TRANSACTING WITH SOCIETAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPECTATIONS IN THE FIGURED WORLD OF EDUCATION: HOW TEACHER MOTHERS CREATE THEIR LIVES IN THE OVERWHELM

by

LAURA ALLISA ABRAHAM

(Under the Direction of Bob Fecho)

ABSTRACT

Poet, Toi Derricotte (1997) wrote, "eventually every identity breaks down to some self that has to learn to live between loneliness and connection" (p. 78). Public school teachers, who are also mothers to school aged children, negotiate this relationship dynamic on a daily basis, often in the isolation of their own classrooms. How teacher mothers transact with and create the potential for agency within the figured world of education is the focus of this qualitative study. Combining Michel Foucault's theories of discipline and punishment with Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory and Dorothy Holland's writing on improvisation within figured worlds, this study describes what happens when teacher mothers write about their lives and share stories with other teacher mothers within communities of care. Poetic inquiry and representation provide further description of the lived experience of the teacher mother within her figured world,

utilizing both persona poems and free verse forms as a means to represent data collected in this narrative writing and interview study.

Through a process of first writing and then sharing stories about instances of teaching and mothering within a small group setting, four participants, forming a community of teacher mothers, met three times to discuss their narratives. Written words and recorded dialogue from these sessions then served as data from which the researcher composed persona poems about each participant and her lived experience. Narrative analysis was then followed by interviews with each participant along with member checks through sharing of the poems. Teacher mother responses indicate that participation in small, writing and sharing communities serve to provide often-isolated professionals with confidence and courage to enact agency within the figured worlds, providing working teacher mothers with a greater sense of efficacy in balancing societal expectations and responsibilities of work and home.

INDEX WORDS: Teacher, Mother, Education, Foucault, Rosenblatt, Holland, Transaction, Improvisation, Narrative, Writing, Communities of Care, Poetic Inquiry, Poetic Representation, Persona Poem, Interview, Overwhelm, Expectations, Agency, Schools, Administrators, Cultural, Societal, Expectations.

TRANSACTING WITH SOCIETAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPECTATIONS IN THE FIGURED WORLD OF EDUCATION: HOW TEACHER MOTHERS CREATE THEIR LIVES IN THE OVERWHELM

by

LAURA ALLISA ABRAHAM

A.B., The University of Georgia, 1993

MMC, The University of Georgia, 1995

Ed.S., The University of Georgia, 2008

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2017

TRANSACTING WITH SOCIETAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPECTATIONS IN THE FIGURED WORLD OF EDUCATION: HOW TEACHER MOTHERS CREATE THEIR LIVES IN THE OVERWHELM

by

LAURA ALLISA ABRAHAM

Major Professor: Bob Fecho

Committee: Melisa Cahnnman-Taylor

Elizabeth St. Pierre

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour

Dean of Graduate School The

University of Georgia May

2017

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation study to my ever-supportive friends and family, many of who sacrificed much time and attention so that I could complete this work.

To my grandmother, Lois Waters Greene, whose fierce, independent spirit lives in me, providing a daily reminder that I can do it. Whatever it is, I have the ability and the will to figure it out. Thank you, Lois.

To my mother, Dr. Kitty Lorraine Greene, for providing me a model for personal sacrifice, determination, and a belief that I could complete this journey. I watched you do it nearly forty years ago, so I knew I could, too.

To my father, Dennis Abraham, for your steadfast love and belief in me. I thank you most, however, for the way you opened my world to a love of learning and your gift of higher education. I endeavor to be worthy of it every day.

To my sons, Samuel Arden and Matthew Michael, you are my greatest works and inspiration for all I do in this world. I thank you for understanding when "Mom's writing time" encroached on our time together. I look forward to making up those moments we lost and thank you both for your patience and maturity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful and continually grateful for the support, encouragement, and guidance so many people have provided to me throughout my years of study in higher education at the University of Georgia.

I am indebted to my committee under the leadership of my advisor, Dr. Bob Fecho. Known to my children as Dr. Bob – that man who makes our mom write all the time – I am so thankful you did. Your gentle, yet persistent nudges to continue on when challenges threatened to block my path were so helpful and often much needed. Thank you for seeing this journey through with me. I am so much richer in knowledge and fortitude thanks to your guidance.

To Dr. Elizabeth St. Pierre, Dr. Melisa Cahnnman-Taylor, and Dr. Stephanie R. Jones, I offer thanks and gratitude. You've served as models of professionalism and excellence in scholarship to me, and I thank you for your careful readings of my work and wise counsel in helping me craft this dissertation study.

I extend sincere appreciation to colleagues Joanna Anglin, Liya Endale, Margaret Robbins, and Kevin Schneider for reading and offering feedback on parts, poems, and early drafts of my work. Thank you for your time and effort to help me accomplish this great task.

I wish to honor my writing mentors as well – you may not have read a page or poem in this dissertation, but your encouragements and invitations to talk about craft with me have profoundly influenced my writer's journey. I thank you all, but specifically acknowledge JoBeth Allen for awakening my consciousness as a poet and writer – for those first inklings of understanding that I might use my words to say something important in and to the world. I once again thank Misha Cahnnman-Taylor for inviting and engaging me in the procress of honing my writing skills, patiently and persistently challenging me to exercise my poetry muscle and experiment with form and verse. I also acknowledge the generosity and rich mentorship of Judith Ortiz Cofer. As her creative writing student, I learned the importance of literary discipline and the value of attention to detail and memory. I regret that I may no longer share this work or celebrate its completion with her, but pay respect and honor with immense gratitude to her influence in my writing practices both now and into the future.

Finally, I acknowledge the gift of time and genuine friendship provided to me and this project by Dr. Judy Bolen, Dr. Rochelle Mungin, and Ms. April Swain. I thank you for your willingness to participate in our writing and sharing community, your trust in the process as we figured things out, your vulnerability, your knowledge, your professionalism, and your patience and trust as I wrote our collective story together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter One:

Introduction

Greetings,

This email is to inform you that your son/daughter has fallen below the 75% or higher STEM grade point average. Please check Infinite Campus to look at your child's grade.

The notification I received sounded innocuous enough, but with a shy 6th grader in his first year at a middle school that very few of his elementary school classmates chose to attend, I thought I had better reach out to his teachers to try and help support him. With his grade posted at a 60 percent, I wrote back to thank the teacher for letting me know about the dip in his average and to request a conference, providing several possible dates and times to meet. I received the following response.

I can only meet on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays during my planning time of 2:30 - 3:45. We are booked still from parents wanting to come in on last week during conference week and we were not able to see them. You can leave me a phone number and we can do a phone conference in between my previous scheduled conferences.

None of the days I had offered to meet were accepted or acknowledged. Her resistance to meet either before or after school was surprising as well as the conference times I provided were hours I knew to be convenient to her middle school teaching schedule. I wondered why she was so inflexible in her response.

What surprised me most, however, was that the conference times she did offer were in direct conflict with my high school teaching schedule. I wondered why she would expect any parent, let alone a working teacher, to take off in the middle of the day to conference with her. It seemed unreasonable at worst and inflexible at best. Then, I realized I had sent my email correspondence through my university account, not my school account. She didn't know I was a teacher, and she didn't know I worked in the same school district. I was determined to secure a meeting time, so I replied again:

> *I'm afraid that I am teaching during your planning period. I would like to meet with you and talk about Sam's progress. Could you find some additional times that would hopefully work? I understand that you are busy, but if we can talk, then we'll best be able to support you by supporting Sam at home.*

Three email exchanges later, I had a conference scheduled, but I was frustrated and tense. She agreed to a time provided I "call or send an email" if "you are unable to make it" (email communication, 2014), knowing full well the conference required me to leave work early in order to attend. Her tone had somewhat softened to include an explanation for her inability to meet with me before or after school. She was a teacher mother, just like me, and had to be available for her own child's transportation needs. This kind of parental obligation I could sympathize with, and I wondered why she hadn't explained that from the beginning, but what I didn't quite understand was what I perceived as rigid inflexibility in the face of a parent reaching out to provide academic support for one of her students. Why inform me of my son's lack of progress if she wouldn't make time to talk about ways to make it better?

The following week, I went to the school and met with my son's teachers. We had a good conversation and made a plan for his academic success in all classes. Yet, as I sat in the conference, I couldn't help but feel resentful of the stress I had felt leading up to this conversation. I had spent hours drafting emails that would hopefully promote dialogue rather than shut it down. I had asked my husband's help in interpreting the teacher's responses just to make certain I wasn't overreacting or being overly sensitive. I altered my professional schedule to make the meeting possible. I carefully navigated our conversations so I would not evoke hard feelings and make my son's teachers defensive. I wanted them to understand that I respected their positions as valuable professionals. It was hard work, but all of these things I gladly did because I wanted to help my son.

However, I wondered – how did this extra stress impact my life as a teacher? Had I lost focus in my effort to teach my own 10th Grade English students? Navigating this meeting certainly monopolized my time and thoughts; how could I in this mode sufficiently concentrate on the needs of my students? I wondered as well – how had my other younger son fared while I diverted time and energy to solving this problem? Did he feel neglected while I tended to her older brother?

Experiencing such tension in my own personal and professional lives prompted me to wonder about other women like me. I really began to think about what it means to construct a life as a teacher and also a mother. Where do we experience limitations, and where do we make moments of freedom due to the advantage our insider knowledge lends us? I wondered if their challenges to manage daily life were similar to mine? And most importantly, as I reflected on my interactions with my son's teachers, I thought about the inevitable daily negotiations over competing interests when teacher duties

collided with mothering responsibilities. In the figured world of the teacher mother (Holland, et al, 1998), how does she transact with her world in a manner that sustains her sense of worth and value?

Statement of the Problem

My own struggle to negotiate professional and mothering duties is a personal story, often laden with raw emotion and feeling, but my experience is not unique to mothers in the working world. In a 2010 TEDTalk on women and work, Facebook Chief Operating Officer, Sheryl Sandberg (2010), attacked the "myth" of the Supermom and confessed, "I fall very short of doing it all" (p. 139). Similarly, Director of the Family Values @ Work consortium, Ellen Bravo (2012) wrote most women are rather "worried about losing it all" because of the "regular conflicts that arise between being a good employee and a responsible parent" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 23).

It made me wonder, in our contemporary world where 74% of working women are mothers to school-age children and 41% of all working mothers are the primary breadwinners for their families (Yen, 2013), where does this leave women in terms of reasonable expectations for work and home? With everyday conversation laden with questions of how to multitask more efficiently in search of life-work balance, where does that leave women like me, especially the women who work, mother, and teach other mothers' children? How may we begin to think about women so entangled in multiple worlds, and what may we learn from her experiences?

In her book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, Sandberg described a no-win situation for working mothers according to contemporary societal standards. She (2013) wrote, "Today, a "good mother" is always around and always devoted to the needs

of her children" (p. 135), describing her own often complicated efforts to be fully present in her family, yet also grasping the results of a 2012 British study indicating, "my career is not harming my children" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 136). Although McMunn, et al. (2012) had found high measures of family well-being in British households where both parents worked, this starkly contrasted attitudes held by men living in the United States. A 2013 PEW Research Center Report revealed 57% of men polled believed children were "better off if their mother is at home" rather than in the workforce. As a result of this alternating viewpoint, many American working mothers may feel a tension between responsibilities and expectations that are not easily resolved, especially if parenting duties are not equally shared with partners. As Bianchi (2011) wrote, "The family system is more turbulent in the United States than elsewhere, and women spend more time as lone mothers, rearing children without a father present, than do their European counterparts" (p. 19).

Time studies and interview research in the social sciences, particularly sociology and psychology, have begun to explore and expose some of the tension working mothers experience as they negotiate this contradiction in career opportunity with societal expectations for good mothering (Raskin 2006, Medina and Magnuson, 2009, Bianchi 2011). As Raskin (2006) wrote, "preliminary research indicates that many women who have multiple roles consistently experience internal conflict even as they are committed to these roles" (p. 1358). My reading of this work made me wonder – with tension over familial responsibilities remaining unresolved and under constant negotiation for so many American mothers, what happens to the potential for tension when women work in specific fields or professions such as education? What's left in this push and pull quest

for a balanced life for the women charged with not only mothering their own children, but the children they teach as well?

Medina & Magnuson (2009) argued for more study into "the impact of motherhood on women's professional lives" (p. 94) as they considered literature on the social construction of motherhood in the field of counseling. James (2010) studied female teachers' understandings of care within the context of teaching, arguing, "though we must strive to understand teachers' efforts to care for themselves and others at the most personal level, we must not forget to ask critical questions about societal and cultural norms that inform those efforts" (p. 533).

With this work in mind, my study takes my first, thoughtful step at developing a process for making meaning and creating space for understanding the lived experience of a certain type of working woman in our society – the teacher mother – a term I will define in later in this chapter. As a teacher researcher I identify with many of the stresses described previously in this paper, for I am an often overwhelmed, working mother who relates too well to the fear of losing it all. Similarly, I take a keen interest in the balancing act so many other working mothers seem to manage daily because, quite frankly, I'm always on the look out for any tip or strategy to help me manage my own household and/or professional life with more grace and style.

However, I am also a scholar with a research interest in how people create a sense of identity using the various subject positions available to them to navigate the contexts of their daily lives. It feels important for me to do this work at this time, for I live with these tensions but also possess the tools with which to expose them and offer them up for examination and discussion.

General Overview

To do my work, I used a process of poetic inquiry I first created and developed as a professional thinking tool in my 7th Grade Language Arts classroom where I drafted poems about my practice and reflected on my writing. Oftentimes, my need to write a poem would spark from a particular interaction I shared with a student, or perhaps a classroom decision I second-guessed. The result, as I wrote in Jones (2014) was powerful. "I bec[a]me a better teacher because I [was] engaged in the process, actively using my senses and constantly thinking about what I hear[d] each day" (p. 81).

Understanding how beneficial the act of writing poems and thinking about my classroom interactions had been for my teaching practice, I began to wonder how my emerging process might help me understand the challenges teacher mothers face on a daily basis. I knew I wanted to know and understand more about this woman with whom I share so much in common, but I wasn't quite certain how to bring others together for the conversations needed to inspire the writing of poems. How I developed and carried out my study will be explained in detail in a later chapter, but first I define a couple of the key terms I use throughout my study, specifically teacher mothers and figured worlds.

Defining Key Terms: Teacher-Mothers and Figured Worlds

This study describes what it means to be a teacher mother in contemporary American society and how teacher mothers navigate their figured worlds created both by the institution of education and cultural expectations for mothers' roles and responsibilities in the context of the home. Working definitions for these two terms are listed below.

Teacher mothers. I define this term as a woman currently working as a classroom schoolteacher who also parents and is a mother to at least one school-aged child. Although all of the women in my study were biological parents to their children, I do not limit the definition of teacher mothers with this criterion. It is sufficient for a woman to take on the role of parenting duties of a child to qualify as a mother.

Additionally, although all of the women taking part in this study served as K-12 teachers in the public school system, I do not limit the definition of the term teacher in this manner either. It is sufficient for a woman to take on the role of teaching as a profession, whether she is employed by a public or private school system.

Figured worlds. Dorothy Holland, Deborah Skinner, William Lachicotte, and Carole Cain (1998) make the case that people are constantly negotiating identity within socially generated, culturally figured worlds. These are defined as "as-if" contexts where people engage in specific, meaningful actions influenced by specific forces that define the parameters for the environment. Composed by characters taking up the social rules and expectations of the figured world through their actions and participation, the players in the figured world reproduce the expectations for behavior and sustain it over time.

Figured worlds are participatory, social encounters located in particular times and places. They are similar to organized activities in that people are often recruited into figured worlds to do something or complete a task. Military organizations reflect this characteristic in that when new members join these groups, they adopt and uphold the rules of the organization. They also sustain traditions of the organization over time through their participation. Should the parameters of the figured world become intolerable, participants do have the option to leave. In this way figured worlds remain

consistent in that they are maintained historically by their participants' activities and interactions, as Holland et al. (1998) wrote, growing a person's sense of identity with "consciousness and agency, persons (and collective agents) forming in practice" (p. 42).

My study makes the case that teacher mothers function as players in the unique and figured world of education, and I wanted to understand better how their interactions and activities worked within that figured world. In the course of this study, I posed the following questions in terms of teacher mothers in our society. What are the daily practices that make up her life? Where does she experience freedom, and when does she experience moments of joy? In a society where "good mothers" are always available to their children, where does this expectation leave mothers who engage in the work of teaching other people's children? Where do they draw the line, if they feel the need to, between the students in their classrooms and the children in their homes?

In order to address the questions above and the more formal research questions listed below, I developed a qualitative study of four teacher mothers. I was one of the four participants. Two teacher mothers identified as European American, and two teacher mothers identified as African American. Each of us had at least a decade of teaching experience, and all of us parented children attending public school during the time of the study.

Our work together began with writing, as we agreed to write no less than three stories about instances or incidents in our mothering and/or teaching lives. We posted these to a wikispace dedicated to our group. About once every two months during the study period, we met for dinner at my home and picked two narratives to share and discuss. The teacher mother author would read her narrative to the group, and the three remaining

participants would identify issues of teaching, issues of motherhood, as well as personal connections they made to the shared narrative.

I recorded the audio of our three sharing sessions and used that data as a springboard for my reflective poetic inquiry practice, in which I crafted one poem for each teacher mother. Writing the persona poems, a specific type of poetic form that I will describe in detail in a later chapter, helped me think about the lived experiences of each teacher mother and provided a vehicle for me to represent each woman's journey as we worked together in our small writing community. Drafting the individual poems also helped me see the common challenges and tensions we shared, and from this analysis and reflection I wrote two additional poems in an effort to represent the insight I gained.

Finally, I followed up by interviewing each teacher mother, as I was curious to learn what each woman had taken from the experience of writing and participating in a small learning community. I also shared with each teacher mother the persona poem I wrote for her and asked for feedback as a final member check. These audiotaped conversations, along with the common tensions and themes I identified, informed my suggestions for not only future directions in literacy research, but new practices of professional learning in the public schools.

This study was designed to address the following questions:

1. What is the figured world of the teacher mother?
2. How do figured worlds influence a teacher mother's ability to create agency as she negotiates the responsibilities and expectations of motherhood with career demands? How is she limited?

3. When teacher mothers reflect on their own narratives and the narratives of other teacher mothers, what meaning and/or understanding about their teaching and/or mothering practices become possible?

My inquiry draws from the writing of three different theorists:

1. Michel Foucault's (1975/1979) theories of discipline and punishment and care of the self (1984/1988).

2. Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory.

3. Dorothy Holland's (1998) theories of improvisation and figured worlds.

All three theorists enhanced and enriched my ways of thinking about this topic of inquiry, and as I continue with the introduction of my dissertation study, I outline the theoretical framework that informs my understanding of the ways teacher mothers negotiate and navigate the parameters that limit and support their daily lives. I then conclude this chapter with a brief overview outlining the remaining chapters and content of this qualitative study.

Theoretical Framework

My own frustration with the "stuck in the middle" sensation Sandberg alluded to in her TED Talk made me wonder what help my reading of Foucauldian, transactional, and improvisational theory might provide as I tried to make sense of this omnipresent and practical problem. Michel Foucault (1975/1979) while never specifically addressing the issues of working mothers, made note of the type of tension they experience and called for work to "show how infra-familial relations, essentially in the parents-children cell, have become 'disciplined'" (p. 215) in our society.

He described social relations as a disciplining apparatus of power, but he also wrote of them as a potentially supportive network constructed from a personal ethic of care (Foucault, 1984, p. 51). It made me wonder if other working teacher mothers perceived a lack of freedom in their daily lives. I certainly had, but I had also experienced moments of great fulfillment in my professional workplace as a teacher. I wanted to know more about how I negotiate the complex life of mother, teacher, and student, but I also wanted to begin thinking about women who shared aspects of my lived experience as a group – a collective of teacher mothers – and how we transact with the other teachers, administrators, students, and parents who make up our social, figured worlds.

Michel Foucault's theory of discipline and punishment speaks to this tension teacher mothers may experience. Personally, I feel watched and judged as I consider my choices in daily practice. However, I also acknowledge that my work as a teacher permits me possibility to create a great deal of agency in the course of those daily transactions. So again, Foucault's work reflects that freedom making potential – this time through his theory of care of the self.

However, it's not enough to think about the presence of tension in my life. I wondered what happens *when* and *as* teacher mothers experience it. What drives our decision-making processes in moments of conflict? Do teacher mothers always consider the same set of priorities, or do we change under different contexts? In these moments Louise Rosenblatt and transactional theory helped me think about what it means to create the life of a teacher mother on a daily basis.

Finally, I wondered how it all fit together. Foucault's theory allowed me to see the various power relations shaping the parameters of teacher mothers' lives, and Rosenblatt's work was helpful in describing the transactional processes within those relationships. However useful though, the two were insufficient to guide my understanding of the identities created by teacher mothers within the figured world of the institution of education. It was not until I added in, Dorothy Holland, Debra Skinner, William Lachicotte, and Carole Cain's theories of improvisation and figured worlds that I assembled the necessary components of my theoretical framework.

Using Foucault's Theories of Discipline & Punishment

Discipline and surveillance are part of our daily lives. From the police officer monitoring traffic to the multiple forms we fill out to secure health care coverage through medical insurance, our actions are nearly always under review. For teacher mothers, however, the stakes are higher, for these women not only experience the surveiling gaze of the police officer and the insurance adjustor, they experience the scrutiny of their administrators as they are evaluated through the state's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). For these professionals, mostly women, creating the life of a teacher mother is to negotiate these various layers of societal expectation – to be produced by them and to construct daily practice in reference to them.

Michel Foucault's theory of discipline and punishment allows us to see the grid of power relations these layers form and how they shape a teacher mother's limitations and possibilities for agency. Foucault (1975/1979) compared his theory to a well-oiled machine, in that its efficiency "makes" individuals (p. 170) and also "distributes

individuals in this permanent and continuous field" (p. 177), ever guiding people back to society's central expectations using the tools of normalizing forces.

Normalizing forces function to train individuals, as Foucault (1975/1979) wrote, seeking to "bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them" (p. 170). In terms of teacher mothers, whether it is through conversation in the teacher workroom or at the ball field watching children practice, it happens so often it seems natural. This disciplinary power is what makes it possible for mothers to know what so called "good mothers" and great teachers are supposed to do. It also reinforces any guilt they feel when they decide to go against these societal norms.

Such simple instruments, as Foucault (1975/1979) called "hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination" (p. 170), do this work, exercising and disciplining teacher mothers ever closer to an ideal state of obedience, with punishment reserved for individuals deviating from the path. Revealing itself to educators in the classroom as well, teacher mothers regularly feel disciplinary power from administrative pressure to use instructional best practices and the cycle of results as they plan and implement their lessons to mandatory responsibility of contacting parents when students fall short of academic objectives.

Another component of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power is characterized by surveilling gaze, a silent force that instills and maintains the norms and expectations of society within its subjects through constant observation of people and their movements. Through it, Foucault (1975/1979) wrote, "disciplinary power bec[o]me[s] an 'integrated' system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it [i]s practiced" (p. 176), yet it has to take on the appearance of good common sense in

order to work. In other words, people have to buy in to it. And buy in we do. Every time we submit to an employee background check, fill out an information contact card for our children at school, or participate in a parent teacher conference, we agree, without saying a word, to the principles of disciplinary power, its "'value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved" (Foucault, 1979/1975, p. 183).

We, in fact, impose disciplinary power on each other; so much so, I imagine Foucault might say if he were alive today that that is the beauty of how disciplinary power works. Yes, it's everywhere. It's subtle. It sets the tone for what's normal. But what we fail to realize is that we've learned its lessons so well, we've taken over, and we're now disciplining each other and ourselves. It's only the simple matter of getting everyone "on the same page".

The life of a teacher mother has the potential to be fraught with this type of tension as she negotiates both implied and explicit expectations for professional behavior, yet many women describe their entangled professional and personal identities as empowering, "perfectly defined by each and yet neither is quite complete without the other" (Bradbury & Gunter, 2006, p. 493). As I reflect on my own work as a teacher, it is both satisfying and informative to my role as a mother to two school age boys. In truth, I perceive my teaching life as a vehicle to show and do my best creative and innovative work.

Such realization on my part prompts my consideration of a teacher mother's life in terms of Foucault's theory of care of the self. Practiced in Ancient Greece, its premise was that a man could not lead other men, care for others, or participate in governing the state if he could not first take care of himself through mental and physical exercise,

leisure and recreation, and healthy relationships. As Foucault (1984/1988) wrote it, "took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living" (p. 45), so much so, it formed an active and common social practice of the time, with the acts of "educating oneself and taking care of oneself" viewed as "interconnected activities" (p. 55). Such is the praxis of a teacher mother as she revisits academic material and plans for new lessons, as she attends district professional development workshops, and as she may pursue additional content knowledge through an advanced degree. All involve an active engagement in continuing education through new learning.

Foucault (1984/1988) described care of the self as a way of living that "arises out of ourselves and within ourselves" (p. 66). In that moment, I thought of the teacher mother, so devoted to each separate role, yet never separated from either, and I knew I must consider the life of this woman as not only a disciplined subject, but as a deliberate person, not only creating moments of freedom but creating her life through daily choice and practice.

Although such recognition of the power relations present in teacher mothers' lives was useful, it was not enough to write the collective story of teacher mothers. What happened when these women had to make decisions between professional and personal responsibilities? What theory could negotiate that in between space? I turned back to my English classroom and the words of Louise Rosenblatt. Her work focused primarily on the possible relationships between student and teacher and text, yet her writing opened potential for possible understanding as I read of how teacher mothers transact with the texts of their social worlds.

Using Rosenblatt's Theories Of Transactional Reading

Louise Rosenblatt proposed as early as the 1930's that reading was a complex process of transaction, rather than the reader to text interaction model so widely accepted in education at the time. Under the model of transaction, readers approach, or read, a text bringing in experience and assumptions from the reader's own life as he or she attempted to make sense of the author's organization and context clues. Thus, every reading of every text by every reader would produce different meanings and understandings. As Rosenblatt (1995) wrote, there was "no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary works" (p. 24). Groundbreaking, yet largely ignored until its application to reader-response theory in the 1970s and 80s, her work affirmed the idea that reading and learning "is a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26), not simply a text transmitting meaning to the mind of a new reader. Every single reading had the potential to construct a new way of seeing the word and the world.

Rosenblatt (1995) also argued that readers "come to the book from life" (p. 34). She wrote these words in reference to a student's approach to literature, as she challenged teachers to consider how important students' experiences (or lack thereof) are to a child's ability to make meaning from text. Considering her words from a teacher researcher's perspective, substituting book for life and reader for teacher, they provide the potential for powerful insight when considering the experiences of teacher mothers. Certainly, we rely on our experiences in navigating life challenges, and these influence how teacher mothers may "see" themselves within the context of social worlds. I wondered too, how

these experiences would transact in a circle of teacher mothers sharing personal and professional narratives. What meaning might become possible in such a context?

Like Foucault, Rosenblatt recognized societal influences and their impact on people in their transactions with the world. She (1995) wrote, "we especially need to recognize how powerful a hold the norms of our own group have on us" (p. 143), and not limit our scope of understanding to isolated events, rather we, "must study it against the background of the motives and emotions institutionalized in that culture" (p. 145). Rosenblatt was certainly writing to teachers about students – encouraging them to enhance student ability to make meaning from text by allowing them to have an emotional response to literature. However, her words speak to the life of a teacher mother as well. Many carry with them "a fund of ready-made, sharp crystallized ideas and habits of response" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 92), formed over the years by transactions with their own former teachers, their children's teachers, and their supervising administrators.

Particularly intriguing was her notion of a "two-way, reciprocal relation" between text and reader with meaning not " "in" the text or "in" the reader" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 25). For Rosenblatt, meaning was something created fresh and new when text and reader collided and transacted in the between space. When applied to the daily practice of teacher mothers, this idea creates profound possibility. If a teacher mother does not create meaning and understanding within her social worlds and she doesn't find it within herself either, then how does a teacher mother create her personal and professional life on a daily basis? Rosenblatt (1995) wrote, "Literature provides a *living through*, not simply *knowledge about*" (p. 38). What did it mean for teacher mothers to live through their daily practices?

Rosenblatt's idea that readings of text are not innocent and involve rich transactions of personal experience, history, and values between a reader and a text and by extension the author who created the text provided potential application of transactional theory to how teacher mothers read their own social worlds as well. Intrigued by transaction theory's emphasis "on the to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence of reader and text in the making of meaning" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xvi), I wondered how might this idea that meaning is made in the act of reading itself inform my inquiry of teacher mothers' daily practices?

Rosenblatt (1995), wrote, we need ways "to think rationally about emotionally charged issues" (p. xv). Certainly, this advice holds true for all people living and working in the world, but it seems more so for teachers, a profession laden with emotion, yet tasked with rational responsibility for reporting results. Such a statement pushes understanding from the idea of students transacting with literature to the notion of teacher mothers transacting with the texts of their lives, whether they are in dialogue with a student, parent, administrator, or their own children. Rosenblatt's theory lends hope for new understanding about the process of constructing personal and professional lives, "places them outside us, enables us to see them with a certain detachment and to understand our own situation and motivation more objectively" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 40).

Using Holland's Theories of Figured Worlds

Dorothy Holland et al. (1998) described individual identity formation as "lived in and through activity" (p. 5) that must be understood as it develops through the social practices of people who make up what she termed, figured worlds. Like Foucault's grid of power relations, figured worlds also distribute individuals "across different fields of

activity" (Holland et. al, 1998, p. 41), where individuals perform and produce daily practices. "By "figured world," then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (Holland, et. al, 1998, p. 52).

The actors in figured worlds are then influenced by a host of factors, including cultural expectations, moral standards, power relations, and transactions with others, as individuals create identity positions through a process Holland called improvisation, where "individuals and groups are always (re)forming themselves as persons and collectives through cultural materials created in the immediate and the more distant past" (Holland et. al, 1998, p. 18). It is in this process of improvising, Holland wrote, where people make decisions, act, and use resources available to them that they create identity and, as Holland argues, potential for agency in the world.

Improvisation and figured worlds are useful constructs in the consideration of the social practices of teacher mothers, for these women work within the specific, social organization of the institution of education. Often recruited and mentored into this figured world by other teacher mothers, their participation and success at school depends on the teachers' abilities to improvise as they act within social contexts. Some teachers experience limiting restrictions through prescribed curriculum. Others are able to create a sense of agency in their professional lives. Some experience tension between the two as they negotiate the parameters of rules that restrict their practices. As Holland et. al (1998) wrote, "people's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically" (p. 49), in "as-if" worlds, where "they opportunistically use whatever is at hand to affect their

position in the cultural game" (p. 279). In other words, while the life of the teacher mother is structured and limited by parameters set by policy adopted and enforced by school administrators, they have the ability to act and participate with other members of their figured worlds to create some freedom as well. It is through these transactions that teacher mothers find the potential to create agency in the workplace.

What These Theories Mean for a Study of Teachers Who Are Also Mothers

Foucault's argument that our social worlds are complex in reality and formed from structured grids of power relations helped me grasp the practical problems many teacher mothers encounter and negotiate on a daily basis. However, I knew it would not be enough to use Foucault's theory to expose and make these structures visible. That work was initiated and discussed long ago by feminist scholars such as Weedon (1997), Grumet (1988), Smith (1987) and Pagano (1990).

To create some possible freedom and opportunity for resistance within the structure would require something more. As Weedon (1997) wrote, "women seeking inclusion have had to negotiate the conflicting demands made upon them by their dual role as best they could" (p. 2). In other words, women have had to learn ways and means to work within the structure that has disciplined them and normalized their behaviors for years and years.

Therefore, in order to push my thinking about teacher mothers and their experiences as a collective story, rather than an overdone consciousness raising exercise, I knew I needed to study the ways these women transacted with demands on their time. For this work, consideration of what happened when these women not only read their

worlds but also responded to them encouraged consideration of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory.

But even this was not enough. It was not until I incorporated Dorothy Holland's concepts of figured worlds and improvisation that I was able to think about the tensions teacher mothers experience as they improvise within the figured worlds of public school systems. Here, my thinking about the lived experiences and daily practices of teacher mothers expanded. No longer was my description of the teacher mother's existence one of limitation or care for the self within a rigid set of social parameters as my reading of Foucault prompted me to conclude. Similarly, my understanding of transactional theory changed as well as I processed the significance of improvisation in the life of the teacher mother. No longer did I see a teacher simply calling on her experience and current situation at hand to make decisions about how to read and navigate the social world of her classroom. Now I understood her decision making process to be more complex and involve many more factors.

Putting these three thinkers together was powerful for me as a researcher. Social scientists do not often link Foucault, Rosenblatt, and Holland, but when I do, I see connections and hear their words talking to each other. This in turn, helps me think and transact with my inquiry. For instance, all three theorists address the significance of normalizing forces in their work. Rosenblatt urged us to pay attention to the many influences and forces that temper our responses and potential for understanding literature. Foucault's theory of discipline and punishment described how the presence of such forces not only influence, but inscribe lives. Holland et. al (1998) acknowledged that most

individuals strive "to say whatever upholds the culturally constructed, moral world" (p. 13).

Fully understanding that I live, work, and raise my own children within the structure of patriarchy, I realize society's expectations for teacher mothers will remain unchanged until we begin to study the lived experiences of these women. Telling and sharing stories may be a consciousness raising beginning, but it is not enough to enact change to the governing structure. Foucault's tools of genealogy and archaeology are useful in this work in that they help us see how it is possible to think and speak our reality into existence through language and practice, but even they may require reinterpretation in order to shift normalizing thought. Rosenblatt's transactional theory created a space and opportunity to do this work as I sought to understand what it meant to enact the life of a teacher mother in today's society. Holland's attention to improvisation within figured worlds allowed me to understand there is potential for teacher mothers to create agency and experience freedom in their work. Putting the three together helped me to create space not only for sharing and discussion, but also provided a foundation from which to begin a conversation about altering the societal expectations regarding teacher mothers. Following a brief outline of the organizational flow of my study, I turn my discussion to the literature on working mothers and teachers working within the institution of education.

Study Organization

My research is organized by chapters, discussing the following topics: a review of literature on working women in education, presentation of my study's design, analysis of

the discussion and interview data collected, and finally implications and next steps for research in literacy education.

Chapter Two begins with an overview of women in the full-time workforce and traces both the entrance to and subsequent path of women in the field of education. In particular, it provides a detailed discussion of previous studies completed in reference to working mother challenges in negotiating demands of career and home and then connects that discussion to the specific concerns of teacher mothers in the figured world of education. I complete the chapter by discussing the need for further research to be conducted in the United States with K-12 teachers working in the public school system as most work in this topic area originates from foreign scholarship and teacher mothers working in higher education.

