

BECOMING “TEACHER”:
SELECTING AND ACQUIRING PRACTICES OF GOOD TEACHERS OVER LONG-TERM
TEACHING CAREERS

by

MARY LYNN HUIE

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth St.Pierre)

ABSTRACT

Seeking to privilege the knowledge of experienced teachers regarding teacher identity, this qualitative research study was designed to gather written and oral interview data regarding teachers' lives over lengthy careers. This study included two participant groups, each comprised of three teachers. Each teacher had taught on average 33 years in a large Southern, metropolitan public-school district at the time of the study. As part of an effort to privilege the knowledge of the participants in this study, the researcher experimented with data-collection methods designed to minimize her influence on data production, most clearly exhibited in group conversations in which participants asked one another questions with minimal influence from the researcher.

In this study a social constructionist interest in the ways teachers shape and are shaped by the contextual worlds of their classrooms combines with a postmodern awareness of the necessary fictions at play in all constructions of meaning (including those of the researcher). Foucault's analysis of the classical concept of care of the self influences data analysis.

By opening spaces within the project for participants to determine the questions asked, discourse used, and conversational paths explored, participants produced data that reflected their

thinking in their terms about their concerns. However, giving participants freedom in how they produced data meant that ultimately the data centered around the participants' interests rather than the researcher's. These participants discussed numerous teaching practices of good teachers, which I have grouped into three sets of virtuous practices: practices of orderliness, energy, and passion. Practices of orderliness and energy help teachers become competent as they master skills necessary to manage the classroom environment and their own resources. Practices of passion take teachers beyond competence toward a career that continues to inspire them and their students.

INDEX WORDS: Care of the self, Focus groups, Learning teaching practices, Teacher identity, Teacher retention, Social constructionism.

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Living over fifty miles from the University of Georgia campus and working fulltime as a teacher, my graduate school career often felt like it was taking place in isolation. However, the encouragement of the faculty in Athens and friends closer to home have made this long project possible and at times joyous. Their voices encouraged and inspired me to begin, to persevere, and ultimately to complete this project.

Jerry Eads came home one afternoon and suggested that I go back to school for a Ph.D. Once I had enrolled, he hired the housekeeper and bought the takeout dinners while I wrote papers, read articles, and transcribed interviews. He discussed every project I undertook, read every paper I wrote, and supported my focus on teacher knowledge.

Jolinda Collins has been my one-woman student cohort in Lilburn for the past three years. Her thoughtful discussions of Deleuze and Foucault were invaluable, as well as her thoughtful, patient readings of my dissertation drafts. When she was not my academic muse, she and Jerry teamed together as academic cheerleaders, telling me over and over that I should not quit.

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem and Meditations on Personal Context

Introduction

This project probably began in April 2006 as the result of a fit of pique. I guess I should not be surprised since so much of my best work begins in response to an irritant. Nature works that way, I suppose—the pearl in the oyster, necessity as the mother of invention, and such. I doubt that I will produce something so valuable, but I may at least succeed in working out the irritation well enough so that I might move on.

I was reading a book about teacher identity, got fed up with its assumptions and methodology, and threw it across the room. Context, as always, is important. I was also at the beach with a group of teachers I had spent spring break with for over ten years—same house, same beach, same rules (no men, no children), same week each year. Each of these teachers had either retired or was near retirement; all had spent at least thirty years teaching. They were reading more appropriate beach material—what they referred to as “trashy mysteries and romances”—so perhaps the irritation itself was exacerbated by a historical and situational context.

The teacher identity book that had led to my exasperated outburst was written by a researcher (Alsup, 2006) who herself had seven years of teaching experience. Her research had been conducted with preservice teachers, a population favored among many education researchers, probably because of its ready availability within schools of education. This author was investigating how preservice teachers acquire a “teacher identity” that is compatible with

their “personal identity.” At some point in my reading, I began to wonder why anyone thought that a teacher identity assumed during preservice teaching, or even one acquired during the first decade of teaching, might be stable. Indeed, why would any identity be stable, no matter how many years one had repeated its mannerisms and characteristics? And why would anyone think of “personal identity” and “teacher identity” as two distinct entities that somehow had to be compatible to function well (like programs on my computer). If they did exist, wouldn’t they overlap and interfere with one another? Then I began to wonder whether what the author had to say would be particularly useful in thinking about why teachers choose to stay in or leave the field. In Alsup’s study, “retention” was defined as whether the student teachers she studied took jobs as teachers after their experiences during student teaching. Given that most teachers leave the field before completing six years of teaching, it seemed clear to me that the larger problem in teacher education is not getting graduates to take jobs; the problem is getting them to keep jobs once they take them. My own commitment to teaching had come long after I had “survived” my first few years in the classroom. My next frustration with Alsup’s study arose from my doubts of whether a researcher with such limited personal experience as a teacher who was investigating a cohort of preservice teachers with even less teaching experience could understand or explain the complicated and shifting nature of teacher identity and the teaching life, especially as that life related to me in my third decade as a teacher. As often happens, once a reader begins to question the premises and assumptions of a writer, the reader’s ability to accept the writer’s vision erodes.

Of course, my frustration with Alsup’s book was hardly the beginning of my frustration with the portrayal of teachers in both academic and popular discourse. Sykes (1983) noted that “Our [American] social history reveals attitudes persistently equivocal toward teachers and a set of decidedly mixed messages about the status and value of this occupation,” an occupation seen

sometimes as “the object of suspicion and the butt of jokes” and at other times as “the source of awe and pride” (p. 98). I had never been comfortable with simplistic depictions of teachers as oppressed (Lortie, 2002/1975), dim/misguided (Troen & Boles, 2003), or saintly (Nieto, 2003; Palmer, 1998). Particularly troublesome because of their tendency to simultaneously exhilarate and depress me were the mythical teacher figures celebrated in the media, teachers whose work changed the lives of the most difficult-to-reach students through endless hours of devoted outreach (e.g., Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* [Edwards, Menendez, & Musca, 1989]; Rafe Esquith in *Teach Like Your Hair’s on Fire* [2007]; and Erin Gruwell in *Teach With Your Heart* [2008]). While I have lived a life as a teacher for more than two decades, I have managed to do so without living my life only for my students. Teaching has always been a difficult job, but representations of teachers as miraculous agents of change in the lives of students who have lived in the worst environments by sacrificing all personal interests beyond the classroom left me wondering whether I would ever read about a realistic role model, a model of excellence and effectiveness I could actually emulate and still have some space left for other interests in my life—not room for a separate *identity* so much as room within my identity for separate interests.

So I tossed the book across the room and looked around me.

One of my friends smiled and queried, “Tired of academics?” I said, yes, and then added, “You guys know more about teacher identity than the writer of that book.”

The irony was suddenly obvious: I was buried in academic research about teacher identity when I was surrounded with lived expertise. I knew then that I would have to tap that expertise. I just wasn’t sure how I could do so or whether I could present the voices of experienced teachers—teachers who had chosen the classroom over the academic world,

professionals who speak in a non-academic discourse—as a viable alternative to the work of the established academic community. But I knew I would have to try.

Looking around the living room of the beach house, I began to wonder how experienced teachers, teachers who had lived long careers in the classroom, would engage in a discourse about the concept of teacher identity. How would they describe their professional identities and how they had acquired those identities? How did they see their professional expertise, and how did they gain that expertise? How did they constitute themselves as teachers, how did they know how to constitute themselves, and how had they been constituted? And could I, within the confines of an academic research project, privilege their meaning-making while organizing, interpreting, and making meaning of their stories?

These initial questions derived from my frustrations with literature I read about teacher identity and sparked my desire to privilege the authority of experienced teachers, in particular, teachers often perceived as less than authoritative because they have chosen to stay in the classroom rather than take paths toward positions in school administration, district or state policy making, or teacher education that are perceived as more authoritative and prestigious (Grant & Murray, 1999; Lortie, 2002/1975). However, research questions can be unstable, particularly when the researcher seeks to privilege the perspective of the research participants. Once the project was underway, these questions were refined into formal research questions for my research proposal, which I report below. As I engaged in the data collection and analysis for this project, the research questions shifted once more as I tried to better understand the perspectives of the teachers who had agreed to tell me about their teaching lives. These final questions, that the data seemed to answer but that I did not know to ask, appear at the end of this chapter.

While my privileging of teacher experience was undertaken with an understanding that the authority of experience has its own limitations (Britzman, 1995; Britzman, 2000; Scott, 1992), I believed that adding the voices of experienced teachers to those most frequently heard in teacher research might help present another side to the lives of teachers found in academic literature. Hence, I began this project with an awareness of the dangers of romanticizing experience (Britzman, 1995; Britzman, 2000; Scott, 1992). My goal was not to “[give] the lie to hegemonic constructions of social worlds” (Scott, 1992, p. 24), such as those of the academic world, constructions built by researchers who speak with new teachers and preservice teachers about their experiences matriculating into the teaching profession, nor was it to “emphasize the idealized outcomes of learning” (Britzman, 2000, p. 28), so much as it was to see if there might be different constructions that could offer useful insights for the academics preparing teachers who might persevere and thrive in lengthy careers in the classroom.

Background of the Problem: Beginnings and Personal Contexts

As Scout Finch wryly observed in Harper Lee’s (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, beginnings are never simplistic or easy to pinpoint. Arguing with her brother about the beginnings of the events that led to the trial of Tom Robinson, Jem’s broken arm, and both children’s loss of innocence, Scout muses:

I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that. He said it began the summer Dill came to us

I said if he wanted to take a broad view of the thing, it really began with Andrew Jackson. If General Jackson hadn’t run the Creeks up the creek, Simon Finch would never have paddled up the Alabama, and where would we be if he hadn’t? (p. 9)

Scout's wisdom reminds me that finding the beginning of any project involves a process of backtracking that has no end. Additionally, Foucault (1977b/1971) warned that the search for origins can lead to "numberless beginnings" (p. 145), not a neat spot one can point to and from thence discern a progressive, linear movement to the present. Indeed, he observed that the effort to distinguish such a "linear development" (p. 139) is misguided, based on the romantic assumption that there is some pure, essential truth revealed at the origin, something that precedes "the external world of accident and succession" (p. 142), something related to eternal and "immobile forms" (p. 142), primordial truth, and original identity.

So I begin this naming of origins with skepticism of my romantic impulse to find such beginnings, but I feel obligated to describe some thematic strands that seem to be linked to my research interests—strands that do not so much explain the origins of my interests as clarify for the reader (and myself) the nature of my interest in teachers' lives as they develop over a long-term career. What I will try to represent is a set of meandering and overlapping tracks, each progressing within some aspect of my own multilayered subjectivity, never truly distinct or independent, but representing distinct and non-distinct angles of my shifting perspectives on life. With an understanding that self-analysis is always hopelessly mired in myopia and the historian's need to revise history so that history has some meaning for the present understanding of the world, I will try to examine some threads that I think have shaped my thinking and dictated the direction of my research paths, all the while mindful of Mahon's (1992) warning that "no thing is to be found at the origin" (p. 82). While I may not be able to offer a distinct origin for my perspective, I can perhaps offer a description of the position from which my "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) derives in this effort at "recognizing [my] own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings" (Haraway, 1988, p. 579).

Personal context as a skeptic. Before I ever tossed an academic text across the room, I was already skeptical of authority. My tendency to question and at times unwisely reject authority was nothing new. I have always had trouble with authority. Perhaps this is the result of being a favored fourth child who refused to be dominated by siblings whose “authority” was based only on the timing of a random sperm meeting a random egg. From an early age, I guess I got away with more exhibitions of a “healthy disrespect for authority” (as my ex-husband used to affectionately refer to what he saw as my defining characteristic) than most of my friends; indeed, I think my refusal to submit to my brothers (and other authorities) pleased my parents. But this refusal to privilege authority has caused my life to be difficult at times.

As a student, I am afraid I all too often allowed this attitude to affect my reading of scholarly work. I was never convinced that publication meant findings were worthwhile, and my experience in academia had done little to modify that skepticism. Professionally, years of administrative attempts to subject teachers to the latest big idea for solving the ills of education, delivered with great pomp from someone with too many degrees and not enough time in schools or a classroom, exacerbated my general disrespect for authority. Like many of my teaching peers, I saw the latest revolution in teaching as idea in, idea out—hopefully, “out” before it could do too much damage.

So it comes as no surprise that I had problems with the authority of the researcher when I read as a student while practicing as a teacher. But those problems took an interesting twist when I had to move on in my academic career to play the authoritative role of the researcher in a project. As the active and directed seeker of knowledge, as the collector of data, as interpreter of the data, and as the presenter of useful/important/significant findings, I found myself particularly unsettled. Essentially, I questioned myself as an authority who was qualified in any meaningful

way to execute any of the endeavors necessary to complete a knowledge project. Taking on that role seemed almost a form of treachery—or at the very least a type of hypocrisy. If I questioned authority, how could I become comfortable wearing the mantle of authority? How could I suspend my disbelief long enough to present an authoritative argument?

Personal context as a teacher. I am teaching in a world smitten with “educational accountability,” an educational environment that I find to be increasingly incompatible with my personal sense of what education should do and what an educator should be. I will continue to teach in this world for at least one more year, when I am eligible to retire, which means that either I will have to continue to adapt my ways to this world or continue to try to adapt that world to my ways.

I never planned to make teaching a career; in fact, I picked up a teaching certificate after I had graduated from college as a form of job insurance since I could not think of much else to do with my degree in English literature. Even with a certificate in hand, another six years passed before I took a full-time teaching job, which offered a daily and yearly working schedule compatible with my school-age son’s life. After a decade of teaching and at a particularly difficult point in my personal life, I left teaching and took a job in research and program evaluation. It was one of the most satisfying working experiences I have ever had, but it also required that I spend a great deal of time in schools across the same state in which I have lived and had taught. Traveling from school to school interviewing administrators, teachers, and students, I was surprised to discover that walking into those buildings was like returning to a home I had not known I missed. At some point in that decade of teaching, I had unwittingly become a teacher, evolving from a person who plays the role of teacher to a person who feels she truly belongs in a classroom.

So I returned to teaching the next year, but I certainly did not feel that I had “finished” becoming a teacher. Entering a new classroom in a new school system, I wondered what sort of teacher I *could* be in a district more conservative than the one in which I had first taught and worried that I might be too outspoken and abrasive for my new colleagues. I also wondered what would work with my students. I had previously taught in a performing arts school where my impulsiveness and creativity were tolerated in the department and successful in the classroom. I was not so sure my whimsies and teaching persona would work so well with “normal” students.

Over the next ten years of teaching, however, I became aware that my “teaching identity” was not fixed; it shifted each year—perhaps each day—in response to myriad fluid variables. Now, after two decades as a teacher, new teachers no longer see me as a co-conspirator but as a source for practical advice in classroom management and an authority on content. And the classroom identity that worked so well or so poorly in any one teaching year will likely not serve me the same way the next year because any teaching identity that I assume is contingent on numerous unpredictable and shifting social contexts. Each year presents new parents and students for whom I rework my presence as teacher in the classroom; some years present new administrations for whom I must reconsider or re-present my work; and, of course, each year presents new challenges in my life outside of school that affect the person I become in the classroom. As I return to my classroom each school year, I not only return to new students but also to a new version of me.

I have now lived a large portion of the past twenty-four years in a classroom, and in this third decade of my life as a teacher, I am still constructing, co-constructing, and reconstructing my self both personally and professionally, trying to maintain some awareness of the importance of the decisions I make. What my students learn and how they interact with the knowledges I

present in the classroom are to a great extent dependent on the shifting ways I conduct and present myself in the classroom and how I find myself relating to the content I am teaching. How I live with myself and understand myself both personally and professionally is also dependent on these variables. A significant difference in my awareness of these identity processes at this point in my career is my acceptance of them. As a younger teacher, I believed that I could keep personal and professional identities separate, refusing to compromise my own free-spirited life for the social conventions of my job. But now I realize that what I liked to think of as distinct lived identities could not help but overlap and produce each other. I am no longer merely a person who teaches for a living; I am a teacher. And I generally like what teaching has helped me to become by forcing me to always consider the impact of my positionality and its effects on others. I sincerely believe that teaching has made me a better person than I might otherwise have become had I pursued a career in a field that fed my more competitive and selfish impulses. In acquiring the practices I have needed to accomplish what I want in the classroom, I believe I have also become more patient, more tolerant, and more generous than I might have otherwise become.

Personal context as a researcher. As a graduate student immersed in a full-time teaching career, I have worked between the worlds of academe and practice, finding value in the perspectives of each to better understand the other. I do not assume that the truth of experienced teachers is “the most authentic kind of truth” (Williams, 1983, p. 128), but it is a truth that is important to consider when thinking about teacher identity and retention. Teachers who have had lengthy careers in the classroom (twenty-five years or more) do not necessarily have the only relevant insights into what it takes to persevere in the classroom. However, while what these experienced teachers offer is not *the* Truth so much as *their* truths, theirs are truths that I see as

under-represented in the literature about teacher identity and teacher retention. I began this project as an extension of my personal interest in hearing what teachers have to say about their work and their lives as teachers.

My commitment to the knowledge of teachers has been demonstrated and stimulated by my ongoing relationship with the National Writing Project, a professional collaborative of educators offering workshops, summer institutes, and professional development opportunities to teachers using a “radical” model: “teachers teaching teachers” (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). This model was based on the idea that what teachers most need and value is the knowledge and advice of other classroom teachers, teachers who have found ways to inspire their students and promote student learning and who have also been able to thrive personally in a career that can be demeaning, demoralizing, and exhausting (Grant & Murray, 1999; Labaree, 2004; Lortie, 2002/1975; Nieto, 2005; Palmer, 1998). The theories of the university world have given me useful ways to think about what these teachers have come to understand, but their voices—the voices of experienced, authoritative classroom teachers—have always been the voices I wanted to guide and inform my research.

My personal concerns about teacher identity are explained by my work in classrooms for over two decades. My musings about teacher identity, however, differ from observations I have seen in myriad articles and books that attempt to pinpoint the ways new teachers find how to comfortably inhabit a persona that will allow and enable them to function within increasingly constrictive classroom environments (Alsup, 2006; Grant & Murray, 1999; Lortie, 2002/1975; Nieto, 2005; Palmer, 1998). I have found myself haunted by the question posed by Waller (1961) in his 1932 sociological study of teachers: What does teaching do to teachers? As I move toward

my own retirement, I find myself wondering what this day-to-day activity has done to me and how much of my identity-making as a person who teaches has been of my choosing.

Combining the Contexts: Getting Lost in the Fold as a Skeptical Teacher-Researcher

Reading the scholarly works assigned in my graduate study, I began to wonder about how teachers construct and revise themselves and their practice while engaged in work that allows little time or energy for active participation in such metacognitive work. In particular, I wanted to understand how they work through professional crises during their careers, what resources they have found to help them in that work, and how those crises have informed their sense of self. I wanted to ask them whether they continued to engage in what Alsup (2006) described as a “transformative discourse . . . in which there is evidence of integration and negotiation of personal and professional selves” (pp. xii, xiv) throughout their careers so that they felt that they were continuing to grow in a position that is assumed by outsiders to be static after the first years of induction into the profession. Most of all, I wondered about the relevance of a conversation about personal identity after a person has lived and been defined by a professional identity for thirty years.

I have been in a graduate program since 2003, and to some extent, that endeavor has also been affected by my own personal and professional identity. I am a teacher-scholar, investigating and applying theory in the classrooms of both a university and a high school. But somehow, I usually feel that living such a hyphenated identity means that I am not both but neither. I cannot comfortably inhabit either identity without critiquing its assumptions and questioning its actions. For me, the space in the middle is sadly *not* an exciting space where “things pick up speed” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980, p. 25), but more often a field of stasis where I am stymied by the uncertainty deriving from too many inadequate or conflicting possibilities. My relationship to

this space is more akin to John Updike's (1994/1966) description in an interview with Howard. There he described the middle as the place where "extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly lies" (p. 11).

Within several research projects in which I interviewed teaching colleagues and friends, I also inhabited a space somewhere between my participants and my role as researcher. Most have thirty years of teaching experience; I have twenty-four. Most are retired and speak from the other side of their work in the profession. I am still actively engaged in teaching and in living that identity. They admire my returning to school so late in my life but openly admit that they would never do such a thing. I also mentor new teachers in my school, finding myself on the opposite end of the space between the experienced and inexperienced. These hyphenated spaces among seemingly distinct worlds have been at times confusing, liberating, and alienating.

Paradoxically, the space of the hyphen is at once in the middle and outside of—joining two distinct identities or masses yet always remaining on the periphery or outside of each. The hyphenated space is both joined to at least two fields and separated from them, a space of tension and discontinuity that bridges spaces seeking at once to connect and disconnect by marking where the boundaries lie. Like the turbulent area on the edges of a storm system, this is dangerous and unpredictable terrain—an area experienced pilots fear and avoid because winds are unpredictable and vision is limited.

As the hyphen is drawn, the fields on each side are decentered, and each is implicated in the larger newly connected entity and changed by the decentering it must endure to make the connection. But the newly decentered mass does not necessarily become a calm space. Each of the two sides may continue to seek to return to its old, distinct center by rejecting the influence of the other side. Plato's (trans. 1968/360 B.C.E.) description of people blinded when they move

from the shadows of the cave into light and then returning to the comfortable shadows of the known cave comes to mind. My first impulse when I saw my teaching practice against the backdrop of theory was to reject the theory and retreat to the comfort of cherished habits of practice. Similarly, when reading theory against the backdrop of my practice, my frequent response was to ignore the ways practice might seem at odds with the theory because I needed to finish reading and comprehend some article before class.

