and Catherine Richards Solomon, whose research on the experiences of stay-at-home dads helped to lay an academic foundation for contextualising and understanding my own. Lastly, I have been mindful of organizations like the Fatherhood Institute, which promotes research on fatherhood but has only recently begun to explore the phenomenon of stay-at-home dads; similarly, I think of the interdisciplinary field of Father Involvement and the absence of research on stay-at-home dads included there. If we are as isolated or marginalised as some prior research would suggest, my hope is that within the community of stay-at-home dads and those who research us, there might be fewer of these disempowering experiences and more opportunity to construct stay-at-home dads within the context of the education which matters to us.

Nothing can be done in isolation (Biesta 2013, p. 106; Holquist 2002, p. 57). I would rather dispel the isolation discourse by suggesting that something can be done, that the something is dialogue, that dialogue might be experienced as the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott 1972 via Pring 2001, pp. 108-109) which is educational and always available. The home learning environment,

networked with schools and other learning environments, disrupt as places for dialogue and meaning making the isolation discourse. Awareness of such possibility for educational dialogue means that even in the most unlikely or lonely circumstance, there is always the unpredictable but inevitable 'homecoming festival' (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39).

8.6.2 Contribution for education

The contribution which this research makes for the field of education begins in this acknowledgement of the importance of education in the experiences of stay-at-home dads. To begin to appreciate that importance requires some theoretical understanding of education to achieve a level of meaning deeper than merely seeing that I offered help with homework or drove my children to their sports practices. Aside from recent articles which looked at the experiences of stay-at-home dads in a school setting (Davis et al, 2019; Haberlin and Davis, 2019), there was little precedence for contextualizing stay-at-home dads in educational research. This first contribution to education, then, is also modest, aiming to make no exceptional claims for generalizable educational benefits of stay-at-home dads for their children, but to offer the simple reminder that stay-at-home dads, just like parents of any gender, are the first teachers of their children and learn from them in return. Such teaching is established in childhood development guidance as a medical necessity and failure to provide it is deemed cause for paediatric concern. By offering their reliable adult presence in the home learning environment, stay-at-home dads have the opportunity to present their children with the relationship and serve and return interactions necessary to healthy brain development and the foundation for learning throughout the life course.

One might ask, what was specifically done in this case study to impact the learning outcomes for my children. While specific actions were performed and detailed and interpreted throughout this thesis, they often can be seen in context of such developmental goals: singing and reading to young children, encouraging first words and first steps, being involved in their school, providing them with opportunities for learning which match their interests, recognizing their need for independence, being available when they need help. By doing these things, we help to shape the home learning environment as a place for experiencing a sense of belonging and meaning making. None of these are in themselves surprising outcomes for so much research. The surprising thing, instead, is that such fundamental educational goals and behaviours are not more associated with stay-at-home dads in our responsibility as primary caregiver.

These basic contributions find theoretical enrichment in the connections between parenting and education which are named in *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013), especially in terms of

the risk, responsibility and the ‘coming into the world’ (Biesta, 2006) experienced within both. These connections I see as an addressivity, an invitation to which I am answerable with ‘no alibi’ (Holquist 2002, p. 181). What might appear as simple practices of listening are at a more theoretical level an effort to remain open to the unpredictable emergence of subjectivity in a pedagogy of the event (Biesta, 2013). This approach offers a contribution to education as an exploration of educational wisdom or ‘virtuosity’ and the idea that

we can develop our virtuosity for wise educational judgment only by *practicing* judgment, that is, by being engaged in making such judgment in the widest range of educational situations possible. (Biesta 2013, p. 135.)

It is thus a contribution to the field of education to offer for consideration whatever educational judgment might emerge from the exploration of my experiences as a stay-at-home dad. This possibility is reinforced by the claim that one might become an ‘*educationally wise person*’ (Biesta 2013, p. 134, emphasis in original) by exploring the virtuosity—this practical wisdom—by studying the virtuosity of others, through conversation or ‘through life-history’ (Biesta 2013, p. 136) such as this.

If learning is constructed within ‘judgments about desirable change’ (Biesta 2013, p. 7), then it is often teachers who shape these judgments:

because the question of the aim or “telos” of education is a multidimensional question, judgment—judgment about what is educationally *desirable*—turns out to be an absolutely crucial element of what teachers do. (Biesta 2013, p. 130.)

It might be helpful to recall that in dialogism we see a similar necessity for judgment.

Dialogism conceives being... as an event... and human being as a project... or a deed... the deed of having constantly to make judgments. (Holquist 2002, p. 152.)

The judgments here are not the same, but they are similar. The judgment in dialogism is the choice, informed by the axiology of my situation, to choose how to respond to the addressivity of the world, in all its multiplicity and complexity. It is not unlike the educational need ‘to explore what it is that should have authority in our lives’ (Biesta 2013, p. 57) and from there to be responsible for the authorship of my responses (Holquist 2002, p. 168). With this in mind, then, we might look back at the judgments I have made. These would include not only in the events as documented in the diary, but also in which events attained to authorship in the diary and, again, to selection and authorship in this thesis.

To this end, I have prepared Table 14, below, which takes a summary look at each of the three diary periods and looks to select events which might be interpreted as judgments for qualification, socialization and/or subjectification. This shows not only how judgments occurred in each period, but also how they might have changed over time and whether those changes over time were themselves desirable and might themselves be judged as learning.

Period Volumes Years	Qualification 'The acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.'	Socialisation 'The ways in which... we become part of existing traditions.'	Subjectification 'The interest of education in the subjectivity... of those we educate'
One 1-4 1994-2005	Questioning mine Playfully, music Otherwise, none	'Conversation between the generations' Music Religion Language acquisition	Music Religion Language acquisition Poetry Marks Dialogue Responsibility
Two 4-14 2005-2010	Teaching; School Song Talents 'No wrong answers' American Football	'Conversation between the generations' Nexus American football	CBT Giftedness Interviews Singing Coming into Presence American Football
Three 15-47 2011-2015	Immeasurable rise Stretansky, Finch Coaching 'Conversation between the generations'	Immeasurable rise 'Conversation between the generations'	<i>The Artist's Way</i> Poetry Drawings 'Conversation between the generations'

Table 24. Diary Periods, showing Qualification, Socialisation and Subjectification (definitions from Biesta 2013, p. 4).

In Period One, thoughts of qualification approach being a nil set, being addressed really only in my doubts about 'learning Shakespeare' and how it is seemingly irrelevant 'to raising a child well' (D1:16.02.1666). Playfully, I suggest that 'Madeleine is showing considerable musical promise' (LP:28.07.1996). The same event is also a judgment for socialisation in that I consider her learning desirable in the context of sharing it to my father, a professional musician. This might also be the first of the events in the diary which illustrates the multi-generational aspect of 'the conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972), which seemed to me, retrospectively, such an apt description of the educational action and responsibility in our family. Socialisation is also offered to Madeleine in 'adorning' her room with a portrait of St. Anthony with the infant Jesus, perhaps as a gesture to persuade both of us that our experiences fit into social norms and traditions. While there

is, of course, considerable socialisation to be inferred in my choices to study religious texts such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the poetry of St. John of the Cross (D1:19.08.1996) or a biography of St. Dominic (D1:11.03.1997), there is also a strong current of Subjectification in these texts, that I am studying them in order to discern and better live my vocation, my calling, my uniqueness, my 'when it matters that I am I.' Subjectification is evidenced as having been judged most desirable during this period, which I see documented in my celebrations of their mark-making and language acquisition, and of my responsibility and poetry.

In Period Two, again, qualification is reserved mostly for me: I am mysteriously judged by others to be qualified to teach, to compose the school song. Education, even in the school setting, is experienced less as qualification and more as socialisation into the Christian faith and its mysteries, such in the claim that 'It's not about how you USE your talents, it's TO WHOM you entrust them' (D5:03.12.2005). There is a greater emphasis on qualification when Max plays American football, but it is a qualification mostly observed, not imposed. His experiences with the sport are far more related to choices in socialisation—the wearing of the uniform—and the subjectification he discovers in his own unique, irreplaceable wearing of it. Again, subjectification takes preference, whether in my own in the uptake of CBT, my children's in their giftedness interviews, or in the singing of the school's students. There is also plain evidence of the unpredictability and weakness of subjectivity in the 'coming into presence' which I experienced multiple times in this period, not least in the dissolution of the surface of St. Mary's statue (D5:03.12.2005).

In Period Three, then, there was an immeasurable rise in qualification and socialisation, largely in conjunction with the children's start of high school with the pressures to attain marks suitable to acceptance to university, but also around sport and peer activities. Again, these were too abundantly documented to adequately represent within the limits of this report beyond the mention of their deselection. My mysterious qualification as a coach echoed my earlier qualification as a music teacher. And in this period, the 'conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) operated across all three domains of educational purpose, generating a sense of qualification and socialisation in the conversations with Stretansky and Finch, and surprising events of subjectification, particularly with my father (D40:23.09.2013). Focusing on the data unique to this chapter was in itself a choice for subjectification, as my uptake of *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 1995) aroused a sense that I was doing work that 'only I' could do (D17:10.05.2011; D36:14.02.2013) and had become a calling (D42:13.12.2013; D46:23.04.2014).

Across the whole of the twenty years, then, there is a clear preference for subjectification. I find this to be in line with the pedagogy of the event (Biesta 2013). While maintaining the multidimensionality of the educational purpose, the greater external pressures seem to steer the educational project always towards qualification and socialisation. It seems uniquely up to the teacher, then, to judge how strong their ‘weak existential force’ (Biesta 2013, p. 59) needs to be in order to resist, to transgress, and allow for the ‘coming into presence’ (Biesta 2013, p. 85) of all those who dare to enter the dialogue.

Another category of contribution for education here also requires a modest claim: there may be an opportunity to speak of education as having a non-teleological aspect. I cannot prove that education is non-teleological, that it has no telos, no goal. That would be mad, especially having worked to discover in these documented events the judgment, educational wisdom, or virtuosity in balancing the goals of qualification, socialization and subjectification. However, I can suggest that in the event of subjectivity there might be in that moment a freedom from goals. This is suggested at the theoretical level in my brief exploration of *Amalgamations* (Stone, 2016, 2019) and the way in which it describes a performance which models a desirable freedom—and beautiful risk—in its non-teleological wayfaring. Maintaining integrity with the music which has informed the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1972) in my life and beyond its limits, and maintaining integrity with the pedagogy of listening which lies at the core of my educational practices, I must suggest such a non-teleological possibility as a responsible utterance which answers for my place in the world. Just as *Amalgamations* in performance moves toward an ending which has no ending, so does education. It is in the event itself where this freedom and endlessness meet in unpredictability. I would also suggest that it is in just such moments that I have experienced the joy in education.

Other contributions for education might also emerge from this thesis. The interpretations of the pedagogy of the event are here joined with other educational concepts and pedagogies including aspects of Reggio Emilia with its pedagogy of listening, documentation and joy, but also more conceptually with dialogism, wayfaring, and professional love. I might claim here, too, some furtherance of the co-creation proposed by Clark and Statham (2005), in its application beyond its original early childhood settings. Lastly, there is a possibility that this work might aid educators who wish to explore their own reflective journal as an educational tool.

8.6.3 Contribution to methods

This work contributes to research methods. Before the project had even begun, it promised at least three categories of uniqueness. First, I would be a stay-at-home dad researching the experience of a

stay-at-home dad with a unique insider perspective and a uniquely educational perspective. Second, I would be co-creating this research with my children, a unique opportunity to involve the children of a stay-at-home dad in such research. Third, I would be using my diary as the primary data source, joined to conversations about it with my participant children; using a diary, particularly one spanning 20 years, offered a unique approach and potential for unique insights into the experiences of a stay-at-home dad.

The lack of precedent for this research allowed for and required further uniqueness to emerge. Responding to prior research, theory and participant expressions of a lack of interest in identity required safeguards beyond a merely theoretical denial of narcissism. These safeguards were achieved in exploring my diary as a document first and by insisting on the co-creation of this research with my participant children at as many stages as possible. Furthermore, negotiating a rebalancing of the 'auto' and 'ethno' and 'graphy' in my autoethnographic approach made explicit my aim to decentre the self, while still acknowledging the role of the self in this research. I frame my researcher positionality in terms of my typicality in relationship with other stay-at-home dads, argue for the co-creation of this research at multiple stages with my participant children, and focus on the diary as a document to analyse and not on myself as an identity to explore. Furthermore, I have offered argument that this case study can be seen retrospectively as an expression of symbiotic autoethnography, especially in the ways in which I have conjoined to mutual benefit features of autoethnographic practices sometimes characterized as separate, such as analytic, evocative and political approaches, and the ways in which the many voices in this research, including those of diarist and researcher and my participant children, have come together as an expression of polyvocality. Discoveries within the diary of shifting purposes and superaddressees justified a flexibility in methods—particularly around data selection—to accommodate for these changes. Across the course of this research, I learned that the spontaneous sharing of brief, individual diary entries with my participants might have generated a more reliable response from my participants than attempts to compile these entries, though general responses to such compilations also proved helpful. (I am thinking particularly of Gus' praise of the diary's poetry, in which he influenced my inclination to include such diary entries during data selection.)

