

2013

I Am a Teacher Walking a Mile in Her Shoes: A Narrative Study of Teacher Identity

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I am a Teacher: Walking a mile in her shoes. A narrative study of teacher identity.

I AM A TEACHER
WALKING A MILE IN HER SHOES
A narrative study of teacher identity

By
Amy Parmenter

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Education Studies

At Lesley University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctorate of Philosophy

Abstract

Using an adapted life story interview process, narratives of six female mid-career elementary teachers were collected and analyzed. The stories describe the values and beliefs of these educators as they reflect on their experience being a teacher employed in one of three public elementary schools undergoing reform. Findings suggest professional development for teachers that cultivates a collaborative school culture and develops reflective dialogue and evaluative thinking is beneficial for schools in the midst of change.

Keywords: teacher identity, community of practice, learning community, life story, public school, professional development, reflective dialogue, evaluative thinking, change

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the product of a journey traveled not alone, but in the company of so many others. I am deeply thankful for the support I have received along the way. Thank you to the participants in this study, your willingness to share part of yourself made this research possible. Thank you to my committee members; Amy Rutstein-Riley, PhD; Nancy Wolf-Gillespie, PhD; and Joseph Petner, PhD, it was a privilege to have your experience, knowledge, and wisdom to guide me through this research. I am so grateful.

To my daughters, Casi and Alli, I am so fortunate to be your mom.

Finally, the opportunity to complete this course of study and dissertation was a precious gift in my life. My hope is that I will have many opportunities to use the privilege I have received in ways that benefit others, particularly people who are experiencing a loss of voice.

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Chapter I

Introduction to the Study

This study sought to explore how experienced public elementary school teachers negotiate teacher identity under the constant strains of school reform efforts and high stakes testing. The purpose for conducting this narrative inquiry was to listen to the stories teachers tell about whom they believe they are as a teacher and what they have valued about being a teacher during their career. As the researcher, I believed knowledge generated through this study would offer new insights into professional development for teachers and inform principals and schools leaders about developing teachers' professional practice. I used an adapted life story interview protocol to inquire about teacher identity. Participants in this study included a purposefully selected group of six experienced elementary teachers.

The first chapter begins with an overview of the background and context that frames the study. Following this is a statement of the problem, a statement of the purpose and the questions for research. Additionally included in this chapter is a discussion of the research approach and my own identity and assumptions as the researcher. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the rationale for this research study and definitions of key terminology.

Background and Context

Throughout the 20th century public education has evolved from single room school houses serving only about half of the country's childhood population in 1900 to 75% of that same population in 1940, and finally to a high of 96% of children by the late 1980s (Snyder, 1993). What began as a domain for individual state and local governments started to shift in the middle of the century along with the ever increasing

percentage of students attending schools. Since that time, schools and teachers have been under a growing amount of public scrutiny and a rising tide of standardization, accountability, and federal mandates.

In 1965 Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson passed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as part of his “War on Poverty” campaign. ESEA has been the most far-reaching federal legislation to affect education in the United States. The act provided an extensive statute that is responsible for funding primary and secondary education, and at the same time explicitly forbids the establishment of a national curriculum. It emphasized equal access to education and established high standards and accountability. In addition, the bill aimed to shorten the achievement gaps between students by providing each child with fair and equal access to education opportunities. ESEA was originally authorized through 1970; however, the government has reauthorized the act every five years since its authorization. Continually, it has been mandated that funds provided through ESEA be applied specifically to professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and for promoting parental involvement.

The next major policy announcement about public education came from Republican President Ronald Reagan in his 1982 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. *A Nation at Risk* listed 11 indicators that American public schools were failing and therefore jeopardizing the nation’s status as a world superpower. The report outlined five specific domains of needed improvement, and the commission made 38 individual recommendations. The magnitude of *A Nation at Risk* cannot be underestimated. This is the first time teachers were nationally criticized and blamed for

the nation's perceived shortcomings. This report set off a fury of efforts to reform education across the country, and this pattern has continued for decades. *A Nation at Risk* cultivated a sense of fear that Americans were falling behind other nations, losing its competitive edge in the world's economy. The following are the five specified areas for improvement in public education according to the report:

1. Extend required content in all high schools to include four years of English, three years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies, and one-half year of computer science. Begin foreign language instruction in the elementary grades and expect proficiency in a foreign language by the completion of high school.
2. Raise standards and expectations by reducing grade inflation in schools and by raising admissions standards at four-year colleges. Also, increase the use of standardized tests of achievement at points of transition such as from high school to college or work.
3. Increase the amount of time students spend in school to a seven hour day and a 200 to 220 day school year.
4. Improve the quality of teachers by introducing competitive salaries based on performance and require teachers to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline.
5. Develop leadership and fiscal support through new expectations that the Federal government take a role in helping meet the needs of key groups of struggling students such as those with special needs and the gifted and talented students.

Also to help ensure compliance with the civil rights of students, and to provide financial assistance to students after high school.

Republican President George W. Bush (senior) followed his predecessor in 2001 with The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB was a result of the reauthorization of ESEA, and built on the fear created by *A Nation at Risk*. NCLB included Title I, the government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students. NCLB is primarily about standards-based education reform, which is based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. NCLB required states to develop assessments in basic skills and to give these assessments to all students at select grade levels in order to receive federal school funding. Originally NCLB did not assert national standards and expected each individual state to set their own standards and achievement tests. However, NCLB again expanded the federal role in public education through requiring annual testing, annual academic progress, report cards, teacher qualifications, and funding changes.

In 2009, Democratic President Barack Obama passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and with it he initiated Race to the Top (RTT). RTT was another revision of ESEA. As part of RTT, the US Department of Education created a \$4.35 billion contest to encourage further reforms in state and local school districts. States were awarded points for satisfying certain educational policies, such as performance-based standards for teachers and principals, promoting charter schools, computerization, and complying with the first set of national curriculum standards.

In 2010, President Obama reauthorized ESEA and established *A Blueprint for Reform*. This plan outlined specific revisions, including providing federal funds for states to implement a broader range of assessments to evaluate advanced academic skills, such as students' abilities to conduct research, use technology, engage in scientific investigation, solve problems, and communicate effectively. *A Blueprint for Reform* stated that the school system would be re-designed to consider measures beyond reading and math tests, and would promote incentives to keep students enrolled in school through graduation rather than encouraging student drop-out to increase annual yearly progress scores (see definitions). The President's objectives also included further increasing the federal budget by \$3 billion to help schools meet the strict mandates of the bill.

Since the middle of the 20th century the federal role in education has continued to broaden: Federal dollars have greatly increased and federal demands have been strengthened. There have been other national trends as well, for example, the role of public education in people's lives has deepened and the expectations of schools have significantly grown. However, 45 years later we are still saying schools are failing, and students are not graduating with what they need to know to take their place in the world's economy. Simultaneously, what really matters for students living in a 21st century globalized world, has been overshadowed by misguided reform efforts that focus on accountability, standardization, and conformity. Former assistant secretary of education, Diane Ravitch (2010) describes these trends and claims;

What was once the standards movement was replaced by the accountability movement. What once was an effort to improve the quality of education turned into an accounting strategy: Measure, then punish or reward. No education

experience was needed to administer such a program. Anyone who loved data could do it. The strategy produced fear and obedience among educators; it often generated higher test scores. But it had nothing to do with education. p. 16

Statement of the Problem

Public schools in America are in a chronic state of reform. Since the middle of the 20th century, countless unsuccessful and unsustainable changes have been introduced in schools across the United States. Despite a few shining stars of individually improved schools, there has been little success with developing models for school improvement that could be replicated, disseminated, and brought to scale. Now immersed in the 21st century, the struggle to make substantial improvements continues, especially in schools where students arrive from high poverty communities (Ravitch, 2010).

A popular idea for reforming public schools in the United States has been to improve teachers. Reforming has been done by firing, hiring, and changing teachers, disposing of entire teaching faculties in a school district or even an entire city. For example, Providence, Rhode Island fired their entire teaching force in 2011 in an effort to improve their schools (Abel, 2011). This strategy contradicts the suggestions of Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) at the Institute of Education Science who suggest teaching experience is an important contributor to facilitating high student achievement.

The retention of teachers in public schools remains consistently low. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) reports teacher turnover rates are an increasingly critical issue for schools across the country. A staggering number (46%) of new teachers in the United States leave the profession within

five years. Urban schools, where turnover rates have risen over 20% in the past fifteen years, continuously struggle to rebuild their faculty (Carroll & Foster, 2010). The costs associated with high teacher turnover are often ignored or hidden from plain sight, unavailable to the average tax paying citizen. It would be impossible to calculate the total loss schools experience from teacher attrition, but estimates currently put the financial loss at \$7.3 billion a year (Carroll & Foster, 2010). Reform efforts continue to raise the cost of public education and yet still fall short of improving teaching and learning in most schools.

Teachers typically do not have the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue about reforming schools. The professional development teachers receive in order to be equipped to cope with these rising mandates is often ineffective. In a thorough review of the literature on the current condition of professional development for teachers in the United States, Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Adnree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) described teacher professional development as sporadic and not useful. Too often, packed agendas of tick-off items fill the professional development calendars of teachers and principals alike, leaving no time for reflecting on their practice or meaningful collaboration with their colleagues and school leaders. Program after program is layered onto teachers' shoulders. Scripted lessons intended to be foolproof tend to diminish the excellence each teacher is capable of bringing to the classroom, turning individual teachers into automated pilots and lowering the overall moral in the school.

In urban schools testing pressures have consumed schools causing students to panic and adults to react like prison guards, counting the minutes of perceived student learning. Professional development for teachers is not carefully considered because

testing dates loom in the air all year long. Leaky ceilings and undelivered teaching materials add to the pressures. Substandard buildings, often lacking basic technology, library resources that are inadequate to meet the challenges of large class size and the high percentages of students who are English language learners (ELL) and/or in need of special education services (SPED) add to the complexity of teaching life in an urban public school and to the public devaluing of the teaching profession.

School leaders charged with improving the instructional practice of their faculty get bogged down in technical communications and overwhelmed by the pressures to produce sweeping results overnight or risk sanctions under NCLB- corrective action, receivership, etcetera. Time carved out of already too tight schedules for collaboration often leads to resentment because teachers find themselves running from one meeting to the next. Despite knowledge of its effectiveness, teachers' opportunities for sharing practice and collaborating has declined in recent years and the reality is few teachers have time for collaborative planning and learning (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009).

The problem of how to improve schools in the United States is a peculiar one that will not be solved in this study. However, this research will offer a glimpse into the minds and hearts of teachers. As veteran teachers these women are part of a generation of educators who have toiled through NCLB legislation and standardized testing adulation, when many others have abandoned the field. In some districts teachers have endured intense scrutiny. This study asks elementary teachers to tell their story of *being* a teacher. What can be learned by listening to the voices of experienced teachers and to whom they believe they are as professional educators?

Experienced teachers, adults working in the field for more than six years, make up more than 80% of those employed in the teaching profession (NCES, 2010). These teachers are the keepers of school culture, a critical element to school improvement. They serve as the mentors, officially through funded programs and unofficially as they counsel and support their newer colleagues, passing on curriculum and instructional practices. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) defines veteran teachers as teachers between their ninth to 20th years of teaching. In *The Life Cycle of the Career Teacher*, Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) describe six developmental phases over the career of a teacher from novice through emeritus. According to their model, teachers who have completed their seventh year (but not before their fifth year), have reached the third developmental phase in their identity as a teacher which they label as “professional.”

The professional teacher is no longer an apprentice, learning the trade, he or she has reached a level of competence and confidence in the role. Participants in this study have a minimum of eight years experience teaching, focusing the study on those teachers who Johnson (2002) refers to as “the backbone of the profession” (p. 60). These are the individuals who tend to be casually expected to make significant changes to their practice (what they do in the classroom), often without having had the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue about the change, and typically after many years of using an already time-honored practice.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

This study connects adult learning and identity as it relates to the professional work of public school teachers by asking how experienced teachers negotiate a teacher identity. Identity shapes learning and at the same time is shaped by learning. In a

professional development situation, teachers will attend to, learn better, and carry out those practices that make sense to them personally. Teacher identity is defined as the stories teachers tell about being a teacher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Teacher identity influences the decisions and practices of teachers in their classroom.

It is not the intention of this study to cast broad assumptions about teaching practices that are superior or inferior in the classroom, but rather to better understand the role identity plays in the decisions teachers make about their classroom practices. If improving schools is done through improving teaching practice, then teacher identity development is a useful consideration for school leaders, coaches, and others who offer professional development to teachers. Through an oral history approach to narrative research, six experienced elementary classroom teachers story the course of their teaching career. In the context of this study these stories serve to document the importance of professional development for teachers, and the significance of the adult school community in which a teacher works.

This study asks;

1. How do experienced teachers negotiate teacher identity?

Because these stories are embedded in a time period where school reform and changing teaching practice is the norm, this study also asks;

2. How might teacher identity interact with change?

These questions emerged from a pilot study I conducted while participating in a program of doctoral studies at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Research Approach

After approval of the University's institutional review board, I began this study of the experiences, values, and beliefs of six experienced elementary teachers working in three different urban schools undergoing reform efforts. These teachers had been employed in a public school between eight and twenty-two years. This qualitative inquiry utilized narrative methodologies.

In-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. The study began with an adapted life story protocol utilized with two pilot interviews. After making further adjustments to hone and focus the interview questions, six teachers completed the interview process and member checks.

Researcher Identity and Assumptions

Research in the narrative realm is intrinsically interpretive, as Josselson (2007) tells us "The researcher's self, with its fantasies and biases, and horizons of understanding, is the primary tool of inquiry" (p. 538). Bringing transparency to my own identity as the researcher is one venue for opening up to readers the nuances for potential biases. From the moment a question is asked a study embodies bias; why that question and not a different one? The idea for a study of "teacher identity" evolved from the researchers experience leading whole school reform and her simultaneous participation in a doctoral program at Lesley University. My doctoral studies in adult learning, leadership, and program evaluation provided me with a new lens from which to view my work in schools. My identity is the primary reason this study evolved in the way it did. I had more power and influence over the shape of this research than the participating teachers, regardless of how much I worked to include them in decisions about the data. It is I who designed this research and made meaning from the literature. I am the one who

framed the research problem and developed the questions. In the likeness of narrative research, I must identify to the reader who I am in this study.

My professional identity brought me face to face with many of the critical issues in schools today, particularly urban schools. I saw the harried life of classroom teachers. I observed systematic flaws that separated teachers and vilified students. I witnessed egregious wastes of resources and time. At the time of this study I worked for a national nonprofit organization that facilitates whole school reform in public schools (K-12) across the country. I traveled between eleven urban schools in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine to rally the faculty and provide professional learning. My charge was to collaborate with principals to transform struggling schools around our organization's detailed set of principles and practices and thus improve achievement scores on state mandated tests.

As a doctoral student I was immersed in a wide range of literature. I was eager to be able to use new understandings about coaching teachers and designing learning for adults. I was blinded by the obvious as I took on my new role, adding a subtle dimension to my identity that indeed influenced this research. I immediately observed teachers, just like their students, being flooded with information, mostly trivial and unimportant to the real work of learning, and the opportunity for digesting the information and making meaning of it all was miniscule.

The participating teachers are all known to me, and the particular nuances of each of the schools and districts in which these teachers work are also familiar. I was in many ways an insider at each of these teachers' schools. But I remained on the peripheral edge, and fluctuated regularly to outsider status because of my role as a provider of

professional development to the teachers rather than an every day member of their teaching community.

I have known the teachers in this study as learners and teachers. I have seen each of them teaching students in their own classrooms, and I have led professional development workshops and meetings at their schools. I was never an evaluator of any of these teachers, but evaluators typically sought my opinion about teaching quality and participation. I always thought my rapport with teachers was the most important part of my job, and it was the part I enjoyed the most. I genuinely loved learning alongside these teachers.

Throughout the research process I continued dialogue with each teacher about her practice and her role in her school. Often new tidbits of information would push me in one direction or another as analysis emerged. However familiar the environment, I am not a trained ethnographer and total collaboration and insider status was not possible, but frequent communication was the norm throughout the study and adds to the substantive validity of the findings and what was learned.

Attempting to remove myself from the narratives was a critical first step, the irony was actually experiencing that it is impossible to do; with every strike of the enter key I was shifting meaning...was it further away from the (her) "truth" or closer to it? There will always be a gap between where others are and where they are represented as being (Geertz, 1988). However, ethical narrative research supports the narrowing of that divide. The oral life history questions and the frequent check-ins with participating teachers were designed in the spirit of staying close as a researcher, for the usefulness of my own experience of empathy making more visible each teacher's story.

My position as a narrative researcher insists that I remain mindful and make readers mindful of my personal perspective. Taking part in our urban public schools has exposed me to things not privy to all. An outcome of my experience is my deep concern for public education. During the analysis phase of this study the notion of empathy rose to the surface and became central to the findings, but a narrative researcher must ponder was it my identity that brought forth the theme of empathy? Who am I in this study? There it was; empathy, the theme of my own story. It was how I approached my work in the schools these teachers occupied, with the intention of empathy. I see myself in these teachers' stories, sometimes uplifting sometimes disappointing. I identify with the challenges and accomplishments their stories tell. Conducting this study let me walk a mile in the shoes of each teacher. The findings are the evidence of those miles.

Rationale and Significance

One reason for asking about a teacher's identity is to develop a more complete understanding of what it is like to actually be a teacher; to personalize teachers and teaching. In the field of education for example, life stories have been used as a teaching tool to develop better understanding of human dilemmas in context. Another reason to empathize with being a teacher is to better understand how professional development works in practice. Psychologists like McAdams (2001) use life stories to understand human development. This research makes no claims about best practices or what teachers should be taught.

Definitions of Key Terminology

- **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):** AYP stands for adequate yearly progress; a term used first at the federal level and is now part of legislature in Massachusetts

(MA) and Connecticut (CT), and most other states. According to NCLB, AYP measures the academic performance of individual schools and districts based on standardized tests. Both MA and CT use AYP scores to establish sanctions for underperforming schools, schools that do not make the AYP goal as determined by each state's Department of Education.

- **Turnaround School:** A term that caught everyone in the field of education's attention in 2009 was turnaround school. According to legislation, schools in the bottom five percent of the nation were to consider transformational options. Two of the schools in this study were labeled as turnaround schools. The third school was not a turnaround but it was under corrective action by the state of Massachusetts.
- **Tier N School:** The state of Connecticut instituted a three-tier system in 2009 to label schools' success on the standardized test. Tier three schools are considered to be failing, and districts are instructed to transform these schools. The elementary school in Connecticut was labeled a tier three school and a turnaround school; indicating its status as being in the bottom five percent of the state.
- **Level N School:** In Massachusetts schools were leveled on a scale of one to four; later changed to include a level five. One school in the study was labeled as a level 4 school; as such the district selected the turnaround status and 50% of the staff was displaced the first year, and an additional 50% were displaced the second year. The second school in Massachusetts was a level 2 school recently identified as in need of corrective action.

- **Common Core:** The Core was established in 2009. These two sets of standards, mathematics and English language arts, illustrate what the federal government expects from public schools. The CC was intended to provide a consistent and clear understanding of what students are expected to learn between kindergarten and high school graduation. The purpose of the CC is to establish what students need to know and be able to do in a 21st century global economy.

Summary

With reform initiatives looming in the air, the hierarchical structure entrenched in the United State's public school system continues to undervalue collaboration and to dismiss reflection and self-study as inconsequential. One of the results of this short-sightedness is high teacher dropout rates and soaring expenditures in the name of improving schools. Experienced teachers are a significant resource for improving student learning in schools. Yet, the professional development opportunities offered to teachers are only dimly effective in creating and sustaining changes in teachers' practice. Teacher identity, a factor in every teacher's practice, can be captured through life story research. This narrative approach has the potential to add a human dimension to professional learning and a deeper understanding of the value of the adult community in a school.

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how experienced teachers negotiate teacher identity. Furthermore, the study sought to understand how teacher identity interacted with change. A thorough review of current literature was essential in carrying out the study. The review began during the development of the research questions and continued throughout data collection, data analysis, and synthesis.

To conduct the selection of literature for review I used a variety of sources, including books, dissertations, internet resources, professional journals, and periodicals. These sources were accessed through academic search premier (EBSCO), LitFinder (Gale), Social Sciences Citation Index (ISI), and ProQuest. Throughout the review I attempted to identify and discuss relevant contested areas or issues as well as omissions in the literature. Some of the search words and phrases that provided leads to relevant literature were; teacher identity, teacher and learning, teacher and professional development, school culture, organizational culture, learning communities, communities of practice, teacher and experience, teacher and veteran, teacher and change, elementary teacher, women and learning, leadership and learning, and change and learning. Literature was evaluated based on its relevance to the targeted population, topic, and context as well as its theoretical framework.