Connecting the space takes extra time and effort that has not always been available or attractive to me; however, that may be the most important work I engaged in as a researcher. I do not have Plato's confidence that one truth is true, that one space has validity the other lacks, or that I should leave behind the shadows for a newly discovered light. In fact, I would argue that neither space has a claim to the light. Each is just a position from which to view the world, and each has its own shadowed areas. Connecting these spaces was complicated by my suspicions about the veracity of each space, but it may be that the space between is the only space from which I could find a position to think about the light and darkness of each.

This new center is always unstable because of its distance from the more weighted centers of the connected fields, yet it provides a tenuous and temporary vantage point for critiquing, but not necessarily synthesizing, each of the other fields. Ultimately, it provides a space for critique itself. Perhaps these fields are best joined at their points of greatest polarity—the place where tension is greatest, where particles are most charged, and where sparks can illuminate both sides in unexpected ways. These fields are never the same, they do not merge, but they are more clearly observed.

The space in the middle is the space of any research project that attempts to join the researcher and the project's participants in an induced camaraderie. As Heisenberg (1949/1930)

noted, there is no way to make an observation without affecting that which is observed. The arena of the participants is decentered by and toward the arena of the researcher and academia by the questions they are asked to consider, by the discussion groups in which they meet, by the conditions created by the research protocols, and by the self awareness induced by participating in the project. The researcher is also decentered by the participants, moving toward the center of their experience even as that center moves toward her.

Perhaps my confusion came instead from the overlapping edges in which I found myself, not so much in separate space outside the two centers, but in places where the two spaces merged. I was often confused about where I belonged in this project. Was I the researcher or the researched, subject or object? Had I taken the stance of the “objective” observer who refused to engage in reflective analysis, I might have produced an imagined clarity and completed the project sooner. However, believing that I could keep myself separate from the research project—working only as a conductor and collector—was impossible and could afford no more than a pretense I would not enact despite what Thomas Hardy described as the “ache of modernism” (2005/1891, p.140) in his characters, in my case a suspicion that postmodern beliefs led me toward more and more discomfort complicated by a conviction that I could not return to a safe world of false assumptions. As a researcher, I acknowledged that I was implicated in every question I asked, every answer I heard, and every analysis I performed on the data my participants co-produced with me.

Pilots refer to the turbulent area at the edge of large storm system as “scud,” a dangerous space of unpredictable winds skirting the more organized storm center, producing little in the way of productive rain. Without direction from the outside, experienced pilots know they can easily become lost in the haze. Inexperienced pilots who direct their small aircraft into scud all

too often crash. At times, I wondered whether or not I was on a similarly disastrous course, that perhaps I should have taken a safer course with clearer objectives. Lather (2007) recommended “getting lost” as a research methodology, and I spent much of my time following her advice, but I often found the spaces in which I wandered to be fraught with tension as I considered too many perspectives and felt that I could adopt none with a sense of conviction or finality. A dangerous space indeed if my goal was to find some sort of productive end for the project.

But then, I was reminded by Foucault (1984/1983) that “everything is dangerous” (p. 343) and by hooks (1990) that “one is always at risk,” especially when trying to carve out a new, fairer space of “radical openness” (p. 129). If I did not risk the danger of wandering lost in the data without a sure methodology, fixed goals and research questions, and a firm foundation of truth, then I risked other dangers that I knew would make it even more difficult for me to proceed—the danger of misrepresentation and colonization.

With what Said (1989) called “the formidable difficulties of empire” (p. 225) came the end of confidence and a series of postmodern crises and dangers, in particular the crisis of representation (Clifford, 1986; Lather, 1991; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) and the danger of colonization (Collins, 2000; Smith, 1999; Villenas, 2000). What Visweswaran (1994) described as the “problem of knowledge and responsibility” for researchers—“How does one act knowing what one does?” (p. 80)—echoed my worries about my role as researcher in a project that sought to privilege the authority of those whom I subjected as soon as I began to record their conversations and analyze their words.

This danger of colonization, with the research project becoming a model of the colonization process as described by Smith (1999), vexed me as I began and continued to vex me throughout the process. As a colonizing researcher, I could easily fall victim to the assumption

that I was better able to solicit information about and to interpret my participants' lives than they were. In taking on the traditional stance of researcher, I could easily fall into the trap of assuming that I had "an inherent right to knowledge and truth" (Smith, 1999, p. 173), an assumption that would make the very "knowledge and truth" that I constructed from other people's lives become little more than a set of "distorted notions" (p. 170) altered by the traditional discourse and research methods within which those data were collected, discussed, and analyzed. There was also the danger described by Collins (2000) of the well-meaning, left-leaning academic (a description uncomfortably close to my own positionality) whose research subjects (whom she champions) "come to voice" (p. 48) and speak for themselves (as she believed she wanted them to do). What does this researcher do when what her participants say does not fit within the existing structures and theories she is prepared to use (or is comfortable using) to make sense of her "data"? Finally, there was the danger of my being colonized by academia as my interpretations and methods were shaped by prevailing theories and methods so that my work was more palatable to the academic world in which my work must ultimately be accepted.

These dangers stayed in my consciousness as I took on and proceeded with this project, worrying me and at times leading me to stop the research and/or analysis process when I felt I could not find a way to move forward honestly or that I was forcing the data to conform to my need to finish something. Eventually, the danger that prevailed, the danger that I tried to keep in sight at all times, was my worry that the safe paths that occasionally beckoned would only offer a way to ignore my concerns about research rather than seek a temporary remedy to those concerns. Rather than finding "The postmodernist context . . . a propitious one" as Richardson declared (2000, p. 936), I have too often found the context to be a swirling fog of confusion and doubt.

I wandered lost in the data I collected, not only in trying to understand what the data told me but also in finding a position from which to examine the data. In an effort to reduce my authority in the project and privilege the authority of the experienced teachers who were my research participants, I invited my participants to determine the direction of the conversations they had. The resulting data left me unsure of how to proceed. Certainly, this has been a space of “lusty, rigorous . . . confusion,” as recommended by St. Pierre & Pillow (2000, p. 1), but I often had doubts whether my confusion was “enabling” (p. 1). I was unsure where I should stand as I sought a theoretical perspective that offered a way to think about the data without shaping, controlling, or excluding too much of what my participants told me. I also struggled with finding where I should stand as an authority in the project: I turned to my participants because of their authority, and I tried to privilege that authority as much as possible while fulfilling the requirements of the research project. As a result, I wondered too often whether I was only wandering in turbulence that offered little of value and significant opportunities for disaster.

In the end, I organized the reporting of my study using conventional categories that I hoped would yield a structure within which I could explain the rather unconventional methods I used for gathering and understanding data and the resulting confusion I experienced in working with the data. As Collins (2000) noted, researchers working in “oppositional discourses” must rely on “the constructs, paradigms, and epistemologies” of traditional theories “in order to be both comprehensible and legitimated” (p. 41).

The traditional chapters of this dissertation (Introduction, Review of the Literature, Research Design and Methods, Findings, Implications) tell the story of a social constructionist study that used a combination of written narrative and oral interviews with six high-school teachers, each with a minimum of twenty-five years of classroom experience in public schools,

with the initial goal of understanding how they constructed, adapted, and/or reconstructed professional identities throughout their lengthy teaching careers. The original formal research questions for the study were as follows:

1. How do experienced teachers understand the concept of teacher identity?
2. How do teachers describe their professional identities and the development of their professional identities?
3. What experiences and relationships affect a teacher's identity?
4. To what extent can the researcher move the center of authority toward the participants in a study by relinquishing control of the interview process?

With my participants, I explored the teaching lives of experienced teachers and their understanding of those lives while seeking to adapt the research methods so that their experiences were not shaped by my research needs; as a result, the first casualties of the project were my formal research questions, which were to some extent rejected by the participants as they took the knowledge quest and meaning-making of the project in their own directions. As I explain in Chapter 4, my participants came to the research project with their own questions and concerns about their careers and lives as teachers. Since I sought to give them as much freedom as I could, their questions and interests overtook mine as they rejected or dismissed the concept of teacher identity and elected to think about their careers using a different set of research questions, asking themselves and one another about the following topics:

1. What is a good teacher? How does one become a good teacher? How does one know who to become?
2. What resources, constraints, and freedoms for becoming a teacher are available to teachers in the public schools where they taught?

3. What makes teaching a good life?

I continued to think about my initial questions, but I found myself pursuing new ideas as my participants revealed new ways for me to think about how teachers stay in the classroom for lengthy careers and find satisfaction with their teaching lives. As I report in Chapter 3, I relinquished as much control of the data collection process and the terms of the discourse as I could while keeping the conversations from becoming tours of the miscellaneous. However, I knew that ultimately I would have to take on the “burden of authorship” (Geertz, 1988, p. 138) in this project by taking control of the processes of meaning-making. At some point, I had to “answer for” (Geertz, p. 138) that which is “made, and made to persuade” (Geertz, p. 138) as a product of this project, which, after all, I initiated ultimately completed. The final research question—my personal challenge as a reluctant researcher—was how far I could venture toward the “chaotic void” (Palmer, 1998, p. 74) before taking charge of the meaning.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Teachers construct/perform identities and lives within highly structured worlds that present familiar, contradictory, and pre-scripted models for what teachers look like, how they act, and what they do. Additionally, how they talk about those identities and lives can be shaped by those same pre-scripted models already available in their cultures as well as by common narrative models that we find appropriate for talking about our lives. Similarly, how the researcher hears, sees, and understands what the teachers say about their lives can be shaped by a desire to make meaning of their stories, often within received models for teacher identity and teacher lives.

This chapter presents a discussion of theories that helped me think about how we talk about our lives and about teachers' lives, the problem of meaning-making for both the researcher and the research participant, and identity construction within the world of education.

Macro-Theories

Social constructionism. One macro-theory that framed this project is social constructionism, a perspective marked by a curiosity about how knowledge is socially constructed and how individuals make meaning of their lives within their communities. As Gergen (2004) remarked in an interview, “constructionism is first an orientation toward knowledge itself” (Mattes & Schraube, para. 15), an orientation that “contribute[s] to the background assumptions for inquiry; one doesn’t study constructionism or defend it; it provides the grounds for one’s research” (para. 5). Burr (1995) also noted that social constructionists are

identified not so much by certain features of their work as by “key assumptions” (p. 2) that form the foundation for a wide-range of research approaches. Citing Gergen (1985), she summarized that social constructionists share a stance that is critical “towards taken-for-granted knowledge,” a stance that is anti-essentialist and “ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” (pp. 3, 5).

Burr (1995) asserted that for social constructionists, “The ways in which we commonly understand the world . . . are historically and culturally specific”: all knowledge is “culturally and historically relative” and “sustained by social processes” (pp. 3-5). Berger and Luckmann (1967) concluded that the task for the social constructionist researcher is to determine the processes by which this knowledge has been “developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations” so that it becomes a “taken-for-granted ‘reality’ congeal[ed] for the man in the street” (p. 3). In other words, the researcher’s concern should be “*the analysis of the social construction of reality*” (p. 3).

What Gergen (1985) and Burr (1995) referred to as “taken-for-granted knowledge” was described by Berger and Luckmann (1967) as the “world of everyday life” that is “taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained by these” (pp. 19-20). Guba and Lincoln (1989) took this stance a step further, from being skeptical of the knowledge and world of the communities the researcher examines to being skeptical of the evaluative outcomes of the research itself. For Guba and Lincoln, these evaluative outcomes are no more “the way things really are” (p. 8) than any of our other social constructions of knowledge. As the social constructionist researcher examines how a community shapes and is shaped by the values of its physical, social, and cultural contexts, that researcher must also

consider how her research is shaped by similar contexts. In fact, Geertz (1973) observed that the findings of the social constructionist researcher represent just another way of understanding the topic under investigation: “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to . . . we are already explicating, and worse, explicating explications” (p. 9).

Crotty (1998) traced the basic assumptions of constructionism to the concept of intentionality as it is understood in phenomenology, a philosophical movement founded by Husserl in the 1930s. Crotty explained that the subject and the world are never separate because “consciousness is always consciousness *of something*” (pp. 44-45). Intentionality suggests a “radical interdependence of subject and the world” (p. 45). Humans construct meaning in *collaboration* with objects, not separate from the objects. Researchers with a social constructionist orientation pay attention to how the subject’s way of seeing the object—his *intending toward* that object—is determined by language and environment (or in Burr’s [1995] terms, the ways they are historically and culturally specific), thereby determining how the object is perceived and understood.

Hence, there is no single truth; there are instead varied meanings ascribed to the world as we perceive it. Meaning is a joint venture, co-produced by subject and object, but each subject interprets the object within constructs she has already learned. In particular, the constructs of language have significant impact on how we interpret and construct meaning. For example, if I am told that a random collection of words or names makes up a poem, I will examine the words and ascribe meaning to the words using what I know about making meaning of poems (e.g., see Fish, 1990). More than likely, other possibilities for the construction of meaning of the data set

will be invisible to me, and I will force the random words into a meaning that I construct within rules I know but do not necessarily know I know.

The social constructionist orientation that Burr (1995) and Gergen (in Mattes & Schraube, 2004) described positioned me to wonder about identity formation within education communities, about how we construct and are constructed by our worlds, and about how we make meaning of ourselves within those worlds. The “radical interdependence of subject and world” that Crotty described (1998, p. 45) helped me to think about the lives of teachers whose work is carried out in interconnected, complex social worlds. The meanings of our lives as teachers are constructed not only by our words and actions but also by the possibilities for meaning offered within each classroom teaching community that we attempt to construct within the larger communities of education that themselves both limit and open up possibilities for identity, growth, and understandings of our lives.

Postmodernism. Postmodernism, the second macro-theory that influenced this project, helped me name the sources of my queasiness regarding the authority of the researcher as well as essentialist and unitary descriptions of teacher identity, discomforts that, in part, led me to this project.

Explaining the diversity of theoretical positions referred to by the term postmodernism, Lather (1991) described “postmodernisms” as

responses across the disciplines to the contemporary crisis of representation, the profound uncertainty about what constitutes an adequate depiction of social “reality.”

Philosophically speaking, the essence of the postmodern argument is that the dualisms which continue to dominate Western thought are inadequate for understanding a world of

multiple causes and effects interacting in complex and non-linear ways, all of which are rooted in a limitless array of historical and cultural specificities. (p. 21)

In other words, the diversity of postmodernisms resulted from myriad interrogations and critiques of positivism across disciplines that engendered the movement. Some of these interrogations are directed toward the essentialist and unitary nature of positivism.

Butler (1995) observed that any reference to postmodernism leads to questions about what exactly is meant by the reference since the term is used to name varied and frequently contradictory theoretical positions. Noting the “unruliness of the field” (p. 38), Butler surmised,

If postmodernism as a term has some force or meaning within social theory . . . perhaps it can be found in the critical exercise that seeks to show how theory, how philosophy, is always implicated in power, and perhaps that is precisely what is symptomatically at work in the effort to domesticate and refuse a set of powerful criticisms under the rubric of postmodernism. (p. 38)

The postmodern impulse to resist powerful truth statements may be a more pleasant way to describe my own tendency to challenge authority, one that certainly appears less childish than I often feel when I question the assumptions that underpin the findings in much of what I read about teacher identity. When I hear administrators describe teachers as troublesome and lazy (as they propose new mandates for record-keeping and increased testing), I am as outraged by the nature of the identity they are imposing on my colleagues and me as I am curious about what they seek to accomplish by putting that identity into play. Every representation of *teacher* held up in the media, in politics, or in educational bureaucracies is part of a play for power, an attempt to control what we know about teachers, how we work with teachers, and who we can be as

teachers. Part of understanding each representation requires understanding the purpose that representation serves the person who puts it into play.

Identity is also a problematic concept. The paradox of Theseus' ship, reported by Plutarch in the first century A.D., and freely modified over the centuries by substituting objects such as an axe or knife for the ship, suggests that from the earliest days of philosophy, the notion of an identity that is stable over time has been difficult to sustain practically. After slaying the Minotaur of Crete, Theseus returned to Athens with the youth of Athens who were to have been sacrificed to the beast. This return symbolized the end of Athens' subjugation to the barbarian rule of Crete and the beginning of the enlightened rule of Theseus' Athens:

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their place, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same. (Plutarch, 1992/late first century A.D., p. 8)

Concepts of identity are rooted in mathematical concepts of sameness, but when applied to things that grow and that are never the same, the concept of identity becomes a paradox we cannot solve. We can only take a side in the argument.

Britzman's (1994) question, "How are selves produced and reproduced through social interactions and daily negotiations, and within particular contexts that are already overburdened with the meanings of others?" (p. 54), assumes the social constructionist position that identity is constructed within social worlds with some agency on the part of the person seeking to construct

an identity but also with a postmodern worry that the construction is never stable, as it is under constant negotiation and pressure from powerful forces at play in the environment, some we are aware of and some we do not even recognize.

Ganguly (as cited in Britzman, 1994) observed, “It is important to underscore the ways in which identities are fabrications—that is, both invented and constructed—because doing so is a necessary step in accounting for the centrality of representation in the constitution of the real” (p. 55). Describing identity in terms of fabric suggests that identity is woven from an abundance of threads with new additions working their way into an ever-changing pattern, akin to Deleuze & Guattari’s (1987/1980) concept of assemblage. As Stagoll (2005) explained,

For Deleuze, there is no world “behind appearances,” as it were. Instead of being about transitions that something initiates or goes through, Deleuze’s theory holds that things and states are *products* of becoming. The human subject, for example, ought not to be conceived as a stable, rational individual, experiencing changes but remaining, principally, the same person. Rather, for Deleuze, one’s self must be conceived as a constantly changing assemblage of forces, an epiphenomenon arising from chance confluences of languages, organisms, societies, expectations, laws, and so on. (p. 22)

Ganguly’s (as cited in Britzman, 1994) description suggested more freedom for the person weaving identity (which is “both invented and constructed” [p. 55]), but both descriptions portray identity as the product of multifarious influences interacting at times in unexpected ways. Thinking of identity as a fabrication is a useful way to consider the identities of teachers, who must construct and reconstruct identities in response to the many people and events they encounter over their careers. Identity as “a constantly changing assemblage of forces” (Stagoll, 2005, p. 22) is also an apt description of the evolving nature of teacher identity, constructed as it

is within worlds that change moment by moment by people whose desires and needs also change moment by moment.

Other Theories

I like to think that I was able to allow the data to dictate the theories that I used in analyzing and interpreting the data my cohort provided me. I hoped to *hear* the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) clearly enough to be open to new directions for understanding that I did not originally include in the plan for research simply because I did not yet know enough to know what I needed to study. The social constructionist orientation positioned me to see my interaction with research participants as a joint meaning-making activity. However, it also reminded me that the meaning I created for this project was shaded and presented by my ways of intending toward the participants. My own historically and culturally specific experiences as a teacher, as a woman, and as an academic determined how I perceived and understood the data I collected and produced.

My interpretation and analysis of data was shaped by theories I had read prior to beginning data collection in addition to theories I read while collecting, producing, and analyzing data. As a member of many communities, it was impossible to come to the data untouched by experience and *a priori* theories. The following is a discussion of relevant theories that shaped the planning and conducting of this study and then continued to shape interpretation and analysis. This is only a limited discussion of theory, a discussion of the theories I could see connected to the analysis of the data I present in Chapter 4. However, even those theories I read and rejected as irrelevant or non-useful have had an impact on my thinking as I moved away from those ideas toward others. A new direction is often determined by the rejection of a previous direction—the “equal and opposite reaction” of elementary physics—making the

rejection as important to the movement dictated by the new direction as the new direction is to the thinking that results. Theories we think we have rejected can also work like rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980), spreading underground, without our awareness, popping up in unexpected and unpredicted spaces in our thinking. Hence, any list of theories can only be partial and incomplete, a listing merely of what I could see at work.

Autobiographical and fictional discourse. Hermans and Kempen (1993) observed that “One of the most conspicuous developments in psychology of the past decade is the upsurge of the narrative approach,” an approach that “puts heavy emphasis on the role of imagination” (p. 11) in the interpretation of events. Drawing on the work of Bruner (1986), they described its distinctions from more rational, logical thought:

It is certainly possible to describe a narrative or a story as a form of “narrative thinking” if one makes sure that a clear distinction is made between thinking of a narrative nature and thinking of a rational nature. Such a distinction was made by Bruner (1986), who argued that there are basically two “modes of thought”: storytelling (narrative thinking) and argumentation (propositional thinking). Each mode represents a distinct way of construing reality and has its own criteria for well formedness. Whereas arguments are intended to convince someone of their truth, stories are construed to convince someone of their lifelikeness. Argumentation appeals to formal and empirical proof procedures. Storytelling appeals to verisimilitude. (p. 17)

Extending the distinctions of this binary, some scholars have claimed that narrative thinking seeks to place the audience in the world of the storyteller, within the subjectivity of the storyteller. Propositional thinking seeks separation of subjectivities. Furthermore, the narrative mode stays grounded in the specific while the rational mode moves toward the abstract.

However, the idea that only two modes of thought are available for interpretation of the world seems to limit the human capacity interacting with data. Our minds have an infinite capacity for creating new ways to think about the world; it is our efforts to describe the mind's processes for thinking and understanding that run into limits. Perhaps a consideration of narrative thinking as a viable option to rational thinking was a necessary step in opening up space in the tight construct of what we mean by scientific thinking. Perhaps, as demonstrated by John-Steiner's (1997) description of Einstein's "thought experiments" (p. 16), our conceptions of scientific thinking should be expanded to include imagination, dreams, and indirect paths of inquiry.

Gergen (2001) expanded Bruner's binary to include a more varied range of discourse styles common to Western society. His description of these styles was historical and focused on the hierarchical relationship between the speaker and audience in each mode. Gergen first identified and described four traditional discourse styles that "we inherit from the Western tradition as forms of authoritative voice" (p. 64) and noted two newer genres of voice that reposition the audience. The traditional styles—the mystical, the prophetic, the mythic, and the civil—share certain implied hierarchical relations between reader, writer, and subject of the discourse. In the mystical, prophetic, and mythic styles, the writer/speaker has a special, privileged insight into the subject that is the source of his authority. These speakers are truth-bearers come to enlighten the listener, bringing "impersonal, monologic pronouncements, intended to illuminate and inform an unknowing audience" (p. 70).