Finally, I might suggest that the capacity for surprise necessary to good research methods (Gorard and Taylor, 2004) appears here to have theoretical support and integrity with the unpredictability essential to the pedagogy of the event (Biesta, 2013) and wayfaring (Ingold, 2007) and dialogism (Holquist, 2002). Balancing the requirements for qualification and socialization necessary to doctoral

research against the event of subjectivity-- for my 'uniqueness-as-irreplaceability' (Biesta 2013, p. 144)—expressed in this surfeit of uniqueness is itself an achievement and contribution in methods as well as a demonstration of educational wisdom.

8.6.4 Contribution to participants

Research with participants has been said to have an ethical 'acid test' of imagining that those participants are family (Sikes 2010, p. 14). Co-creating this research with my participant children has made this ethical imperative inseparable from our working together. Coming together in this fashion, with a researcher's 'ethical obligation to give something important back to the people and communities they study and write about' (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 56), this research fulfils the objective that, 'What researchers write should be "for" participants as much as "about" them' (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 56).

Chief among these contributions is the claim of healing made by Madeleine (EM:24.03.2021) and her corollary claim that this research has been 'a reminder of who I was and how God has always loved me' (EM:28.03.2021). Were there no other contribution made by this research, this alone would suffice, would make it worthy of merit.

Something similar to these claims can be found in the spontaneous expressions of love which occurred in this research. These occurred from the beginning:

From Madeleine:

Congrats on getting your proposal approved! Here's my completed consent form... Love you!
(EM:16.07.2020)

From Gus:

Hi Dad,
Good luck!!! Let me know if I can help or contribute at all. This will be so great!
Love,
Gus (EM:21.07.2020)

From Max:

Hi Dad!
Sorry for taking so long getting this back to you! I'm excited to be a part of your research--I think it's going to be great :)
Love,
Max (EM:30.07.2020)

And they have persisted throughout this research, even in the little hearts offered in reply to shared data, or in the sharing of our individual learning outside of this project. In all of these we can see expression of the idea that our study has been a dialogue without limit and joined to love:

The primary meaning of study, then, has to do with going out of the self, abandoning it for another; it has to do with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning. Properly understood, at the heart of study is love. (Wilson 2020, p. 31.)

This 'going out of the self' is reminiscent of the study of the poetry of St. John of the Cross which I made in my early days as a stay-at-home dad:

He who truly arrives there
cuts free from himself;
all that he knew before
now seems worthless,
and his knowledge so soars
that he is left in unknowing
transcending all knowledge. (John of the Cross, Saint 1991, p. 54, emphasis in original.)

By offering each other such transcendence in our love, we experience our irreplaceable uniqueness in a dialogic education, in which 'a position of transcendence' (Biesta 2013, p. 56) is necessary and from which 'teaching can be understood as a gift or as an act of gift giving' (Biesta 2013, p. 44). So in the act of co-creating this research, we become each other's teachers from our subjectivity, from a love which transcends its place as a professional qualification (Page, 2018).

All of this, then, becomes a mitzvah, a good deed which deserves retelling as its retelling itself becomes a good deed (Paley, 1999).

8.6.5 Future research

What are the applications of this research? I never anticipated that this project would result in any outcomes which might be prescriptive. It is not, in other words, a how-to book for stay-at-home dads or parents or educators of any gender. 'Levinas leaves us educators empty-handed, as no program of action follows from his insights' (Biesta 2013, p. 22). The same might be said of the insights I offer here.

That being said, I hope that this research will offer stay-at-home dads an opportunity to see the caregiving we do in a different light, and to begin to consider the rich opportunities for involvement and an end to the isolation discourse available through participation in education of any kind. Likewise, it might be a call to the communities in which stay-at-home dads live, as just a reminder that these are not just men out of work or babysitting, but contributors to the education of their

children and a potentially valuable if overlooked resource in the community. This work will also be an invitation to further research into the experiences of stay-at-home dads from an educational perspective or, for that matter, from other perspectives which break free from what has come to feel like the 'single story' (Achidie, 2009) of isolation and marginalization which is being told about us. I would like to see future research into father involvement begin to name stay-at-home dads for the way we enact this. And if the government is going to assert the importance of the home learning environment (Department for Education, 2018), it would be helpful, I think, if we could continue to explore the benefits of and support available to parents who choose to be the primary caregivers of their children, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and the negative discourses which emerged from that about staying at home with children (Naumann and Sakali, 2022). Finally, it is worth noting that the United States, where I raised my children, still lags behind the rest of the world in legislating parental leave policies (Bryant, 2020; Eichner, 2010). Continuing to look at stay-at-home dads as isolated for their gender nonconformity seems unlikely to help to change those policies; perhaps seeing our educational value within an educational system which is always under strain would stand a better chance.

For me, personally, as I come to the end of this project, I am mindful that, '*wherever you are, there is somewhere further you can go*' (Ingold 2007, p. 170, emphasis in original). This holds true for this project as well. It points to possible future wayfaring. There are a few directions that I might take.

First, I feel an ethical responsibility to share the fruits of this research. This means adapting and rewriting significant portions of this work for presentation to and publication for the academic community and any other interested parties. This also extends beyond what is first being shared here. For example, the suggestion has been made that 'Further reflexive accounts are needed of the social process and personal experience of documentary research' (McCulloch 2004, p. 48). If such a need still exists, I imagine that my research log might be a useful data source. As a digital document, it has the benefit of being word searchable and therefore far easier to explore than my manuscript diary. Also, given all of my appreciations for the importance of dialogism and conversation in this present thesis, I would also like to explore possibilities of how documentary research might be being conducted in a less solitary and more collaborative manner.

Long before the start of this project, I have been interested in phenomenological interpretations of experience. In an essay entitled 'A "Choreography of Becoming": Fathering, Embodied Care, and New Materialisms' (Doucet, 2013), a uniquely phenomenological perspective was brought to the interpretation of the experiences of stay-at-home dads. When I first proposed this doctoral research

and then as I first began to read the diary, I had this phenomenological perspective in mind. I had written my undergraduate dissertation on *The Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and while I was raising my children studied *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein, 1989). I was keen to bring my own phenomenological understandings of the richly embodied experiences I found detailed in the diary, including my dream of being able to breastfeed (D1:11.02.1996). In order to stay on track with developing an educational perspective, however, I eventually suspended looking at the diary in such a way. Nonetheless, my study of *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2013) has only increased my desire to again delve into pure philosophy. Restraint was required to prevent myself from losing myself in the sources which Biesta was citing: Arendt and Derrida, Caputo and Levinas, and of course Dewey. With this project behind me, I might now explore them more freely. Finally, there is the issue of 'the book.' My mother, may she rest in peace, was convinced from the beginning of this project that its end product would be what she tirelessly referred to as 'the book,' as in 'How's the book coming?' Even before this project, such hopes were not without precedent.

And Mom or Dad... had said something like they look forward to when I'll put all my writing together into a book. (D42:02.02.2014)

To be fair, my research proposal for this project also suggested the possibility of a book as an end product, based on the success of *The Daddy Shift* (Smith, 2009) and the number of years since its publication. Such a work, as I imagine it, would still be research, but might follow a more heuristic approach.

The life experience of the heuristic researcher and the research participants is not a text to be read or interpreted, but a comprehensive story that is portrayed in vivid, alive, accurate, and meaningful language and that is further elucidated through poems, songs, artwork, and other personal documents and creations. The depiction is complete in itself. Interpretation not only adds nothing to heuristic knowledge but removes the aliveness and vitality from the nature, roots, meanings, and essences of experience.' (Douglass & Moustakas 1985, cited by Moustakas 1994, p. 19.)

I was aware of this approach early in my research but felt it would be too difficult to link to the educational theory necessary to my field. Similarly, I had considered exploring my diary using as an artwork using methods from practice-based research in the arts (Smith, 2009; Sullivan, 2010). Such an approach would allow for the outcome of the research also to be art; I'm not sure that the present thesis attains to that, despite efforts to honour the spirit of the document it explores. Again, the approach that I chose to take was more appropriate to my field. There is also the chance that I might look again at my diary and this time just look at all the wonderful, funny, tender stories in it

and not think at all about what they mean but share them because they're worth sharing. Any of these approaches might allow for greater freedom to 'Never *explain*' (Horne, 2019, p. 22).

Chapter 9: Conclusion

To offer a conclusion seems contradictory to the theories of dialogue and wayfaring, both of which are conceptualized as being without end: ‘the contents of dialogue are without limit’ (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39) and ‘the line, like life, has no end’ (Ingold 2007, p. 169). The same is said of the ‘conversation between the generations’ (Oakeshott, 1971), which I have considered as a way of understanding the education of a stay-at-home dad and his children.

As in all good conversations (especially one where there is such an engagement with ideas and where the spirit of criticism prevails), one cannot define in advance what the end of that conversation or engagement will or should be. Indeed, the end is but the starting point for further conversations. (Pring, 2001, pp. 108-9.)

A conclusion might be an entirely too predictable way to complete a doctoral thesis when the educational theory it explores insists upon the importance of the event of subjectivity and its unpredictability.

Subjectivity is, in other words, not something we can have or possess, but something that can be realized, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter. (Biesta 2013, p. 12.)

Furthermore, it seems too much a capitulation to the concept that ‘Theories... explain’ (Cohen et al. 2017, p. 69) and takes into too little account the other side of that frontier: ‘Never *explain*’ (Horne, 2019, p. 22).

To offer a conclusion, then, returns to this idea of audience. The superaddressees of my diary—Jesus, the saints, my children, myself—require no conclusion. Neither do they offer one. What they offer, instead, is more harmonious with these ideas of endlessness, unpredictability, and the inexplicable. Our conversation and our education continue. My son Gus, with his interest in the storytelling of Martin Scorsese inspired by our first viewing of *Taxi Driver* (1976) together (see D44:13.05.2014), caused me to question the purpose of my narrative. I found an answer that claims for narrative research in education an aim of sharing educational wisdom or virtuosity (Biesta, 2013), and so this has shaped the interpretation of the narrative I have shared here. I also found in dialogism the hope that every utterance, including such a narrative, has ‘its homecoming festival’ (Bakhtin 1979, p. 373 cited by Holquist 2002, p. 39).

And so the superaddressee responds, in a way, to the utterance of the diary in an unpredictable, inexplicable way. Just as my diary began with an image of Jesus contextualized as an iconic encounter, so when my years as a stay-at-home dad had passed, the image returned, contextualized

in the silence which closed those years as a silence which is still expressed as that same encounter, a homecoming of an icon of Jesus almost identical to that with which the diary opens. The difference between the two images, if one studies them carefully, 'going out of the self, abandoning it for another... with desirous and pleasurable longing or yearning' (Wilson 2020a, p. 31), is that in Scorsese's rendering, the face of Jesus lifts more to his viewer, his audience, if you will, and 'the face speaks to me... signification introduces itself into being... it becomes real' (Biesta 2017, p. 52). The research thus contributes to its participants as a form of healing and an expression of love, and thus as a mitzvah or good deed, which renews itself as a new mitzvah with each retelling (Paley, 1999).

It is to the academic audience, then—those who research stay-at-home dads, education, or research methods—that this conclusion responds.

This single case study has explored my experiences as a stay-at-home dad in the United States as documented in my diary during 20 years (1994-2015). Responding to prior research which relies on a gender perspective to interpret similar experiences, and recognising a discourse of isolation in prior research as potentially harmful and incomplete, this research explores alternative interpretations based on an educational perspective which is in turn enriched by these documented experiences.

Its autoethnographic and diary research methods offer a unique insider perspective on this growing demographic and significant change in family structure, as well as the unique participation of my adult children in the co-creation of the research, and the unique use of a diary as a longitudinal data source for the experiences of a stay-at-home dad. Careful balancing of the 'auto' and 'ethno' and 'graphy' in an autoethnographic approach, plus joining document analysis of the diary to co-creation with my participant children of its interpretations, helps to avoid an undesired narcissism. Three distinct periods in the diary are identified based on the metric of frequency of entries; methods remain flexible to the periods' shifts in purpose. Data selection responds to prior research on stay-at-home dads, educational theory, and the co-creative input of participant children while remaining open to surprises in the data. The uniqueness of its methods offers a contribution to other researchers who see an opportunity to discover new knowledge in exploring their own diary as a data source, especially given the safeguards taken here for making such an inquiry rigorous instead of narcissistic.