Chapter Three provides an outline of research design for my study, in which I make a case for collecting and studying narratives, as well as using poetic inquiry as a means to describe and come to new understanding of teacher mothers working in the public school system. In this chapter, I introduce the teacher mothers participating in this research study, and I also describe my process and decision to write poetry from collected data, discussing my thinking process for developing our narrative writing and sharing protocol. I also trace my thinking and learning process as I experimented with developing poetic inquiry as a form of analysis beginning with drafts of two-voice poems to think about common tension, then moving to use of persona poems as a way to represent the individual women in the study, and then concluding with free verse poetry to represent our emerging understandings from participation in our small writing and sharing community.

In Chapter Four I analyze narrative, discussion, and some interview data for each teacher mother in the study, beginning with Rochelle, continuing with April's story, following with Judy, and concluding with my story. In particular, I begin each section by providing personal and professional context of each teacher mother's place within the figured world of education. I then present each teacher mother's persona poem as well as a discussion of my analysis of writing and discussion data I used to compose each participant's poem. After considering each teacher mother's persona poem, her narrative writing topics, and our discussion of those stories within our writing community, I then turn to a discussion of what became possible in terms of new meaning and understanding for each teacher mother as a result of participating in a small writing and sharing community. This in turn helped me connect what I learned about the women as individuals to our common challenges and concerns as teacher mothers – a discussion I continued in the following chapter.

In Chapter Five, I discuss some of the common, yet unique characteristics shared by teacher mothers participating in this study and represent their commonly held tensions in a free verse poem. I then connect my poetic inquiry and analysis of data from follow up interviews conducted at the conclusion of the group's narrative sharing sessions in an effort to expose and describe the collective experiences of teacher mothers in the figured world of education. In addition and in conclusion to this chapter, I provide a discussion of poem member checks conducted at the end of each interview, as I shared the persona poems I wrote for each teacher mother with the teacher mother and asked for feedback.

In Chapter Six, I consider the implications for the participants of our small writing community and the personal confidence and growth that resulted from sharing stories

with others. I represent my understandings of this growth with an additional free verse poem and from this text offer next steps for teacher mothers and also researchers interested in studying this group of women in the future. My suggestions for teacher mothers include encouragement to meet together in small groups for writing and sharing purposes. I then offer suggestions for how school administrators may facilitate such writing and sharing communities through professional learning communities that may already exist in their schools. I provide encouragement for literacy researchers to continue studying the figured worlds of teacher mothers working in the public schools. I conclude with my commitment to continue my work and inquiry in this area of study.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review

> I tried to focus on what really mattered… I began to adopt the mantra "Done is better than perfect." Done, while still a challenge, turns out to be far more achievable and often a relief. (Sandberg, 2013, p. 129)

The poster Sheryl Sandberg references hangs on the walls of Facebook headquarters as motivation for employees to above all – get the job done. As Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the company, Sandberg may embrace that motto, but as a working woman and now single mother, she also understands that juggling work, family, and relationships between those two worlds is a complex and often frustrating endeavor. Her 2013 book describes with candor her ongoing struggle with the Supermom myth of doing it all – at times embracing the challenges and long hours involved in successfully running a Fortune 500 company in an ever-changing industry, but at other times arguing she places just as much effort and commitment into her family life as a parent to two small children.

While Sandberg is not a teacher mother, her professional experience and effort to write about what it means for working women to live in a world of conflicting demands and subjectivities is a good place to begin an inquiry into the lived experience of teacher mothers in the figured world of education. However, as I began my search of the literature, I became frustrated as I soon discovered that the teacher mother is a sparsely studied woman. I spent time with our curriculum, materials, and media specialist as she

helped me create folders to collect my anticipated finds, and we began searching for articles across databases using key words such as “teach,” “mother,” “teacher,” “school,” “work,” and “educate.” We found articles about teachers and teacher preparation. We found articles about mothers volunteering in schools and helping children at home with homework. What we found little evidence of was research into what happens when the figured worlds of teaching and mothering collide.

Later searches would reveal an emerging body of literature in reference to teacher mother concerns at the university level as scholars discussed tension women working in the academy experienced as the time constraints and pressure of making tenure bucked up against biological time considerations influencing decisions to start families. Although I strongly believe that research is a worthy inquiry and hope it continues in the future, it did not help me understand the experiences of teacher mothers working in the public schools. For instance, the pressure of achieving success in the academy when compared to achieving professional success in the public school system seemed so very different to me in that public school teachers rarely experience professional penalty due to pregnancy and motherhood. Teacher mothers appear to be a given in the figured world of K-12 education rather than an exception.

Therefore, I continued looking for research studies addressing concerns specific to K-12 teachers and was encouraged to find some interview studies conducted in Britain and other countries in Europe. Some research focused on administrators and their attitudes on work and home issues, and some studies focused primarily on a teacher’s decision-making process in whether or not to begin a family and remain in the workforce.

It wasn't exactly what I wanted, but it was a beginning for the type of research study I wanted to develop and conduct.

Given the general lack of specific scholarship on teacher mother subjectivity in the K-12 context, I have attempted to separate the various subject positions of this woman into general categories: women in the workplace, women as teachers, and finally, the professional teacher as mother. In this way, I hope to better understand the research in reference to the conflicts, successes, and tensions inherent in creating the life of a teacher mother on a daily basis. I begin with a review of literature of women in the workforce, then move to a discussion of inquiries dealing with women as teachers, and end with a review of studies examining issues specific to the lived experiences of teacher mothers in contemporary society.

Women in the Workplace

While it is true that some women in the United States took up professional careers in teaching and nursing as early as the 1840s, the world of work remained largely closed to women throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was not until the 1940s, when their labor became necessary to support weapon manufacturing demands during World War II, that women began to take on paid work opportunities outside their homes. Up until that time, most women's work was centered in the home as a supplement to family income. As Bianchi (2011) wrote, "during the 1920s and 1930s – women often combined rearing children with paid work, or unpaid family work, either on farms or in urban ghettos where they took in boarders, laundry, or piecework" (p. 18). In addition and most cases, any employment opportunity located outside the home was accepted only after a woman had completed her primary task of raising her children.

This workplace and family dynamic remained largely constant throughout the 1950s and 60s with women tending to stay out of professional careers in favor of staying home to rear children and relying on their husbands to bring home enough income to support family needs. However, the 1970s and the second wave of feminism radically altered this tradition as women surged into the workforce in rapidly increasing numbers. "Between 1975 and 2009, the labor force rate of mothers with children under age eighteen increased from 47.4 percent to 71.6 percent" (Bianchi, 2011, p. 16), indicating that women no longer accepted the role of stay at home mother and care giver to children. 2003 U.S. Census Bureau data affirm this trend with the reported number of working women, many of whom are mothers to school age children, increasing with 80.5 percent of married mothers of children ages 6 to 13 years in the workforce full time.

This surge in number of women taking up professional careers and devoting time to fulltime work has created opportunity for career satisfaction, but it has also created tension and conflict for working women, particularly for women who are also mothers. As Medina and Magnuson (2009) found, while professional opportunities have opened and societal expectations have changed to accept the image of women in the workplace, they have not altered in terms of expectations for women's work in the home. "Employed mothers devote approximately 80 hours per week to their job, home, and child care activities" (p. 92), while employed fathers devote significantly fewer hours to similar activities.

As Medina and Magnuson (2009) wrote, "Mothers who work in demanding professions are particularly affected by the intensive mothering bind" (p. 92). Other studies of women, work, and home conflict concur with issues of time management,

balance, and "concern about the considerable pressure that multiple demands placed upon them" (Thomson & Kehily, 2011, p. 497), abounding in working mother narratives. Indeed, as Schulte (2014) wrote, "Time studies find that a mother, especially one who works outside the home for pay, is among the most time-poor humans on the planet" (p. 25). What that means is a whole generation of women are struggling with how to manage daily life in a state of being termed the "overwhelm." Indeed, Bianchi (2011) reported a dramatic increase in the time working mothers devoted to "time to children", with a study of mothers' time diaries revealing, "employed mothers were recording as much time doing primary child care in 2000 as non-employed mothers did in 1975" (p. 20).

For many working women, such conflict between work and home influences consideration and subsequent decisions to leave the workforce in favor of staying at home with their children. Carlson, et al. (2011) found in their quantitative, longitudinal survey study of 179 working mothers that perceived work-to-family conflict and subsequent job turnover was related and influenced by job demands and resource-poor work environments. For many women, this collision of subject positions had the potential to create uncertainty and anxiety. As Luttrell (1997) wrote, "an individual's position in a web of intersecting privileges and constraints can often be experienced as paralyzing" (p. 6). As Carlson et al. found, new mothers considering care for their children and a potential return to the workforce were not immune to such feelings of stress and doubt.

So with this dynamic and social construction of the good mother as one capable and willing to provide her child unlimited time and resources directed at academic success, where does this leave the working woman who is a teacher to school aged

children? How does her knowledge of the workings and expectations of the institution of education inform her decisions at home and in the classroom? What happens when her social worlds transact and even collide?

Women As Teachers

First entering the field of education as instructors in the 1840's, women, "less intent on scheming for future honors or emoluments [than men]" (Grumet, 1988, p. 43), were viewed as non-threatening, even safe placements in the institution of education. Along with hospitals opening employment to women as nurses during this time period, the schoolhouse served to provide and limit opportunity for women in that "teaching had become the shelter of the educated woman" (p.44). In other words, jobs like teaching and nursing served to give women an opportunity to work and use the knowledge they had gained in their schooling if they had been fortunate enough to have access to education. However, they were only given the opportunity to work in these fields because their presence did not appear to threaten or compete with the interests or professional advancement of other working men.

In a relatively short period of time, women then flooded the profession with 60% of positions filled by females by 1870. In 1910, 80% of all teaching positions were held by women (Grumet, 1988, p. 44); however, the field was one without opportunity for career advancement for female educators. As Griffith & Smith (2005) wrote, "Until the post World War period, women teachers could not continue in their profession after marriage; even thereafter they were typically confined to positions without opportunities for advancement beyond classroom teacher" (p. 25). As a result, teaching positions

functioned as a place holding activities for young educated women in preparation for society's preferred and expected roles for them – those of wife and mother.

One hundred years later, statistics documenting the number of women in the field of education remain constant. Occupying 84% of teaching positions in the United States in 2011, women seem to bear the responsibility for educating our country's youth. Schatz-Oppenheimer & Halpert-Zamir (2010) argued, "there are structural, organizational and gender-based reasons – both overt and hidden" (p. 366) for the dominance of women in teaching. One reason is our society's cultural linking of teaching to the ideas of warmth and care, stereotyping the profession as a feminine one. Therefore, women, who embody femininity, are viewed as natural candidates for teaching positions. Research also finds women show preference for jobs in care-giving fields such as nursing and teaching (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Halpert-Zamir 2010) in that they appear to offer job security and schedule flexibility when female employees decide to have children and become mothers.

However, gender dominance in the field does not translate into control of the profession or power to decide what gets taught in the classroom. The institution of education is largely directed by men in top leadership positions and firmly rooted in the tradition of patriarchy. JoAnne Pagano (1990) wrote, "As a teacher I present authoritatively, authorized readings of authorized representations of things. My voice is the voice of tradition" (p. 22-23). Thus, women who are teachers not only likely feel pressure to teach material produced in and by a male-dominated society, they realize they will be evaluated and assessed by male administrators in terms of teaching effectiveness and overall job performance. Such organizational structure in effect locks women

educators in a professional holding pattern where a cultural stereotype, "sets the mold of teachers as women and prevents them from attaining the professional approach required through the realization of their intellectual potential" (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Halpert-Zamir, 2010, p. 377).

Such a staggering workload with little promise of career advancement or professional esteem might seem to keep women away from professions such as teaching. However, studies reveal women find a type of safe haven in this workplace (Bradbury and Gunter 2006, Guendouzi 2006, Raskin 2006, James 2010, Schatz-Oppenheimer and Halpert-Zamir 2010). As Guendouzi (2006) found in an interview study of eight, British high school teachers, the teachers' workroom, where forty-two planning and lunchtime conversations were recorded, provided a space for the women to talk and voice frustrations. Having the discursive space for these conversations allowed the women to not only share, but also support each other as they transacted with the challenges of negotiating work-home conflict. As Guendouzi (2006) wrote, "Paradoxically, although working places stressful demands on women, it also provides a separate sphere in which they can access and express their individual identity" (p. 907).

On the other hand, as Schatz-Oppenheimer & Halpert-Zamir (2010) found, many women teachers perpetuate the perception of themselves as non-advancing employees through their own stories and discourse. Interview data revealed common themes for women in teaching, including emphasis on satisfaction with teaching as care-giving work – their narratives revealing stories that "served as a platform for the 'continuity' of a caring-emotional function" (Schatz-Oppenheimer & Halpert-Zamir, 2010, p. 376), in

effect the women themselves perpetuating society's stereotype of the emotional, nurturing, maternal woman as the ideal teacher.

Teachers As Mothers

Historically perceived as a profession "understood to be a flexible and child-friendly career for women in terms of school holidays and the potential to take time out without jeopardizing the ability to return to the classroom" (Thomson & Kehily, 2011, p. 235), many women seek jobs in education to prepare and situate their schedules in anticipation of motherhood. However, no plan is without complication, and studies show this to be true of working mother discourse outside the sphere of teaching as well once working women become mothers and begin the process of merging personal and professional worlds in an effort to balance responsibilities and minimize work-family conflict (Guendouzi 2006, Raskin 2006, Medina & Magnuson 2009, Bianchi 2011, Carlson, Grzywacz, Ferguson & Hunter, Clinch & Arcury 2011, Nomaguchi & Brown 2011).

Raskin (2006) conducted a quantitative survey study of 164 professional, middle to upper-class working women who were also mothers to children 18-years-old and under. In this self-reported survey study, participants revealed that the complexity of their careers and motherhood created potential for "a[n] ongoing conflict between commitments to identity roles in the work-family domain" (Raskin, 2006, p. 1359). For women committed to their careers, however, this struggle to meet perceived role obligations was more immediate and intense. Raskin (2006) found that these women expressed a strong desire "to be better mothers than they themselves had" (p. 1367), with the participants' perceptions of conflict or crisis strongly linked to the working mothers'

conceptions of identity and fulfillment in the workplace, especially for college educated women.

Overall the study suggested that the more committed a woman is to her career, and the higher her education level is, the more likely she is to experience strong feelings of work-family conflict. Such tension is predictive of health concerns such as emotional exhaustion, lowered job, and life satisfaction. These findings, applied to teaching, known for its seemingly family-friendly work schedule and set vacation policy, reveal it as an extremely time-demanding profession with work hours frequently extending into the evenings and weekends. As a result, these working mothers would likely identify with the experiences reported by the working mothers in Raskin's study.

Similarly, Guendouzi's (2006) qualitative analysis of the recorded dialogue between eight, British secondary teachers focused in on feelings of guilt working mothers experienced "from the social pressure placed on women to be ever-present and accessible" (p. 904) to their children's needs, suggesting that working teacher mothers' perceived duties and responsibilities may overshadow and "overwhelm the women's sense of individuality" (p. 907). Thomson & Kehily's (2011) qualitative case study of three preschool teachers working in the United Kingdom described the experiences and reflections of preschool teachers becoming first time mothers. They reported anxiety and even pain over "renegotiation of professional and personal boundaries in which new modes of identification and desire emerged" (p. 244). In other words, for these working teachers, becoming a mother not only forced decisions over care and schooling, it challenged the very lens through which the working women once viewed their social worlds. Hargreaves (1997) concurred, noting how writing and dialogue surrounding

narratives of study participants likely expose, how "being a parent shifts the moral reference points on which teachers fix their teaching" (p. xii).

Pagano (1990) wrote of teachers, "our entry into institutions seems to require an institutional identity, a masquerade almost" (p. 98). Rosenblatt (1995) argued that the teacher will always be "exerting some kind of influence, positive or negative" (p. 17) in helping students learn. Both suggest the life of a teacher is complex and requires multiple approaches or faces to suit the context of any situation. Evans & Grant (2008) in their collection of essays, *Mama PhD*, did much to begin a conversation about the struggle of teacher mothers to succeed in the male-dominated world of higher education, noting, "the academy seems oblivious to the struggles mothers face within its walls" (p. xxi). However, what is largely left out of the discourse is the complication experienced by the public school teacher who is also a mother to school age children. She brings both subjectivities into the classroom each day and is reminded of home responsibilities constantly as she works with students – the children of other mothers.

Such a dynamic of transaction is deserving of study when considering the daily practices of teacher mothers employed in the public schools, especially when so little scholarship addresses this particular woman's issues and concerns, and most of what does exist has not studied teacher mothers practicing in the United States. As Bradbury & Gunter (2006) wrote, "what needs investigation is the interplay between gender and professionalism, and how the person experiences and understands this as social practice" (p. 490). Similarly, Pat Sikes (1998) argued for research with a focus on life stories as a way to promote insight generation, with reflection acting as a tool to "lead people to

consider the things which have happened to them in new light" (p. 22) and hopefully, open possibility and new understanding.

Some scholars have begun to inquire into the lived experiences of teacher mothers (Sikes 1998, Bradbury & Gunter 2006, Guendouzi 2006, James 2010, Schatz-Oppenheimer & Halpert-Zamir 2010, Popescu & Gunter 2011, Thomson & Kehily 2011). Guendouzi's (2006) qualitative analysis, as mentioned above, documented the talk of eight, British, secondary teachers as they gathered for informal chats in their school's workroom. She found conflicting accounts of the intersection between mother and teacher subjectivities. While noting the workplace as a sort of safe haven from home and family demands, "accounts reflect how difficult it is to readjust to the dynamics of family roles after a week of teaching" (p. 906). Such findings fly in the face of societal assumptions that mothers with their innate nurturing tendencies make the best teachers of other people's children. They also suggest tension for the woman who must negotiate the transaction between her various roles, perceived responsibilities, and the knowledge she holds about her profession.

James (2010) came to a similar conclusion in her qualitative interview study of six, elementary school teachers, finding "the line between teaching and mothering is blurred" (p. 532), as the teachers assumed a responsibility of care for their students that often superseded care for themselves, while Thomson & Kehily's (2011) qualitative interview study of three preschool teacher mothers revealed "a troubling reflexivity that has the potential to transform both the professional and the maternal identity" (p. 242). All three case study participants noted a feeling of being caught in the middle between notions of practice and care.

The researchers' analysis found it was conflicting for teacher mothers "to be the custodian of a professional identity while also becoming the object of that professional knowledge" (Thomson & Kehily, 2011, p. 239) often producing for these teacher mothers a knowledge transfer model with "the tendency to take the professional into personal projects of mothering rather than taking mothering into the professional realm of the school" (p. 243). In other words, researchers found when the teachers became mothers, they were more likely to allow their teaching practices into inform their mothering style than to bring their mothering practices to bear in the classroom.

Thomson & Kehily's (2010) identification of such a one-way model of care suggests that while there is a "great deal of traffic between domains of work and home" (p. 242), there is also an imbalance of influence between the domains with the professional teacher sphere claiming dominance over mothering practices. Conflict arises when teacher mothers attempt to merge the responsibilities of home and work, and many working women respond to this tension by either reducing their work hours or quitting their jobs (Bianchi, 2011). With teaching structured as a contracted profession and jobs not easily abandoned mid-year, such conflict as Thomson & Kehily (2011) found was difficult for mothers to reconcile as they attempted to merge the worlds of work and motherhood into a satisfying sense of balance.

In contrast, James's (2010) qualitative interview study of six elementary school teachers working in the United States implied a seemingly positive connection between the demands of teaching and mothering as "notions of care are embedded in discourses of teaching" (p. 532). For women in her study, conceptions of care were significant for teacher mothers, especially if they conceived of mothering as part of their job

descriptions. James (2010) wrote, "an important part of being a teacher was being a 'mom-figure'" (p. 526) with self-sacrificing behavior seen as part of the job and creating a sense that the line between teaching and mothering was "blurred" (p. 532). Griffith & Smith's (2005) institutional ethnographic study of Canadian women with children in primary school supports this finding as study participants described a felt responsibility to help their children succeed in school. One mother claimed, "Teaching is just part of how I do my mothering" (p. 91), echoing the suggestion that working mothers feel a maternal duty and pressure to insure the academic success of their children.

Additionally, literature on mothers' roles in schooling depicted this perceived responsibility as an extension of the social construct of the "good mother" (Guendouzi 2006, Medina & Magnuson 2009, Bianchi 2011). As Guendouzi (2006) wrote, "the social obligation to fulfill the demands of being a good mother appears to take precedence over self-needs" (p. 906). In terms of teachers who are also mothers, findings suggest that the social construct of "good teacher" exerts considerable influence over professional and personal transactions as well, increasing the need for study of teacher mothers and how they transact with the social constructions of their figured worlds and whether or not they perceive those transactions to be cultivating success within their workplaces.

What the Educational Literature Means for This Study

Although the literature addresses many issues of women teachers and working mothers in other countries, very little research exists to describe the lived experience of teacher mothers in the public schools here in the United States. From my review of the literature, I know that teachers working in schools abroad reported experiencing many of the same frustrations I often felt as a working mother to school age children. A vacation

from work meant going to work at home because my children were off from school along with me, so I never fully understood what it meant to relax. I worried about how my children were doing academically, and I regretted that I was often too tired to help them with homework because I had been working on homework all day in my classroom with my students.

Teachers in these "foreign" studies expressed so many of the same feelings I had about teaching and mothering. I related and connected to so much of what the teachers said even though we work an ocean apart, and this frustrated me the most as a researcher because I couldn't prove a connection between teacher mother experiences in Britain and my teacher mother experiences in Georgia. All I had was a hunch that there were more women out there like us. Only their stories hadn't been collected yet.

So, what I decided was that if I couldn't find research to inform my thinking, then I needed to go out and conduct the research myself and find out if my hunch was correct, or at least on the right track. My review of the literature told me it was time to begin building a body of literature about concerns of this unique group of women workers, especially the experiences of teachers working in the United States. I could let the work that has been done in other countries guide my way, but I needed to start studying what it means to create a life of teaching and mothering in the public school systems of America..

It is because of this gap in the literature that it is important to undertake a study of this nature, not only to attempt to understand and describe the ways teacher mothers create their daily lives, but to begin to expose and trouble some of the challenges and tensions they experience in their professional and personal lives. Michel Foucault's

theory of discipline and punishment helps us see the parameters and limits of this lived experience. His theory of care of the self serves to reveal possibilities of freedom that result from participation in supporting networks and communities of care, while Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory allows us to describe some of the meaning these women make from the intersections of their professional and personal lives. Dorothy Holland's theories of improvisation and figured worlds provides a context in which to situate the lived experiences of teacher mothers. Finally, the writing and sharing of teacher mother narratives and interviews, along with poetic representation of this data as a form of analysis, allows this teacher mother researcher to transact with the stories of other teacher mothers in an effort to create new understanding of these lived experiences.

Grumet (1988) wrote, "it is difficult to separate the well-taught consciousness from the consciousness that teaches" (p. 59). This research study sought not to separate the consciousness of the teacher from the mother, but to more fully understand how each subject position informs the other and what that means for women creating their lives as teacher mothers in our society.

Chapter Three:

Methodology & Research Design

Just as I had to navigate the structure that set the boundaries and expectations for the conversation with my son's teachers, so do other teacher mothers have to make similar negotiations in the context of their social worlds. How these teacher mothers view these relations is influenced by the expectations they perceive others have for them.

To more fully understand the significance of the lived experiences of teacher mothers and make meaning from their stories, it was important to me to consider not only how these women transacted with the challenges and issues they encountered within their figured worlds but also what meaning they made as they processed and decided to take action. Additionally, it was important to consider how my own subjectivity as a teacher mother informed my interpretation and representation of the narratives, along with the dialogue opened by discussing them. I committed then to using my transaction with these texts as a "beginning of a process of organic growth" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xviii), rather than an opportunity for anecdotal storytelling, as it has always been important to me to make something and contribute rather than simply do something.

I developed a plan, and got it approved, but as I've heard so many professors and doctoral students say before, my study didn't end up turning out as I envisioned it would. It changed along the way, but my life did, too, as I experienced divorce and the loss of my mother – all during my data collection period. However, I adapted my study as my life altered and changed, and in the end I learned so much – not only about how teacher

mothers' lives become inscribed by perceptions of expectations others have for them, but how talking and sharing stories with peers can open up possibility for breaking free of those conditioned responses.

Study Design Overview

Certainly, describing the daily practices of teacher mothers with an eye toward making change was the goal of this inquiry. Originally, I started with a solid group of eight women, but when the deadline came to post our first narratives to the wikispace I had created to house our stories, only three teacher mothers posted, and that included my narrative published primarily as a guiding model.

I was further discouraged by the turnout at my home for the first group dinner and sharing session – three teacher mothers plus me made for a small group indeed. I worried I would have to start over – find a new way to study teacher mothers because clearly they didn't have time to bother with writing and talking about stories. What's worse, the submitted narratives other than mine were not really narratives at all. They were painfully short – two paragraphs at most – and did nothing more than describe an occurrence in a brief and general manner. I consulted with my advisor and asked his advice. He was the one to suggest I join the study as a full-fledged participant – after all, I was a teacher mother, too. Plus, it would give me the opportunity to go deeper with my inquiry. I could interview all the teacher mothers in our group rather than a select few who said or wrote interesting things I wanted to know more about. I could listen harder and pay attention better in a small group as well.

So, I joined the study as a research participant and wrote alongside these women, as I identified with them; however, I wrote *about* their experiences as well by

representing their narratives and our dialogue together as poems. I chose to employ poetic craft not only because I enjoy this type of writing process, but because it had through the years become a critical thinking tool in my classroom teaching practice. Writing poetry about the issues and tensions in my teaching life sharpened my focus in terms of responding to my students' needs and helped me think about the world of education and my place in it. I had a feeling the process would be equally powerful as I considered my life and others as a teacher mother, and I wanted to try doing it.

Writing in the genre of persona poetry – a form of poem I will describe in detail later in this chapter – did enable me to focus in on each teacher mother in our group. I was able to read and re-read her narratives, read and re-read the transcripts of our sharing sessions, and email her with clarifying questions. All of these texts contributed to my thinking about each teacher mother, and from this thinking I drafted a poem encapsulating her journey as a participant in our community of care.

I decided to conduct follow up interviews – one with each teacher mother – when our writing and sharing data collection period had ended. I was curious about how they perceived the experience, and I wanted to know if and how they had changed. Most importantly, I wanted to know if they thought I got our story right; therefore, I shared each teacher mother's poem with each study participant and asked for feedback. This intimate dialogue created space for me to consider common themes of teacher motherhood, so once again, I returned to poetic craft, drafting poems to represent our shared experience and new understandings. From these new understandings, I was then able to think about next steps – for participants in writing communities, teacher researchers using poetic inquiry, and teacher mothers in our public school system.

Research Questions

Specifically, I examined the following:

1. What is the figured world of the teacher mother?
2. How do figured worlds influence a teacher mother's ability to create agency as she negotiates the responsibilities and expectations of motherhood with career demands? How is she limited?
3. When teacher mothers reflect on their own narratives and the narratives of other teacher mothers, what meaning and/or understanding about their teaching and/or mothering practices become possible?

Methodology

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1988) and sociologist Laurel Richardson (2000) are largely responsible for legitimating the process of writing as research methodology in the social sciences. Richardson called on social scientists to use writing to explore and discover "to expand one's interpretive skills, raise one's consciousness, and bring a fresh perspective to one's research" (p. 931). She challenged researchers not only to use writing to think about their questions; she encouraged them to experiment with the manner in which they represented their findings as well. Mixing up representations of thoughtful research was beneficial, as Richardson (2000) wrote for, "settling words together in new configurations lets us hear, see, and *feel* the world in new dimensions" (p. 933). In this study of teacher mothers, I used both bits of advice.

By writing poems from discussion data and studying teacher mother narratives, I employed narrative analysis as a means to understand the personal practical knowledge teacher mothers bring to the figured worlds that compose their professional lives. In

crafting the poems from our narratives, shared dialogue, and then interviews I also used poetic representation in an effort to focus in and "see" the rich detail and nuance of improvisation, as well as the tensions present within those figured worlds.

Narrative Inquiry

When authors engage in the writing process, they likely never imagine themselves as social science researchers, but they are engaging in the process, in the way they write from observation and memory, thinking and writing about what it means to construct identity within specific social context. As Richardson (1990) wrote, "narrative is the best way to understand the human experience, because it is the way humans understand their own lives" (p. 65). Indeed, some of the most insightful and powerful learning is produced when we write about what we've experienced and remember.

For example, when Judith Ortiz Cofer (1990) described in her poetic memoir, listening, as a young girl, to her grandmother spin tales, Cofer remembered marveling at her grandmother's storytelling skills, but as she matured, Cofer began to think and write about her grandmother's stories in terms of how they served to instruct young women in the ways of proper woman and motherhood. In this manner Cofer was able to construct what Connelly and Clandinin (1999) identified as a "story to live by," a space where "knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively" (p. 4).

Engaging in this form of narrative inquiry, Cofer recognized what she termed the "prevailing woman," an identity Puerto Rican women were expected to emulate throughout marriage, even difficult ones. She (1990) recalled beginning to identify in the women's stories, "the subtext of sexual innuendo, to detect the sarcasm, and to find the hidden clues to their true feelings of frustrations in their marriages and in their narrowly

circumscribed lives" (p. 142), and in the process, she realized how insightful words could be, even in simple stories. Thus, throughout her writing process, Cofer came to new understanding about how her family narratives and the social context of their oral storytelling could and did produce womanly identity within the figured world of her family culture.

Narrative inquiry provides a useful analytical tool for education researchers as well. From composition studies to qualitative inquiry to teacher research, social science researchers have used narrative inquiry as a way to think about questions and concerns in their professional fields (Connelly & Clandinin 1999, Conle 2000, Conle 2001, Marquez 2011, Richards 2011, and Ravitch 2014). All found narrative inquiry methods well suited to reveal specific and unique characteristics within everyday practice.

Stories to Live By

Connelly & Clandinin (1999) identified in a culminating research study of graduate students, teachers, administrators, and student teachers characteristics of "stories to live by" and thus argued for narrative as an ideal method to share and tell such personal practical knowledge. Showcased within narrative stories and situated within professional landscapes, each "having a history with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimension" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 2), the researchers engaged in three rounds of narrative analysis with stories written by their study participants. Their work revealed three different layers of meaning in their participants' stories. From this analytical work, Connelly & Clandinin (1999) identified three types of stories teachers are likely to tell about their practices – cover stories, secret stories, and sacred stories. I observed a similar

layering of story content in the narratives that were produced over time within our teacher mother writing and sharing community.

Cover stories. These were surface level stories and often focused on the expectations the participants felt imposed upon them. Just as Connelly & Clandinin (1999) found in their analytical work of teacher narratives, I too, observed the production of the cover story, especially in the beginning of our group's work together. Judy wrote a gloss of how her family loved summertime, not ever focusing on one specific interaction or activity that had taken place and describing in a vague and general way how family activity during the summer months made her feel like a successful parent.

Rochelle wrote about her disappointment at missing her son's first hit at a tee ball game, but she did not examine why she felt that way or describe any action she took as a result of her disappointment. April came to dinner and participated in our discussion but did not post a narrative the first round.

I had posted a very detailed story about an instance where I disciplined my son for refusing to exercise with me, and I questioned my parenting decision within my narrative. I wrote this particular story as a model, so the other teacher mothers could see the type of narrative I wanted us to produce during the study. While I did not want to direct the writing choices of the women, my participation in a similar writing community with Fecho, et al. (2016), helped me learn what type of narrative in length and content would produce the most fruitful discussion.

We discussed all of the stories posted to the wikispace in our first dinner and sharing session, beginning with my narrative to model the protocol and process for sharing stories within our group. We generated less talk in our discussion of Rochelle and

Judy's narratives than we did during mine because the narratives provided less depth, for they were cover stories – skating over the larger issues of teaching and motherhood.

The exercise of discussing them was productive to our work, however, in that Rochelle, April, and Judy left our group session with a better idea of what to write about next. It was because of this initial work with cover stories that we were able to take our writing and subsequent discussion to the next level in that we were then able to write secret stories, the narratives that captured the tensions we experienced in the figured world of education.

Secret stories. Connelly & Clandinin's (1999) continuing work with teachers and narrative writing produced a type of story that reflected dilemmas in practice where teachers worried about conflict between their actual practices and perceived expectations from administrators. These became known as the secret stories. As our teacher mother group came together for a second time, the narratives we shared reflected these characteristics as well.

April had written and was ready to share her narrative of the conflict she experienced in sharing her middle school workplace with her now 6th grade son. She was worried about him but also anxious about how her colleagues would perceive her as a mother now that both identities were in play in the same context. Her willingness to express vulnerability and uncertainty opened our interactions as well, and we had a thoughtful discussion of how notions of teaching and mothering become complicated when our figured worlds collide.

Rochelle opened up and shared how conflict with her son's pre-K teacher over reminders about his behavior were stressing her out. Judy shared her anxiety that her

daughter, soon to be entering kindergarten wouldn't know the content she had taught successfully to others for more than a decade. I expressed my fear that I had made the wrong school placement for my oldest son. We knew each other better now, and that could help explain the shift in dialogue; however, we were risking more in our writing as well. We were sharing our hopes and fears in our small community, and through this dialogue taking our joint inquiry deeper still – to a place of understanding with the possibility for growth and change. To reach that point, though, our writing and discussion would need to stretch and add the complexity of what Connelly & Clandinin (1999) described as the sacred story.

Sacred stories. These were the rarest form of story produced in Connelly & Clandinin's study and provided the foundation for a participant's story to live by. Our community of teacher mothers produced similar storied outcomes as we came together for our third and final sharing session.

Judy wrote about a tension-filled parent conference that made her question whether she wanted to continue teaching. Rochelle wrote about her realization that in focusing so intently on her son's issues at school, she ignored the needs of her youngest child. April's narrative detailing her experiences at her son's first teacher-parent conference reflected her developing understanding of processes for transacting with the conflict she felt with her colleagues. I meditated on how teaching my son to cook helped me process the consequences of my divorce to my family and navigate my new role as a single mother.

As a result of our heightened writing, our discussions became more lengthy and richer in content. Certainly, the process of writing and then sharing together the stories of

our lives had changed us. As a researcher, employing narrative inquiry as I analyzed the teacher mother narratives permitted not only a rich but layered understanding over time of the unique and specific aspects of creating a life within the figured world of the institution of education. As Sikes (1998) wrote, "bringing these stories into the public arena gives substance and status to the experiences and emotions they describe" (p. 23). In other words, transacting with the stories through dialogue permits intensive analysis of particular stories told under particular circumstances.