Drawing on Shapin's (1994) *A Social History of Truth*, Gergen (2001) observed that civil discourse—also called "scientific style" (p. 71)—operates with a different hierarchical structure: writing to an audience of similarly enlightened people, the *subject* of the discourse is objectified and examined by these superior minds. This discourse, which arose with the work of Boyle in

17th century Europe, continues to privilege the speaker as a truth-bearer, but it addresses its audience as having the *potential* for similar enlightenment.

Gergen (2001) then described two recent narrative modes—the autobiographical and fictional modes—as new styles that developed after what he referred to as “the discursive turn” (p. 72) of postmodernism. The relationship of writer, reader, and subject in these styles reflects postmodern shifts in subject/object positionality:

We now find a significant flowering of the autobiographical genre, in qualitative research, narrative inquiry, ethnography, case reports, feminist research, and more. Such writing is notable for two particular characteristics: the presence of the author as agent, and the reflection of another's subjectivity . . . through the author's experience. In the former case, the scholar resists appearing as someone other than a personal self, for example, priest, prognosticator, or civil fellow, and attempts to make his/her own interior available to the reader. In the second, there is an acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the other, and an attempt to render it transparent through the expression of one's experience. (p. 74)

The fictional mode is a genre that “inherently operates as a counter to the dominant discourse of ‘fact,’ while simultaneously functioning in the human sciences to blur or destroy the fact/fiction binary altogether” (Gergen, 2001, p. 75). For Gergen, this discourse opened up new polyvocal possibilities for the researcher/writer, acknowledging the multiple voices that have created what we have come to believe are our individual voices and the social construction of the “individual” subjectivity:

Within this context, it is difficult to characterize the “fictional genre” in terms of rhetorical specifics. Rather, for the human scientist who is at once restless to break with

common traditions, and informed by the fictional tradition, virtually all forms of writing become available for use. . . . In my view, the most significant contribution afforded by the genre is its expansion of vocal registers. That is, in a variety of contrasting ways, authors have enriched the number of realities, rationalities, or values embraced within a single work. All of the genres considered heretofore depend on and reconstitute the assumption of the author as a singular subjectivity. They presume and express the view of the author as a unified being, of one mind, one consciousness, a coherent rationality, and moral integrity. To be other than unified is to invite epithets of incoherence, self-contradiction, or moral muddlement. However, the fictional impulse has given broad license for the dispersion of authorship. (pp. 75-76)

In my own thinking about research, I see the influences of both autobiographical and fictional narrative modes. Seeing the participants as authors/agents of their identities as teachers, and seeing their accounts as a means for revealing of my own subjectivity may invite me “into a posture quite unlike those previously considered,” a posture in which “the reader is invited to identify or be at one with the writer” (Gergen, 2001, p. 75) who expresses herself via “epithets of incoherence, self-contradiction, or moral muddlement” (p. 76).

The “fictional impulse” and its “broad license for the dispersion of authorship” (Gergen, 2001, p. 76) allowed me as writer to move in and out of the varied subjectivities of not only my participants but also of myself as I tried to make sense of meaning-making and identity-shaping for teachers and researchers. Teacher identities are themselves polyvocal products, and my reporting of their voices was similarly polyvocal. Their voices became part of my voice, and my choices were shaped by their lessons, their examples, and their subjectivities. Together, we considered the voices that contributed to our subjectivities. The extent to which I absorbed the

voices of my participants and acknowledged my own polyvocality was the extent to which I could legitimize my own voice/s as researcher.

Narrative theory. In their explanation of why they chose to employ narrative theory in their research regarding teacher experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described how their research goals seemed to demand a narrative approach:

We saw our research problem as trying to think of the continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience. This research problem in our educational studies eventually brought us to narrative. . . . For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. In effect, narrative thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative. It might be said that narrative method is a part or aspect of narrative phenomena. Thus, we say, narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences. (pp. 17-18)

For Clandinin and Connelly, narrative researchers imagine themselves into truth by immersing themselves in the stories and the world of their participants. But as they imagine the worlds of the participants, they also imagine their own stories, deploying personal narratives that help them understand the meaning of the narrator's experience. Hence, narrative is not only the phenomenon and method; it becomes the analysis and representation of the findings.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called the space in which narrative researchers work "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 54), a space in which the researcher moves among dimensions of time, place, and interactions (the personal and the social) as her experience of the experiences of other people leads her to re-experience her own history. As the researcher works in this space, place and time shift as the stories of others lead her to "restory" (p. 56) her

own life, revisiting the past and/or imaginatively visiting another's past, thereby gaining new understanding of her present and constructing new identity possibilities for the future. Riessman (1993) also asserted that narrative analysis recognizes the role of the researchers' perspective, history, and relationships in shaping interpretation. In fact, the analysis itself is a new narrative, co-authored by the people who tell the stories, the people who analyze and interpret them as researchers, and ultimately the audience who reads the research product: "Story telling, to put the argument simply, is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us. The story metaphor emphasizes that we create order, construct texts in particular contexts" (p. 1). Participants told stories about their lives, re-experiencing their lives at the same time that they led me to re-experience my own life as a teacher through their stories. Through their narratives—and my own emerging narrative (as teacher and researcher)—we created a shared subjectivity and identity as teachers/researchers.

As the lines between author, researcher, and reader become indistinct, so too do the lines between data collection, data analysis, and data reporting. Crisp lines that once separated researcher and participant, or subject and object, blur and fade as the researcher becomes both observer and participant in the data and the participants become observers and researchers. Indeed, the research event itself is experienced by all, and there are no untouched, neutral observers, for "It is not only the participants' stories that are retold by a narrative inquirer. . . . it is also the inquirers' . . . stories that are open for inquiry and retelling" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60):

What starts to become apparent as we work within our three-dimensional space is that as narrative inquirers we are not alone in this space. This space enfolds us and those with whom we work. Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry as we work in the field, move

from field to field text, and from field text to research text. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60)

From the raw material of the narratives offered by research participants, the narrative researcher makes decisions about the new narrative she will construct. The narratives themselves tell stories on multiple levels. One potential story they tell could be revealed on the structural level: the story of the stories available to the narrators, which may be the story of the identities available to the narrators. This is the story of the cultures of the narrators, and the meaning-making these cultures allow and enable. Each individual story tells how each person makes choices within those structures, choices that may or may not lead to a satisfactory sense of self within a community.

Narrative theory led me to think about the processes and possibilities of meaning-making via narrative, focusing on the choices respondents made in structuring the stories of their lives. However, the experiences they related also deserved serious consideration for understanding the discourses and opportunities available to them for constructing identity within the figured world of education. Narrative theory reminded me of the difficulty of resisting the compulsion of my metaphors in “creat[ing] order, construct[ing] texts” (Riessman, 1993, p. 1) as I interpreted data and reported findings, but also that I had to at least try to hear and respect the order and text—the metaphors—of my participants. The pull of the narrative impulse invites both the storyteller and the listener to disregard pieces that do not fit, pieces that I believed were the most useful because of the very disruptions they threatened to create in the narrative. The narrative impulse was one more force (both in myself and in others) I sought to understand even as I was wary of and tried to resist its allure and power.

Standpoint theory. Harding (1992) described the genealogy of standpoint theory, traditionally traced to Hegel's observation that to understand the relationship between master and slave, the "standpoint" of the slave might be more revealing than that of the master. This idea was adopted by Marx and Engels, substituting the proletariat for the slave. In other words, the standpoint or perspective of marginalized groups (slave or proletariat) should be the "starting point for thought" because "the experience and lives of marginalized peoples . . . provide particularly significant *problems to be explained* or research agendas" (Harding, 1992, pp. 442-443). All social situations place limits on what one can know; however, because of their privileged position, dominant positions tend to be less often critically examined and thereby more limiting. Standpoint epistemology attempts to explain "the effects that different kinds of politics have on the production of knowledge" (p. 444), and while all knowledge attempts are socially situated, "some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points for knowledge projects" (p. 444) because they are less subject to the blinders of power.

Hartsock (1983a) argued that what Marx had done for the proletariat should be done for women—to use their standpoint to understand and oppose "all forms of domination" (p. 283)—asserting that

just as Marx's understanding of the world from the standpoint of the proletariat enabled him to go beneath bourgeois ideology, so a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more humane social relations. (p. 284)

Standpoint theory assumes that from "some perspectives on society . . . however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural worlds are not visible" (p. 285). This is not so much about relativism as it is about the idea that a dominant

perspective is most likely to be blind to its own assumptions. Because of its dominance, the limits in its perspective go unchallenged, with serious consequences for knowledge projects. The feminist standpoint Hartsock championed would have “liberatory potential” (p. 289):

The feminist standpoint which emerges through an examination of women’s activities is related to the proletarian standpoint, but deeper going. Women and workers inhabit a world in which the emphasis is on change rather than stasis, a world characterized by interaction with natural substances rather than separation from nature, a world in which quality is more important than quantity, a world in which the unification of mind and body is inherent in the activities performed. (p. 290)

Feminist standpoint theory offers a way of thinking about the identity formation of teachers, who work in an environment described as highly “feminized” (Grant & Murray, 1999; Labaree, 2004; Lightfoot, 1983; Lortie, 2002/1975) because of the relational quality of its practice. Describing what she saw as fundamental distinctions between the feminist standpoint and that of men, Hartsock (1983a) could have been describing the teaching profession when she observed that “Women as mothers even more than as workers, are institutionally involved in processes of change and growth, and more than workers, must understand the importance of avoiding excessive control in order to help others grow” (p. 293). What might this mean for the identities teachers construct for their lives as teachers? Arguing the advantages of the female standpoint, Hartsock noted that “Motherhood . . . results in the construction of female existence as centered with a complex relational nexus” (p. 294). This “female construction of self in relation to others” leads “toward opposition to dualisms of any sort, valuation of concrete, everyday life, sense of a variety of connectednesses and continuities both with other persons and

with the natural world” (p. 298), making the feminist standpoint a valuable perspective for the researcher thinking about her own position within a knowledge project.

Feminist standpoint theory is also useful for considering the communities within which teachers work. From the center of “a complex relational nexus” (Hartsock, 1983a, p. 294), the teacher oversees the growth and learning of hundreds, even thousands of students over her career while maintaining complex relationships with parents, administrators, and society. Within the strict hierarchy of schools, the teacher may not be in the most marginalized position within the “complex relational nexus” of educational worlds, but she is expected to subordinate herself to people who may not share her values or expectations for what a teacher should be or do. In an environment that stresses quantity (test scores and pass rates), many teachers experience conflict by trying to maintain a more maternal focus on quality (student relationships and learning).

I did not begin this project intending to examine the larger social structures of schools; however, that sort of cultural examination of schools is difficult to avoid in any discussion of teachers’ lives within those structures. Schools are culturally produced figured worlds, and their social structures certainly affect the ways teachers construct their identities. Lives are historically and culturally situated, and dominant forces in the culture limit the development of those who are marginalized (as well as limiting the potential development of those who exert those forces). As Hartsock (1983a) asserted, “The articulation of a feminist standpoint based on women’s relational self-definition and activity exposes the world men have constructed and the self-understanding which manifests these relations as partial and perverse” (p. 303).

I also did not begin with plans to expose the phallogocentric social structures limiting the lives of students and teachers in schools. However, beginning a knowledge project from the perspective of a marginalized group almost necessarily results in some critique (implicit or

explicit) of those structures as they are exposed by the stories the participants tell about their lives. Collins (2000) reiterated the value of marginality “as a potential source of strength” that can render “a powerful oppositional knowledge” (p. 45). The “situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1988) of teachers—in particular, the knowledge of experienced teachers whose voices have been marginalized within the academic community—might reveal new ways of seeing the profession and its impact on the people who choose to live in the profession over long careers.

Teaching is a feminized profession (whether the teachers are male or female) not only because the majority of teachers continue to be women (72% nationally according to Grant and Murray [1999]; 81% in Georgia according to recent data from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission [2008]), but also because the status of teachers within the culture is similar to that of the status of women, and because the identities of teachers within the worlds of education and the community have too often been written by others.

Writing a teacher's life. Heilbrun's (2002/1988) remarkable feminist analysis of how women's lives (and thereby identities) have been written in biography, autobiography, literary analysis, and fiction documented the difficulty of writing/living women's lives in the face of dominant male scripts for those lives. Since the meanings of their lives have already been defined by the lives and plot needs of the stories of men, women have struggled to find a discourse in which to tell their stories or have masked their stories behind false plots (e.g., Jane Adams' characterization of herself as passive) or false personae (e.g., George Sand's dressing as a man to be able to afford the life she desired). Heilbrun observed that women of great accomplishment frequently denied any active or aggressive role in their own successes, saying rather that they were “called” to the work and “helped” along the way by others. They also

described their work as something greater than themselves, a mission from which they could not turn away.

Perhaps most damaging, Heilbrun (2002/1988) noted that women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century who tried to create characters that ventured beyond the expected and accepted life patterns for women ended up creating characters whose rejection of these patterns led to isolation and lives of little or no production; each female character “left no path behind her for future women, had lived with no community of women, no sense of bonding with other women” (p. 43). Ultimately, these women “failed to speak profoundly to one another” (p. 43).

Teachers have similarly found themselves faced with a restrictive set of pre-fabricated narratives with which to understand their lives. To paraphrase Grant and Murray (1999), in the United States, “The [story] of teaching is closely bound to the status of women” (p. 11), at least since the mid-nineteenth century when women were recruited into classrooms to address public-school needs that resulted from a rapidly growing immigrant population. The recruitment of these women was couched in missionary terms by writers such as Beecher (1981/1846), who exhorted women to take up the call to teach, not only because it was “the only noble profession open to woman” (p. 45), but also because of the good works a woman could accomplish in this role:

If our success equals our hopes, soon, in all parts of our country, in each neglected village, or new settlement, the Christian female teacher will quietly take her station, collecting the ignorant children around her, teaching them habits of neatness, order, and thrift; opening the book of knowledge, inspiring the principles of morality, and awakening the hope of immortality. Soon her influence in the village will create a

demand for new laborers, and then she will summon from among her friends at home, the nurse for the young and the sick, the seamstress and the mantuamaker; and these will prove her auxiliaries in good moral influences, and in Sabbath school training. And often as the result of these labors, the Church will arise, and the minister of Christ be summoned to fill up the complement of domestic, moral, and religious blessings. (p. 51)

This exemplar would be a teacher who changed the lives of her charges, quietly and submissively making the world a better place and expecting little in return for herself. Women were not recruited to the classroom for their expertise in their academic fields; they were chosen because of their ability to nurture children (Grant & Murray, 1999; Lortie, 2002/1975; Lucas, 1997). Women in the mid-nineteenth century reported that they were drawn to teaching because it was a profession that could “provide moral rewards” (Biklen, 1995, p. 55). The story of the teacher as a morally superior, selfless, and well-intentioned person (of perhaps limited intelligence and academic expertise) whose life role was to nurture and support the success of others mirrors the stories Heilbrun (2002/1988) described, stories that limited how women could/can even imagine their lives.

Ironically, what Beecher (1981/1846) imagined as a “Remedy for the Wrongs to Women,” a profession women could join and thereby gain an option to marriage for economic survival, became yet another arena in which women would be controlled by men. As women took more and more jobs in schools, a new position in education evolved—a position that was almost exclusively held by men until the late-twentieth century—the principal.

Given this social history of women as teachers, it should come as no surprise that teachers continue to report being drawn to the profession by a desire to make a difference in the lives of others and to have a job that is important to society, rather than reporting being attracted

by financial rewards or opportunities for personal accomplishments and professional growth (Grant & Murray, 1999; Nieto, 2003; Nieto, 2005; Palmer, 1998; Troen & Boles, 2003).

However, they also complain about and agonize over the problems of working within a world seemingly structured to discipline them into acting in accordance with goals of a hierarchy that may contradict the very moral imperatives that drew them to the profession.

Teacher identity in the teaching world. Deciding who we are as teachers is complicated even more by the multifarious images of *teacher* available and prevalent in the culture. Teachers come to their work already “saturated” (Gergen, 2000) with images of who and what a teacher is. Long before entering college and taking a course in educational pedagogy, students have “been exposed to patterns and ideas of teaching and schooling that pervade the culture” (Nemser, 1983, p. 152). But as Gergen pointed out about cultural assumptions, “If there is one message writ large within the annals of anthropology, it is to beware the truths of one’s own culture” (p. 8). Certainly, the perceived truth of teacher identity is a truth to be approached with skepticism.

Britzman (1994) described a teacher’s identity as one “that is at once familiar and strange” (p. 59). Before a teacher ever takes over a classroom on her own, she has interacted with and observed teachers closely, a familiarity that can lead to a false sense that becoming a teacher is already understood and can be accomplished easily. Drawing on Butler’s (1996) description of “performative identities,” Johnson (2009) illustrated how this observed identity can be passed on to new generations of teachers, constructing identities for new teachers via their performance of an identity they have observed as students: “As the teacher identity is repeated in classrooms, not only from day to day but from generation to generation, the performance becomes familiar and in turn constructs the subject who calls herself or himself teacher” (p. 161). In his “evolutionary” theory of teaching, Stephens (1969) postulated that humans have been programmed to teach by

centuries of hearing parents' instructions, correcting one another, and finally engaging in formal education with teachers. Stephens observed that this learned teaching impulse can be observed in children at play as they perform the role of teacher/parent with peers. However, working with student teachers, Britzman (1994) observed that for teachers, "the taking up of an identity is a constant and tricky social negotiation. . . . Indeed, the significant, albeit hidden, work of learning to teach concerns negotiating with conflicting cultural representations of and desires for what a teacher is and does" (p. 54).

Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) used the phrase "figured world" to refer to "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" (p. 52). The figured worlds in which people function not only "supply contexts of meaning for actions," but they also "provide the loci in which people fashion senses of self—that is, develop identities" (p. 60). As people step into a new figured world, they also step into a new context of meaning that can help them see more clearly the context they normally inhabit. The new context may also give a direction for the construction of a new identity by offering "a new understanding of their selves and their lives and a reinterpretation of their own pasts" (p. 66).

The figured worlds of education (in the overlapping social worlds of classroom, school, and society) present contradictory roles and expectations for teachers, complicating the "taking up" (Britzman, 1994, p. 54) of teacher identity. Teachers seek this professional identity in a culture (and from an image they bring with them) that predefines the profession in ways that are unrealistic, imagined, and at once both exalted and demeaning (Grant & Murray, 1999; Labaree, 2004; Lightfoot, 1983; Lortie, 2002/1975). Weber and Mitchell (1995) described the "familiar blandness" of the available representation of teacher in the culture as "a sort of uniform" (p. 60).

Stepping into this new figured world of mixed messages regarding who and what it means to be a teacher, rather than lead to “new understanding” and “reinterpretation,” may instead lead to confusion about identity or to the acquisition of an identity that is incompatible with the teacher’s previously held personal beliefs and values, leading to conflict and discomfort.

Alsup (2006) described the complexity of the process new teachers undergo trying to develop a professional identity that is compatible with their personal identity:

The integration of personal aspects of the self and professional expectations or demands is more complicated than simply bringing together two binary opposites (*i.e.*, the self and the other); such a synergy involves bringing together, mixing and merging, and even welcoming a collision between personal ideologies and perceived professional expectations. (p. xiv)

Lightfoot (1983) elucidated the special difficulty for teachers constructing an identity in a career that often makes character demands that can conflict with personal values: “most analysts see the role of teacher as constricting the personality” because of “negative characteristics” the teacher must employ due to the “special form of domination and subordination” that is the “basis of the student/teacher relationship” (p. 245). Beyond the need to control the class, teachers are still expected to embody “decorum,” a term she borrowed from Waller’s 1932 (reprinted in 1961) sociological study of teachers. Lightfoot further observed that society continues to expect teachers to occupy a “peculiar status . . . as guardians of morality, as caricatures of virtue, and as symbols of traditionalism” (p. 246).

Britzman’s (1994), Alsup’s (2006), and Lightfoot’s (1983) descriptions of the social assumptions and pressures that make caricatures of teacher identities suggested that finding a workable identity—that is, an identity that is satisfactory in the sense that it is compatible with

one's personal identity while allowing one to be effective in the classroom—is a difficult process that may take years to accomplish. The facts that personal identities grow and change—a natural maturation process—and that teaching/organizational situations also change suggest that a static professional identity could even lead to increased tension.

As teachers acquire and transform their professional identities, they also acquire a body of professional knowledge that shapes and is shaped by their personal identity. Clandinin (1993) described what she and Connelly termed “personal practical knowledge,” knowledge that is “not found in lists of the contents of teacher education textbooks, workshop outlines, or teacher task analysis” (p. 362). Rather, it “is revealed through interpretations of observed practices over time and is given biographical, personal meaning through reconstructions of the teacher’s narratives of experience. Personal practical knowledge is, therefore, found in practice” (p. 363). The acquisition of this knowledge seems to involve an integration of the teacher’s personal and professional identities; hence, it is part of an identity acquired over time, constructed as varied experiences are woven into a “narrative of experience” via imaginative processes. The nature of the experiences, both in and out of the classroom, affects the person who is crafted. Furthermore, personal practical knowledge is never fixed: it is “tentative, subject to change and transient” (p. 364). Teachers’ knowledge and identity change over the course of their careers, and while they may seek “narrative unity” as they try to make meaning of the stories of their careers, they often revise and thereby shape new stories along the way.