Educational theory provides an opportunity to see the diary itself in an educational light, as an expression of the pedagogy of listening, documentation, and joy practiced in Reggio Emilia, as a site for recognising my children's expertise in their own lives, and as a reflexive cultivation of the love

necessary to study and professional early childcare education. The findings within the diary expand this opportunity. They reveal that by considering the experiences of a stay-at-home dad less in terms of creating a new masculinity and more in terms of being the primary caregiver for his children and their first teacher, the risk and responsibility of parenting can be seen as experiences of dialogism, wayfaring and the pedagogy of the event. Furthermore, the context of childhood development helps to show how this one stay-at-home dad contributed to the education of his children first by simply being present for the essential relationship every child needs for healthy development, and more specifically by listening for the 'serve and return' interactions necessary to building neural networks for learning throughout the life course. This listening is evidenced most fundamentally by the very existence of the diary, which by its documentation of educational events reveals a curiosity for and attention to the children at every stage of their development along with developmentally appropriate practice to support them. Further contexts show how this stay-at-home dad helped to co-create with his children a home learning environment as a place networked to other places for meaning making associated with education and a strong sense of belonging. This sense of belonging was further aided by the active participation of their grandparents in a 'conversation between the generations' of intergenerational learning.

This research makes its contribution to education primarily in the fulfilment of the purpose for narrative research in education, which is the sharing of educational wisdom or virtuosity, found in the balancing of the three domains of education: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. It reveals my practice as one which exercises within this balance a preference for subjectification appropriate to a pedagogy of the event. It also shows ways in which the pedagogy of the event and dialogism are harmonious and supported contextually by the developmental importance of serve and return interactions. These experiences, interpreted with the aid of the experimental musical composition, *Amalgamations* (Stone, 2016, 2019), suggest the possibility of speaking of the pedagogy of the event and education itself as non-teleological.

None of these claims is particularly startling, but the diary shows how central such educational behaviors were to my experience as a stay-at-home dad. Such interpretations disrupt the discourse of isolation seen in prior studies of stay-at-home dads, suggesting instead the possibility of recognising our freedom to act with virtuosity in educating our children, while still allowing for interpretation of the difficulties in these experiences as liminal, but chosen. This is its contribution to stay-at-home dads and to those who study our experiences.

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Appendices

1. Inventory and Cover Images

No.	Start Date	End Date	Type	Notes
1.	04/10/94	10/22/98	N 6x9.5 100	Approx. 40% filled. Loose material.
2.	09/30/99	07/27/00?	C 4.5x3.25 80	
3.	10/10/00	08/07/03	A 3.5x4 80	Approx. 40% filled. See music file.
4.	04/26/04	08/14/05	Am 8x12 50?	Loose material
5.	09/18/05	01/27/06	S 8x11.5 51	Repurposed NU notebook
6.	01/29/06	06/01/06	M 4x5 100	Loose material.
7.	06/02/06	09/24/06	M 4x5 100	
8.	09/25/06	02/21/07	M 4x5 100	Loose material.
9.	02/22/07	10/02/07	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
10.	10/03/07	04/22/08	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
11.	04/23/08	10/29/08	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
12.	11/04/08	07/12/09	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
13.	07/13/09	03/12/10	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. 13a. Jan-Dec '10 Planner
14.	04/28/10	01/08/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
15.	01/11/11	03/29/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. First 'cloud drawings'
16.	03/30/11	04/29/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Ritualized cloud drawings
17.	04/30/11	05/27/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings. Collages
18.	05/28/11	06/27/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
19.	06/28/11	07/27/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings. Collages
20.	07/28/11	08/28/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings. Collages
21.	08/29/11	09/29/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
22.	09/30/11	10/30/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
23.	10/31/11	12/01/11	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
24.	12/02/11	01/01/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
25.	01/02/12	01/30/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
26.	01/31/12	03/03/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
27.	03/04/12	04/06/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
28.	04/07/12	05/10/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings

29.	05/11/12	06/11/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
30.	06/12/12	07/12/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
31.	07/13/12	08/12/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
32.	08/13/12	09/13/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
33.	09/14/12	10/13/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings
34.	10/14/12	11/25/12	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Cloud drawings decline
35.	11/27/12	01/28/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Few cloud drawings
36.	01/29/13	02/28/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Numbered Psalms
37.	03/01/13	04/16/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. N+7 sonnets
38.	04/17/13	06/10/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
39.	06/11/13	07/31/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
40.	08/01/13	10/04/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. 1 cloud drawing
41.	10/05/13	12/12/13	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
42.	12/13/13	02/23/14	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Drawings
43.	02/24/14	04/21/14	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
44.	04/22/14	06/26/14	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
45.	07/01/14	10/13/14	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material
46.	10/14/14	12/31/14	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Poems. Social media
47.	01/01/15	11/13/15	M 6x9.5 100	Loose material. Less than 50% filled
A1	FD '09	09/20/12	2x3	Pocket notebook. Poems. Drawings
A2	Undated		2x3.5	Pocket notebook. Sketches
A3	Undated		4x5	10 pages, remembering childhood
A4	Undated	02/07/12	Maharam 5x7	Poems
A5	07/11/13	2015?	2.5x4.25	Pocket notebook
A6	Undated		Letter file	Music, incl. 05/31/03 letter from ICS

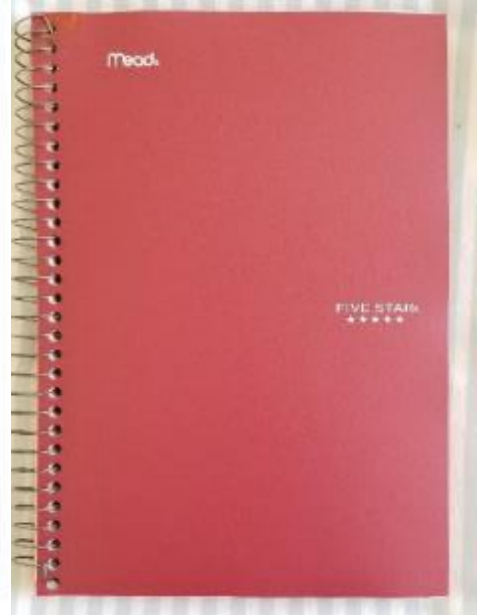
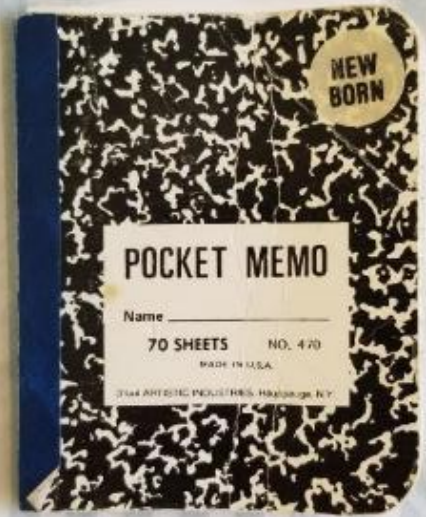
Table 25. Inventory of Diary volumes.

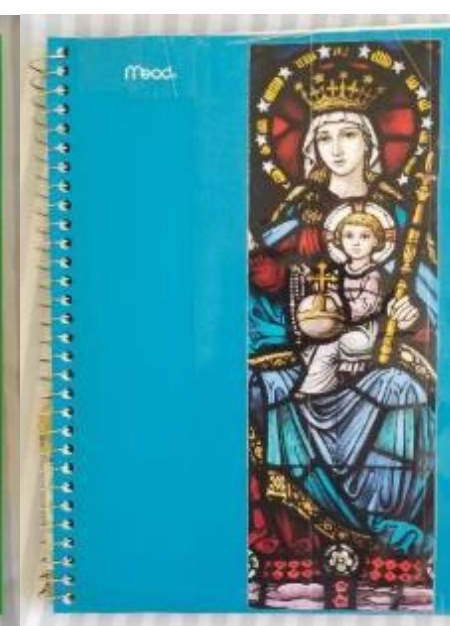
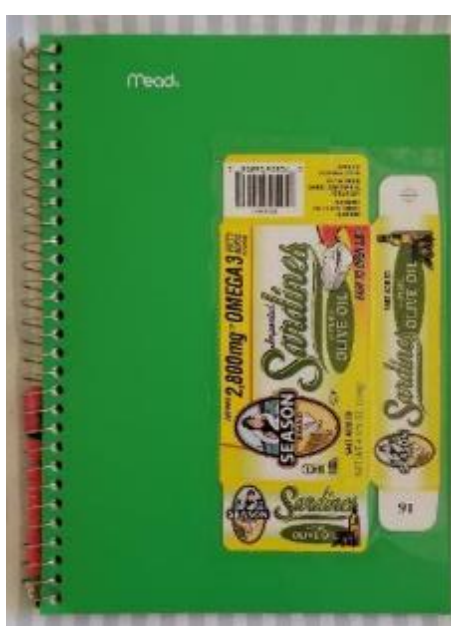
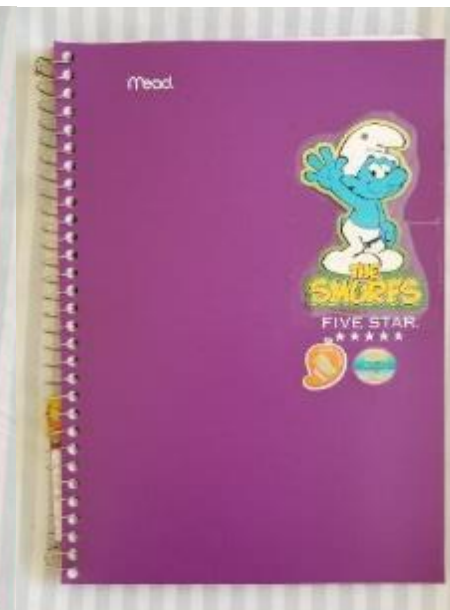
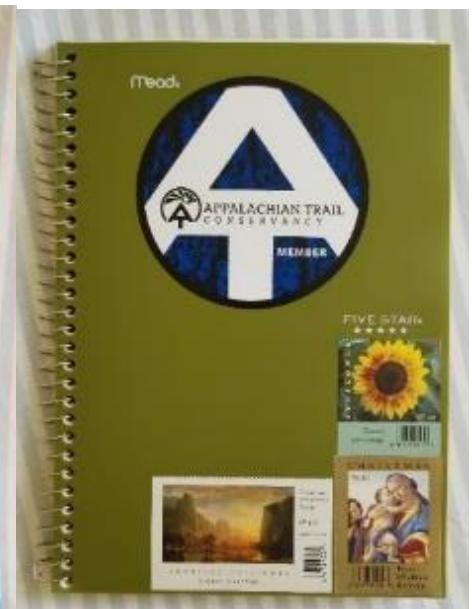
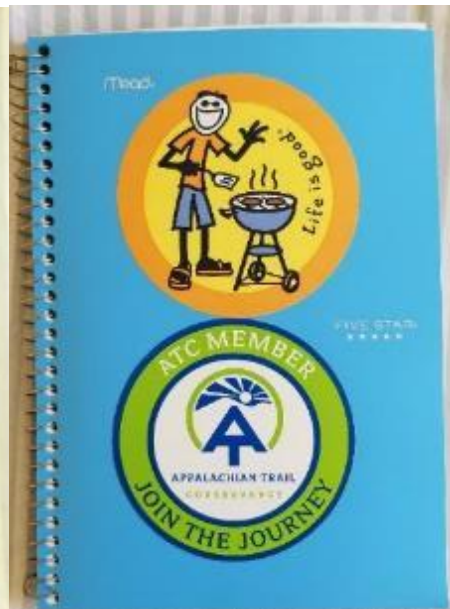
*'Type' is expressed as Brand abbreviation, Size, Number of pages

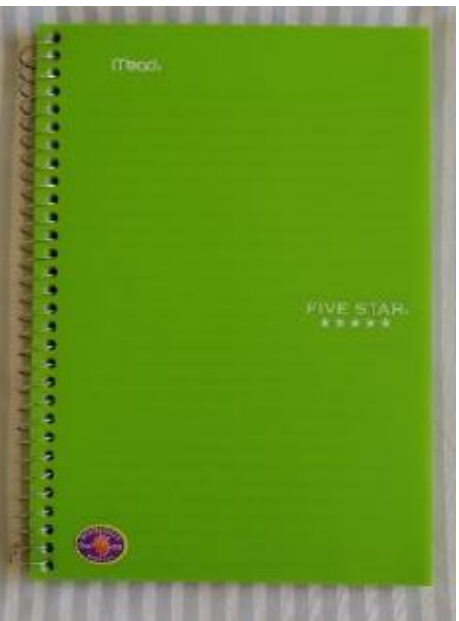
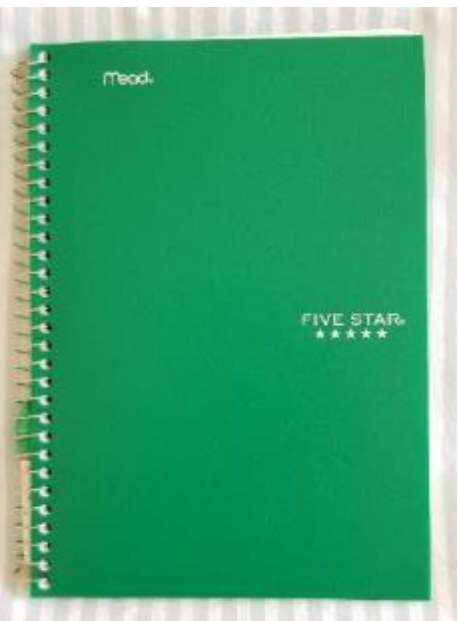
**A1-6 might be considered 'Adjunct' texts, as they were produced outside of the sequence of dated texts and/or were undated.