This literature review explores the connectedness between teacher identity, professional learning, and communities of practice. Four major areas of literature were critically reviewed: (a) adult learning and development; (b) teacher identity; and (c) school culture and (d) leadership in a learning community. The review of the literature

on adult learning and development offers a framework for thinking about professional development for teachers. Teacher identity is reviewed to establish the meaning and value in considering its contribution to teaching and learning, while school culture and learning communities add a context to this review for where teachers work and must negotiate their identity. The literature review ends with a summary and reflection on the implications for this research. A final section describes the study's conceptual framework.

Adult Learning and Development

Adult learning and development is the foundation of this research. During childhood, the formative years, frames of reference are constructed and established through what we learn and what we experience. Adults then behave according to these deeply held, often unconscious beliefs about the world, and when these frames of reference are inconsistent, incorrect, or incomplete they can influence behavior sometimes below the level of awareness.

Transforming what we have learned requires the capacity to think dialectically, dialectical thought allows an adult to hold objective and subjective thoughts in tension with each other (Brookfield, 2006, p. 92). It is through this process of dialectical thinking that adults can critique these deeply held frames of reference. This process of coming to objectify our subjective thoughts, standing apart from our points of view and analyzing them is the process of critical reflection that can lead to transformational learning. According to adult learning expert Robert Kegan (2000), "It ordinarily takes the first two decades of living to develop these complex capacities and some people have not developed them even by then" (p. 61).

Kegan (2000) distinguishes clearly between learning that *informs* and learning that *transforms*. According to Kegan, learning can only be transformative when a previous belief already exists, stating that “if there is no form there is no transformation,” (p. 48) thus making transformational learning an adult endeavor. Adults evolve from one way of knowing, that is, an underlying meaning system, to another more complex way of knowing at their own pace and depending on the available supports and challenges. This form of development involves “transformational learning; a qualitative shift in how people know and understand themselves, their worlds, and the relationship between the two” (Drago-Severson, Helsing, Kegan, Broderick, Portnow & Popp, 2001, pp. 5-6).

This notion of questioning underlying values and beliefs was first described by Jack Mezirow (1978) in his qualitative study of adult women returning to community college to continue their education and the expanding socio-cultural awareness experienced by these women. Mezirow explained the ways in which these women questioned previously unexamined beliefs and assumptions and incorporated a modification of those beliefs into new, more comprehensive perspectives. According to Mezirow (2000) transformational learning “refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (pp. 8-9). Transformative learning allows us greater control over our beliefs and actions, permitting us to live with clearer thinking.

Mezirow’s (2000, 1978) original theory maps out ten phases of transformational learning. This form of learning begins with a disorienting dilemma. For teachers this

dilemma could be prompted by the adoption of a new curriculum or program, the introduction of new teaching practices, a new principal or team to work with, or a student who poses particular challenges to name a few possibilities. From this point the learning process turns to self examination and critical reflection. The person, or teacher, determines a change is necessary or welcomed. There may be a period of trying on potentially new roles, or practices in the classroom. Mezirow's ten phases end with the individual building confidence and competence in the changed behavior and eventually taking on a new perspective. Researchers do not all agree that every phase is necessary for transformational learning to occur, and some argue that phases may be skipped or repeated (Taylor, 2000). However, Mezirow insists it is critical reflection that allows us to change our personal perspectives (Mezirow, 2003, 2000; Taylor, 2000).

There are three forms of critical reflection: premise, content, and process. Premise reflection is the least common and yet the most essential to learning that transforms. Premise reflection is the "basis for critical reflection, [and] refers to examining the presuppositions underlying our knowledge of the world" (Taylor, 2009, p. 8). In a study of critical reflection among educators, Kreber (2004) concluded that "when learning about teaching, teachers need to begin with premise reflection" (p. 41). For teachers, these perspectives or principles inform their everyday planning and decisions in the classroom. How teachers interact with students, parents, administrators and each other is tightly embedded in these frames of reference.

Critical reflection is an important maxim for developing autonomy according to Tennant (2012) in his book, *The Learning Self*: "The autonomous self is characterized by agency, choice, reflection, and rationality" (p. 35). Tennant explains the interaction

between three dimensions of autonomy: political, emotional, and intellectual. Political autonomy is the ability to make decisions and choices without being coerced by government or other external authorities. Emotional autonomy refers to the capacity to be self-aware and to act on one's own feelings without being thrown off by impulsive behavior and reliance on approval from others. Finally, intellectual autonomy is about the ability to make decisions based on one's own personal experiences and available evidence. It includes the propensity to think critically and rationally without being influenced by prejudices. This aptitude for critical thinking is what allows a person to reason and to be able to readjust previously held beliefs and ideas when new information is introduced; it is the ability to revise one's own understanding and values.

The critical reflection criterion for transformational learning has been questioned by critical and feminist scholars. Brookfield (2000) insists critical reflection that is transformative must represent ideological critique and disbandment of the status quo in order to eliminate oppressive situations. Yet feminist scholars express concern that many adults have not had the experience of developing the capacity for critically analyzing assumptions in this way and that it should be explored further what learning experiences are needed in order to develop this capacity (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). Underscoring this concern by focusing on the marginalized and silenced voices of our society Merriam (2004) claims many people "do not have the tools they need for participating in the kind of discourse community Mezirow describes" (p. 83).

Feminist scholarship is important to this study of all female teachers. Furthermore, gender is important to understanding adult learning in the field of public education. Public schools, particularly elementary schools, are a gendered institution. In

2008 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported there were 3.5 million teachers in the United States and that approximately 75 percent of all public and private school teachers were female. When considering only elementary schools this number rises to about 85 percent female (n. p.).

The differences and similarities in women's learning has long been ignored (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1987; Hayes & Flannery, 2002; Gilligan, 1982). Women's learning has typically been left out of research or discussed only in relationship to the learning of men. The notion that women's learning is different than men's was first popularized by Carol Gilligan (1982) in her landmark study of the moral development of females, a critique of Kohlberg's phases of moral development which universally applied the perspective of privileged white men. The women in Gilligan's (1982) study described a world composed of relationships; the self is described through connections with others. During the 1980s, other researchers also began to portray women as connected and relational. Belenky et al. (1987) identified five ways women come to know, two of which involve connection; subjective knowing and connected knowing. Subjective knowing refers to knowing in relation to oneself, and connected knowing refers to knowing in relation to others. Although it should not be assumed that all women learn in and through connections with others, there is an inherently feminist perspective throughout this study.

Feminist theory suggests a narrative process to transformational learning. Narrative thinking is the process of storying, making multiple and diverse pieces into a coherent whole. Personal storytelling is a way of experiencing relational intimacy (Hayes & Flannery, 2002). There are specific narrative qualities to transformational

learning. First, transformation occurs interactively on a personal level as well as a social level, the traditional view only relies on the personal. Second, transformation occurs as a result of sharing personal stories. Furthermore, the learner must think generatively and critically, she must share her experiences, her criticism of the past with an idea for a better future, in a collaborative process. In feminist theory the narrative process of transformation is emotional, spiritual, and physical as well as the cognitive process described by Mezirow (Hayes & Flannery, 2002).

Teacher Identity

Identity development is a lifelong and multifaceted process (Erikson, 1980; Bruner, 1996; McAdams, 2001) that becomes increasingly complex with age and experience (Drago-Severson, Helsing, Kegan, Broderick, Portnow & Popp, 2001; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). While teacher identity is by no means the sum of an individual's identity, it does represent a particular aspect of identity, that of *being a teacher*, which has tremendous influence over what a teacher will do in practice in his or her classroom.

A focus on teacher identity in the narrative field began with sociologist Nias (1985, 1993), who listened to narratives of teachers for themes in their stories that characterized them as a group or demonstrated changes in their profession over time. Since that time, studies that view teacher identity through a narrative lens are not uncommon. There has been a narrative interest in how teachers new to the field form a teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Cook, 2009; Horn, 2008). A few narrative researchers have also investigated content-specific teacher identity, such as being a music teacher or being a science teacher (Brewer, 2009; Forges & Davis, 2008).

Narrative is well established in the realm of education and additional research through this lens is sought (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This research uses Horn's (2008) definition of teacher identity as "the way a person understands and views himself, and is often viewed by others, at least in certain situations – a perception of self that can be fairly constantly achieved" (p. 1-2). The teacher identities of the pre-service professionals in her study emerged from three worlds: a university class world, a field practice world, and a real world or lived history. Horn claims being a teacher is a continuous developmental process, and teachers arrive in the classroom with a set of beliefs about what it means to be a "good" teacher and who they believe they are as a teacher. What happens to those beliefs after teachers have gone on with the day-to-day experience of being a teacher for decades?

In Horn's (2008) study, identity was central in the minds of the developing teachers. The interns paid closer attention to information and instructional practices that fit with who they were as a person. For example, during a course on assessment Horn observed a teacher intern who claimed he would not give pop quizzes. Horn (2008) states, "In formulating his justification for rejecting the practice of giving pop quizzes, the intern makes an explicit identity statement: he is "not a scare tactic kind of guy." According to Horn, certain archetypes were already present in the minds of the interns. The images interns held of "good" teaching and what it means to be a "good" teacher had an influence on intern's learning goals in each of these worlds. According to Horn, pre-service teachers adopted, rejected, or modified teaching practices based on their visions of a "good" teacher coupled with their view of what was feasible for a teacher. This

research will explore how feasibility and personal vision fit in the experiences of veteran teachers.

Horn (2008) observed identification and negotiation as a process of learning that could “redefine interns’ teaching identities” (p. 2). The visions interns held about what made a “good” teacher and who they are as a teacher changed over time (Horn, 2008). As interns integrated the roles, meaning systems, or symbols they were being exposed to into their identities, Horn employed the label “identification.” Modifications on the other hand were the changes interns made to their identities as teachers because of what they encountered, and were labeled as “negotiation.” Essentially, Horn observed interns come into contact with a teaching practice he or she had not previously considered and either identify it as a fit, or negotiate how it might fit into his or her teacher identity. According to Horn, “The resulting newly modified identities changed their learning agendas, reorienting them to adopting or adapting teaching practices that had particular meanings associated with their newly modified teacher identities in that world” (p. 6). This research will investigate how this continues to play out once a teacher is a seasoned professional.

Teacher identity is a creative and dynamic process of becoming, represented by the stories a teacher tells about who she believes she is as a teacher. During the stages of entering the profession it is a continuous developmental process of identification and negotiation. As the teacher transforms from novice to professional identity continues to develop, development does not stop once one has achieved the employment status of “teacher.” According to MaryAnne Johnson’s (2006) research on the life cycle of a career teacher, “what teachers believe matters, and traditions that teachers value matter;

shifts in beliefs about learning tend to help teachers change practice” (p. 5). Experience through participation and nonparticipation within the available school community, and through everyday decision making in the classroom, continues the process of identification and negotiation of a teacher identity long after the internship is over.

A “social cognitive perspective” (Tennant, 2012, p. 88) of identity claims, “You come to be and know yourself through the eyes of others.” Social learning theorist Etienne Wenger (1998) explains that communities of practice affect identity development, are everywhere and we all belong to multiple communities. Yet not every group with something in common is a community of practice. A practice is a shared set of values, behaviors, beliefs, rituals, and artifacts constructed through a dynamic group process of reification (Wenger, 1998). Public school teachers in the United States share the practice of classroom teaching, particularly with the communities of practice at the schools in which they are employed. While participating (or not participating), teachers engage in narrative constructions of their experiences as teachers, stories about who they are as a teacher and who they are not. Participation, or nonparticipation in a community of practice “is both a kind of action and form of belonging” (p. 4), shaping who one is, as well as their interpretations of what they do. Wenger’s framework for the “social ecology of identity” shows how identity is continually formed and acted out through practice, see figure 1.

Figure 1

Identity				
Identification			Negotiability	
Identities of Participation	Identities of Non-participation	Mode of Belonging	Identities of Participation	Identities of Non-participation

Close circle of friends doing everything together	Experience of boundaries through a faux-pas	Engagement	Having one's ideas adopted	Marginality through having one's ideas ignored
Affinity felt by the readers of a newspaper	Prejudice through stereotypes	Imagination	Vicarious experience through stories	Assumptions that someone else understands what is going on
Allegiance to a social movement	Submission to violence	Alignment	Persuasion through directed experience	Literal compliance as in tax returns
Forms of membership			Ownership of meaning	
Communities		Economies of meaning		
Structure				

Social ecology of identity.

Note: Adapted from *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*, by E. Wenger, 1998, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, p. 190.

There are four possible ways to participate in a community of practice: as an insider, an outsider, on the peripheral edge or marginalized (Wenger, 1998). Insiders are those who are participators in the practices of the community, while outsiders are those who are not participators. Among the insiders of a community, two forms of nonparticipation are seen, which are peripheral and marginalized members. Peripheral participation is the kind of nonparticipation typical of when an individual first becomes a member of a community of practice, or is on his or her way out of a community (e.g. entering retirement). Marginalized membership is different than participation on the peripheral edge. Members of a community of practice who are marginalized are restricted from full participation that results in a kind of forced nonparticipation (Wenger, 1998). Marginalization in schools takes place on the individual level and with subgroups

of insiders. For example, an individual teacher may experience forced nonparticipation because of personal conflicts with other teachers in the building, or because her title or daily schedule restricts her participation. For faculty members of an elementary school, participation and nonparticipation in the community of practice influences the identity of teachers, the kind of teachers they believe they are, and therefore how they carry out their practice in the classroom.

Wenger (1998) explains that varying degrees of participation or nonparticipation in the process of identity formation is based on three modes of belonging to a community of practice: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement is a process of negotiating meaning, forming trajectories, and telling the stories of the unfolding histories of practice. Individuals develop their identity as a teacher through engaging with other teachers and administrators who are working in the building. It is through this immediate engagement that teachers begin to form and reform their teacher identity in a continuous process of social and narrative development.

The second mode of belonging in a community of practice is through imagining. Imagination is a necessary component for change; we need to be able to imagine what it would be like to adopt new practices. Imagination is a way of “expanding our self,” it is what allows us to take on a new perspective, take a risk, or see things from a different point of view (Wenger, 1998, p. 176). When teachers read, hear about, or see a teaching practice in use, they can develop an image of what it would be like to implement the practice. In the process of wondering about the teaching strategy and then either accepting or rejecting it, identity formation is at work. The teacher will either participate

(use the practice) or not participate (refuse to use the practice), and her teacher identity continues to develop according to her decisions.

The third mode of belonging is alignment. Leaders of all kinds, not only administrators, cultivate alignment in schools. There is power in alignment, but that power is not inherently good or bad. It is possible for a community of teachers to become aligned with weak or even destructive practices in the classroom. Alignment can become a collective force, “magnifying the effects of our actions” (Wenger, 1998, p. 180). Alignment is what allows teachers to work together toward a common vision. It is perhaps the most instrumental when it comes to school-wide change. When these three modes of belonging—alignment, imagination, and engagement—are working in unison “a community of practice can become a learning community” (p. 187).

School Culture

Every school community has its own organizational culture or group identity. In this study, school culture refers to the set of beliefs, values and assumptions that organizational members of a school (principals, teachers, coaches, etcetera) subscribe to publically (such as the mission statement) and privately (the way things are done around here). The norms and expectations at a school, often unspoken, can nurture or hinder the learning process for students and teachers alike. The beliefs, norms and expectations for teaching and learning are reflected in the school’s culture. This is not just echoed in the classroom between teachers and students but permeates schools, influencing decisions about all aspects such as, curriculum, discipline, parent involvement, and the professional learning of teachers. When, what, where, how and how much professional learning and collaboration takes place in a school system is largely dependent upon school culture.

Hoffman and Withers (1995) write, “The culture in which...learning occurs – the framework, atmosphere, environment, and set of circumstances – is the compelling determinant of the type or quality of learning” (p.463).

The culture of a school impacts student learning and achievement because it shapes and influences the way people do things in the school and in the classroom. According to Edgar Schein (2004) from the Sloan School of Management at MIT, organizational culture is the guiding influence of behavior, “culture is pervasive and ultimately embraces everything that a group is concerned about and must deal with.” (p. 85). School culture is the “narrative glue” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 97) that keeps people moving in the same direction. Beliefs that are collectively and individually held penetrate schools and school systems guiding the actions of educators and their administrators.

School culture affects how teachers experience being a teacher. Schein’s (2004) explanation of the three levels of organizational culture, “artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions” (p. 25) is helpful in considering some of the ways school culture impacts teachers and ultimately their students. Assumptions about teaching and learning, curriculum and instruction, discipline and development can seem invisible because they are deeply embedded in the culture of schools. Artifacts are not only tangible items, but include anything that can be seen, heard, or felt within a culture. Text books, classrooms, scripted curriculum, and mandated frameworks can all be seen as artifacts of school culture. Espoused beliefs and values according to Schein are found in the “strategies, goals, philosophies” and spoken “justifications” (p. 26). In elementary schools espoused beliefs are seen in school mission statements, websites, and

improvement plans such as teachers' individual professional development plans.

Through shared experience and common learning, members of a school community develop common assumptions that ultimately influence all aspects of life in school.

The dominant culture in American public schools was founded on a factory paradigm (DuFour & Eacker, 1998; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Senge, 2000; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Mitchell and Sackney (2000) explain, "the educational order in most school systems more closely reflects the clockwork model than it does the ecological model" (p.2), which has fragmented learning, alienated students, and disconnected learning in public schools from real life experiences. It holds a machine-like perspective of how children learn. Teaching is something to *do to* children, like winding a toy or growing a plant, and educating a child occurs in an assembly line-like process. Subjects are taught in separate disciplines; children are chronicled by grade level then tiered for instruction and behavior interventions. Human relationships, (i.e. school boards with superintendent, superintendent with principals and teachers, principals with teachers, teachers with students and families) are primarily authoritarian and controlling. In this school culture the notion of human nature dictates that people, especially children, cannot be trusted. Students and teachers can and need to be controlled through systems of rewards and punishments. When the right incentive is applied students will be perfect and complete, and teachers will produce children who get higher test scores. Well known educator, Parker Palmer (2007) points to the fragmentation of learning and isolation in schools, labeling the dominant culture in Western schools "a culture of fear" (p. 39). According to Palmer fear penetrates the Western education system, shutting down educators' capacity to teach: "In a culture

where fear is the air we breathe, it is hard to see how deeply fearful education is – let alone imagine another way to teach and learn” (p.39).

Education Leadership, a popular national news source for school leaders, published an article by Rutgers’ Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, William Firestone (2009), summing up school culture as “a pattern of shared assumptions,” (p. 672) and described the influences of culture from the district level. Firestone asserts that in districts where there is a “culture of accountability” teaching and learning are at-risk (p. 672). According to Firestone, an accountability culture maintains a well established hierarchy with power and knowledge located at the top, the professional learning of teachers is of minimal concern and professional development lacks resources and coordination. The role of the principal is to enforce and monitor the mandates from the central district office, and the focus of teaching and learning in the classroom is on raising standardized test scores.

Social science researchers Preskill and Torres (1999) suggest we are leaving the industrial era and have entered into the knowledge era that emphasizes the qualities of a learning community, which include “cooperation, collaboration, autonomy, being proactive, long-term thinking, and learning” (p.7). Reliance on control and competition are not working. This new era will foster relationships and support critical reflection on assumptions previously taken for granted. This shift in paradigm from a mechanistic worldview to a wholeness worldview has brought a new understanding of the significance of relationships and context upon the learning process for adults and children.

Notably, in a longitudinal study of the Chicago Public Schools, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) determined it was the quality of relationships in a school that determined the status of student learning. In schools where relational quality was strong students achieved higher on standardized tests, the gold star of education reform. Bryk et al. (2010) analyzed an extensive database about Chicago and its public schools assembled between 1990 and 1996 by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago while the district underwent extensive school improvement initiatives and determined “relations are the lifeblood of activity in a school community” (p. 137).

Leadership in a Learning Community

Learning communities have become a popular idea in public education since the turn of the century (Benson, 2011; Senge, 2000; DuFour & Eacker, 1998). In fact, so widely used is the catch phrase professional learning community that quality assurance is lagging far behind in most schools. In her unpublished dissertation Benson (2011) explores teacher collaboration in professional learning communities and concludes, “a focus on certain ‘results’ and the demand to achieve short term gains may impede the creation of successful, collaborative, professional learning communities” (p. 4).