Another approach to thinking about identities acquired over years of practice is proposed by feminist political philosophers such as Butler (1990, 1996), Butler and Scott (1992), and Cornell (1998). Their proposition of identity as a performative construct opens up new ways to think about how we repeat and/or resist dominant social constructs for identities through creative

performance. These theorists described identity as something produced, something we enact daily, rather than a mysterious, elusive, and essential aspect of an interior core being. Identities do not exist ahead of practice. Butler's (1990, 1996) critiques of the aspects of the body or of sexual behavior that lead to a defining of gender offer a useful position for reconsidering the identity of teacher as a performative construct acted out in a culture that offers, indeed encourages, pre-established options for how to perform that identity, options that one may or may not choose to re-enact. Rephrasing questions Butler raised in a 1994 interview, I wondered "what is absolutely salient or primary" (Osborne & Segal, para. 11) to the category of teacher, and who decides on those traits? What characteristics or behaviors do classroom teachers identify as salient or primary to the category, and how do they describe the performance and acquisition of these traits/behaviors? How do their descriptions of the category *teacher* conflict with, comply with, subvert, and reinforce the representations popular in the culture?

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) discussion of a teacher's evolving personal professional knowledge as an identity acquired over time via the experience of teaching and the performative feminist (Butler, 1990, 1996; Butler & Scott, 1992; Cornell, 1998) description of identity as something that can be creatively accomplished via practice reminded me once again of Waller's (1961/1932) original research question for his 1932 sociological study of teachers: What does teaching *do* to teachers? This question leads to closely related queries: How are teachers' identities shaped by their practice and by their educational worlds? How much can personal preferences shape practice and professional identity? How do teachers decide what practices and skills they need to be effective in the classroom, and how do they acquire those practices? How do teachers feel about the lives they have lived/performed as teachers? How much freedom did

they feel they had in constructing those lives? And how are their identities ultimately constructed with, expressed in, or shaped by their practices?

Philosophy, the virtuous life, and the beautiful existence. The performance and practice of an identity can lead to ethical questions about how we live life well and construct a life worth living, questions that have been central to storytelling since the earliest cuneiform texts of the ancient Sumerians. In the Sumerian text, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, dating before 2000 BCE, the hero's journey to the land of the gods is instigated by a shocking recognition of the imminence of death, a fundamental and universal human awareness credited by Critchley (2008) as the foundation for philosophical thought. Gilgamesh's failed quest for immortality results in his acceptance of the inevitability of death, an acceptance that leads to his eventual conception of a purpose for his life. Returning home with an understanding of mortality, Gilgamesh ceases living a life of pleasure—centered upon his own desires and impulses—and begins living a life devoted to the needs of his people. Haraway (1988) connected such an acceptance of mortality to an understanding that we are “not in ‘final’ control” (p. 596), a central concern of many ancient Greek writers and philosophers.

Gilgamesh's transformation involves releasing himself from the bonds of self-consciousness so that he can move toward an other-consciousness. This transition begins the moment he accepts that he has failed the test of Utnapishtim, staying awake for seven days, and completed after he loses the flower of immortality that he had wished to take back to the people of Uruk. Prior to these tests, Gilgamesh had introduced himself in each new situation with a lengthy, self-assertive boast, itself an identity statement that he repeated whenever his godlike status was challenged: “Gilgamesh is my name . . . / I am the king of great-walled Uruk. / I am the man who killed Humbaba / in the Cedar Forest, I am the man / who triumphed over the Bull

of Heaven” (Mitchell, 2004, p. 166). Upon his acceptance of his human limits, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, where he devotes his life in service to his people rather than in self-aggrandizing feats. The ancient Sumerians seemed to be telling us that since we cannot live forever, the best immortality we can attain is in constructing a life of purpose by serving something greater than ourselves.

Greek and Roman writers and thinkers, heirs to the concerns and literary genres of the ancient Sumerians, continued to ask questions about how humans can live lives of value and meaning within the limits of their human condition. Regarding the enduring interest in the cultures of Greece and Rome, Wilson (2007) observed that these cultures “remain relevant not because we share the beliefs of the ancients, but because we continue to be preoccupied by many of their questions, worried by their anxieties, unable to resolve their dilemmas” (p. 1). One of the most enduring of these ancients is the one who famously distrusted the written word, choosing to teach only in conversation with his students, Socrates.

What we have of Socrates’ words are the divergent ways his words were individually experienced, interpreted, and deployed by his disciples. As a result, whatever Socrates we read today is a Socrates received via the needs, consciousness, and agenda of another writer. Much like Jesus Christ, whose words come to us in the words and stories of his disciples, we receive a multi-layered, shifting, and at times contradictory literary character who, in responding as a teacher to the needs of each disciple, seemed to have become what each needed at a given “teachable” moment. Hence, when we see a reference to the discourse of Socrates, we are reminded of the instability of language and the fictive nature of history, not only because of his notorious distrust of the uses of language, both written and spoken, but also because his distrust seems to have been justified in his divergent representations by his disciples. Socrates reminded

me also of my own multi-layered, shifting, and at times contradictory character and how it becomes something different when experienced/received/perceived by others. Despite his essentialist perspective on identity, Socrates' example, both as a man who distrusted language and as a represented figure whose words were shaped by the needs and desires of others, prefigured the concerns of postmodern thinkers such as Butler (1990) and Foucault (1972), who wrote extensively on the uses of discourse to control and shape knowledge.

Socratic dialogue, as presented by Plato and Xenophon, was in its time a new genre, one that has proved influential in literature and teaching in subsequent centuries (Wilson, 2007). Many scholars (e.g., Critchley, 2008; Kosman 2003; Wilson 2007) observed that the representations in Plato and Xenophon were not necessarily presented or expected to be received as accurate representations of Socrates' words. Wilson explained that as a form, the dialogues "were an enormously flexible instrument to express widely differing ethical and philosophical beliefs" (p. 93), noting that their realism lies only "in the sense that they evoke conversations that could have taken place" (p. 93). Their value, rather, comes from their mimetic, or theatrical, qualities. As Kosman (2003) pointed out, truth in the Platonic dialogues, as in theater, is revealed in the interactions of characters, none of whom exactly represent the position of the writer. Somewhere among the positions and words of the individual characters, the reader can discover that truth, but only if she fully engages with and critiques each of the positions portrayed in the space for play that the dialogues represent, using those positions to critique her own understanding of the concepts under discussion.

Drawing a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, Critchley (2008) identified the beginning of philosophy to Plato's Socrates' "questioning of certainties in the realm of knowledge and the cultivation of a love of wisdom" (p. xxiii). Unlike the Sophists, Socrates did

not offer knowledge to his students; he instead taught them the wisdom of “radical doubt with regard to all things” (p. xxiv). This critical, ever-tentative position makes self-examination and self-doubt central to the philosophical stance of Plato’s Socrates.

Reading the dialogues, in which Socrates considers and challenges the flawed definitions and positions of his interlocutors, one comes away convinced that theory alone is useless; what one *does* and what one *is* are much more important than what one thinks, or as Hadot (2002) noted in his discussion of Socrates’ critique of the Sophist concept of knowledge, “The real problem is therefore not the problem of knowing this or that, but of *being* in this or that way” (p. 29). This move toward doing and being as the measure of one’s moral goodness leads to considerations of *arête* and moral virtue.

Arête, or virtue, is first mentioned in Book I of Plato’s *Republic* (1968/c. 360 B.C.E.) when Socrates, in conversation with Thrasymachus, speaks of the virtue of animals (335b) and then later connects virtue to the *work* of something, whether that thing be dogs, horses, eyes, or ears: “does there seem to you also to be a virtue for each thing to which some work is assigned?” (353b). Kosman (2003) explained that in this section, Socrates connects virtue to function, “the characteristic activity or work that something engages in” (p. 22). More importantly, virtue is “what enables something to perform its function well”; that is, virtue is “a quality something has that allows it to be itself in a good fashion” (p. 22).

According to Plato’s Socrates, certain qualities (piety, temperance, justice, courage, and good) are necessary for humans to live virtuously (by performing well the necessary functions of society). Describing the position of Plato’s student, Aristotle, Kenny (2006/1998) observed that the Greek concept of *arête*

has a broader range than the English word. ‘Virtue’ is an appropriate enough translation when what is in question is moral virtue, but the Greek word really means just “goodness”, “excellence”, and has a much broader range, so that we can speak of the *arête* of a knife or a horse. (p. 73).

Ultimately, virtues are those qualities that enable us to perform well the necessary functions of society.

Living a virtuous life involves developing and enacting the virtues that help us do what we do well. Moral philosophy, at least in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle, is concerned with considerations of how one develops and enacts these virtues:

According to Plato and Aristotle alike, the question of moral philosophy is not simply the question: how am I to conduct myself in my life, what should I *do*? Moral philosophy addresses more specifically the question: How am I to become a good person? What should I *be*? For both thinkers, a good life is a life of activity in which the states of character we call virtues are actualized and not simply possessed; otherwise, one could imagine good people simply sleep their lives away. But a good life is a life in which actions are not only in *accord with* virtue but are the *realizations* of those virtues.

(Kosman, 2003, p. 74)

In striving toward a virtuous life, we strive toward “the development of a skill, the skill of character” (p. 74).

Of course, Socrates’ questions about certainties were conducted from an essentialist perspective that absolute truths existed but were beyond the full understanding of man. As he explained in the *Apology* (Plato, 1969/c. 395 B.C.E.), one might know more, but one can never know all. Hence, through rigorous questioning and examination, one might come to some

agreement about the nature of the various virtues one should strive toward. The critical difference for postmodern thinkers is that they do not assume an absolute truth exists. So while one might examine how one performs so that one's life is virtuous, one must also examine how virtue works in society. To paraphrase Bove (1990), the postmodern thinker should go beyond the question of "What is [virtue]?" by moving on to questions such as "How does [virtue] function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist?" (pp. 53-54). It is not merely who we are or what we do but *how* who we are and what we do came about and *how* it gets put into play, repeated, and resisted. It is also *what* we can and cannot do or be within the framework of virtue and/or identity available to us.

A number of ideas from Foucault's later works (1984/1983; 1985/1984; 1986/1984; 1997/1984) offer rich perspectives for thinking about the ways people strive to construct virtuous lives. Foucault's interest in the ancient Greek concept of *care of the self* as a practice of freedom was part of his move toward the study of ethics, his third and final "domain of analysis" (Davidson, 1986, p. 221). Hoy (1986) observed that Foucault's consideration of ethics was focused not on moral codes or "sets of principles that people espouse however much they may live up to them" (p. 16). Instead, Foucault's history of ethics

owes an acknowledgement to Hegel, who criticizes Kant for looking only at the explicit moral rules instead of at the underlying "ethical substance" that allows the moral code to function. For Hegel and Foucault the ethical substance includes the background of shared understanding of what it is to belong to a particular community and to aspire in practice to being a good person there. (Hoy, 1986, p. 16)

Davidson (1986) described ethics in the larger context of Foucault's work as a whole, demonstrating that the evolution of Foucault's different theoretical domains has an organic

trajectory, one domain developing from another in a natural movement. Rather than describe ethics as a set of principles or moral codes, Foucault saw ethics as *rapport a soi*, the relationship of the self to itself. This relationship has four main aspects: the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the self-forming activity (*pratique de soi*), and “the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave morally” (*telos*) (Davidson, 1986, p. 229).

A good life as the pursuit of virtue in terms of acquiring the skills in order to do well whatever it is that we do seemed to fit how many teachers think of and evaluate themselves as professionals—always concerned with the doing of the work and finding better ways to connect with more students more effectively. The ethical substance is “the part of ourselves or our behaviour which is taken to be the relevant domain for ethical judgment” (Davidson, 1986, p. 228), the aspect of one’s life one focuses on in evaluating oneself. This ethical substance might be a shared, community idea or a highly personal focus. In teaching, it might concern what it is to be a good teacher, or the practices that lead one to consider oneself a good teacher whose practice has been worthwhile. When the ethical substance is a shared understanding within a teaching community of what it is to be a good teacher, pressures may result when one does not agree with the communal proscription or when one tries to become a member of that community.

The *telos*, the fourth aspect of Foucault’s (1984/1983) ethics, refers to “the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way” (p. 355). Davidson (1986) described this being as “the goal to which our self-forming activity [is] directed” (p. 229). When we aspire to become “good” teachers, what and who is that teacher? Who is the model? And at what point does that model move from an outside point of reference to an inside point of reference—from a mentor (exterior model) to a model based on some “better self”?

Both Plato's Socrates' and Foucault's considerations of ethics helped me think about the kinds of professionals teachers aspire to become and the practices they employ to try to become that being. This differed somewhat from *practique de soi* because it is not exactly a disciplining of self so much as an emulation of some other. However, whether discipline and/or emulation, the becoming involves choosing to perform a desirable identity. Foucault (1984/1983) observed that in classical ethics, one is not required to behave in a certain manner, but those who desire "to have a beautiful existence, if they want to have a good reputation, if they want to rule others, they have to do that . . . it's a personal choice" (p. 356). This choice to lead a particular type of existence comes after some indoctrination into the life and an acquisition of some understanding of the "glory" of the existence—an understanding that comes over time. In Foucault's (1984/1983; 1986/1984) discussion of classical Greek ethics, this choice to lead a "beautiful existence," which is necessary to rule others, has the prerequisite of successfully ruling oneself. Accomplishing this state requires *epimeleia heautou*, *care of the self*, which "does not mean simply being interested in oneself, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination" (Foucault 1984/1983, p. 359). Rather, the Greek term means "'working on' or 'being concerned with something . . . it describes a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique" (p. 359-360).

This ancient concern with embodying within one's life a certain set of values, accomplished through practice, attention, and technique, along with a focus on what one has done in one's life rather than on who or what one is, is certainly echoed in how experienced teachers look back on their lives as teachers (Nieto, 2003; Nieto, 2005; Palmer, 1998). These echoes go back to the nineteenth-century women drawn to teaching because the profession not only gave them a way to be financially and physically independent of men but also because

teaching offered them a way to serve man and God (Beecher, 1981/1846; Biklen, 1995). While modern teachers may report a morality more related to social concerns than their nineteenth-century counterparts, the chance to “make a difference” continues to be an appeal for people choosing to teach.

Foucault (1984/1983) observed that care of the self was not concerned with life after death, but with everyday practices to use in “making one’s life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a *techné*—for an art” (p. 362). The worldly goal is that of ruling others, but, ultimately, care of the self is an art form that must be perfected so that one might most effectively have an impact on others. Plato’s Socrates prefigured the same concern in his discussions of care of the self. As Hadot (2002) explained, Socrates’ concept of care of the self

is thus not opposed to care for the city. In the *Apology* and the *Crito*, what Socrates proclaims, in a remarkable way, as his duty and that to which he must sacrifice everything, even his life, is obedience to the laws of the city. . . . Care for the self is thus, indissolubly, care for the city and care for others. (pp. 37-38)

Perfecting practice, for a teacher, is primarily motivated by a similar desire to more effectively have an impact on others. The concepts of virtue, the virtuous life, ethics, care of the self, and the subject and individual freedom were useful in helping me think about how the practice of teaching (the doing) might lead to the moral/ethical rewards teachers continue to seek in their profession—and that many people seek in life. Together, these theories address relationships to the self and to society. Teachers develop professional identities within a number of special social situations involving students, administrators, the school itself, and the community in which the school is located. Beyond the school itself, communities and bureaucracies at the district, state, and national level affect teacher practice while political

climates at all levels can affect teacher esteem. But ultimately, it may be that esteem comes not from recognition within the teaching community but from the sense that one has led a beautiful existence by finding and enacting the virtues necessary to practice effectively and purposefully, thereby having an impact on others.

Summary

In Chapters 1 and 2, I have attempted to describe the “constantly changing assemblage of forces” (Stagoll, 2005, p. 22) I have recognized at play as I have conceived, pursued, analyzed, and ultimately produced this project, at times in concert with my participants but finally falling back on the theoretical foundations that have produced me. Chapter 1 details a personal context, life experiences that have affected a positionality that shapes my perspective of the world. Chapter 2 is an overview of theories that have interacted and blended with my life experiences, theories that are sometimes familiar, sometimes challenging, and sometimes revelatory.

My social constructionist “orientation toward knowledge” (Gergen, interviewed by Mattes & Schraube, 2004, para. 15) and my long career in teaching combined to make me wonder about how the lives and identities of teachers are constructed over long careers within education communities. In producing this project, I attended to and drew on fictional and narrative impulses, impulses that motivated my participants and me to look back on our lives for meaning, constructing a storyline from the chaotic data of our lives (and of this project) so that we could ascribe purpose and meaning for the time we spent on our careers (and on this project). I indulged in these impulses as I encouraged my participants to tell me and one another about their lives as teachers and as I read the transcripts of their stories to produce the story of their stories. Yet I resisted these impulses and sought the disruptions that often told me more about the forces that shaped their lives and my reading of their lives. My use of my own personal

narratives in later chapters of the dissertation illustrate the illogical, “other than unified” (Gergen, 2001, p. 76) thinking that at times helped me move forward when logical thinking failed. These attentions to polyvocality—of both the participants and of the researcher—were critical to my methodology and understanding of data, as I explain in the following chapter.

As teachers, the participants for this project constructed lives within “a complex relational nexus” (Hartsock, 1983a, p. 294) of forces wherein they sought spaces for control (over students, over curriculum, over themselves) and wherein they were subject to controls (by students, by curriculum, by the culture, by administrators) that were at times visible and invisible. Indeed, the very life and identity of “teacher” is a life that has been written for us in impossible, irresistible, and contradictory storylines of noble, maternal self-sacrifice, a storyline that even as we seek to gain respect as academics we cannot easily dismiss or resist. In our practice, we seek to acquire the virtues that enable us to do the work of teaching well, constructing teaching identities in response to needs and expectations of our communities, our colleagues, our students, and ourselves.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

Personal Context as a Methodologist

What follows in this prefatory section is my effort to understand myself as a research methodologist and my personal concerns with research methods, in particular, with interviewing. As a Southern woman, I have practiced some interviewing skills most of my speaking life, learning the myriad rules of engaging people in conversation under every sort of social circumstance imaginable. And while those events may not have appeared to an outsider to be the “purposeful conversations” described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998, p. 133), any Southerner knows that even what appears to be a trivial verbal exchange has a purpose. Rubin and Rubin (2005) observed that researchers who use interviews build on conversational skills they already have acquired, though they added that researchers must refine those skills to conduct successful interviews.

In this project, however, I have sought to undo some of the very conversational skills that I once thought served me well as a woman, Southerner, teacher, and interviewer. In fact, the final research question for this project—added as a response to my growing concerns about the researcher’s manipulations of data production—was, “To what extent can the researcher move the center of authority toward the participants in a study by relinquishing control of the interview process?” Here I explain how this question became important to me as a teacher and as a researcher who has made her work more difficult by trying to disperse power/control in interviews.

Ten years ago, I worked with a team of program evaluators assessing Georgia alternative schools. Because I had no formal training in qualitative research, my job mainly called for skills I had previously acquired as an English major: taking notes and editing reports. I also scheduled interviews, solicited participants (teachers and administrators from schools around the state) to join the study, and ferried experts from the airport to hotel conference rooms where the focus groups took place. However, everything changed when the experts decided they needed to expand the data collection and interview students in the alternative programs.

To that end, I attended a meeting with two doctoral students in statistics and one program evaluator who were reviewing a protocol they had created for use at program sites across the state. Looking over their work, I realized that students would not respond as the researchers wished to the questions they had written for a focus group protocol. For example, the first question was “How have you changed since coming to this school?” Ten years of working with high-school students told me that there was a good chance adolescents would merely retort, “I haven’t,” and become set in that position. Furthermore, students in alternative programs, who have experienced problems in school, often see themselves as having essential identities that conflict with school demands. In fact, I suspected many were in alternative schools because they had refused to become the kind of student their schools wanted, and while the alternative program might have been a more amenable space for them, they likely were not yet ready to admit (and perhaps were not even aware) that the change of environment could have led to changes in behavior in school and at home. As a population, these students were less likely than their peers in regular school to be thoughtful about their experiences in school, and they may have been in alternative programs for the sorts of behaviors that adolescents engage in when they are reacting instead of thinking things through.

Because of my concerns, each of us revised the protocol; then the team visited a site we had selected for piloting our data collection methods. We piloted each protocol, and because mine was the most successful at eliciting the data we needed, we used it for the duration of the study. And because my session with the students had gone so well, I was drafted to conduct focus groups, especially when students were involved. By the end of the four-month data collection period for the project, I was also conducting focus groups and interviews with administrators and teachers.

Of course, my “training” in conducting focus groups had taken place during my previous decade working with students in a classroom. As I saw it, my skill in conducting interviews (moving young participants toward the thinking we needed them to engage in for the project) was the result of teaching skills that had earned me the respect of students, parents, and administrators. With carefully structured writing prompts and questions, I could often arrange for my students to think through a set of ideas and come to a conclusion without my telling them directly what I wanted them to understand. It seemed to be a sort of magic. I believed I was teaching them to think for themselves by giving them a heuristic that had worked for me. It was years before I began to see this process—which had so very successfully led my students to think as I did and come to my conclusions—and its outcomes as manipulative. My students were not thinking for themselves; they were thinking for me. However, after I noted that students often came to interesting conclusions I had never considered when they worked in groups, especially when they considered literature I was less passionate about and more willing to hand over to them for meaning-making, I began to feel more and more uncomfortable employing those manipulations, and I used them less frequently in my teaching methods.

It wasn't until I had been in graduate school for a couple of years that I began to think directly about the significance of my discomfort with my suspicions that I had manipulated my students' thinking. While teaching Siegfried to tenth-graders one day, research methods and teaching methods collided serendipitously. In the middle of a classroom discussion about the epic hero, I wondered aloud, "How many of you thought Siegfried had a 'tragic flaw' when you were reading the story?"