Stories Enable Professional Understanding

Similarly and following the structure of my own inquiry, Richards (2011) found participatory narrative inquiry to be a powerful tool for personal and professional understanding. Engaging in a semester long study of email correspondence with eleven, interdisciplinary graduate students enrolled in her qualitative research course, Richards (2011) described her involvement as necessary. She (2011) wrote, "I had to analyze my students' stories because analyzation reveals and documents what truths reside in those stories" (p. 815).

Richards's (2011) analysis of notes and email correspondence, which included a process of reading and re-reading to identify central themes, subject position, and any evident secondary themes, provided a useful structure for her work and "helped us to remember long ago incidents and recall recent events and to use those occurrences as a way to explain personal decisions" (p. 796). This outcome reflected findings in my own inquiry and one of the main reasons narrative analysis worked for me as a tool for promoting understanding in my study of teacher mothers; however, it was not the only selling point.

We Change When We Hear Things Out Loud

Another outcome of narrative inquiry that I found useful in my work was its change making potential. Researchers note the collaborative nature of telling and sharing stories as a vehicle for sustaining and/or changing narratives for the future (Connelly & Clandinin 1999, Marquez 2011, Richards 2011, and Ravitch 2014). Marquez (2011) described narrative inquiry as a method that "exposes the contexts and constraints under which women enter the academy," but one that also allows participation in "transformation" (p. 83). Ravitch (2014) encouraged researchers to use narrative inquiry as an enabling force "to see our practices anew" (p. 6). Connelly & Clandinin (1999) made the argument that teacher narratives and teachers' conceptions of identity are intertwined. If this is true, then it stands to follow that teachers sharing and telling narratives have the potential to write a new story; thus, opening the possibility of constructing new notions of identity and agency. As Connelly & Clandinin (1999) wrote, "listening to the stories we told shifted our understanding of the possibilities for living community on the in-classroom place of our classroom landscape" (p. 19).

Such was the case of Annie Davies, a participant in Connelly & Clandinin's study. In her narrative, Davies (1999) described how a school's faculty responded to the efforts of its new principal to write a new story for their school. Once known for its colorful, student-made banners and other decorative touches that defined the school's identity for its teachers as family centered, a new principal arrived and proceeded to freshen up the building by removing the banners and painting over formerly decorated walls. Connelly & Clandinin (1999) noted how Davies acted as a facilitator for faculty members to share their stories, which in turn, created a forum from which the teachers

collaborated to resist the principal's changes. Connelly & Clandinin (1999) wrote, "The things, banners and logos, thrown out and painted over, were not merely things. They were materialized memories, repositories of shared experience" (p. 100). In the sharing of their stories, the teachers realized how important their school narrative was to their perceptions about their school's identity and also the educators' professional contributions to that particular learning space.

Possibilities for Inquiry Into Teacher Motherhood

Such work with narrative analysis implied fruitful possibilities for my study of teachers who are also mothers. If Connelly & Clandinin were correct and teacher stories are interwoven with and even inseparable from conceptions of identity, then a study of teacher mothers using narrative inquiry as an analytic could only add to and strengthen the body of knowledge about the professional and personal transaction of these women's subject positions within the figured worlds of teaching and mothering.

It was powerful for me as a literacy researcher to watch the change in our group. The narratives we wrote became richer and more complex as they evolved from cover to secret to sacred stories, and the dialogue we shared as we discussed them also changed in nature from four women following the classroom rules of teaching and mothering to four women taking risks and trying new ways of being in their personal and professional lives.

I confess, what intrigued me most about this narrative work was getting at or at least closer to our sacred stories. However, in this quest, I feared narrative inquiry would eventually fail me. Therefore, I inserted an additional level of analysis – one with the power to focus my attention with razor-sharp accuracy and create potential for generative space for thinking, what Cahnmann-Taylor (2003) referred to as an "iterative loop" (p.

32). For me, such a thinking space occurred most often when I wrote poetry; therefore, I added poetic inquiry as an analytic. In the end this additional layer of analysis not only strengthened the quality of my overall inquiry, but promoted my individual understanding of the tensions experienced by teacher mothers. It also provided an additional opportunity for my personal writing practice to transact once again with the women in my study, for in sharing my poems with them as a member check, we dialogued once again not only about the content of my poem but about how the experience of writing and talking with other teacher mothers had changed the way the women were now transacting within their figured worlds.

Poetic Inquiry

Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) described ethnographic poetry as an "important place where ethnographers can explore tensions that emerge between the outside researcher and the community" (p. 7). Toi Derricotte (1997) used poetic craft to write her way out of depression with the publication of *the black notebooks: an interior journey*. Mary Oliver (1994) argued for poetry as "a kind of possible love affair between something like the heart…and the learned skills of the conscious mind" (p. 7). All noted the value of poetic craft as a viable tool for inquiry through writing.

Richardson (1990, 1992, 2000) was one of the first social science researchers to use poetics as a tool and method for representation of data. Since her groundbreaking claim that poetry counted in the world of qualitative research, others have also made use of poetic inquiry (de Vries 2007, Furman, Langer, & Taylor 2010, Lahman, Rodriguez, Richard, Geist, Schendel, & Graglia 2011, and Henderson, 2014). All noted poetic craft as a powerful tool that opened their inquiries to new insights. Furman, et al. (2010) and

Lahman, et al. (2011) argued that the nature of constructing poems, through the compression of language, allowed them to notice themes and listen to voices in a way that was not possible with other types of data analysis. Slotnick & Janesick (2011) and Henderson (2014) noted how the practice of writing poetry generated an iterative loop of writing and thinking, thus sharpening the inquiry and analysis skills of the researcher to promote synthesis and understanding.

Distance and Proximity

As a teacher mother and an active participant in this study, such sharpened skills served not only me, but this inquiry as I explored tension in teacher mother lives, yet sought a way to distance myself from this lived experience I knew so intimately. Writing poems beginning from words and phrases I found in my participants' narratives and grounded in our group's discussion of issues surrounding teaching and mothering provided this rigorous thinking space and allowed me the opportunity to think about a lived experience without being so "of" that experience. As a practicing teacher mother, I acknowledged I was so of this study that I feared traditional data collection and analysis would not provide sufficient distance – I would have difficulty thinking about the teacher mother narratives and our dialogue without imposing reference from my own teaching experience.

However, this sharpened focus informed my final task – interviewing the teacher mothers based on themes and perhaps outliers I identified from writing and revising the poems. It also helped me make sense of any data gathered from our online sharing and discussion of the narratives and provided me an opportunity to ask deeper questions about any connections or tensions that presented as we ran narratives through our

protocol. Such practice and commitment to (re)presenting data in poetic form helped me and others see the poetry, as Furman et al. (2010), "as a vehicle for co-constructing meaning between clients and family members" (p. 69), or in the case of this study, teachers mothers and those who inhabited and transacted within their figured worlds.

Poetic Response Prompts Further Discussion

As I found in my study, writing poems and sharing them with study participants creates the potential for rich, clarifying discussion. Such was the case in de Vries (2007) qualitative interview study of three parents of children under the age of five in reference to music activities in their homes. When the parents, who had been surveyed and interviewed, showed no interest in reviewing or responding to interview transcripts as a form of member checking, de Vries crafted poems from their transcripts. He wrote, "I found myself selecting prominent words and phrases that gave voice to the themes of the poem" (de Vries, 2007, p. 22). He then shared the poems with participants, again as a member check, to see if he got their stories "right".

This practice engaged the parents in conversation. As de Vries (2007) found, "the poem was not just a means of data presentation, but a means of further discussion and reflection on the parents' experiences" (p. 28). The same was true for my study when I shared the persona poems I drafted with each teacher mother. Doing so opened the possibility for rich discussion and clarification of questions that had come up for me as I analyzed narratives and discussion data. Reading the poems also prompted the teacher mothers to reflect on their own perceptions of their growth during our study and quite possibly made it easier for them to articulate what they had gotten from the experience of participating in the study.

While it is encouraging to find relatively recent studies, de Vries (2007) and Henderson (2014), employing poetic craft as a tool for analysis, it is noteworthy that the use of poetic inquiry in education research is not widespread with scholarship seeming to argue for its place in the academy along with study discussion findings (de Vries 2008, Furman, Langer, & Taylor 2010, Lahman, et al. 2011, Henderson 2014). These successful applications do indicate, however, that poetic inquiry as an analytic tool has powerful potential when applied to future inquiries in literacy education. The charge now is to begin doing that work in earnest.

Research Design: Study Overview

For teachers, Pagano (1990) wrote, "our practices within curriculum are discursive practices. We are not mute in the classroom. To borrow from the code of production, language is our medium of exchange" (p. 32). However, in the case of teacher mothers, how might discursive practices present differently from other educators' practices? What code, if any, do teacher mothers bring to the classroom? Might they communicate and read the world using "a common vocabulary" (Sikes, 1998, p. 26) shared only with other teacher mothers, and do they recognize any differences in their professional and personal experiences?

Using poststructural and transactional theory, as well as theory of improvisation in figured worlds as means to make sense of the life experiences of teacher mothers, I examined the following research questions: What is the figured world of the teacher mother? How do figured worlds influence a teacher mother's ability to create agency as she negotiates the responsibilities and expectations of motherhood with career demands? How is she limited? When teacher mothers reflect on their own narratives and the

narratives of other teacher mothers, what meaning and/or understanding about their teaching and/or mothering practices become possible? Study design includes the following elements, and the table below describes how this inquiry searched for answers to those questions.

Table 1: Research Questions

Research Question	What data will help answer this question?	What analysis is required for this question?
1.What is the figured world of the teacher mother?	TM Narrative Discussion Protocol Poems Interview Data	Narrative Analysis NA Poetic Inquiry Poetic Craft
2. How do figured worlds influence a teacher mother's ability to create agency as she negotiates the responsibilities and expectations of motherhood with career demands? How is she limited?	TM Narrative Discussion Protocol Persona Poems Interview Data	Narrative Analysis NA Poetic Inquiry Poetic Craft
3. When teacher mothers reflect on their own narratives and the narratives	Discussion Protocol Persona Poems – Member Check	NA Poetic Inquiry Poetic Craft

of other teacher mothers, what meaning and/or understanding about their teaching and/or mothering practices become possible?	Interview Data	

Research Site Participants

Originally eight teacher mothers agreed to take part in the study, but from the time they signed on in May of 2016 to the conclusion of the first narrative sharing session in August of the same year, only three participants remained. I panicked as I scrambled for ideas of what to do next, as I imagined my work, effort, and study falling apart before I even got started. After talking things over with my advisor, however, I realized all was not lost – there was opportunity in the challenge of losing more than half my participants.

Studying fewer teacher mothers would give me the chance to learn more about each woman in the study and thus understand better what it means to be a teacher mother. Adding my voice to the mix could also provide another lens through which to think about teacher motherhood as well. So, I made the decision to join the group as a fourth participant. Together, our group comprised four teachers who were also mothers to school age children in public schools in the southeastern portion of the United States.

Two of us identified as African American, and two of us identified as European American. We all identified as professional educators, and two of us were employed by the same school system educating our own biological children. We ranged in age and stage of parenthood. Rochelle was the youngest at 38 years of age, and I was the oldest

participant at 45 years of age. April and I parented the oldest children with all of our boys attending middle school, while Rochelle and Judy's children were just entering the public school system.

We all qualified as veteran teachers as we all had more than a decade of experience in the classroom. April and Judy were the most experienced instructors with eighteen and nineteen years respectively. Rochelle and I each had eleven years of teaching experience. Both of us had taken up teaching as a second career and had worked in other fields previously with Rochelle coming to teaching from marketing, while I had worked in the communications industry as a news broadcaster.

Teaching experience varied between us from elementary to secondary education and by content as well. April and I were language arts teachers. Rochelle taught science, and Judy taught everything as a kindergarten teacher. We all identified as good teachers. Judy and Rochelle possessed doctoral degrees in education. April was a former Top 3 Teacher of the Year Finalist for our district in 2006.

Introduction of participants. At the time of the study, 38-year-old Rochelle Mungin was mother to two small children. Her son, Ian, had completed pre-K and had begun kindergarten. Her daughter, Chloe, attended preschool and entered pre-K. While teaching is Rochelle's second career (she changed fields from marketing to education), she had more than a decade of classroom experience teaching mostly middle grades science and was in her second year as a district level professional learning coach. She and her husband, Chris, share parenting duties and work as a team on behalf of their children's educational needs.

April Swain has the distinction of being the only teacher mother in our group to work as a teacher in the same school where her child was enrolled as a student. 44-years-old and a veteran teacher with eighteen years in the classroom as an English/Language Arts instructor, April now serves Reading Coordinator for her school. Married as many years as she has been teaching, April and her husband work together to parent their only son, Corey, a now 7th Grade student served for special education needs.

42-year-old Judy Bolen is an ecstatic mother to three small children and a veteran kindergarten teacher with nineteen years of classroom experience. She has the distinction of being the only teacher mother in the group to have children attending school at the same grade level she taught, and her daughter, Georgia Xan, currently attends Judy's school. She and her husband, Scott, are committed to their family and ever thankful for the opportunity to parent, as they experienced difficulty conceiving to the point they were told that having children of their own was not possible.

My mothering experience is unique in that I am the only single teacher mother in the group, having experienced divorce during the time of the study. I share custody of my sons, 14-year-old, Sam, and 13-year-old, Matthew with my former husband. The boys attend middle school in the district where I taught both middle and high school English/Language Arts for eleven years. I am currently a university graduate teaching assistant and literacy consultant working part-time in my former school district.

Table 2: Study Participants

Study Participant Age	Teaching Experience & Context	Parenting Experience & Context

Rochelle 38-years-old	County Office Professional Learning Coach – 2 years; Middle school science teacher – 11 years	2 children – 1 son in pre-K; 1 daughter in preschool
April 44-years-old	School-based Reading Coordinator – 1 year; Middle school ELA teacher – 18 years	1 child – 1 son in 6th grade; enrolled in April's school
Judy 42-years-old	School-based Title I Coordinator – 1 year; Kindergarten teacher – 19 years	3 children – 1 daughter in kindergarten - enrolled in Judy's school; 1 son & 1 daughter in preschool
Allisa (me) 45-years-old	GTA – 1 year; Middle & High School ELA teacher – 11 years	2 children – 2 sons in middle school; 1 in 6th grade; 1 in 8th grade

Recruitment procedures. I initially recruited for my study by advertising through online resources of the National Writing Project (NWP) and my local Red Clay Writing Project (RCWP). I also advertised my study by word of mouth in two leadership-based courses held within my school district. I was a participant in both classes. Nearly all of my participants came from my leadership courses.

I knew that women involved with additional graduate coursework would be more likely to be teachers holding advanced degrees and be experienced, even veteran teachers

with at least five years classroom teaching experience. I liked this idea because I speculated that women with more experience in education would be more likely to have something to say about the experience of being a teacher mother. I also liked the idea of inviting women with graduate level writing experience to participate because they would likely have some comfort level and/or experience with writing in online sharing communities and be most likely to stay with our study for the entire data collection period.

However, I also recognized that women affiliating with writing project sites and those doing graduate level coursework could bring a singular ideal of teacher motherhood to the learning space in that they would likely share similar economic and educational status with their peers. I reminded myself to be mindful of this possibility throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study. Additionally, as a teacher consultant affiliated with Red Clay and the National Writing Project, I was cognizant of this connection and the strong probability that my own values and experiences could echo those of the study's participants. I reminded myself to listen for and seek out differences in the collected narratives and interviews, so I would not forget to tell those stories.

All participants signed informed consent forms (Appendix B) as teacher mothers agreed to join the study. Participants were encouraged to write at least three narratives, attend all three sharing and discussion sessions, and complete one follow up interview. They retained the option to leave the study at any time if they so wished.

Data Collection

As stated previously, the data collection period for my entire study covered a ten-month time frame – from mid-August 2015 to June 2016. Our group began work in

August 2015 by writing and posting narratives to our dedicated wikispace. We had planned to write at least three narratives a piece and to meet approximately once every two months for dinner and to discuss one of the narratives that had been posted. We held the first two meetings in September and November; however, our third session scheduled in January 2016 had to be pushed back to March after my mother became ill and unexpectedly passed away. Rochelle, April, and Judy were extremely supportive of me during this sad time and helped me understand the importance and possibility of continuing on with our work together.

With our narratives written and three discussion sessions completed, I then began the process of conducting follow up interviews in March of 2016. I interviewed Rochelle, April, and then Judy one time for a period of approximately one hour to ask clarifying questions and to share the persona poems I had written for each of them. I completed my final interview in June of 2016. I considered the possibility of interviewing myself as well, but I decided against this idea opting to re-read my written narratives and reflect on the experience of participating with the group as a study participant instead.

Writing and posting narratives. During the narrative writing phase of the study, which lasted from August 2015 to March 2016, teacher mothers were invited to a password protected wikispace, which I administrated. There we posted our narratives after writing our stories about teaching and mothering. The wikispace was a closed group, yet we had the opportunity to read each others' narratives and offer feedback prior to meeting for our small group discussions. Nobody took up that opportunity during the course of the study, but that did not surprise or trouble me – I was glad to have the narratives posted and ready for discussion.

As a now fully participating teacher researcher in the study, I wrote and posted narratives along with the participants in my study. I did this for several reasons. The first assisted me as a reflection tool. As poet Mary Oliver (1994) wrote, "One learns by thinking about writing, and by talking about writing – but primarily through writing" (p. 17). I wanted to understand our lived experiences better; therefore, I realized I must practice this craft as well and write alongside them. I also wanted to create a space where teacher mothers would feel comfortable sharing their honest feelings about possible tension spots in their busy lives.

I placed myself in the other teacher mothers' shoes. I knew I would feel more comfortable committing to writing and posting my personal stories if I knew the group's facilitator were committing to do so as well. I wanted for our group to share and learn together, so I hoped my willingness to write helped communicate this intention. Finally, none of the teacher mothers in my study had ever participated in a writing and sharing group like the one I created for us to use. My full participation and writing helped provide a model to help Rochelle, April, and Judy know how to engage fully and completely in the study.

Small group sharing sessions and discussion protocol. Narrative sharing sessions took place at my home approximately once every two months beginning in September 2015 and ending in March 2016. We ate dinner together on a Friday evening, selected our narratives to share, and then discussed these narratives utilizing a protocol I will explain in detail later in this chapter. Any talk or text generated within the wikispace or during the data sessions served as possible data to be collected for the study. These

sessions were audio recorded as well and were not only analyzed in terms of the shared narratives but the talk and response in the group surrounding these stories.

Our forum, the living room of my home, hopefully engaged participants as a safe and supportive space to talk through parenting and teaching challenges. The sessions were entirely voluntary, and while I encouraged Rochelle, April, and Judy to commit to the entire length of the study, they had the option to leave the study at any time. As Richardson (1990) wrote, such participation holds "transformative possibilities" as "people who belong to a particular category can develop a consciousness of kind and can galvanize other category members through the telling of the collective story" (p. 26). I predicted such possibility existed in the case of our small group of teacher mothers as well.

I did notice that our talk grew as time progressed from stilted conversation and uncertainty to free flowing connected conversations. After the study was complete, we talked about the option to continue our writing and sharing as an informal professional learning community, as we found the dialogue beneficial to our teaching and mothering practices. We have not yet taken up that opportunity.

Our protocol for discussion was one I was familiar with. In working with Fecho, et al. (2016), we employed Patricia Carini's discussion protocol (Himley with Carini, 2000) for our inquiry into dialogue in classroom practice. I adapted the guiding questions to serve my study of teacher mothers, and we followed a similar procedure. One teacher mother would read her story to the group and then take a vow of silence while the others discussed the narrative guided by the questions in the protocol. The author of the shared narrative took notes while the others talked. After the discussion concluded, the author of

the narrative then shared out with the group what she had heard the others say about her story. It was then that she could ask clarifying questions of the other teacher mothers in our group.

Each meeting, I had planned for one participant to share a narrative with the group. However, we ended up discussing at least two narratives each session. I facilitated and guided the group through the sharing protocol where participants reflected on the following questions:

1. What issues of mothering/parenting do you notice?
2. What issues of teaching do you notice?
3. What connections can you make to the narrative?

Responses to the guiding questions were recorded, and I transcribed these recordings with the transcripts serving as another potential data source. At the end of the data collection period this practice yielded three recorded sessions of our discussion for review and possible analysis during the analysis phase of my study. Each transcript contained sharing and discussion of at least two teacher mother narratives. Our third sharing session contained discussion of three narratives.

Writing poems from discussion data. I read the teacher mother narratives and studied the transcripts from the narrative sharing sessions. From these sources, I wrote poems inspired by and many times using the words "found" in the teacher mothers' individual stories. This process of reading and re-reading served as a springboard for ideas and understanding and helped me to see and think about the figured world of teacher mothers through the experiences of others. Writing the poems also helped me

later in the study as I crafted interview questions for each teacher mother. Thus, the poems produced from data served as another data source in this study.

It was important to me as I committed to this process that the poems I wrote be valued as aesthetically good ones – I wanted them to mean something in terms of my understanding about teaching and mothering, but I also wanted the poems to be good enough to stand alone as art. Anthropologist, Ruth Behar (2008) addressed this potential pitfall in arts-based research by arguing for less bad poetry and more deliberate use of poetic craft in social science research as she reflected on her writing of poetic ethnography. "I've made the case that the most charged intellectual insights occur precisely when one's ethnographic work and one's life crash into each other in a head-on collision" (p. 63). As a teacher-researcher-poet engaged in a study of other teacher mothers, I endeavored to take up Behar's challenge, using my "obsessive ears" (Hugo, 1992, p. 29) to dial in to my study participants' words and the tensions they described.

I crafted these poems by examining the teacher mother narratives for key words and phrases, looking for commonalities but also differences in the women's stories that made them unique. Using the words I "found" in their narratives and our session transcripts, I was able to organize recurring phrases by theme or tension.

I had planned to write a found poem for every narrative I shared on the wikispace and for at least two of the narratives posted by each of my study participants. The plan was to compose poems mostly using the spoken and written words of the participants with some editorial additions or deletions as I revised each one. I thought I might also create poems from the interview transcripts as well; the found poems were to be included in an appendix of my dissertation.

However, I found it limiting and overreaching to write a prescribed number of poems for each participant at every stage in the data collection process. Plus, I realized if I forced the process, I would likely end up with a large volume of bad poems. What became much more "true" and useful to my developing understanding of the figured world of the teacher mother was to use the teacher mothers' narratives and the transcription of our dialogue, along with interview data as possible resources from which to describe tensions surrounding the figured world of the teacher mother. In other words, I couldn't force a meditation and subsequent level of new understanding by sticking to what I originally proposed. I needed to consider all the texts and write about what seemed important, when it did.

As I didn't have a road map for negotiating this process as a teacher-researcher-poet, I relied on a process of trial and error as I wrote and then reflected on whether what I had produced was helpful to my inquiry or not.

I started with a focus on our dialogue about teaching and mothering. I had experimented years before with writing dialogue poems and also two-voice poems with students in my classroom, and I liked the format of the two-voice poem in that its form presented words in conversation with each other. I thought – *Voila! There it is.* – the perfect genre to represent the dialogue of our teacher mother group.

So I tried it, creating the two-voice poem I titled, "Lurking Beneath the Teacher Hat: A Data Poem in Two Voices" (Appendix C). The format for my poem followed the rules for this poetic form where the speakers in the poem are represented by the placement of their words in different columns and lines on a page.

The voices become differentiated when a speaker's words are isolated on single lines in single columns for they are spoken or read alone by a single reader. Poets may also reinforce common ideas through this genre, for when words are situated on the same line but in different columns, they are spoken or read together.

I drafted my first two-voice poem by tagging the key phrases and words I identified as important in our narratives and discussion. I found it useful to place the collective voice of the teacher mother in the left hand column of the poem. In the right hand column I placed my questions or clarifications in the voice of the researcher. In this manner, I was able to check my writing and thinking as I continued to process new stories and my understanding of our discussions.

As I noted bits and pieces of language that were common throughout Rochelle, April, and Judy's vignettes, I came to identify some of the common themes of teacher motherhood, but this process did not help me understand the women in the study as individuals. To this end, I found it much more useful to write persona poems to help me situate and describe each teacher mother's figured world, for the form of the persona poem provided me the distance and proximity I desired. As Boisseau, Bar-Nadav, & Wallace (2012) wrote, "all poems involve a persona and the perception of a presented character, real or otherwise" (p. 145). However, the persona poem was specific in its form, allowing me as a teacher-researcher-poet to put, as Boisseau, Bar-Nadav, & Wallace (2012) wrote, "on a mask, adopt a persona who speaks the poem" (p. 145). In other words, in crafting and revising the poems, I was able to take a step back and write from a more detached perspective, even though I experienced the sharing within the group first hand. This vantage point further permitted a perspective from which to

explore issues unique to each teacher mother. This aspect of the genre appealed to my task at hand.

When I followed up with Rochelle, April, and Judy during the interview phase of the study, I shared these poems with the teacher mothers in the study. This process functioned as a member check and hopefully, as de Vries (2007) noted, as "a means for further discussion and reflection" (p. 28). Their reading of my writing helped clarify any lingering questions and helped me know that I was representing their stories in ways that honored both their lived experiences and commitment to my study.

Conducting interviews and member checking. The interview phase of my study began in March and ended in June 2016. I interviewed Rochelle, April, and Judy one time for approximately one hour. Conducting interviews at different times during the second semester of the teacher mothers' academic school year not only provided a realistic description of everyday challenges and reflected a greater sense of pressure and tension as the teacher mothers prepared to finish out the academic school year, they allowed the teacher mothers time to respond after reflecting on what they learned and shared during the narrative data sessions.

I followed up these full-length interviews with shorter, fact-checking conversations through email during the summer months as a way to clarify my ongoing analysis and provide an additional layer of member checking, so study participants could be assured their stories and ideas are represented accurately (Glesne, 1999, p. 32). Interview questions focused on teacher mother experiences and stemmed from the narratives written and shared during the online sharing experience. The teacher interview protocol focused on the following areas: the teacher mother's background experience and

educational philosophy (how she came to teaching as a profession and why she stays), the teacher mother's perception of her role in the classroom and how being a mother does or does not influence her transactions with student learners, her role as a mother to school-age children, any challenges or obstacles she faces in her role as a working mother, how the teacher mother views the transaction of these two subject positions, and finally, what the teacher mother had learned from her reflection on participating in the writing and sharing process.

I prepared individualized interview questions for each teacher mother. I did this because participating in the narrative data sessions and online sharing experience allowed me to come to know each participant more fully. I worried that asking each teacher mother to answer the same set of generic questions would yield shallow, surface response data, when I wanted the interview to allow me to ask deeper, clarifying questions. To help me tailor the interview guides for each teacher mother, I used the text of each teacher mother's persona poem in an effort to guide me. What I found was the process of crafting persona poems permitted me an entry point from which to describe the figured world of the teacher mother. From that writing, I then developed an individualized set of interview questions for each participant. I was interested in using the interview as an opportunity to clarify issues and statements made during the data sharing sessions, but I was also very interested in hearing how participating the data sharing sessions had altered the practices of the teacher mothers.

I began from the questions in the interview guide, but hoped the informal, semi-structured format of the interview, along with the pre-established relationship from the online sharing forum, would encourage my participants to feel comfortable enough to

simply talk about their experiences and tell their stories of teaching and motherhood. I saw the follow up interview phase of my study as another opportunity for rich dialogue as we continued to discuss the give and take of transaction between the two, as well as perceived opportunities for improvisation within this figured world.

Interviews consisted of one audio recorded, semi-structured, individual interview with each participant. Interviews were conducted starting in March 2016 and ending by June of the same year – all outside of working hours to allow for participant comfort and limit potential distractions and interruptions during the recording. While it was unrealistic to expect the same enthusiastic response and rich narrative from every study participant (Glesne, 1999, p. 80), the nature of semi-structured interviews, along with the individualized question guides, did invite participants to share stories about pre-determined topics. With established rapport between researcher and study participant through their participation in the online forum earlier in the school year, this method of data collection was ideal for the sharing of experiences through interview and following up on stories begun and shared during the narrative data sessions. While the interview continued to focus on the lived experiences of teacher mothers, the open-ended nature of the interview allowed for study participants to share stories rather than simply respond to questions. In this flexible manner, the interview was more like informal conversation, a "catching up" with participants recalling a time when… rather than attending to a rigid script.

Under my original plan that included eight teacher mother participants, I had planned to draw from a pool of active, online writers generating a volume of narratives when I considered which participants to select to interview. However, when five

participants did not post narratives and subsequently left the study, I was left with a total of four teacher mother participants, including myself. At that point, I decided to interview all three remaining participants in an effort to gather richer data than I would collect from the narratives and discussion sessions alone and make the effort to go deeper in my study of the figured world of the teacher mother. Individual interview guides are included in Appendix A.

It was a strange feeling to interview women I had come to know so well. April was my first interview in March of 2016, and I'm quite certain I messed things up. For starters, I wasn't happy with the quality of April's persona poem. It read like prose narrative rather than a poem, and it really needed more work, but I felt pressure to get started on this phase of the study and as a result, went in without a set plan.

I followed the questions I created for April, and I didn't deviate from these. Although we had a good conversation, I missed out on asking her some basic questions I would need to write her story such as how long she had been married, where she went to school, how many years she had been a mother – I had to go back and email her with these questions. To avoid this in later interviews, I placed these general questions at the top of Rochelle and Judy's interview guides.

I also missed an opportunity to dialogue with April about her poem. I shared it with her, and she said that she loved it, commenting on how it was all there, but I didn't ask her what she meant by that comment. Part of my behavior stemmed from the embarrassment I felt as a writer that my poem was not ready for a reading. The other part was my uncertainty of my interview process. I did, after talking things over with Bob, refine my process into a protocol of sorts, and I found that in simply asking Rochelle and

Judy to share their reactions and observations about their poems allowed for the beginnings of much richer and more meaningful conversation. It made me wish I could go back and redo April's interview, but the fact that I had gotten smarter about the process helped me move on and forward as I began to analyze the interview data.

Analysis

Richardson (1990) wrote, "The question is not whether we will write the lives of people – as social scientists that is what we do – but *how* and for *whom*" (p. 9). I considered this heavy responsibility as I prepared to undertake the task of writing our teacher mother story. I realized I could never separate my own lived experience as a teacher and mother from my interpretation of other women's stories; however, writing narratives did permit a certain freedom in analysis to "galvanize other category members through telling of the collective story" (Richardson, 1990, p. 26). In other words, in the sharing and talking about our stories, we came to realize we were not so alone in terms of experience, and this knowledge provided a point from which to inquire, trouble, and reflect on the figured world we inhabit. Therefore, it was not imperative for the women in this study to change the ways in which they created their lives, but in the sharing of their stories through the interview process and participation in the narrative sharing protocol engage in meaningful conversation about what it means to create a life as a teacher mother and an understanding that it did not have to be a unique or solitary endeavor.

Similarly, my use of poetic craft functioned to not only spark conversation and permit teacher mothers to notice the unique qualities of their figured worlds, it extended the conversation, as de Vries (2007) found the sharing of his work "a stimulus for further discussion of the issues/themes raised in the poetry" (p. 31). I found this to be true as I

conducted follow up interviews, and I hoped the teacher mothers would make or do something with the knowledge they gained from participating in the study.

Once I collected data from the narratives, dialogue recorded during the small group discussion protocol, and individual interviews, I analyzed this data using the following methods: narrative analysis, transcription, and poetic craft.

Narrative Analysis. Once study participants posted their narratives into our wikispace, I began the process of analyzing those narratives. Using a process of reading and re-reading, I looked for issue of teaching, mothering, common themes, and outlying differences. I then reflected on these common themes. As Goldberg (2005), argued for writing as an "act of burning through the fog in your mind" (p. 94), so too, I used writing to make meaning of not only teacher mother experience, but my own experience as filtered through my comprehension of others' stories.

I thought deeply both about the differences I noticed in their stories and the themes and common threads and reflected on what their presence or absence meant to a study of teacher mothers and their lived experiences. Narrative analysis permitted me to interpret and re-present the potential collective story of teacher mothers in a way to share a story "about people who are not collectively organized" (Richardson, 1990, p. 25). This is unique work was potentially important to share as the story of public school teacher mothers was and remains largely absent from the literature.

Transcribing and analyzing discussion data. Posting narratives and participating in the narrative sharing discussions of the posted stories produced recorded talk about the narratives. This additional data functioned as another text available for narrative analysis. I transcribed my own discussion data throughout the collection

process, as writing down the words and thinking about my participants' stories represented a unique opportunity for early analysis. Once again, I engaged in a process of reading and re-reading these transcripts, looking for common threads and differences. Transcription of discussion data provided a vantage point from which to do this preliminary work and provided material for the next level of analysis – poetic inquiry.

Writing poetry. The crafting of poetry is an enjoyable, personal writing practice that focuses my attention. It has played an important role in my reflective teaching practice for years (Hall, 2014). I chose to make poetic inquiry part of my ongoing data analysis practice in this study of teacher mothers for several reasons. Most importantly, I wanted to attend to the narratives of these women. As Oliver (1994) wrote, "the task of the meditation is to put disorder into order" (p. 105). Writing poems helped me dial in and make sense of things I did not quite understand or even have the ability to see at first blush. The process also helped me identify, as I explain in a later section, the common themes and tensions present in the figured world of teacher mothers.

Transcribing interview data. Transcribing interview data provided a means to clarify questions and/or responses. Using transcription as part of my ongoing thinking process also facilitated opportunities for me to revisit interview questions and responses or even compose new questions as I continually reflected on these narratives and their meanings in the larger context of teaching and mothering.

I followed the same process I used to analyze discussion data recorded during the narrative sharing sessions. I transcribed my own interview data, again understanding that writing down my study participants' words provided a unique opportunity to immerse

myself in our conversation and prepared me to think deeply about what their narratives meant in the context of teaching and mothering.

Writing new poems. After conducting follow up interviews with Rochelle, April, and Judy, I then transcribed the interviews, looking for common themes and shared experiences of these teacher mothers as I completed this work. After the transcription process concluded, I used the data from the interviews to assist me in constructing more poems about those common themes. These poetic representations, composed from striking or powerful lines of interview data that "glow" (MacLure, 2010, p. 281), functioned as another layer of analysis for my study, as I sought to describe tensions in the lived experience of teacher mothers as they worked within and against the structures that set the parameters for their professional and personal lives but also the changes that became possible for each teacher mother as a result of participating in my study.

Other Considerations and Challenges

As an insider to the world of teaching and mothering, I believe that the sharing of collective experience promoted rich discussion and insight into the figured world of teacher mothers. While I can't separate my personal understanding of what it means to create and practice my daily life from the lived experiences of Rochelle, April, and Judy, through the sharing and analysis of other perspectives we grew and expanded our understanding of the figured worlds of teacher mothers. At some level I believe participating in the process allowed me to come to new understanding and even provide me a sense of calm about my own practices of teacher motherhood. Use of poetic representation as an analytical tool, as well as multiple data collection sources, provided a check of sorts and a distancing tool as well as I worked through and analyzed data,

helping me recognize my presence in any potential interpretation and keeping me "on the hook" as I wrote the meaning I took from others' lived experiences.