Vescio, V., Ross, D., and Adams, A. (2008) investigated learning communities in schools and determined that in schools where true learning communities exist there are certain qualities in common. There are shared values among the members of the community of practice with regard to learning. A focus on student learning permeates the culture, and there is a collective view of children and their ability to learn. The members hold a common commitment to sharing practice and they engage in a continual

reflective dialogue with each other. The underlying assumptions of the individuals in leadership roles, such as principals and school coaches indicated that critical reflection with others on the knowledge teachers' gain in their day-to-day lived experiences is valuable, and that actively engaging in the community will increase professional knowledge and thus student learning (Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A., 2008).

The notion of a learning community suggests there is an element of care, for each other as members of the community and for the quality of work, the affective climate is affirming and inviting (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). In a learning community relational trust is intentionally nurtured, and leaders demonstrate credibility and authenticity through fostering leadership capacity in others, sharing power, and modeling continuous learning. To be a member of a community of learners is to belong to a network of relationships where individuals hold learning as a priority and care deeply about their own and each other's learning. Adult learners appreciate the feeling of a safe environment and may even require that in order to engage in critical thought. Rossiter (1999) explains, "When one can feel safe and secure, then – and really only then – can one let go of self defense and reclaim the energy necessary to attend to and engage with people, ideas, and perspectives outside oneself" (p. 212).

Leadership can be classified into two forms, transactional and transformational (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership limits relationships to imposing rewards and punishments, and does little to build consideration of others. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, embodies a unique ethic of responsibility. Transformative leaders take individuals into consideration, and seek to transcend their own self-interest for the benefit of the common good. School leaders who hold a transformative

perspective of leadership spend time coaching and mentoring teachers. Thinking about leadership from this point of view also means using distributive leadership strategies which help to make teachers more central to decisions that affect what is happening in classrooms and the content being taught. Complimentary with a learning community, Bass and Riggio (2006) explain: “Under the transformational leader, participation in the organizational efforts becomes an expression of membership and identity with a social collective” (p. 39).

Summary

Adults learn to behave according to deeply held, often unconscious, beliefs and values about the world. Changing behavior often requires dialectical thinking, where individuals come to objectify their subjective thoughts. This form of critical reflection on one’s values, beliefs, and assumptions is challenging for many adults but it is what allows a person to adjust attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors when new information is revealed. This understanding of how an adult’s values and beliefs impact what they do in practice, and how development often requires critical reflection on personally held assumptions and beliefs provides the foundation for making meaning of any findings from this research.

Identity construction is a lifelong developmental process. A work-related identity, such as a teacher identity, pertains to the values and beliefs a person holds about being a teacher. It follows that a teacher’s classroom practice is driven by her values and beliefs about teaching and learning, in other words, she is likely to carry out practices in her classroom that she believes are “good” teaching practices. For experienced teachers,

the school where they are employed holds a specific community of practice that influences and is influenced by each teacher identity.

The organizational culture of any school impacts the opportunity for professional growth of teachers. In the current study, teachers spoke about their identity in relation to their school's community of practice and the culture of that community. The traditional culture in schools locates knowledge and decision making in a top-down model, leaving little room for teacher leaders and expertise to flourish. Learning improves for all when a school's culture cultivates relationships and collaborative values.

Learning communities maintain a caring and collaborative environment. Collaboration is the norm rather than the exception. The organizational culture in a learning community intentionally and actively welcomes participation from all members. Leaders believe in the power of "we" and maintain a stance that encourages critical reflection on taken-for-granted beliefs and practices. A transformational leadership perspective is complimentary to cultivating a learning community.

Summary of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of any study is constructed by the researcher. It is the way the researcher weaves together the research problem, goals, personal experience, and selected literature to identify "something that is going on in the world, something that is itself problematic or that has consequences that are problematic" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 34). The conceptual framework justifies the research project and its design. Maxwell explains the methodological choices researchers make, as well as the steps taken for analysis should derive from the study's conceptual framework. A conceptual framework helps to focus the study and shape the research process, providing a way of organizing and

reporting the findings. The conceptual framework for this study began with my own experiences being a teacher and coaching teachers through whole school reform. I came to believe that a better understanding of how teacher identity is negotiated and how change intersects with teacher identity would be beneficial for principals and other school leaders charged with reforming schools.

This study describes teacher identity as an ongoing narrative construction that is best understood through stories, thus the study is embedded in a narrative design. This perspective led me to test and adapt in a pilot study the “Life Story Interview” (Atkinson, 1998) as a methodological match for data collection. Life story interviews engage participants in telling stories about themselves and their personal points of view.

Relationships emerged as central to participant’s stories about who they believed they are as a teacher. Literature on communities of practice supported framing teacher identity as relational. It should be understood that this is a study of women conducted by a woman. This is not a study that compares female and male teachers and the reader should remain cautious about over-generalizing that all teachers who are women would present similar stories of negotiating teacher identity, or assuming that teachers who are men would present opposing stories. However, this notion of relationships that runs parallel to teacher identity throughout the study is a feminist point of view.

Literature on school culture and leadership in a learning community support the feminist notion of teacher identity as a relational process of development. This connection between teacher identity and relationships led me to “The Listening Guide” (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Gilligan, 1982) as a methodological match for analysis. I believed a voice centered approach to analysis would compliment

I am a Teacher: Walking a mile in her shoes. A narrative study of teacher identity.

the life story interviews and allow me to mine the data in ways relevant to the research questions. The methodological design and process are described in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how teacher identity is negotiated by experienced elementary teachers, and to understand how teacher identity and change interact, “qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding” (Pinnager & Daynes, 2007, p. 4). I believed that a better understanding of teacher identity and change could be useful for principals and leaders engaging in school-wide reform efforts. Toward this goal the research addresses two questions: (a) How do experienced elementary teachers negotiate a teacher identity; (b) How might teacher identity interact with change?

This chapter describes the study’s research methodology and includes discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for narrative research design; (b) description of research sample, (c) description of the communities of practice, (d) overview of research design, (e) methods of data collection, (f) methods of analysis and synthesis of data, (g) ethical considerations, and (h) issues of trustworthiness and limitations of the study. This chapter ends with a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for Narrative Research Design

Research on identity development tends to be qualitative in nature because identity is qualitative. According to narrative theory, a person’s identity is directly related to a person’s life story; essentially identity is the story (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative research aims for depth of understanding. The purpose is to listen, not for correctness or “truth” but for the humanness that comes from wanting to understand a

person's position in life. According to Riessman (2008) "education continues to be an area for inquiry that includes teachers, children's and parents' narratives" (p. 77).

This research inquiry is not intended for making claims of causality, or to generalize across persons or populations. It is not the intention of this study to make conjectures about individual levels of effectiveness in the classroom. Generalizations about teachers or teaching are not a goal, and would not be an appropriate measure of the quality of this research. The inherent constructivist view in this study presumes no professional trajectories to be more correct or advanced than others, and no hierarchy of teacher identity has been sought. Narrative methodology is "more reflexive than procedural...good narrative research is conducted inductively...narrative research, with its contingencies and explorations cannot be controlled at the outset by observers in the same way as hypothesis-testing studies" (Josselson, 2007, p. 557).

Narrative researchers Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) locate narrative inquiry by four turns researchers take who endeavor this path: "The attention to relationships among participants, the move to words as data, the focus on the particular, and the recognition of blurred genres of knowing" (p. 3). Following is a discussion of each turn taken by the researcher:

1. Relationships

Relationships are inherent to studies involving human beings. When conducting narrative research, "every aspect of the work is touched by the ethics of the research relationship" (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). Before the start of the study I had a relationship with each of the participating teachers as a school-wide professional coach. I provided professional development regularly and had the opportunity to observe each teacher's

classroom practice and interactions within the community of practice at her school.

Already in a position of perceived power both as the researcher and as a school leader, special care to cultivate caring relationships and collaborate with teachers was taken throughout the study.

Narrative researchers endure a certain amount of accountability that researchers of, say, animals, are not subjected to. Human beings permit themselves to be vulnerable for the creation of the finished product, in this case the dissertation. Informed consent, the potential for harm, ending participation of interviewees, and representing the data are all considerations of ethical narrative research relationships. Frequent member check-ins, a standard of quality in narrative research, was the norm in this study. I learned that humility is a quality worth striving for as a narrative inquirer.

2. Words as Data

The words people use paint a vivid picture of the world they see around them. Narratives show a special kind of truth about the person telling the story, in part because the story is limited and structured by the vocabulary and means of expression available to the storyteller. Expressing identity through life stories has a long history in narrative research. Life themes, like lessons of a lifetime, naturally emerge as an individual tells his or her story. The findings in this study rely on the words participants used to tell their personal story of who they are as a teacher. Individual life themes emerged in the telling of those stories and I did my best to hone in on those themes, checking back with participants to ensure trustworthiness of these interpretations.

3. The Particular

The search for a grand narrative “and the capturing of the universal is an ethos that occupied all branches of the social sciences” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007 p. 22). Alternatively, this research was designed to capture the particular. Identity is undoubtedly a particular subject matter, as there are no two in the universe exactly alike. Furthermore this research is of a particular group of people, experienced teachers. The teachers are each employed in a particular setting, public schools undergoing reform in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The research was conducted during the close of the first decade of the 21st century (school calendar year 2010-2011), a particular time.

4. Blurred Genres of Knowing

Coming to know is more like painting a landscape than shooting an arrow. Even a teacher cannot assume it is her lesson that ultimately led to the student’s learning. The range of ways one comes to know is broad and uncharted. Accepting multiple ways of knowing is to accept findings of authenticity, resonance, and trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000). The value of this research is in the wondering and tentativeness.

Finally, a narrative design is appropriate for research on teaching and learning. In the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) describes the twenty-five year history of narrative research in K-12 teaching and concludes that narrative research is “well established” in the realm of classroom teaching and calls for new forms of narrative research “in particular to understand and represent teaching as embodied” (p. 373). Elbaz-Luwisch goes on to make this essential point, “the development of a narrative understanding of teaching follows directly from the realization that teachers are central to the development of curriculum and pedagogy;” (p. 358), in essence teachers determine what and how children learn in school.

The Participating Teachers

The subjects of this research are referred to as participating teachers. It is more truthful to say these teachers were collaborators, sages, and advocates. Therefore I refer to members of the sample as participants, a label more demonstrative of the active role these individuals had in the research. By first using a purposeful sampling strategy, “convenience sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 241), potential participants were approached through personal contact. Because I was also an educational coach I naively believed access to teachers across the country was possible. Recruiting was challenging. I realized financial limitations would prevent me from traveling by plane to conduct interviews. I began asking potential participants to complete an online survey so that I could screen for the following criteria:

- experienced teacher, between 7-25 years teaching experience
- currently an elementary classroom teacher
- currently teaching in a public elementary school

A second mode of searching for participants, “snowball sampling” (Paton, 2002, p. 237), arose because some teachers who completed the survey were excited about the study and offered to solicit another teacher they knew, one teacher posted the link to the survey on her Face Book page so her “teacher friends” could use it. Overall, the survey had more hits than completions and those that tended to complete the survey and want to be considered for the study were those teachers who knew me personally.

A final step of purposeful sampling, “critical case sampling” (Patton, 2002, p. 236) narrowed the potential pool of interview candidates to six. I noticed commonalities among some teachers that stood out and determined that teachers who were presently

School State and Grade Level	Participant	Grade Level	Present School Experience	Years of Experience
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working in a school undergoing reform efforts were more likely to have experiences with change that would come up during the interview and thus added this criterion to the sample. Further, familiarity with the participants emerged as a useful strategy for building credibility of the study because I was able to collaborate more closely with the teachers and understand their narratives more empathically.

The teachers crossed the grade levels from kindergarten to grade five, all women. They had a range of experience of 14 years, with the least experience being eight years and the greatest amount of experience being twenty-two years. This range of time excludes teachers who are not yet considered “veteran” professionals, and teachers who are within the final stages of their career and approaching retirement.

The Communities of Practice

The six teachers worked in three different elementary schools; all located in the northeast of the United States. The schools ranged in size from 329-426 total students. Three of the teachers were new members of their school community; they were at the end of their first year. The other three teachers were seasoned faculty within their own school.

Massachusetts PreK-5 (MAE)	“Lisa”	3 rd Grade	8 years	8 years
Connecticut K-8 (CE)	“Belle” “Mary” “Dana”	1 st Grade 5 th Grade 2 nd Grade	8 years 1 year 1 year	9 years 10 years 12 years
Massachusetts K-5 (MBE)	“Leah” “Ana”	K 4 th Grade	1 year 19 years	15 years 22 years

Two of the schools were located in high poverty urban areas, and one of the schools was located in a middle class suburban town with higher than average immigration. All of the schools were under some form of corrective action by their state department of education and two were labeled as “turnaround” schools.

Massachusetts A Elementary (MAE).

Total Number of Students	329
Minority	93%
Low income	95%
English as a Second Language	31%
SPED	20%
Level	4

Note: Adapted from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

MAE was the most depressing school I have ever been inside. Most of the windows were darkened by something that prevented the full glare of the sun, I never knew if it was a film over the windows placed there on purpose or if they were just old and murky from years of wear, nevertheless, the first floor windows had bars on them as did all of the windows in the stairwells. Oddly, the building had small stone gargoyles perched inside the corner bricks at each end of the hallways, giving the building a gothic-like appearance.

I spent over 50 days at this school during the period between September 2010 and June, 2011. I observed every teacher's classroom practice at least two times, often several more times. The principal at this inner-city school was in her second year. The school was filled with student work. A humble but beautifully created "museum room" elegantly displayed student work every month, the work of a few outstanding and dedicated teachers in the building. The school culture in this community of practice was extremely negative. During this year, the teachers were downtrodden. The faculty had a tendency to be cruel to each other. There was a sense of competition and bitterness that pervaded faculty meetings and school-wide professional development. The paraprofessionals had an unusual amount of power in this school, and their treatment of students was aggressive. Student behavior was dangerous; children roamed the halls, and fighting was the norm.

The school was labeled by the state with a "Level 4" status in 2010 and the district had selected the "turnaround" option, displacing 50% of the faculty each year for two consecutive years. The teachers were guaranteed a job somewhere else in the district, but the year began with 50% gone and everyone was fully aware during this year that by June, 50% more would be displaced.

Connecticut Elementary (CE).

Total Number of Students	408
Minority	95%
Low income	96%
English as a Second Language	35%
SPED	22%
Tier	3

Note: Adapted from Connecticut State Department of Education

Connecticut (C) Elementary was labeled a “turnaround” school by the state of Connecticut in 2010. The school campus had a unique challenge; C-Elementary was comprised of students in two separate buildings. Preschool through second grade was in one building; across the street was the second building with third grade through fifth grade down one hall of the school and sixth through eighth down the other hall. Each building had its own cafeteria, library and gymnasium; although the primary gym was not full-size, it was adequate. The upper elementary students shared common spaces such as the music and art room with the middle school students, while in the primary school the music and art teachers floated from room to room on a cart or utilized other “borrowed” space.

C-Elementary school transferred out the majority of its faculty at the end of the school year in June 2010. The first grade teacher in this study was one of the few teachers asked to return to the school in its new emerging formation. She had worked as a colleague with the woman who was now promoted to vice principal. The second and fifth grade teachers were both new to the school. The summer I met these teachers they were participating in a week long workshop that I was leading on classroom management and school culture. Their professional community had seen such a massive turnover in faculty because of the school’s status as a “turnaround school” that very few of these teachers knew each other. I spent sixty days in this school during the 2010-2011 school year. As a coach, I observed all of the teachers in this school in their classrooms on multiple occasions.

Massachusetts B Elementary (MBE).

Total Number of Students	496
Minority	10%

Low income	30%
English as a Second Language	15%
SPED	13%
Level	2

Note: Adapted from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Located in a suburb, MBE was also not making AYP. MBE was under a warning by the state, and would enter restructuring the following year if significant improvement was not made. The school building originally housed the town's high school in decades past; the large building was totally renovated ten years ago. The classrooms are large with ample storage space, a luxury hard to come by for teachers.

The superintendent and the "district" culture appeared by far the least concerned with MCAS and accountability norms. I spent thirty days in this school during the 2010-2011 school year. The teachers were generally pleasant to each other and to me, an external consultant and coach in their building. Some confide in me about various struggles with leadership, minor annoyances. Professional development in service learning and character development have historically been seen as important to instruction. There has been a total turnover in central office administration during the past two years. MCAS scores are not improving, and pressures are increasing but scattered.

Overview of the Research Design

The following is a list of steps followed to carry out this research design. Following the list is a more in-depth explanation of each step.

1. Preceding the framing of this research or the collection of any data a broad review of the literature on identity development and adult learning was conducted to note the contributions of previous authors and researchers.
2. A pilot study was conducted to test the usability of an adapted life story interview protocol for its effectiveness in gathering career stories from teachers.
3. Proceeded with outlining the process of the study and acquired IRB approval from the University to ensure the necessary standards were followed in protecting human subjects.
4. An online survey was designed and utilized to screen potential participants. The survey collected demographics and current employment status as well as some general perceptual information.
5. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled with ten experienced elementary teachers presently teaching in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. Ultimately two individuals dropped out of the study and two were eliminated with the intention of focusing the research. Transcripts were generated after each interview.
6. Initial analysis of individual transcripts began along with ongoing meetings with participants to check findings.
7. Analysis across all six narratives was conducted.

Literature review.

A thorough review of the literature began at the onset of the research project. The focus of the literature review was to gain a better understanding teacher identity and its

relationship with change. Three specific topics of literature were identified: “teacher identity,” “adult learning,” and “school culture,” during data collection the topic of “communities of practice” was added. Selection of literature continued throughout data collection and analysis, informing the study as it was conducted.

Pilot study.

Narrative methodology was appropriate for the research questions. The “life story interview” was selected as the primary instrument for data collection and a pilot study was conducted to test and adapt the questions for this study’s interview protocol. The life story interview was first developed by Atkinson (1998) and later adapted to focus on identity development by McAdams (2001). According to Atkinson and McAdams, the life story interview can be used to collect narratives about particular aspects of a person’s identity, such as a career role. In the pilot study the life story interview was adjusted to collect narratives that illuminated the part of a person’s identity that related to being a teacher.

Internal Review Board (IRB) approval.

Following the initial review of the literature and the pilot study, a research proposal was submitted that included the research problem, purpose, questions and methodological approach described in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to Lesley University’s internal review board. This research proposal was approved prior to collection of any data for this study.

Data Collection Methods

Life story research is about listening to the primary voice of the speaker and relaying that message as true to that person’s reality as possible. Three phases of data

collection contributed to my ability to listen deeply to the stories told by participants: (a) the survey, (b) the life story interview, and (c) post interview meetings. Checking in with participants as findings emerge is essential in life story research. This strategy adds rigor and trustworthiness to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained (Creswell, 2007). The study included ongoing check-ins with participants to ensure the validity of findings. It is therefore important to note that Phases II and III overlapped at times.

Phase I: The survey.

A preliminary survey was developed at the onset of the study and utilized to screen potential participating teachers (see Appendix A). The survey requested demographic information about the teaching status of each individual as well as personal demographics such as the number of years teaching. I approached and asked experienced elementary classroom teachers to consider completing the online survey. If the teacher completed the survey and let me know, I then asked if the teacher would share the survey request with one or more colleagues. Thirteen teachers completed the survey in full. Ten teachers met the original criteria for participation outlined in this study.

Phase II: Life story interview.

The study used an adapted “life story interview” process to gather data from experienced classroom teachers, according to Atkinson (1998), “the life story as a narrative form has evolved from the oral history, life history, and other ethnographic and field approaches” (p. 3). Atkinson, the original developer of this method for data collection, explained how the personal stories of any professional, including educators, is a potential use for the life story interview tool; “The life story of an educator (or a

political scientist, a physicist, a minister) might focus a majority of the questions on the category of career but also might include many that get at the essence of family dynamics, early education, characteristics and values...personal meaning systems, and tendencies toward any profession or worldview, exist in a social, historical, and cultural context” (p. 17).

I selected and crafted specific questions based on McAdam’s (2001) adaptation of the life story interview to frame my interviews around teacher identity. Prior to the interview process, initial meetings were scheduled to talk about the study, and acquire participant’s consent. At the start of each interview, I went over the consent form and answered any questions participants had about the study. Interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the participant, usually a quiet restaurant. I paid for all food and beverage costs during the interview, and care was taken to ensure each participant felt comfortable and respected.