The first responses from my students were somewhat defensive: "Well, the question in the book asked for examples of this thoughtlessness." "The other questions asked about how his downfall was the result of his flaws." I agreed, but then I asked again: "When you were *reading*, did you think he was *flawed*? I mean flawed the way you saw Oedipus and Achilles and Creon as flawed?" I laughed. "Or the way you think of yourself or of me as flawed? Were you seeing him in a critical light?" A few beats passed—and they began to reconstruct out loud. They had noticed that he was a bit of a show-off but not much more than they expected in the context of a bunch of guys out hunting together and competing to see who could kill the most animals. A bit foolish to let that bear run loose in the camp. Perhaps overconfident. Then others countered that he was hardly overconfident since he could handle the situation. Gradually the conversation shifted to a discussion of how the questions in the textbook had directed us toward an interpretation that did not fit our readings of the story. Students concluded that the textbook had shaped their interpretations. After some conversation about how learning might be shaped/controlled in public education, we decided that in the future, we would rely on reading journals prompted by student thinking rather than by textbook questions. (Though some found the questions interesting for thinking about the types of thinking the books condoned.) But I was

still uncomfortable. The textbook had accomplished what I had so often congratulated myself for accomplishing—pushing students to conclusions that they did not realize were not their own.

That night, I returned to a chapter on qualitative interviewing I had read the previous night—Patton’s (2002) discussion of shaping interview questions to keep the interview focused and clear. I began noting my concerns in the margins: “But what if I direct the thinking of the respondent so skillfully and keep the discussion so focused that I get what I want instead of what a participant thinks or has to say? Whose interview is it then? Whose meaning-making is at work in the resulting data?” Interviewing, like classroom discussions, was suddenly suspect, no longer a space within which participants might work to create meaning but a space within which they were manipulated into creating a pre-determined meaning. What would be the purpose of bringing in participants for my research if all I could see or hear was what I already thought?

In this research project, discomfort with my classroom methods and the research process folded in on one another as I considered how teaching/research methods enable teachers/researchers to manipulate outcomes and meaning making, concerns that wove back and forth in both fields (teaching and research) and led me to tinker with methods in both arenas. This project was an extension of my efforts to minimize my manipulation of meaning making. I sought to open spaces in data collection and analysis wherein power in the construction of meaning was more available to the participants so that my meanings might be more effectively challenged and the meanings of my participants more clearly heard.

Introduction

Social constructionism informed by ongoing postmodern critiques framed this study. In particular, my discomfort with authority led to concerns about the power/authority of the academic researcher (hence my efforts to privilege the expertise of experienced teachers). Even

though I came to understand my misgivings about conventional qualitative interviewing and adjusted methodology accordingly during fieldwork, I begin this chapter with a brief overview of research methodologies that contextualize those evolving methods. The research design description that follows includes an in-depth discussion of the interview methods and interpretation of data that I employed for the project.

Throughout the chapter, I have included parenthetical remarks (representing *ghost data* that influence my collection and interpretation of data) and *interludes* (representing covert data analysis that took place when I did not realize I was analyzing data). I have borrowed the term “interlude” from Lather (2007), who used interludes between the chapters of her book *Getting Lost* “to elaborate/complicate some aspect of the preceding chapter” (p. xi). I have opened spaces in my description of research methodology with interludes that clarify/complicate my explanation of how I came to decisions about how to proceed in my analysis.

What I call *ghost data* refers to out-of-field data that came from somewhere other than the research site and research participants I name in the research design section of this chapter—memories from my past as well as lines of songs and poetry that haunted me during data collection and coexisted with interview data, coloring my understanding of what counts as conventional qualitative data just as conventional research data led to reinterpretations of out-of-field material that interrupted and contaminated my formal analyses. Like apparitions, these memories and lines fluttered through my mind as I worked, usually a bit of a nuisance as I was trying to understand why they had dropped in to distract me. Often I could continue to work with the *ghost data* co-existing with and enriching the interview data and analysis. In the Site Description below, I represent *ghost data* parenthetically to illustrate the way personal memories

and family history complicated and enlivened my understanding of the history of Temple County, the site for this project.

However, there have been periods when my frustrations with this project led me to turn away from the data, the analysis, and the writing to pursue other interests and responsibilities. *Interludes* represent turning points in these longer interruptions in the flow of my research, times when I wrote my way to new understandings of songs and poems (metaphors for my problems with the research) that ran through my mind when I thought I had given up on the project. Hence, I present the *interludes* as interruptions in the chapter to signify the fallow periods in my research process. (In agriculture, fallowing a field involves allowing the field to be unused for a time so that its soil can revitalize.) These sections of the chapter are samples of journal entries that I wrote toward the end of the fallow periods. As I wrote my way to a new understanding, the *ghost data* in the literary analysis turned out to be the data of this research project, lurking behind the lines of poetry waiting for me to discover the connections. Once I wrote about the poem or song (thereby analyzing the *ghost data*), I found a new way to approach the interview data.

Between the time that I turned away from the research project and began writing each *interlude*, I was engaged in an unconscious analysis for this research project, which is why I refer to the analytical work in these pieces as *covert analysis*. When I finally wrote about the poems and memories that had been running through my mind, I discovered these analyses were relevant to the research project, offering an understanding of research data that had eluded me in my efforts at direct analysis. (Concurrently, a re-evaluation of the poem/memory was taking place through the prism of my problems with data analysis.) *Ghost data* and *interludes* are distinguished from the more traditional elements of this chapter by italics. I discuss both more thoroughly in the data and analysis sections of this chapter.

Ghost data and interludes are examples of the contamination of what counts as conventional data and analysis in this project. Indeed, presenting them and the other processes described in this chapter as *distinct* elements of the methods and methodology of the project is a misrepresentation of the overlapping and folding nature of theory, data, and data analysis in human lives.

[Frost Interlude] Telling the Story with a Sigh

One of his most anthologized poems, with lines that seem to have always been a part of American culture, Robert Frost's (1969) poem "The Road Not Taken" is also his most frequently misread. Even the name of the poem is "misremembered" by many as "The Road Less Travelled," a mistake that reflects stubborn adherence to a reading that seems to willfully ignore the first 17 lines of the poem. The most commonly quoted lines, lines 18-20, are frequently and earnestly deployed in homilies, graduation speeches, car commercials, and greeting cards, exhorting listeners to follow the Romantically individualistic path of the speaker by taking the road "less travelled": "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--/I took the one less travelled by,/And that has made all the difference" (p. 105).

Students of Robert Frost's poetry learn quickly to be careful as they read his sing-song verses, careful not to be taken in by the folksy speakers in his most loved poems or by the seemingly simple and direct language and images. If we are not careful reading "The Road Not Taken," we can hear the message we want to hear by isolating the last lines (always the most important, right?) and ignoring the warnings in the rest of the poem that tell us these lines describe a necessary fiction the speaker has constructed so that a choice he made earlier in life can be read (by others? by himself?) as the right choice. Three times (and we literary critics love threes), the speaker warns the reader that the roads were the same ("just as fair," "really about

the same,” and “equally lay” [ll. 6, 10, 11]) before he changes his story long after the decision was made and says one was “less travelled.” The final, oft-quoted lines are anything but earnestly Romantic; they are full of the irony of postmodernism, presenting the story he finds himself telling the world about his choice and his need to cast it as a conscious and wise decision when it was actually little more than an eenie-meenie-meinie-mo choice between two seemingly equal but unknowable futures. His example illustrates our need to construct the random events of our lives into narratives so that we can believe that our lives have had themes and morals.

And if our need to restory is not enough, there is also the problem of memory, which I am told by Philip Hilts (1995) is not a revisitation to a recorded event that I have stored in my mind but a revisitation to the last time I reviewed that memory. In other words, I do not remember the event; I remember my last consideration of the event. With this in mind, Frost’s “perhaps” in line 7 takes on more significance as we realize that what we think we remember is only “perhaps” what happened—or perhaps what we thought was happening—or perhaps what we have restoried about what we thought happened.

But the line from the poem that haunts me as I begin to tell my story of this research project is a line that introduces the story he has constructed for the world to hear: “I shall be telling this with a sigh . . .” (l. 16). Is the sigh of the speaker something he imagines using for his listeners, a dramatic effect to impress them with the importance of this moment when he made the decision? Or is it a sigh for himself, for the fact that once again he will lie so that he can tell a story of his life that has a plotline, direction, and, therefore, purpose? Perhaps the sigh is his acceptance of the necessity of our fictions, of our need to give meaning to our past so that those around us can look to us with respect or so that we can move on with our lives without becoming mired in what-ifs.

A social constructionist stance combined with a postmodern conscience places me as researcher in an irresolvable situation. On one hand, I am curious about the ways my participants shaped and were shaped by the contextual worlds of their classrooms over long careers in education. On the other hand, a postmodern impulse leads me to wonder about the myriad necessary fictions at play in the stories we are all constructing about our lives. I question the validity of my own construction of meaning from other people's constructions of meaning, and the ethics of constructing that meaning. A postcolonial awareness taunts me as I seriously wonder what right I have to manipulate what these teachers have reported of their lives so that I might construct this project for my own purposes.

Ultimately, I move forward in fits and starts with the conflicts and doubts unresolved, no longer sure that any truth can be discovered in memory, but hearing and often repeating to myself Lather's (2007) words (which I speak ruefully, as I now hear the sigh of Frost's speaker): "It is what we do" (p. 29).

Methodology and Methods

Qualitative social constructionist methodology. Crotty (1998) observed that social constructionism "mirrors" the phenomenological concept of "intentionality," which means "referentiality, relatedness, directedness, 'aboutness'" (p. 44). Intentionality means the subject and the world are never distinct because "consciousness is always consciousness *of something*" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 44-45). Subject and object are always implicated in one another, engaged in a "radical interdependence" (Crotty, p. 45) that leads to a collaborative production of meaning, a construction that is not *created*, but *constructed* from "the world and objects in the world" (p. 44). Researchers with a social constructionist orientation also pay attention to how the subject's

way of perceiving the object—his way of *intending toward* that object—is determined by language and culture, or as Burr (1995) described it, is historically and culturally specific.

So the social constructionist researcher begins her project with a curiosity about how people construct knowledge and an orientation toward knowledge that is skeptical that knowledge is either stable, universal, or extant. She might go about collecting data using either empirical or ethnographic methods; however, what may set her apart from other empiricists or ethnographers is the way she sees, analyzes, and uses the data. For example, beginning with Gergen's assertion in an interview (Mattes & Schraube, 2004) that constructionism is primarily "an orientation toward knowledge itself" (para. 15), an orientation that leads the researcher to investigate the effects of "taken-for-granted knowledge" (Burr, 1995, p. 3), some research questions that arise from a social constructionist orientation could be investigated using traditional positivist methods. For example, social constructionists see language as one of the most powerful tools for making meaning, both enabling us to organize and make sense of random information and limiting our ability to interpret information that does not fit our experiences. Experimental psychologists such as Brown and Lenneberg (1961), Carmichael, Hogan, and Walter (1932), Herman, Lawless, and Marshall (1961), and Lotz (1961) demonstrated that when presented with colors, shapes, and sounds for which their languages do not have words, participants have greater difficulty remembering the phenomena presented than when they are presented with phenomena for which they do have words. In fact, participants often distorted what they perceived to fit the words and language sounds they already knew, shaping their memories to fit the constructs they already carried in their minds. For example, in one of Lotz's experiments, researchers presented three identical staccato beats to Czech, Polish, and French participants. Members of each language group interpreted the beats according to the

stress patterns of their own language. The Czech language stresses the first syllable, and the Czech participants reported hearing a stress on the first beat. The Polish language tends to stress the middle syllable, and the Polish participants reported hearing the stress on the middle syllable. French is a terminally stressed language, and French participants reported hearing the final syllable stressed. Certainly, quantitative, empirical studies can share the social constructionist orientation by demonstrating that how people perceive and interpret their taken-for-granted worlds is culturally and historically specific. Lotz (1961) concluded that “Language influences the total psychological makeup of man” (p. 12), an assertion that most social constructionists could embrace.

In the same interview with Mattes and Schraube (2004), Gergen insisted that constructionist methods can include traditional empirical techniques, such as those of experimental psychologists, as well as newer qualitative methods, which he pointed out “are not constructionist methods, *per se*, but simply methods that have been invited by the recognition of the constructed character of our knowledge claims” (para. 16). For example, the language experiments described by Lotz (1961) appear to have followed what Gergen described as the positivist guidelines of experimental psychology—controlled experimental settings and stimulus conditions, statistical evaluation of causal sequences, and broad generality. However, the curiosity of some empirical researchers about how we construct knowledge in relation to the world and its phenomena marks their work as social constructionist, not their methodology.

In contrast to Gergen’s position that social constructionism is an orientation toward knowledge that may provide a foundation for numerous research methodologies (in Mattes & Schraube, 2004), Guba and Lincoln (1989) took a more restrictive position by describing a specific methodology appropriate for social constructionist evaluation, one that they asserted

must be “radically different from scientific positivism” (p. 13). They posited a “constructivist paradigm,” which “rests on a relativist rather than a realist ontology” (p. 13):

Its exercise unites the evaluator and the stakeholders in an interaction that *creates* the product of evaluation, utilizing a hermeneutic dialectic approach aimed at establishing that interaction and maintaining it within quality bounds. Moreover, the product of the evaluation is not, in sharp contrast to conventional methodology, a set of conclusions, recommendations, or value judgments, but rather an *agenda for negotiation* of those claims, concerns, and issues that have not been resolved in the hermeneutic dialectic exchanges. (p. 13)

In their view, the very act of investigation places the researcher in a position of intending toward a participant or a community, a position from which the researcher cannot be separate from whatever or whoever is being studied. By observing and interviewing the community, the researcher becomes part of the community and the research project becomes part of the community experience. Guba and Lincoln asserted that the researcher’s honesty about this aspect of research, her reliability as an evaluator who recognizes that hers is only one perspective, and her responsibility to participants as stakeholders in the research project mandate that the community members should be encouraged to actively participate in analysis and interpretation of the data and results of the research project.

Another challenge to the position that positivist methods are appropriate for social constructionist research projects is implicit in social constructionism’s roots in phenomenology, which makes suspect any assumption that the researcher can be objective or separate from the research. From a phenomenological perspective, “the world shows itself as a place in which we are completely immersed and from which we do not radically distinguish ourselves” (Critchley,

2005, p. 29). There is no single truth to be found; there are instead varied meanings ascribed to the world (or the data) as we perceive it. Even more confounding, meaning is produced as a joint venture between subject and object with each subject (and here the subject and object can switch places freely) interpreting the object within constructs he has already learned and is learning. The researcher seeks to understand how participants make meaning of their worlds. The participant is the subject intending toward the object (her world, the interviewer, or other participants), but the researcher is also the subject intending toward an object (the participant/s). Furthermore, once the researcher becomes immersed in the field of the participant, the participant's intending toward his field is affected by the very presence of the researcher as he intends toward the researcher, a new phenomenon in his world. A new field is created the moment the researcher enters the space of the participant/s. And as the researcher tries to be mindful of her own perspectives shaping the research project, that is, her ways of intending toward the subject, she also becomes both subject and object of intention. The result of this process is at the very least, in Geertz's words (1973), explication of explication ad infinitum, a result that may spin ever further from the meaning-making of the subjects under investigation and toward the meaning-making of the researcher.

The assumption that all knowledge is socially constructed certainly makes qualitative methodologies best for investigating questions about *how* knowledge is constructed within communities. Since the subject of investigation is human, Guba and Lincoln (1989) had a valid point when they asserted "the methods employed should be primarily those that are congenial to humans—qualitative methods" (p. 177). These qualitative methods most commonly include field observation, individual and group interviews, and document examination. Marshall and Rossman (1999) noted that of these methods, the most suitable for attaining "the participants' perspectives

on events” (p. 110) is the interview. However, as I discussed above, the traditional qualitative interview, while designed to investigate and gather participant perspectives, can be a manipulative process shaped primarily by the desires and needs of the researcher, thereby limiting the freedom of participants to engage in their own meaning making.

The traditional qualitative interview. Marshall and Rossman (1999) noted that interviews, combined with observations, “allow the researcher to understand the meaning that people hold for their everyday activities” (p. 110), making these qualitative methods the methods of choice in many social constructionist projects concerned with “the social constructions of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 3) in communities. Concerns about the objectivity or subjectivity of such data are irrelevant to social constructionists. All constructions of reality are human and therefore both/neither objective and subjective. Objectivity is thinkable only in a foundationalist epistemology such as positivism. However, Marshall and Rossman contended that interviews can provide a window into the shared and separate constructions of community members’ understanding of the community’s history, culture, and language. Indeed, Patton (2002) went so far as to declare that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). These researchers believed the interviewer can remove herself from the interview enough to discover the perspective of the person or persons being interviewed and described research processes designed to elicit that perspective.

The goal of the social constructionist interviewer is to discover participants’ interpretations of their lives and their worlds, the perceived truth of other people’s experiences, so that the researcher gains a “solid, deep understanding of what is being studied, rather than breadth” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35). Each person’s truth has its own validity; it may be

compared to other perspectives to better understand the “taken-for-granted” world that shapes that truth but not necessarily as a test of its validity. Since the social constructionist interviewer needs participants to reveal their perspectives, certain styles of interviews work better than others to achieve this goal of describing and understanding the ways individuals ascribe meaning to objects, words, events, and their lives.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) described an interview style they call “responsive interviewing” that “relies heavily on the interpretive constructionist philosophy, mixed with a bit of critical theory and then shaped by the practical needs of doing interviews” (p. 30). Responsive interviews are “built on naturalistic, interpretive philosophy,” “extensions of ordinary conversations” in which the “interviewees are partners in the research enterprise rather than subjects to be tested or examined” (p. 12). This special relationship with the person being interviewed is a cornerstone of social constructionist research. Interviewees are more than passive subjects of research but are instead partners who “share in the work and the fun of discovery, often guiding the questioning in channels of their own choosing” (p. 14). Indeed, social constructionist researchers replace the traditional positivist term for the person being interviewed, “subject,” with other terms that signal this desired egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the human subjects who are sharing their perspectives, terms such as “interviewee” (Glesne, 1999), “participant” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002), and “conversational partner” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Patton (2002) described six kinds of questions that an interviewer might ask in an interview, questions designed to reveal experiences and behaviors, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory experiences, and background/demographic information about the participants. Of these six categories, two are particularly useful for meeting the goals of the

social constructionist researcher: opinion and values questions, and experience and behavior questions. While other questions may be included in an interview protocol—for example, background/demographic questions are essential for gaining information necessary for analysis and reports—the most important responses for helping the researcher understand *how* a reality is socially constructed are often from these first two categories. Responses to opinions and values questions can reveal “what people *think* about some experience or issue” (p. 350) as opposed to how they act or behave. Responses to experience and behavior questions can reveal the structures that sustain those realities. And discrepancies between observed behaviors and stated beliefs may reveal foundations and structures that are not only taken-for-granted but also unrecognized.

Bearing in mind that each interview in a research project is unique because of the distinct qualities and experiences of each participant and the distinct relationship established between the interviewer and each conversational partner, Rubin and Rubin (2005) outlined a model for conducting the interview that reflects the social constructionist’s goals of understanding how the conversational partner understands the topic of research while maintaining an atmosphere of comfort and respect. Traditionally, such an interview has three broad stages that may occur in one interview or over the course of several interviews. The first stage, the introduction, is primarily designed to establish comfort and trust between the interviewer and conversational partner. During the middle stage, the interviewer introduces the “hard questions” of the interview—those that are “the more emotionally or intellectually difficult” (p. 114). During the final stage, the interviewer focuses on winding down any tension that has been introduced during the interview so that the conversational partner may return comfortably to his normal life.

For Rubin and Rubin (2005), the goal of the introduction is to establish a relaxed tone by explaining the participant's place in the context of the research project, how her knowledge and expertise is important to the overall understanding the interviewer is seeking. Ultimately, the interviewer seeks to establish the relationship of the interviewer and conversational partner as *partners* in research. Then the interviewer proceeds to some easy, general questions linked to the topic mentioned in the introduction, *guiding* the conversation to the areas of the researcher's interest. Answering these questions should develop the conversational partner's comfort and sense of expertise, and, at the same time, the interviewer will have also moved the conversational partner toward the topics and thinking the researcher wants the conversational partner to consider.

After trust has been established and the conversational partner is comfortable, the interviewer moves on to tougher questions, questions that may be more difficult to answer because of their emotional content or intellectual demands. If the interviewer seeks information that the conversational partner has trouble remembering, Rubin and Rubin (2005) recommended deploying questions that work like regressions in psychotherapy and hypnotherapy to help the conversational partner remember, taking her gradually back to a particular time.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) described the end of the interview as having two stages: (a) toning down the intensity that may have been reached in the middle stage and (b) closing the interview session on a positive note. After the interview, the interviewer may still need information that she does not yet know enough to ask for. As the conversational partner has come to understand more about the research project, she is now better able to help the interviewer understand not only the topic but also the very research questions the researcher should be pursuing. In this final stage, the researcher wants to keep the relationship between

interviewer and conversational partner open. Rubin and Rubin recommended that the conversational partner, whom they now consider a co-researcher, be encouraged to contact the interviewer if she thinks of something else to add later. Offering to send a copy of the interview notes and transcript to the conversational partner for comments may help reinforce the relationship as co-researchers, instill a sense of transparency and trust in the relationship, and add to the validity of the research project.