To undertake a study of women who are full-time teachers and mothers meant asking already busy and potentially stressed individuals to commit extra time to an extra endeavor. It was difficult and even stressful to keep teacher mothers engaged in the process and committed to completing the study, especially since many were over-extended and time impoverished professionals. Now that the work is complete, I understand that Rochelle, April, and Judy's commitment to stick it out stemmed not so much from my encouragement to them to continue, but their commitment to supporting our community of care, or as April called it – a secret sisterhood of teacher mothers.

The online platform of the wikispace had the potential to intimidate some; therefore, I put in the extra effort to model the length and depth of the narratives we used for discussion. I provided writing prompts in the beginning, but as time went on, I received fewer requests for what to do and how to do it. I worried in the beginning that my study would lack diversity and therefore fail to sufficiently tell the collective story of teacher mothers within the figured world of education. However, in the end, the teacher mothers remaining and participating throughout the study reflected diverse backgrounds and perspectives in motherhood and teaching. From pre-school mothering and teaching to secondary stories in the classroom, the narratives displayed a wide variety of lived experience for such a small group of women. I learned so much about teacher mothers in general, and I gained a great deal of confidence from working and writing with Rochelle, April, and Judy.

Where This Work Has Taken Me

Derricotte (1997) wrote, "eventually every identity breaks down to some self that has to learn to live between loneliness and connection" (p. 78). Teacher mothers potentially negotiate this relationship dynamic on a daily basis. In their classrooms, they often find themselves alone, perhaps feeling pressure to be the one who knows all at all times. At home, they are connected to their families in a complex web of relationships; however, they rarely spend time thinking about how these two worlds transact with one another and what that means as they create their lives through daily practice.

What's especially troubling for this woman in today's society is her lack of time and opportunity to connect with others. She has no idea if her experience is a shared one or not. As a result, many teacher mothers may remain isolated and likely under stress. For this reason a study of teacher mothers and their perceptions of their lived experiences became an important opportunity for sharing and reflection. Just as Rosenblatt argued for students to be permitted an "emotional response" to literature, so do teacher mothers deserve this opportunity as they consider the implications of their daily practices in a larger context.

I often wondered as I did this work what might happen after I completed my study. Would it spark conversation leading to change, or just fizzle as an inconsequential exercise? I hoped it wouldn't. Derricotte (1997) wrote, "There's a very dangerous moment when feelings, real feelings, start to emerge" (p. 122). I witnessed signs of these surfacings along the way, best exemplified in April's comment, "This thing right here has got me looking real different. It really does." My hope in the least was that sharing narratives allowed teacher mothers a space to know they were not alone but part of a

collective story, one that deserves examination and discussion. At the most I imagined it a springboard for women to organize and work towards societal change, providing "a *living through*, not simply *knowledge about*" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38) this collective group.

Chapter Four:

Data Discussion

What does the figured world of the teacher mother look like, and how do I write this unique, yet commonly held experience into existence so that others may understand it better and learn from the work Rochelle, April, Judy, and I did together? These questions haunted me as I thought and thought again about how to process all the vulnerable talk I had collected over the past months. What I had as I sat down to analyze and process was intensely personal, in effect a precious gift from giving, yet time impoverished women, so I perceived a great responsibility in sharing any lessons learned from our work with a wider audience. With this in mind, I agonized over how to describe the very personal concerns, hopes, and experiences each participant shared within our group. I knew it was important to consider everything the teacher mothers shared, from written narratives to talk transcribed from our data sessions to informal chats while we shared meals to our interview conversations to follow up emails sent just to double check. All added value to our developing collective narrative.

Rochelle, April, Judy, and I learned a great deal about each other as we participated in this project together. We also learned a great deal about ourselves, for in forming what April would later call "a little secret sisterhood of teacher mothers," we were able to view our personal experiences, as Rosenblatt (1995) wrote, "with a certain detachment and to understand our own situation and motivation more objectively" (p. 40). I certainly came to new understanding about my own life as a teacher mother

through my participation with the group. However, when presented with the final task of representing the stories of the other women, I lost confidence in that I didn't feel qualified to tell the story of another sufficiently – I didn't feel as if I had the authority to do that work justice.

Yet, it was work that needed to be done, for I believe the teacher mother story one I was compelled, even required to tell and share now that we had invested time in doing the work together. Therefore, I needed a vehicle to help me find a credible voice that would not diminish the voices and personalities of the other women in the group. I selected poetic craft as my mode of representation, but I relied chiefly on a specific type of poem – the persona poem – to provide the researcher in me with some distance and thinking space. As Boisseau & Wallace (2004) wrote, of its specificity in form, "[it is] a poem in which a fictional, mythic, historic, or other figure speaks" (p. 161). This aspect of the genre appealed to my task at hand, and with the teacher mother speaking to readers, this vantage point further permitted a perspective from which to explore issues unique to each woman's life. As Boisseau & Wallace (2004) wrote, "through looking at a version of the self, poets challenge their assumptions and enlarge their perceptions – along with the reader's" (p. 162). I wanted this outcome, so I engaged in this poetic process.

I found it was in the crafting of Rochelle's poem and the others that I was able to make new meaning as a researcher as well. Using poetic inquiry as "verbal stimuli toward a special kind of intense and ordered experience – sensuous, intellectual, emotional" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 31), I dialed in and focused on the texts we created, and this practice led me to new insight.

Beginning with this chapter and continuing on through chapters five and six of this dissertation study, I represent my understanding of the meaning and growth of each teacher mother through poetic inquiry. I begin each section by providing personal and professional context of each teacher mother's place within the figured world of education. I then present each teacher mother's persona poem as well as a discussion of my analysis of writing and discussion data I used to compose each participant's poem. Following explication of each teacher mother's persona poem, I then turn to a discussion of what became possible in terms of new meaning and understanding for each teacher mother as a result of participating in a small writing and sharing community.

This process of analysis in Chapter Four helped me connect what I learned about the women as individuals to our common challenges and concerns as teacher mothers. In Chapter Five I develop this discussion, focusing some of the common, yet unique characteristics shared by teacher mothers participating in this study. I once again represent these commonly held tensions through poetry, but now employ the genre of free verse. I then connect my poetic inquiry and analysis of data from follow up interviews conducted at the conclusion of the group's narrative sharing sessions in an effort to expose and describe the collective experiences of teacher mothers in the figured world of education. In addition and in conclusion to this chapter, I provide a discussion of poem member checks conducted at the end of each interview, as I shared the persona poems I wrote for each teacher mother with the teacher mother and asked for her feedback.

In Chapter Six, I consider the implications for the participants of our small writing community and the personal confidence and growth that resulted from sharing stories with others. I represent my understandings of this growth with an additional free verse

poem and from this text offer next steps for teacher mothers and also researchers interested in studying this group of women in the future. My suggestions for teacher mothers include encouragement to meet together in small groups for writing and sharing purposes, and I also encourage school administrators to facilitate such writing and sharing communities through professional learning communities that may already exist in their schools. I also issue an invitation to literacy researchers to continue studying the figured worlds of teacher mothers working in the public schools. I conclude with my commitment to continue my work and inquiry in this area of study.

Refocusing with Rochelle

I turn now to the teacher mothers in our group and our individual stories. I describe each woman and share her unique contexts for teaching and mothering. I also share the individual persona poems I crafted for each teacher mother as well as my subsequent analysis of what the text of the poem means for each woman in a larger context of teaching and mothering. The lines sometimes come directly from our own words – from our narratives, our shared sessions spent in dialogue, our informal conversations. Sometimes the lines are a product of my choice and interpretation. However, each word selection endeavors to represent each teacher mother's experience with honesty, clarity, and above all, care and respect. I begin with Rochelle, continue with April, follow with Judy, and end with my story.

Rochelle Mungin is a 38-year-old, African American woman working as an instructional learning coach for a mid-sized public school system located in a suburb of a metropolitan city in the southeastern portion of the United States. She is spunky, always positive in her outlook, and she wears a smile that makes me wonder if she is perpetually

cracking herself up with private jokes told inside her head. She is an experienced educator with twelve years classroom teaching experience, and until the current academic school year, taught 6th grade science at one of the middle schools in the system in which she is currently employed. Ever versatile, teaching is a second career for Rochelle, as she put her masters degree to work in the marketing industry prior to embarking on her career in education. She was neither a wife nor a mother prior to her career change, but admits she was in search of extra time she perceived she would gain as a teacher. "I was trying to "find" myself and felt that Corporate America was sucking the life out of me and my relationships with family and friends," she recalled.

Rochelle conveys both a sense of gratitude and deep responsibility in terms of higher education. Notably, she is the first of her siblings to attend college, and it was extremely important to her working class parents that she become a college graduate. She recalled, "One thing my dad always, and my mom – both of them [said,] "I want you to be better than me. I want you to do better than me."" Today, her highest level of education is a PhD; however, she remains committed to life-long learning, as she is set to complete her leadership certification by the end of the year.

Professional Context

Presenting herself as an organized, competent, and very "together" professional, Rochelle is passionate about helping teachers learn and grow. "All I think about," she said, "is what's good teaching? What does it look like? How can I help people be better?" She thoroughly enjoys having the opportunity to facilitate this type of work and growth every day. "When you help other people get there – that's success," she said.

Rochelle has been married for nine years and describes her relationship with her spouse, Chris, as a team effort. They routinely divvy up childcare duties and take a shared approach to parenting in their family unit. During her participation in the study; however, Rochelle shouldered a bulk of the responsibility of providing for her family financially. This was because her husband had been laid off from his fulltime job and was in the process of looking for another position. She said, "I did what I had to do in order to keep us afloat once his severance ran out." A private person by nature, Rochelle did not immediately reveal this personal information with the group; it was not until the last data session that she shared her concern for her spouse's disappointment at not yet finding a suitable position.

While she readily accepted the responsibility as temporary breadwinner for her family, this new role was a source of stress and even anxiety for Rochelle. For in primarily focusing on her work, she knew she would divert attention away from her family's needs, and it was important to Rochelle to maintain the image of one who does good work in all aspects of life. "I don't want to fail. I do know that when you fail, you learn, and you can climb from that, but I don't want to." She would often worry out loud about appearing lazy compared to her co-workers who kept longer hours, and she would speak of efforts to "do better" and work harder in response to the guilt she felt. Rochelle's response was likely informed by her own experiences. As Schulte (2014) wrote, "people with more education felt more time stress than those with less education" (p. 28). As an educated professional with a PhD, Rochelle's expectations of performance are likely higher than those of her other colleagues. As she said, "I only have my name, and I want people to equate my name with good, high quality work."

Parenting Considerations

She commits the same level of dedication to her home front as well. At the time of the study, Rochelle was also a mother to two young children – a 6-year-old son in kindergarten and a 4-year-old daughter beginning pre-K classes. They did not attend school within Rochelle's employment district, but even with new added professional responsibilities on her schedule, she remained very involved and hands-on in the planning of their care and wellbeing.

Rochelle's sense of commitment was evident in her work with us during the study. At more than one point during the course of our work Rochelle was the glue that held the group together, motivating other participants to post stories by deadline and continue on even as responsibilities and other time commitments threatened continuity for the group. As a former doctoral student, she understood the importance of keeping the teacher mothers together, so that I would have good data and could progress towards completion of my dissertation.

"I'm a controller," Rochelle says with a chuckle, "but I'm a controller of me though. I don't try to control other people." Certainly cognizant of the idea that she feels the need to be in command of her own actions and decisions, Rochelle would make comments such as, "I've got to get it together" to express her commitment to righting her own ship and pressing forward when deadlines and life stressors encroached on her sense of personal and professional wellbeing. Family, financial, work stability – all were her responsibilities to shoulder, however.

Though she was guarded in sharing criticism in the beginning of our study, as the four of us got to know each other better through our writing and time spent talking

together, Rochelle became less reserved, the comfort enabling her to share her opinions more freely and her own insecurities about mothering more openly than before. In fact, we all became more open and comfortable with each other as time went on, and this increased level of vulnerability heightened my awareness as a researcher that I had been entrusted with a great responsibility to represent our stories with respect and care. As I carefully considered my options for representing reflection and analysis, I was reminded of the descriptive power of the persona poem. It confirmed for me that such a vehicle was the most appropriate fit for the work I wanted to do to showcase the unique, yet connected stories I wanted to share.

Composing Rochelle's Figured World

Presented below, I share the poem I wrote to capture Rochelle's experiences and attitudes about her role as a teacher mother in our society. As I have written previously about my composition of the persona poems, not all the words in the poem are Rochelle's exact words. As I wrote I did focus in on phrases she said that prompted me to think more deeply about her experience; however, my words and interpretation are blended throughout the verse. In this way, the poem is a result of "cooking" original data.

"I'm the Mama, and They're Not Getting Another One" is an example of this type of work, and it plays with an extended metaphor Rochelle first shared with our group – the journey. I used it as a foundation from which to more fully describe her overarching struggle to reconcile her career expectations and goals with her deeply felt commitment to her familial responsibilities. Following the poem, I then unpack the text by stanza, describing my decision making process in identifying the concern for inclusion in the

poem, its placement in the poetic text, and also my analysis of the issue in the larger context of Rochelle's perceived and lived figured world.

"I'm the Mama, and They're Not Getting Another One"

I struggle on the journey. Forks
in the road – never end, demand decision.
I commit. Step. But wonder – Is this right?
Is it enough? I may look cool, but I'm nervous,
anxious. I have to follow through even if I make
a mistake. I'm the mother. That makes me the boss.

Sometimes I look at what my children are doing
or not doing, and I take that on – like it's my fault.
I tell myself – I know my children, but sometimes
I put things in place that don't fit, and I know it.
I feel stuck, but stick to what I said I was going
to do. Sometimes that makes me the unhappy one.

In the classroom and life, there's always
conflict in starting something new. I try
keeping up to childless colleagues punching
the clock at ungodly hours. I get home when
bath time is over and ask - I left the classroom
for this? Did my son just call me *mean* mommy?

The work never used to get to me like this –
once content to fill the space with other people's
children, I'm now redirected, focused, eyes trained
on the clock, ready to bolt for the playground. I long
for this time, and I know I must hurry. We don't have
much daylight left. It's my job to make the most of it.

As discussed previously, the poem opens with the idea that Rochelle is in conflict as she travels on a journey – in this case her path of motherhood, which proceeds in tandem with and often intersects with her expanding professional life. She questions the day to day parenting decisions she must make because she feels as if she is often in new territory and doesn't have the confidence that her choices are the right ones for her children.

Balancing Tension at Home

"There are times I definitely question myself – about how – what kind of mother I am," she said, "As a teacher, I'm pretty good I think because I can get some kids to do some stuff." However, this same professional confidence did not extend to teaching and guiding her children at home. For instance, as we began our work in the group, Rochelle was engaged in an ongoing and stressful struggle with her son's preschool teacher over issues of his class behavior and performance. She recalled the teacher's approach, seemingly beginning with praise. "I can tell that you've been doing x, y, and z – She would always start with that – and then she would drop the bomb." In Rochelle's thinking, because she was unprepared to receive the bad news, and it forced a round of snap decision making in the presence of and under the gaze of another teaching professional, Rochelle perceived that the teacher was handling her, so to speak. "I feel like she only did that because I was a teacher, and she was trying to pacify me before she told me what I wasn't doing," she shared. Furthermore, she attached the feeling of inadequacy she felt to the fact that the teacher knew Rochelle was a teacher, too, and she didn't like that. "I didn't want them to know I was a teacher because I didn't want them to assume anything."

More specifically, she didn't want the teacher to make assumptions about her son's abilities simply because he was the child of an educator. She said, "I didn't want them to expect anything from him that would show that maybe I was not a good mom," indicating Rochelle took the criticism of her son's behavior as a criticism of her parenting ability, while the teacher's attention to Rochelle's son's performance deficiencies called Rochelle's teaching abilities into question. "He was the measure of what kind of mother I

was because he's my first child. How he turned out determined what kind of mom I was – the caliber of mother I was," she recalled, her reflection an indication of just how complicated the life of a teacher mother may become in that mothering and teaching roles are never fully separate from each other. Rochelle's reaction reflects this tension in that her feelings of inadequacy in her mothering life strongly influenced her perceptions of success in her teaching life as well, especially since the criticism Rochelle received came from another teacher.

This series of parent teacher conferences then set in motion an internal conflict that led Rochelle to seriously question her own maternal decision making process. Lines 3-4 of the poem speak to her worry over whether or not her choices and actions are adequate enough to warrant status as a good mother – a distinction important to Rochelle, while lines 4-5 include Rochelle's admission that she has serious doubts the answer to her questions could be yes. "Anything that deals with my kids – just anything with them – it makes me nervous and fearful because they can't look out for themselves," she said. This is further reflected in her first shared narrative. Her writing described her guilt and shame at not being present to see her son get his first hit in a tee ball game:

> *I received the most wonderful yet heart breaking news… Ian hit*
> *the ball for the first time in a game and he scored his first run!!! This*
> *was definitely a hard situation for me to handle. It was at this time*
> *that I felt the extra job wasn't worth it because that was something*
> *that would never happen again, I missed an important "first" for him.*

Rochelle said she felt this way due to the fact that she had chosen to work – teach an after hours teacher leader endorsement course - rather than go to the game. "Some

people can be very judgmental, [and] I didn't want to feel like I had to defend my actions. I already felt bad about it," she said. In addition, societal expectations for good mothering fuel her fear that she will receive little to no sympathy for her decision. As Schulte (2014) wrote, "employed mothers are seen as more selfish and less dedicated to their children than at-home moms, especially if they are thought to be working because they want to" (p. 80). Because Rochelle seemingly chose work over attending the tee ball game, she acknowledges that may make her appear self-centered from the perspective of others, but she is quick to counter, "I don't think anyone who truly knows me would question my dedication or call me selfish."

Yet in lines 5-6, the speaker's attitude shifts. It is as if Rochelle is re-reading her situation and talking herself into a state of situational control through self-validating reminders that she is the knowledgeable adult. She is the boss, and she must act like one, even if she doesn't feel like one at the moment. Such self-teaching talk was evident in Rochelle's discourse with the group and identified as part of her personal practice, as if her transaction with the other teacher mothers generated new understanding about her role as a decision maker for her family. It was as if the "text" of the teacher mothers in dialogue provided Rochelle with an opportunity to read her figured world anew and create new meaning about her place in it. As she said, "I may not do everything right; however, I know what's best for him at that point." Here in processing her son's outburst that Rochelle is a "mean mommy," she rationalizes that he said those words to her because he was not getting his way. While feeling hurt from his words, Rochelle tells herself that they were spoken by a child with underdeveloped maturity. "I try to correct them when they're doing something I think needs to be corrected; however, I try not to

control what they do. I'm trying to allow them to make choices, and I'm hoping I'm teaching them to make better choices." Rochelle then concludes that because of her greater knowledge and experience, her son must learn to respect her decision because she has the authority and experience to make that choice for him at that point in his life.

While stanza one reflects Rochelle's ability to snap out of it before a permanent sense of self-doubt sets in, stanza two conveys her understanding that she makes mistakes and that her decisions do not always result in the most favorable outcomes. "We gotta save face," she said in reference to some classroom decisions she made that did not fit; however, rather than admitting she makes errors in judgment and simply changing her mind and taking a new action, Rochelle describes a process of following through no matter what. As she explained, "[In the classroom,] you're kind of backed up against the wall. You know it's not the right thing to do, but you have to do it because you said you were going to." It is in this process of sticking to her guns, equipped with the knowledge that the decision is flawed, that Rochelle experiences intense feelings of guilt and unhappiness as both parent and teacher to students. In these moments Rochelle admits to feeling paralyzed and limited by the actions she feels compelled to take. Lines 9-12 reflect this realization on her part, "sometimes/ I put things in place that don't fit, and I know it./ I feel stuck, but I stick to what I said I was going/to do."

As a result, she follows through with consequences because she believes that image is expected of her as a parent and a classroom teacher, and in our society it is in terms of knowledge workers. As Schulte (2014) wrote of mothers' responsibility, "When things go wrong, it *is* your fault. The thinking is, you could have planned more, or you should have anticipated what went wrong" (p.63). However, Rochelle struggles to permit

and include the competing narrative her instincts and reflective thinking processes are providing. Unfortunately, without support she feels powerless to do anything different, and she continues to follow through on an unsuccessful plan of action. As is reflected in line 12, this inability to change or create agency makes Rochelle unhappy, but she lives and continues to work within her feelings of dissatisfaction.

Negotiating New Workplace Expectations

At line 14 the poem shifts to describe Rochelle's new job as a professional learning coach and alludes to the idea that she struggles to navigate this new professional role. "I'm the only one with little kids," she said as she referenced times when she has to come in late or leave early when others do not, "and then it makes me feel like the new person like I suck, but I can't keep the hours they keep, or I'll never have time for my kid." As a result, she experiences uncertainty because the position is not only new to her and very different from her former work as a classroom teacher – a position in which Rochelle considered herself an expert – the unspoken "rules" of her new workplace are different as well. Rochelle's struggle on this portion of her professional journey stems from the fact that she does not know the expectations or measures for good work in this new environment, and this causes her extreme discomfort because it is important to her to be perceived as a competent, good worker.

She notices on lines 15-16 that her colleagues in the new office space work a much longer workday, coming in earlier and staying much later than Rochelle is used to. She responds by trying to keep up with them because she perceives this is her new workplace norm, but she experiences conflict in scheduling the extra time, as it takes away from her time at home with her husband and children. On lines 17-18, she describes

getting home after her children are bathed and ready for bed and really questions why she took on the stress of the new opportunity when it was generating feelings of unhappiness and guilt over missing out at home.

We could see evidence of Rochelle wrestling with this challenge as time passed between our group meetings. By our last group session, Rochelle admonished herself for her knee-jerk response to uncertainty in her new workplace. In her words it was out of alignment for her personal goals, set years and years ago in college. She said, "I did tell people that my biggest accomplishment is not going to be my career. It's going to be my family. However, I don't think that my actions once I got my family lined up with that." Rochelle lamented as she remembered her words how disappointed she was that her present day actions had not mirrored her original promise to herself.

Making a Turn

It was in this reflective sharing space that Rochelle described her decision to do things differently. She talked with us about how the new job and new context opened her eyes and shifted her focus back to her family. She said, "I think before I didn't miss it as much because they were little, and I was around other people's children. Well, I'm not around other people's children now, and so it makes me focus on mine." This change of attitude is reflected in the final stanza of the poem. I picked up on Rochelle's deliberate change in focus and redirection and used these verbs in line 21 to help direct the reader to her shift in thinking. In lines 21-22, I attempt to communicate how Rochelle's change in thinking has resulted in a decision to change her actions. As I wrote in lines 21-22 her, "eyes trained/on the clock, ready to bolt for the playground," Rochelle decided to stop trying to match her colleague's work hours and made the conscious decision to leave

work earlier each day in order to spend quality time with her children. She recalled in her follow up interview, "If I had not found a balance, then down the road, things wouldn't be good at home because I was so much about career, career, career." In this instance and others, her reflective thinking and sharing with the group permitted her the possibility of creating agency and the freedom to live her life differently. This is reflected in lines 23-24 as the speaker emphasizes the urgency of leaving the workplace and her hurry in doing so. As she said, "we don't have much daylight left." In other words, time is limited by the amount of hours in the day, and Rochelle commits to spending this time with the object of her focus – her children.

As the poem ends, the reader is left with the idea that the change Rochelle has made will be a lasting one. Ending with the sentence on line 24, "It's my job to make the most of it," I wanted to create the possibility in a reader's mind that Rochelle's thinking about her professional and parental responsibilities had changed, not because she had resolved a single instance of stress combined with guilt-laden feelings, but because she had written, dialogued, and reflected and now practiced her role as a teacher mother from a new perspective.

As Rosenblatt (1978) wrote of a reader transacting with text, Rochelle approached her workplace challenge armed with her past experiences in prior workplaces, processing past transactions as she went, "reject[ing], revis[ing], or assimilate[ing] into the resources with which [s]he engages the world" (p. 173). So although Rochelle did not specifically say the words written in the last line of the poem, she certainly took steps to alter her daily practices seeking a more equal balance between work and home. This was reflected in her dialogue with the group as she responded to other narratives, but it was also

evident in her own writing decisions. As we began the study, her narratives focused on feelings of guilt in reference to choosing work over family, but as we progressed from data session to data session, her writing topic choices reflected a mindful and deliberate desire to pay attention to and even change aspects of her life that had up until our study gone largely unnoticed.

Rochelle's New Understandings As a Participant in a Community of Care

Due in part to sharing and discussion within the group Rochelle was able to see the possibility to shift her focus and do things differently. She recalled, "Everyone in the group was so different, yet so similar that I could take something from everyone. And I'm thinking – If she can be like that, I can try that, too."

Through her own narrative writing Rochelle was able to come to new understanding as well about what reasonable balance could look like in her figured world. Rochelle's last narrative begins with a poem and displays this increasingly thoughtful meditation on balance as she considers the time she expends mothering her son versus time spent mothering her younger daughter.

I'm focused on you because I am your mother.

I'm focused on you because you are my first.

I'm focused on you because we are experiencing new things together.

I'm focused on you because you are a reflection of me.

I'm focused. I'm focused. I'm…

Hey what about me?

In writing the poem and the subsequent narrative describing her dismay at ignoring her younger daughter and failing to see her educational needs, Rochelle engaged

in a powerful reflection on focus and what was getting it in her life. She resolved to pay attention to each of her children on a more individualized basis much as she was used to doing in the form of differentiation in her own classroom with students. “I do individual things with them, and I do things with them together,” she said.

Rochelle also began to think about time and how she could be smarter with her 8-hour workday, slowing her pace and delegating responsibilities, so that she could leave work in the afternoon and not the late evening. “Unless there’s a pressing something happening, I don’t stay past 4:30.” She found her work was still being accomplished, and she was getting more time at home with family. In her resolution to live life differently and her decision to act on her reflection, she found the freedom to make agency and new choices in her figured world, thus eliminating feelings of inadequacy and guilt. When I asked her how a guilt-free slow down and change became possible, and even more importantly, sustainable, Rochelle said with a slow shake of her head and a wide smile, “It’s still getting done. As long as the job is getting done, and it’s good work, there’s nothing to feel guilty about.”

Just as Rochelle struggled to direct her focus on the most important concerns in her figured world, April struggled as well. However, in her case, April wrestled with issues of balance and time. She would begin our work together slightly resentful and wishing she had more time for her own use, but as we wrote and talked together and April reflected, she came to understand she had choices if she chose to make them.

Balancing with April

In our second dinner meeting, I share my worry for my son. He is having a rough year in 7th grade. He looks different, he’s overweight, and the other kids pick on him

relentlessly. He doesn't know how to respond or ignore them; in fact, he reacts to every insult, so that makes him an even easier and more frequent target. April Swain, the 8th grade language arts teacher, listens and tells me not to worry. "I'm gonna teach him some words," she says. Rochelle cocks her head to the side, and asks, "You're gonna teach him some words?" April nods. "I'm gonna teach him some words. He doesn't have the comeback. I would say, 'Well no, my mama looks like your mama.'" She cocks her head right back at Rochelle, and we all laugh. With the tension broken, April the mother of a middle school age son then softens her tone, and adds, "It's kind of like that wit. I mean, you kind of have to." Have to what – I wonder? Provide our kids an instruction manual for how to fight back? Give them an edge they lack?

I never find an answer, but the result is I felt better, and we moved on. It was just one of many times April used humor to diffuse stress within the community of our teacher mother group. Her gift and strength often permitted some much-needed silliness out in the open and allowed us to release bottled-up tension. Oftentimes, the laughter brought comfort and new perspective from which to tackle problems anew.

At 43-years of age, April's personality is larger than life. She makes her presence known through her engaging, warm smile and quick wit. It is indeed part of her charm and embedded in her teaching practice as well. Spend fifteen minutes in her classroom, and any visitor will recognize the humor in her exchanges with students. It puts them at ease and invites them to learn from her and with her.

April employed this tactic often in our group sessions, providing honest insight and comic relief to otherwise sticky conversation topics. For instance, as Rochelle shared with us her tendency to "over-volunteer" – by sending items in to her children's

classrooms as a way to compensate for guilt at not attending events when work commitments conflicted with activities at their schools, she remarked how the practice was "breaking her wallet." April nodded with understanding and quipped, "Yeah because you need a second job to be a kindergarten momma." In this case, April, through her use of humor not only empathized with Rochelle's feelings and subsequent actions, but it provided a light moment in which Rochelle could release some of the judgment she perceived and felt for not being able to attend her son's school events. April's quip had helped Rochelle realize that April had experienced the same feelings when her son was the same age.

Professional Context

A veteran teacher with nineteen years classroom experience, April loves teaching for the unique moments she can create and share with her students. She frequently organizes field trips for her students and claims, "I'd take them every six weeks if they'd let me," indicating her understanding that many of her students' most memorable life experiences come directly from activities they experience during school hours. "As a teacher, you make those sacrifices. You make those plans. You don't give up because you realize that the kids are better for this experience," she said. More than once as we shared news of coming attractions and events with each other, April smiled brightly and exclaimed, "Now that's a field trip," leaving no doubt in our minds that she would set out to make what we viewed as an outing idea with potential a reality for her students.

Education has been her favorite and only career. The African American wife, mother, and teacher earned her bachelors degree from Georgia State University in June, got married in August, and began teaching the very next month - all in the same year,

1998. She has been teaching middle school language arts as long as she has been married – nineteen years. In her words, "For me, teaching is innate. It's something I always just wanted to do. Felt like this is truly what I was made to do." Indeed, April is a master teacher, but she is humble in terms of her success in the workplace. In conversation she will make no mention of the fact that she is a former Teacher of the Year. But not only for her individual school - April was also a top three finalist for her school district.

Parenting Considerations

Motherhood is a role that came later for April – five years into her marriage, and it didn't come easily. As revealed in our narrative sessions, her now13-year-old son Corey is April's first and only child, but her third pregnancy. Today, she treasures her family, as she feels she has earned motherhood by continually traveling a long and rocky road. "It was so important for us – to get that miracle baby," April recalled, reflecting on her struggle to conceive a child. Born twelve weeks premature with cerebral palsy and a heart condition, Corey faced a host of medical difficulties in his early years. April said, "He's been through a whole lot. A whole lot. He had brain surgery at eight," – an effort to stop seizures he experienced as a child. Heart surgery as a baby as well. But through it all, April and her husband worked as a team, splitting time between hospital stays and working to provide for their family financially. Their shared practice continues to this day. "Now that we're on the schedule together, my husband says, 'Well, which days do you want me to take off?' And I'm like – all of them," she says with a good-natured chuckle, reflecting on her need to enjoy some individual time off from work as well. She insists on it, "because as a mother, there's never just time for you."

Despite the many health scares and challenges they've faced in caring for and raising Corey, April and her husband remain thankful for the gift of parenthood. "He's an amazing little kid. That's why sometimes I think I put up with more from him," she said, "He's my little miracle. My miracle mess."

Today, Corey is a 7th grade student, attending the same school where April currently teaches. Using arm braces for walking most days, he also makes use of a wheelchair for mobility. He is able to get around with little assistance from others, and has made a several good friends. They hang out in the mornings in April's classroom, and she is glad he is doing well socially. His CP diagnosis entitles him to special education services and assistance with academic work. Academically, Corey's struggle is math. April said, "He'll make an A in science because he's passionate about it, but math, give him a 71, and he'll be just fine." She shakes her head as she recalls the many conversations she has shared with Corey and his teachers over the years about math and other topics, but what perplexes her most is the difference between her son's expectations for himself and Corey's teachers' academic expectations for him as the son of another teacher. She said, "I think people, colleagues, don't necessarily know how to respond to that student whose mother is a teacher, who doesn't always present themselves as the best student in the class. And it's like – He's like any other kid if his mother didn't work here."

So although April is not Corey's language arts teacher, she does feel anxious about both Corey's reception at her school and how her colleagues' perceptions of her mothering abilities may shift or alter now that he is a student in her workplace. "Sometimes I think they think I don't make him do, but I promise you, I do. We do the

best we can," in voicing her apprehension in attending parent teacher conferences in the role of a parent and not a teacher. "I just think they expect – *Well, if your mom's a teacher, you should* – No, ma'am. He's just going to have all the pencils he needs. That's all I can give you right now."

Composing April's Figured World

I considered all these factors – the tension April experienced in balancing learning opportunities she created for her students versus time she could be spending at home, her deep gratitude to have the opportunity to mother, yet slight resentment over losing time alone, her anxiety over how her colleagues would perceive her teaching skills now that she had to bring her mothering skills into the workplace – when drafting April's persona poem, "April Breaks Down the Balancing Act." This poem was crafted from the same data sources as Rochelle's poem – blending April's written narratives, our small group discussion data – its purpose to bring the lessons of April's sharing and dialogue into focus for me as the researcher, not the teacher mother participating alongside women in a study. The "cooked data" and poem that developed from this drafting and revision process follows below, after which I then unpack the poem in an effort to describe and make meaning from her actions and concerns.

"April Breaks Down the Balancing Act"

We have to be mindful of consequences. I think –
Do I really want you sitting in silent lunch? That's
punishment for me. Trial and error with just about all
of it – in class and in life. You don't always want to pull
the "because-I'm-a-mom" card. Sometimes they have to gain
their own insight, even though you have the wisdom. I never
want anything to happen to them, but if nothing ever happens…

they don't have the experiences to make right decisions.
Take Corey. He's spoiled. I own that, but so carefree. I say,

"I think you're failing math." He says, "Yeah, probably."
Think *they* see me as this bad mom because my kid is failing?
Well, if my colleagues have words to say to me then – *whatever*.
If my child tells me he's doing the best he can, then I have to figure
out how to take that. So - teacher or not – I try to do that. I'm learning…

Even when he's talking about taking a road trip
to Pearl Harbor like it's a drive up to Stone Mountain.
He's thinks he's some kind of historical scientist on mission
to visit every single military battlefield in America! I'm like,
"Listen," but he's not hearing me, and then my husband says why
don't we go – he's asking – still talking to us. So next time you see me,
I'll be waving from the car as he has to know what these places look like…

I struggle to find time for me, just me, but then I
remember my cute little somebody. Cried the first day
of school. Yeah. We followed the bus that day. Not typical
for a "teacher's son" – he shakes off that distinction with a shrug.
That's my *mother* – not me. That's hard truth. So many responsibilities
are ours – strictly for mothers. Look at this picture of Corey and his dad.
You'll say they are brothers, but I promise he's all mine. My miracle mess.