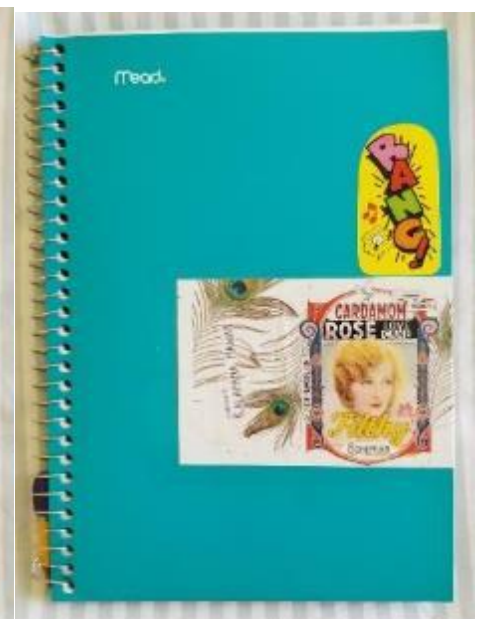
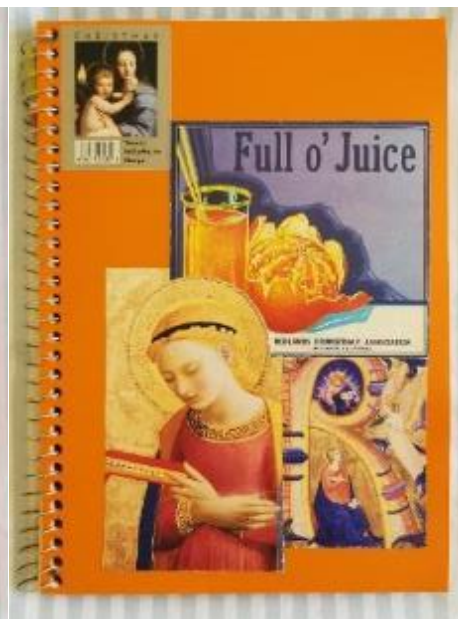
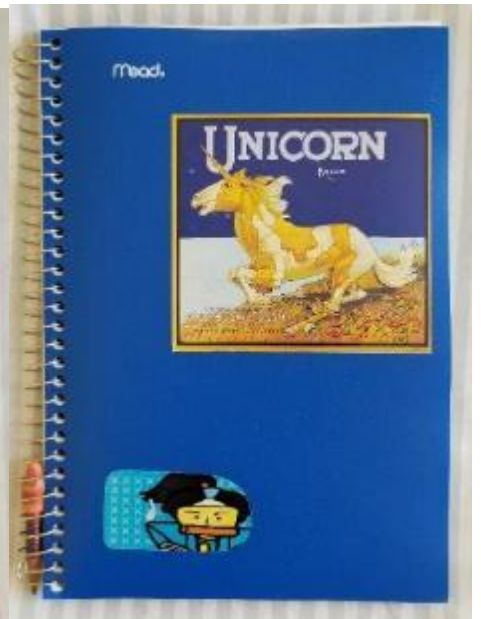
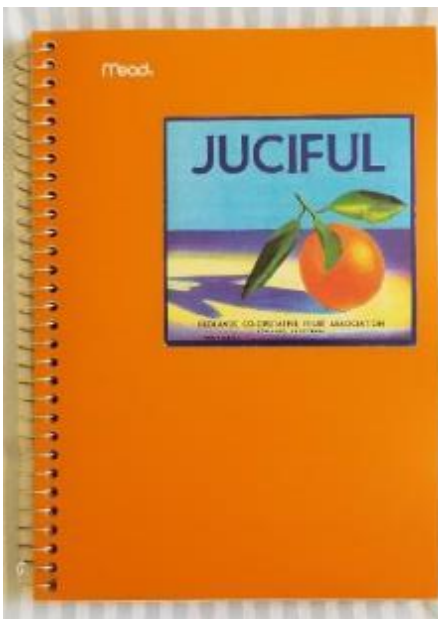
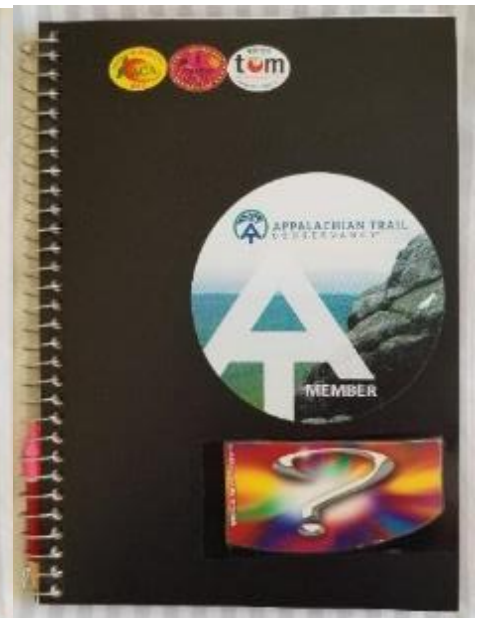
'Loose material' refers to the presence of items not affixed to the diary, but often found in an attached pocket.

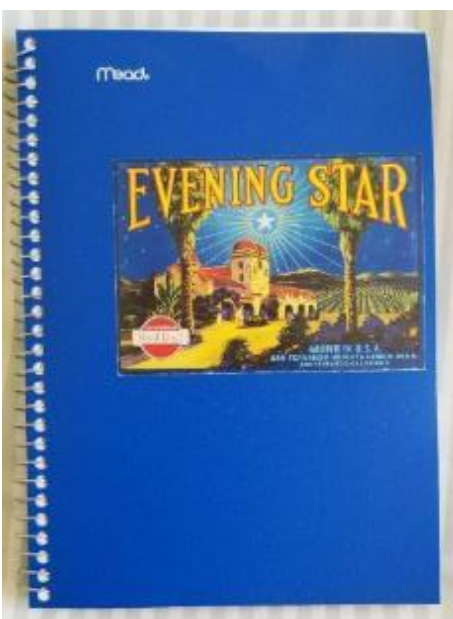
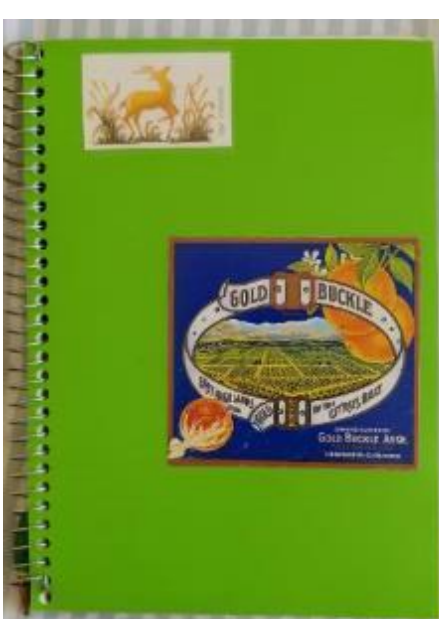
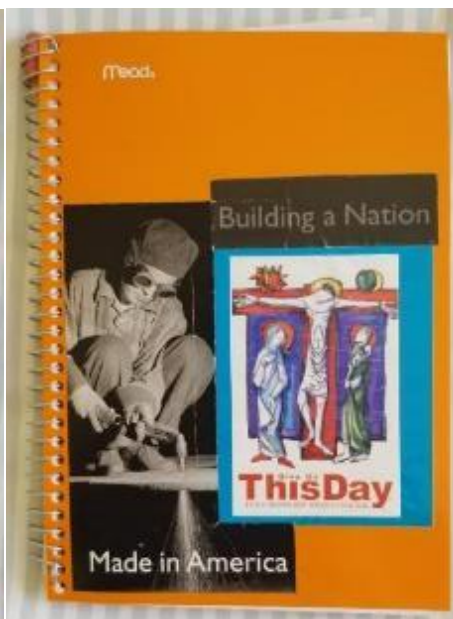
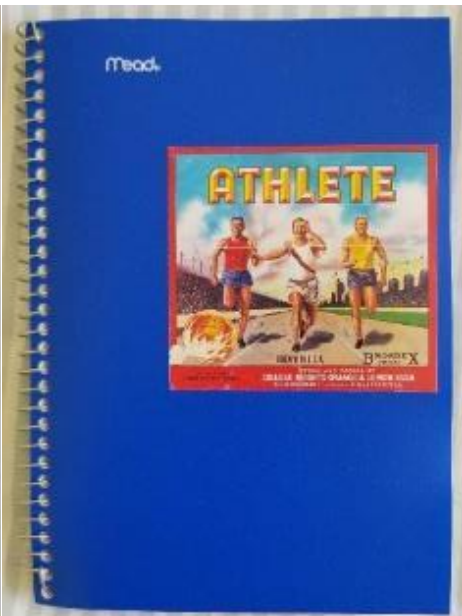
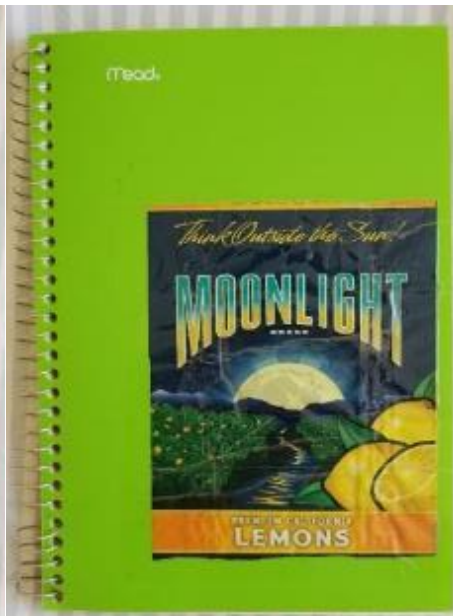
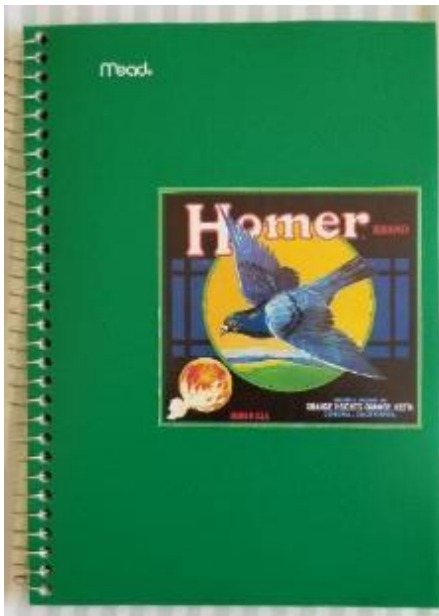
Images below show front covers of each of the 47 volumes in order.