Of course, what Rubin and Rubin (2005) outlined was a very tentative plan, a framework for the interview protocol that the interviewer follows until she enters into a “partnership” with the people who will facilitate the research project—the conversational partners. As they saw it, meaning in such an interview is co-authored: The “subject” is the authority, and all plans are contingent on what is learned by the researcher in the field, during observations, during interviews, and during analysis before, during, and after the interviews. However, much of the procedure they described is designed to *control* the interview as the interviewer moves the conversational partner from a position outside the research project to an understanding of what the researcher is seeking to a position as a member of the researcher’s inquiry project. This process insures that the conversational partner moves toward the researcher and her concerns, making meaning in a manner that is useful to the research project and the needs of the researcher, a troubling manipulation that potentially co-opts the conversational partner’s perspective into the interviewer’s rather than vice versa.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) also emphasized the importance of conducting social constructionist research in the natural setting of the community being examined:

If multiple realities are assumed, and they are dependent on the time and context of the constructors who hold them, it is essential that the study be carried out in the same

time/context frame that the inquirer seeks to understand. . . . Contexts give life to and are given life by the constructions that are held by the people in them. (p. 175)

The social constructionist, according to Guba and Lincoln, is *not* “a technician, describer, and/or judge” but a collaborator, negotiator” (p. 19) who makes meaning *with* and *about* the subject of the research. However, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Rubin and Rubin (2005), this is a researcher who controls the research processes.

This research project, which primarily seeks the perspectives of its participants, relies primarily on the interview as data source. However, I have sought to *lose* control of the research process by taking steps to encourage my participants to take more control of the interview process, steps that I developed while reading and thinking about postmodern methodologies and methods.

Postmodern methodologies. While I share with social constructionists an “orientation toward knowledge itself” (Gergen in Mattes & Schraube, 2004, para. 15) that is “ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” (Burr, 1995, p. 5), I have found critiques of absolute, fixed truths useful for my own thinking about problems with research methodology and the authority of the researcher in data collection and analysis. Just as Lather (1991) used postmodernist theory as a position from which to critique and *expand* both feminist and Marxist theory, thereby enabling her to move beyond some limits of discourse and power positionality created by these critical theories’ implication in power struggles and oppression, so I used postmodernism as a position from which I might critique conventional qualitative research methods, thereby opening spaces in those methods for my participants to discover and reveal their perspectives more freely, enabling me to move beyond the limits of my power positionality as researcher.

Danforth (2004) observed that the “range of views captured under the heading *postmodernism*” is confusing because of its diverse and at times conflicting philosophical traditions (p. 446). But he added that the postmodern positions offer a useful stance for critiquing the positivist belief in “value-free research methods” (p. 446). The varied “posts” may appear diverse and conflicting because they do not share a theoretical *base* so much as a theoretical *stance* that seeks to view the world outside both the mainstream and themselves:

What unites these disparate philosophies under the miscast moniker postmodernism is simply the fact that they provide conceptual means to critique the basic positivistic positions on professional knowledge and practice. These philosophies do not support the notion that a value-free research methodology is possible or that professional practices can be scientifically validated or invalidated. (Danforth, 2004, p. 446)

However, Lyotard (1984/1979) offered a surprisingly simple description of postmodernism as an “incredulity toward metanarratives” (p. xxiv), a description that captures my own problems with research. In this and other projects, I have been incredulous of the research project as a narrative with the researcher as hero on a quest for knowledge and truth. Specifically, I am incredulous of the authoritative role of the researcher—as the active and directed seeker of knowledge, as the collector of data, as interpreter of the data, and as the presenter of useful/important/significant findings. This hero, who performs God-tricks of interpretation within an unassailable framework of discourse and meaning, is reminiscent of the archetypal epic hero, chosen by God to save society by establishing order where chaos once ruled and by bringing truth where ignorance once prevailed.

I also question the distinctions that conventional qualitative research generally makes among data, data collection, interpretation, analysis, and reporting. These processes are often

described as discrete events, separate in both time and space, occurring at distinct and appropriate intervals within an orderly research process. Conventional academic research reports, such as the dissertation, are usually neatly organized to present research events in separate chapters, sections, and subsections as if they occurred separately, when, in fact, they are integrated and overlapping physical and intellectual processes. I am not thinking merely about the recursiveness of the research process in which data collection leads to analysis which may lead to more data collection. Rather, I propose that each is all: analysis *is* data; data collection *is* analysis; reporting *is* re-interpretation and more data collection; and so on.

Similarly, people involved in a research project resist categorization. For example, my role as researcher bled into all aspects of my life, and all aspects of my life bled into my research. I was the researcher and the researched, uncomfortably occupying both positions simultaneously. I was the authority who instigated and designed the project, but I sought the authority of others to help me think.

Postmodernism challenged me as a researcher to find ways to become aware of the somewhere (Haraway, 1988) from which I began my research and continued to view my data, ever aware of my “noninnocence” (Lather, 2007, p. 38) as researcher. Indeed, it prodded me constantly to wonder about the extent to which any data could be other than *my* data and whether I could produce anything other than what I expected to see and hear. While postmodern critiques convinced me that I would always be complicit in my data, they also offered ways to rethink my research goals and methods, and challenged me to try new ways of opening up new possibilities wherein I might at least “keep educational research in play, increasingly unintelligible to itself, in order to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 27). These differences may be achieved as a result of a postmodern stance that approaches

“master narratives” with skepticism: “our assumptions about what constitutes everyday knowledge as well as academic knowledge, indeed the very possibility of knowing, have been placed deeply into question” (Martusewicz, as cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 26). This skeptical stance opens a perspective from which researchers may critique—indeed *must* critique—their own positionality and the limits any positionality imposes on their work.

I found in Foucault’s (1977a/1975; 1978/1976; 1980) discussions of power relations a useful position from which I could think about the researcher’s position within the research project. Describing Foucault’s (1980) analysis of power as a modern system, Taylor (1986) noted that for Foucault, the insidious nature of power “lies partly in the fact that it is not seen as power, but as science” (p. 69). In some forms, power, according to Foucault (1980), “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (p. 39). However, Foucault (1978/1976) also stipulated that “Relations of power/knowledge are not static forms of distribution” (p. 99). Could I create a research space that encouraged a freer circulation of power, avoiding its getting mired in my desires to produce answers to my questions, to discuss life in my discourse, and to understand identity in my terms? Could this freer circulation of power lead to a new production of knowledge or a production of new knowledge?

Foucault’s descriptions of power (1977a/1975; 1978/1976; 1980) offered ways for me to think about power and take steps to address some of my concerns. In noting the productive potential of power when it is allowed to flow freely within those human relations, Foucault opened up new possibilities for thinking about research and interviewing. While I cannot give power to any participant, I might be able to create an interview space wherein power could flow more freely so that participants (individually and as a group) might pursue their own “lines of

flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980) in writing and in conversation. To expand these spaces within the interview, I had to think about the aspects of the interview that have potential to block or diminish the free flow of power.

I first examined the conventional qualitative interview for practices that might block or diminish the free flow of power among the participants. I then modified the interview protocol in an effort to increase the likelihood that my participants would produce their own knowledge rather than necessarily produce knowledge that I desired. With each step in the research process, I continued to adapt research protocols (for selecting participants, for conducting interviews, and for performing analysis), opening more space for my participants to exercise power in the research process by making more decisions about the direction of the research project. In the next section of this chapter, research design and analysis, I explain the moves I made to encourage free flow of power, as much as possible, within the interview so that relations among all the participants stayed in play. These moves were efforts to remove myself from the interviews, at times physically by having participants write personal histories and at other times as the questioner by having participants ask one another questions.

Researchers enter the field to learn from subjects who are presumed authorities. Indeed, their knowledge is the very reason we leave the office, the classroom, and the library. We enter the field looking for something books cannot tell us, something that we think those outside of academia can reveal. But we enter the field already shaped by the very knowledge that was inadequate, and we design questions to find the information we want.

If we are lucky, we soon discover the woeful inadequacy of our research questions and design, as we begin to see and hear the field and our own taken-for-granted prescriptive texts that have predetermined what we see and hear. The new research challenge at that point involves the

problem of losing oneself in the field—not in the sense of immersion but in the sense of letting go of the predetermined knowledge structures that have given us a sense of direction and control.

Research Design

Overview. This overview gives a broad picture of the more detailed description of the research design that follows, lending some coherence to the less deliberate steps I took on this journey. After the overview, I present a more detailed description of data collection and analysis in which I seek to capture the evolving processes of my data collection and my ongoing adaptations of methods for data collection and analysis of data. This more detailed description is organized chronologically rather than in the more traditional organization by process (e.g., participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and so on) to reflect the non-distinct nature of these processes in my project.

This qualitative research study was designed to gather written and oral interview data that might offer insights into how this group of six experienced teachers viewed their professional identities over lengthy careers in classrooms in a large Southern, metropolitan school district. The design takes advantage of the fact that I grew up in the district, attended schools in the district from first to twelfth grade, and taught in the district for ten years. My decade of teaching in the district (1987-1997) overlapped in part with the teaching careers of the participants (1970-present), and I taught with three in my first years as a teacher. In fact, I credit these teachers with teaching me a great deal of what I know today about how to be a teacher.

While most of the participants in this study taught in more than one school district during their teaching careers, they all shared at least ten years teaching in Temple County Public Schools (TCPS) (names of the school district and schools are pseudonyms; participants are identified with initials), the third-largest school district in what is now a sprawling metropolitan

area of a state in the southeastern United States. During the final three decades of the twentieth century, the time frame during which these teachers taught in TCPS, both the county and its schools experienced rapid population growth and sweeping demographic changes that played out in the classrooms of the research participants. Additionally, from 1969 to 1986, the system was under the supervision of federal courts because of a lingering lawsuit related to problems of desegregation in the district's public schools. Indeed, this district in many ways reflects the experience of many school districts in the Southeast where rapid growth, economic expansion, and cultural change occurred during the post-World War II years. These factors, described in detail in the site description below, contributed to the teaching environment in TCPS.

This study included two participant groups, each comprised of three teachers, for a total sample of six high-school teachers. Each teacher had taught for at least 25 years at the time of the study. The participants began their careers as teachers between 1967 and 1973 and ranged in age from 55 to 63 in spring 2007 when I formally began this research project; four had retired and two were still teaching. Because I had decided to conduct group interviews and wanted the participants to feel comfortable in the conversation groups, I chose teachers for each group who had worked together for at least ten years in a Temple County school. I refer to each participant group using the names of the schools where they taught together: the Adams High School Group (AHS Group) and the Conway High School Group (CHS Group).

The primary data source for this study was a series of interviews in which participants discussed their identities and careers in the classroom. I first asked each participant to complete a written interview by responding to written prompts (see Appendixes B and H) that I expected would help them write about how they created a professional teaching identity over their careers in the classroom. Then the participants engaged in a group conversation, one conversation each

for the AHS and CHS group (see Appendixes D and I). Each of these conversations lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. I conducted three individual follow-up interviews in response to questions that arose as I engaged in preliminary data analysis of the group conversations, two with members of the AHS group, one with a member of the CHS group. I arranged each individual interview to ask the participant to tell me more about something she/he had mentioned in the group conversation. For example, I arranged a follow-up individual interview with NE to ask her to tell me more about her son's two-year tenure as a teacher, which she had mentioned in the group conversation. She had alluded to problems he had with the teaching environment, and I wanted to ask her to elaborate on his decision to leave teaching. Each follow-up interview took approximately 60 minutes. One of these follow-up interviews was extended by email correspondence that I initiated for clarification of a comment.

Data analysis took place throughout and beyond the data collection process. Written and group interview protocols were revised after each interview in response to my increasing desire to move control of data production away from myself and toward my participants. Follow-up interview questions were designed in response to preliminary analyses of the written and group interviews. Writing helped me think my way through to some understanding of the data, and Plato's (1968/c. 360 B.C.E.) theory of virtue, Foucault's discussions and expansions of the ancient Greek concept of the care of the self, and Butler's (1990; 1996) discussion of performative identities helped me find and name themes in the participants' conversations. I cannot say with certainty that the themes I have named were the themes of my participants, but they are the themes that enabled me to construct a narrative about the data I collected from them.

In the following sections of this chapter, I will explain in detail the research site, research calendar, and research methods I have summarized in this overview.

Research site. The physical field of play for this project was Temple County, a metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. Like many metropolitan areas in the country, Temple County experienced rapid change and growth in the latter half of the twentieth century as post-war changes swept the country. To tell the story of these changes, I have used several sources to verify and clarify the informal references to change in interviews and the prior knowledge I bring from living in the county for my first 17 years and then, almost two decades later, returning to teach in the county for 10 years. These formal sources include the United States Census Bureau, the Temple County History Center, a local university's documents collection, the Temple County Board of Education, and the state teacher licensing agency. (I do not include citations for this information since it is overlapping and considered common knowledge.)

Doing the research for this section was an unusual research process for me, more akin to hearing a half-forgotten story about my mother than conducting typical academic research. I found myself accompanied by odd memories as I sat reading in old buildings, memories that connected to the data I was collecting—memories that took on new meanings in this new context. These sometimes vague and other times clear memories of living and working in the county, the ghost data of my research, were hardly important to the history of the county, but were important to my understanding of that history. I have included some of these memories parenthetically—my experiences growing up and returning to teach in Temple County while many of these changes were taking place.

I begin by describing the growth and changes in the county, and then discuss how these changes affected the Temple County Public Schools (TCPS).

As in much of this southern region, the early settlers of Temple County were English, Scotch, and Irish, some arriving from other southern states and others coming from the British Isles. *(My name, Mary Lynn Huie, captures both the Scotch (Lynn) and Irish (Huie) history of my family. It is carved on one of the oldest tombstones in the same Southern metropolitan area, the burial site of the first of my patronymic family to emigrate from Ireland to this state in the late 1700's. My first childhood visit to the cemetery left me with a strange mixture of self-importance and dread.)* These residents were generally poor, uneducated farmers. Early industries included granite quarrying, farming, and operating cotton and grain mills. Few of these original inhabitants owned slaves, and as late as the 1960's, the region continued to be predominantly rural and white, with the African-American population only about 5%.

From its establishment in 1822, population growth in Temple County was fairly steady, averaging 10-30% each decade, with greater-than-average spurts reported in the census data for 1880 (45%), 1920 (58%), and 1930 (60%). Only one decade, 1860, saw an unexplained decline in population. Data from the 1940 census reported the county's population as 86,942. After World War II, the county saw a period of sustained, explosive growth that mirrored that of metropolitan areas across the nation. The population increased by 57% (to 136,395) in 1950, 88% (to 256,782) in 1960, and 62% (415,387) in 1970. Thereafter, the county's population growth slowed to 16%, 13%, and 22% as reported in 1980, 1990, and 2000.

Data from 2007 indicated that the black (the term used by the Census Bureau changed from earlier reports) population rose to 54% and the non-Hispanic white population was 31%. Temple County had also become the most densely populated county in the state, no longer a rural, agricultural community but part of the urban sprawl of the state's nearby capital city. Over the period of the post WWII growth, the dairy lands disappeared as a wave of white

professionals built homes in Temple County's attractive suburbs between 1950 and 1970 and then fled for more distant counties between 1970 and 1990 after federal mandates required schools to desegregate. *(In the 1950's, our milk was still delivered daily from the nearby dairy—a cream skim on the top waiting for whoever got to the door first to bring in the milk and remove the paper cap. It was a race to get that first delicious sip—all five of us kids arguing over whose turn it was.)* Demographically, the county continues to change as new immigrant groups settle into blue-collar neighborhoods abandoned by whites and as two-income professional families stake out once-sleepy towns, now dotted with charming boutiques, organic farmers markets *(these days those farmers come from more distant parts of the state)*, and trendy restaurants.

Temple County schools reflect the rapid changes in population and demographics and have been challenged to keep pace with the shifting needs of its students and the demands of their parents. Prior to WWII, when farms still made up most of the area, fewer than 16% of its students were expected to go on to a professional career, and the attainment of a high-school diploma was the exception rather than the rule: approximately 40% of white students and only 7% of black students graduated from high school. After the war, Americans from rural towns flocked to cities, leaving behind generations-old traditions of working the land. The major social changes across America were even more pronounced in a place like Temple County, with its proximity to a southern capital that was also rapidly changing from a backwater to a major urban center. Not only were more students entering the schools as these young, upwardly mobile people moved to places like Temple County, but their parents also expected their children to graduate and enter college. *(My parents were representative of this migration: my mother was the first in her family to attend college and move into a professional career as a nurse. And while my father came from a family of Southern lawyers and physicians, he left the family's small-town*

home in the southern portion of the state for a more exciting life closer to the city. Both served in the war, both benefitted from the educational and professional opportunities of the war, and both returned to life in America with expanded ideas of what their lives could offer in comparison to what they had seen in their family history. Both also expected all of their children to go to college and enter professional careers.)

The GI Bill had an unprecedented impact on the expansion of the ranks of the educated, professional class, and Temple County between 1950 and 1970 welcomed the newly educated professionals to its recently developed pasturelands. In tandem with that expansion, TCPS opened 13 new schools in 1955 alone to serve the growing number of middle and upper-middle class children. Between 1956 and 1958, another 34 schools opened. Student population growth continued until the 1980's, a decade that saw some decline in student numbers. However, student numbers rose again in the 1990's and continues to increase today. Temple County schools, which had served approximately 9,000 students in 1946, served almost 100,000 students in the 2008-09 school year.

As mentioned before, the first wave of postwar growth, between 1950 and 1970, was primarily comprised of white, middle-class families and their children. The primary response of the school system was to expand facilities, increase the number of teaching and administrative staff, and add more college preparatory classes for students whose parents expected them to go to college. However, 1969 ushered in more complex changes as well as educational and legal challenges for TCPS. These events had been slowly developing since the United States Supreme Court had ruled racial segregation to be unconstitutional in the 1954 landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case.

The superintendent of TCPS from 1947 to 1972 had overseen the expansion of the school district, opening what the system proudly touted as “first-class schools” and extending the education provided by TCPS from kindergarten to the first two years of college by adding a technical school and junior college to the system. While he was a pioneer who improved educational opportunities in the county for many of its children, he was also a man who believed firmly that the races (in particular, black and white) should not be mixed, and for many years under his leadership, three separate schools were maintained to serve black students. The first of a series of lawsuits was brought against the county in 1969, charging that the county was, in practice, running a dual school system, and for the next 27 years, the system operated under federal supervision. During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, some newspapers reflected the uproar among whites that the public schools should be closed rather than comply with court orders to desegregate, but TCPS went ahead with plans to desegregate and keep its public schools open. As in most Southern areas, any consideration to desegregate by sending white students to the black schools was out of the question, so the black schools were closed in 1969. Black administrators and teachers from those schools mostly lost their jobs when black students were sent to white schools.

Desegregation in TCPS was relatively smooth. *(Or at least, the newspapers were not filled with pictures of students escorted by armed guards to class. However, I remember the whispers among my peers even before those schools closed. Since race had never been a topic of conversation among us, I had never known how people I had known all my life felt about blacks. I remember being shocked at first by the vitriol coming from the mouths of students in my classes. What I remember most was the unsettling feeling that I could share school and play experiences with people and never know much about them until something happened to reveal*

fundamental differences that would make it impossible to be friends. In the years after I graduated from high school in 1968, nearby working-class neighborhoods changed seemingly overnight as families sold homes in a rush to move to white havens in more distant counties. The upper-class neighborhoods were somewhat stable since those families could—and did—send their children to private schools.) Between 1969 and 2009, the percentage of black students in the county's schools increased from 5% to 75%. Conversely, the percentage of white students decreased from 95% to 10% of the students in TCPS. However, these numbers tell only part of the story of the changing demands on the school system. As whites left the area—or ceased to send their children to TCPS—immigrants moved in. The current 75% black population includes students who have recently settled in the area after their families fled war-torn areas such as Eritrea, Ghana, and Mali. Today, one high school in TCPS serves immigrant students speaking 54 different languages who are trying to adapt to a new life in a new world.

In some ways, the years during which TCPS was under court supervision were exciting years to be a teacher there. To comply with the demands of the courts, the schools implemented innovative programs to accomplish diversity in the schools even as the housing patterns tended toward segregation with whites clustered in the northern neighborhoods of the county and blacks in the southern neighborhoods. Magnet schools that focused on math and science, performing arts, and foreign language offered opportunities for students and teachers to pursue special interests. These schools used 50%-50% quotas to maintain diversity, and everyone seemed to benefit. The home schools housing the magnet programs benefitted from the influx of money, and students in the home schools benefitted from expanded curricular offerings. Most magnet schools received more applicants than they could accept, and a lottery system was implemented to select students.

The Majority to Minority (M-to-M) program, mandated by the court, allowed students who were in the majority population of a school to apply for transfer to a school where they would be in the minority population. Primarily attractive to black students, as many as 4,500 students participated in the M-to-M program. The courts ordered the system to balance the ratio of faculty and staff at each school so that the proportion of the black and white teachers in each school reflected the proportion in the county. *(As a white teacher, I could only be considered for positions at predominantly black schools when I applied to teach in TCPS in 1987.)* An initiative to equalize teacher pay in the schools was the Core Four plan: high school core teachers (those teaching English, math, social studies, and science) in minority schools with less-experienced faculty were assigned only four classes instead of five so the average per-pupil spending on teachers was equalized—and these schools became more attractive to experienced teachers from schools in the north of the county. *(For five years, my teaching schedule in TCPS at AHS included only four classes, a policy that gave me two planning periods. I had an extra period to talk with experienced teachers and to plan my classes. It was a wonderful way to begin teaching because I was always around other teachers in informal settings. During each planning period, different teachers were available to me for advice. I still believe new teachers should be assigned fewer classes to reduce their stress and give them more exposure via their extra planning period to experienced teachers in the school.)*

However, many of the efforts to accomplish diversity and equality in the schools were unpopular and led to nervousness and disgruntlement among faculty as changes in the schools seemed to take place with little input from teachers. The M-to-M students were perceived as more likely to get in trouble in their new schools, and teachers often saw these children as problems in their classrooms. Forced teacher transfers to accomplish faculty diversity and equity

(at least on paper) were generally unpopular among teachers of both races. White teachers were transferred to predominantly black schools, and vice versa. Generally, members of neither group were pleased. *(I remember listening to a black teacher who said she had gone into teaching specifically to work with underserved black students. She was not unhappy in her position in a predominantly white school, but she felt her work had lost its purpose.)* Teachers with long years of service, who were generally white teachers in predominately white schools because experienced black teachers had lost their jobs during integration, were transferred to predominately black schools to equalize pay and experience in staffs. Many of these teachers transferred to other school systems rather than transfer to a new school. *(AHS was a popular destination for these white transfers. While its student population was majority black, it still had a significant white population during the 1980's and 1990's when these forced transfers were taking place. One of these white transfers whom I knew was wonderful, a man who got over it and got busy working with and adapting to his new students. Another transfer never got beyond her bitterness, and her students suffered as a result.*

(But for teachers, the most damaging impact of the years under court supervision—an impact that did not show up in any of the documents I read—was a fear of lawsuits that permeated the schools and our work as teachers. If any parent so much as intimated that she was thinking of calling a lawyer because of a conflict, the administration would not support a teacher. Parents knew this and often used it to their benefit. It is over a decade since I taught in TCPS, and I still cringe when I call parents. What I continue to expect to hear on the other end of the phone line is an accusation, such as one that still echoes in my mind: “What did you do to make him act that way?”)