Phase III: Post interview meetings and ongoing checks.

My ongoing dialogue with the participants had an important role in this study. I remained in close contact with all participating teachers. These check-ins offered collaboration and corroboration of the findings. As plot lines for teacher identity and learning experiences emerged in a teacher’s narrative, I would bring forward these ideas to participants for their consideration. On occasion understandings were discarded or not accepted by a participant.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

In any qualitative study, the challenge of data analysis is to make meaning of extensive amounts of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data for this study included long

transcriptions produced after the life story interview, researcher notes, and summaries from subsequent member check-ins. The interview data was collected from September, 2010 through July, 2011, the end of the first decade of the 21st century, and member checks continued the following six months.

There is a wide range of methods for conducting narrative analysis. In this study, identity is described as relational and developmental. First developed by Gilligan (1982) in her research on identity and moral development of women, Gilligan et al. (2003) describe the “Listening Guide” as “a method of psychological analysis that draws on voice, resonance, and relationship as ports of entry into the human psyche” (p. 157). This feminist approach to narrative analysis is rooted in understanding the identity development of women. As such, it makes sense to use the listening guide in this study for analysis of narratives collected from female teachers in a predominately female profession. Drawing on Gilligan et al., the following steps were taken and are described in detail below: (a) reducing the data, (b) listening for plot, (c) developing I-poems, (d) displaying individual narratives, (e) listening for contrapuntal voices, and (f) cross narrative comparisons.

Reducing the data.

“Data overload” is a serious concern for qualitative researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The life story interviews I conducted produced thick transcripts. I spent many months culling the data and many months familiarizing myself with the data in order to determine how to reduce the data to information relevant to the research questions. In all of the interviews there were points where tangential conversation emerged. I began by removing irrelevant stories from the narratives. There were points

in time when I removed myself from the data to relieve the sense of feeling overwhelmed by it all. In making decisions about condensing the data, transcripts from six participants were purposefully selected. All six participants were female teachers whom I had extensive experience coaching and facilitating professional development in their schools. All of these teachers worked in a school undergoing reform efforts.

Listening for plot.

The first step in the Listening Guide includes listening for plot and the researcher's personal response to the interview (Gilligan et al., 2003). During these listenings I attended to what was happening in each story, who was in each story, and the context in which stories were embedded. Repeated language was noted as dominant themes in the narratives. For example, one teacher used the word "need" repeatedly throughout her story of being a teacher. The phrases she used that included any derivative of the word 'need' (needs, needed) were coded "need." This initial coding was completed for all six transcripts.

A shared rhythm between the narratives emerged. Although there had not been specific instructions about where to begin their story as a teacher during the interview, every participant had begun by summarizing her pre-teaching experience; what led her to become a teacher. In doing this each participant demonstrated looking back at her lived experience and making meaning from that experience about who she is now as a teacher and why. These pre-teacher stories were described like a rationale for who each participant believed she was as a teacher. After noticing this connection I organized each narrative into only three chapters; *who I was, who I am, and who I will be* [as a teacher], and reflected on the data in this form.

Throughout this step I made note of my own thoughts and feelings in association with listening to the interview. This documentation assisted me in remaining mindful of my relationship with the participant and the participant's school community or other individuals mentioned in the stories. Recurring themes were shared with participants and feedback was requested as possible plot lines for teacher identity began to emerge.

Developing I-poems.

The second step in the Listening Guide is to focus on the first person voice of the speaker. Gilligan et al. (2003) suggest this step is crucial to this relational process of analysis because it "is a way of coming into relationship that works against distancing ourselves from that person in an objectifying way" (p. 162). Following this methodology, I extrapolated from each transcript the statements participants made using the pronoun "I" and isolating each I-statement on its own line. At first I did not remove any of the teacher's spoken words but simply began each new line with a new statement. Then I reduced each line to simply the pronoun I and whatever the speaker said immediately following it to defining the pronoun. For example,

Original transcript.

We were trying to design curriculum for ancient world study for fourth grade. I don't think I would ever get to the idea of a theme like that, like this big idea that everything was built around rivers. I just wanted to talk about the Nile River and their civilization, then Mesopotamia, and then whatever civilization came next on the list. I didn't realize these Rivers were connected and that's how civilization began, around rivers. I learned something from them. I was able to take my

curriculum design to a totally different level. Now there could be theme, and everything was not just separate entities. That was something really huge.

First iteration.

I don't think

I would ever get to the idea of a theme like that, like this big idea that everything was built around rivers.

I just wanted to talk about the Nile River and their civilization, then Mesopotamia, and then whatever civilization came next on the list.

I didn't realize these Rivers were connected and that's how civilization began, around rivers.

I learned something from them.

I was able to take my curriculum design to a totally different level.

Second iteration.

I don't

I would

I just

I didn't

I learned

I was able

Displaying individual narratives.

According to Miles and Humberman (1994) “as with data reduction, the creation and use of displays is not separate from analysis, it is a *part* of analysis” (p. 11). I returned to the first iteration in the previous step and etched away at the words more

slowly, honing in on the speaker's message. As the essence of each teacher identity rose to the surface, check-ins with participants ensured the I-poems were aligned with each participant's perception of herself as a teacher.

Listening for contrapuntal voices.

The next step I took was to reread each transcript several additional times while listening for contrapuntal voices. Contrapuntal voices are the hidden voices within a narrative that offer a counterpoint for analysis. Stories are multifaceted, and people tend to express more than one way of thinking and feeling about a situation. According to Gilligan et al. (2003), contrapuntal voices help researchers to understand the layers of a person's experience. Following Gilligan et al., the selection of what voices to listen for were guided by the research questions and by questions raised during previous readings. To better understand the relationship between change and teacher identity, I listened for the voices of continuity and change. Completing this step, I listened for voices of alignment and marginalization with the participant's community of practice.

Cross narrative comparisons.

All of the teachers spoke about learning experiences over the course of their careers in the context of a school's community of practice. I segmented the narratives into learning experiences and compared the sense of alignment or misalignment between each teacher identity and her community of practice in light of the learning experience. I then compared the narratives for each participant's experience with participation and non participation in these communities of practice.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers must be concerned with ethical issues and consideration for the participants of the study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). According to Atkinson (1998), “The ethics of doing life story research are all about being fair, honest, clear, and straightforward” (p. 36). Human participants deserve, and the researcher is responsible for providing, information about the study and protection from harm. It is the researcher’s role to explain the purpose of the study and to ensure participants are willingly volunteering to participate. Life story interviews are not likely to be harmful but I provided safeguards to ensure participants were protected and remained anonymous throughout the study and from any subsequent review of the study.

The first step in ensuring no harm would come to any participant in the study was acquiring informed consent (see Appendix C). I explained the process and purpose of the study to each potential participant and received written consent to proceed. Second, I was committed to keeping the names of the participants and the schools where they worked confidential. Caution was taken to secure the storage of the data and no person had access to this material. Finally, throughout the process of reporting the findings, I was careful to eliminate any identifying characteristics in the narratives.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In any study design bias exists (Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers, like researchers of quantitative studies, must seek to control for potential biases or make transparent those that might be present throughout implementation and analysis of the study. As stated in this chapter’s rationale for a narrative research design, this study does not seek to make generalizations about teacher identity. It would be futile to seek to

generalize about the particular and it has been explained that identity is indeed particular. Nor does this study seek to consider causality or typologies.

Life story research is conducted for the purpose of understanding lives in context. The life story offers a way to “step inside the personal world of the storyteller and discover larger worlds” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 224). Life stories hold a particularly unique truth to the person telling the story. It is one’s perception of what has taken place and the meaning that is derived is uniquely one’s own. This is not to say that there is no reality to a story, but rather to state that the story needs to resonate as true with the person doing the telling of the story. The standard for reliability and validity lies in the mind of the storyteller; “reliability and validity are not necessarily the appropriate valuative standards for a life story interview” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 59). The life story seeks personal perspective, a personal truth. Therefore, this section will address four modes of trustworthiness in this study: (a) internal consistency, (b) corroboration, (c) persuasion, (c) credibility, and (d) empathic neutrality.

Internal consistency.

Because narrative research, particularly life story research, does not seek standards of generalizability and there are “no set of formal procedures for determining narrative validity,” according to Atkinson (1998), “one of the most important controls is internal consistency” (p. 60). While a person may interpret a given life story differently over time, the story told within the interview session should remain “consistent within itself” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 60). There should be a sense of sequence and directionality in the narrative. The narrative must make sense and be able to stand alone. An exact reporting of historical truth is not what is sought. Internal coherence of a person’s lived

experience take precedence. It is understood that what the reader is getting is not the whole truth, rather it is the story the participant wanted to tell, her perception of reality.

Corroboration

The process of this study was a collaborative one as corroboration requires. The role of the researcher is to capture participants' stories for others to witness and honor. Collaboration with participants during analysis is another effective measure of validity and trustworthiness within the life story interview process, "the storyteller is, after all, the first author" of the narrative (Atkinson, 1998, p. 61). As has been described throughout this chapter, follow up meetings with participants were ongoing throughout the process of analysis allowing me to check in as new understandings emerged from the data. Participants read transcripts, discussed emerging themes and contributed to my developing understanding throughout the process of analysis. In addition, I maintained notes on my thoughts and feelings while listening to the recorded interviews as well as during the follow up meetings with participants.

Persuasion

Atkinson (1998) tells us that "persuasion is an objective measure in which the life story seems reasonable and convincing to others" (p. 61). In other words, the narrative is believable. The context each teacher described is familiar to me which allowed me to reflect on the plausibility of each narrative. The reader must now determine if the experiences described resonate as believable stories of teacher identity.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is about ensuring the researcher followed dependable procedures that could be followed and replicated. This is not to say another

researcher would find precisely the same results. Life story research is subjective, and the individual researcher conducting the study brings her own identity and experiences into making meaning from the data; “One of the few points of agreement in narrative analysis is that the interpretation of life stories is highly individualized and very subjective” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 73). The telling of the story is a process of meaning making in and of itself, thus even the storyteller could relay her story differently if she were to tell it again (Atkinson, 1998).

Selecting a methodology that is well established, following a systematic process of data collection and analysis, and describing the details of that process are strategies for ensuring dependable, credible, and confirmable results in narrative research (Patton, 2002, Shenton, 2004). As explained, I adopted Atkinson’s (1998, 2007) Life Story Interview for data collection. During analysis I adopted Gilligan et al.’s (2003) Listening Guide as a protocol for focusing on the first person voices of the participants in the sample. Both of these methods have been utilized in narrative research and are recognized in the field of narrative studies. Further, I have explained throughout this report the design and implementation of the study, the details of gathering data, and the process taken for analysis.

Another strategy used in this study was the purposeful selection of participants. The study began with a slightly larger sample but ultimately I decided it was prudent to include only those participants whom I was familiar with and had first hand knowledge and experience with the culture and other members of the teachers’ school. Teacher identity is socially constructed and this familiarity allowed the researcher to reflect with participants on the school community as a whole. Shenton (2004) claims this strategy

builds credibility of the research because the study participants are known to the researcher and a “relationship of trust between the parties” has already been developed (p. 65).

Empathic Neutrality

Patton (2002) describes empathy and neutrality as two qualities essential to the qualitative researcher. “Empathic neutrality,” according to Patton is a philosophical stance expected in qualitative research. This means the researcher “does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths...rather the investigator’s commitment is to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to conclusions offered” (p. 51). Throughout conducting this study and in the writing of this report, I have sought to reserve judgment and to be open to participant’s own interpretations of who they are as a teacher and how they experience change in that role. As described by Atkinson (1998), listening to a person’s story about who they believe they are and who they believe they have been, is deeply personal and perhaps both researcher and storyteller are never the same once the story has been told and heard; “it is a sacred moment that is shared” (p. 65).

Perhaps the best measure of quality for this research is the reader’s experience of empathy. Empathy is what human beings experience when they see themselves in someone else; when they *walk a mile in her shoes*. Empathy is not sympathy; sympathy is a sense of feeling sorry for someone, empathy is a sense of understanding someone. Patton’s (2002) discussion of empathy is worth noting:

The value of empathy is emphasized in the phenomenological doctrine of *Verstehen* that undergirds much qualitative inquiry. *Verstehen* means “understanding” and refers to the unique human capacity to make sense of the world. This capacity has profound implications for how one studies human beings. The *Verstehen* doctrine presumes that since human beings have a unique type of consciousness, as distinct from other forms of life, the study of human beings will be different from the study of other forms of life and nonhuman beings. The capacity for empathy, then, is one of the major assets available for human inquiry into human affairs. (p. 52)

Empathy, in this study, is how the reader comes to know these teachers, and what it would be like to be a teacher in a 21st century public elementary school undergoing reform (for example all schools are charged with adopting the Common Core, a tiered system of response, and a new educator evaluation system).

Limitations of the Study

This study contains limiting conditions, some of which are inherent in the research design. Unique features of narrative research and the life story methodology present potential limitations in its usage. Careful consideration has been given to ways of accounting for these limitations and to ways of minimizing their impact. Because life story research seeks to display truth as it is seen from the eyes of the study participants, this bias is ever present in the findings and conclusions. The subjectivity presented by these issues is a key limitation of this study. Therefore, there is an overriding concern for the assumptions, interests, and perceptions of the participants and of myself.

The research sample is restricted. The context of this study (i.e. elementary schools, where 85% of teachers are women) led the researcher to select all female participants. The study is also feminist in its design. A feminist bias influenced the selection of methodologies and literature selection. In addition to gender, the research sample is further restricted based on class and race. Investigating issues of race and class are not within the scope of this study despite their obvious presence and the clear need to pursue this line of inquiry in schools. This study is limited to a white, middle class, female point of view.

The familiarity I shared with participants is another limitation of the study. Because the participants knew me as a leader and coach in their schools, it is possible their responses were influenced. Participants may have tried harder to appear cooperative, or may have tried to answer questions in ways they believed would be helpful. On the other hand, it is also possible participants could have felt more guarded because of their familiarity, and they may have withheld responses that could be deemed unfavorable. The methodological concerns for internal consistency, persuasion, corroboration, credibility, and empathic neutrality help to guard against these biases.

I took steps to reduce the impact of these limitations. The first step was to acknowledge these limitations and to state up front the assumptions and identity of the researcher. To lessen researcher bias during data analysis, narrative plot lines were shared with participants for their feedback, and emerging themes were discussed during check-in meetings. I continued to reflect throughout the study on how and in what ways I might be influencing participants and made a conscience attempt to create an environment that supported open and honest dialogue.

As a result a critique of this study might be the limited possibility of generalizing to other teachers and schools. As stated earlier in this chapter, generalizability was not a goal of this study. Instead the researcher sought understanding of personal perspective and personal truth. Descriptions of the schools these participants taught in serve to provide a more specific context to their stories offering the potential for transferability. These participants were not merely experienced teachers in any elementary school; they were teachers working in schools undergoing a reform agenda, and within specific communities of practice, each with their own dynamics and nuances. Different individuals, teaching in different environments would be likely to yield different results.

Summary

This study asks about identity development of experienced public elementary school teachers in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The narrative framework and design is consistent throughout the study. Narrative research is focused on depth over breadth, and standards for the study of life stories indicate participant authority and collaboration as the measures of quality. I participated in an ongoing dialogue with participants about the emerging ideas in the study. The purpose for conducting life story research with experienced public elementary school teachers is to establish a better understanding of what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century era of school reform. Life stories “give the person the opportunity to tell his or her story, the way he or she chooses to tell it, so we can learn from their voice, their words, their subjective meaning of their experience of life” (Atkinson, 2007, p. 233).

Chapter IV

Presentation of the Narratives

The purpose of this study was to explore with a sample group of experienced elementary teachers their experiences negotiating teacher identity, and how teacher identity interacts with change. The study was based on the following two questions:

1. How do experienced elementary teachers negotiate teacher identity?
2. How might teacher identity interact with change?

I believed that a better understanding of teacher identity and development could inform principals, superintendents, educational consultants, coaches and other mentors who have been charged with leading change and school-wide reform. This chapter presents the narratives obtained from life story interviews with six experienced elementary teachers working in schools undergoing reform efforts.

The presentation of each teacher identity is in the first person voice of each individual teacher. Prior to the start of each narrative I offer a brief introduction to the teacher and describe her school community to prepare the reader to more fully grasp the essence of each teacher's story. I also briefly interject between sections of each teacher's narrative to continue to help the reader anticipate the context of the story. According to Ely (2010), "the selection of voice must be a purposeful act...it is as blind to overwrite in first person as it is narrow to stick obsessively with third" (p. 575). My description of the teacher within the context of her school is displayed in prose while the teacher's first person narrative has been displayed in more of a poetic form. The chapter concludes with a summary.

"Lisa"

I have something to share.

I met Lisa during her eighth year as a grade three teacher. She was working in an urban elementary school located in Western Massachusetts. Her bubbly personality and constant smile on her face caught my attention. Regardless of whom Lisa was speaking to her smile shined, disarming her colleagues who had a tendency to be less than kind. The culture of the school where Lisa worked was extremely negative and could even be described as toxic. Teachers strolled in late, failed to show up for particular duties or responsibilities that were in place to safeguard students, and generally demonstrated a lack of respect for each other's personhood by screaming at each other and the students.

This was Lisa's first school of employment, and she had worked with a partner teacher since the start of her career. Paired with a teacher for English Language Learners, she turned to this woman for a mentoring relationship. After a few years, Lisa took on a novice English Language Learner (ELL) co-teacher only a couple of years younger than herself, and the two women continued to work together for several years becoming quite close as colleagues and friends. Lisa and her third grade teaching partners were often sarcastically referred to as "The Dream Team," by her increasingly resentful colleagues.

Lisa and her team deeply engaged in the professional development that was offered. Her style was to do everything she could to enhance her practice. A year before I met Lisa, she and her team won a grant from the notable "Fund for Teachers" organization. Awarded \$10,000 for their proposal to study "biomes," she and her two colleagues traveled across the country camping in rural parts of America to experience first hand a wide range of biomes. The central purpose of their research was to develop a

unit for their third grade students. When I met Lisa, the work of her students was “published” in the school’s “museum,” and it was remarkable; broad in scope including art, literature, writing, science, and history. During the time Lisa participated in this study she entered into a significant transition as a teacher; she was leaving the only school she had ever worked in for a position with a “turnaround” school in Connecticut.

Coming to the Teaching Profession: *I decided I really wanted to teach.*

Lisa entered college thinking she wanted to be a Veterinarian. It was not long after she began that she realized the academic content of this field was not something she was truly interested in learning about. She attributed her poor performance in school to a lack of care about the subject of study. The courses she enjoyed were based on themes of social justice and this led her to apply to the education department at her university.

I don't remember when
I decided to go into teaching.
I was pre-vet
I wanted to be a veterinarian.
I realized all I wanted to do is play with the animals.
I didn't actually care
I just wanted to play with them and pet them.
I realized
I was not going to be a veterinarian.
I was always a swimmer
I had blew out my shoulder
I wasn't able to swim anymore.
I started teaching swim lessons
I think that's what got it going.
I was undecided
I didn't know what to do.
I decided
I really wanted to teach
I think because of the classes in education
I had taken just for the heck of it
all focused on social justice
I felt like
I thrived in that.

I was going through a lot of personal stuff
my grades were abysmal
they really were horrible
I would look at my report card
my education grades were all As.
Every class I took in education
I was able to ace
I think it was interest level
I just loved it
I realized.
I applied to the masters program
I was still an undergraduate.
The day of my interview
I had to leave in the middle of class
I told my professor
she ripped off a piece of paper
wrote me a *recommendation note*
right there on the spot
to bring with me to the interview.
They interviewed me
their concerns were with my early GPA.
I explained that my father passed away
I was able to explain that to them
they accepted me.

Learning Experience: *Teaching is intense and worth it...it was no joke.*

Lisa described her preparation at the university she attended to be well suited for becoming a teacher. She recalled the program being intensely demanding and now with her years of experience being a teacher she looked back and determined that intensity helped to prepare her for teaching in an urban school.

It was a one year full time experience to get my Masters.
It was intense
they called it an intensive program
that's why they were very careful about who they brought in
it's no joke
there was a person in each of the four cohorts
didn't make it,
just didn't do it,
a cohort was only about twenty people.
They're not joking around with what they're doing,

again it e was surrounded by social justice themes
There was daily time in the classroom and the class,
the program was full-time
five days a week in the classroom
three days a week there was class afterwards.
I worked on top of it all.
It was really, really intense
it was really the perfect first chapter
it was crazy
it was hard
it was worth it
taught me right off the bat
teaching is hard work
it's worth it
it's worth putting the time into it.