2. Diary Content Chart

YEAR	PAGES	LIFE EVENTS	WORLD EVENTS	SCHOOLING Madeleine Max Gus	DIARY STRUCTURES	THEMES
1994	50				D1 'Just a diary'	
1995	16	Relocation MLS Birth C				
1996	74					
1997	14					
1998	16	Birth C				
1999	4			P3	D2	
2000	172	Birth C		P4	D2-D3	
2001	14		9/11	K		
2002	20			1 P3		
2003	16			2 P4 P3		
2004	39	Crisis		3 K P4	D4 Mostly undated entries	
2005	122			4 1 K	D4-D5 CBT. Themes Dated entries	Sleep, Kids, Work, People, etc.
2006	521			5 2 1	D5-D8	
2007	400			6 3 2	D8-D10	
2008	400		Recession	7 4 3	D10-D12	
2009	200	Nintendo; Job hunt; Death		8 5 4 Football	D12-D13	
2010	300			HS9 6 5 Football	D13-D14	
2011	2,000	Counseling	PSU Scandal; Tsunami	HS10 7 6	D14-24 New purpose; Themes abandoned; 'Artist's Way'; Cloud drawing; so <i>hi</i>	Productivity
2012	2,100			School Closing HS11 MS8 MS7	D24-35 <i>Numbered Psalms</i>	
2013	1,300			HS12 HS9 MS8	D35-D42	
2014	900			UNI1 HS10 HS9	D42-46	
2015	90	Dad dies		UNI2 HS11 HS10	D47	
TOTAL	8,768					

3. Words at 18 months (1997)

(D1:22.05.1997)

Green	Bed	Tow	Girl
Blue	Bead	Pear	Ba(nana)
Red	Bear	Belt	Star
Yellow	Bread	Belly	Moon
Cat	Baby	Button	Monkey (“Ooh-ah”)
Dog	Baa-baa	Mama	Hat
Meow	Moo-moo	Dada	Brush
Woof	Neigh-neigh	Ma(deleine)	Quack
Up	Go	Door	Bubble
Down	Boat	Tuba (“doda”)	Water
Little	Pony (“Boden”)	“A”	Dirt!
Hello	Air(plane)	“B”	Boo-boo
Bye-bye	Hair	“O”	Ant
Bath	Ear	Bee	Bug
Bolt	Eye	Knee	Broom
Book	Nose	Duck	
Ball	Arm	Boy	

4. Sentences at 21 Months (1997)

9/16/97

And now, a day shy of 21 months, you have sentences. Were I more faithful in my recording of your progress, you too might someday marvel at the emergence of words, the joining of adjectives, verbs... Typical examples:

Dada up boden down boden

(Make the hobby horse bounce)

Pink doll up boden down boden

(Dolly wants to ride the pony)

Want boden duck

(Let's go to the playground.)

No climb! (Sounds like "no da-lamb")

No bite dada!

No hit dada!

Open door!

Close door! (sounds like "da-lot door")

Madeleine pooping!

Baby eating!

Big BM!

Upside-down!

Mama loves Madeleine. Want Mama.

Sit down little bare cat!

Stand up little bare cat!

Little cat bare! (Take off the cat's dress)

(I think this one's the happiest one yet:)

Mama, little baby, Madeleine sit down the blue chair.

Go out! Go up! Go down! Go in!

Wunderbar! (Wunderbar, baby!)

Out wet! (Get me out of wet clothes)

Dry! (Put dry ones on)

Pick little green one, Mama!

(Pick a little green flower for Mama)

Blue one! Big one! Little one!

Night light on!

Night light out! (observations, not commands)

Hot! Too hot! Not too hot! Warm!

Bite dada—no!—boo-boo. Hurt.

Bonk-ow!

Blippity.

Hoppity-hoppity-hoppity!

Run and run and run.

Blippity blue doll. (I dropped the blue doll.)

Want more.

Now.

Come in.

Don't eat it.

Good throw. Good catch.

Carry (me) up (the stairs).

Putting away!

Away tuba!

Go away, dada!

Go away, bug!

Rock to boden.

Out the boden. (Get me off of it.)

Doll bag. → blue doll pink doll bag. (they're in it.)

Run boden duck! (Run to the playground!)

White cat hiding.

Little green ball – up!

You can count from 0-9, though you still think the 7 is another 1.

Round around get dizzy!

Again!

Lay down new bed.

Dada sit down.

I gotcha!

Big bite.

Hey you! (Ay hoo!)

9/19

Madeleine big, big pooping!

Jumping, jumping!

Big hug Dada.

Better run!

9/28

Dada help Madeleine clean the kitchen.

Big stars hiding in the rain.

Sh! Little baby sleeping.

Baby out the gimme (the Gymini is GG's play mat.)

Play snap.

Dada's turn.

Turn on little light, please.

Want night light out.

Want out down see little stars, big stars.

Pick up bubbles.

Meat good!

Hot cat!

Hot stars!

Socks and shoes.

Hiding place (puh-lace)

Dada sit down neigh.

Madeleine put away rocking chair.

Clean diaper.

Pee-yew!

Icky!

Dirty!

Help dada feed cat.

Cat food.

Little baby bottle.

Broken.

Break it.

10/7

Dada proud of Madeleine. Madeleine proud of Dada.

Dada drinking hot tea again.

Baby bottle cap.

Little brown cat looking at Madeleine.

Icky cat food.

Stars hide in the rain.

Dada Find the big bright star.

Stars out at night. Hey you, star!

Stars gone inna day.

Madeleine loves Madeleine.

Big star loves Madeleine.

Little stars loves Madeleine.

Dada Madeleine goin-a (going to the) store.

Play the big oo-ah (Monkey Shines computer game)

Big oo-ah running, jumping, flying.

Stop! Madeleine running! Stop!

Walk.

Madeleine wiping the table.

Scared.

Madeleine looking funny.

Madeleine looking pretty.

Change the wet diaper.

Play put away the numbers.

Play put away the letters.

Madeleine's reading red.

Put away the crayons.

Color.

Drawing red cat.

10/9

Tom. Honey. Hello honey.

Read the book about the big star.

Fun.

1/30/98

He can't play catch with the little dog because he falls over.

Big Dog Puff Song

G below low G

"Big dog has a pu-hu-huff... and me!"

variant: high E & high F

same lyrics sung falsetto

5. Max's Vocabulary at 15 Months (1999)

10.02.1999

Mama	gobble	dump
Dada	apple	woof
Madeleine	juice	meow
Max	wow	zip
Grandpa	no	bap
ball	up	hug
boo!	diaper	jump
crash	hi	pop
big	bye	book
boy	mine	wash
car	tickle	chair
go	bonk	cow
throw	on the floor	out
whap	one two three	up we go
bap	keep Bubba (bear)	go up there

6. Interviews with Max and Gus for Giftedness (2005)

(D5:22.11.2005)

What do you like to do?

GUS

1. Play with Otter
2. Buy new toys
3. Hug my elephant
4. Play with Max
5. Play with my magnets
6. Pull up the curtains
7. Clean up
8. Take baths
9. Buy new clothing
10. Eat stuff
11. Listen to other people and read books at school. (I like to do that a LOT.)
12. Do work.
13. And also I would like it if my elephant would turn into one that could talk.
14. Being with (family) except for when they're mean to everybody
15. I would also like it if we could buy the black & white kitty at the pet shop...

I would add:

1. Watching videos.
2. Listening to music.
3. Making people laugh.
4. Building things.
5. Gardening.

What do you like to do?

(MAX)

1. Playing with my cousin
2. Throwing Beanie Babies down the laundry chute
3. Playing outside
4. Owning 10 wolves and 2 foxes
5. Getting pizza tonight.
6. Having friends come over.
7. Going to a baseball field because we're basically never allowed to hit baseballs with our aluminum bats in the back yard.
8. Having a kickball field.
9. Having no homework.

I would add:

1. Playing almost any kind of sport: baseball, basketball, football, biking, skating, scootering, swimming, sledding.
2. Learning new vocabulary.
3. Playing computer games.
4. Watching sports/reading about sports: learning about sports
5. Cooking
6. Building stuff, especially with tools

7. Gardening, especially with tools
8. Laughing
9. How things are made

7. CBT Inventories (2005)

WORKSHEET 11.1 *Mind Over Mood Anxiety Inventory*

In order to use this inventory multiple times, do not write on this page. Indicate on the answer sheet on the following page the numbered answer that best describes how much you have experienced each symptom over the last week.

	Not at all	Sometimes	Frequently	Most of the time
1. Feeling nervous	0	1	2	3
2. Frequent worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Trembling, twitching, feeling shaky	0	1	2	3
4. Muscle tension, muscle aches, muscle soreness	0	1	2	3
5. Restlessness	0	1	2	3
6. Easily tired	0	1	2	3
7. Shortness of breath	0	1	2	3
8. Rapid heartbeat	0	1	2	3
9. Sweating not due to the heat	0	1	2	3
10. Dry mouth	0	1	2	3
11. Dizziness or light-headedness	0	1	2	3
12. Nausea, diarrhea, or stomach problems	0	1	2	3
13. Frequent urination	0	1	2	3
14. Flushes (hot flashes) or chills	0	1	2	3
15. Trouble swallowing or "lump in throat"	0	1	2	3
16. Feeling keyed up or on edge	0	1	2	3
17. Quick to startle	0	1	2	3
18. Difficulty concentrating	0	1	2	3
19. Trouble falling or staying asleep	0	1	2	3
20. Irritability	0	1	2	3
21. Avoiding places where I might be anxious	0	1	2	3
22. Frequent thoughts of danger	0	1	2	3
23. Seeing myself as unable to cope	0	1	2	3
24. Frequent thoughts that something terrible will happen	0	1	2	3

Score (of total circled numbers)

From *Mind Over Mood* by Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky. © 1995 The Guilford Press.

Mind Over Mood (Greenberger & Padesky, 1995) Anxiety Inventory.

WORKSHEET 10.1: *Mind Over Mood* Depression Inventory

In order to use this inventory multiple times, do not write on this page. Indicate on the answer sheet on the following page the numbered answer that best describes how much you have experienced each symptom over the last week.

	Not at all	Sometimes	Frequently	Most of the time
1. Sad or depressed mood	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling guilty	0	1	2	3
3. Irritable mood	0	1	2	3
4. Less interest or pleasure in usual activities	0	1	2	3
5. Withdraw from or avoid people	0	1	2	3
6. Find it harder than usual to do things	0	1	2	3
7. See myself as worthless	0	1	2	3
8. Trouble concentrating	0	1	2	3
9. Difficulty making decisions	0	1	2	3
10. Suicidal thoughts	0	1	2	3
11. Recurrent thoughts of death	0	1	2	3
12. Spend time thinking about a suicide plan	0	1	2	3
13. Low self-esteem	0	1	2	3
14. See the future as hopeless	0	1	2	3
15. Self-critical thoughts	0	1	2	3
16. Tiredness or loss of energy	0	1	2	3
17. Significant weight loss or decrease in appetite (do not include weight loss from a diet plan)	0	1	2	3
18. Change in sleep pattern—difficulty sleeping or sleeping more or less than usual	0	1	2	3
19. Decreased sexual desire	0	1	2	3

Score (of total circled numbers)

From *Mind Over Mood* by Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky, © 1995 The Guilford Press.

Mind Over Mood (Greenberger & Patesky, 1995) Depression Inventory.

Cheerfulness Inventory (later named H, presumably for happiness)

1. Happy or cheerful mood
2. Feeling innocent
3. Unflappable (stable) mood
4. More interest or pleasure in usual activities
5. Attract or engage people
6. Find it easy to do things
7. See myself as valuable
8. No trouble concentrating (flow)
9. Easy making decisions (Decisive)
10. Adventurous thoughts (Willing to take reasonable risks)
11. Recurrent thoughts in awe of life (Awe)
12. Spend time planning for the future (Look forward to something)
13. True humility
14. See the future as hopeful (Hope)
15. Encouraging thoughts
16. Alertness or vigor
17. Healthy diet
18. Good night's sleep
19. Attracted to others

Peaceful Inventory (later named C—probably for 'calm')

1. Feeling calm
2. Frequent confidence
3. Stillness
4. No pain
5. Restful
6. Alert
7. Deep breathing
8. Quiet heart
9. Cool as a cucumber
10. Unchapped lips
11. Equilibrium or balance
12. Regular
13. Continent
14. Not hot or cold
15. Easy to swallow
16. Centered
17. Unruffled
18. Focused
19. Sleep well
20. Stable
21. Adventurous
22. Courageous
23. Capable
24. Frequent thoughts that something great will happen (D5: 11.29.2005)

8. Evaluating Documents Checklist

'Evaluating Documents Checklist' from Bryman (2016, pp. 566-7).

Who produced the document?

I did. Also: a stay at home dad in the US, writing between 1994 and 2015.

Why was the document produced?

There appear, from initial explorations, to be many reasons for its production. So far, I have identified:

- a. Most straightforwardly, it is a diary, a personal record, with no intended audience.
- b. A space for personal reflection or reflexivity.
- c. A prayer journal or space for interpreting religious, mystical and theological signs.
- d. A literary exercise, a space for exploring literary ideas and techniques.
- e. A notebook, in the sense as a space for learning, as one takes notes at a lecture.
- f. An extended exercise in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Positive Psychology.
- g. A sketchbook.
- h. A site for musical notation.
- i. A research log, particularly with regard to genealogy.

Was the person or group that produced the document in a position to write authoritatively about the subject or issue?

Insomuch as the subject or issue is the experiences of a stay at home dad, yes.

Is the material genuine?

Yes.

Did the person or group have an axe to grind, and if so can you identify a particular slant?

If there is a slant to identify, it is not of the axe grinding sort. Rather, it would be that the influences of CBT and PP might render an 'overly positive' account which does not record or avoids recording negative events, thoughts and emotions. Some of these negativities might be inferred, however. It appears obvious to me, for example, that the marriage was not a happy one. At the same time, the lack of happiness seems a neutrality, not a bitterness or anger. Other 'slants' might include a tendency towards hagiography and/or literary exploitation of an 'unreliable narrator'.