As our group of four worked through the process of writing, sharing, and reflecting on the many transactions between our personal and professional lives, several tensions emerged as we discussed the challenges of negotiating space and limited time. Balancing roles and duties of motherhood with the workplace expectations of classroom teaching took a front row seat in our discussions, as all of us grappled with doubts that we were measuring up in this area. However, questions of balance were most central and thoroughly illustrated in April's dialogue with the group. For her, it was not simply a balance of mothering and teaching. She was constantly weighing her multiple roles as daughter, mother, wife, and teacher in terms of a balancing act, and she applied this negotiation to nearly every aspect of her life.

Balancing Consequences of Choices

For instance, in terms of disciplining Corey, April reflected on a balance of fairness of punishment, considering both parties involved, "You lose credibility if you don't go through with consequences as hard as it is on you. I hate to take my son's ipad because that's like his solace and quiet time for me." Yet, she quickly, almost seamlessly, shifted and applied the same internal thinking from her personal life to her professional role as teacher in discussing consequences for students in her classroom. She said, "If you said you were going to do it, you have to do it. But you have to be careful. That's the thing. Like detention is a punishment for me too."

This tension is evident in the first three lines of April's persona poem as she reminds the reader to "be mindful" of consequences. Such mindfulness and internal negotiation were evident as April described working with unmotivated students in her classroom. She chuckled at the frustration she felt from their resistance as she recalled thinking, "*Why can't you be – like I'm this awesome teacher. Don't you see that? Everything I do, you should want to do*." However, her teaching memory quickly turned away from frustration to a process of negotiating solutions based on proper balance of time, issue, and relationships. She said, "Just finding that balance in when to back off and when to kind of push that student," was not only important for April, it was central to her teaching practice.

April admitted to our group that in her experience, much of finding that balance had been due to taking chances and just rolling with it. "You question – Is this too much? Is this too hard? Like do I give detention? Or do I give silent lunch?" As she said in lines 3-4, "Trial and error with just about all/of it – in class and in life." However, she also was

acutely aware of how intricacies and nuances complicated her ability to transact within her relationships. As the poem continues on lines 4-6, she revealed, “You don’t always want to pull/the “because-I’m-a-mom” card. Sometimes they have to gain/their own insight, even though you have the wisdom.” Here April provides the reader with hints that she actively negotiates her parent-to-child and teacher-to-student relationships, drawing from experiences in multiple roles and making choices based on her funds of knowledge as she continually processes issues in terms of greater balance. “When I speak to a lot of the kids at church, I’m always asking about their schoolwork. And I’m always asking how are things going with your tests and things like that,” she said, “So I think that’s the teacher part, but I think, even before I was a teacher, I still kind of nurtured those kids,” indicating her everyday interactions as teacher and mother are intricately connected, and at least for her, impossible to separate.

By the end of the poem’s first stanza, April turns her attention from what she has learned from her own experiences to a discussion of how important she believes it is to provide her students with similar character and knowledge building exposure. As she shared in our group, “I think sometimes we feel like we give more as a teacher to those children that don’t bear our last names, but I think sometimes we see that they need more.” Her sentiment is similar to the text of lines 6-8, “You never/want anything to happen to them, but if nothing ever happens…/they don’t have the experiences to make the right decisions.” The words of the poem are reflected in her commitment to planning and taking field trips with her students as a means to expose them to more than what they would find inside the walls of their school building. “We took a charter bus recently to downtown, and one of them said, “I’ve never been on a charter bus!” That like made his

whole trip," she said, but April also conceded that they are time-consuming activities that take away from her family time. "Planning a field is exhausting, but you don't give up because you realize that the kids are better for this experience."

As April shared in our group, "It's like a balance of *when* to give them choices, and when you know what's best, you really do know what's best." April the teacher mother often made such decisions moment to moment, but demands on personal time were not limited to only school activities. Her students wanted and asked for her support of their endeavors outside her classroom, and this often infringed on potential personal time with family. As April said, "There are times when the students kind of make you feel guilty. [They ask,] "Ms. Swain, you're not coming to the game?" No. – While I want to support my students, I want to support my own kid, too. It's almost like as a teacher, you're still the mother of these kids as well because they want to see your face there for these things."

When Professional and Mothering Roles Collide

While April acknowledged that her combined experience as a teacher and a mother provided her with greater knowledge to transact within her relationships, she felt increasingly anxious about the fact that her personal and professional worlds would in effect collide with the addition of her son Corey to the student body of her own workplace. Although April was armed with nineteen years of experience and achievement, she worried about the challenge of balancing this new situation. "I think what kind of frustrates me, is people can't – teachers. Some teachers can't accept that every child – period – is different regardless of who their parents are," she said.

On line 11 of the poem, April wonders aloud if her colleagues judge her as a poor parent based on Corey's academic performance. "Think *they* see me as this bad mom because my kid is failing?" In the line of the poem, *they* refers to her co-workers, incidentally the same colleagues who nominated and voted her Teacher of the Year. The line references a nagging feeling that April won't measure up in others' eyes when assessed by peers for her parenting skills. "I didn't want to be seen as a bad mom, which I think some of my co-workers see me as a bad mom," she said, adding, "You know how sometimes you look at some parents [and think] – *What ya'll doing at home*?" April worried and assumed her colleagues now viewed her similarly. She admitted, "I find it kind of difficult to motivate my own kid. It's different motivating other people's children. You have different strategies." Lines 12-14 reflect the tension April experienced in trying to motivate her son to do better in math class, a task she found daunting given her skill set as a language arts instructor. "I can get a tutor. We can get tapes. We can do whatever, but I don't want my co-workers to think that I'm not trying," she said this to us in group, but as she talked through her frustration, April seemed to talk her way into understanding her anxiety for what it was – a fear that her colleagues would judge her as a poor mother and in effect poor teacher because her son did not perform well academically in math class. Her worry over potential judgment then kept her from attacking the problem at hand, but as she said the words, "That's just his struggle," in the context of our group, April seemed to resolve the tension and find a possibility for improvisation. This agency is reflected in lines 12-14. "If my colleagues have words to say to me then – *whatever*./If my child tells me he's doing the best he can, then I have to figure/out how to take that. So – teacher or not – I try to do that," April said. What's more, her pronouncement, "I'm

learning," shared with us in group and at the end of line 14 in her persona poem, indicate an openness on April's part to thinking differently about the tension and also about future action she takes in response to it.

Her struggle to negotiate the apprehension she felt about making herself vulnerable before a group of people she knew in a professional context was evident in her narrative writing as well, as she wrote and reflected on her challenge of teaching in the same middle school that her now 7th grade son currently attends. She wrote of Corey's first day:

> *I was now that nervous parent with fear in her heart. I wanted to follow him around all day to be sure he got it. To be sure he didn't get lost in the maze of hallways. To be sure he got his lunch. To be sure he had all his supplies in every class and that he was able to keep up with instruction. For this first day of school, I didn't want to be the teacher; I wanted to be the mom.*

April's narrative described her concern for her child on his first day of middle school from both a teacher and mother's perspective. She wondered aloud, "My middle school mom anxiety kicked in. Would he make new friends? Would he like his teachers? Would his teachers like him?" We noted as we discussed the narrative, how April's series of questions began focused on Corey from a mother's perspective; however, they quickly incorporated and then turned completely to teacher related concerns. As Judy pointed out, "You couldn't balance this event like you wanted to – that struggle to be there as a mom versus the teacher," culminating in April's desire to sever her connected roles of teacher and mother in favor of being a mother. April admitted this instance was not the first time

she wished for separate roles. “I used to want to be Miss Stay at Home Mom,” she said, “I didn’t want to miss those firsts.”

Tension Over Designating Personal and Family Time

While April expressed a strong desire not to miss any of Corey’s important firsts, in making time to spend solely in the role as her son’s mother, April came to understand that choosing to spend time with and for Corey meant she could not easily take time for herself. This resulted in tension for April in her mothering context, as she was adamant that she deserved free time just as her son and students did. Teacher mothers, she reasoned, like any mother, needed time for self-care and rejuvenation. Yet, while personal lack of time frustrated April, she understood that her decision making process in favor of Corey’s needs had become automatic in her daily practices.

This tension between finding time for self and perceived primary responsibility for raising children surfaced quickly during our discussion of summertime activities. Our group members acknowledged, while many people outside the teaching profession perceive school vacation days to be composed of completely free time that was not our experience as mothers to school age children. Using humor once again to soften possible resentments expressed in the telling of our “We Needed a Vacation After Taking the Kids on Vacation” stories, April took the lead as she shared with the group. “Personally, we could all sleep the summer away, but we want our children to have everything. So it’s that issue of what are we gonna do for these six or eight weeks,” she said.

More often than not for teacher mothers, time off from school centered around planning unique learning and travel experiences for their children. In April’s case, Corey’s interest in military history directed family road trips. On lines 17-18 April admits

to a level of exasperation at her son's requests to visit remote locations such as Pearl Harbor, "He thinks he's some kind of historical scientist on mission/to visit every single military battlefield in America!" However, she quickly acquiesces when her husband reminds her on line 20 that "he's asking – still talking to us." As the poem's third stanza ends, she has fully rationalized the road trip as part of her motherly duty. Lines 20-21 are evidence of her acceptance of duty. "So next time you see me,/I'll be waving from the car as he has to know what these places look like…" For April, the family travel experience was just an extension of work she had done all year in her classroom. "You plan something as a teacher, you plan something as a mother. You're gonna do this. I'm in. I'm trying to guide you either way," she reasoned.

However strong her perceived sense of responsibility for Corey's educational future was, or even as she expressed resentment at having no personal time to care for herself, April would likely choose her son's needs over all other priorities for the simple reason that she is ever thankful for the opportunity to be Corey's mother. "He was a preemie. One pound six ounces," she shared in our last data session. "He was born on September 9th. He came home on December 9th." Working as a team, a practice still in place as she and her husband attend parent conferences, April and her husband worked together to support each other and their son. "My husband went to the hospital every day, and I went every other day," she said as she recalled those first twelve weeks of uncertainty. At one point Corey's heart stopped, and he had to be revived, but in the end he survived. April said, "He's an amazing little kid. That's why sometimes I think I put up with more from him."

She considers Corey a miracle, and the gratitude she feels for the chance to mother him supersedes all other concerns. Whenever she thinks she may be growing selfish, she remembers the gift of her son. As lines 22-23 reveal, "I struggle to find time for me, just me, but then I/remember my cute little somebody." Here April refers to a theme that presented in her follow up interview, after she had time to process and think about how our writing, sharing, and talking had influenced her perspective on teaching and mothering. "I think when you have a child with difficulties or differences, you kind of treat other kids, I don't want to say tenderly, but I think that you just become more aware of their differences," she said, "I want people to be good to him in the same way he should be good to others. So I think that being his mother makes me more aware of just how I think people should treat each other, especially the children." In her persona poem's final stanza, this understanding of difference is evident in lines 24-26. Her son Corey is, "Not typical/for a "teacher's son" – he shakes off that distinction with a shrug./That's my *mother* – not me," indicating April's new and developing understanding that her son's academic identity in the world they both inhabit with April as a teacher and Corey as a student, may be guided by expectations within their familial relationship, but it is not a direct result of her mothering or teaching abilities. The follow up sentence on line 26, "That's hard truth," indicates April is wrestling with the idea that she doesn't have to assume responsibility or guilt for that difference either.

Yet as the poem ends, April seems to long for some recognition for her mothering work. On lines 27-28, she shares a photograph of Corey and his father with the reader. "You'll say they are brothers, but I promise you he's all mine. My miracle mess." As she

shared in our interview on mothering, “I don’t want to say it defines me, but then again it kind of does define me. It gives me an added quality of being a woman I think,” she said.

April’s New Understandings As a Participant in a Community of Care

April’s poem printed above suggests not only a culmination of experience, but also a mindful thinker in reflection and transaction with the figured worlds that make up her life as a teacher mother. Just as Rosenblatt (1995) wrote of how a reader “must “live through” what is being created during the reading” (p. 33) in order to make meaning from text, so did April come to new understanding about her place in the world through writing down and sharing her experiences with other teacher mothers. She specifically recalled her practice of reflecting on our sessions as she drove home and deciding, “Let me make time for this. Or, let me, again, put things in priority.” From April’s new understandings she could then improvise and experience freedom by bringing such agency into her identity as a teacher mother. As Holland etal. (1998) wrote, “Improvisations crafted in the moment are one of the margins of human agency ” (p. 278). More than once during our narrative sharing discussions, April commented how our talk had “got me looking real different,” indicating that the experience we shared had provided her with new understanding and sensitivities through which to view her world and take action within it. “I think I’ve gotten to where – really where you know where it says – God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. Encouraging. Just to know the difference in if I can make a difference, I’ll make the difference, but if I can’t, then I’ve learned to not let it stress me,” she said.

While Corey’s new presence in her workplace did threaten April’s understanding of who she is as a professional educator and how she is viewed by colleagues, she found

not only courage to shrug off what she perceived as others' expectations for her as a teacher mother, but also a community of care that fostered her decision to improvise in the first place. April found in the group dynamic, "Friendship definitely. On a different level – a new level. Like a little secret sisterhood of mothers if you will. Just knowing that you're not the only one doing something, but to know that you have heard others say some of the same things or voice those same experiences. Just knowing – That's my girl. We got each other's back on this thing."

This understanding was critical and defining for April, but the supportive nature of our community of teacher mothers was important for others as well. I turn now to the third member of our group. Although Judy did not know what it meant to share her school environment with her own child as April was experiencing, Judy's anxiety over how that scenario would play out grew steadily during our work together in that Judy's daughter was set to enter kindergarten the following year. As a veteran kindergarten teacher, the fear of missed check points and possible gaps in knowledge plagued Judy as she grappled with the tension she felt over wanting to choose home and motherhood but knowing she needed to continue to work in the schools.

Family First for Judy

Forty-two-year-old Judy Bolen brings a sunny disposition to any situation. A European American mother of three small children, her positivity is contagious, as she seems to laugh away trouble before it has a chance to dampen her outlook or anyone else's. Often chuckling or laughing as we talk within our small group, the sound takes on more of the characteristics of a giggle; however, this regular fixture in our teacher mother sharing sessions is not a silly or dismissive gesture, appearing to me as time progressed to

function as a coping mechanism to help Judy process unpleasant tension and shift attention away from negativity.

As the ecstatic mother of what she enthusiastically calls her three blessings – 6-year-old Georgia Xan, 4-year-old Peyton, and 2-year-old Caralee, Judy's posts to social media such as Facebook are chock full of family photos, a vivid and colorful celebration of family life and times in the Bolen household. For Judy, even the smallest moments are well worth celebrating, and she heartily does so. From photographs taken before church to playing in the backyard to back-to-back birthdays in October, she records and shares the lives of her children as they grow. "The struggle to become a mom was so hard and a long journey, so ever since having children, I've always wanted to think of everything as a mom first," she said. Not surprisingly, she counts herself lucky among mothers and freely admits to not wanting to miss a single moment of her children's lives. Her October 18th Facebook post reflects her stance in terms of parenting so well:

> *Six years ago, we went to the hospital to induce labor with Georgia Xan. She had already passed her due date, and we were so ready to meet her! We had been told a few years before that time that we would never be able to have children. I sit here today feeling extremely blessed for not only one miracle to celebrate but three! We could not talk highly enough about RBA, Dr. Toledo, and his staff. We also thank God every day for these three blessings! When I was a girl I dreamed of being a mommy...of two...a boy and girl...and a white picket fence. In my early 30's that dream was crushed. In my late 30's, I received more than I had ever wished for as a child. God is good!* ❤️

To read Judy's post, with her overwhelming gratitude and intense focus on motherhood, it might be possible to overlook her rich and successful professional life. Indeed, she gives it little play on social media, for there, family is her top priority. Judy is however, in fact, a full-time teacher as well – a veteran educator with twenty years teaching experience and a doctorate to boot. She says she loves teaching and professional learning, but she has come to prioritize motherhood above it. "I would give it all up tomorrow just to be a mother. Financially? My husband wouldn't agree with that," she said, but if she could choose her vocation, it would be at home parenting her children fulltime, and she would do so without regret.

Parental Commitment

Married for eleven years to another educator working in the same school district, Judy and her husband Scott are deeply committed to the care of their three children, sharing parenting chores and responsibilities. However, their devotion to parenting seems to extend beyond desire to provide their children with unique experiences; rather it manifests as a sense of duty. "We want our children to have everything and more than we ever had. Our hope is that they will grow up to become more educated than us, more successful than us, more of everything than us," she said.

An important time for providing such experiences comes for the Bolens during the summer – a time when both parents are off from work. As Judy wrote in her first narrative on summertime activities, "I am grateful for the breaks that come with our jobs, not because they are restful, but because they are opportunities to spend quality time with my children." This heightened level of attention to family time now is perhaps due to the many years Judy and her husband spent trying to start a family without success.

Regardless of the reason, they commit to making the most of their spare moments in much the same way a classroom instructor teaches "bell to bell." As Judy wrote, "We love summer! It is a time that we can shower our children with adventures and enjoy each other's company."

And shower them with experiences they do. The family spends several weeks on vacation at the beach, makes regular trips to Disneyworld, visits the local zoo at least once a month, and makes almost daily visits to the community YMCA pool. Judy and her husband combine their love of exercise and healthy lifestyle into their summer routine, jogging to the closest stops pushing their children along in strollers. "When summer break ended, my husband and I were exhausted!" she recalled. However, "we felt that our summer had been a complete success." So while the high level of activity is not particularly restful for Judy or her husband, they feel satisfaction in the time spent providing meaningful and educational experiences for their children.

Professional Context

Back at work in the classroom, kindergarten is Judy's area of expertise. She has considerable experience working with 5 and 6-year-olds, and she also has extensive knowledge of pedagogy through completed graduate work in the field. Her terminal degree is a PhD, earned in 2009. While this knowledge bank has made her an expert at working with developing learners, and she has been an often-requested kindergarten teacher in the past, it now supplies Judy with a heightened level of concern. "I do know every single inside and out detail about kindergarten, and now I have my first of three starting kindergarten, it just, I think, makes me worry more," she said.

Part of her concern stems from her great love and hope for her daughter's future, but much of Judy's anxiety comes from the very knowledge that has made her a master teacher in the first place. As Judy shared with me in our interview conversation, many people assume that her daughter is already in possession of kindergarten basic skills and more, by virtue of having a kindergarten teacher as a mother. "Somebody just asked me out at the car rider line," she said, "How is she doing? Oh, I bet she's ahead of the whole class. That assumption that everything's perfect. [She's] the smartest kid in the school because I'm a teacher type thing." Negotiating comments and assumptions such as these frustrated Judy because in fielding the questions, she began to doubt not only her teaching, but also mothering abilities. "I told her teacher before the year started. I was like, 'She doesn't know everything. We have a lot to do. We have a lot to learn,'" she said, "Right now I'm okay, but it's the beginning. It'll be having that knowledge when every checkpoint goes by and – where are we?" that made Judy cringe, for it was not an internal conversation Judy looked forward to having, especially if her daughter happened to fall short of those checkpoint expectations. In fact on more than one occasion Judy remarked that having such extensive teacher knowledge could be a curse rather than a blessing. "I had to learn to really step back and keep my mouth shut sometimes. The mommy side of me wanted what's best for my child and because I'm a teacher, I felt like it was better for her. If I wasn't a teacher, I wouldn't know any different. I'd be oblivious to it all," Judy reasoned.

Therefore, as a mother of three young children experiencing a wide variety of milestones she didn't want to miss, Judy seemed to live in a constant state of negotiation for small pockets of time off. Two hours in the morning to take her son to Open House.

An afternoon to attend Mother's Day Tea at her daughter's preschool. Another couple of hours to experience Thanksgiving Feast Day festivities. While she believed it important for her to make time away from classroom duties to be part of her children's school events, arranging time away often lead to feelings of guilt. "I have always felt like I needed to be at school – every single day – every single minute – every single hour. So, when I had children, that was a big struggle for me because I felt like I needed to be there for all their special activities where other parents would be," Judy said. Indeed, of the four mothers in our group, Judy was the most adamant in fulfilling mothering commitments. "I used to be on every committee known to man," she recalled, but "I quit my organizations that I was in because I wanted to focus all on her."

As we began our work together, Judy faced the greatest challenge in finding time to attend her children's school events, for she was a fulltime, kindergarten teacher with a classroom full of students for whom to consider and plan. "You know, you don't want to ask too many times for favors," she said, "More of that, not a guilt of – I didn't teach my students today because I felt like they were getting some solid, good teaching that wasn't going to hurt if I was gone two periods or something, but I'm putting somebody else out – an adult – who has to cover my class." While her administrators supported her requests to attend her children's activities, Judy did feel as if she had to pick and choose which events required her presence over others. This caused tension for Judy in that she felt as if *all* the school activities merited her attendance. As she shared with our group, "Today was transportation day. It bothers me that I didn't go. She had a grandmommy there. My dad was there. It still bothers me that I wasn't there, and that's a real struggle for me."

As we ended our study, however, Judy had shifted to a new role at her school, and it was one that provided Judy with scheduling flexibility to attend more of her children's school events. Because she was now working in support of other teachers and not in charge of a homeroom of kindergarten students, she was able to schedule short breaks away from her school much more easily and without guilt. "I shouldn't say I have freedom. But I do feel more of a – if I leave the building, nobody is going to miss me," she said, "I have work to do, but I'm not impacting someone every minute I'm gone."

Composing Judy's Figured World

As we sat down to record our final interview conversation, Judy had found the means to improvise and transact within her figured world, and as a result, she was able to make space for the family time that was so important to her, yet still make meaningful professional contributions in her workplace. Her persona poem, "Will You Do This? Will You Do That?" attempts to capture her decision-making process in this multi-year negotiation through time as she transitions from fulltime teacher on committee assignment to fulltime teacher mother wanting to "be there" for her own children. The poem that developed from my drafting and revision process follows below, after which I then unpack the lines in an effort to describe and understand Judy's actions and concerns.

"Will You Do This? Will You Do That?"

Since becoming a mother,
I have found myself saying
no, No, NO! I don't want to be
on your committee. At this point
in my life being a mother is
more important than teaching.

I struggle with it - know I need
to keep working, but I don't want
to miss a thing. Just why, oh why

do I feel this allegiance to my job?
Can't let it go sometimes.

As a teacher mom, I feel I must
say something. Do something.
Because I have knowledge other
mothers don't. People expect
my child will know it all. Be perfect.
It's that your mom's a teacher thing.

Well, I have worries now.
Driving my actions, fueling
my anxiety. Whispering in my ear –
Hey mom, What you gonna do now?
Everybody's watching.

If I wasn't a teacher, I
wouldn't know the difference.
Wouldn't even hear it.

At the conclusion of every interview conversation, I made it my practice to share the persona poem I wrote for each teacher mother with the teacher mother and ask for her feedback. I wanted to know if the women recognized their experiences or even their own words as they read the lines of the poems, what surprised them, and what I may have missed. I was also curious to know if they believed my writing captured their understandings – new and old – about our work together in our community of teacher mothers.

Overall, the poems were well received, and the teacher mothers' responses were positive. Rochelle said, "You've captured where I have been throughout this year," while April remarked, "I love it. Wow. I see it. Like all of it." However, when I shared "Will You Do This? Will You Do That?" with Judy, she laughed and said, "That's funny." The poet inside me was nervous, for I hadn't set out to write a humorous account of Judy's

experience. The researcher inside me wanted to know exactly what Judy meant by funny, so I asked her to explain.

It turned out she thought the poem contained several coincidences connected to our talk. She said laughingly, "The funny thing is because I answered your question just like the beginning of your poem. 'No I won't be on your committee. No I won't do anything anymore. I'm just going to be a mom.'" Similarly, in the middle stanzas Judy recognized her feelings of conflict in balancing teaching duties with mothering responsibilities, and then she ended by sharing her recent experience at bus duty where a parent had assumed Judy's daughter was brilliant simply because a kindergarten teacher was her mother. As I couldn't have known how Judy would respond to my interview questions when I had just recently asked them, it was a series of funny coincidences for her to then read back what seemed to her fresh off the press answers to my questions in a poem she knew had been drafted weeks earlier.

Reflections on Teaching and Mothering in Practice

In many ways I understood what Judy meant. In preparing myself to write the experiences of other teacher mothers using poetic inquiry, I read several collections of poems by women on women. In reading Alicia Suskin Ostriker's, *The Mother/Child Papers*, I made connections to my own mothering experiences, but I most frequently recognized Judy's words in Ostriker's lines. For instance, as Ostriker (2009) wrote:

> I am telling you and you can take me for a fool there is no
> good time like the good time a whole mama
> has with a whole little baby and that's
> where the first images
> of deity came from – sister you know it's true
> (p. 45)

In these few lines taken from Ostriker's "Poem Propaganda: Maybe for Some Young Mamas," I read what had become the culmination of Judy's decision-making process as she considered the importance of her role as a teacher versus her role as a mother. Lines 5-6 of her persona poem reflect her final conclusion that "being a mother is more important than teaching." However, such a pronouncement did not come easily or overnight. In fact, Judy spent many years in education creating her life in the image of the ideal employee. "I think I attended every county meeting that was out there, and I was in several different organizations like ADK. I was stretched all over the place," she said. Creating her professional life according to what she perceived her school and district's cultural expectations were for good teachers, Judy bought into what sociologist Edson Rodriguez (2013) called "the drive for busyness," (p. 47). So in saying yes to committee request after request, Judy fed the cultural expectation, for as Rodriguez (2013) wrote, "the human urge is to conform to it" (p. 47).

Judy's heavy workload and pace of activity continued in this manner for many years – more than half of her teaching career. It changed, however, the moment she became a mother. "I had many, many, many years of teaching where I wasn't a mom, and so I always, of course, I put my students ahead of many other things. But then when I had kids? It was like now as a mom, I do this," she said. Her resolution is reflected in lines 1-3 of her persona poem. "Since becoming a mother,/I have found myself saying/no, No, NO!" supporting her decision in favor of motherhood over teaching responsibilities.

Although Judy made this decision and believed it was the right one for her to make, the competing interest of work and professional expectations did not disappear from her life. This created tension and angst that Judy had to deal with as she negotiated

between the two. In lines 7-9, she admits, “I struggle with it – know I need/to keep working, but I don’t want/to miss a thing.” Part of her unhappiness stemmed from the guilt she experienced as a result of choosing her children over her job, sometimes to the point of agony. In lines 9-10 she wonders, “Just why, oh why/do I feel this allegiance to my job?”

It was a conundrum we discussed in our group as well. “I don’t understand why I do. The logical side of me says I shouldn’t feel guilty at all. That I should take time off and do whatever,” Judy said, “It doesn’t make sense to my husband, and he is also in education. He has no problem putting allegiance to the family first, so what is that? A male versus the female? A mother versus…” She never finished her thought on why she experienced such guilt over taking time off for personal reasons when her husband did not, but in our group we brainstormed. April observed that while education is a seemingly female-dominated career, most men hold the leadership positions. This could lead women teachers to take on more responsibility in an effort to stand out and move up, but once they begin to have families, they pull back. “You don’t have as much freedom I guess as your male counterparts,” April reasoned, and it may have been the lack of choice in the matter, even though Judy had chosen motherhood over work, that contributed to her inability to, as written on line 11, “let it go sometimes.” As Judy said, “Almost on a daily basis I wonder – What could I do? What different position can I take, or what can I do differently to not feel that way?”

Experiencing Anxiety in Figured Worlds

As the persona poem transitions to the next stanza and a description of how Judy’s teacher funds of knowledge influence her parenting decisions, it is interesting to

note that her feelings of guilt do not dissipate. Rather they seem to intensify in that Judy, as well as the other women in the group, accepted a higher level of responsibility in guiding and instructing their own children simply because they were trained as teachers. The guilt for them presented when their own children fell short on grade level assessments. As Judy explained, "feeling like wait a minute – I could have taught her this if I just had known she didn't know her colors." Here the guilt comes from not only the low performance by the child, but extends to the teacher mother for not maintaining awareness of her child's educational needs. She agonizes the misstep, "I can't believe I didn't know that," and as a result blames herself for the poor performance, "I didn't help to teach her that." This sentiment is reflected on lines 12-15, "I feel I must/say something. Do something./Because I have knowledge other/mothers don't," indicating the teacher mother is not only compelled but required to teach at home as well as at school.

Judy felt an extra burden of responsibility in this area as her daughter, Georgia Xan, prepared to enter kindergarten. "I keep having the fear that people are going to expect that she will be perfect," she said, for as a veteran educator of children in that age group, Judy is known as an exceptionally gifted kindergarten teacher. However, as the mother of a kindergarten student, Judy is nervous that that perception could change as the system begins to assess Georgia Xan, and she is especially sensitive about her daughter's skill set. "I actually keep already telling them – Listen. Don't expect her to come to kindergarten knowing all her letters and sounds solidly," she said, "You know it kills me, and I try to work with her, but she doesn't." Lines 15-17 of her persona poem echoed the

nervous tension this created. “People expect/my child will know it all. Be perfect./It’s that your mom’s a teacher thing.”

As we sit down for our final interview conversation, Georgia Xan joins us in Judy’s office. She colors at a nearby table, yet she does not make a sound to interrupt us. Georgia Xan has been a kindergarten student for approximately one month at the time of the interview, and Judy is noticeably less anxious about how others perceive her daughter’s abilities. While Georgia Xan has had a hard time adjusting to a new school and making new friends, Judy chalks that up to normal kindergarten progress. “I myself don’t have that feeling of – Oh, I need to stick around because she needs me. I know she doesn’t, and so, I’ve kind of cut her off earlier than I would’ve if I didn’t have the knowledge of kindergarten,” she said, “But as far as academics, of course, you know I know where she should be every step of the way, so of course I’ll be thinking about that and in my mind panicking or being like – everything’s okay.”

Judy’s New Understandings As a Participant in a Community of Care

As the interview session came to a close, Georgia Xan did present her mother with the drawing she had been coloring at the table. Judy stopped to take a look and smiled in almost relief. “See,” she said, showing me her daughter’s artwork, “and then she does stuff like this, and I’m like – everything’s fine.” It was a drawing of their family complete with identifying letters. “J for Judy, G for Georgia Xan, C for Caralee, S for Scott, and P for Peyton. All the family.”

While the dual roles of teacher and mother often created conflict for teacher mothers as they attempted to apply work skills to home contexts, how that tension manifested was different from woman to woman. For Judy, the uneasiness she

experienced caused her to doubt and question her parenting abilities. “Many times as a mom you’re like – Ugh! Did I do that the right way?” And then from the questioning and doubting came new levels of anxiety. She said, “Sometimes I’m like – Do I even know what I’m doing? Did I just totally screw him up for the next five years?” As Judy shared in lines 18-20, the tension then has the potential to grow and spiral out of control. “Well, I have worries now./Driving my actions, fueling/my anxiety.”

Part of the whirlwind of doubt comes from the fact that teacher mothers such as Judy have the knowledge and understanding of what well-adjusted and successful children should look like in American society, and as teachers of those children in the public school system, they feel internal pressure to mold and shape their own children in this model. Similarly, they may feel like failures if their efforts do not produce exceptional students. This encroaching panic comes in part due to the fact that there is no playbook for creating model students, yet teacher mothers feel this expectation and responsibility quite intensely. As Rosenblatt (1978) wrote, “It is not the words but the individual reader who has acquired the associations with them, and who pays attention to these associations or shuts them out of awareness” (p. 72). In other words, Judy’s festering worry that she is doing motherhood all wrong is in response, not to specific written rules she violates, but rather the unspoken expectations she perceives as her responsibility as a teacher mother. As a teacher she see the associations quite clearly, so as a mother she takes them up as a form of duty. In this way the expectations hover over Judy, their pervasive nature acting as a presence in her life, sometime taking on life of their own. Lines 20-22 attempt to capture this feeling with the worries personified,

"whispering" in Judy's ear, "*Hey mom, What you gonna do now?/Everybody's watching*." In those moments, Judy questions her ability to make the right moves.

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) wrote, "Language is at once basically social and intensely individual" (p. 20). When applied to the lived experiences of teacher mothers such as Judy attempting to transact in the figured world of education, yet faced with pressure to perform not only spectacular acts of teaching, but parenting as well, it is no wonder that teacher mothers often wish they could give up the extra knowledge they possess. Judy shared this sentiment through her stress over Georgia Xan's school preparation, "She doesn't do some things I wish she could do," she said, "She can't do it, and if I didn't have the knowledge, I'd be clueless. I'd be happy." Lines 23-24 of her persona poem reflect her wish to be free to parent without the pressure of educational knowledge. "If I wasn't a teacher, I/wouldn't know the difference." The final line of the poem, "Wouldn't even hear it" further suggests Judy believes she will experience peace in motherhood if only her teacher knowledge would vanish. "I would think she's a genius," Judy proclaimed, "I'd be happy as a lark." She then giggled at the possibility.

Transacting Change with Allisa

So that leaves my story. I saved it for last for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it's difficult to write a life, as I discovered in trying to represent the narratives and understandings of Rochelle, April, and Judy. I felt so much pressure to do right by them and a special motivation to write with care, for they had entrusted me with their personal stories, laden with vulnerability, worry, and fear.

With that care in mind for others, it became less and less clear how I could write my own story. How could I possibly write objectively about feelings and experiences I

held so dear? How also could I put into words a life so changed as much as mine had over the course of this dissertation study. When I began this work in 2012, I was certainly a teacher mother and qualified to take part, but I also identified as a wife and daughter. My circumstances changed rather rapidly in the past year. I am no longer a wife, as I am now divorced from my husband after seventeen years of marriage. This has drastically altered the ways I mother my two sons. And while I still have my father to rely upon for advice and support as I negotiate these new circumstances, I no longer have my mother. I lost her suddenly in the past year, and this has shifted my priorities, refocused my attention to the importance of relationships and family, and shaken my beliefs about control.

So it seems an understatement to write that forty-five-year-old Allisa Abraham is a woman transacting intense and rapid change, but it also feels like the statement closest to the truth. I have always identified most strongly with the world of professional work, and I find a great deal of strength and satisfaction in a job well done, whether it is producing a news story under deadline, growing tomatoes in my garden, writing a mini grant to support my work in the classroom, or repainting my dining room walls. I come from a family of people who make things, and I am happiest when I am producing something helpful to send out into the world.

Professional Context

That mentality first drew me into education, first as a special education collaborative teacher, then as a 7th grade language arts teacher, and then on to high school English as a 10th Grade instructor and reading specialist. I worked as a teacher for eleven years in the same school district, and my children, 14-year-old Samuel and 13-year-old

Matthew, grew up in the school district as well, although I never taught at a school they attended.

I spent a great deal of personal time during these years learning and honing my classroom craft. During my time in the district, I completed several endorsement series from Gifted Instruction to Reading to Teacher Leader to Teacher Support Specialist. All helped me develop skills for classroom practice and prepared me to mentor other professionals in the field. I also became skilled at building relationships and working with at-risk students, for I used my practice as a laboratory of sorts, always in constant development of alternative means to instruct and assess comprehension and meaning making ability.