Learning Experience: *Every day something ridiculous would happen...it was a joke.*

During her first few years teaching Lisa experienced nothing short of what could be called chaos. Her career as a teacher began in an extremely challenging school that was just beginning a series of major transitions. She described feeling awestruck by the disciplinary issues in the school and the ineffectiveness of the vice principal (VP) and other leaders to manage the students and teachers alike.

The VP made my life hell
The first two years were tough.
I think because of my Masters experience
I made it through.
Because of my masters
Because I was put in a classroom with [experienced teacher]
who was an ELL teacher
she became my mentor.
Pretty much every day something ridiculous would happen.
She would just look at me,
“it’s not like this everywhere,
do not think this is teaching.”
She feared that I would quit
it was just that bad.
I had a pretty small class
but [school] was insane at the time.

Kids roaming the hallways was nothing
administration didn't know how to handle it.
I had a kid that would threaten to hurt other kids
he would threaten to leave the building
it scared the heck out of me
a child I was responsible for
threatening to leave the building
[school] was not in the best neighborhood
who knows what happens to him out there.
The response I got talking to the VP,
she said "let him leave he doesn't want to get hit by a car"
it was terrible.
There are so many horror stories
that woman [VP]
accused me of barging into her office
ordering her to get off the phone
when really
I had this same child
scrambling with another kid
I took the kid to protect him into her office
just kind of mouthed to her, "I have an emergency,"
she shut the door on me
later accused me of barging in
I had to
the only way I was going to be able to stop it
I have to meet with her
the principal wanted to have a meeting
the three of us
I said the only way I could have that meeting
was if I had a union representative
she is making things up about what I did
I don't know what to do about that
she is my superior
making things up
what do I do?
Just stopped after that
it never went anywhere
we never had a meeting
we never had anything
I mentioned union and it came to a stop.

Learning Experience: *They would move whoever they wanted into my class.*

During this chaotic time, Lisa learned about the politics of being a teacher. She described

how she followed the lead of other teachers in the building and attempted to avoid contact with the school principal who she determined was not out to help her succeed and could at times be vengeful in her placement of students.

Again that same kid
I feel like he got so lost
because of everything at [school]
it scares me to think about where he is right now.
He was taking pencils and threatening to stab kids
I didn't actually believe he would do it
I didn't necessarily want to take that chance
the other third grade class had been evacuating their classroom on a regular basis
because of threats
so I knew where they went
where that teacher brought her kids to keep them safe.
I did the same thing
it was the first time
I ever evacuated my classroom.
He was threatening to stab children with his pencil
hit them on the head with books
I didn't necessarily fully trust that he wouldn't do it.
I brought them out
I brought them to the hallway near the gym
I brought them to her office.
Kind of played goalie back and forth blocking him
he found this to be hilarious
I would handle this differently I think now
at the time I didn't know what to do.
It was just a matter of blocking
he played it like tag
like I'm gonna try to get around you.
It was a terrible, terrible situation.
It was right outside her office
she never came out.
I knocked on her door
I think she was in there
I can't be sure.
She later came
pulled me into her office
basically threatened me
she said she had been protecting me.
They wanted
from the other troubled third grade classroom
kids to be moved into my classroom.

I had been handling my classroom management
up until then.
If I was going to be evacuating my classroom
then she was going to stop protecting me;
they would let them move whoever they wanted into my class.
I mean things like that made for a very tough situation for years.
Those were the dark days
the very dark days.
That was another thing,
there was a middle school child
taken by the EMTs and police
right outside my classroom
they put him on a backboard
they feared for other students
they feared he would hurt himself.
I was so use to that amount of noise
I didn't know about it for days.
Somebody said, were you able to keep teaching
I never noticed.
I was just used to it, there was no difference.
I had a middle school student barge into my room
threatening to beat up one of my third graders
he had a disagreement with her little cousin.
It was Saint Patrick's Day
I was wearing a hat with little bobbles on my head
I'm like yelling at her to get out of my classroom
trying to diffuse the situation
a middle schooler
four inches taller than me
I have bobble shamrocks on my head.
Some of it is funny to look back to.
What that must have looked like is ridiculous.
Those were the dark days.

Learning Experience: *It changed...it was like my first year teaching again.*

Lisa's passion for being a teacher was brought back when a non-profit organization entered the school. The non-profit was charged with coaching the teachers and reforming the school. Their approach to learning was hands-on and student centered. Lisa described it as a comfortable and even exciting experience working with coaches and trying new practices in her classroom. She was reminded of her positive experience in

college which seemed to resonate with the proposed changes throughout the school. However, she continued to describe this feeling of being overwhelmed and under supported.

It changed after that
what's interesting
administration changed over
[Non-profit] came in
middle school was gone
all at the same time
a new chapter started.
We were really focusing on changing the culture of the school
went fairly well
fairly fast.
I really liked [Non-profit] from the get go.
It brought me back to my masters program
the way that I was taught to teach
the way that I always wanted to teach.
I felt like I was finally able to start doing that.
Looking back
I also think
we didn't have enough direction
focus
our culture
we didn't have enough strong materials
enough strong background in our academic culture
to know what to do
we had too much free reign
we had almost like free reign
it ended up being too projecty,
as they like to put it
and it was a big learning process
I learned a lot from it.
It probably wasn't the most efficient way to teach.
I look back
I'm kind of like ugh,
I wasn't doing guided reading enough
I knew I wanted to
but the expedition
I wanted to focus on that
or focus on best practices
the school had absolutely no direction whatsoever.
I don't think when [Non-profit] came in they were focused either
they were focused on culture

it's what we needed
it's where you have to start
culture without any of the tools to help you fix it
the culture definitely changed.
Its weird to look back on it
I felt like I was changing my ideas of how to teach every day
everything was changing constantly
it was always an improvement
I was probably coming in at a really low level
kind of like my first year of teaching again
I wasn't teaching
I was surviving.
I was getting the basics to the kids
I knew that it wasn't real teaching
I knew it wasn't comprehensive or real quality.
It was probably very similar to what happens in a lot of the scary inner city stories
just getting through the day like all those scary movies
when the principal makes a huge transition in the beginning part
like that first ten minutes of the movie
that's probably what it was.
The kids aren't getting much
most of the kids were in fear of their safety *in school*.
They would say that
they would say it.
There wasn't a lot of teaching going on.
It was like my first year teaching again.
There were a lot of changes in positions.
I went to the reading institute for [Non-profit]
I hated the program that we had
I came back after that five day institute
I loved it, loved it, loved it
it just kind of shows how I was functioning in [Non-profit]
which wasn't the best way to go
I went back after five days
threw out [school's reading program] 100%
went straight into [Non-profit's approach to teaching reading]
I'm going to do this, and this, and this
I quickly got lost.

Learning Experience: *It would have been a lot harder without each other.*

The changing school expectations were not welcomed by all teachers, and Lisa soon took to shutting her classroom door and trying to keep her colleagues who were resisting the

changes at bay. This ever increasing division in the school between those who were on board with the non-profit and those who were not quickly became an immense chasm in the school community. Lisa and her teammates were on one side of the chasm, and the majority of the remaining teachers were on the other. A few individuals in the school floundered between the two sides without committing to either, one of whom was the principal. The effect this had on the school's culture was enormous. Unfortunately, the growing resentment between the two sides seemed to halt any real progress for the students academically. Lisa described realizing in hindsight just how important her collaborating colleagues were to her during those transitional years.

I didn't want to go back to [reading program]
I was hard headed enough to just not go back into it
so we muddled through
we got a little bit better with it.
We were doing more
we got a lot more professional development
academic ones.
We felt like the culture was getting started in the right direction
the culture had improved tenfold from where it was
it was still nowhere near where you would like it to be
the culture of teachers had been just anger and fear
that's all it was
it was changing
the PD [professional development] we were getting
the coaching we were getting.
I was use to feedback
I got a lot of feedback in my graduate program.
I was like e "Come into my classroom"
I think I got more coaching than other people in our school.
Jennifer started that year and the next year Victoria came
I think that's what made us so close
Going through all those changes together
We supported each other in what we wanted to do
If some people were abandoning Expeditionary Learning [EL]
Or I don't know if this is going to work
We decided we liked it
We were going to do it and that was that
We had our team time

people kept barging in
We tried
we were called cliquy for it
it was necessary it was a survival tactic
it was a tactic that we used to try
to do the best that we could
with what we had to educate the kids.
It would have been a lot harder without each other.

Learning Experience: *I have something to share.*

Lisa's story ends as she projects into her near future. Her school and the non-profit have decided to sever their relationship, and as a result Lisa applied for a new position. She talks about leaving her dysfunctional school community behind and following the non-profit to a new school in a different city and state. She describes feeling that she will be the expert in this new school, unlike the rogue status of her and her colleagues in the school she is leaving behind. Interestingly, three of these four colleagues were leaving the school simultaneously, all going to different locations.

It's the beginning of a new chapter
I'm still in the middle of it
I'm still learning
what it might be about
I'm still making sure.
I love expeditions
project based learning
that's what I love.
People are going to see me as a leader
someone who has knowledge that they want
I have something to share.
Just being recognized is going to be hugely different
I'm going to have to straighten up.
I won't be able to just go with the flow.
It's a good thing
It makes me scared
but scared in a good way
its time to step up.
I didn't feel like I was being valued

I wanted to be
now I will be the one.

“Belle”
I need to be the person who made that difference.

It was Belle’s ninth year teaching in elementary school. She had gone to college to obtain her teaching degree after her first child was born. She had been a bartender and waitress most of her adult life. Becoming a teacher was her “dream come true,” it was everything she wanted for herself and her family. She aspired to be not just a “good teacher,” but the best teacher she could be, and she told me so several times during her interview.

For Belle, the authorities were above her in some way. She placed a tremendous amount of importance in what “they” had to say. She found great value in being liked by those she deemed as important, these authorities, principals and administrators in the only district she had ever worked in. She completed her student teaching in this district and took a position there, remaining in the same school for her the entire nine years of her teaching career. She expressed no curiosity or intention to work anywhere else.

Being recognized as a “good teacher” was extremely important to Belle. She aspired to be an expert in her role, and expressed feeling that indeed she was an expert in teaching first graders to read. As her coach, I found her to be quite knowledgeable and at the same time traditional and rigid in her approach to teaching reading. While I appreciated her strong grip on teaching phonics for example, I wondered about the students who were not connecting to reading through phonics and would perhaps benefit from other methods of learning to read. I sensed early on that dialogue on this topic was off limits between us, but if I had been in the role of continuing to work with Belle,

eventually I would hope to have the rapport needed to broach the topic. In every other manner, Belle was eager to please and to show me what she was learning or trying to work on in her classroom practice.

Coming to the Teaching Profession: *I Had a Son Who Knew Everything.*

Belle entered a Masters program to become a teacher after getting married and having a child of her own. She was waitressing at the time and she decided she wanted to work in a field where she could be home in the evenings with her son. When her son was born Belle noticed that he was learning quickly and she recalled feeling like if she had a son who knew everything then she must be a good teacher.

I wanted to start studying teaching
I went back for my masters in teaching
I was good at it
I had a son who knew everything
I went back for teaching
I enjoyed learning about teaching
I was either waitressing or at school
I finished my masters in teaching
I did my student teaching at a Magnet school
they offered me a job
full-time substitute for the year
I said no
I didn't want to do that
I told them no thank you
I was going to look for a full job
I told them no thank you.
I went to work for Catholic charities
a teacher of abstinence to inner city youth
it wasn't just teaching them abstinence
it was more about teaching them positive life choices
communication with their parents
things you and I take for granted
a lot of the time the children of the inner city just don't get that.
It was a great job
a really thrilling job
it was a good paying job.
Finally

I was called by a principal
She hired me in March
1st grade position teaching.
I was like “wow”
She said come next week
you can start.
I was very excited
I never thought in a million years
I just thought
I think she took into account Catholic charities
I started teaching at [school].

Learning Experience: *They're much smarter than we are...and the kids need the Federal dollars.*

Belle's teaching position was in a K-8 school that went from one building to two buildings the summer we met. Belle reflected back to the way the school was before the changes. The way she spoke about the principals and superintendent in her district was as if they were all powerful and all knowing.

Back then
We started in 1st grade
all the way up to fifth.
Across the street was Head Start
it wasn't even another school.
We were not at all like two schools [buildings] as one like we are now.
Dr. Smith got rid of all the middle schools
to avoid the requirements
no child left behind
he restructured the school
more time to reach the bench marks for testing.
It was a slick thing to do
a lot of people have done it
New York did the same thing
it's not just him.
They're much smarter then we are
they have consultants that are smarter
the kids need the federal dollars.

Learning Experience: *I wanted to be the best.*

How she was perceived by school leadership was important to Belle. Their acknowledgement of her indicated to her that she was a good teacher, someone who was worthy of the position when others have failed. She described herself as a high achiever, a person who wanted to be seen as not just good at her job, but great.

It was like someone threw me in the deep end of a pool
I didn't know how to swim.
It really was a tremendous amount of work
it was so fulfilling.
I wanted to be the best teacher that I could be
I was hired
I wanted to be the best
not better than this person
not better than that person
but the best I could be.

Learning experience: *I became an expert in reading.*

Belle was in an interesting situation. She was a teacher in a school where the present vice principal had once been her teaching colleague, but had just been promoted that year. She reflected back on the rift between the previous teachers and administration, most of who had been transferred out of the school prior to the current teaching year; part of the district plan for transforming the school.

I read every book on literacy and reading.
I went to every workshop
they would send me to.
I wanted to be the best reading teacher I could possibly be.
I wanted the two principals
to be proud of me
wow, what a good choice we made.
I became an expert in reading.
I came into the system that year
I didn't notice anything
any kind of upheaval
I was oblivious.
We had a grant from Reading First
500,000 dollars
to improve all the teachers' literacy knowledge.

We had consultants
they started to teach us
what guided reading should look like
what shared reading should look like
all research based best practices.
along with that teaching
came a lot of change
for the instruction that was happening.
Change for me? No.
Change for all the other teachers.
I came in
I know no better
I'm going to do exactly what you tell me to do.
All the other teachers
grumble, grumble, grumble
nobody wanted to do this
it was a lot more work
a lot more paper work.
At that time, [Vice Principal] was a teacher
a kindergarten teacher
kind of set in her ways
like I know what I'm doing.
Along with her
was [teacher] and [teacher], same thing.
I would go to meetings
I would hear
err, err, err
they would hear
the dinosaurs
grumble, grumble
they would be like, yah I don't want to do this
if they don't want to do it I'm not going to do it.
Here's me
ok, ok, ok
I end up looking like a kiss ass.
I want to be good
I want to make an impression
I want to be the best for my kids.
It was an interesting set of dynamics.
I became an expert in reading.
I always wanted to do more and do better.

Learning Experience: *Part of who I am is- wanting to have the principal say “good job” hiring her.*

Belle described feeling like she had been doing it right (a “good teacher”) since she began at the school. Driven by her desire for school leadership to see her as a teacher worth keeping, Belle had gone beyond, starting her own evening reading event for parents.

I started to write away for grants
I got grants on behalf of our school
I did something called “moonlight readers.”
I wanted to be the best I could be
trying to see what would be the best.
A lot of our work rules now
come from the practices I had already
by myself
I’m not saying that they came to me
what does she do?
They didn’t do that.
I know that many of those things came from me.
I started teaching many years ago at [school]
I did a teacher letter back then
the exact same format they use now
9 years ago
I was doing it.
People that worked with me
were like oh my god,
are you kidding that you do this?
I used to eat lunch with my kids
I used to read to them at lunch time.
The moonlight readers program
I wrote a grant for the materials
I got 1500 dollars
every month my friend,
partner teacher and I
we would stay for three hours after school
with parents
teaching them how to teach their kids how to read.
We didn’t do that for money
We did it because we wanted them
to have the knowledge that they need to have with kids.
I think the very heart of this conversation
I became a teacher
sitting in front of a class
looking down at the little eyes
little toothless grins on the first day

they have shiny little eyes
shiny little faces
toothless little grins
you think to yourself
how could I let them down?
How could anybody let them down?
You're here to do a job
someone's paying you
I guarantee you want to do the best you can
you're looking in those eyes.
They're so cute.
Part of who I am is,
wanting to have the principal say "good job" hiring her.
I really thought they were crazy to hire me
I knew nothing
I didn't even know phonics
I had no idea
I wasn't trained in phonics in school
I learned how to read on my own
it wasn't through phonics it was Dick and Jane
a sight word program.
I became an expert
the better I got the more
I noticed my students would grow.
That made me proud
not just of myself
what the kids could do
when you give them the chance.
These kids can learn to spell
as good as the kids in [suburban school].
If someone is not giving them a chance
not giving them someone who knows what they are doing
Yah, those kids in [suburban school] might have an edge
they have a nanny
they got a mom that stays home and reads to them every day
but we can catch these kids up.
The more I would learn
the more I would do
the more I would want to know more.

Learning Experience: *What I really want is to teach reading or to be a data person, but*

I can't commit to being half of each.

Belle was one of five teachers who remained at the school through the transfers. She thought she was staying for a position working with data for the school, but as the district brought in support from nonprofits the financial situation no longer permitted for an on site data person. Belle was offered a position teaching part-time and working with the testing data part-time.

I was shocked
everyone was getting, not fired, but displaced
the principals came to me
we would like you to apply for this job
or a position in data
they knew I loved
or k-5 science teacher.
I was pleased
I said I needed time to think about it.
I thought about it
I was like, God yes!
I would love doing data
I would love to be doing that
to be a resource.
The principal thought
we would have money
to have a data person for the school
I could do other things
besides data for the school
help out here and there
I said yes
I applied
I was hired.
They didn't tell me what the position was
somewhere in the school year
the principal called me into the building
she said, I'm sorry
we didn't get the money
for a data person full time
we would like you to be a first grade teacher for half the day.
We're going to give you a very strong Para
we're going to allow her to take over for you after lunch
for the rest of the day
do math and science or social studies
with your children.

I was very excited
I thought, wow this is great.
Sad I don't get to have the data position
I get to teach reading
which I love to do
I get to go do data
which is really
reading and data that's my passion.
I thought and thought
I said
I can't do it.
I can't do it.
It was a big drama last year
these children
their parents are sending them to school
I would get referrals
people would say you should get this teacher
I'm going to give my kids away half way through the day
to someone who is a Para?
I love my Para to death
but expect her to teach them
to continue the literacy teaching
you do that through math
you do that though
even though people don't realize
you're pointing to the target or the objective
whatever they want you want to call it
you're reading it word by word
you're actually teaching the child
to read along the line.
Story problems
science and social studies
big, big draw
for a child who might not want to read at all during the literacy block.
He see's a panda
all of a sudden is on edge
can't wait to read it all
especially the boys
if I can't get them in the morning time
I know when science and social studies come
I will get them
if its wagons and guns or Indians or whatever
they love to learn that stuff.
I thought to my self
I could never do this to a parent
or to a kid.

I can't take a job
half way through the day
I'm like yes
I get to do
what I want.
What I really want
is to teach reading
or to be a data person
I can't commit to being half
I can't commit to those kids to be half of their teacher
to the parents to be half of the teacher.
I'm not going to give that job away
half way through the day.
I went back to the school five days later
the principal is standing in the hallway
I don't have a relationship with her yet
she is standing there with her bags packed
she's going somewhere.
I think oh, no
I don't know how to say this to her.
So she asks, "Do you need me?"
And I say, "No that's okay.
I can talk to (Assistant Principal)."
She drives away in her car to a meeting.
I say, "[Assistant Principal] I really want to tell you
I can't accept this position."
I cannot accept this position.
It's not in my heart.
I can't tell the parents that half the day
I'm going to be your children's teacher
half the day
I'm just going to give them away
to somebody who doesn't even have a degree.
I can't give them away
for half the day.
I want the data
the biggest thing I wanted to do
I became a teacher
to be a data person for the district.
I'm torn
I can't do half and half.
I just can't do it.
I'm one
or the other
I can't do both.

She had known me for many years
she understood
I couldn't do one or the other.
I'm very much the person who gives it my all.
I knew she didn't have the money for the data,
I told her I'd do first grade and that was that.
The district brought in a data person.
I didn't have the knowledge to do that.

Learning Experience: *I need to be the person that's made that difference.*

Belle believes she is making a difference in the lives of children. She is committed to working in an inner city school. She describes feeling frustrated that she was on the peripheral edge of the community of practice in her school this year because she maintained a second job.