Is the document typical of its kind, and if not is it possible to establish how untypical it is and in what ways?

I make no claim for this document being typical. On the contrary, I assert its uniqueness. While certainly other stay at home dads must have kept diaries, no comparisons are possible aside from what might be found in the literature about stay at home dads' experiences, the private posts on Facebook, The Daddy Shift, and anecdotal evidence.

Is the meaning of the document clear?

The meaning of the document is comprehensible in many ways, but its complexity renders it multi-faceted in such a way that renders it something other than perfectly clear. It requires a great deal of interpretation.

Can you corroborate the events or accounts presented in the document?

I can do and in a variety of ways. For example, I could prove that I was a stay at home dad by my tax returns, on which my occupation was listed as Homemaker. Photographic evidence of the events in the document are not presently in my possession but might be secured if required. Also, the collaborative testimony of my children in the co-creation of this research is offered as corroboration and, should it arise, contradiction of the events described therein.

Are there different interpretations of the document from the one you offer, and if so what are they and why have you discounted them?

An answer to this question will need to wait until the diaries have been read and interpreted, and then that interpretation critically and reflexively considered.

9. Dialogues with Research Participants

Diary Date	Description	Dialoguer	Notes
	Vol 1 to Kids (1994-2003)	Gus	IGDM:04.04.2021
D1:10.04.1994	Librarian	Madeleine	EM:24.03.2021 guilt, sacrifice
	Letters to parents (1995-1996)	Madeleine	EM:27.03.2021 sweet, fun...
D1:18.06.1996	'Achievement'	Madeleine	EM:24.03.2021 difficult
D1:25.06.1996	'Outside interests'	Madeleine	EM:24.03.2021 difficult
D1:22.05.1997	List of Words	Madeleine	WA:12.04.2021 surprised
D1:16.09.1997	List of Sentences	Madeleine	WA:12.04.2021 amazing
D1:05.12.1997	Poem	Madeleine	WA: 26.04.2020 +/- EM:24.03.2021 loved
D1:30.01.1998	'Big Dog Puff'	Madeleine	EM:24.03.2021 funny words
D2:21.05.2000	'Garbage truck' & 'sea garbage'	Madeleine	EM:24.03.2021 biggest laugh
D2:12.07.2000	Knoebels guy	Madeleine	EM:24.03.2021 touching
D4:26.04.2004	Singing at school	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 favorite mem.
D4:26.04.2004	Max Jacob	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 Petit Prince
D4:n.d.2004	'One story... of war'	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 Peace conflict
D4:n.d.2004	9/11	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 confusing
D4:n.d.2004	Mime	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 remember
D4:n.d.2004	Baloney-scented air filter	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 cracked up
D4:n.d.2004	Strangely Propped Man	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 sad
D4:n.d.2005	Quote from invented author	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 why?
D5:n.d.2005	Discarded answering machine	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 creepy
D5:03.12.2005	Statue of Mary	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 interesting
D5:12.12.2005	Bored with school/giftedness	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 interesting +
D5:17.12.2005	'gem'	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 sweet
D5:15.01.2006	Best & Cutest Dog certificate	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 smile
D5:16.01.2006	Beautiful dream!	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021
D5:18.01.2006	Breaking the computer	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 remember
D5:19.01.2006	Classmate's dad at war	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 fears
D5:25.01.2006	Macbeth	Madeleine	EM:28.03.2021 remember
D6:13.02.2006	Max's 2 drawings	Max	IGDM:10.11.2019
D8:17.07.2006	Max's pocket	Max	IGDM:17.11.2019 no reply
D8:09.11.2006	Max's reading progress	Max	IGDM:08.12.2019
D9:04.04.2007	'No-emotion contest'	Madeleine	WA:17.01.2020 meaningful
D9:16.04.2007	Neverending Story	Max	IGDM:18.01.2020
D9:05.06.2007	Max cuts the apple/recital	Max	IGDM:19.01.2020
D9:24.09.2007	Jean Baptiste	Madeleine	WA:11.03.2020 funny, brilliant
D10:09.12.2007	Isaiah 28:7-8	Madeleine	WA:20.03.2020
D10:11.12.2007	Max gave me this (sticker)	Max	IGDM:20.03.2020 (liked)
D :29.07.2008	Blatt & squidge, cooking	Madeleine	WA:23.03.2020
D11:23.10.2008	'Summary of 20 years'	Max	IGDM:25.03.2020 'quite nice'
	Portraits of Madeleine	Madeleine	WA28.04.2020
	Maroon B football (2008-2011)	Max	IGDM:28.03.2020
My birthday	Scrabble, Jerky, Riffing text	Madeleine	WA:28.03.2020
D12:07.11.2008	Playing football	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 loved it
D12:05.04.2009	Flag football	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 not margined
D12:19.04.2009	'Words of Silence'	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 What?
D13:08.08.2009	Football with Max	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 favourite

D13:17.08.2009	Football, butterflies, Hello Kitty	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 charming
D13:27.08.2009	Max shining in his games	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 really proud
D13:05.09.2009	Fun times	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 remember
	Music at St. M, Westport	Madeleine	WA31.03.2020
D14:20.05.2010	Max composes on Nintendo DS	Max	IGDM:30.03.2020
D14:10.08.2010	Max's humility, sport & faith	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 sweet
D :29.09.2010	Field hockey	Madeleine	WA:01.04.2020
	Field hockey solitude Gods voice	Madeleine	WA:19.04.2020
	Arc of the whole football story	Madeleine	EM:30.01.2022 resonates
D15:26.01.2011	'Max is awesome'	Max	IGDM:02.04.2020 'funny'
D19:22.07.2011	Max: 'I am the future.'	Max	IGDM:17.04.2020 (liked)
D24:22.12.2011	GO HUG DADDY	Madeleine	EM:18.02.2022 funny: imagine
Jan 2012	Summary	Madeleine	WA:27.04.2020
2012	Learning to drive	Madeleine	WA:18.05.2020
2012	Geggy Tah, Honneth, Winnicott	Max	IGDM:19.05.2020
	Sideways dinner	Madeleine	WA:20.05.2020
D31:22.07.2012	Cox: 'I believe in you!'	Madeleine	WA:10.06.2022 very vividly
	Numbered Psalms (2013)	Madeleine	WA:12.06.2020 cool, funny
D :30.01.2013	FDR chart	Madeleine	WA:15.06.2020
Approx 2013	Taxi Driver, genius	Gus	IGDM:29.03.2020
Lent 2014	Stations by Madeleine	Madeleine	WA:29.03.2020
	Dad's funeral cards	Madeleine	WA:19.05.2020

Table 26. Table of Dialogues..

Emails with children

Date sent	Content	Replies from:	Madeleine	Max	Gus
16/07/2020	Consent Form		16/07/2020	30/07/2020	21/07/2020
13/03/2021	Vol 1 to Kids		24/03/2021		
15	Bonus (letters)		27		
21	Vol 2 to Kids		28, 29		
30	Postcard piece		30/06		
17/09	Cashore		17/09		
21/01/2022	Football		30/01		
17/02	Basketball		18/02		
10/03	NICER NEXUS				
18/03	NICER PP				

Table 27. Table of emails with children.

Max & Gus IG DMs

Gus

What I observe from the following passages:

- Our dialogue is rooted in cinema and our responses too it—a dialogue about dialogue, so a metalogue, albeit one which we would not name as such. It is just our 'normal' way of speaking.
- We name 22 films
- the Figgy named at 14.01.2021 is a character in a screenplay he shared and I read and replied to.

- There are 4 video calls. Given his preference for motion pictures, these might be interpreted as dialogic moments which incorporate his preferred medium. As such, however, they retain no record of what was said in the same way which text might have done.

For me, there are 3 events which might particularly merit inclusion:

- Mekas (2000) 'It's you, it's you in every frame of this film'
- 'the writing you sent me..'
- Request for brief bio

The latter two of these simply are evidence of my research process, that he received the writing on or before 04.06.2021 and that the IG DMs document my request for a brief bio on 24.02.2022. The Mekas quote, however, was sent uniquely to Gus. His only reply to it was to 'like' it—but that, for me, is enough. I am asserting, by way of Mekas, the presence of Gus, of all my children, in every step of this process and he at least acknowledged that he liked something about this, whether it was Mekas or the sentiment which I was trying to express.

I would add, too, that both Max and Gus received the BobandRobertaSmith statement that 'My Son Changed My Art.' God, it's so hard not to go spiralling off into that book, too.

There is discussion of the pandemic and its effects on study. And more importantly there are mutual declarations of love.

[16.02.2021](#)

Back (British sitcom) and *Playtime* (Tati)

[25.08.2020](#)

Me and You and Everyone We Know

Wild Tales

Cold War

Ida

Video Call

[15.01.2021](#)

Tangerine

Catastrophe

The Florida Project

[14.01.2021](#)

Figgy

[23.11.2020](#)

Screenwriting contest

Happy as Lazaro

[16.02.2021](#)

Video Call

[17.03.2021](#)

BobandRobertaSmith

The Way Way Back

[04.04.2021](#) *Corroboration*

Pink Flamingos

'I also wanted to say I'm sorry it took me so long to get around to reading your work. By the way, I do fully condone and encourage the idea of you using my real name. I don't think words can describe how excellent I thought your writing was. I'm not a fan of poetry, but I'm a fan of your poetry. The journal entries were as profound as they were funny. And I thought it was pretty amazing how even though it's specifically the story of our family, how there is such an undisputed level of universality to it. I also thought there was a great balance of writing about us kids and writing about yourself. I can't wait to see more of it!'

[10.03.2021](#)

Mekas (2000) 'It's you, it's you in every frame of this film'

[05.04.2021](#)

Video Call

Film poster

[04.04.2021](#)

[Requires editing to remove names, details]

[22.05.2021](#)

Paris, Texas

Submarine

Kill Smoochy

Happy as Lazarro

Meshes of the Afternoon

[20.06.2021](#)

Video Call

[04.06.2021](#)

'the writing you sent me..'

Spiderverse

Norm MacDonald in The New Yorker

[13.11.2021](#)

The French Dispatch

[24.04.2022](#)

Request for brief bio

[29.11.2021](#)

The French Dispatch

20.06.2021

The Life Aquatic

Max

My communication with Max differs.

There are diary passages:

- Diary page 12.11.7: Squidward sticker
- Two of his drawings; one from Feb 2006
- Diary entry from 11/9/6: Max reading at 7th grade level*
- How Max cuts the apple, June 5, 2007*
- Trouser pockets: 7/17/6 (no reply)
- *Neverending Story* 04.16.7
- Diary 10.23.8 poem 'not mine, but ours'
- Diary entry 1/26/11: 'Max is awesome'
- Diary entry 5/20/10: 'Max writes his first song – on the Nintendo DIY software.' (followed by discussion of classes—and his current scoring softwares)
- Diary entry 7.22.11: 'I am the future.'

Those marked with an asterisk (*) I consider important for the degree to which they corroborate the events as documented in the diary. This is important for establishing reliability; I should look for it again—or, conversely, contradictions—in the responses of all participants.

Discussion of my research theory:

- 'Choosing to be a stay at home dad was a politically radical act...'
- Score from *Lines*
- Bakhtin
- Crises of Materialism
- Orpheus Institute seminar

And much on the *processes* of schooling and qualification, from which I highlighted:

- Congratulations (on the award of my scholarship)
- my MA graduation
- Max's graduation

As Gus' dialogue frequents the topic of cinema, Max's frequents music. Max also gets the BobandRoberta Smith quote and the request for a brief bio. And Max refers to receiving my 'football chronicles.'

Max refers to 'the conversation between the generations' (Oakeshott, 1972) in his response to my photograph with his own, from the two of us together as musicians, he proceeds to include my dad, and not just with words, but responding using the same medium, photo for photo.

Cooking, machinery, erging—these are all interests from his youth recorded in the diary which persist, which are still areas of learning and practice (with the exception of the erging, I guess).

There is discussion of the pandemic as there is in Gus'. And again, the warmth of the interactions, the fond expressions of missing and loving each other, these characterize the 'love' in the 'study'.

There are two Zoom conversations documented here.

Aside from a few passages where we openly discussed more private aspects of our lives, like health and relationships, the majority of what we talked about was *what we are learning*.

[05.05.2019](#)

Congratulations (on the award of my scholarship)

[07.07.2019](#)

Mary Halvorson

[05.07.2019](#)

CEO of Evan

[14.10.2019](#)

‘Mistakes’: Chesterton, Augustine, Tom Petty, & the Sex Pistols

‘Choosing to be a stay at home dad was a politically radical act...’

[19.09.2019](#)

Giraffe, Learning sledding

[13.02.2020](#)

Score from *Lines*

[20.03.2020](#)

Diary page 12.11.7: Squidward sticker

[10.11.2019](#)

Two of his drawings; one from Feb 2006

[08.12.2019](#): *Corroborations*

Diary entry from 11/9/6: Max reading at 7th grade level.