Today, I've transitioned to another type of classroom. I continue to teach students about reading, but my students are now adults both young and older. I teach at the university level as a graduate teaching assistant. My students are college seniors in the midst of student teaching practicums. I help them prepare to teach other middle and high school students what I know about reading and writing. I also teach teachers as an instructor for the very Reading Endorsement classes I took early in my career. This work is different compared to working with students in the classroom, but I still consider myself a teacher all the same.

I identify strongly as a student and lifelong learner as well. As I complete work on this dissertation study, I also complete work on my fourth degree from the University of Georgia. While most of my college coursework has been centrally located at one institution, my experiences have varied through the years and across fields of study. I completed my undergraduate degree in English and went straight on to earn my masters

in journalism in 1995. From there, I went to work in the television news industry and spent the next six years as a broadcast news anchor and reporter. When I became pregnant with my oldest son Sam, I also began looking for a more family-friendly profession. During my search, I tried substitute teaching. I fell in love with the students and the classroom, so I went back to school to become certified. That work led me to courses in English Education and a Specialist degree. From there I found the doctoral program and dived into deep study of Reading Education. It was 2009, and by then I had been teaching fulltime for nearly four years while raising my young boys in tandem. I studied part-time taking one class each semester.

Parental Considerations

I continue to be a mother, now to two teenage sons although our traditional family unit is no longer in place. After seventeen years of marriage, Sam and Matthew's father and I have divorced, and I am currently transacting with new definitions of what home looks like in our lives. While we commit to co-parenting our boys and getting along, it is often difficult for me to process having less time and in effect less influence in my children's lives, and many days I do mourn the loss of my family. We traveled together, completed 5K races together, and supported each other. We were Team Hall all the way.

However, now that my ex-husband has remarried and blended his family with another, differences in our parenting styles have surfaced, bringing tension when they come into conflict. Bedtimes vary across home contexts, as do rules for electronics and expectations for schoolwork. Components of a nutritious dinner waver from household to household as do encouragement for exercise and outdoor leisure time. I've had to accept that my rules apply only to my new household and the times my children physically live

with me. It is a difficult change to process in that everything related to the care of the boys always fell to me in the past. Now I must negotiate for assistance from afar. Now I must explain and re-explain to my boys reasons why my rules are not the same as they are at their father's house.

It is an exercise in patience, especially in terms of mothering my youngest son, Matthew. Diagnosed in 2006 as mild to moderate on the autism spectrum, it often takes more time and explanation for Matthew to comprehend concepts. Additionally, he has trouble understanding nuance and making inferences. Why questions are particularly difficult for him to answer. He prefers to live in the literal world of absolutes, and he doesn't like to change. He asks me perhaps once a month why I don't love his dad anymore, and although I know the question is coming, it always catches me off guard. I take a breath and do my best to explain once again how people change and they ways we love them do too.

I have always been Matthew's advocate as well, attending every special education meeting held to discuss services he should and will receive from the school system. This responsibility came to me through the assumption that I possessed the teacher knowledge needed to best negotiate on Matthew's behalf. Long employed in the same school system as my son, this has resulted in professional tension for me from time to time as my ideas of what services Matthew needed to receive have sometimes differed from the assessments rendered by other education professionals. His entrance into middle school with less supervision by a case manager, as well as the disconnect I feel from not caring for Matthew 100 percent of the time makes it more difficult for me to assess and understand his needs as he learns and grows.

While the separation of households has been a source of tension in how I care for my children, it has brought positive personal lifestyle change into my daily practices as well. Financially, I dug myself out of debt and committed to saving for my future. This alone reduced my stress substantially and provided me with choices as I consider my options in the future. Not having to worry about money issues has further freed me to attend to other concerns and to do so with more engagement. I also began to exercise and eat healthier foods. I started to walk regularly and then began to jog. Within a year's time I had lost nearly forty pounds. I felt stronger than ever and had attained a level of fitness I hadn't seen since my broadcast news days, twenty years prior. I had more energy to attend to the projects and people most important to me.

Composing My Figured World

Not surprisingly, in crafting a persona poem for my experience as a teacher mother, I gravitated to running as a metaphor for the conditioning teacher mothers experience in their attempts to meet societal expectations as ideal workers and good mothers. The connection felt easy for me in that I'm always on the go, in a race of sorts to get to a finish line somewhere out there. "We Get Conditioned for It" attempts to capture the tension I often felt as a woman burdened with many responsibilities, yet not equipped with any materials to help guide my way. From lesson plans to the family vacations to putting out the little fires as mothers regularly do, I worked without knowing if I had the right answers or not, and that created uncertainty in my personal life, even though I was largely successful in my professional life. The poem that developed from my drafting and revision process follows below, after which I then unpack the lines in an

effort to further describe and explain my transactions within the figured world of teaching and mothering.

"We Get Conditioned for It"

I am running, conditioned
for the yes. A rock star in service
of other people's children, but stumble
at home - failing to keep the plates midair.

No set course for being
a mother. I never know how
I'm doing. Only that there are so
many ways to feel small as a parent.

Sluggish foot falls, tired steps signal
vacation is over. Our highly scheduled
odyssey has always been my job. I'm good
at fixing everything – because I put in the work.

Plus time to race far enough, fast
enough. En route I pick up pockets
of time. Stuff them away. Hold in reserve
for the next dilemma needing help on course.

It's my job to finish strong,
feel fulfilled, make great time.
But no one's rooting for me at the end.
I want to be sure. Instead I hope I'm okay.

The poem opens with the idea that I am on the go, running a race. Truly, it is often an exhilarating feeling when I do head out for a jog, but when I make the comparison to my daily life as a teacher mother, I often feel stressed by my situation. I'm not running because I want to. I'm running because I feel I have to. A grudging participant in the demographic market researchers call "frenetic families" (Schulte, 2014, p. 7), I run because I fear being left behind by other mothers who are smarter and more time efficient than I am. On lines 1-2, I write that I am "conditioned for the yes." It reflects my perception that society expects me, as a teacher mother, to have it all figured out. That I can do multiple tasks successfully at the

same time and look sharp doing it. So I say yes when supervisors ask me to take on extra projects, and I complete them because I don't want others to get the idea that I can't perform or they can't count on me. As I shared with my group, it's the idea that "as teachers, we are programmed for the yes." What's more, I said, "It's very difficult to break that cycle." So challenging, that even when I do gain the understanding that the extra work is not meaningful for me or helping me grow as a professional, I keep accepting new projects and responsibilities because I want to keep up appearances that I am a professional educator who has it together.

Transacting with Expectations of Work and Home Worlds

As a teacher in my classroom I feel confident in my instructional abilities. My students, even though they come to me far behind, lacking motivation and skills needed for reading proficiency, often soar academically by the end of our school year together. Many times, their successes make me feel, as I share on line 2 on my persona poem, like a "rock star." However, as lines 3-4 indicate, my teaching skills don't transfer easily to the home front as I try to guide and motivate my own children. I confess that, "I stumble/at home – fail to keep the plates in motion."

I shared with my group members my frustration in trying unsuccessfully to motivate my son to read a book. It wasn't simply that he didn't show an interest in reading, it was my feeling of failure that I couldn't successfully scaffold and guide him to a more complex read, my mastery skill set. "I can't get my kid to read a book," I said, "I can't get my kid to do what I do best, and I just feel like a failure." In this instance, my confidence, so high in the classroom, was shaken by my inability to teach my son. As I

shared, “Most of the time I have this persona of having everything together, and I don’t need anything,” I said, “But as a mom, I do need that reassurance.”

My wishes for some certainty and validation carried over into the poem’s second stanza. I wrote in lines 5-7, as I continued my run, there’s “no set course for being/a mother. I never know how/I’m doing.” Not alone in experiencing this feeling, our group discussed this issue at length. We understood clearly that we were required to make decisions and choices for our children, but we also admitted to experiencing doubt in the process. As I shared, “Life is all about this for us. There’s always a situation. There’s always a choice, and I don’t know that I’m ever completely happy with the choice that I make,” I said, “I know I have to make one, and I know I have to live with it, but that’s something I struggle with.” The understanding that we knew we’d always be second-guessing ourselves as parents was difficult to accept, especially for me. I desperately wanted some feedback, a grade of sorts to guide my way, but I knew I’d never receive such clarity. That left me and the other teachers to make due with wishes and hope for success. As I shared, “I’m trying to get each one what they need,” I said, “and as I’m doing that there’s potential for one of them to get left out.”

The process wears me down as I write on line 9, “sluggish foot falls, tired steps,” but I continue the journey anyway, for I know it is my responsibility as a mother to do so. As April shared with us so poignantly, “So many responsibilities are ours. And truly ours.” In this manner I continually accepted responsibility for specific activities and duties in service of mothering and teaching my children. As I wrote in lines 10-11 of our family vacations, “Our highly scheduled/odyssey has always been my job.”

It is a job I view as an important, even vital one, and it is one I enjoy. For me, like Judy and her husband Scott, time off from school has always been a great opportunity to hit the road and take a trip, but we never go to a single location and just rest and relax. Travel is a powerful teaching tool, and it is one I learned from my mother. She drove my sister and I all over the country when we were young, visiting Civil War battlefields and former presidents' homes. She did it all by herself without fear. I try to follow her model as I use it in the spirit of showing my own children the world. "Any vacation, I'm packing it full. We can go here, and we can go there," I said, "It's an adventure, and I want my boys to learn that. I want them to do that with their kids when they grow up."

Chasing the Mythological Supermom

The poem turns in the middle of the third stanza from planning vacations to what our teacher mother group identified as a serious and prevalent assumption about mothers in general. It is reflected in lines 11-12 of my persona poem, "I'm good/at it – fixing everything – because I put in the work." On the surface the words imply a compliment to efficiency, and the idea that mothers have their fingers on the pulse of their households. If a child is missing a pair of dress shoes, mom will know where to look. If the dog runs out of the house and won't come in, mom will know what to do.

What isn't spoken, however, is the wide-spread assumption and expectation that mothers are responsible for doing and fixing everything in their households, especially when it comes to the education of their children. "It's always been my job. The teaching stuff and the school stuff," I said. In the case of advocating for Matthew during IEP meetings, it is a responsibility I embrace because I know that I am his best bet, a secret weapon of sorts because I've been a special education teacher, and I know what services

he is entitled to receive. “I have got to be my kid’s warrior,” I shared with conviction. “I don’t know what it is about special education services that people don’t want to give them up,” I said, but I “just keep asking with a smile and ask again until you get what you need.”

However, what became troublesome and harder to accept as given for the teacher mothers in our group was the assumption that anything at all connected to school became our personal projects simply because we taught for a living. I experienced tension in this area with my sons’ father as my school district prepared to open applications for families to apply for school choice programs for the following school year. We had talked about moving the boys to a different school and into study programs that were more aligned with their interests. We agreed that the arts-based program at one of the middle schools was the best fit for both boys. What we didn’t talk about was my ex-husband’s assumption that I would take care of everything.

And then my life began to spiral out of control as my mother was admitted to the hospital. As I tried to work, parent, and care for my mother in the weeks before her death, I quickly realized I didn’t have any extra time to handle the school project, and I reached out to my ex-husband for help. I said to him, “You’re going to have to do this because I just can’t.” He was stunned, sputtered about how this was my thing, sent emails asking me to reconsider, but I was adamant. “I said, ‘I’m telling you. I have enough on my plate, and it’s not going to get done if you’re counting on me. I know I usually do these things, but you have to – you have to do this for your kids if you want it to happen.’” As I told the women in my group, I did have to spend time walking him through the paperwork, “It got done, but it was just kind of ridiculous.” I remember thinking that it made no sense

for him to act that way. Surely, he could fill out paperwork and schedule audition times, yet he didn't step up to do so because school concerns were my responsibility.

Perhaps the trouble I experienced in asking for and getting help would have been enough to convince me to just do the job and continue on my path. As I wrote in lines 13-14, I continued to seek time "to race far enough, fast/enough." Certainly, just taking on the work and getting it done is reflective of my usual behavior. Many teacher mothers would do the same. As Schulte (2014) wrote, "That strong, self-sacrificing "ethic of care," as leisure researchers call it is also the reason women tend to have the ongoing tape loop of tasks yet to get done, responsibilities, and worries that play in the head like the annoying and hard-to-shake jingle" (p. 239). In other words, mothers continue to accept responsibilities and duties not only because they are used to the expectation that they do this type of work, but also the assumption that they will find the time to do it. Any other response or action would appear contrary to the norm.

The ability to find, as I wrote in lines 14-15, "pockets/of time" is another necessary skill for the teacher mother on the go. As I shared with the group, "We are always looking for time, and then once we find the pockets of time, we are always trying to make the most of them." They become vital to a mother's ability to wrap her head around what our group of teacher mothers identified as the latest "situation to handle" at home or at work, so teacher mothers, as I admit to doing in lines 16-17, tend to "Stuff them away. Hold in reserve/for the next dilemma needing help on course." I certainly feel compelled to collect and account for my time as I transact in my personal and professional contexts. My daily planner contains a weekly to-do list, and my search for pockets of time needed to complete my objectives is evident in the arrows I draw on the

page, directing one task to Wednesday evening and another to the weekend when I am not working. I operate in a constant state of organization, fluidly adjusting the commitments I must attend to, along with the objectives I wish to complete in any given week. Anything left undone moves on to the following week.

Creating Possibilities for Contentment

As the poem enters the fifth and final stanza, I am still running, but I am nearing the end of my race. I understand my objective, as written in lines 17-18, "It's my job to finish strong,/feel fulfilled, make great time." However, as I approach the finish line, my understanding is diminished by the realization, on line 19 that, "no one's rooting for me at the end." As the speaker in this particular poem, such lack of support for my unpaid work, time, and effort trouble me, and I expressed my dissatisfaction during our group sharing session as we discussed the differences between perceptions of fatherly and motherly responsibilities. "For males, the fathers, it's the idea that they could be as involved as they wanted to be, or they could be as detached as they wanted to be, as long as they're providing for the family," I said, "and then for mothers, there's not that idea that, you know, we need our jobs to feel fulfilled and that's important. There's not that. There's no one rooting for that. We're juggling this. We're juggling that, and that's fine unless we drop the ball."

What's left for me then as the runner and subsequently the teacher mother is the understanding that I must find my own satisfaction from my endeavors - from work I do at school to my work at home. Also unsettling for me is the reality that I am largely alone in my journey, in much the same way that I run in isolation. This is troubling because I seek validation for my effort. As I wrote on line 20, "I want to be sure. Instead I hope I'm

okay." As I shared with the members of our group, "When things don't go right for one of the kids, then I feel like I failed them as a mom." While no one is there to reprimand me formally for any poor decision I make in parenting my children, I do feel the weight of cultural expectation all the same. In this way, for me it is difficult to feel exceptional or extraordinary because I seemingly must grant the validation to myself, an act of self-assessment this teacher finds at least a bit peculiar.

My New Understandings As a Participant in a Community of Care

As a researcher participating in this study, I fully participated in the writing and sharing of narratives about my teaching and mothering experiences. I also joined Rochelle, April, and Judy in rich discussion about what it meant to actively negotiate multiple roles and expectations while under constraints of time, stress, and dwindling energy. While I followed up with Rochelle, April, and Judy with interview conversations after reflecting on what had been shared during our group sessions, and I also shared with Rochelle, April, and Judy the persona poems I wrote for them in an effort to capture the new meaning and understanding they gained over the course of our work together, I did not make the same opportunity to check my own thinking and writing about my experiences as a teacher mother. I decided that attempting to interview myself would feel too strange. However, as I sat down to write my new understandings about my role as a teacher mother in the figured world of education, I realized I was at a disadvantage in that I had no follow up interview conversation to draw upon.

I knew from my conversations with the other teacher mothers that they all gained a sense of empowerment in the sharing of stories and common experiences. As I reflected on our work together, I agreed, for I felt the same surge of courage and confidence to act

in the world that they had described to me. However, at the end of my persona poem, I seemed to lament the fact that I am alone in my effort to teach and mother my children. I have found in many instances that my most courageous acts are often carried out in solitude, for if others could come with me, I wouldn't have to be so brave.

Participating in a community of writing and sharing with other teacher mothers voicing the same anxieties and concerns permitted me the understanding that I am not the only woman in the world to feel this way. This understanding, while not fixing any perceived problem, did provide me with comfort, and in that commonly shared feeling, I felt and grew stronger in the knowledge I wasn't truly alone in my efforts, to the point where I imagined myself capable of feeling "okay with" and accepting of my decisions and actions as a mother. No longer did I feel the need to put up a front and masquerade as a woman who has it together. I am content in the knowledge that my efforts are sufficient.

In the next chapter, I continue analyzing data collected in my study, but my focus shifts from the individual teacher mother stories to an examination of what characteristics our lives share in common. My analysis draws on the teacher mother narratives and our small group discussion data as I do this work; however, I also include data collected from single, follow up interviews with Rochelle, April, and Judy as I discuss these common themes. Considering all these sources, along with feedback from the teacher mothers on the persona poems I wrote for them, I then turn to the final chapter of my dissertation and offer suggestions for where this work may go next.

Chapter 5:

Data Discussion

Interviews & Common Tension

"The way I reflect on my work practices, I need to reflect more on my real life. I think we take for granted – well I think I take for granted my personal life. Because I don't feel like I really had to work for that. It just kind of happened. But you can't take those things for granted because they pass by too, and they can get out of control." As Rochelle reflected on what she gained from participating in our study of teacher mothers, much of that learning, by her own admission, resulted from the writing, dialogue, and reflection space created within our small community of teacher mothers. Here, Rochelle was speaking of her own personal meaning making process, but her culmination of understanding was common across our experiences.

Like Rochelle, we all learned as we wrote, shared our narratives, and talked about our connections to each others' stories. We came to new understanding about what it means to be a teacher mother in the figured world of education, and when we parted company, each of us took that new knowledge and applied it as individuals, whether it was to advocate for more family-friendly work hours or a more suitable position. In doing so we drew from the new meaning we had made by exposing vulnerable moments, sharing them, and talking about our stories together.

As I continue my discussion of how our stories and shared dialogue heightened awareness of what it means to identify as a teacher mother, I make the argument that all

teacher mothers possess a special knowledge that sets them apart from other working mothers. Many times this creates tension for the teacher mother as she transacts with the texts of her figured world, and negotiation of these challenges is a frequently complicated endeavor. I also make the argument that recognition of this unique characteristic held by teacher mothers is a first and necessary step in order for a teacher mother to change the way she transacts with her figured world.

Shifting my focus from study participant to literacy researcher, I use the dialogue of our sharing sessions to continue my inquiry, once again employing poetic inquiry to help me construct new meaning about my understanding of what it means for teacher mothers to live and work in our society. I represent my new understandings in the poem, "Lurking Beneath the Teacher Hat," and I follow up with discussion of two distinct sub tensions teacher mothers typically negotiate as a result.

Teacher Mothers Have Special Knowledge

While it is true that the teacher mothers shared experiences that might echo the discourse of many other working women not employed in the field of education, they also identified, as the women became increasingly willing to express vulnerability with each other, certain characteristics unique to their home and work worlds. I wrote the following poem, "Lurking Beneath the Teacher Hat," as we worked through our process of writing, sharing, and talking about narratives written about those moments in our lives. Different from the persona poems I wrote in order to more fully understand the experiences and background of each teacher mother, this poetic inquiry employing free verse poetry attempts to deconstruct our meaning making process as we began to

understand that we, as teacher mothers, are in possession of a special type of knowledge pertaining to education.

On the surface, this special knowledge appears to give us an edge over other working mothers. We "know" more about how educational systems work; therefore, it makes sense that we should be more effective at navigating educational challenges for our own children, no matter what academic obstacle they face. For instance, both April and I, through our advocacy for our children in terms of securing special education services, have specific knowledge about various service levels. We know, when a special education teacher suggests that our children receive support on a consultation basis, that our children will be supported by a teacher who "checks in" with our children about once a week. We are not confused by the technical jargon of special education policy, so we are able to decide such questions with confidence. Other mothers outside the institution of education do not have this luxury. They have to learn about special education policy, or they run the risk of others making long-term decisions for their children.

However, with no consideration for how knowledge becomes specialized by content or grade level, many times possession of this "knowledge," assumed to be all-knowing and encompassing, created tension for the women in our group and made us resentful of the expectation that we shoulder the burden of and responsibility for it at all times. For instance, as April described her son's ongoing struggle with mathematics - the many conferences she attended in reference to his low performance as well as the conversations she shared with Corey's teachers over the years - her irritation with what she perceived the teachers expected of her knowledge and skill set had reached an all time high. "I told [them] all he struggles. I'm a middle school language arts teacher. I

don't know what to do for him when it comes to math," she said, reflecting her mounting frustration with the idea that children of teacher mothers should have no academic trouble because all their mothers have to do is take the time to share a little of their teacher knowledge with their children in order for them to be successful at school.

Exposing a Teacher Mother's Assumed Knowledge

Recognizing this stark difference in our written narratives as a common experience we shared, we then began the process of talking about and troubling what we perceived we were assumed to know as teachers of students, and by extension, mothers and first teachers to our own children. Acknowledging the shared knowledge that set us apart from other working mothers, we then engaged in an examination of our perceptions of the expectations we believed others had and continue to have for us as teacher mothers. This in turn evoked feelings of dissatisfaction with those terms and created space and desire for change. The poem below reflects both the frustration with how things are and the process of exposing the disparity in our sharing sessions.

"Lurking Beneath the Teacher Hat"

Such a lovely child.
I can tell you've been working
at home. She always starts there.
To pacify. To lessen the blow
curling off her tongue - a bullwhip
in fluid motion. Compliments swirl
above us in elegant form – almost
hypnotic – a soothing spell cast
seconds before the crack and snap!

I sent some flash cards home. Fractions.
Decimals. *If you'd just practice thirty*
minutes a night, we'd close those deficits
in no time. She smiles as she reaches out
to gather her coils of leather, carefully
returning her weapon to proper rest –
Textbook "over and under" technique.

I imagine her securing it by her side.
Flexible. Reflective. Always ready
for a follow up conference.

As the poem suggests, boiled down, the defining difference between a teacher mother and any other professional female in the workforce stems from the educational knowledge teacher mothers are assumed to posses by virtue of their profession. Lines 2 - 4 reveal mutual recognition of this perception as the two teachers conference with each other. One, the mother of a student and the teacher of other people's children, understands that her own child's teacher is using on her, a form of glow and grow feedback, as it is a technique she often employs in her classroom while working with students. She is resentful of the other teacher's tactic, effort to "handle" her, and use of compliments "to pacify" her or "lessen the blow" of the criticism she predicts the teacher will later share with her. She is irritated and on the defensive with the other teacher in the room to the point where the teacher mother imagines the other educator purposefully and strategically using her words as damage inflicting weapons.

Both women have knowledge of what children are supposed to learn and know in order to be successful students – in general. The conflict comes in that both women also know that they are in possession of the same knowledge, yet one teacher must now tell another that her child has not learned information that the child is supposed to know at this learning stage. It is a dangerous conversation in that the information the teacher imparts to the mother may easily be interpreted as a reprimand. Thus, both women are on the defensive in that the conversation may be construed as an indictment of not only poor teaching but poor mothering in that the teacher mother has not yet passed on to her biological child the knowledge she is presumed to hold by virtue of her profession.

Another assumption guiding their interaction is that the teacher mother is decidedly an expert about how to teach children because more than likely, a teacher will be a woman and have children of her own. This natural born, nurturing expertise is implied by virtue of the teacher mother's gender, and it is expected to inform and supplement the teacher mother's work place performance in the classroom as well.

For the teacher mothers in our group, this knowledge both benefitted and generated anxiety. Rochelle viewed her teaching experience as a valuable experimental space she used to inform her mothering role. "I got to try some things out on them, and what worked, I tried. If it d[id]n't work with them, I kn[e]w not to do it with my kids," she said. For April and for me, as mothers of special needs children, our practical experience as teachers and our understandings of how student-teacher conferences and IEP meetings work, allowed us to advocate more effectively for our own children in terms of securing educational services for them. We knew what to ask for and how to ask for it. However, for Judy, her specialized knowledge of kindergarten instruction was a perpetual source of stress and worry. As her own children approached developmental checkpoints, she panicked and worried about whether they would meet them or not. It was almost as if she believed that she would be perceived as a less quality teacher if her children didn't demonstrate mastery of the content she taught.

Judy's brewing anxiety over her daughter's future performance on academic assessments is one example of the tension teacher mothers experience as a result of having knowledge of the workings of the institution of education. My feeling of discouragement at not being able to motivate my teenage son to read more complex books when I am known as an innovative and inspiring reading teacher to adolescents is

another. It makes us uneasy about the knowledge we possess. Almost like receiving a gift for which we didn't ask. It also creates a sub, secret tension in that our knowledge of how things are supposed to play out under ideal conditions makes us hesitant to accept any praise for any good work we do in our classrooms, for our "failures" at home make us feel like frauds, not exceptional instructors. The following section takes a closer look at this commonly shared perception among the teacher mothers in our group and how exposing our anxieties about this imbalance within the group setting helped generate possibilities for transacting with the tension in the future.

Expert professionals/struggling parents. While each teacher mother found great personal value in participating in the study and developed strategies through which they were able to transact with the unique tensions they experienced in their lives, a common concern voiced by all was the shame we felt in reference to our seeming lack of ability to teach our own children academic related content, even as we produced great successes with our students in the classroom. As Rochelle put it, "I can get some kids to do some stuff. But my own children? I can't even get them – They ignore me." Similarly, April agonized over her son's difficulties in math class, and I felt a sense of failure when my son rejected my best book recommendations. Judy worried that her daughter would not measure up to various kindergarten checkpoints. As she said, "There's a struggle with not only worries but then guilt of not doing things right," indicating that Judy not only questioned her ability to teach her own children sufficiently, but perhaps questioned her ability to teach children adequately at all.

Given the years of experience and overall success each teacher mother achieved in her professional context – keeping in mind April was a former Top 3 district Teacher

of the Year finalist and both Rochelle and Judy had earned doctorate degrees in education – it was extremely difficult to pinpoint what qualified in our minds as failure to properly mother our children, especially since all of us qualified as veteran, even master teachers. However, the possibility hovered over us, as if it were a secret we didn't dare let out. As Rochelle confessed, "I used to be a bundle of stress because I truly didn't want to expose what I was feeling and thinking on the inside," her fear of losing any credibility fueling her drive forward.

However, it was in the community we created and maintained through our group that the teacher mothers began to loosen their grip and unwind their bundles of anxiety, for the gathering space of shared meals and talk permitted a comfort level that increasingly invited greater sharing of vulnerable moments and an opening for dialogue. As Rochelle continued, "once we got to our session, and then we talked through everything and listened and left – I felt fine. I felt great." For her and for the rest of us, it was in hearing similar accounts from other expert teachers in the room that we began to understand our concerns not as individual problems that made us failing mothers, but as a collective narrative from which to grow possibility and solution at home.

Seemingly, the anxiety over potential guilt of not replicating the successful classroom within the home context initially shut down our abilities to adapt and make flexible choices at home. In other words, we weren't improvising. Not at home anyway. Whether the strategies that enabled us to achieve resounding success in the classroom wouldn't transfer or we didn't try the same tactics at home at all, we could not say. But we also couldn't escape the fear that we couldn't instruct our own children *as well as* we educated other people's children - our teaching skills and knowledge were seemingly

trapped at school. As Holland (1998) wrote, “Identities become important outcomes of participation in communities of practice in ways analogous to our notion that identities are formed in the process of participating in activities organized by figured worlds” (p. 57). James (2010) touched on this tension between work and home as it relates to constructs of care and identity formation. “The degree to which teachers are (or believe themselves to be) responsible for raising the children in their classrooms can have particular implications for their lives as women and as teachers” (p. 528). What that meant for the teacher mothers in our group was not only the uneasy responsibility of holding a presumed and immense amount of knowledge, but then also the uncertainty of *where* it was most appropriate to use the knowledge we did recognize as actual knowledge we possessed.

Writing and talking about our narratives exposed this discrepancy of practice on all of our parts and put it on display. We didn’t specifically address our lack of improvisation on the home front in our group discussion, but we couldn’t help but think individually about what we had been doing long after our sessions had ended. Evident in April’s reflection during her follow up interview, she recalled, “I remember driving home from your house thinking about everything we had shared, and then making it a point to say – Let me do this.” It was in her personal decision to make it a point to do something different, that she exercised the courage to improvise. She decided to act in much the same manner she made instructional decisions every single day within her classroom, but it took reflecting on another teacher mother’s narrative and experience that she thought to examine her own practices at home.

"I remember Rochelle talking about those things that she'd missed. Middle school is a milestone – [a] certain thing I just didn't want to miss." In the community of our sharing session, it didn't matter to April that Rochelle had written about choosing work over attending her 4-year-old son's tee ball game. What mattered was the connection April made to the idea that milestones are important times to share with family and her realization that she didn't want to miss her son's transition as he began his middle school years. She further recognized that any decision to focus on work during this time would increase her chance of missing Corey's important milestone, so she then made it a point "to put work in the back for a minute," indicating her willingness and effort to learn from Rochelle's shared experience.

Here, April described and deconstructed her thinking process, all stemming from her participation in our teacher mother community. There, the transaction with others provided a supportive space from which new decision-making practices became possible. As Holland (1998) wrote, "Improvisational responses to social and cultural openings and impositions elaborate identities on intimate terrain, even as these identities are worked and reworked on the social landscape" (p. 270). In April's case, she was able to listen and think about another teacher mother's story in a safe sharing space. It was in the supportive context of this intimate environment that she was then able to think about risking a new response in reading her figured world. As Rosenblatt (1978) affirmed, "learning what others have made of a text can greatly increase such insight into one's own relationship with it" (p. 146). Indeed, Rochelle's experience informed April as she decided to focus on family rather than work.

Rochelle, too, learned from other teacher mothers in the group, and again, evidence of this learning did not present itself until the interview stage of our study. “I did take some advice from Judy,” she shared, “This summer I have already planned out days where it’s just me and the kids. We’re doing things together.” Her decision to carve out time specifically for family indicates that she not only reflected on her own experience where she missed out on time with family due to work, but reflected on the transactions of another teacher mother within her figured world who had decided to act differently than she had. As Rosenblatt (1978) wrote of a reader’s consciousness, Rochelle applied her transaction within the group to guide “the choice of what to pay attention to, what to select out and synthesize” (p. 184), for in listening to Judy describe her decision to prioritize family over work, Rochelle adapted her stance from which to see her position differently and thus make different decisions at home. “I am putting more effort into being a better mom, whereas being a great professional – I don’t have to plan that,” she said.

Rochelle’s words reflect a new stance where she imagines herself with the potential to be perceived as a better mother if she mindfully devotes more time to her mothering practice, or in effect, improvises in much the same way she has for years in her work place. Her shared context and dialogue with other teacher mothers enable her to now see a habit so ingrained in her teaching life that she doesn’t think about it anymore as applicable to her context at home. The discussion in the figured world providing her, as Holland (1998) wrote, with “contexts of meaning for actions, cultural productions, performances, disputes, for the understandings that people come to make of themselves, and for the capabilities that people develop to direct their own behavior” (p. 60). Indeed,

Rochelle had decided to direct her time in a different manner and rationalized herself capable and entitled to make such a decision.

Such change was also evident as we approached the second sub tension associated with our possession of special knowledge. In the beginning of our work together, we often expressed frustration with the perception that as teacher mothers we were naturally equipped to manage all aspects of education – at home and school. However, as we wrote and shared our stories, new possibilities for transacting with the text of our figured world opened up. Assumptions about our abilities likely continued, but our perceptions of how we could transact with those assumptions certainly changed.

Mom will handle everything. A perceived feeling of total responsibility for knowing also figured strongly for the women in our group. Going beyond what we often see in television commercials – Dr. Mom providing the best care for kids who are sick, Omniscient Mom always knowing exactly where Dad left his keys – this assumption of knowledge and the accompanying skill set for family caregiving carried with it an assumption of added workload for the women. As Schulte (2014) wrote, "as a knowledge worker, you're *expected* to be in charge of everything" (p. 63). April echoed this sentiment in her follow up interview, "[They] just take for granted – The mom will take care of it."

This additional home work cannot differentiate the women in our group from other working mothers; however, what does is the added layer of responsibility they assume in terms of schooling their children at home. All participants in the study, at some point or another, expressed understanding that to be a teacher mother means carrying the bulk of the burden for anything related to education of their children. From

homework to arranging family vacations to school program applications, the teacher mothers perceive that they are expected to handle all of it, often without thanks or prior discussion. As Rochelle shared, "I felt like I had to be in control of everything – like I had to do it. It was up to me to do it." Here Rochelle embodied the societal expectation revealed in working class family time studies. "A good mother is always available to her children" (Schulte, 2014, p. 25); therefore, even though she had a parenting partner in her spouse to help shoulder the workload, she still felt pressure to carry a majority of the "home" work as well.

Why is this so? Teacher mothers are professional educators, and to others outside the institution of education, this translates into a generalized assumption that teachers have universal knowledge of schooling and are best suited to handle any educational task or decision. As April joked good-naturedly with the group, "My husband looks to me like – you **are** the teacher. You help with homework cause that's what you're supposed to do. He doesn't see [that he has] a college degree. [He] can add, subtract, multiply, and divide. [He] can help with homework."

I had a similar exchange with my ex-husband when, overwhelmed with caring for my ailing mother, I asked him to submit applications for our boys to the district's school choice program. As I shared with the group, "He could not get it together. [Sent me] a series of emails [insisting] **You** do this." Like April's spouse, my ex-husband was so used to me handling educational concerns for our children, he perceived he lacked the skills to complete the task by himself and tried to give the job back to me. Submitting the applications only after I refused to do it, he did not come away from the experience feeling empowered to advocate for our children in the future. That he did not change his

stance is not uncommon. As Connelly & Clandinin (1999) wrote, "teacher knowledge is embodied and carries with it moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions, the difficulty in crossing and modifying borders is not surprising" (p. 105). Therefore, it came as no surprise that conferences, field trip notices, schedule changes – all school-related issues continued to fall under my purview.

Different teacher mothers in our group found different ways to shoulder this responsibility. Rochelle practiced a suck it up "we are the bosses" mentality where she rationalized her authority and expertise through her decision making process. Initially, April accepted her position. In our first group meeting she said with conviction, even pride, "So many responsibilities are ours and truly ours – not a parent's responsibility – strictly a mother's." However, as we wrote and talked together, she began to question her role and the perceived duty that came with it. She was as Rosenblatt (1978) wrote, "The reader, bringing [her] own particular temperament and fund of past transactions to the text, liv[ing] through a process of handling new situations, new attitudes, new personalities, new conflicts in values" (p. 173). Indeed, by the end of the study April had begun pushing back, troubling her noticings and observations, making different decisions and new choices. Her new attention to her past transactions within her figured world sparked new types of transactions in terms of her perceived responsibility in it, all brought on through participation in our shared dialogue.