In 1996, when the Supreme Court decided that TCPS no longer operated a dual school system, few who had attended county schools prior to WWII would recognize the school system. But then again, few people who lived among the dairy farms and mills that dotted the county in those days would recognize the county itself. The changes are breathtaking. When I go to parks and festivals in the area, I recognize the names of the streets and landmarks such as the long-abandoned textile mill that once produced cloth. The surrounding mill houses are now brightly painted, revitalized by the urban pioneers moving into pockets of the county, but reminders of the old divisions in the county (racial, political, and economic) stand in stark contrast to those optimistic colors.

The six teachers in this study taught in TCPS for at least a decade, some beginning as early as 1970. All taught there during the 1980's and 1990's during the period of dynamic growth, change, innovation, and legal challenges. While the history of TCPS is in many ways unique, it is also similar to the history of many metropolitan areas around the country during the same time period. In some ways, this history suggests that pressure on teachers because of changing demographics, media criticism, and legal mandates is ongoing.

Overlapping time frames: Creating a beginning and ending for the study. Just as the beginning and ending of questions and themes that reverberate through our lives are difficult to determine, so too are the beginning and ending of this study. In an effort to make linear what was never linear, I have attached an appendix, a seriatim listing of the events of this project.

Appendix A lays out a calendar for this study.

One part of this calendar begins with my research proposal and subsequent IRB approval, and includes the various interviews I conducted under the approved plan, traditional parts of the dissertation research calendar neatly presented in traditional black type. This part of the calendar

reports that my dissertation proposal was accepted in September 2006 and that I received IRB approval February 2007. It indicates that I conducted my first group interview with the three participants I refer to as the AHS Group in April 2007 and then began to form a new three-participant group from CHS in June of the same year. The calendar continues to report dates on which research events occurred. The CHS Group interview took place in August 2007, and I conducted a follow-up interview with one member of the CHS Group in October 2007. I resumed what I could then understand to be data collection in May 2008 when I attempted to form a third cohort of teachers at Mayfair High School (MHS). My preliminary analyses of the AHS and CHS group conversations had yielded data that appeared contradictory (in terms of the research questions I was investigating at that point), and I felt that a new group might help me see new directions for thinking about the data. I also was interested in speaking with a group of teachers who had taught in a school that had undergone similar changes but in a different school district and in a different era. However, the teacher who had agreed to recruit the third group could not get responses from her colleagues, and this group failed to coalesce before the end of the school year, so I decided to work with the six participants I already had. The calendar reports that in July 2008, over a year after I collected most of the data for this project, I began writing data analysis and conducted follow-up interviews with two members of the AHS Group. The calendar reports that from July 2008 to June 2010 I wrote, edited, and revised the chapters of this dissertation in preparation for my dissertation defense scheduled June 21, 2010.

Such a traditional calendar of research events does not account for fallow periods that appear unproductive but actually were important parts of my understanding how to work with the data. It also does not include the academic influences on my thinking that occurred before and while I worked on this project or the questions that arose while I was writing that led me to

conduct follow-up interviews with the two teachers from the AHS Group. Bold typeface begins to fill in a more informative research calendar, including earlier research projects and academic coursework that led to my framing of the particular research questions that initiated this study and to the development of the interview protocols I used to collect data.

Entries in italics are a tentative step further, as I try to recall and understand data of another sort—ghost data that infused the participant data as I found myself more immersed in the study and found the study invading more of my life. Similarly, my life also invaded my data, and the lines between life events and research events became more and more indistinct. As mentioned earlier, ghost data refers to personal memories and experiences in the both the research site, Temple County and its schools, and in my life beyond Temple County—memories and experiences that colored my understanding and interpretation of the site and participant data for this project. I also use the italics to account for periods of covert analysis, a process that I am only now coming to perceive (but not fully understand) as a significant part of this project. For example, at a retirement luncheon in June 2007, I found myself visualizing the guests sitting at the table as immersed in a stream of educational practice, unaware of what had come before them or what would come after. At the time, I had no idea that this image would become an important part of my understanding of the data I was collecting at the time—or even that I was engaged in data analysis for this project.

In Ralph Ellison's (1995/1947) *Invisible Man*, the narrator withdraws from society into a state he calls "hibernation" (p. 13), which he defines as "a covert preparation for a more overt action" (p. 13). These entries in italics represent my attempt to account for times I believed to be fallow periods in my research, such as the period when I withdrew from the project in frustration

because the data made no sense to me (10/2007-5/2008). I now see these time-spaces as periods of hibernation, when I seemed to wander away from the research project into separate parts of my life even though the research continued in the background of my consciousness. In these linear calendar entries, I find I cannot easily present serially the data and analysis that overlap, intermingle, and resist the boundaries that suppositions of linear analysis impose. I have included examples of these covert analyses as *interludes* in this chapter to demonstrate how these periods of hibernation—when I thought research was suspended—actually helped me move toward new insights for data analysis.

While I find this particular (never final) representation of the research process to be a more accurate rendering of how this project evolved, it is the bold and regular typeface calendar entries on Appendix A listing the academic research events comprising this study that I shall elaborate on (in standard typeface) for most of this chapter. These are the research events that can best lend some clarity to my messy collection and analysis of what became messy data. However, even those entries resist order and categorization. For example, how should I represent data collection that appears as “official” data in the final project but that I collected before I was sure I was collecting data? Should I present those entries in half bold and half regular typeface? For the sake of clarity I made a decision (regular typeface to represent traditional data collection) and moved on.

In the section on data analysis below, I discuss the italic calendar entries a bit more directly. Yet even as I try to move chronologically from one entry in bold or black type to another, I expect the italicized entries will shadow this report in ways I cannot always control, just as those ghost data and periods of covert analysis shadowed my thinking.

Research before the design. Research for this project began before I thought about its formal design. I had been interested in long-term teacher retention prior to entering the doctoral program, and a consideration of the lives and identities of those who stay in the field seemed a natural outgrowth of that interest. In spring 2006, I conducted a small study on teacher identity for a doctoral class on teacher education programs, interviewing three teachers who each had over twenty-five years of classroom experience. This study was in many ways a response to assigned books and articles that based descriptions of teacher identity on the experiences of preservice and first-year teachers, research that I reacted to with some skepticism. The participants I worked with for this earlier study are also participants for this study, and, with their permission, the data I collected in the earlier study is included in this study. For that reason, I describe the participants and data collection methods for that study here. However, at the time I collected data for this study, I did not foresee how this data would become the beginning of this project.

The three participants in the 2006 study were teachers I had worked with in my own teaching career. All are white, Southern, middle-class women who had taught together for at least thirteen years in the same school, AHS, which is part of TCPS, a system in which I had taught for ten years, giving me some understanding of their teaching environment. I selected these women because each had over twenty-five years of teaching experience in the classroom. I also selected them because I knew them well, respected their work in the classroom, and thought they would be interested in participating in the project.

These three teachers had taught in more than one school system, but all had taught at least ten overlapping years at AHS. Two, NE and DS, had retired from TCPS, and one was still teaching at the time of this study. All had taught exclusively in public schools and primarily in

schools that would be described as “diverse” racially, culturally, and socio-economically because of the high percentage of students who were African-American and who qualified for free or reduced price lunch. NE came to education with no formal teacher training; however, the lack of experience with a teacher education program did not hinder her career: She retired in 2002, a department chair and highly respected leader in the county’s English program as well as a consultant and trainer for College Board’s Pacesetter curriculum. DS followed a more traditional path into education, having graduated from a large public institution’s school of education. She retired after teaching 30 years. Both NE and DS retired when they felt their parents’ increasing health problems and their careers were affecting each other in detrimental ways. JL, a 36-year veteran teacher, officially retired in 2003, but she continued to teach part-time in a small, urban school. She came to teaching via a traditional program of study in a large university’s school of education.

For this early study, which could be considered a pilot study, I sent an email to each participant, asking if she would like to respond in writing to a set of written questions about teacher identity. At the time, I felt that having them write at their own convenience would make participation easier for them. I also felt that writing would give them freedom to respond independently, with less overt influence from me as interviewer. And while I did provide a series of questions for them to consider (Appendix B), I included in the instructions permission to “write in response to those [questions] that interest you—as many or as few as you wish.” My concern was to avoid imposing too much on their time and to allow them freedom to consider the topics as they felt inclined to consider them.

While I kept a record of the writing prompts and instructions I sent each participant, I did not keep my early email correspondence with these women since it was not required for the

project, and at the time, I did not realize I had begun a much larger research project. However, I remember that those early emails were informal explanations of my interest in how experienced classroom teachers think about teacher identity.

The responses I received from these participants were moving and remarkable. The analysis I performed for the class project was thematic, and I organized my analysis and report by the questions I had asked. Shortly after I completed this class project, I decided I wanted to continue tapping the experience of female teachers who had had lengthy careers in the classroom, and I began to think more about how to design such a project for my dissertation research. In summer 2006, using the class project as a pilot study, I designed a second study derived from what I had learned from the pilot study that would use a combination of written and face-to-face interviews with eight new participants to investigate how experienced teachers thought about and acquired identities in the classroom. The research questions for this project were as follows:

1. How do teachers construct their career narratives?
2. How do teachers describe their professional identities and the development of their professional identities?
3. What crises do they identify; how do these crises threaten or challenge their professional identity?

I planned to select participants who had a minimum of twenty-five years of classroom-teaching experience from public schools in the large metropolitan area in which I live. Each participant would first write answers to a series of prompts similar to those I had used in the 2006 study (revised with advice from my university advisory committee). In response to my initial analysis of the written interviews, I would develop a protocol for face-to-face interviews with each

participant so that I could further investigate themes that emerged in the written interviews. I received approval to move on with that project from my committee on September 26, 2006, submitted the proposal to the university's Institutional Review Board in October 2006, and returned to my own teaching.

Theorizing design. In spring 2007, while waiting for approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, I took a postmodern methods course, which led to a reconsideration of my own conventional qualitative design. Reading the concerns of postmodern methodologists (Britzman, 1995; Chaudry, 2000; Lather, 1991; Lather, 2000; Lather, 2007; Pillow, 2000; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) who challenge traditional qualitative research methodology, I began to think about how I might adjust my interview protocols to create more space for my participants to create meaning within the data collection activities of my dissertation study. I had begun to question how research questions and interview protocols directed participants toward limited sets of responses within a predetermined discourse. To examine my interview protocols, I invited the three participants from the 2006 pilot study (the AHS Group) to help me critique the questions I had designed. The letter I sent to these participants is attached as Appendix C. I extended this invitation believing that the expertise of these teachers could not only tell me a great deal about teacher identity but also about how to frame questions about teacher identity. My plan was to bring them together in an informal conversational setting to ask one another questions about how they had established identity in the classroom and then use their interview questions to critique my own questions and better understand the limits my questions imposed on meaning-making during interviews. Based on this critique, I would modify my initial protocol and open up more space in the study for my participants' expertise.

On the afternoon of April 18, 2007, we met at the home of DS, who lived most centrally to the other participants and had volunteered to host the conversation. I brought tapenades and bread, JL brought homemade banana cupcakes, and DS provided cheese and crackers. We spent some time admiring DS's new porch and contributing ideas for landscaping before we moved the food into the living room and began to talk. Before I even turned on the tape recorder, two of the three participants began to ask me questions: What was the goal here? What did I want from them? Their questions signaled to me that we were ready to begin. As we relaxed in the living room chairs and sofa, I turned the tape recorder on to begin official data collection. I began explaining my goals by noting my trouble with authority (which led to a good laugh since they all know me pretty well) and my desire to use their authority as professionals who had thought a great deal about teaching to critique my own ways of approaching research about teachers. Appendix D is the transcript of my initial instructions to the AHS Group.

Before I began the interview, I had worried that their conversational paths would be similar to mine, that they might ask the questions that occurred to me as I listened to their conversation. I really should have known better with these women. After I explained that I felt they knew much more than I did about my subject (teachers who stay in the field for long careers) and that their questions might be much more interesting than mine, NE got up for a notebook to take notes for asking questions. Her action signaled a seriousness of purpose among the group members that persisted through most of the approximately 90-minute conversation.

After some explanation of the project, I began with a question similar to one they had written about in the previous study. I felt that would be a comfortable place for them to begin, and I observed that they had not read each other's responses. Each individual would be able to begin with her last engagement in the project and other members could hear a bit of what I had

already read. So I said, “Let’s start with the original prompt from your written interviews: How did you acquire an identity that worked for you in the classroom?”

But before anyone began to reminisce or share anything she had already thought about in *my* terms, NE began to question the terms of the discourse in the previous project: Rather than respond to the initial prompt, she questioned what “teacher identity” might be. That led to a lengthy discussion of teacher identity—what they thought it was and how they thought it was developed. Their definitions were much more complex than those I had previously considered. And I had to fight myself to not tell them what I “knew” from academic reading and thereby redirect their conversation. I let them go where they wanted with the topic, at the time thinking that eventually they would get closer to my research interests. Only later did I realize everything they said about teacher identity was not only powerful and intriguing but also that it deviated from the discourse I had assumed to be the discourse of my project, discourse that derived from the educational literature I had read about teacher identity. Indeed, their work in critiquing the term “teacher identity,” which I discuss in Chapter 4, challenged my thinking and forced me to question assumptions about the topic and methodology of my project.

Another aspect of the conversation that fascinated me both at the time and later as I transcribed the tapes was how carefully the participants listened to one other. Once the conversation began, they never seemed to be focused on me or too worried about what I wanted them to say. They listened to whoever was speaking, asking for clarifications and confirmations: “Do you mean . . . ?” “Do you think . . . ?” They were not argumentative; indeed, their curiosity about one another’s thinking seemed as much a way to think about their own thinking as to understand one another. It was a session of thinking and sharing with no need for agreeing or convincing. They were interested in the topic, but most of all, they seemed interested in one

another and how their differences might help them understand themselves better. And each time they clarified their own thinking and their understanding of each other's thinking, I too began to think differently about teacher identity.

This camaraderie was in stark contrast to their exchanges with me after their written interviews in the first pilot study. Then they had worried more about whether they were performing as I needed them to perform in an interview. (“Am I answering your questions correctly?”) And while there was some concern at the end that this conversation may not have yielded results that would be useful to me (“We were telling stories and enjoying ourselves. Is this really what you wanted?”), they did not seek approval during the conversation, either by looking at me, by asking me, or by using questioning tones. As I said before, once the conversation began, they focused on one another.

As I used the group conversation to analyze and critique the questions I had used in the earlier written interviews completed by the AHS Group, I realized that this experiment had not yielded what I had sought—ideas about how to revise interview protocols for the dissertation project—but it had given me something much more valuable. Rather than finding a new way to *frame* my questions, I had found a new way to conduct the interview by not *asking* questions beyond the initial prompt. I had stumbled on an interview method that opened up significant space for participants to engage in meaning-making more freely than I had experienced in previous interviewing sessions.

While I had seen similarities between that group conversation and my earlier work conducting focus groups, my understanding of focus groups had been limited to its traditional uses in marketing and for preliminary data gathering (Krueger, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Most focus group handbooks

(Krueger, 1994; Patton, 2002; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007) emphasize the careful planning that goes into creating and implementing protocols for what appears to be an open conversation among equals. However, to accomplish the goals of the researcher, an interviewer (also referred to as moderator) must be highly skilled in managing social groups so that the conversation stays within the parameters of the research topic, that the conversation is not hijacked by one or two dominant personalities, and that participants with minority viewpoints are not discouraged from speaking. As Patton observed, “**the power of focus groups resides in their being focused**” (p. 388). Indeed, one of the ironic cartoons in Patton’s handbook depicts the “Postmodern *unfocused* group interview” with a confused group of participants staring at a moderator saying, “Focus? No focus. Just interview each other. Whatever comes to mind” (p. 387). Traditionally, the focus group has been a highly controlled group discussion, moving in directions predetermined by the skilled moderator.

However, as Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook (2007) noted, focus groups, like interviews, can be more loosely structured, allowing more space for the participants “to pursue those issues and topics of greater importance, relevance, and interest to the group” (p. 39). More structure is maintained if the researcher wishes to keep the focus on his interests, and less structure can be desirable when the researcher wants to investigate the interests of the participants:

This [less structured group interviews] is perfectly appropriate if the objective of the researcher is to learn about those things that are most important to the group. Often, however, the researcher has rather specific information needs. Discussion of issues relevant to these information needs may only occur when the moderator takes a more directive and structured approach. It is important to remember that when this occurs,

participants are discussing what is important to the researcher, not necessarily what they consider significant. (p. 39)

What I had been calling a “group conversation” had become what Patton (2002) satirically referred to as an “unfocused group interview” (p. 387). This unfocused focus group seemed to be the interview method that could accomplish my goals of moving the research toward the interests of my participants. In what I had considered preliminary data collection with the AHS Group that would help me create structure for my dissertation interviews, I had been conducting the unstructured research I wanted to conduct and gathering the data I wanted to collect before I understood that that was what I was doing.

In May 2007 I obtained permission (from both my advisor and my participants) to use the data I had already collected with the AHS Group in both the 2006 study of experienced teachers for the class on teacher education programs (written interview data) and in the 2007 study of interview protocols for the class on postmodern methods (group conversation data). I then revised the design and research questions for my project in response to my early analyses of AHS written and group data, and had the participants from the AHS Group complete a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix E) that would supply information I would need for this dissertation project. The new research questions were as follows:

1. How do experienced teachers understand the concept of teacher identity?
2. How do teachers describe their professional identities and the development of their professional identities?
3. What experiences and relationships affect a teacher’s identity?
4. To what extent can the researcher move the center of authority toward the participants in a study by relinquishing control of the interview process?

I began again *in medias res*. However, as I stated in Chapter 1, beginnings are illusory. Perhaps I had just come to recognize the path I had already been taking and was finally ready to see the landscape that surrounded that path. Halfway into data collection, I felt I could theorize a methodology that would involve trying to create in my research what Palmer (1998) called “bounded and open” (p. 74) spaces for learning:

for a space to be a space, it must be open as well as bounded—open to the many paths down which discovery may take us, to the surprises that always come with real learning.

If boundaries remind us that our journey has a destination, openness reminds us that there are many ways to reach that end. (p. 75)

I determined to resist being controlled by received knowledge either from the literature I had studied at the university or from my own teaching experiences. I also did not want my participants to be controlled by my received knowledge as it might emerge in my interview questions. While I suspected that letting go of control of the interviews could lead to conversations that wandered in directions I had not foreseen, I had come to believe that “getting lost” (Lather 2007) might be a desirable outcome. Once one is lost, discovery comes in the creation of new paths, which I believed could be forged with the help of my participants—paths that would pull me back from the “chaotic void” (Palmer, p. 74). This determination is reflected in the final research question regarding data collection: To what extent can the researcher move the center of authority toward the participants in a study by relinquishing control of the interview process?

I revised the design for my dissertation research to open more space for venturing toward chaos by giving control over the terms of discourse and direction of data collection to my participants. I was unsure what lay ahead, but I knew I would have to continue without the sure

sense of purpose and direction I had relied on in every research project I had previously undertaken.

Working with a new research design. To collect data from a second cohort of three teachers, I used both the written interview of the first study and the group conversation of the second study with the AHS Group. However, I modified the written interview prompts I had used in the first pilot study, eliminating some of the questions and making the remaining questions more open-ended (Appendix H). For the group conversation, I used the same prompt I had used for the AHS Group with minor modifications. Some differences due to the conversational nature of the prompt appear in the transcripts (Appendices D and I), but I also felt that the CHS Group needed a bit more explanation of the research goals and history of the project since they had not worked as closely with me as the AHS Group in developing the dissertation research design. I also added one question for the CHS Group in response to preliminary data analysis of the AHS Group:

In the previous group, one of the teachers mentioned a point in her career when she “became her own authority” about teaching. Can you tell me about that? What does it mean to be your own authority? How does that come about? How does it change your sense of yourself as a teacher? How does it change what you do? What can you tell me about that? A point where you become your own authority?

I will discuss my use of this question in more detail in the data analysis section below.

Based on changes I made to the research design while collecting data from the AHS Group—now the first cohort of my new dissertation design—my research design now stated that two cohorts of experienced classroom teachers would first write about their careers and teacher identity in open-ended interviews and then meet as a cohort for a group conversation about how

they had acquired a professional identity over their teaching careers. Each cohort would be comprised of three middle-class, white women with a minimum of 25 years of classroom experience and would have taught together in the same public school for at least 10 years. I believed the shared experience of each cohort would facilitate conversation. I also suspected that this design could change.