In my heart I'm not a tier 1 school teacher.
I'm not a teacher for that kind of school.
I'm a teacher for the inner city kids.
I'm a teacher for the project kids.
I'm not a teacher for a bunch of little suburbanites.
That's not who I want to be.
Those children
they are going to grow on their own.
Someone's going to sit back
watch them and be proud
I need to be the person that's made that difference.
So this year was great.
It was very difficult for me personally
I had to take a second job.
I'm a person who has to give 100%
especially to my kids
I had a great Para
I don't feel like I was able to give them everything
I could give them this year
I also realize that there had to be some kind of a fine line
what I gave my own children at home
what I gave my children here.
I knew it was a temporary situation
I had to waitress for three nights a week.
What I tried to do
was give a 100% Monday Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday to my kids in school.

Friday would be my hard day
I would have all my prep for my teaching
I would go through the motions on Friday
then I would go to [the restaurant] and have to do another five or six hour waitressing.
The only thing that suffered this year
I think
I could have been more on board with [Non-profit]
more, truthfully
if I wasn't waitressing this year
I would have read every book they would have given me
I read voraciously
I read three books a week
I would have read.
I would have been the schools expert on [Non-profit]
anybody could have came to me.
I think this next year, going into next year
my goal is to be super involved with [Non-profit]
as well as continue my work with data
hopefully get this moonlight readers grant up and off the floor.

“Mary”

“I’m like a first year teacher again.”

Mary was in a state of disequilibrium the day I interviewed her, ten years into her teaching career. The school year had ended only days before, and she expressed her distress with how her first year in a new school, a “turnaround school,” had unfolded. She felt unsupported, and confused about whether or not being a teacher was the right career for her. Being one of the coaches who should have been aware of her concerns, I had been blind to them. It immediately struck me that she had “fallen through the cracks,” and I knew instantly I was at least partly responsible for that. My heart went out to her as she wept on and off throughout the interview.

Coming to the Teaching Profession: *Not knowing what I wanted...I guess by default I said, I’ll be a teacher.*

Mary did not set out to be a teacher. She minored in education “just in case.” She was familiar with the teaching profession because her mother was a teacher. After graduation she found herself looking for a career that would be active and fulfilling, and it just happened to be a teaching position that she eventually found herself interested in.

In college there was no education degree.
There was an education minor.
I was grateful.
I had done plenty of education work in my school.
My mom was a teacher.
I didn't know if
I was an English major.
I did work within the education department.
Not knowing what I wanted
going to a nonprofit career fair
still not knowing
working in a summer program with inner city kids
getting a sense of the difficulties of teaching
wanting to have some sort of social component
to what I was doing.
My first job was in Americorp in DC;
a place called “turning the page,”
a great program
get parents into the schools and reading with their kids.
A desk job
not active
I got to go out and run these programs,
a lot of it was in the office.
What do I want to do?
I guess by default
I guess
I'll be a teacher.
I moved to Virginia
reading specialist at a school
I had a job.

Learning Experience: *I Was Just a Warm Body in the School.*

Once in the job Mary realized she actually knew nothing about teaching and was not able to offer much as a teacher to her colleagues. However, she did feel she saw something in

her role as a reading teacher that interested her, but she also still felt it was not the “exact right fit.”

I was hired two days before school started
never having taught a class
no formal training
my education had been philosophical.
I became the reading specialist at this school.
Everyone looked at me
who is this girl?
I was just a warm body in the school.
I did some co-teaching.
It was a good fit
but not the right exact fit.
Still having no idea what teaching was
I would read through the manuals or the books
try to figure out what teaching was
How do you do a Venn diagram with kids?
No concept of anything.
I was given an actual class.
I was teaching three history classes
three different levels and a reading class
a low level reading group.
It was a fifth – sixth grade school.
I was reading the history books
finding out what happened in Virginian history
the day before
I was supposed to teach it.
I was taking classes to get certified
but they were very poorly taught.

Learning Experience: *I was working with adults I respected.*

The following year Mary found her stride. She describes feeling respected by her community of practice and learning from the people she was working with. The distraught look on her face lit up when she talked about her previous position.

I sort of found a niche the following year.
I got moved to be a math teacher.
Throughout the next few years
I sort of found a place.

I was taking classes again
a Masters as a math specialist.
I was working with adults I respected
respected the way that they
the program is really deeply into just increasing teacher content knowledge
going into more of like instructionally how do you get kids there,
once your own personal knowledge is up
just enjoying doing research with them
getting to teach some with them
present some
and help.
I became the math leader at that school.
I was working with the other teachers
helping bring them along as well.

Learning Experience: *Like a First Year Teacher Again*

Mary explained her regret for leaving a school community where she felt engaged and was seen as a leader in exchange for a community where she felt again like she lacked knowledge and expertise. Mary was part of the new faculty in an inner city school designated for “turnaround.”

Coming here
throwing everything out the window
learning how to teach everything
I had never done before
I had one class all day long
this was a whole new boat.
I’ve learned more
getting kids more actively engaged
thinking in more long-term chunks than I had before
It made me feel like a first year teacher again.

“Dana”
“I wish I had the whole package.”

Dana’s story of her twelve years as a teacher inspired me and broke my heart all at the same time. Having grown up in a trailer park in Florida with her mother, Dana was perhaps the only participating teacher who was also no stranger to serious poverty; at

least she was the only participant to discuss it openly. Dana had experienced the pangs of hunger like many of her urban students of color. She knew what it was like to be picked on and ridiculed, despite her natural beauty inside and out. She was sensitive to the needs of all children. Dana's story was interesting in other ways too. Unlike the teachers I interviewed, Dana had been a teacher in three different states and four different districts, her lived experience was vast.

Dana's colleagues at the "turnaround school" where she was employed at the time of our interview did not know about her childhood experiences. In fact, to look at Dana or to watch her teach, one would have thought she had experienced a happy, perhaps upper class, life as a child. Indeed, this was not at all the case. During one of our follow up discussions Dana described her mother's careful and kind removal of lice from her hair, an experience she recalled having as a child, "more times than I can count." Her empathy for her students was striking and an exemplar to anyone who works with children.

Coming to the Teaching Profession: *I decided...to be a teacher, but it wasn't because I really wanted to be a teacher.*

Dana described how her father had been a teacher when she was young. She was told he was a very good teacher but he had to leave the profession for a better salary. Despite her sense that she may not make a lot of money being a teacher, Dana found herself entering the teaching profession because she was not sure what else she could do for work as a woman.

I wish the first chapter was more exciting.
I remember applying to colleges;
trying to make an exciting story about why I wanted to be a teacher.
I really just didn't know what else to do.

It seemed like something that made sense for women.
My father was actually a teacher for 8 years.
He quit because it doesn't pay enough
he opened a restaurant.
I've always heard stories
he was such a wonderful teacher.
It was so sad
he left the profession because of money.
For me to decide to do it
knowing I would never make a lot of money
I don't really know why
I went into college and decided to be a teacher
it wasn't because I really wanted to be a teacher
the first chapter is kind of sad.

Learning Experience: *I can be a teacher!*

During her internship Dana realized that she loved teaching. She enjoyed working with children and commented that she had never even babysat as a teenager, so this had been her first experience with children. She described the school she worked in as the opposite of the inner city school she was presently teaching in during the interview.

I interned in college.
I loved it.
That was my first experience with children.
I felt more comfortable
that's what I wanted to do.
I could be a guidance counselor
or something else in schools.
I never really knew for sure
my major was elementary education.
I was like yes
I could
I would like to do this.
They were prestigious elementary schools in very nice areas in Orlando.
That was chapter one
I learned, yes, I can be a teacher!

Learning Experience: *This is what I really wanted to do.*

Dana's first teaching position out of college was more challenging than she had anticipated. She described the impact of one of the more senior faculty members

challenging her commitment to teaching. This challenge made her feel badly but at the same time it pushed her to work on her teaching practice and ultimately she felt it made her a better teacher.

My first job was really hard.
It was the saddest point in my career.
The teacher that was the behavior specialists asked me one day
I was kind of complaining
I was asking for support with a kid in my class that was really challenging;
She asked me to really think about
if I wanted to be a teacher.
This kid was more than I felt like I could handle by myself.
I had to really think about
can I do this?
I don't know if I can handle kids
this one particular kid
was saying hurtful things to me.
It also lit a fire under me
to prove to that person
yes, this is what I really wanted to do
I could do it
I wasn't going to let somebody
make me second guess myself.
All brand new teachers in that school
that's all they could get
it was a really hard school
everybody left but me.

Learning Experience: *Kids Have to Like You*

Dana's early experience taught her that if her students did not like her as a person then they would be unlikely to do what she wanted them to do. She explained that she did not want to manipulate children but that she watched other teachers fail at their attempts to manage their students and she concluded it was because they were mean to them. She explains how important noticing this was to her developing teaching practice.

I was the only new teacher
back for the second year
it was awesome.

I had to learn a lot
about classroom management.
I didn't need to in my student teaching experiences.
I learned that the kids just have to like you
I learned it from all the teachers around me that bombed
I learned if they like you then they'll do what you want them to.
I know that sounds kind of manipulative
I wasn't doing it in a manipulative way
I just wanted them to learn.
After that second year there
I felt like I could teach anywhere.

Learning Experience: *I got into the groove of teaching.*

Dana explains her decision to leave Florida. She felt good about herself as a teacher and she wanted to continue teaching once she arrived in Connecticut but found it difficult to find a position in the beginning. Deciding that teaching was her passion, she returned to Florida so she could continue, but knew that ultimately she would need to find a job in New England, closer to her boyfriend.

I left Florida and lived in CT for a little bit;
I couldn't get a job.
Maybe I wasn't supposed to be a teacher.
What else can I do?
I bartended
I subbed;
that is the hardest thing in the world
I have a new appreciation for this.
I thought I figured out
I had this management
I could handle anything;
subbing felt really different.
Now what do I do?
After bartending for a while;
I was never going to get a job in Connecticut.
I have to go back to Florida.
I have to teach.
It was a hard decision.
I felt like people supported my leaving Florida for the first time.
My parents helped pay for it.
I left everything that I knew.
I left my family.

Less than a year later,
turning around and saying
I can't do this.
I need to come back my home.
My parents had to help me again to go back to Florida.
I got a job in Florida;
I got one instantly.
Yes, I am meant to [teach].
I just wasn't meant to in Waterbury.
To get a job that fast;
within three days I was working.
I had an apartment in Florida
I was working.
It was considered inner city;
it was a little city,
it wasn't so hard.
I was really happy there.
It had challenges,
not quite such tough challenges.
I got into the groove of teaching I guess.
I was in Deer City teaching for three years.
It started to feel that was who I was.
I wasn't going to do anything from that point;
I wasn't going to do anything else.
Yah, this is my career.

Learning Experience: *I'm good teacher.*

Dana wanted to move to Connecticut where her sister and boyfriend [currently her husband] were living. She went back and forth two times, taking various jobs while looking for a teaching position. Eventually she finds a position in Massachusetts which seemed close enough at the time. There she describes feeling comfortable and competent, like a “good teacher.” She explains that this feeling drove her to become very involved in her position at the school to the point that it began to take over her life. She determined that feeling good about being a teacher is one thing, but that she needed to be working closer to home and she reluctantly decided to leave the school. Nevertheless, this was a turning point for Dana. She developed a sense of confidence about who she

was as a teacher. She did not describe her practice changing as much as she described the way her colleagues treated her and their level of acceptance being more positive at this school. At this school, the teaching community believed students should like their teachers and the dynamics she explains were different, more suited to her likeness.

I was working there.
I was visiting up here.
I met my husband.
He tried to live in Florida.
He didn't like it.
It was hard.
I didn't want to come up here.
I couldn't get a job up here.
Teaching was my life.
I was glad to have met him;
I didn't want to risk it again.
I was good.
I was liking how everything was going.
He asked me to try.
I was flying to places;
I flew up here to take all the tests
I had to for certification
flying up here for job fairs
Connecticut and Massachusetts
I've got to try everything
I'm not moving up here without a job.
I didn't want to come up here
be depressed
I couldn't be a teacher.
I had a job down there.
It was meant to be for me to work in Little Town;
even though everyone was like that's crazy.
I had never lived in Little Town.
It's far away.
It was a job that hundreds of people were applying for;
one job.
The principal,
that the same day of the interview,
"we want you."
For them to choose me,
in a place where it was really hard.
No one was even calling me back for an interview.
All these places I was sending my resume.

I didn't understand why no one was interested,
but they weren't.
I tried to say it was because I didn't have my Masters,
or because I wasn't from here,
or I didn't know anyone.
It seemed like a lot up here was political;
who you know.
I didn't know anyone.
For him to be that excited about me;
I was like ok this is good.
Working in Little Town changed me.
I wasn't just, "yes I'm a teacher;"
I was like "yes, I'm a good teacher."
I had amazing professional development.
I worked with people who had been teachers awhile.
I went from being in Florida with a lot of newer, younger teachers
Here, I was the person with the least amount of experience in Little Town.
I was working with a lot of amazing people.
All wanted to mentor me.
They were totally accepting.
I loved the people there.
They were just so warm,
so inviting,
not judgmental at all.
I felt different.
They were all liberal democrats;
I was the southern republican.
It didn't matter.
They were just so great.
I learned so much.

Learning Experience: *I don't really like where I am working.*

Dana's new school was at the start of state mandated improvement. She was part of the faculty that was hired to bring change to the school. Dana was not happy with the differences between what she left behind in Little Town and what she was encountering in her new inner city school. She believed strongly now that her students needed to feel well liked and by their teacher and needed to like their teacher and coming to school. This belief she developed in Florida was affirmed in Little Town, yet here she was told to

use punishments and rewards with her students which she believed undermined her relationship with them.

It was a really hard decision to leave there.
I felt like I had to do something.
My life was too much school.
I was starting to not feel married;
that can lead to problems when you don't feel married anymore.
I was never home.
I was always staying there.
I had a teacher friend who was letting me stay in her basement.
I was renting a basement;
staying there whenever I needed to,
so not so much driving back and forth.
My husband works at night,
it seemed to be okay,
but it really wasn't.
I don't really like where I am working.
I'm really grateful for the past.
I do feel like a teacher that can teach anywhere.
I do feel like I'm a good teacher;
a good feeling, because for a long time I didn't.
I didn't know I wanted to be a teacher.
Then, I felt like a teacher but not a good teacher.
Eight years to decide that I'm a good teacher.

Learning Experience: *I wish I had the whole package.*

The dissonance that teaching in the inner city school caused Dana made her question her position as a teacher. She was no longer sure this was what she wanted to do for work during the time of our interview. Dana decided to leave one city school for a school in a different city, but one that felt more positively aligned with her own thinking about how school should be for students. She hoped that in this new school she would find a place that had everything she wanted.

I wish I had the whole package though;
To like where I am working,
to be with teachers that I respect very much,
to love it.
I don't want to say that it's transitional.

I don't want to be disappointed if I do stay here.
I don't want to be upset with myself.
Yesterday I enrolled at Southern.
I didn't have any power in my future.
I don't like a lot of what I see in education.
I want to have another option.
I do love a lot about the kids and school,
especially books.
Every weekend I go to the public library.
I'm going to get a Masters in Library Science.
I could have the option of working at a public library,
I still will be working with kids.
I love kid's books.
I don't know.
It would be another something.

“Leah”

“I can't just do what everybody else says, that's wrong.”

With fifteen years of experience, Leah described herself as a person with strong convictions about being a teacher. She was a “career changer;” leaving the banking industry and entering the teaching profession later in life than most. She gave up a lot and worked hard to acquire her credentials, arriving first as a teacher's assistant as well as with many opinions about what was wrong with teaching and schools. I met Leah while I was a teacher myself. We were not friends. In fact, Leah and I tended to walk different paths as teachers. A decade after I left the teaching profession, I was the “principal intern” for a full year in Leah's school, a different school than where I first met her. At that time, Leah felt she had come full circle from when I knew her previously. I saw little change in her as a teacher, but I recognized her new role teaching kindergarten suited her quite well.

Coming to the Teaching Profession: *I was developing myself as a teacher.*

Leah described her first few years as a substitute and paraprofessional as an opportunity to develop who she would be as a teacher. She spent much time observing a range of teachers in their classrooms and determining she liked and did not like about their practice.

I started as a sub.
I learned.
I had to go back to school
from business into teaching.
I had to go back to school
pick up those things I didn't have.
I hadn't in years
back into it
feeling around
getting my style.
I went into different rooms.
I liked that.
I didn't like that.
I was a Para.
I was there all the time
going into different rooms.
Seeing things I liked
I didn't like
the way people were teaching.
I thought
I would never do that.
I was developing myself as a teacher.
I had to really go back
what was it I was bringing?
What would I do?

Learning Experience: *The students I felt connected to...the kids who didn't have it all.*

In Leah's next role as a math intervention teacher she continued to observe teachers in their classroom and make decisions about what she believed was good and not so good. She also learned that she wanted to be a teacher who helped struggling students. Leah felt there were some students whose needs were ignored or pushed aside. She wanted to be a teacher who put those student's needs first.

The kind of students
I felt most connected to
the kids I always wanted
the kind of kids I always had
the kids who didn't have it all.
They needed someone to give them encouragement.
I found classroom teachers
weren't really doing that.
Those students
sent off to work somewhere else
no one was really watching
or caring.
I decided
I needed to be NOT *that* teacher.
I have to be a teacher for all of them.
I started as Title 1
I actually enjoyed that.
I got kids that really needed the help
sometimes one on one,
sometimes in the classroom.
Again it gave me that other step
watching other teachers
there were great teachers to watch,
there were others
I went ugh
I never want to do that.

Learning Experience: *I got to play with the kids.*

Leah's first classroom of her own was offered to her when one of the teachers she worked with went out on maternity leave. She incorrectly recalls this as the first year of MCAS implementation, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. It was her first experience with a fourth grade classroom of her own who were participating in the test, but the actual system of testing had been put in place three years previously. Leah had a clear disdain for MCAS.

I went to fourth grade.
When the fourth grade teacher left
I got to take over.
I loved that, loved that.
I liked fourth grade

they were a little older,
you could do more things with them.
That was the year of MCAS
my first experience with that.
That was a hard one
those kids really struggled
crying
I was like
it can't be the only thing we do
It can't be the only thing we do.
My view
we can't just focus on that.
The kids were a mess.
I had students that were very needy,
more than I have ever experienced
a student coming in from a hospital,
a kid with mental health issues
tried to kill him self.
I had never experienced
my teaching was really difficult.
I connected
to those kinds of students.
We got over some bumps,
it was a good year.
It was good
I got to play with the kids.
I loved
the kids wanted that.
We took the time
they wanted.
They had to drive their learning
I mean you have to let them drive it.
That was such an eye opener that year with those kids,
especially the children with really severe needs.
One was definitely in the wrong placement,
that wasn't where he belonged at that time.
It was unfortunate;
I think he lost out.
I kind of followed him a little bit;
I think he's doing much better now.
I'm happy about that.
I don't know if that's where he should have been.
I went on the next year in teaching
I went to second grade.
I really watched kids.

I said, "That child, it's really not a good placement for him,
he needs more intensive."
I think it helped me see that with him.

Learning Experience: *I looped...The learning picked up immediately.*

Leah then had the opportunity to loop with her class. Looping is when at the end of a school year the teacher moves up a grade with the majority of the same students she has in the present grade. It allows students to have the same teacher for two years in a row.

I went to third
I looped.
I took them for two years
I loved, loved, loved.
I would do that in a second if anybody would do it with me,
No one wants to do it anymore.
I loved that.
Those students
so much they could do in the summer time
I came back in the fall
it was just like we never left.
It was like April vacation.
We came back
they knew it was time for morning meeting,
they knew what to do,
they knew the routine,
We didn't have to start all over again.
The learning picked up immediately.
They knew the routines.
The only class I ever looped with
keeping kids
knowing parents
really being able to know their kids
almost as good as they did,
was really nice.
Conferences
we really could have a conversation.
I think when you only have a conference in November.
In a year
I don't really know what to say to you
I've had your child for a month and a half.
It's hard.
It becomes a conversation
them telling you

you telling them
when you have a kid for two years.
That second year
you know them so well.
It's very easy to say
what you need to do.
They loved that
I loved it
would do it again in a heartbeat
I thought it was great.

Learning Experience: *I can't just do what everybody else says, that's wrong.*

At the time of the interview, Leah had settled in as a kindergarten teacher. In making this transition she returned to a school (in the same district) where she previously was a paraprofessional observing classroom teachers. She describes feeling on the peripheral edge of her community of practice with a spirit of pride. She refers to “them” with a roll of her eyes or a distinct tone of distaste. “Them” is a reference to all of the other teachers in her building, everyone other than herself and her co-teacher who is the special education counterpart in her classroom.