Also common to our collective experiences was the assumption that because we educate students in the classroom, we as teacher mothers are uniquely qualified to be responsible for all academic concerns of our own children at home. It is an extension of the special knowledge they possess as teachers in the institution of education. From

homework in any content area, to failing grades and email communication, the teacher mothers in our group perceived that they are held accountable for their children's academic performance. Under the discourse of mothering they are, for it legitimizes such maternal responsibility in our figured world and beyond. As Griffith & Smith (2005) wrote of its expectations, "it requires the subordination of women's unpaid labor and the conditions of her life to the ill-defined needs of her children's development and of their schooling" (p. 39). In effect, "the mothering discourse sets up the professionals as authorities" (p. 39). It is such discourse that made April's husband's remark that she help with homework because that's what she's supposed to do, an accepted and even reasonable response within their familial context.

Strongly connected to this notion is the additional assumption that teacher mothers, despite working 40+ hour weeks in the classroom, can and should find the time to support these educational needs. This creates unique tension for teacher mothers in that extra time for homework and other family care giving duties is scarce and hard to come by. As Griffith & Smith (2005) wrote, "the time available to all families, including families in the middle classes, to complement the educational work of school has been significantly reduced" (p. 130). In 1996, more than 70% of women who are mothers made up the workforce in the United States. Now twenty years later, it is no wonder working mothers experience added stress due to schooling expectations.

It is worse for the teacher mothers in that work weeks frequently extend longer than forty hours, for educational concerns for their students often keep them after hours or follow teacher mothers home. In our first sharing session, April asserted her fervent wish that, "There still has to be time for [me]," as she described her dissatisfying

work/home imbalance. Time studies affirm her struggle, "American mothers, on average, have about thirty-six minutes a day to themselves" (Schulte, 2014, p. 216). Additionally, women, "feel they aren't *entitled* to have leisure time. They feel they have to *earn* it first by getting to the end of the to-do list. Which never comes" (Schulte, 2014, p. 239).

Rochelle echoed this as she spoke of school vacations. "Me really having a break?" she said, "It's just a break from the school building, but it's not a break from life because I fill that time with so much more stuff that I'm doing for other people." This reflects Csikszentmihalyi's 1990 time study research revealing that men do one and a half things at a time. Whereas women, particularly mothers, do about five things at once. Perhaps this statistic is a reflection of the cultural norm that mothers can, will, and should take care of it all, but for the teacher mothers in our group, it seems to indicate a perception that time to accomplish all that is expected simply runs out and the remaining tasks to be completed shift forward to the following day. Teacher mothers often manage the left over duties in much the same way they manage time in their classrooms, shifting one activity to later in the week, bumping others into the next with little expectation that all of them will ever get completely accomplished.

Participation in our writing community certainly provided Rochelle, April, Judy, and me with several sets of sympathetic ears in which to vent our frustrations over finding elusive pockets of time. However, we didn't simply come away from the experience with comfort to help us endure. We came away with the understanding that the expectations everyone else in the world seemed to accept for us as normal were truly intolerable, and most importantly, that we had the ability to disrupt those expectations through our changed actions. With confidence gained in the dialogue of our group, we

each returned to our homes and jobs with different eyes to read them, and as we read the conditions of our figured worlds with these new eyes, we began to use our voices to ask for different conditions.

The result of those new transactions surfaced during my follow up interviews with Rochelle, April, and Judy. I was curious to know how the writing and sharing had changed the teacher mothers in our group, for I speculated that participating in our community of care had been a powerful experience. What I wasn't prepared for was the degree of change each mother experienced. And the sense of peace. That was a shocker. I had a hard time fathoming how three stressed out teacher mothers could sit and smile as they described their lives after our study. I remember asking the question of how – in different ways – just to make certain Rochelle, April, and Judy truly understood my question. In classic teacher mode, they patiently explained it all again.

Follow Up Interviews

As I transcribed discussion data, reread our narratives, and wrote poems to reflect my learning during the course of our study, I felt a growing sense of confidence and courage in my interactions with others in terms of mothering my children. I felt more empowered and effective as a mother even as I was learning how to handle things completely differently after my divorce positioned me as a single mother. What I didn't know and wouldn't know until I began conducting follow up interviews was that Rochelle, April, and Judy were experiencing many of these same feelings as well.

Interestingly, we never experienced a moment where we came together in our small group and said the words, "We are more confident now. We learned what we need to know to make better use of time." Certainly, we all began the study ready to go

because that's what needed to be done to help me complete my dissertation study. As dutiful professionals, Rochelle, April, and Judy wanted to help me succeed in much the same way they wish success for their students. However, as time progressed we became less concerned with the task to be completed and following the parameters of our protocols, and as a result, the talk we shared became more intimate and personally meaningful.

As I continue my analysis of the data collected during our study, I add in an additional layer to the written narratives and the recorded discussion of those narratives with the inclusion of data collected in follow up interviews with Rochelle, April, and Judy. As I stated previously, I interviewed each teacher mother one time for a period of approximately forty-five minutes. During these interviews I also shared the persona poems I had written for each woman and asked for her feedback on the poems' content. This served as a member check and assisted me as I thought about the next steps my research could take in the future.

In this final analysis section, I discuss two aspects of participation in writing and sharing communities that were instrumental in moving Rochelle, April, Judy, and I to experimenting with and adopting new thinking stances within our figured worlds. For this work I return to Connelly & Clandinin's (1999) work with narrative inquiry and discuss how their study of teachers and their generation of narrative from surface to secret to sacred story mirrored the types of narratives produced in my study over time. As supported by participant responses in the interview data, I argue that the structure of our community of care created an environment supportive to this type of writing comfort and growth thus enabling Rochelle, April, Judy, and I the courage to write new stories to live

by. As Connelly & Clandinin (1999) wrote, "when teachers come together and share stories, new stories to live by can also be composed" (p. 102). I then continue building my argument that the increased comfort level with the production and open discussion of sacred stories then led us to comfort with risk-taking in figured worlds as we began to test our new confidence and courage by trying new actions and ways of being within our figured worlds.

Our Community Encouraged Production of Sacred Stories

In the beginning, it was difficult for the Rochelle, April, and Judy to write about their lives. The narratives were slow in coming, and they were short when they did produce writing, often too brief to generate the rich dialogue I was seeking. More than once a teacher mother would remark, "I wrote something, but I don't think it's what you want," and in truth, it wasn't. They were simply surface stories, a basic level of storytelling retelling surface events. I was looking for depth these didn't possess.

Therefore, we started with my narratives. I modeled not only length of story but specifically addressed and exposed vulnerable moments in my mothering and teaching life. In the telling of my vulnerable experience, I gently pushed the level of our writing to a more complex level – the secret story. My first narrative laid this out boldly as I shared an experience where I ended up spanking my son because he had refused, during an exercise session, to keep running with me and had taken off for home. We discussed and questioned my actions as we worked the narrative through our protocol.

We then set out to write again, and when we returned to our group a second and third time, the teacher mothers' stories were longer in length and dug deeper into their personal experiences, our writing moving ever closer to the sacred story, a level of

narrative identified by Connelly & Clandinin (1999) as having "a special quality" (p. 2). In addition, the women were writing without prompts or questioning the content of their narratives. They knew what they wanted and needed to write. Oftentimes, they could identify the topic of their next narrative by the time our sharing session had ended.

Additionally, the nature of our discussions evolved as the study progressed. In the beginning, the teacher mothers were concerned with writing and giving me "what [I] wanted." They followed our protocol directions with fidelity - remaining silent as their narratives were discussed and taking thorough notes on what they heard. The women seemed to fear saying, as many students do in the classroom, the wrong thing as we discussed. They measured their words, taking time to pause as they spoke and qualifying any comment that might be construed by another teacher mother as critical of her teaching or mothering practices with sympathetic words or phrases. As I transcribed our sharing sessions, I frequently heard the teacher mothers say "um" or "uh" before they spoke critical words. They seemed to serve as gearing up or fortifying utterances to help the women prepare to articulate critique of another.

However, by the third sharing session, the teacher mothers were no longer holding back. They frequently broke protocol, even as their own stories were discussed, and offered comments and connections they made. I often heard a teacher mother say, "I know we're not supposed to talk, but…" and then proceed to offer a comment to the group. However, rather than viewing this change of interaction as a nuisance or mistake to redirect, I embraced it, probably even encouraged it by breaking protocol myself, for I could see that the new freedom to talk at will was not only fostering the rich dialogue I wanted, it was just one example of how the writing, sharing, and talking we were doing

in our community was changing the way the teacher mothers perceived how they could act in and on our figured world.

Writing and Sharing Sacred Stories Created Possibility for Agency

Certainly, the narratives and dialogue generated in the early stages of this study consistently reflected feelings of stress, life imbalance, and unresolvable conflict. However, by the time I conducted follow up interviews with the teacher mothers, just a few months after our sharing sessions had ended, something big had happened. The women were acting very differently within their home and work worlds. Rochelle called it a sense of peace. April appeared to have achieved her sought after balance, or at the very least gained the knowledge to create moments of time to focus on her own needs. Judy had found freedom from guilt through her new schedule. I felt greater confidence as well. Perhaps we didn't actually have more time as measured in minutes or hours, but we seemed to be content in that we knew how to advocate for ourselves to arrange for it.

"To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work." These words from poet Mary Oliver's 1994 collection, *White Pines*, encapsulate the charge each teacher mother in our group took up as a result from participating in our community of care. April made a great deal of new meaning from the physical process of writing her narratives, for it was on paper that April was able to express her concerns, hopes, and fears. But it was in sharing her stories with other teacher mothers that she was able to reflect on her decisions and experiences and move forward with new confidence. "I paid closer attention to how my time was divided, but then I also think I was more deliberate in dividing my time. Because I felt like as a mother I always give, give, give, give and I said – no. Let me deliberately give myself some time."

From this active participation in what Foucault (1984/1988) described as "a complex interplay of affective reciprocity and reciprocal dependence" (p. 80) new meaning became possible for April. "Being able to learn something from their experience on how they handled something. You know, getting that advice from them about their same situations because kids are kids and mothers are mothers, and some things are uniquely yours, but at the same time, as a mother there are certain things…and as a teacher who happens to be the mother and the teacher all in one. I think there's a certain commonality that's just there," she said.

Similarly, Rochelle recognized through our writing and talk that she had been taking her personal life for granted and that holding her experiences in and keeping them private maintained her feelings of stress. The opportunity to share and even vent with other teacher mothers gave Rochelle a sense of release. As she reflected on her learning, she said, "I had to pick a role, and once I picked the role, it was better. It was easier for me to be clear on where I stood." The sense of calm that came from releasing her anxiety and questions of not being good enough is what enabled her to think about her life differently for she was paying attention in her figured world and aware of her possibility for making new and different choices.

April too, began to recognize, as early as our last group discussion session that she had engaged in very similar behavior. As she shared with the group how she and her husband scheduled time off to be with their son during school breaks, she seemingly talked her way into recognition that she had not and typically does not schedule time for herself. As her story ended, she paused and said to us with finality, "You're right. You need that time so that you can plan, but so you can refuel also."

As our study ended with interview conversations, April not only was consciously aware that she had been counting herself out for years, she was engaged in a process of actively seeking out ways to change her behavior. “I guess the answer’s always been there, but no one ever thought to even, not necessarily care to ask, but they never asked,” April reflected. So what had become automatic decision-making on her part now turned to a process of prioritizing people and events in April’s life. “I think that too was part of the process of me just being more aware of what was going on,” she said. Family and work expectations had not disappeared for April, but they had taken on different levels of importance depending on the context of the situation. With her new awareness, April was then able to consider all parties, including her own individual needs for time. “The professional decision also affects the personal life,” she said, “So just as a teacher, what are some sacrifices you’re going to make in your career? What are you okay with? What can you do without?”

By the end of our study, April had seemingly come to the conclusion that she could no longer do without time for herself. The act of writing her experiences and sharing her stories within our group had given her that clarity. “I actually went back and reread some of the stories we’d done because again it just got me thinking about it,” she recalled, “Just remembering some of the things we said, over and over throughout our time together, just had me, I guess I would say that was my process.”

We felt less isolated. As Judy was the teacher mother in our group most likely to prioritize a life of mothering at home over her professional life in the classroom, I wondered what influence our writing and sharing had on her ability to make and act on her decision. Indeed, throughout our time in the study, Judy experienced a sweeping

change. As we began our work together, she felt resentment when she couldn't be present for her children's activities, yet she felt guilty when she did take the time away from teaching. However, by the end of the study, her outlook had changed dramatically.

I wondered if writing and talking with other teacher mothers had provided Judy with the courage to improvise and cast off her feelings of guilt. When I asked her about it, she replied, "I think no. That was already there. That was already my feeling from the get-go." In terms of making decisions for family over work, I agreed. Of the four teacher mothers in our group, Judy participated in the strongest network of support for her mothering concerns. She actively engaged other mothers in conversation about parenting through Facebook groups. "We always share like – You are not gonna believe what happened today kind of stories," Judy said. Her husband also encouraged her to take time and attend their children's school activities and urged Judy to do it without guilt.

Yet with this support network in place, the guilt remained, so I asked Judy to consider our group work once again. She said, "I think what it did do was hearing other people's stories made me feel like – Ah! I'm just like everybody else. I'm not the only one. Everybody else feels this way, too." So while her feelings in support of family concerns may have been in place prior to writing and sharing with the group, the affirmation she experienced in conversation with other teacher mothers did not. This was an important consideration in that the guilty feelings, worry, and anxiety Judy was experiencing all hailed from workplace expectations within the figured world of education. Therefore, talking and sharing with other professionals familiar with her teacher mother concerns helped alleviate those feelings.

In many ways the camaraderie fortified Judy and provided a foundation of confidence from which she was able to begin disengaging from the feelings of guilt that had once been a source of anxiety. The experience had a similar effect on April as she sought relief from feelings of imbalance in her life and her ever-constant state of weighing expectations and making choices that left her feeling ineffective as a mother. As she said, "We wear so many hats as a mom." At times, especially at the end of our study, April expressed frustration that her responsibilities were implied, expected without negotiation or even discussion. "Nobody ever asked how you felt about being the mother, being the teacher, being the wife. You know, being the caregiver, being the daughter," she said with a spark of resentment.

What participating in the group did for April was to bring her choices into awareness within a community of supportive listeners, but it was in the process of writing and talking with other teacher mothers that the tension she perceived moved from a position of solitary endeavor to a community of care where once visible, new options for action and agency became possible. As Judy said, "I don't know if there was one person that said something that I could not relate to. It's like we all had common worries or common things that we enjoyed or the common knowledge that made us fear school for our own children." Having space for those conversations became vital for Judy where she and other teacher mothers could, "just have these conversations and laugh and joke and leave there going – Yep. I'm sane. I'm good. I'm doing a good job," she said, "almost like a Teacher Mother Club."

Similarly, Rochelle said that although writing and meeting for data sessions did require extra time on her part, she always "felt better" after participating in the group

discussion. It was as if she didn't feel so isolated anymore because she had just heard three other women express many of the same worries and frustrations she was feeling at the same time. She said she would hear others in the group describe decisions they had made and think – if they can make it work for them, then why don't I try it too? She credits these inspirations along with her new found peace of mind with providing her the courage to act differently in her figured world.

What I realized was our sharing space was a needed space that helped time impoverished and stressed professionals slow their lives down a bit and take some notice of the daily practices that made up their lives and in doing so feel empowered to make different decisions if they chose. As Rochelle reflected, "I know when I start until when I end, I've given everything I can. I've helped out the team as much as I could, and I'm okay with that now. Before I was trying to match what everyone else was doing, and that didn't work for me." Seemingly, in finding the agency to improvise, Rochelle found courage to live differently. We all did.

Teacher Mothers Transact with Their Persona Poems

As I completed my last interview with Judy in the summer of 2016, I came to realize we were all using new courage to make new types of decisions, or at least very different choices than we had made in the past. The first time I heard April speak about the change, I thought that it was an isolated response. Two months later, Rochelle was smiling ear-to-ear and thrilled with her new sense of peace. A couple weeks after that, as I resigned my teaching position to work full-time on my dissertation, I began to wonder if we were on to something, as it seemed as if I was in conversation with three different women than before.

In fact, when it came up during our interviews, I asked Rochelle, April, and Judy individually where this change came from because, quite frankly, I was perplexed and anxious as to how I missed this big event when I was writing each persona poem. My intent in writing them, after all, was to capture their personal journeys and growth in one poetic narrative, yet I had clearly missed the peace, the balance, and the freedom. In response, they all remarked that those feelings were definitely new. I shouldn't worry about missing anything in the poems, for they simply hadn't gotten there yet.

Member Check - What Do You Notice?

At the end of each interview session, I shared the persona poem I wrote for each teacher mother. I did this for a couple of reasons. First, it served as fact-checking measure, for I wanted to know if I had gotten their stories straight. Secondly, I wanted to know if they liked or approved of the way I had represented their journeys during our work together. As a teacher-researcher-poet this was important to me in ways I can't quite articulate, but somehow I felt that this was important, for at some level if the poems created negative feelings on the teacher mothers' part, then I would have to question my ability as a researcher to fully or even partially interpret and represent their experiences.

The first time I shared a persona poem, it was with April. She was my first interview in March 2016, and unfortunately, I hadn't thought through how I wanted to proceed with the poem sharing segment. I think my excitement over hearing her say that she liked my work kept me from thinking like a researcher, so I didn't ask her why she liked it. I also failed to ask her what surprised her or what might be missing from the poem, and I wanted to know the answers to these questions. So, after that first session, I

decided to develop a poem sharing protocol of sorts. I then followed this procedure at the conclusion of Rochelle and Judy's interview sessions.

I asked Rochelle and Judy to read the poem to herself and then share with me her thoughts in response to three questions:

1. What did you notice or resonate with?
2. What surprised you?
3. What experiences that might be missing?

To my delight every teacher mother enjoyed her poem. April looked up after reading to say, "I love it." Rochelle said she resonated with the content strongly. "It's all there," she said – inclusive of where she had been during our time together. "You heard what I had to say. We talked through it, but you also got to read for yourself my words." As I wrote in a previous chapter, Judy was amused with the content of her poem, for it progressed in tandem with the questions and answers of our interview session. She thought it was a funny coincidence that the two could match up so closely.

This also doubled as Judy's surprise, while Rochelle added that she was surprised I was able to capture her feelings in totality, remarking, "I guess I didn't expect myself to be so transparent that you would get it, but I think you did." When I asked Rochelle what might be missing, she said nothing, but I felt strongly that I had missed writing about her new sense of peace. She shook her head and smiled. "The peace is new," she said, "That was never shared." In that moment I felt better too because Rochelle was correct. What she felt now as peace was the result of the new actions and choices she was making as an individual. We had never discussed this in our group.

Hearing Rochelle, April, and Judy speak so highly of poems I had written for and about them was a gratifying experience. I already felt new confidence as a teacher and as a mother, but this affirmation by my peers gave me confidence as a literacy researcher. I had collected data, analyzed it, and gotten their stories right. I hadn't had such a feeling of writing accomplishment since my early years as a television news reporter when I was learning that craft. I celebrated in my storytelling moment for a bit, but I quickly shifted focus to one of my remaining burning questions – What does all this confidence and shared feeling mean, and what can we do with it moving forward?

James (2010) found in her analysis of teachers' narratives that "teachers do not speak of the need to join efforts with others in order to meet their students' needs" (p. 531). Much of the discourse produced in her study reflected actions of teachers working in the isolation of single classrooms. I thought about this pervasive feeling of isolation and how the interview data of my own study echoed this feeling. Rochelle did not want to expose anything about her mothering experience that would lead others to believe she was not a good teacher. Judy lived in fear that her kindergartener would not measure up and thus paint her as an ineffective teacher, so she remained silent about her worries.

Our writing and shared discussion changed that. As Rochelle reflected in our interview conversation, the release of these anxieties long trapped in the isolation of her individual life was the key to her ability to imagine a different way of acting in the world. As Marquez (2011) similarly discussed the value of teacher-scholars writing about the intersections of work and home life, she wrote that it "lets us participate in this transformation" (p. 83). I believe the crafting and sharing of the persona poems with the teacher mothers in our group allowed me the choice and honor to not only engage in but

share in the transformational improvisations Rochelle, April, and Judy were taking up. However, that continued to leave a question on the table. What do we do with it now?

In my concluding chapter, I take up that very discussion and offer suggestions for other teacher mothers like us to break out of isolation and join together in groups to share, write, and talk about their lives as teachers and as mothers. I also invite school leaders, not as potential participants in these small communities, but as facilitators of these groups. I encourage administrators to see the value in making time for teachers to engage in this type of work and how it benefits the students attending public schools in our country. Finally, I extended my encouragement to other literacy scholars to take up this work and do more of it. As James (2010) wrote, "we must strive to understand teachers' efforts to care for themselves and others at the most personal level, [and] we must not forget to ask critical questions about societal and cultural norms that inform those efforts" (p. 533). I commit to continuing my study and offer suggestions for possible next steps to take in that effort.

Chapter 6:

Implications

What We Got from This Work

To examine the figured world of teaching and mothering is to recognize that teacher mothers strongly perceive cultural expectations that define parameters for living and doing within their social group. They do the things they believe they are supposed to do, and they rarely, if ever, take the time to question why, as they perceive that there is no extra time in the day to do so.

In fact, as our work began, all of the women shared experiences of acting in the world because they believed that was the expectation for them as mothers, teachers, wives, and daughters. Many times these actions resulted in increased stress and unhappy feelings, yet the women said they felt as if they were locked in, paralyzed, and powerless to make different decisions. The result then became a repeated cycle of dissatisfaction and frustration without hope for change.

In this concluding chapter, I attempt to unpack these changes in perception and behavior as they unfolded during our shared time together and then offer suggestions for what teacher mothers, school administrators, and literacy researchers may do to support them in the future. I begin that discussion by turning my attention to a description of what this new awareness made possible for us in terms of transaction within our figured world of education. Poetic inquiry and another poem entitled, “And Now” helps me to describe these new possibilities for action from a researcher’s perspective. I close with a call to

action for other teacher mothers to form and join writing and sharing groups. I also encourage school administrators to make space and time available to support teacher mothers in this effort. Finally, I urge literacy and education researchers to consider taking up this important and under-examined area of study in our country so that a body of work may serve to help sustain teacher mothers at work and home in the future.

What We Came to Understand about Our Figured World

How we got there, was seemingly through our dialogue. All of the teacher mothers referenced the supportive community we created through talking about our narratives. In this space, often referred to as a club or secret sisterhood of teacher mothers, we were able to share experiences and frustrations that we had long held inside as we operated in isolation. Rochelle recalled a sense of fear that exposing them would prohibit her from meeting the expectations she perceived so strongly. However, once those stories were "released into the atmosphere," as Rochelle referred to it, she didn't feel so "weird" anymore. She, like the other women in the group, realized that other teacher mothers were experiencing the same types of stresses and emotions she had kept bottled up for years. Sharing the stories and talking about them made her feel better.

This new and improved way of feeling turned out to be very important to the women in the group. As Schulte (2013) wrote, "What often matters more than the activity we're doing at a moment in time, [time researchers] have found, is how we *feel* about it" (p. 23). What this meant for the teacher mothers dialoguing in this new, safe space was an environment conducive to production of different feelings and emotions. This thus led to development of different stances from which to approach life choices in their figured

worlds. Feeling better about place in the world, the confidence then produced new and different transactions with it.

I argue it was in this dialogic space that we began to develop the courage to make these different decisions. Acting independently, but projecting out from the community created in the group, we then began transacting within our social worlds using improvisation as a tool to generate agency. As Holland (1998) wrote, "Agency lies in the improvisations that people create in response to particular situations, mediated by these senses and sensitivities" (p. 279). In other words, our new ways of feeling about place in the figured world of teaching and mothering permitted new options for transacting with our work and home worlds. And when those new transactions produced positive outcomes in the figured world, we then began to feel the freedom to choose to write a new story. As Rosenblatt (1978) wrote of readers transacting with texts, "Some scene, some brief dialogue, some episode may spark an insight into one's own or another's nature, or unleash a new way of understanding, a new sense of possibilities" (p. 160). For the teacher mothers, shared dialogue in the group seemed to spark new possibilities for transacting with the text of their lives.

Such confidence became possible through the writing, sharing, and talking we did within our community of teacher mothers. Certainly our care for each other was fostered through our respectful attention to each narrative and shared experience. However, I also argue that our shared dialogue enabled each woman to come to new understanding about her place in the world and her perception of how she was permitted to transact with it.

Michel Foucault (1975/1979) wrote of these types of transactions within figured worlds in terms of a grid we all inhabit along with power, which is not fixed but rather

flows along the grid and forms our power relations. Gaining a sense of agency to choose to act differently than before happened in the space of the teacher mother writing community, but I believe it was able to spark and then grow due to the specific work we did to expose this grid to the teacher mothers in the group. Before our work together, Rochelle, April, and Judy viewed agency or the power to act differently as something off limits or out of reach to them. By exposing and then deconstructing the unique characteristics that set teacher mothers apart from other working mothers in our country, this new awareness then enabled us to notice, pay attention to, and then begin to attack and break down some of the barriers that confined our experiences and made us uneasy keepers of that knowledge.

I conclude my discussion of our study with a description of how our transactions changed through deliberate improvisation, leading us all as individuals, to moments of freedom within our figured world of teaching and mothering. The effort, still under development, remains a slow moving process, but as Holland (1998) wrote, "conceiving oneself as an agent whose acts count in, and account for, the world cannot happen overnight" (p. 285). The important and exciting point is that the writing and shared dialogue made space for ideas of change to ignite, and once these were in place, we began acting in our figured world quite differently. Presentation and explication of the poem "And Now" attempts to represent the collective change members in our secret sisterhood of teacher mothers engaged in as we began to experiment and improvise based on our emerging understandings of what new actions were possible within the figured world of education.

How We're Transacting with the World Now

As Holland (1998) wrote, "forming an identity on intimate landscapes takes time, certainly months, often years" (p. 285). With so many cultural and institutional expectations with which to transact, it is no surprise that Rochelle, April, Judy, and I moved with tentative caution as we all began testing the fences that we perceived limiting our life and work options. While we may have been spurred to thinking about taking new action by the confidence gained through writing, sharing, and talking about singular moments of mothering and teaching, we also weren't certain things would work out if we did make different decisions and take different actions. In fact, we left our last sharing session with no set plans to try to do anything differently at all.

But try we did, taking with us in transaction, as Rosenblatt (1978) wrote "[our] relationship with, and continuing awareness of, the text" (p. 29). In the case of teacher mothers, the text refers to our individual readings of and in our figured world based on the confidence we developed and supported within our teacher mother community. What that in turn provided each of us was personal and somewhat different in nature, but at the core, we came away from the experience with confidence to decide and to act differently than before.

It was in this way, working on a system of trial and error that the teacher mothers in our group were able to experience wider choices and subsequent moments of freedom within their figured worlds, often for the first time, without feelings of guilt or shame. Judy referenced her relief in realizing that she was not the only teacher mother in the world to feel strongly about attending her own children's school events and prioritizing them over the needs of her students in the classroom. Understanding that the shame she

had internalized in isolation was actually a feeling shared by the other women in our group, it freed her from anxiety. "I would say it actually helped make me to feel less concerned about going to activities," she said, "I was like – *Okay. It's not a bad thing if I go*."

Similarly, Rochelle altered her former ways of acting and doing in her workplace in favor of something different. Whereas before, where she felt responsible for being in control of every aspect of her work and home life, she changed her stance and approach. Reflecting on the growing sense of peace and contentment this provided, she said, "Now I don't really feel like that. Now I think that – it'll work out – because it did!" For Rochelle, she didn't know that making different decisions and acting differently in her figured world would or could produce the sense of peace she now felt, but as we talked during her follow up interview, she clearly understood that her new actions had made the new feeling of peace possible. "There were just some things I didn't think were an option for me, and hearing someone else say that's an option for them, and they're okay with it, allowed me to at least try it. So I do think that's where I got it from," she recalled, "It's new, and I'm gonna hold on to it as much as I can."

While the teacher mothers in our small group are quick to acknowledge that writing and sharing stories did not make our unique problems and tensions disappear, they all agree that the process of writing, sharing, and talking together did provide an element of inner peace and confidence from which to make new and different choices in our lives. April recognized this unexamined assumption through her writing process. "I never thought to look at the story behind all those things that are happening in our lives day to day," she said, but once she did, the process opened up both her awareness and her

freedom to choose without guilt. “So I did think about it then because I guess the answer’s always been there,” she said.

By the end of the study, Judy had achieved what she was looking for as well – the ability to choose time spent with her family without regret or feelings of guilt. As we discussed a narrative she had written about a conference in which a parent lashed out at her for not doing enough, the unsettling understanding that we as teachers often invested in our students to a greater degree than our own children, revealed this tension she felt so strongly above all the others. In response to her writing, I said, “You recognize that you have all this time and effort in other people’s children;” however, it was in the processing of her resentment over the attack that Judy realized she had reached a point where she would not make this choice again. Her priority refocused to her family as she decided – *My children are important to me. When do I get to make the choice for them?* Support from social media groups and our own teacher mother group provided Judy the thinking space and courage to decide that the time for her to make a choice for her own children was now and on into the future.

For me, active participation with the women in my study enhanced not only my understanding and awareness of my place within the figured world of teaching and mothering, it provided me with a rich opportunity to appreciate through a researcher’s eyes how writing, talking and sharing stories in dialogue makes things possible for groups of people on the margins – the people in our society who often have the least opportunity to speak and make their own choices. I saw this most clearly as I worked to understand our experience through poetic inquiry. I was, as Rosenblatt (1978) wrote, “bring[ing] the poem into being by responding to the visual signs with the resources of

[my] own personality and experience but also focus[ing my] attention on the very work that [I was] shaping" (p. 44). To this end, I wrote the following poem, "And Now."

Composing A New Story to Live By

I wanted to describe not only the outcomes of transacting differently with the world to gain the peace Rochelle felt, the balance April achieved, the delicious freedom Judy created, the confidence I exercised in decisions I made to be brave and live fearlessly, but also pay respect to the generative space that enabled these opportunities to develop and flourish. After explicating the poem, I then conclude with implications for teacher mothers moving forward in dialogue and possibilities for future research.

"And Now"

I just kind of relax,
allow things to progress.
Understand and believe
that everything will work out.
Still want my kids to be happy.
Successful. Same set of goals…
just not stressing about them.

Then I felt like I had to be
in control. Of everything.
Like it was up to me to do –
All of it. Kept it inside until
I heard others. Unafraid
to expose their own bundles
of stress. Before I didn't do that.

And I'm thinking - *If she*
can be like that, I can too.
Make options. Try because
now I'm aware and paying
close attention to how time
divided me in lesser versions
of myself. Nobody ever
asked, but I did it anyway.

Now, I make it a point

to make time. Over and over.
Until it becomes habit. I'm okay
with things not getting done.
You change when you hear
things out loud. I know this now.
I am enough. From that certain
commonality of teachers, mothers –
women with stories to share.

As indicated in the title, "And Now," it is clear the speaker in the poem has undergone a change from a point in time "then" to now in the present day. Through the speaker's words, we understand as readers that while the individual has made a change and acts differently in the world, the speaker, as revealed in lines 6-7, "Same goals…/just not stressing about them," asserts that she didn't give up an important life goal or desire to do so. Additionally, with inclusion of words such as "relax," "believe," and "happy" within the first stanza, readers come away with the understanding that the new decision or action has produced positive feelings and contentment.

Juxtaposed with the language of the second and third stanzas, with word choices such as "control" in line 9 and "expose" and "stress" in lines 13 and 14 respectively, a reader may begin to perceive that the speaker's past contained feelings of unhappiness and even distress. On line 14, the speaker says, "Before I didn't do that," after recounting her experience of listening to people who were seemingly "unafraid" to share their stresses with others in the open. Additionally, as revealed in lines 15-16, "And I'm thinking – *If she/can be like that, I can too*," the speaker imagines taking on the stance of the storyteller and makes plans to act differently in the world, for previous decisions, as shown in lines 20-21, as time divided the speaker "in lesser versions/of myself" produced resentment.

The resolve to do things differently carries over into the fourth stanza of the poem as the speaker commits to practicing the routine of making time until it becomes habitual. Acknowledging on lines 27-28, "You change when you hear/things out loud," the speaker also reflects on her learning process and the catalyst for her decision to change. As the poem ends, the speaker pays respect to that generative space where she first heard other "women with stories to share."

As the poem indicates, it is important to come to new understanding about our lives and place or places in the world, but making meaning only takes us so far – we must do something with our learning – take some action – make some change if we want to experience life differently in the future. In this final section, I attempt to describe the types of action that came out of our writing and sharing community, where Rochelle, April, Judy, and I transacted differently with our home and work worlds and as a result, experienced different outcomes.

Change Was Possible Because We Changed Our Actions

In 2009, at a seminar on Holocaust education, I first heard the Hebrew proverb, "Change your place; change your fate." As I consider the newfound peace and contentment experienced by the teacher mothers in our group due to our new ways of transacting in the world, I am excited because I am experiencing these feelings as well. As a teacher researcher, I understand that my ability to see my circumstances differently has opened new choices and possibilities for action.

One of the common, and I believe very important, outcomes of possessing new confidence along with new choices is that the women in our group became emboldened to ask for different types of jobs or work placements that facilitated more time with their

families. They followed the words of the proverb, and as a result, experienced greater feelings of happiness, even freedom.

Positioned with confidence to ask for something different, Judy did and subsequently transitioned out of the kindergarten classroom, taking on the role of Title I and RTI Tier 2 Coordinator at her school. “I’ve been asking actually for a few years, so finally it came about,” she said, bringing with it a change in pace. “Trust me, there’s plenty of work to do. It’s just different,” she said. The new job permitted Judy to leave the classroom and the responsibility of a homeroom behind and allowed greater schedule flexibility. “I think it also allows me to go home and have more patience,” she said, “not having directly worked with children all day.” Not only did that remove the stress of being a kindergarten homeroom teacher with her own kindergartener attending classes in the same building, it provided schedule flexibility for her to attend her children’s school activities, as she didn’t have regular classroom duties to attend to anymore. “I can already tell this year is going to be a better year,” she said, “I already have needed to go with my son and take him to his Open House, and I didn’t have that feeling of anxiety or worry leaving school to do it.” The result has been less guilt and a new feeling of agency that Judy is enjoying getting used to. “Like today,” she said, “I didn’t come into work until 9:30, and I didn’t feel guilty at all.” She hesitates to call the feeling freedom, but Judy definitely feels she has choices in terms of making meaningful time for her family without diminishing her ability to work and provide for her family’s wellbeing. “I’m kind of enjoying this change of pace,” she said, “I try not to say that to too many people.”