Max: ‘It was all those Bionicle books hahaha’

Those plus Calvin and Hobbes

Me: Haha literally 2 sentences later: ‘I observed that he has lately been interested in Bionicles in a similar way to how he once was interested in Trucks—their names and their various powers.’

Spot on!

Max: That’s so funny lol

[29.11.2019](#)

Projects with Jono

[19.01.2020](#) *Corroborations*

How Max cuts the apple, June 5, 2007

Same day: Recital, Dairy Queen...

[17.11.2019](#)

Trouser pockets: no reply

29.01.2020

His music, my studies (includes Orpheus Institute seminar, my MA graduation)

18.01.2020: Corroboration

Neverending Story 04.16.7

[Requires editing for names]

06.03.2020

Heavy machinery

22.03.2020

Covid

25.03.2020

Grandma's encouragement

05.03.2020

Erging

25.03.2020

Diary 10.23.8 poem 'not mine, but ours'

11.03.2020

Berklee to online

02.04.2020

Diary entry 1/26/11: 'Max is awesome'

30.03.2020: Corroboration

Diary entry 5/20/10: 'Max writes his first song – on the Nintendo DIY software.'

28.03.2020: Corroboration

Cooking

Football: Maroon B

17.04.2020

Diary entry 7.22.11: 'I am the future.'

16.07.2020

Ethics forms

12.07.2020

BobandRobertaSmith

01.01.2021

Kind words from Max

24.06.2020

Max's recent projects, cooking, Grandpa's illness.

26.03.2021

Max's good advice from his professor.

26.01.2021

Zoom

21.02.2021

Pandemic haha

10.01.2021

Baptism

24.06.2021

Zoom

17.06.2021

Projects

09.06.2021

Berklee in my library

08.08.2021

Flight

13.06.2021

Summer of Soul

Bakhtin

17.08.2021

Current projects

14.10.2021

Supervision and music

25.09.2021

Coltrane

28.09.2021

Joni Mitchell, Whitney Houston, Crises of Materialism

24.08.2021

Holy, Holy, Holy and The Dickies

24.04.2022

Request for brief bio and reply

09.03.2022

Chair of Studies as bass guitarist

17.04.2022

Photos of musicians: Max, me, and Grandpa

05.01.2022

Black and White Night

21.01.2022

Letter, handwriting, 'football chronicles'

Don Williams

12.07.2022

Bassist

21.06.2022

Spinosaurus

09.05.2022

Max's graduation

01.08.2022

Machinery

This process has been really exhausting, emotionally and intellectually.

Madeleine & the apps

A statement should be made, something to the effect that while Madeleine and I have communicated by way of WhatsApp and Instagram DMs (and even Scrabble Go DMs), she has focused her responses to my research within her email replies to an extent to which I do not feel it necessary or practicable to scour through a much vaster body of communication to find any further instances or chance mentions as I felt was necessary for Max and Gus.

Last night in a brief conversation with Madeleine, she said that my research is 'healing'. (RL2: 28.04.2020.)

Table of Corroboration

Event Date	Description	Corroborator	Notes
13.02.2006	Max's 2 drawings	Max	IG DM 10.11.2019
09.11.2006	Max's reading progress	Max	IG DM 08.12.2019
16.04.2007	Neverending Story	Max	IG DM 18.01.2020
05.06.2007	Max cuts the apple/recital/driver	Max	IG DM 19.01.2020
11.12.2007	Max gave me this (sticker)	Max	IG DM 20.03.2020 (liked)
23.10.2008	'Summary of 20 years'	Max	IG DM 25.03.2020 'quite nice'
	Maroon B	Max	IG DM 28.03.2020 ¹
05.20.2010	Max composes on Nintendo DS	Max	IG DM 30.03.2020
26.01.2011	'Max is awesome'	Max	IG DM 02.04.2020 'funny'
22.07.2011	Max: 'I am the future.'	Max	IG DM 17.04.2020 (liked)
	Vol 1 to Kids (1994-2003)	Gus	IG DM 04.04.2021 ²

¹ 'Wow what a totally different phase of my life hahaha. It was a ton of fun though... I'm glad I did it! I'm also glad I stopped when I did – the risk of injury is so scary.' T: Yeah. You probably got a mild concussion once at practice. And it was totally part of the ethos to 'get right back in.' M: '...that thing about the concussion is scary – I don't remember that at all haha.'

² 'I also wanted to say I'm sorry it took me so long to get around to reading your work. By the way, I do fully condone and encourage the idea of you using my real name. I don't think words can describe how excellent I thought your writing was. I'm not a fan of poetry, but I'm a fan of your poetry. The

journal entries were as profound as they were funny. And I thought it was pretty amazing how even though it's specifically the story of our family, how there is such an undisputed level of universality to it. I also thought there was a great balance of writing about us kids and writing about yourself. I can't wait to see more of it!

10. Emotions

To summarise what I found, I looked for inspiration back to Period Two and the idea that emotions can be quantified as a way to understand them (Greenberger and Padesky, 1995). By searching through the seven volumes of my Research Log (RL1 – RL7) for words I might have used to describe my emotional responses, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how this research had proceeded and impacted me emotionally. Aware of what seemed to me to be the great number of times I have cried during this research, I first sought terms which might reveal this, such as ‘cry’, ‘cried’, ‘weep’, ‘wept’, ‘blub’, and ‘tears.’ I looked for occurrences of the word ‘sad.’ And I searched for more extreme expressions, such as ‘crush’, ‘rekt’, ‘destroyed,’ and ‘heavy,’ which I later gathered under ‘depress’, which would capture variants like ‘depressing’ or ‘depressed.’ To balance these, then, I looked for happier terms, such as ‘laugh’, ‘smile’, ‘joy’, ‘happy’, ‘happiness’, ‘happier’, and ‘delight.’ Finally, I searched for ‘emotional’, which although a neutral term might indicate that work was being done between these emotions. A count of these terms, then, being careful to exclude false hits (‘crypt’ for ‘cry’, for example), generated the following Table 19.

Term	RL1	RL2	RL3	RL4	RL5	RL6	RL7
Tears	31	22	16	25	15	15	28
Sad	36	26	20	19	3	10	6
Depress	10	28	23	17	6	19	7
TOTAL (-)	79	76	59	61	24	44	41
Laugh	74	124	23	20	18	14	38
Smile	37	48	6	6	6	6	9
Joy	127	234	61	73	49	35	60
Happy	107	231	45	78	28	31	64
Delight	19	30	3	3	5	4	11
TOTAL (+)	364	667	138	180	106	90	182
Emotional	32	17	30	39	15	19	32

Table 28. Emotional experiences, showing terms searched and number of incidents per Research Log (RL1 – RL7).

Difficult experiences were gathered as ‘TOTAL (-)’ and happier experiences were gathered as ‘TOTAL (+)’. These two summary lines, then, were joined to the neutral line of ‘Emotional’ experiences to generate the following chart (Figure 35).

This graphic representation of the emotional experience of this research surprised me. My descriptions of the research as ‘emotional’—a neutral term, despite its implications of a category of work—ran roughly equal to recorded instances of tears, sadness or depression, the ‘negative’ (-) category above. I feel like I was very aware of these emotions, which were not always negative, but were often difficult, and could include a heightened awareness in an experience as embodied as tears. It is the curve of the positive here which surprises me most. First, though, it must be made

clear that this curve *includes* the happiness and joy from my diary, while the line of tears is *mine alone*. So, they really are not comparable as equal forms of data.

In this way, the chart might appear misleading, for if the sadness in the diary were to be included, certainly the middle line here would be higher. But the sadness within the diary does not interest me here; rather I am interested in the way that I managed the more difficult feelings across the period of this research. Over and above those difficult emotions, then, the combination of the diary and my own good feelings soar.

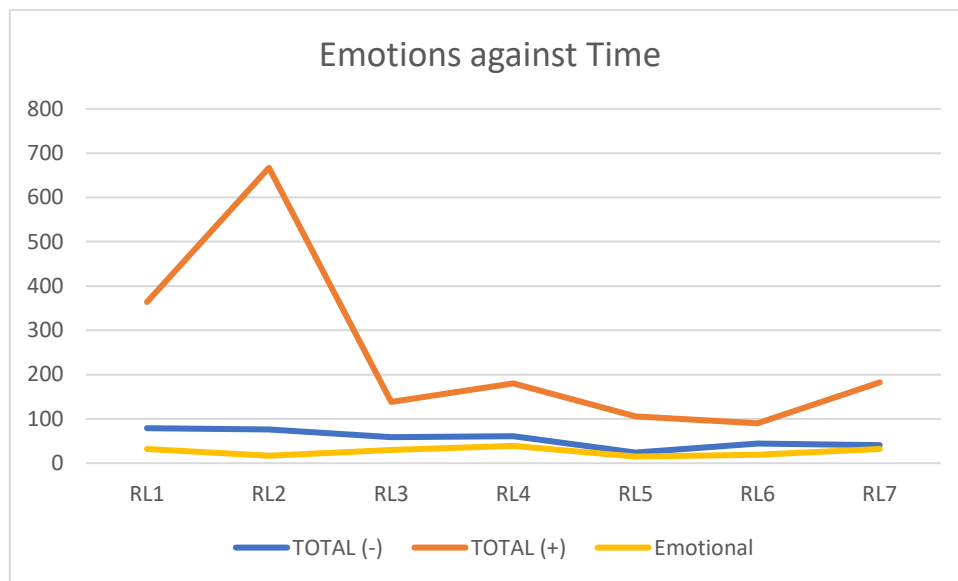


Figure 38. Emotions against Time.

So, this is the first surprise here: I am pleased to see that the positive feelings appear to have been experienced with greater frequency than the more difficult ones. The second surprise is the steepness of the curve in RL1 and RL2, entering into the research high and climbing higher as I progressed through the first reading of the diary. This surprises me because there was a lot of difficult material to deal within the diary, especially toward the end as it documented my father's final illness. The chart, then, might be a fair representation of just how much joy was documented in my experiences of being a stay-at-home dad and, as a result, how much joy I have experienced in re-encountering those experiences. As the first reading of the diary ended, RL3 returns to more of a baseline happiness, which would still include some mentions from the diary. The steep increases during RL1 and RL2 make me wonder if this wasn't possibly perceived as a difficulty, as the positive experiences it represents are far above the baseline, leaving a large surplus between my experience of the diary and the baseline experience. This might have been the cause which makes the darkest, blue line (TOTAL negative) swell ever so slightly upwards during RL1 and RL2, but such a claim of causality can only be speculative. The third surprise is almost aesthetic. I'm surprised by how this

chart seems almost to mirror my earlier chart, Pages against Time (see, for example Chapter 6, Figure 22). There's not much to say about such a comparison, perhaps, beyond the obvious conclusion that by either of these measures, the diary, both in its writing and its reading, represents what has been something of a pinnacle experience for me.

11. Ethics Applications

This research has been conducted in compliance with the standards of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). Application for ethics approval was made to the Canterbury Christ Church University first on 26 March 2020. This was Approved on 14 July 2020 with the Approval code Ethics – ETH1920 – 0212. An amendment was requested on 21 September 2020 and Approved on 27 October 2020 with Approval code Ethics – ETH2021 – 0034. These are available upon request from Canterbury Christ Church University, to the discretion of the holding body.

Participant Information and Consent Forms, plus an Overseas Ethics Declaration are immediately available, below.



The Education of a Stay at Home Dad

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by Tom Troppe.

Please refer to our [Research Privacy Notice](#) for more information on how we will use and store your personal data.

Background

The main aims of this study are:

- to discover the experiences of a stay at home dad as recorded in a diary over a period of 20 years
- to explore how these experiences describe and reflect upon the co-creation of one home learning environment
- to share the voices of a stay at home dad and his family members so that such experiences might be recognised within academic research in the field of education.

A preliminary review of the data contained within the diary suggests that all members of this family contributed to the co-creation of the home learning environment. As a result, I am asking for the consent of these other family members so that the extent of their agency and contribution might be more fully explored and accurately described and theorized.

No third party participation or external funding is associated with this research project.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be required to

- consent to the use portions of their story as recorded in this diary to inform the narrative of these experiences and their analysis
- contribute to the establishment of the boundaries of what may and may not be discussed in this research
- co-create an understanding of the meanings of these recorded experiences

To participate in this research you must:

- Be one of the natural children of the lead researcher in this study
- OR be the natural mother of these children.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in occasional conversations in which excerpts from the diary will be shared to elicit your impressions about recorded experiences. Due to geographical distance and the additional obstacle of the present pandemic, these interviews will be conducted by whatever means of telecommunication seems most convenient, including but not limited to email, WhatsApp, and direct messaging on social media. Note that such sharing of experiences and communication about them historically fall within the normal practices of our family life and that this research presents an opportunity for the expansion and enrichment of such practices. Consent is being sought to create an awareness that such ordinary exchanges may be included in the extraordinary context of doctoral research, its findings and analysis. The granting of consent is not viewed as a one-time event; rather, this document lays the groundwork for an ongoing conversation about consent.