Coming back to kindergarten
where I did my para work.
I've come full circle
I did two years of para work in this building.
I'm back now in a different capacity.
When I was there as a para
I thought there were things
I would never ever do
I would never do it.
I changed what the norm is here
This building is very rigid
They've all been there forever.
The first year they've had a change in that building.
I had to interview with them,
which is wrong in and of itself,
I interviewed with them,
They did not like
I was going to bring change.

As a teacher
I can't just do what everybody else says, that's wrong.
So, don't ask me to do that
don't ask me to do that.

“Anna”
“I Feel Comfortable In My Teaching Skin.”

I met Anna when I was a first year teacher, our relationship spans two decades. Anna had been a teacher for twenty-two years. In many ways, Ana's interviews and subsequent feedback anchored my analysis. I checked in with her most frequently, and our discussions moved well beyond her teacher story and delved into the literature I was reading and my own personal development as a school leader and coach for teachers. It was and has always been a relationship of mutual learning, and I am extremely grateful.

Anna entered teaching reluctantly, yet it was no less than “the family trade.” Her first position as a teacher was in the very same private school she had attended; her father had been the Director of and her mother a teacher.

Coming to the Teaching Profession: *Listening to my mom and step father...I really didn't want to go into teaching.*

Ana reflected on her life growing up and how much that influenced her decision to become a teacher. She grew up with her mother and step-father, both of whom were teachers at the small private school she attended as an adolescent.

Before I even thought about teaching
so much influenced me
like my background
being in my family
Listening to my mom and step father
talk about their teaching days
knowing that that's a reflection.
You think about your day
you go back and you think about your day.

You strategize
how can I do this differently
how can I approach this person
how can I approach this student?
College
I dabbled in teaching
I taught sailing in the summer
I would go home frustrated.
My parents would work it through with me
how I needed to approach behaviors.
I did an internship.
I learned how to watch students
my mom taught me how to do that.
I worked in a science museum
I designed some different things there.
I really didn't want to go into teaching
I needed a job.
I took a paid internship.
I worked at a private school
\$25 dollars per week
I learned all about science teaching
elementary teaching
the whole school life.
I decided teaching wasn't for me.
I went back to school
I wanted something meaningful in my job
my job wasn't meaningful.
I went into graduate school.
I did some internships in the city
really interesting
different styles of teaching
first time I was in a public school ever
It was really interesting.

Learning Experience: *I became a learner.*

After finishing her bachelors, Ana went straight on for her Masters degree. During her Masters program Ana thought she developed herself as a learner. When she finished the program she accepted a position teaching at the same private school she had attended.

Eventually leaving private education Ana moved into a role teaching in a public school.

I went back to private school
the place that I could get a job.

I went back for three years to private school
I learned a lot.
My major challenge has been working with others.
I think as a learner I just went along
In college I just sort of changed
I became a learner.
I went along
I went to graduate school
I can finally feel good about something
I'm passionate about something
I can learn about it.
I jumped to public school
the first time I ever taught on my own.
I had been in the same place.
I feel pretty successful
in terms of learning in my own classroom
my own graduate classroom

Learning Experience: *I want to work by myself.*

Ana prefers working alone. She described the tension she experiences when she is expected to work with others. The different value systems teachers bring to their decision making about how to teach the content can create discord that makes Ana uncomfortable.

I go along sort of struggling with something
I want to work by myself
I need control.
I've resisted learning with other people.
I have these moments
I get pushed to work with other people
my mind kind of explodes.
I've thought about different things
I'd never think about before.
I realize the importance of learning with other people.
I've resisted learning with other people
I've tried to learn by myself.
I get in these situations
I have to learn with others
it's just mind blowing.
I reach different levels that I'd never thought I'd reach.
Working with people
I really don't agree with what they believe in

struggling with that
it might be what's appropriate for children
how we learn
making sure that we're incorporating lots of different types of learning.
Working with others in a building as a learner
I guess it's really about other people
my role as an individual
my role as a team player
and team learner.

Learning Experience: *We Had to Work as a Team.*

Ana determined that working with others helped her to see the content of what she was preparing to teach to her students differently. She described an occasion when a large amount of time over the summer had been set aside for the purpose of having teachers discuss the content and create a unit of study together. Ana explained that developing curriculum with her colleagues changed how she thought about curriculum design altogether, it changed her practice.

I know that I'm not new to teaching
I'm starting to realize I have experience.
I know I have strengths in the classroom.
I have motivations of curriculum
I'm finally seeing the light in curriculum.
It's obtainable
it's not a perfect product
I thought it was.
Now it's just these are the goals
I actually really love the core curriculum
I think it's really cool
really freeing.
We worked together
I remember I just wanted to work by myself
I wanted to work in my own little cubicle
organize it
make it perfect.
We weren't allowed to do that.
We had to work as a team.
We had a group.

We had to really push
come to a consensus
hear everyone's point of view.
There was a part of me
like its okay
it was okay.
It was messy
curriculum's not going to be perfect
nicely organized
everything like that.
We had this discussion
We came to this idea of rivers
We were trying to design curriculum for ancient world study for fourth grade.
I don't think I would ever get to the idea of a theme
this big idea
everything was built around rivers.
I just wanted to talk about the Nile River and their civilization
then Mesopotamia
then whatever.
I didn't really realize
these Rivers were connected
that's how civilization began
around rivers.
I learned something from them.
I was able to take my curriculum design to a totally different level
there could be theme.
Not separate entities
that was something really huge.

Learning Experience: *"I Feel Comfortable In My Teaching Skin.*

Ana, the most veteran of the six teachers in this study, described feeling confident in her role as a teacher. She explained that she believes she has developed expertise in teaching over the length of her career. She has worked at it.

I'm learning is that there's an expertise in teaching
really makes you a better teacher
no one just hands you.
I think that's where I am right now.
This year has been one of the best years.
I feel comfortable in my teaching skin,
I feel comfortable with kids.
I love that I have a background from being a parent.
I love that I understand.

I feel like I have experiences
with different genders,
different learning styles,
from parenting
and from my past.
It just feels really good.
For the first time
I feel like
I am really interacting with my kids
the way I want to interact;
having meaningful conversation,
responding to their needs,
not necessarily knowing exactly what
I'm going to do for the month of...
Now I know
this is where I'm going
let's see what happens
what do they need
to help them
or push them?

Summary

This chapter presented each teacher identity by using the participant's own words. Preceding each narrative was my description of the context and brief interpretation of the teacher's story. Data from the follow up meetings and basic demographic data provided by the initial survey were used to inform the first person narratives collected during the life story interview process, and to interpret how each participant in the sample perceived her teacher identity. By relying on the participants' own words I aimed to represent the perceptions of each teacher studied and to minimize researcher bias and superfluous interpretations. These six women described being a teacher as part of who they believe they are as a person, "it's in my blood," one teacher said, and another referred to "my teaching skin." For these women, being a teacher is to do something "meaningful."

Chapter V

Analysis

In the previous chapter each unique teacher identity was displayed in the participant's own words. This chapter presents my interpretative insights into the stories these teachers told about being a teacher and negotiating their teacher identity throughout their career in education. This discussion takes into consideration the literature on adult learning, communities of practice, school culture, and leadership in a learning community explained in Chapter 2. The findings offer a synthesis of what was learned about teacher identity and change throughout this study. The chapter is divided into two sections; (a) the social ecology of teacher identity and, (b) the voices of teacher identity. Each section ends with a summary.

The Social Ecology of Teacher Identity

This section presents a discussion of my interpretation of the social ecology of teacher identity. I found teacher identity to be a process of development that continues throughout a teacher's career. In Horn's (2008) study, she found the teacher identities of the pre-service professionals emerged from three worlds: a university class world, a field practice world, and a real world or lived history. The participants in this study add to Horn's findings by describing an ongoing process of teacher identity development well into their professional careers. Following Horn, this section draws on Wenger (1998) to better understand the impact of communities of practice on teacher identity and change among experienced educators:

Because our identities are fundamentally constituted by processes of both identification and negotiability, our communities and our economies of meaning

are inherent aspects of the social fabric in which we define who we are.

Overlooking one process or the other, and especially thinking that one or the other could or should disappear to enable the other, is misleading oversimplification of the social character of human nature. (p. 213)

The social ecology of teacher identity has influence over what gets done and how it gets done in public schools. This social ecology explains why the community of practice in a school is instrumental in school improvement and individual teacher development; and the narratives of these six experienced teachers underscore its value. Like Horn (2008), the teacher identity of these experienced professionals emerged from their lived history. It was this personal history that first opened up the possibility of becoming a teacher because it allowed these women to imagine being a teacher:

Before I even thought about teaching so much influenced me, like my background and being in my family. Like at dinner listening to my mom and step father talk about their teaching days, and knowing that that's a reflection, you think about your day; you go back and you think about your day. You strategize: how can I do this differently, and maybe how can I approach this person, or how can I approach this student?

- Ana

I never planned on having children of my own. Here I was, I had this kid and he was reading, and he knew everything. I had a kid who knew everything, so I thought I would be a good teacher.

- Belle

I was always a swimmer, and one summer I had blew out my shoulder so I wasn't able to swim anymore. I started teaching swim lessons there. I think that's what got it going.

- Lisa

The university world and the field practice world identified by Horn (2008) have evaporated at this stage in a teacher's career. All six of these experienced professionals had already completed Master Degrees in education. Instead of the university and field practice world coinciding with their lived history, these professionals described teacher identity developing within their work world, the community of practice in the school where each was employed:

I changed what the norm is here. You know this building is very rigid and they've all been there forever. This is the first year they've had a change in that building and I had to interview with them [the other teachers], which is wrong in and of itself, but I interviewed with them. Boy, they really did not like that I was going to bring change.

- Leah

I would go to meetings and I would hear all these rrrrrr (growls), and I would hear the dinosaurs going grumble, grumble and then they would be like, "Yah I don't want to do this; if they don't want to do it I'm not going to do it." And here's me like, "Ok, ok, ok," and I end up looking like a kiss ass.

- Belle

Working in [little-town] changed me. I wasn't just, "Yes I'm a teacher;" I was like "Yes, I'm a good teacher." I had amazing professional development there. I was working with a lot of amazing people and they all wanted to mentor me. They were totally accepting. I loved the people there. They were just so warm, so inviting, and not judgmental at all. Even though I felt different because they were all liberal democrats and I was the southern republican, it really didn't matter. They were just so great. I learned so much.

- Dana

Like the pre-service teachers in Horn (2008), all of these teachers described a set of beliefs about being a “good” teacher, and who they are as a teacher. As teachers looked back on the course of their career a thread of continuity was reflected in their pursuit of being a “good” teacher. Along their journey, teacher’s vision of what it means to be “good” was either affirmed or challenged by the various schools, or communities of practice, in which they engaged. When a teacher’s beliefs felt challenged she resolved the tension between what she believes is good and what is touted as good by her community of practice in one of three ways: (a) decided to leave the community of practice, perhaps even leave the profession entirely, (b) began to develop a new understanding of what it means to be a good teacher and to learn to adjust her practices accordingly, therefore continuing her participation, perhaps even deepening her participation in the community, or (c) attempted to negotiate the meaning of good teaching within the community of practice, ultimately resulting in her marginalization by the community of practice.

Decided to leave the community of practice, perhaps even leave the profession entirely.

Already experiencing feelings of forced marginalization, Dana began to move herself further toward the peripheral edge of her community:

I don't want to say that it's transitional because I don't want to be disappointed if I do stay here, you know? I don't want to be upset with myself. But yesterday I enrolled at Southern. I felt like I didn't have any power in my future. I don't like a lot of what I see in education. I want to have another option. I do love a lot about the kids and school, especially books. Every weekend I go to the public library. I'm going to get a Masters in Library Science, so I can have the option of working at a public library; I still will be working with kids. I love kid's books. I don't know. It would be another something.

-Dana

Several teachers mentioned feeling so marginalized in their role as a teacher that they considered leaving the profession at some point in their career. Teachers described changing grade level, schools, and even whole districts because of their community of practice. Dana had previously experienced a community where she felt a strong sense of belonging. At the time of this interview she had just completed her first year at a “turnaround” school, a new district for her. At this school, her ideas about what it meant to be a good teacher were being challenged by the school’s protocols for student discipline. During her first year there, she was turned off by the community’s system of rewards and punishments that underscored the competitive nature of the school culture. During our follow-up meetings she told me she was applying out of the district, had

interviews coming up and was still pursuing her Masters in Library Science. “I’m not happy here, this isn’t the school for me,” she explained.

Began to develop a new understanding of what it means to be a good teacher and to learn to adjust her practices accordingly, therefore continuing her participation, perhaps even deepening her participation in the community.

Teachers described learning experiences that transcended how they had imagined being a teacher, and these experiences always included other teachers or school leaders. In other words, shifts in teacher identity evolved through social interaction. Ana gave a detailed example of a time when working with other teachers expanded her teacher identity and what she felt was her overall capacity to be a teacher;

We worked together and I remember I just wanted to work by myself. I wanted to work in my own little cubicle and organize it and make it perfect. But we weren’t allowed to do that because we had to work as a team. We had a group and we had to really push to come to a consensus, we had to hear everyone’s point of view. There was a part of me like, it’s okay and it was okay, but it was messy; curriculum’s not going to be perfect and nicely organized and everything like that. We had this discussion and we came to this idea of rivers. We were trying to design curriculum for ancient world study for fourth grade. I don’t think I would ever get to the idea of a theme like that, like this big idea that everything was built around rivers. I just wanted to talk about the Nile River and their civilization, then Mesopotamia, and then whatever civilization came next on the list. I didn’t realize these Rivers were connected and that’s how civilization began, around rivers. I learned something from them. I was able to take my

curriculum design to a totally different level. Now there could be theme, and everything was not just separate entities. That was something really huge.

- Ana

There were stories in each teacher's narrative where she described feeling like she had learned something significant about teaching. What was interesting was the way these experiences were nestled in a set of relationships and a series of social interactions within the community of practice. For Ana, who held a strong preference for working alone, to surrender control over her curriculum to a group of teaching colleagues was extremely difficult. It challenged who she believed she was as a teacher – someone who works alone and likes a lot of structure. But the challenge “blew my mind” she told me, meaning it expanded her thinking, it developed who she thought she would be as a teacher in her classroom. In fact she said, “I was able to take my curriculum design to a totally different level,” meaning not only did she learn something that improved this particular unit, she learned something that changed her approach to teaching and what she believed was possible and doable in her classroom.

Attempted to negotiate the meaning of good teaching within the community of practice, ultimately resulting in her marginalization by the community of practice.

Leah described being very aware that her perspective about being a “good” teacher was different from the shared perspective of her community of practice. She orchestrated her own after school and evening events with her students and their families at the expense of making her colleagues “look bad.” In turn, they left her out of traditional whole school events and rarely communicated with her. Her approach was

avored by the principal, and this attributed to her marginalization in a school where the culture embodied a sense of “us against them” between the teachers and leadership.

Coming back here to kindergarten, the place where I did my Para work; it's like I've come full circle. I did two years of Para work in this building, and I'm back now in a different capacity. When I was here as a Para, going into different classrooms, I thought to myself that there were things that I would never ever do. As a teacher, I would never do it. I changed what the norm is here. This building is very rigid because they've all been there forever. This is the first year they've had a change in that building for a long time. I had to interview with them [the other teachers] last year to transfer over, which is wrong in and of itself. I interviewed with them but they did not like that I was going to bring change. As a teacher, I can't just do what everybody else says, that's wrong. So, don't ask me to do that, you know? Don't ask me to do that.

- Leah

All of the teachers described some period of marginalization and some time of full engagement with a community of practice over their careers. Marginalization contributed to participant's sense of teacher identity as much or even more than times of participation. Leah described an interesting experience with marginalization; she likened to her status of being on the edge of the community and wore it like a badge of honor. She explained that she wanted to bring change to a school that had long remained status quo. However, she was kept at arms length by the faculty and she did the same, neither side embracing a negotiation between the poles. At the time I interviewed her, it was the end of her first year in this school. Very little change was going on in the school, and

there were no systems in place for teachers to mutually construct change at that time. It was true that she was a different kind of teacher than those who had been there for decades, but her belief that, “I changed that school,” appeared to be overstated. Other than her presence, I witnessed no real changes in the community, and the principal remained frustrated with the resistance to change from the teachers. Leah’s ideas were different and they were very positive but she did little to include other teachers or to help them understand her ideas.

Participants also described times when they felt very much in sync with their community of practice, and this affirmed their teacher identity and sense of being a “good” teacher. Mary was at the end of her first year in a “turnaround school.” She was downtrodden at the time of the interview. However, a glimmer of hope for a different future appeared as she recalled stories from a previous teaching experience in an alternative community of practice. In her previous community she was an engaged participant, recognized with an unofficial title as the “math leader:”

I sort of found a niche the following year when I got moved to be a math teacher. Throughout the next few years I sort of found a place, and I was taking classes again, to get a Masters as a math specialist. I was working with adults I respected, I respected the way they collaborated; the program we used is really deeply into not just increasing teacher content knowledge, going into more of like instructionally how do you get kids there, once your own personal knowledge is up. Just enjoying doing research with them and getting to teach some with them, and present some and help; I became the math leader at that school. I was working with the other teachers and helping bring them along as well.

- Mary

These unofficial titles like “math leader” and “reading specialist” indicated leadership and expertise in a community of practice and they were important to a teacher’s identity. The sense of being known and in a positive way, known as a leader, indicated being an active participant in a community. An unofficial title demonstrated that relationships had been built, trust had been established. Mary was disappointed that she “threw it all away” and was left “feeling like a first year teacher again.” A sense of domain ownership contributed to the positive learning experiences described by participants, and consequently tended to be the times when individuals also described feeling like a “good” teacher.

As participants relayed the story of their career, chapters where typically sectioned off by changes in their school community, not by changes in their practice, or salary increases, or even by getting an unusually challenging student as may have been anticipated. For example, teachers could have said things like, “after we got the new reading curriculum a whole new chapter began,” or “getting my 5% raise began the start of my next chapter,” but they did not say things like this. Instead, teachers spoke about changes in their community of practice that led to their change in self perception as a teacher.

Then I came here, and that’s another chapter completely.

- Mary

Teaching in X-town changed me; that was a different chapter entirely.

- Dana

Being at this school... is like a whole new chapter.

- Lisa

I switched from second to third, whole new team, whole new chapter.”

- Leah

This notion of change, a change in self and/or a change in school culture, hand in hand with continuity, arose in all of the narratives. Although Dana explained, “Teaching in X-town changed me. Before that I was just a teacher, there I was a good teacher,” she followed it up with a description of a school environment that affirmed what she already believed to be true about being a good teacher before she ever arrived there. She had not changed, but in this new school her values were affirmed rather than contested. The change was more about her community of practice changing than it was about her, or any of her beliefs changing. The strong sense of alignment she experienced with that particular community brought a change in the way it felt to be a teacher; she felt good because she was surrounded by people who shared her beliefs and values. At the time of the interview she had just moved on from her ideal community and her values were being challenged by a culture of test obsession and a discipline system that relied on rewards and punishments when she valued intrinsic motivation and pro-social learning. Again, her teacher identity had not changed. She resolved the disequilibrium she experienced in this new school culture by enrolling in graduate school to become a librarian, concluding “I don’t like much of what I see in education.”

Summary

Teacher identity is a story of change and continuity. The fundamental beliefs teachers hold matter, and the dialogue teachers have with their colleagues matter. For the six experienced professionals in this study, teacher identity continued to develop

throughout the course of their career. The community of practice each woman engaged in within in her work world contributed to how she saw herself as teacher, or her teacher identity. Participants described feeling personally affirmed or challenged by the values of their communities and this contributed to how they perceived “good” teaching, and who they are as a teacher.

Part Two: Voices of Teacher Identity

This section presents my interpretation of three voices that emerged from the narratives in this sample. Member checks indicated that the identification of these voices resonated with the participants in this study. The voices of learning, leading, and liberating, weaved in and out of the narratives as participants told their story of being a teacher.

Teachers as Learners

What I’m learning is that there’s an expertise in teaching that really makes you a better teacher and no one just hands that to you.