Similarly, April took on a new role as Reading Coordinator at her school, leaving the traditional ELA classroom after eighteen years. While she continued to teach in a

classroom setting, her classes were composed of much smaller groups of students, and the change allowed for her to focus more time on her son and his continuing transition to middle school. Rochelle, instead of trying to keep up with her colleagues' work hours, elected to put limits on her own time at work and began dropping projects she decided did not serve her learning needs and goals. "I'm not taking on a lot of extra responsibility. I'm learning how to delegate work things," she said, "[The work is] still getting done." What she found in the process of letting go of extra work was that she had more time to enjoy her children at home. Indeed, in finding the courage to ask for a different place or position, the teacher mothers were able to realize the freedom of experiencing a different fate.

The fact that four very different women came to similar understandings and subsequently took the same types of new action as they later transacted with their work and home worlds on an individual basis – all as a result of participating in a writing and sharing community – strongly supports the notion that writing stories and dialoguing about them in a community of peers is powerful and beneficial. Indeed, the work Rochelle, April, Judy, and I did together was that at the very least. For some of us, the experience even resonated as a cathartic one, as the writing and sharing community experience prompted a release of long held tension and frustration. In sharing our stories and talking about them in a supportive group setting, we were able to learn to care for ourselves and each other and then see our figured world in new ways. In turn, new perspective allowed us let go of that hopeless feeling that things would never change.

As I complete this study, I can't help but look ahead and dream about where this work should go next. My experience sharing pieces of my mothering and teaching lives

with Rochelle, April, and Judy – learning from them as we talked together – leads me to believe that teacher mothers need this time and space just as we found we did. In the last section of my dissertation, I encourage teacher mothers to join in groups and engage in writing and sharing practices similar to ours. I then extend my call to action to public school administrators – from principals to system superintendents. It is not enough for teachers to find extra time on their own time to gather and talk. They need dedicated space and time to meet and share if the group work is to be most beneficial. Administrators can help facilitate such writing and sharing communities. Finally, if doing this work has taught me anything, it's that education and literacy researchers need to do more to examine and document, especially in the United States, this vast yet under studied group of working women that makes up such a large percentage of the educators in our public schools. I conclude with my ideas for how that might be accomplished.

Looking Ahead to the Future

As I consider the positive change I experienced as a result of not only changing my place to commit to my studies full-time but committing the time to study and think about what it means to create the life of a teacher mother, I am quick to argue for more work in this area, for I am not the only one to experience such a positive outcome as a result of my participation. Certainly this study of teacher mothers was beneficial to the four women taking part in writing, talking, and sharing stories of their lives with each other. Every time I asked one of the women in our group if she thought it would be valuable for other teacher mothers to take part in similar activities, she responded – Yes!

As active participants in this work, we know it is powerful as we sit and talk in our little group about the peace, restoration of balance, newfound freedom, and overall

confidence. We feel so much better and more hopeful about our daily lives – we can't help but want other women like us to experience it, too. However, we also know our group is small, tiny even, compared to the thousands of teacher mothers in Georgia and across the country who didn't get the opportunity to participate with us. What if it only worked for us? We are teachers, after all, so we question our results as we question the success of our lessons in the classroom. Was it all a fluke? We think about this possibility and wonder however briefly if we should keep our success a secret, for what if our new choices were discovered and taken away from us before we had the time to figure out how we wanted to use them?

So yes, this work must expand to include more women and perhaps larger groups of teacher mothers, especially in the United States, for the current body of literature in reference to teacher mother concerns is limited to experiences of women living in other countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom. It is helpful to know that teachers in the United Kingdom experience tension in their lives when negotiating work and home demands upon their time (Guendouzi, 2006), but their responses are tempered by work hours, conditions, and societal expectations that are different from expectations in the United States. As Bianchi (2011) wrote, "The family system is more turbulent in the United States than elsewhere" (p. 19). Future studies with teacher mothers working in U.S. public schools will enable literacy researchers to expose and define such differences, providing the means to understand how to better support the teacher mothers who instruct children, for success in encouraging these women cannot help but support the needs of student learners across our country. We must try this with others and see if it helps achieve that outcome.

In the concluding sections of this dissertation study, I offer suggestions for how such an expanded effort may be achieved. I begin with teacher mothers. How might they organize similar writing and sharing communities within their individual schools and in their districts at large? How might Rochelle, April, Judy, and I take our agency and turn it into action? Certainly we have the capability to invite other teacher mothers to write with us. If we did so, our numbers could grow exponentially as we invite our colleagues into writing and sharing practices they could then take and share as they formed their own writing communities.

I then turn to school leaders – administrators, instructional coaches, school board members, and superintendents. In a changing economy where the challenge of retaining committed teachers has become a financial issue and concern for local school districts nationwide, it makes sense to pay attention to how teachers – with teacher mothers forming a vast majority of this workforce – are *feeling* about the time they put into their classroom duties, for those who are less stressed will likely not burn out and remain committed to their employers for longer periods of time. Finally, I end with a charge for future researchers. What lessons may be learned from this developing topic of study, and what may we do and ask next?

What Teacher Mothers Can Do

I encourage teacher mothers, above all, to do what they can to make the figured world of teaching and mothering visible within the institution of education. My suggestions include but are not limited to the following:

- Join and participate in small writing and sharing communities.
- Invite other teacher mothers to join communities already in existence.

- Engage school leaders in discussion about the possibility and importance of creating time for teachers to meet and share stories of their lives.

As the women in our teacher mother group now recognize, there is much to be learned from sharing stories and talking about snapshot moments in daily life. It creates, as Foucault (1984/1988) wrote, communities of practice where participants learn that their experiences are not isolated and discrete. Women learn how to better care for their own needs as they have vocalized problems rather than keep them inside, and in their sharing of stories new ideas spark for how make problems better. As they write, share, and talk the women develop strategies to care for themselves first and then the efficacy to enact care of others in their small sisterhood of teacher mothers.

Such dialogue also makes possibility for action, for the participants now see things differently because they read their figured worlds quite differently. As Schulte (2014) wrote, "We create the culture by the stories we tell ourselves. And change gets a little easier when it's visible. When we see that somebody's out there doing things differently, we begin to think that maybe we can, too" (p. 130). The teacher mothers in our study certainly did, using available resources and improvisation to create moments of freedom, as Rosenblatt (1978) wrote, "crystalliz[ing] out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience" (p. 12). Indeed, we decided to write a new story, and we have begun that work in earnest.

To continue that good work, my first suggestion extends to the four of us. Rochelle, April, Judy, and I could easily continue our writing group and not let the conclusion of this dissertation study be the end of our writing and sharing experience. We could also invite other teacher mothers to join in our secret sisterhood and continue to

support each other as we read new challenges at home and in the workplace and transact with them in the figured world of education.

We could also take our new knowledge, branch off, and begin new writing communities with new groups of teacher mothers. Share what we learned together with others. If we all did this, working with even just four new teachers in each new group, our numbers of teacher mothers fortified by support and experimenting with agency would grow exponentially – from four to sixteen. This new generation of teacher mothers could then do the same. Such growth strikes me as a very exciting possibility.

I encourage other women who identify as teacher mothers to organize and join together to form communities of care. Even if they do not form writing communities following our group's model, having space to talk and share provides that reassurance, as Judy said, "Just having the time away to sit and talk. Have these conversations and laugh and joke and leave there [thinking,] "Yep. I'm sane. I'm good. I'm doing a good job." As our group found in our work together, that support is vital to encourage the confidence necessary to enact agency.

My hope is that teacher mothers will begin to join together and that change becomes possible through their work. I suspect that change will be slow in coming, but if they commit to writing and sharing together in supportive communities of care, it will happen. School administrators can help facilitate their efforts. As I think ahead to the future for teacher mothers in our society, my hope is school officials being to see their support as an investment aimed at retaining good teachers rather than a drain on time attending to planning and instruction.

What Administrators and School Systems Can Do

I encourage school leaders and building administrators to above all – facilitate time and space for teacher mothers to engage in discussion about their lives and teaching practices. They may help in the following ways:

- Set aside portions of professional learning time once dedicated to instructional learning to these small sharing communities.
- Restructure the format of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that may be in place at their schools to include dedicated time for teacher talk, shared writing, and reflection.
- Step back from these communities. Resist the temptation to micro manage these meeting spaces.
- Provide teachers autonomy in creating and participating in small sharing communities so that they feel as if the space is a safe place for free expression.

Building administrators, whether assistant or full principal, have the potential to become powerful agents of change in the figured world of education as they set the tone and agenda for professional behavior and learning in their buildings. Additionally, school leaders are vested with a great deal of power over teacher mothers' professional lives as they routinely evaluate teacher effectiveness, and this results in the perception, imagined and real, that they strongly influence teachers' instructional decisions and actions in their classrooms.

As I observed in the beginning of our study, the women in our group dutifully performed the role of the good student – never breaking protocol, endeavoring to take

thoroughly detailed notes. It seemed as if they feared getting things wrong, so they shied away from voicing opinions and risking failure before their peers. When I compare Rochelle, April, and Judy's behavior in our early work to their work world contexts, I can't help but draw a parallel to their professional relationships with their evaluating administrators. How many of the hundreds of decisions they make every day can be traced back to a subconscious effort to perform this role of the good teacher? Indeed, Rochelle, April, and Judy never know when they may be observed or evaluated, so they are always on guard, performing in the classroom in ways they know are "correct" according to their administrators' evaluative measures, for they want and need a good grade to be perceived as successful teachers in the figured world of education.

However, as they do this, they in fact surveil themselves, resulting in the panoptic type of relationship Foucault (1975/1979) described in *Discipline and Punish* where administrators take on the role of prison guards and teachers become like prisoners under their direct supervision. In such a relationship, the teachers, ever mindful of an unscheduled walk through, act in ways that in effect police their instructional decisions and keep themselves in line with administrative expectations for proficiency. Since they may be observed at any time, the teacher mothers likely will not try new lessons in class because they aren't confident they will work under evaluative criteria. In this manner, the teacher mothers also remain isolated from their peers. They don't share ideas or vent frustrations, and they become isolated from each other. Unfortunately, this ever present pressure to perform, along with building stress and frustration potentially lead to burn out where educators leave the profession and do not return.

By building time and space for teacher mothers to engage in discussion within writing communities, school administrators could alter workplace dynamics and change school culture for the better. Many schools already have that potential with their establishment of professional learning communities where time is set aside for teachers to come together within their grade levels and/or content disciplines to talk about student performance and achievement. All that would be required in these cases is the commitment to including time for teachers to talk or perhaps write about issues and instances connected to their teaching lives. Even just an hour once a month dedicated solely to teachers talking about what it means to live and work in the figured world of education could do much to lessen feelings of isolation and frustration.

School administrators possess great opportunity in leading the way in creating and facilitating these sharing spaces for teachers in their buildings. If professional learning communities are already in place, I strongly encourage school leaders to dedicate some time for teachers, most of whom are teacher mothers, to engage in discussion about their teaching and living practices, not just from a professional standpoint, but to include the personal aspects of it as well. I encourage administrators to make time for teachers to write, reflect, share, and discuss the issues of their lives with others who share their experiences. In this way, teachers may begin to feel less isolated, just as Rochelle, April, Judy, and I found we did.

If such sharing time or professional learning communities do not exist in schools, then I strongly argue for their creation. Certainly, they benefit the teachers who participate within them. Likely, the work that flows from these dialogic spaces will keep educators in the classroom for longer periods of time as well, and with committed and

more connected teachers in the classroom for longer periods of time, student achievement cannot help but benefit. I also encourage administrators, once this sharing and learning time is established, to take a step back from these communities. Resist the urge to sit in and observe or ask to participate. This will help teachers talk freely and help break the perception of surveillance within their work worlds. It also provides the opportunity for them to decide to take different actions. When they begin doing so, it is then up to literacy researchers to make the commitment to study how these teacher mothers are reading and transacting within their figured worlds.

Possibilities and Agency for Literacy Researchers

On the final day of the final class of the reading endorsement series, it is now 4 p.m., and fourteen of the fifteen teachers I teach in this class series have turned in their final projects and gone home. I look out into the mostly deserted media center to see Kiley staring at her computer screen, a panicked look on her face, shifting her feet and legs in rapid-fire alternation as if to jolt her into action. I imagine she wishes she could run away and forget about this project – an extra class on top of teaching duties and mothering responsibilities waiting at home.

I walk over and ask what I can do to help. She stares at me, blinks hard and says, "I don't know. I feel like I'm drowning." She then proceeds to tell me why – it's her first year teaching in this school and there is "sooo much to do" she never feels caught up, she has a 10-month-old baby at home and has just now been diagnosed with post-partum depression for it took her months to find time to go to the doctor. And then

she has this project, but she doesn't want to hold me here any longer,

because that's not fair to keep me waiting.

I think about that little word – fair – and I get angry, not because Kiley is going to take an extra hour of my time away from me, but because it's truly not fair for anyone to feel such stress and tension between work and home worlds. No one should have to feel as if they are drowning in a sea of expectations, duties, responsibilities, requirements – at work or at home. I tell Kiley that she isn't keeping me from anything, and that if staying an extra hour will help her finish the project, then we will do that. I feel as if it is the least I can do as a teacher to support her in our classroom space.

I return to my table while Kiley finishes writing, and while I sit and try to read, I get angrier and angrier – Why do so many women believe they have to live this way, frantically trying to snuff out little fires which never seem to stop cropping up? Why, oh why, doesn't somebody do something for them? Help them find ways to enjoy life and make choices rather than do simply because they think they have to?

I ponder these questions for several moments until something just clicks. Kiley is one of us – a teacher mother, and her story is not so different from the narratives we shared in the early stages of our work together. It is then I know what literacy researchers like me can do, and that is reach out and expand this body of work to a greater number of teacher mothers, especially women working in education in the United States.

When I think back to the beginning of our work together, I remember how stilted the conversation was, how brief the first narratives were, and how careful we were to adhere to the rules of the study, but I also remember how that began to change as we met, wrote, and talked together. More teacher mothers need that experience just as I can see

that Kiley needs it. As literacy researchers with the potential to give teacher mothers a voice others may hear, we must study these women and what happens when they engage in this powerful dialogic work because their concerns and stories have been largely ignored by the academy to date. I would see that oversight change in the future, as so many women who teach identify as teacher mothers as well.

When I think of Kiley panicking at her work table, struggling not to be a bother, I understand that like her, so many teacher mothers do not speak up or ask for help. It is the fellow teacher mother's opportunity to listen and share experience with her so that she does not suffer in isolation. School administrators may help by providing time and space for this talk to occur, and it is the literacy researcher's charge to document and share with a larger audience what happens when teacher mothers do begin to write, talk, and share their stories. In this manner, the number of stressed and even hopeless educators may decrease, replaced by a growing number of empowered women with the confidence to act differently not only for their own children, but the countless others they teach in their classrooms.

Finally, I would not see this type of work stop with teacher mothers. As a literacy researcher in the field of education, I take up the important responsibility to write the stories of not only teacher mothers but other groups of people whose voices have been stifled, deliberately or accidentally through perceived societal expectations. I am convinced they too would flourish in such dialogic communities. Just as the teacher mothers found confidence and strong sparks of courage, so too could other groups of people without sufficient voice, living their lives on the margins without knowledge or feeling entitled to make different choices than have been prescribed for them.

Timeline

Jan 2015	Submit Proposal to major professor
Jan 2015	Submit proposal to committee for review
Jan 2015	Defend dissertation proposal and begin IRB process as approved
Feb 2015	Invite participants to OLE
Feb/May 2015	Solidify participants and paperwork for OLE
August/Sept 2015	First OLE data session and narrative sharing; transcribe
Nov 2015	Second OLE data session and narrative sharing; transcribe
Feb 2016	Submit Chapter 1 to major professor; continue to write and revise Ch. 2-3; Begin data analysis – poem drafting and revision
Mar 2016	Third OLE Data Session and narrative sharing; transcribe; Interview protocol set. Ch. 2-3 to advisor.
Mar/June 2016	Revisions; Poem drafting; interviews; transcribe
October 2016	Poem revision; analysis; Draft of Ch. 4 to advisor
Nov/Dec 2016	Revising Ch. 4; continued work on poem drafts; Draft of Ch. 5 to advisor
Jan 2017	Revising Ch. 4-5
Early/mid Feb 2017	Writing Conference
March 2017	Dissertation defense
March/Apr 2017	Final checks
May 2017	Graduation

References

Behar, R. (2008). Between poetry and anthropology: Searching for languages of home. In Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor & Richard Siegesmund (Eds.), *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice*. (pp. 55-71). New York, NY: Routledge.

Bianchi, S. (2011). Changing families, changing workplaces. *The Future of Children*. Retrieved from http://www.futureofchildren.org

Bradbury, L. & Gunter, H. (2006). Dialogical identities: The experiences of women who are headteachers and mothers in English primary schools. *School Leadership & Management, 26*(5), 489-504.

Cahnmann, M. (2003). The craft, practice, and possibility of poetry in educational research. *Educational Researcher, 32* (3), 29-36.

Carlson, D., Grzywacz, J., Ferguson, M., Hunter, E., Clinch, C. & Arcury, T. (2011). Health and turnover of working mothers after childbirth via the work-family interface: An analysis across time. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*(5), 1045-1054.

Cofer, J. (1990). *Silent Dancing: A partial remembrance of a Puerto Rican childhood*. Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press.

Conle, C. (2001). The rationality of narrative inquiry in research and professional development. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 24*(1), 21-33.

Conle, C. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Research tool and medium for professional development. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 23*(1), 49-63.

Connelly, F. M. & Clandinin, D. J. (Eds.). (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Derricotte, T. (1997). *the black notebooks: an interior journey*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

De Vries, P. (2007). Using poetry as data representation to explore music opportunities parents provide for their children at home. *Music Education Research*, 9 (1), 17-34.

Evans, E. & Grant, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Mama, PhD: Women write about motherhood and academic life.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Fecho, B., Falter, M., & Hong, X. (Eds.). (2016). *Teaching outside the box but inside the standards: Making room for dialogue.* New York, NY: National Writing Project & Teachers College Press.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original published in 1975)

Foucault, M. (1988). *The care of the self: The history of sexuality. Volume 3.* (R. H, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage Books. (Original published in 1984)

Furman, R., Langer, C. & Taylor, D. B. (2010). Analyzing narratives through poetic forms and structures in gerontology: Applying new tools in qualitative research. *Journal of Poetry Therapy, 23*(2), 61-71.

Geertz, C. (1988). *Works and lives: The anthropologist as author*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.* New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.

Goldberg, N. (2005). *Writing down the bones: Freeing the writer within*. Boston, MA: Shamhbala Publications, Inc.

Griffith, A. & Smith, D. E. (2005). *Mothering for schooling*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

Grumet, M. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Guendouzi, J. (2006). 'The guilt thing': Balancing domestic and professional roles. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*(4). 901-909.

Henderson, L. (2014). Partial and incomplete voices: The political and three early childhood teachers' learning. *Educational Action Research, 22*(1), 21-38.

Holland, D., Lachiotte, W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hugo, R. (1992). *The triggering town: Lectures and essays on poetry and writing*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

James, J. H. (2010). Teachers as mothers in the elementary classroom: negotiating the needs of self and other. *Gender and Education*, 22 (5). 521-534.

Jones, S. (Ed.). (2014). *Writing and teaching to change the world: Connecting with our most vulnerable students*. New York, NY: National Writing Project & Teachers College Press.

Lahman, M., Rodriguez, K., Richard, V., Geist, M., Schendel, R., & Graglia, P. (2011). (Re)forming research poetry. *Qualitative Inquiry, 17*(9), 887-896.

Luttrell, W. (1997). *School-smart and mother-wise: Working-class women's identity and schooling*. New York, NY: Routledge.

MacLure, M. (2010). The offence of theory. *Journal of Education Policy, 25*(2), 275-283.

Marquez, L. (2011). Narrating our lives: Retelling mothering and professional work in composition studies. *Composition Studies, 39*(1), 73-85.

Maynard, K. & Cahnmann-Taylor, M. (2010). Anthropology at the edge of words: where poetry and ethnography meet. *Anthropology & Humanism 35*(1), 2-19.

Oliver, M. (1994). *White pines: Poems and prose poems*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc.

Oliver, M. (1994). *A poetry handbook: A prose guide to understanding and writing poetry*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc.

Ostriker, A. S. (2009). *The mother/child papers*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Pagano, J. (1990). *Exiles and communities: Teaching in the patriarchal wilderness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Popescu, A. & Gunter, H. (2011). Romanian women head teachers and the ethics of care. *School Leadership and Management, 31*(3), 261-279.

Raskin, P. (2006). Women, work, and family: Three studies of roles and identity among working mothers. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*(10), 1354-1381.

Ravitch, S. (2014). The transformative power of taking an inquiry stance on practice: Practitioner research as narrative and counter-narrative. *Perspectives on Urban Education, 11*(1), 5-10.

Richards, J. (2011). “Every word is true”: Stories of our experiences in a qualitative research course. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(3), 782-819.

Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing strategies: Reaching diverse audiences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Richardson, L. (1992). The consequences of poetic representation: Writing the other, rewriting the self. In Carolyn Ellis & Michael G. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*. (pp. 125-137). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (2nd ed.). (pp. 959-978). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader the text the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1995). *Literature as exploration*. New York, NY: The Modern Language Association of America.

Sandberg, S. (2013). *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead.* New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Schatz-Oppenheimer, O. & Halpert-Zamir, L. (2010). Episodes from the professional life stories of women teachers: A feminist reading. *Teacher Development 14*(3). 365-379.

Schulte, B. (2014). *Overwhelmed: Work, love, and play when no one has the time*. New York, NY: Sarah Crichton Books.

Sikes, P. (1997). *Parents who teach: Stories from home and from school*. London, England: Cassell.

Slotnick, R. & Janesick, V. (2011). Conversations on method: Deconstructing policy

through the researcher reflective journal. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(5), 1352-1360.

Smith, D. E. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Thomson, R. & Kehily, M. (2011). Troubling reflexivity: The identity flows of teachers becoming mothers. *Gender and Education 23*(3). 233-245.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice & poststructuralist theory*, (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Yen, H. (2013). Working mothers now top earners in record 40 percent of households with children. *Huffington Post: Parents*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/29/working-mothers-top-earners_n_3351495.html

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

April Swain

1. I think the big issue I took away from writing/sharing/talking with you was your concern about balance in life. Could you talk a bit about how this experience may have informed or changed your view in terms of:

- your personal time vs. your mom responsibilities with Corey and family
- your time for family vs. your professional role as caregiver to your students

2. How do you balance things? Any strategies you use?

3. You were the first to say in our sessions, "We're always the mother first." Do you still stand by that statement in the same way? Why or why not? What has influenced your thinking one way or another?

4. I feel like I knew you on a very professional surface level before we began, but every session I learned something more of you. There is a tender mother under the tough wit.

You said this whole thing has got you thinking about and rethinking things? Could you talk about that process and what you might have learned?

5. I realize this was a lot to ask and that your participation was probably viewed as a huge favor, especially in the beginning. I appreciate you so much. You added so much to our talk – you always seemed to come in with the insightful comment.

What would you say you've gotten out of doing this work together?

6. Is there a value in it for other teacher mothers? What is it?

7. Do you think you're more of a woman because you're a mother? Why?

8. Do you think you're more of a teacher because you're a mother? Why?

9. Do you think you're more of a mother because you're a teacher?

10. Is there anything you want to talk about that I haven't asked? If you do, please share.

Rochelle Mungin

Basic Questions:

Age:
Highest degree (s):
School/University:
Number of years married:
Number of years mothering:
Number of years teaching:
Number of years teaching & mothering together:

1. I think the thing I took away from your writing and our conversation was the metaphor you used – the journey. Could you talk a bit about how you came to use that analogy and what it means to you in terms of how our sharing/writing experience impacted your view on:

- the idea that we all have to struggle to learn
- your new role as a teacher support specialist – coach vs. time in the classroom
- how you see yourself as a mother figure

2. Where are you on your journey?

3. One of your comments from one of our early sessions was – We are the bosses, and sometimes our kids have to do what we say.

- Was that an idea that was already formed in your head or did it take our sharing experience to bring it out? If it was the writing, then what was it about that experience that helped you think that? Speak it?
- What has the writing/sharing done for your thinking about the process of making decisions, mistakes or choices as parents? Do you view them/ define them differently? How?
- You talked about how many times our decisions lead to guilty feelings – do you view that differently as a result of our work together? How?

4. You talked about questioning yourself – Is this right? Do you still do that in the same way? How is it different?

5. You talked about the importance of knowing your children. Do you see Ian and Chloe differently? How has your perspective changed?

6. You also talked about how you give the appearance of being cool and collected as a mother, but on the inside you were worried and anxious.

   -How did the sharing/writing impact your worries?
   -Do you worry you've messed up as a parent?

-Your belief that we put our best into our children, instill values in them?
-Your wish that your children have more than you did?

7. I think one of the most poignant things you shared was your reflection on how your college age goals have matched up or not with your present day practice.

   Now you are living your work life differently and making different choices for your family. How did that come about? Did our experience have anything to do with it? What and how?

8. I realize this was a lot to ask and that your participation was probably viewed as a huge favor, especially in the beginning. I appreciate you so much. You added so much to our talk – you always seemed to be the glue that held us together.

   What would you say you've gotten out of doing this work together?

9. Is there a value in it for other teacher mothers? What is it?

10. Do you think you're more of a woman because you're a mother? Why?

11. Do you think you're more of a teacher because you're a mother? Why?

12. Do you think you're more of a mother because you're a teacher?

13. Is there anything you want to talk about that I haven't asked? If you do, please share.

Judy Bolen

Basic Questions:

Age:
Highest degree (s):
School/University:
Number of years married:
Number of years mothering:
Number of years teaching:
Number of years teaching & mothering together:

1. I think the thing I picked up on from your writing and our conversation was the phrase "as a mom." Could you talk a bit about what it means to you to be a mom?

    -How did becoming a mom change your view on your work and place there?

2. Another idea that I attach to you is this uncomfortable tension we feel with having the knowledge of teaching and schooling, and that without the knowledge, we'd be happier parents or at least more relaxed.

    -How does having the knowledge of kindergarten teaching work on you?
    -If you could separate yourself, your roles, would you be happier – better?

3. At various times during our sharing sessions, you talked about how you really struggle with or even resent not being there to experience your children's school activities. Why do you feel so strongly about this?

- Was that an idea that was already formed in your head or did it take our sharing experience to bring it out? If it was the writing, then what was it about that experience that helped you think that? Speak it?
- You talked about how many times our decisions lead to guilty feelings – do you ever feel guilty about missing work or is it just the family events?
- You talked about questioning yourself – Is this right? What am I doing? Do you question your mothering abilities? Did our sharing alter how you view that?

4. You talked about how worries can fuel our anxieties. What ways does this happen for you? How does worry spark for you?

    -How did the sharing/writing impact your worries?
    -Do you worry you've messed up as a parent?

5. I realize this was a lot to ask and that your participation was probably viewed as a huge favor, especially in the beginning. I appreciate you so much. You added so much to our talk.

What would you say you've gotten out of doing this work together?

Is there a value in it for other teacher mothers? What is it?

Do you think you're more of a woman because you're a mother? Why?

Do you think you're more of a teacher because you're a mother? Why?
Do you think you're more of a mother because you're a teacher?

5. Is there anything you want to talk about that I haven't asked? If you do, please share.

Appendix B

Informed Consent - Participant

Study Consent Form – Transacting & Negotiating Societal & Institutional Expectations

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how teachers who are mothers of school age child manage their home, leisure and work time. I am asking you to take part because of your active participation in our online sharing forum. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how teacher mothers manage their professional and personal lives within the context of societal expectations. You must be a full-time teacher and a mother of school age children to take part in this study.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your home life, social and leisure activities, your health and well-being, and how you manage the demands of your teaching career. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview.

Risks and benefits:

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you.

Compensation: You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within six months of its taping.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may

skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Allisa Abraham. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Allisa Abraham at lisahall@uga.edu or at 404-747-4325. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 706-XXX-XXXX or access their website at http://www.irb.cornell.edu. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed)

_____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date_____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on [date].

Appendix C

Practice Poems

Lurking Beneath the Teacher Hat: A Data Poem in Two Voices

I can't just
shut it off.
The knowledge –

of being a teacher
in a mother's body?

Yes.
All
those things
to worry about.

All

Like what?

If I could just be
a mother today –
go and follow

see for yourself

how he's doing, make
sure he's receiving

his due
no less

no less
than I would give.

I

say these words
Again and again.

Again and again.
The knowledge
is

already there.
Without it?

Without it?
I'd be happy
as a lark.

Instead?

I wait with
Ex-pec-ta-tion.
For the Bomb to drop.

Tell me a little
more about that?

I can tell you've been
doing x,y,z – she always
starts with that.

Yes, pacify
I know where she is
because I have sat
in that chair.

to lessen
The blow
before she tells me
what I'm not doing.

Yes, it's the knowledge
that gets me.

many

hats.

The kind that makes me
look at other parents
and wonder –

What ya'll doing at home?

Sometimes I just wish
that she didn't know.
Spare me the – *I can tell.*
I know.
Yeah, I know too.
I'm a teacher, remember?

Yeah.
Then I can just
get
it
over
with.

To pacify?

She wants
to lessen

It gets you.
Makes you wish
you could hide your teacher
badge under one of your
many

many
hats
before going in
to conference?

You feel judged?
Evaluated?

Dispense with
the - set up?

get
it
over
with.

Appendix D

Study Poems

I'm the Mama, and They're Not Getting Another One

I struggle on the journey. Forks
in the road – never end, demand decision.
I commit. Step. But wonder – Is this right?
Is it enough? I may look cool, but I'm nervous,
anxious. I have to follow through even if I make
a mistake. I'm the mother. That makes me the boss.

Sometimes I look at what my children are doing
or not doing, and I take that on – like it's my fault.
I tell myself – I know my children, but sometimes
I put things in place that don't fit, and I know it.
I feel stuck, but stick to what I said I was going
to do. Sometimes that makes me the unhappy one.

In the classroom and life, there's always
conflict in starting something new. I try
keeping up to childless colleagues punching
the clock at ungodly hours. I get home when
bath time is over and ask - I left the classroom
for this? Did my son just call me *mean* mommy?

The work never used to get to me like this –
once content to fill the space with other people's
children, I'm now redirected, focused, eyes trained
on the clock, ready to bolt for the playground. I long
for this time, and I know I must hurry. We don't have
much daylight left. It's my job to make the most of it.

April Breaks Down the Balancing Act

We have to be mindful of consequences. I think –
Do I really want you sitting in silent lunch? That's
punishment for me. Trial and error with just about all
of it – in class and in life. You don't always want to pull
the "because-I'm-a-mom" card. Sometimes they have to gain
their own insight, even though you have the wisdom. I never
want anything to happen to them, but if nothing ever happens…

they don't have the experiences to make right decisions.
Take Corey. He's spoiled. I own that, but so carefree. I say,
"I think you're failing math." He says, "Yeah, probably."
Think *they* see me as this bad mom because my kid is failing?
Well, if my colleagues have words to say to me then – *whatever*.
If my child tells me he's doing the best he can, then I have to figure
out how to take that. So - teacher or not – I try to do that. I'm learning…

Even when he's talking about taking a road trip
to Pearl Harbor like it's a drive up to Stone Mountain.
He's thinks he's some kind of historical scientist on mission
to visit every single military battlefield in America! I'm like,
"Listen," but he's not hearing me, and then my husband says why
don't we go – he's asking – still talking to us. So next time you see me,
I'll be waving from the car as he has to know what these places look like…

I struggle to find time for me, just me, but then I
remember my cute little somebody. Cried the first day
of school. Yeah. We followed the bus that day. Not typical
for a "teacher's son" – he shakes off that distinction with a shrug.
That's my *mother* – not me. That's hard truth. So many responsibilities
are ours – strictly for mothers. Look at this picture of Corey and his dad.
You'll say they are brothers, but I promise he's all mine. My miracle mess.

Will You Do This? Will You Do That?

Since becoming a mother,
I have found myself saying
no, No, NO! I don't want to be
on your committee. At this point
in my life being a mother is
more important than teaching.

I struggle with it - know I need
to keep working, but I don't want
to miss a thing. Just why, oh why
do I feel this allegiance to my job?
Can't let it go sometimes.

As a teacher mom, I feel I must
say something. Do something.
Because I have knowledge other
mothers don't. People expect
my child will know it all. Be perfect.
It's that your mom's a teacher thing.

Well, I have worries now.
Driving my actions, fueling
my anxiety. Whispering in my ear –
Hey mom, What you gonna do now?
Everybody's watching.

If I wasn't a teacher, I
wouldn't know the difference.
Wouldn't even hear it.

We Get Conditioned for It

I am running, conditioned
for the yes. A rock star in service
of other people's children, but stumble
at home - failing to keep the plates midair.

    No set course for being
    a mother. I never know how
    I'm doing. Only that there are so
    many ways to feel small as a parent.

Sluggish foot falls, tired steps signal
vacation is over. Our highly scheduled
odyssey has always been my job. I'm good
at fixing everything – because I put in the work.

    Plus time to race far enough, fast
    enough. En route I pick up pockets
    of time. Stuff them away. Hold in reserve
    for the next dilemma needing help on course.

It's my job to finish strong,
feel fulfilled, make great time.
But no one's rooting for me at the end.
I want to be sure. Instead I hope I'm okay.

Lurking Beneath the Teacher Hat

Such a lovely child.
I can tell you've been working
at home. She always starts there.
To pacify. To lessen the blow
curling off her tongue - a bullwhip
in fluid motion. Compliments swirl
above us in elegant form – almost
hypnotic – a soothing spell cast
seconds before the crack and snap!

I sent some flash cards home. Fractions.
Decimals. *If you'd just practice thirty*
minutes a night, we'd close those deficits
in no time. She smiles as she reaches out
to gather her coils of leather, carefully
returning her weapon to proper rest –
Textbook "over and under" technique.
I imagine her securing it by her side.
Flexible. Reflective. Always ready
for a follow up conference.

And Now

I just kind of relax,
allow things to progress.
Understand and believe
that everything will work out.
Still want my kids to be happy.
Successful. Same set of goals…
just not stressing about them.

Then I felt like I had to be
in control. Of everything.
Like it was up to me to do –
All of it. Kept it inside until
I heard others. Unafraid
to expose their own bundles
of stress. Before I didn't do that.

And I'm thinking - *If she*
can be like that, I can too.
Make options. Try because
now I'm aware and paying
close attention to how time
divided me in lesser versions
of myself. Nobody ever
asked, but I did it anyway.

Now, I make it a point
to make time. Over and over.
Until it becomes habit. I'm okay
with things not getting done.
You change when you hear
things out loud. I know this now.
I am enough. From that certain
commonality of teachers, mothers –
women with stories to share.