Feedback

Participants will be provided with feedback throughout the duration of this research:

- The telecommunications methods for interviews as described above will in most cases create a transcript available for participant and researcher review.
- Regular family communication can be an opportunity to discuss the research, as desired or necessary.
- As chapters of the doctoral thesis are prepared, they will be shared with the participants for review and feedback.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The following categories of personal data (as defined by the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR)) will be processed:

- Name, age, sex.
- Race, ethnic origin, socio-economic class.
- Religious or philosophical beliefs.

We have identified that the public interest in processing the personal data is:

- Best served with a full and accurate description and theorization of the home learning environment central to this research.
- Personal data will be used to provide context for the experiences described and theorized in this research.
- It may be determined that some anonymization of this data may provide maximum benefit for all its participants. The form which this anonymization may take, including the possibility of fictionalizing the narrative, will be co-operatively determined by the consent of participants working with the lead researcher. In any case, the goal of this researcher is to protect the dignity of

all participants by revealing only what is necessary and beneficial. I therefore reserve the right to tell a partial story to preserve the privacy of all.

Data can only be accessed by, or shared with:

- The individuals central to this research project within the university, namely myself as the principal researcher, my supervisor, chair of studies and examiner.
- Because publication is an ethical goal of research, participants will be asked to help determine to what extent their story is shared in publication with or without anonymization.
- Due to the location of the participants in the United States of America, data necessarily will be transferred outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) to these participants in the USA. Therefore, this research will abide by the regulations governing research in the USA, such as the Common Code, as well as the requirements of ethical research in the UK and the British Educational Research Association.

The identified period for the retention of personal data for this project:

- Will be indefinite given the inclusion of personal data in the narrative.
- Alternatively, anonymization of the data by fictionalization of the narrative would limit retention of personal data to only the duration of this research project, which ends April 2023.

If you would like to obtain further information related to how your personal data is processed for this project please contact Tom Troppe at t.troppe246@canterbury.ac.uk.

You can read further information regarding how the University processes your personal data for research purposes at the following link: Research Privacy Notice – <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notice/privacy-notice.aspx>

Dissemination of results

The results of this study will be published as a doctoral thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a PhD and as such will be archived in the CCCU library and accessible by way of the British Library EThOS index. Additionally, portions of this work may be published in the form of conference papers, academic journal articles, or as a monograph.

Process for withdrawing consent to participate

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this research project at any time without having to give a reason. To do this, please submit your request in writing using any of the normal modes of communication described in this document. Such a request may be directed to me as lead researcher, to my supervisor, or to the Faculty of Education as detailed below.

You may read further information on your rights relating to your personal data at the following link: Research Privacy Notice – <https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx>

Any questions?

Please contact Tom Troppe at t.troppe246@canterbury.ac.uk or my supervisor, Dr. Paula Stone, at paula.stone@canterbury.ac.uk. Inquiries can also be directed by mail to Canterbury Christ Church University, The Faculty of Education, North Holmes Road, Canterbury Kent CT1 1QU.



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The Education of a Stay at Home Dad

Name of Researcher: Tom Troppe

Contact details:

Address: Canterbury Christ Church University
Faculty of Education
North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

Tel: Faculty of Education 01227 767700 or Dr. Paula Stone 01227 923840

Email: t.troppe246@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. (If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University Research Privacy Notice
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
5. I agree to take part in the above project.

MT
MT
MT
MT
MT

Name of Participant: Maximilian Troppe	Date: 7/30/20	Signature: <i>Maximilian Troppe</i>
Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher): N/A	Date: N/A	Signature: N/A
Researcher: Tom Troppe	Date: 06 May 2020	Signature: <i>Tom Troppe</i>

Copies: 1 for participant
1 for researcher



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The Education of a Stay at Home Dad

Name of Researcher: Tom Troppe

Contact details:

Address: Canterbury Christ Church University
Faculty of Education
North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

Tel: Faculty of Education 01227 767700 or Dr. Paula Stone 01227 923840

Email: t.troppe246@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

- 1 I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- 2 (If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings.
- 3 I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University [Research Privacy Notice](#).
- 4 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason.
- 5 I agree to take part in the above project.

MT
MT
MT
MT
MT

Name of Participant: Madeleine Troppe	Date: July 16, 2020	Signature:
Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher): N/A	Date: N/A	Signature: N/A
Researcher: Tom Troppe	 Date:	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant
1 for researcher



CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The Education of a Stay at Home Dad

Name of Researcher: Tom Troppe

Contact details:

Address: Canterbury Christ Church University
Faculty of Education
North Holmes Road, Canterbury, CT1 1QU

Tel: Faculty of Education 01227 767700 or Dr. Paula Stone 01227 923840

Email: t.troppe246@canterbury.ac.uk

Please initial box

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | G.T. |
| 2. (If applicable) I confirm that I agree to any audio and/or visual recordings. | G.T. |
| 3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential and in line with the University Research Privacy Notice | G.T. |
| 4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, without giving a reason. | G.T. |
| 5. I agree to take part in the above project. | G.T. |

Name of Participant: Gus Troppe	Date: 7/21/2020	Signature: Augustine John Paul Troppe
Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher): N/A	Date: N/A	Signature: N/A
Researcher: Tom Troppe	Date: 06 May 2020	Signature:

Copies: 1 for participant
1 for researcher



Overseas Ethics Declaration

**A declaration of compliance with appropriate ethical procedures
and protocols for research undertaken with human participants
in countries outside the United Kingdom**

I declare that I, Tom Troppe

have followed all the necessary procedures to ensure that the research involving
human participants I have carried out, or intend to carry out, entitled

The Education of a Stay at Home Dad

in the United States of America

between [start date] and [end date]

as part of my research project or research degree, conforms in full to the ethical requirements of that country.

I have acquired all the necessary permission from all the necessary parties with regard to access, use of research instruments or any other invasive procedures, and confidentiality.

I have made the purpose of my research appropriately clear to all the parties that I am required to, and have behaved appropriately in response to the outcomes of this communication.

I attach a copy of any regulatory or ethical documentation/certificates that I have had to sign or have been awarded by the jurisdiction within which I am operating.

In the US, research on human subjects is regulated by

The 'Common Rule' – described here:

<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/regulations/common-rule/index.html>

and accessible in its entirety here:

Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (in effect on July 19, 2018)

Title 45 – Public Welfare

Part 46 – Protection of Human Subjects

<https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi->

<bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=83cd09e1c0f5c6937cd9d7513160fc3f&pid=20180719&n=pt45.1.46&r=>

<PART&ty=HTML>

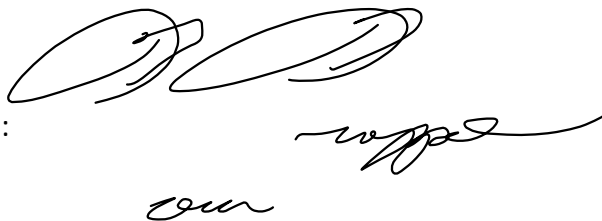
Guidance: Informed consent

<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/guidance/informed-consent/index.html>

While no gatekeeping or oversight is provided by any research body in the US for this study,

I am aware of these regulations and will abide by them.

Signed:

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tom Troppe'.

Date:

6 M 2020
ay

Completed declaration should be returned to the red.resgov@canterbury.ac.uk, and the Graduate School.

Researchers should retain a copy for inclusion in their thesis/dissertation.

12. 'The Dark Night' and 'Stanzas...' (St. John of the Cross)

THE DARK NIGHT (John of the Cross, 1991, pp. 50-52)

Songs of the soul that rejoices in having reached the high state of perfection, which is union with God, by the path of spiritual negation.

1. One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
--ah, the sheer grace!--
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.

2. In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
--ah! the sheer grace!--
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

3. On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

4. This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
--him I knew so well--
there in a place where no one appeared.

5. O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

6. Upon my flowering breast,
which I kept wholly for him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in the breeze from the fanning cedars.

7. When the breeze blew from the turret,
as I parted his hair,
it wounded my neck
with its gentle hand,
suspending all my senses.

8. I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself
leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies.

Stanzas concerning an ecstasy experienced in high contemplation. (John of the Cross, 1991, pp. 53-54)

*I entered into unknowing,
and there I remained unknowing
transcending all knowledge.*

1. I entered into unknowing,
yet when I found myself there,
without knowing where I was,
I understood great things;
I will not say what I felt
for I remained in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

2. That perfect knowledge
was of peace and holiness
held at no remove
in profound solitude;
it was something so secret
that I was left stammering,
transcending all knowledge.

3. I was so 'whelmed,
so absorbed and withdrawn,
that my senses were left
deprived of all their sensing,
and my spirit was given
an understanding while not understanding,
transcending all knowledge.

4. He who truly arrives there
cuts free from himself;
all that he knew before
now seems worthless,
and his knowledge so soars
that he is left in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

5. The higher he ascends
the less he understands,
because the cloud is dark
which lit up the night;
whoever knows this
remains always in unknowing
transcending all knowledge.

6. This knowledge in unknowing
is so overwhelming
that wise men disputing
can never overthrow it,
for their knowledge does not reach
to the understanding of not understanding,
transcending all knowledge.

7. And this supreme knowledge is so exalted
that no power of man or learning
can grasp it;
he who masters himself
will, with knowledge in unknowing
always be transcending.

8. And if you should want to hear:
this highest knowledge lies
in the loftiest sense
of the essence of God;
this is a work of his mercy,
to leave one without understanding,
transcending all knowledge.

John of the Cross, Saint (1991) *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Tr. Kavanaugh, K. and Rodriguez, O. Washington, DC: ICS Publications.

13. School Song

School Song

VERSE 1.

C FM7 C F G
 Saint Moni ca, our school is blessed to call on you in joy and confi- dence, that

Am G F Em Dm7 Em F G C
 As our pa- tron, you will hear and whisper all our prayers in Jes us' ear. TO REFRAIN

VERSE 2.

C FM7 C F G
 Saint Moni ca, please inter- cede with Jesus Christ, our friend in every need, that

Am G F Em Dm7 Em F G C
 AS we learn and grow and play, We might please the Lord to- day. TO REFRAIN

VERSE 3.

C FM7 C F G
 And when each day is through, St. Moni ca, we give him thanks three you, for

Am G F Em Dm7 Em F G C
 All our fam' ly, teachers, friends that Christ our lov ing Sav ior sends. TO REFRAIN

Words & Music © Tom Troppe, 2008

Carl Fischer, Inc., New York 12 staves - 96 sides AC112-Printed in the U.S.A.

REFRAIN:

FM7 G F C FM7 G F C



Saint Moni ca pray for us. Saint Moni ca be our guide.

FM7 G G7 Am Am7 FM7 Dm7 G6 C



Saint Moni ca we will foll-ow. Saint Moni ca we love you

14. Litany of the Diary

Dear Jesus.

knowing me as you do...

St. Casimir. Pray for us.
St. Anthony of Padua, pray for us!
St. Aloysius Gonzaga (pray for us)
St. Matthew, pray for us.
St. Ignatius Loyola, pray for us.
St. Alphonsus Liguori, pray for us.
St. Dominic, pray for us!
St. Lawrence, pray for us!
St. Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us!
St. Bernard, pray for us!
St. Pius X pray for us.
St. Bartholomew, pray for us!
St. Monica, pray for us!
St. John the Baptist, pray for us!
St. Ignatius of Antioch, pray for us.
Sts. Simon & Jude, pray for us!
St. Charles Borromeo, pray for us.
St. Nicholas, pray for us!
St. Ambrose, pray for us.
Immaculata! Pray for us!
St. Damasus, pray for us!
Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!
St. Antony, pray for us!
St. Thomas Aquinas, pray for us!
St. Blase, pray for us!
St. Agatha, pray for us!
St. Paul Miki & companions, pray for us!
St. Jerome Emiliani, pray for us!
Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us! St. Bernadette, pray for us!
St. Peter Damien, pray for us!
Sts. Perpetua & Felicity, pray for us!
St. John of God, pray for us.
St. Joseph, pray for us!
St. Francis of Paola, pray for us!
St. Martin, pray for us!
St. Catherine of Sienna (I've seen your head!), pray for us!
St. Matthias, pray for us
St. Isadore, pray for us!
St. Boniface, pray for us!
St. Anthony, pray for us!
St. John the Baptist, pray for us!
St. Thomas, pray for us!
St. Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us!

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, pray for us!
St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, pray for me!
Our Lady of Lourdes, intercede for us!
All you Saints, Pray for me!
Sweet Jesus.
For those of you...
Stay tuned.