- Anne

Almost all of the teachers described a sense of “not knowing” during their first year or two teaching. The phrase “like a first year teacher” popped up in several narratives, and it appeared to be understood that this meant to be in a state of “not knowing.” To describe feeling like a first year teacher again when one is in fact a seasoned professional is to suggest a sense of feeling *lost*. For example Belle vividly described her first year teaching, “it was like someone threw me into the deep end of a pool and I didn’t know how to swim.” The implication is as

experienced professionals these participants felt like they had learned a lot; they had traveled a distance since that first year of “knowing nothing,” as Lisa put it.

The teachers talked about learning from their colleagues. Ana described a powerful experience when she “allowed” herself “to be open to learning with others.” In fact, she used the word “learn” forty-seven times in her career story. Mary longed to return to her previous school where she felt she had been “learning a lot from people she respected.” Every story described being a learner as part of the participant’s teacher identity.

Teachers as Leaders

People are going to see me as a leader, someone who has knowledge that they want. Just being recognized is going to be hugely different. I’m going to have to straighten up. I won’t be able to just go with the flow.

- Lisa

These experienced teachers described a journey toward leadership, not in the form of management *per se*, but leadership in the form of recognized expertise. How they were recognized in their community of practice (their teacher identity) mattered to these teachers. When Mary “became the math leader” in her community of practice, it prompted her to enroll in a special Masters program that focused on teaching mathematics, strengthening her teacher identity at work. When she changed communities (schools) and the unofficial title of expertise was eliminated, she became unsure about pursue math as an area of specialization in her graduate program. All of these teachers valued the opportunity to share their area of acquired knowledge with their colleagues. Even

Ana, who described herself as being “the kind of person who needs to have control,” described learning through collaboration with her colleagues to be “mind blowing.”

Recognition for these teachers was achieved through leadership responsibilities, seen in the granting of an unofficial title like “math leader.” As a math leader, there is not necessarily more money. A teacher’s contract will still read “classroom teacher,” but this unofficial title lifts her above her peers when it comes to mathematics instruction in the community of practice. It may give her some added responsibilities (which teachers tend to take on without additional pay). She becomes known as the resident expert on math. This positive recognition cultivates in teachers a sense of belonging. For Mary, being the math expert felt like a good tagline to her teacher identity, but upon entering a new school she felt her identity was like that of “a first year teacher again,” and it loomed over her like a dark cloud. Recognition was transient throughout the teacher’s narratives, and not located at the end of a slowly ascending hierarchy, nor one from classroom teacher to school administrator as one might presume. In other words, these teachers did not describe a career cycle of getting more and greater recognition with age and experience; there were peaks and valleys of recognition throughout the length of the narratives.

Teachers as Liberators

In my heart I’m not a tier 1 school teacher. I’m not a teacher for that kind of school. I’m a teacher for the inner city kids. I’m a teacher for the project kids. I’m not a teacher for a bunch of little suburbanites. That’s not who I want to be.

- Belle

Threads of social justice mingled within these career stories. Lisa specifically mentioned choosing to be a teacher because she identified it with “social justice.” Leah described herself as “the kind of person who looks out for the underdog,” and after describing her social concerns for her students she explained, “I’ve got to be the teacher for all of them.” A continuum of liberation as a theme ranged from a favoring of promoting equality as a teacher to the ultimate reason for being a teacher. Nevertheless, it existed as an ideal for participants in this study; “good” teachers stand up for individual student’s learning needs. When Belle explained, “I’m not a teacher for tier one schools,” it was not suggestive that she lacks the necessary skills to be a tier one teacher, but rather that her talent should not be squandered on students who “will succeed no matter what.”

I wondered how this voice of teacher identity was impacted by race and class. Even though it is commendable that teachers in this study described wanting to help students overcome the hardships in their lives, this voice of liberation is worthy of further exploration, particularly in schools where the students are predominately children of color and the teachers are predominately white. The notion of being a savior, or the one who will “be the difference” as Belle hoped to be deserves further investigation. There is a danger in appearing like the white knight or thinking of oneself as such. It could be an overestimation of one’s own importance in the life of a student. It is a good example of an area for self-examination through critical reflection on assumptions and beliefs.

On the other hand, participants also described an awareness of a power differential between their status and those that loomed beyond the walls of their classroom. “I felt I had no power in my future,” Dana said as she explained why she was

returning to school to pursue a degree in library sciences. Power differences between teachers and administration were most pronounced in Belle's story, "they're smarter than us," she told me. This dynamic between helping those who were considered to have little power, students, and yet describing a lack of power as a teacher ranged from subtly to overwhelmingly present in all of the narratives.

Summary

Three voices emerged from the stories these six professionals told about being a teacher, the voices of learning, leading, and liberating. Participants described themselves as lifelong learners, actively engaged in the process of developing themselves as teachers over the course of their careers. The belief in helping children was paramount. Proud memories were recalled as were disappointing ones when teachers believed a student did not get all he or she needed in school. Teacher leadership, even informally assigned, was perceived as a status symbol in the communities of practice; at a minimum it was a way of fitting inside the community, a sign of being an active participator.

Chapter V

Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this study is to consider how teacher identity is negotiated among experienced teachers working in public elementary schools engaged in reform, and how teacher identity interacts with change. I believed that a better understanding of the relationship between teacher identity and change could assist principals and other school leaders charged with improving classroom practice. Following is a discussion of: (a) lessons learned; (b) implications and; (c) limitations. The report concludes with a brief reflective summary.

Lessons Learned

Following the research questions and purpose, two main understandings can be gleaned from this study: (a) experienced teachers negotiate teacher identity in a continual process of development within a school's community of practice; (b) changes to classroom practice may be an adaptive challenge for experienced teachers.

Experienced teachers negotiate teacher identity in a continual process of development within a school's community of practice.

This study extends Horn's (2008) findings that pre-service professionals develop a teacher identity within communities of practice. This study found that the construction of a teacher identity continues long after the internship or pre-service work has ended, perhaps for as long as the teaching career extends. Participants in this study spoke about who they are as a teacher, and who they are not, in relation to the colleagues they worked with in their school.

The ongoing dynamic exchange between identity and community matters when it comes to classroom practice and change in schools. The teachers in this study described different levels and kinds of participation in the community of practice at their school, and this was connected with how they felt about being a teacher. A few participants described looking back to the kind of teacher they were when they worked in a previous school with regret because they favored who they believed they were then as a teacher within that community of practice. This finding suggests identity and community is not only important for implementing school initiatives, but actually *are* the initiative, especially when changing classroom practice is part of a school's improvement agenda. How teachers feel about who they are in relation to the community of practice will ultimately impact what goes on in the classroom and throughout the school.

Changes to classroom practice may be an adaptive challenge for experienced teachers.

Like the pre-service professionals in Horn's (2008) study, experienced professionals maintain certain beliefs about who they are as a teacher, and who they are not. They have spent years, perhaps even decades, acting on who they believe they are as a teacher. Adopting a new teaching practice or curriculum means learning to behave differently, to think differently, and this may be an adaptive challenge for experienced teachers who have become accustomed to doing things a particular way. Simply telling someone to change a teaching practice is not likely to be enough.

Participants in this study described enjoying the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their colleagues about classroom practices, but they also described resistance to changing practices. This is teacher identity at work. Teachers, like other reasonable

adults, behave according to what they believe is good and right. An individual may even intend to take on a new behavior or practice but if the change does not take place in her perspective the practice is likely to be forgotten or pushed aside, or even purposefully resisted. To make a change in behavior that becomes a new, lasting way of behaving, is often an adaptive challenge because it involves the way a person thinks about the world. Adaptive challenges may require transformative learning experiences. Participants in this study described expectations of collaboration and reaching consensus with a team of colleagues as two ways that led to critical reflection on classroom practice.

Implications

This study has implications for leading whole school reform and for those charged with helping teachers make changes to their pedagogical practice. Recommendations for principals and school leaders follow transformational forms of leadership as described in chapter two. The adaptive challenge of leading school-wide reform and changing teachers' classroom practice is well matched with a transformative perspective because it connects the group identity with the self, and engages the collective force of a school's culture. Adaptive problems require something different from leadership than authoritative solutions. Effectively facilitating adaptive change is challenging and complex, "making progress on adaptive problems requires learning, the task of leadership consists of choreographing and directing learning processes in an organization or community" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 187). Adaptive leadership cultivates a supportive community where individuals feel comfortable taking risks and strategically maintains a level of tension that does not overwhelm members of the community, but provides enough discomfort to mobilize people into action. At times leaders may coordinate

experiences with disequilibrium and purposefully refrain from rushing to restore the balance. Three effective ways of supporting communities of practice with adaptive work are by, (a) teaching the skills and mindsets for building a collaborative culture, (b) recognizing and publicizing the unique gifts and talents each teacher brings to the school and by, (c) facilitating teachers' critical reflection on values and assumptions.

Teach the skills and mindsets for building a collaborative culture.

A collaborative culture is cultivated with intention, "communities don't just happen" (Garmston & Wellman, 2009, p. 164). Edgar Schein (2004) from the Sloan School of Management at MIT argues, "*Uniquely* associated with leadership [is] the creation and management of culture" (p. 2). School leaders have tremendous influence over the culture of schools, at times without realizing it. Traditional authoritative and adversarial approaches to leadership create conflict instead of cooperation, a sense of winners and losers as opposed to mutual understanding. Thinking about the world from a collaborative frame of reference is different than traditional competitive norms. Collaboration rejects an "either or" version of the world and embraces a "both and" perspective (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Creating a common vision of norms and values throughout a community of practice using collaborative leadership skills and processes can provide a framework for holding people accountable, struggling together instead of alone, and reaching consensus.

Relationships are fundamental to a collaborative school culture. A collaborative school culture requires participation of all members of a community so that over time shared concerns can develop. Collaboration generates "involvement with the other which considers the other's enhancement" and builds a network of responsive relationships

(Kegan, 1982, p. 57). The trust that develops from caring, authentic relationships is an important factor in leading adaptive work (Heifetz, 1994). Engaging in a collaborative community is not always natural and easy as collaboration is the accumulation of many different skills and shared understandings. Teaching the mindsets and skills necessary for participating in collaboration is the role of leadership and may itself be a transformative development in some schools.

Leading collaboratively helps mitigate divisions in the community through education and communication. Effective communication includes not only the message but the ability of individuals to hear it, to take it in and understand it. Collaborative leaders expand their influence through problem solving with others, as opposed to delivering instructions for fixes. A collaborative leader can help groups construct shared learning through critical reflection and dialogue, and by not assuming as the leader that one has *the* answer.

Recognize and publicize the unique talents each teacher brings to the community of practice.

The perspective of this researcher is that recognition is largely misunderstood and therefore does not typically yield the kind of results intended or desired. In public schools there is usually one or two awards presented to a few teachers in each district every year. Typically there is a teacher appreciation week or day where parents and school leaders offer kind gestures of thanks to teachers such as a breakfast or a small memento. All of those things may be enjoyable and they certainly are a form of recognition, but usually they are lacking in two significant ways, they do not necessarily contribute to cultivating a collaborative school culture, and they do not necessarily add to

an individual's sense of belonging to the community of practice. In fact, they can even undermine efforts to promote collaboration. True recognition does not come from a prize, gift, or even a notable award. Although anyone might enjoy receiving a bonus check, recognition is not the number on the check. It is also not the same as a once a year celebration of the profession. The kind of recognition being referred to here is the day to day feeling a person gets when she is known by others for her positive contributions to the community.

Recognition within a learning community is about ensuring that everyone is recognized rather than honoring the work of a select few. Developing a sense of community begins with knowing each others' names and referring to each other in an openly agreed upon way, for example calling each other (including the principal) by first names or not. Agreeing publically to a set of guidelines for professional discussion and every day behavior is also a powerful act for engaging a community of practice. In a learning community, publicizing the good work of individuals to the community of practice is embedded into daily routines and procedures, for example beginning meetings by providing time for any member of the community to acknowledge the positive contributions of others. It is throughout this kind of organizational work that principals and others in positions of leadership can begin to develop a culture where individuals feel safe to take risks, and committed to developing a shared vision of practice.

Facilitate teachers' critical reflection on values and assumptions about practice.

Developing teachers' capacity for critical reflection on values and assumptions is important to facilitating changes in practice. Collaboration and critical dialogue among

teachers cannot merely be add-ons to what is already in place in schools; they must be central to the structure of each school. Literature on program evaluation is helpful in addressing this issue. Using the structure of evaluation as a tool for bringing a community of practice together for the purpose of critically reflecting on their own work can have a powerful effect on changing practice. According to Patton (2002), "The concept of *process use* called attention to the observation that those who go through an evaluation often experience changes in thinking, attitudes, and behavior that can have lasting effects on how programs and organizations go about their business" (p. xvii).

Preskill and Torres (1999) lay out a plan for facilitating continual learning and improvement in schools through "evaluative inquiry." The process is participatory, and networks are strengthened allowing teachers to pass on constructive information to each other. Evaluative inquiry is designed to question educators' "values, beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge" about practice. Alignment with the school's mission and vision is strengthened through participating in the evaluative inquiry process. The growth of any practice requires dialogue and reflection, without it stagnation sets in and there is a silent acceptance of what works, even when it does not (Palmer, 2007).

Limitations

There were inherent and imposed limitations to the study. I have given careful consideration to transparency and accounting for these limitations throughout the report. As explained, "truth" in life story research is seen from the eyes of the study participants. The storyteller determines if the story accurately describes her personal perspective, her personal truth. This study cannot be generalized to other teachers and schools. Understanding of personal perspective and personal truth was sought instead of

generalizability. I took steps to ensure the stories were internally consistent and believable, and corroborated with participants in analyzing and displaying the stories.

I was familiar with participants and with their school's community of practice. During the time of the interviews, I was an external coach and leader of school reform efforts at each teacher's school. This relationship could have influenced participant's responses. Participants may have tried harder to appear cooperative, or may have tried to answer questions in ways they believed would be helpful to the researcher. On the other hand, it is also possible participants could have been more guarded because of their familiarity with the researcher, and they may have withheld responses that could be deemed unfavorable. I did my best to maintain open communication with participants throughout analysis, I ensured anonymity of participants, and took efforts to help participants feel comfortable.

The research sample was restricted and purposefully selected. I selected teachers in schools where I worked as a coach and leader of school reform. All three of the schools were undergoing school reform as a result of insufficient progress on the standardized state assessment. Although a random sample would have offered greater validity and reliability, the research design sacrifices these norms of objectivity for closeness and empathic neutrality.

Recommendations

Further research is needed to better understand how teacher identity affects an individual's classroom practice. A study that tracks the presentation and implementation of a new teaching practice while including a series of interviews with experienced teachers would yield findings that could offer additional insights into this adaptive

challenge. Conducting a parallel study with a larger sample of experienced teachers could determine the extent to which the same or similar findings would be uncovered as well as to correct for researcher bias. Additional research is also needed to better understand the perspectives of other subgroups of teachers. Issues of race and class in relation to teacher identity have the potential to offer important guidance to those working in urban settings in particular.

In addition, I believe a future study that investigates narrative learning as a potential contribution to professional development for teachers could be helpful. The use of biographies has been an aspect of teaching and learning for over a century (Dominice, 2000). In post interview meetings, all six teachers described feeling they had learned something about themselves from telling their story as a teacher. During this follow up dialogue, teachers commented on the lack of opportunity they have had to “talk about being a teacher” and wishing they had “more opportunities for reflection.” They described a sense of enjoyment from the interview process, and all six commented that they had “learned something from the interview.” Goodson, Biest, Tedder and Adair (2010) suggest narrative learning comes not only from the story itself but also in the act of narrating the story: “People learn ‘in’ and ‘through’ their stories and storying (p. 14). The authors go on to claim, “For all those interested in education as a route to self development and social purpose, narrative learning would seem to offer a promising gateway” (p. 132).

Beyond the field of professional learning for teachers, this research has potential implications on a broader organizational level. The dynamics revealed in this study about role identity in a community of practice are likely to exist in similar fields such as law

enforcement, social work, and nursing. Further research on professional role identity in a community of practice could reveal important insights into these professions.

Researcher Reflections

At the close of this study I want to take a moment to reflect on the journey that was undertaken with the participants, dissertation committee advisors, and readers of this research. My intention and sincere hope throughout this project was to listen carefully to the often unheard voices of teachers, those experienced professionals who are charged with meeting the varying learning needs of students each and every day. The collaboration I received from the participants greatly enhanced the insights I was able to garner from this investigation. I am deeply grateful for all that I have learned throughout this process.

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Appendix A

Online Screening Survey

I. Demographic Information:

State and Town you teach in: _____

All grade levels of the school you teach in: _____

Grade you teach now (2010-2011 school year) _____

Number of years teaching in a public elementary school: _____

II. Describe the adult community at your school:

III. Describe the student community at your school:

Appendix B

Consent Letter

Dear _____,

The information in this letter is provided to assist you in deciding if you would like to participate in a study about teacher identity. The study is part of my work at Lesley University as a student in the Ph.D. Program in Educational Studies. It is important that you are fully aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time. Whatever choice you make will be respected by this researcher and will not affect your relationship with this researcher.

The purpose of this study is to gather stories of the experiences of experienced public school educators. Data will be collected through a two hour interview process, your feedback on the interview through an online survey, and your verbal feedback after the first draft analysis. During the interview you will be asked to share personal stories about teaching and learning. There are no known risks associated with sharing personal stories. It is possible telling a story may cause an emotional response, and you may stop at any time. Telling our own stories, however, can also be beneficial emotionally. General information about your school, available in the public domain, may be described in the findings but you and your school will not be named in the study in any way. A pseudonym will be used to refer to you and your school throughout all reported findings and/or any articles for publication.

You are welcome to contribute your feedback at any time throughout the process of this study, your thoughts and feelings will be completely respected by this researcher. I am happy to share the final findings of the study with you when the research is complete, and you should be aware that I may seek to publish portions of the research. Your identity and the identity of the school will always remain anonymous.

Please feel free to ask questions about the study before deciding to participate, or anytime during the study. If you would like to speak with me directly about this study, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact myself or any of the persons listed below:

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Please indicate that you understand the purpose and process of this study by signing this consent letter below. A copy of this letter will be provided to you.

Thank you,

Amy Parmenter

Signature

Date

Appendix C

“Teacher Story” Interview

Introduction

I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you in your role as a teacher. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things, key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things about life as a teacher. I will guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours or less.

Please know that my purpose in doing this interview is not to figure out what is wrong with your teaching style or to do some kind of deep clinical analysis! This interview is not for evaluative purposes. The interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story. Social scientists often collect people’s life stories in order to understand the different ways in which people in our society and in others live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are. I am interested in the stories of teachers. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. I think you will enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

A. Chapters

Please begin by thinking about the time you have spent as a teacher as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To begin here, please describe very briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please give each chapter a title, tell me just a little bit about what each chapter is about, and say a word or two about how we get from one chapter to the next.

As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter. You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest having between about 2 and 7 of them. We will want to spend no more than about 20 minutes on this first section of the interview, so please keep your descriptions of the chapters relatively brief.

B. Key Scenes in the Teacher Story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your role as a teacher, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your career story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. For each of the eight key events we will consider, I ask that you describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular

scene is *important* or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a teacher? Please be specific.

1. High point. Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your role as a teacher that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be *the* high point scene of your entire career, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a teacher.

2. Low point. The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over the time you have spent as a teacher, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not *the* low point in your career. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it. What happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so bad and what the scene may say about you as a teacher. [*Interviewer note: If the participants balks at doing this, tell him or her that the event does not really have to be **the** lowest point in the story but merely a very bad experience of some kind.*]

3. Turning point. In looking back over your time as a teacher, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in your story as a teacher. Please identify a particular episode in your role as a teacher that you now see as a turning point in your teaching practice. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your role as a teacher wherein you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a teacher or about your teaching practice.

C. Future Script

This section of the interview is about how you see your work now and leading into the future.

1. Teacher Learning project. (Transition to future) Do you have a project as a teacher? By this I mean a project that is something you have been working on and plan to work on in the future chapters of your teacher story. The project might involve your colleagues or your school, or it might be a learning or professional goal. Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future. Tell me what the project is, how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for your students.

2. The next chapter. Your teacher story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future

role to be. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your role as a teacher. What is going to come next in your teacher story?

3. Dreams, hopes, and plans for future instructional changes. Please describe any plans, dreams, or hopes to change or improve an instructional practice. What do you hope to improve in the future as a teacher?

D. Personal Ideology

Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning in your teaching. Please give some thought to each of these questions.

1. Ethical/Moral values. Consider for a moment the ethical and moral aspects of expectations for students in your classroom. Please describe your overall approach to moral or ethical behavior in the classroom. How do students in your classroom know when they are doing the “right” thing?