To create a second cohort of teachers, in June 2007 I asked members of the AHS Group for recommendations of teachers who had taught together in another high school and who might be interested in the project. Asking my research participants to help me expand the project seemed a natural extension of my desire to experiment with yielding as much control of data collection to the research participants as possible. DS, a member of the AHS Group, responded almost immediately, recommending that I contact BC, a colleague of hers from Conway High School (CHS), another school in TCPS. I was acquainted with BC socially and agreed that she would be an excellent addition to the study: She met the criteria I had established for participation and had seemed intrigued earlier when we had talked informally about my study. DS contacted BC about joining the study in June 2007. BC enthusiastically agreed to participate, and I sent a letter to her outlining the research project and the interview process (Appendix F). Within a few days, she had selected two more teachers for what would become the CHS Group. However, one of her recommendations was male, and I had begun the project planning to use female participants only.

I initially had chosen to work with women for a number of reasons. When I first proposed the project, I expected to focus on questions of teacher identity formation. Feminists such as Harding (1992) and Hartsock (1983a) asserted that men and women form identities in very distinct ways. Professional development authorities such as Fessler (1995) and Huberman (1995)

noted that male and female teachers experience career trajectories that are quite different, with men frequently ending their careers embittered, perhaps because the career path is static and social expectations for men make career stasis look like failure. Studying male teachers who spend a full career in a profession that is usually described as feminized (Grant & Murray, 1999; Labaree, 2004; Lightfoot, 1983; Lortie, 2002/1975) might be interesting in itself, but I did not want to design a study in which I would need to compare male and female teacher identity development.

I also chose to work with women because, as a woman, I am most curious about the lives of women in a career that, while described as feminized (or perhaps as a result of its being feminized and part of what makes it feminized), is also generally dominated by men in administrative positions and controlled by a society that imposes restrictions on women's professional behaviors and personae (Lortie, 2002/1975). These features of teacher in the culture are also features of woman in the culture. However, I had come to believe that respecting the advice of my participants and giving them more freedom in the research design was important, so I listened to BC's reasons for including a male, SR, in the CHS cohort. She felt SR would add an interesting set of experiences to the discussion since he had taught special education and had come to teaching in a roundabout way. She also wanted to hear what he had to say about his identity in a special education classroom because his experiences would be so different from hers. I agreed that his experiences would be interesting to hear, and, following her direction for thinking about the project, we agreed to invite SR to be part of the CHS cohort. Once again I revised the design for this dissertation study.

BC first approached the other two CHS participants about joining the CHS Group, and I followed up with a formal letter of invitation in which I briefly described how I had conceived

the project. I then explained the interview process (one written interview, one group conversation, and possible individual follow-up interviews) so that they would understand what their participation might entail. I asked each participant to complete the same Demographic Questionnaire I given to the AHS Group (Appendix E). I have included a copy of the letter I sent to CHS participants as Appendix G.

At that point, I was most eager to discover how a new cohort would respond to the group conversation, the directions their conversation would take, and the challenges they would present to my thinking. However, I felt it was important to have the new group complete the written interview before the group conversation so that they would come to that conversation having already thought about the topic they would be discussing—teacher identity. I also thought that some replication of the data collection process for the AHS Group might make it easier for me to compare the sets of conversations. However, on the advice of my committee members, I modified the writing protocol by asking fewer questions that were more open-ended. This plan fit with my goal of decreasing my control over data collection.

SR and LF, the teachers recommended by BC, agreed to participate. On June 10, 2007, I sent the revised writing protocol (Appendix H) to the three members of the new CHS Group and received responses from BC and SR between June 13 and June 23. LF never completed the written interview, but I decided that she could, nonetheless, participate in the group conversation because I did not want to appear punitive. I also believed that a group conversation with only two people might be awkward. While it is impossible to know how the conversation would have differed if LF had completed the written interview, her participation was lively, thoughtful, and proportional to the other participants' engagement.

The written interviews completed by BC and SR were comparable in length to the written interviews from the members of the AHS Group despite my having provided fewer questions. Written responses from the AHS Group ranged from three to five single-spaced pages each and responses from the CHS Group ranged from two to five single-spaced pages. These responses were broadly narrative, with BC and SR telling their stories as teachers from their university education, to their entries into teaching, and to the ends of their careers. The AHS written interviews had more closely followed the questions I had provided and lacked the broad narrative structure of the CHS Group. I felt I lacked some specific information I had found in the AHS written material because of the questions I had provided (particularly related to conflicts in the classroom that came from problems with teacher identity), but I believed that encouraging them to tell their stories as much on their own terms as possible would have its own benefits when I began data analysis.

The CHS Group conversation took place the evening of August 4, 2007, at the home of BC, almost four months after the AHS Group conversation. Her home was conveniently located, and she had offered to host the group before we even discussed a location. In fact, she seemed to feel quite responsible for this part of the research because of her role in selecting the participants. She prepared lavish refreshments for the group and welcomed us all as if for a party she were hosting. I arrived early and helped BC arrange the food in the living room. I also set up the tape recorder. The living room had ample seating, and each participant and I had an individual chair or loveseat. Once SR and LF arrived, we first socialized, admiring LF's photos from her recent trip to Italy and BC's architectural plans (self-drawn) for remodeling the first floor of her house. After informal conversation and refreshments, we all moved to the living room to begin data collection.

However, the conversation had begun before I turned on the tape recorder when LF asked as she walked in the front door, “What is teacher identity?” I laughed and noted that perhaps we would be able to figure that out during the evening’s conversation. When we later began the “official” group conversation, I explained my research project and my concerns with academic and researcher authority as well as the protocol for the conversation. I have included the transcript for these instructions to the CHS Group in Appendix I. BC wondered whether I would ask questions if they did not think of questions to ask each other; I assured her that I could do so, and had a number of questions available if necessary. LF saw that I had a notebook and pen, and asked if they also needed paper. I told them that I might need some notes for later questions, but that if they wanted paper, they were certainly welcome to take notes also. Everyone took paper. As LF observed, “Sometimes I don’t want to interrupt and I want to say something.” The group at the beginning was conscientious and concerned about doing the “right” thing for my research.

As BC and I distributed paper and pens, I told them to use them as they wished but not to worry about questions or about performing. I urged the group members to listen to one another during the conversation and ask the questions that came to them as they heard what the others had to say. I assured the group that as they knew from teaching, silence was not something to fear; it might just be time we all needed to think. I also told them to feel free to get more to eat if they got hungry, use the restroom without worrying about the group (we would wait for anyone to return), and relax. I also explained that they should not worry about the tape player picking up odd noises and that it would pick up their voices without a problem. I mentioned that after my initial prompt, I would hold my participation to a minimum. Members of the CHS Group were more worried about protocol and technical aspects of the interview than anyone I had ever

interviewed before, perhaps because the interview did not have a sure structure they could rely on to guide them.

But as with the AHS Group conversation, worries about running out of questions were unfounded. The conversation ran almost two hours; indeed, had it not been so late, we might have gone on much longer. No-one left the room or thought about food once the tape began to run; they became completely absorbed in the conversation within a few minutes. These teachers, as mentioned before, knew each other quite well both socially and professionally; however, this was an evening of discovery for them as they explored what their careers as teachers meant in their lives. Toward the end I asked the new question I had developed in response to the preliminary analysis of the AHS Group conversation:

In the previous group, one of the teachers mentioned a point in her career when she “became her own authority” about teaching. Can you tell me about that? What does it mean to be your own authority? How does that come about? How does it change your sense of yourself as a teacher? How does it change what you do? What can you tell me about that? A point where you become your own authority?

They responded, and the conversation wound down with a number of humorous stories about teaching. The last comments I captured before turning off the recorder were LF’s comment that the interview had been “less painful than I was anticipating” and SR’s observation that he had never taken any notes. Everyone was laughing at the end, and the participants in this group left on a happy note.

As I drove home, I also knew that the evening had not gone as I had anticipated, and I was worried. The CHS Group’s conversation about teacher identity had gone in quite different directions than the AHS Group’s conversation, and I was unsure how to deal with the

differences. Because I had deliberately not set the boundaries of the two conversations by using the same interview questions and by controlling the discourse of the conversation, I wondered whether I had ventured too far into chaos.

Interpretation and Validity of Unruly Data

Analysis. In his guidebook to the qualitative research process, Patton (2002) observed that “no absolute rules exist” (p. 433) for analysis, representation, and communication of data, except for a rather fuzzy mandate that somehow the researcher must do her best to be fair to the data. However, a number of factors influence the focus of data analysis, and thereby the outcome of analysis: the research questions that initiate the project, which derive from the existing literature on the topic and from the interests and experiences of the researcher; the theoretical framework for the project; and the audience for the project. As noted earlier, the very impulse to leave the academic institution to venture into the field is often spurred by some missing puzzle piece in the academic research literature, which already determines that the findings will most likely be interpreted within an academic framework for meaning-making. The audience for such work is typically academic, so the findings will be reported in an academic discourse and tradition that in itself affects the shape and direction of meaning-making. A secondary, yet powerful, reason for leaving the academic world to venture into the field relates to the requirements of the academic profession to produce significant contributions to the academic discourse. Requirements for advancement (degree programs, resume needs, tenure) certainly help determine the focus for and method of analysis in a research project. The researcher’s desire or need to produce new knowledge may also direct the selection of data to analyze and report.

These requirements, knowledges, and discourses of the academic world concerned me throughout the project, and many of my processes of research design, data collection, data

analysis, and writing resulted from my desire to at least acknowledge their impact on my thinking. Attempting to avoid “analyst-constructed typologies” that “impose a world of meaning on the participants” (Patton, 2002, p. 459), I therefore invited the participants from the AHS Group to analyze the data from their group conversation in June 2007, shortly after I had redesigned the study, using any analytical method they liked to note their own observations about the interviews and themes they thought most significant in the conversations. I sent each member of the AHS Group an audio recording and typed transcript of the conversation. Each member of the AHS Group returned the transcript with comments, but I could only find limited uses for these analyses. Most of the comments from the participants were self-deprecating (“Wow, I sure say ‘You know’ a lot!”) or comments about what they found to be interesting in what the other participants said. They did not note themes or reevaluate what was said. Basically, their comments did not provide any interpretation I had not already noted. At the time, I only asked each participant to read the transcript or listen to the tape for his or her group conversation; however, I now wonder if I should have asked them to read the conversations of the other group. They may have had more interesting comments to make about the conversation in which they did not participate, particularly since the conversations went in such different directions.

However, I believe that my efforts to enlist my participants in data analysis and interpretation had a profound and complicated impact on my own thinking as a researcher. Whenever I used a particular theory in data analysis, I found myself wondering and worrying about what my participants would think about that theory and the resulting knowledge.

Certainly, my own past, present, and future shaped my analysis and interpretation. My experiences as a teacher—prior to and concurrent with the undertaking of the dissertation project—shaped what I saw and heard from my participants. What I found lacking in the

academic literature, in part because of my positionality as a practicing teacher, set me on this path of inquiry. My data sources have been my colleagues in a career that has in many ways consumed my life. As I asked them to reflect on how their lives and identities were shaped by their careers, I considered the direction of my own life and career. My work as a researcher shaped my work as a teacher as the voices of my participants echoed throughout my days. The work shaped my relationships with the teachers in my building as I thought about the teaching communities my participants described. The focus of my analysis shifted from the careers of my participants to my own career. The source of authority also shifted from the academic to the fields (both mine and those of my participants) of teaching practice and then back to the academic.

Just as I sought to find data collection methods that would reduce my influence over the meaning-making of my participants, mindful of “the vantage of the other and the obligation of our own implication” (Britzman, 2000), I also sought ways to analyze the data I had collected without shaping it toward received knowledge about teacher identity and authority. However, this effort to keep analysis in play led to a great deal of trouble and confusion for me. While “getting lost” (Lather, 2007) in the data sounded exciting in theory, it proved to be a difficult space for working. I also discovered that until I reached this space of discomfort, I did not really allow the data to control the meaning-making.

Working within a priori thematic structures. My first analysis of the AHS Group data was thematic. As I mentioned earlier, it was fairly simple to analyze the data from the written interviews using the themes suggested by the interview questions even when participants’ comments contradicted one another. Because each participant addressed the same questions, I could easily discuss the varied ways they engaged the themes I had given them. And while their

conception of teacher identity differed in many significant ways from what I had read in academic literature, they did discuss teacher identity, and I could imagine myself offering an expansion of the definitions already in the literature.

The theme that most struck me in my first analysis of the AHS Group conversation was the importance of teaching communities and mentoring for early-career teachers. While this was hardly groundbreaking material, I was moved by its importance to my participants. I began to think about using Lave and Wenger's (1991) theories about how people move toward "full participation" in "communities of practice." I was also drawn to a rather passionate and cynical outburst by NE during the group conversation when she spoke of a point in her career when she realized that she had acquired an "authority" in her work that liberated her from worrying about what her administrators might say or do. I wondered if that movement toward "full participation" led toward "practices of freedom" similar to those Foucault (1997/1984) described in his discussions of care of the self. I continued to read Foucault, thinking of how the teachers as "subjects" might be constituted in practice and the self "constitute[d], not as an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice" (1986, p. 51). I also was intrigued by the possibility of applying Foucault's concept of *telos* to my data, investigating "the kind of being to which [these teachers] aspire when [they] behave morally . . . the goal to which [their] self-forming activity is directed" (Davidson, 1986, p. 229). With these ideas in mind, I looked forward to the second group conversation where I anticipated investigating these ideas by adding a new question to my protocol about this movement toward authority and freedom in practice.

Getting lost. Fortunately or unfortunately, I had begun to theorize too quickly. The participants in the CHS Group challenged my attachment to the theories the AHS data encouraged. They simply did not take the paths I had fantasized. For example, their response to

any consideration of personal authority was completely negative. Toward the end of the CHS Group conversation when I asked the participants about becoming their own authorities as teachers, the conversation almost stopped. Perhaps it was because they had not had NE's experience with poor administrators, but for whatever reason, they saw such a sense of oneself as the final authority in the classroom as a form of arrogance. As LF remarked, "I was always my own authority, but never *an* authority." Another member, BC, stated that thinking of herself as an authority would be arrogant. She always felt she could learn more as a teacher. The assertive independence of NE and the AHS Group seemed to be completely missing in this group. The practices of freedom I had hoped to hear about were not interesting to the CHS Group.

I came home from the group conversation worried, and as I transcribed the tapes, I wondered what on earth I could do with data that had become unmanageable. Where the AHS Group had discussed teaching communities as supportive environments for personal empowerment as a teacher, the CHS Group focused more on learning how to serve and empower their students. For the CHS Group, the personal needs or goals of the teacher were irrelevant. I wondered if I needed to find another approach to the data, but before I abandoned thinking about practices of freedom, I decided to conduct an individual interview with one of the CHS Group, SR, who had been silent when BC and LF had rejected talking about themselves as authorities in the classroom. In an informal conversation a few weeks after the CHS Group conversation he had told me a story that I thought might help me get my data back on track toward analyzable results.

I had originally planned to use individual follow-up interviews to further probe themes that emerged in the group conversations as I analyzed those transcripts and as I tried to apply theory to the data I had collected. For example, as previously mentioned, the CHS Group had

resisted my ideas about becoming one's own authority in the classroom and about this sense of authority leading to some sort of freedom in teaching practice. However, in a later informal conversation with SR, a member of the CHS Group, he mentioned an amusing episode in his classroom that I thought might illustrate the sort of authority and freedom I had been hoping to investigate. In other words, I wanted to interview him so that I might be able to *create* meaning for the data (by adding more friendly concepts to the data) rather than *find* the meaning in the data (by abandoning *a priori* theories that did not work with the data). Rather than abandon my interest in how teachers become their own authorities and then find freedom in the classroom—a theme that had been rejected by the other members of the CHS Group—I decided to ask SR more specifically about this theme. I asked SR if he would be willing to talk about that event in a follow-up interview; he was willing, and we scheduled the interview.

This interview was revealing both to SR as participant and to me as researcher and interviewer. During the interview, I led him to think about how he grew into authority as a teacher, which led me to think about my failure to resist shaping the thinking of my participants. His/Our thinking in the interview, however, was remarkable and fascinating, and I knew I would use his responses even though I was troubled by my own shaping of the data. While he did agree that he had become a sort of authority, he also described that growth as an increase in skill and facility, but not as an increase in freedom. The more I thought about what he had said, and what my other participants had described, the more I felt that I had only a few scattered themes to present in my findings, themes related to the importance of mentors and environment for young teachers and to the movement from being a novice to being a master teacher, none of which were particularly striking findings. I picked out seemingly disconnected strands of conversation that seemed important, but I could not see how they fit together or what they added up to that was not

already a cliché in teacher training. Every paper I had written in my doctoral studies (and probably in my life) told a story that conveyed some meaning. My own narrative impulse and training as a writer dictated that the only way I could write about the study was to find themes in what my participants had said and written.

While I struggled with this unruly data, I considered using the theoretical orientations of the participants (which I believed were positivist [DS, JL], social constructionist [NE, SR], and social justice [BC, SR]) to analyze how participants considered their careers and their teacher identity. Perhaps such an analysis would have been interesting. But I was not ready to think about *why* they spoke about their lives as they did before I understood *what* they actually had to say about teaching. At some point I would have to shape the data into a set of findings within a set of theories, but I wanted to resist meaning-making until I better understood what my participants had said. Even if I did not like what they said, I was committed to trying to hear their data and how they had explained themselves.

So I returned to the data, trying to analyze what my participants had said about their work as teachers and how they felt they had become successful in their work. They talked about the work they did, its value, and how they learned to do that work. However, since they had so many different ways of talking about teaching, I could not see a coherent way to work with the data I had. My resistance (to the theories and methodologies I had brought to the study) and my participants' unruliness (in their individualism between and within the groups) became my field of study. I did not want to force the data into a meaning, but I could not see the data taking on a meaning of its own. The inconsistencies in the data seemed to outnumber the consistencies, and I wondered if I had any options to ignoring its inconsistencies. I was getting more lost than I had planned to be. So I walked away from the tangled paths that seemed to be leading me nowhere.

[Whitman Interlude] Becoming the Air

This—2007-08—has been the year that I took off from the dissertation project, shifting my center from the part of me that is a doctoral student to the part of me that is a practicing teacher. I have spent most of that time feeling guilt for my lack of productivity and my failure to move forward in the project, but that guilt has done little to force me to shift back toward the research, the scholarly reading, and the writing. Most of the work I did attempt was on the parts of the dissertation I saw as most distinct from my own role as a teacher: research methods and literature review. I put aside the analysis of interviews with teachers, thinking I could not really work on analysis before I had finished these previous sections. However, the larger problem was that I was not ready to understand what I had heard.

Now that I look back at the year, I realize that the work on the data was going on in what seems to be a parallel universe within (or outside of?) my mind. My method shifted once again as I subconsciously began a self-study, the one methodology I had always avoided because it had looked so unscientific, so unprofessional, and so self-indulgent. I started thinking about what the confluence of my research, my career, and my teacher roles (both as teacher with students and with other teachers) was doing to my own identity as teacher.

Before I began this consideration as a conscious set of thoughts, the poetry of Walt Whitman had begun to swirl in my mind, in particular, the recurring images of air, water, and soil from Song of Myself. Just as some people can predict the onset of migraines or illness from certain perceptual phenomena, I begin to sense a new understanding of the world coming to me when lines of poetry, song, or literature begin to emerge in my consciousness, sometimes for months before I finally see the meaning of the lines: the poetry seems to be either a metaphor that explains a problem I am working toward understanding or it is just a helpful, yet

unexplainably abstract way I can think my way into the problem. The poems that return to my thoughts are ready for a new reading I had never previously considered, showing me a way to think and read that may help me with other problems I cannot find a way to read.

Gaston Bachelard (1994/1958) wrote of the special power of poetry to effect these sorts of changes in readers, changes that take time and patience as the “reverberations bring about a change of being”:

Forces are manifested in poems that do not pass through the circuits of knowledge. . . . The resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence. In the resonance, we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own. The reverberations bring about a change of being. It is as though the poem’s being were our being. The multiplicity of resonances then issues from the reverberations’ unity of being. . . . the poem possesses us entirely. (pp. xxi-xxii)

That period of being possessed by a poem is a time when I wait for the new way of seeing the poem (the world?) revealed. It can take days, weeks, months, or longer. But it usually comes.

Walt Whitman began to dog my steps in July 2007. Looking back, I can see that this was the same time that I thought I had wandered away from the research; now I think that I took a side trip in my career journey, a side trip that is now helpful to understanding my data. (Am I, too, telling this with a sigh?)

In celebration of the career of TW, our retiring department chair, our new department chair had arranged a luncheon at the Swan House, an elegant site for a traditional ladies’ lunch. (That may be the reason the male teachers in our department did not join us; their regrets sounded legitimate enough, but I am sure they were breathing sighs of relief as they sent off

those regrets.) Chicken salad, frozen fruit salad, iced tea: a classically Southern luncheon. I usually feel like an interloper at these sorts of events (just waiting for my lack of proper Southern training to emerge), but I also love them as representing the South I have always lived in but not quite understood how to navigate. I sat at a table that was filled with an equal balance of teachers I knew and teachers I had never met. The images of that afternoon have stayed with me—a powerful visual sense of my place within/out the teaching world. Shortly after I returned home from the luncheon, I wrote the following response in my journal:

July 2, 2007—Ladies Luncheon at the Swan House. This was a luncheon for my retiring department chair. Only the female members of the department came—which is really no surprise. I mean, the dessert is shaped like a swan and large blooming flowers are part of every aspect of the decor! But here is the cool part. I was sitting almost exactly halfway down a long table of around 24 female teachers. At the head of the table were Teri [my retiring department chair] and the three other women who had served as department chair at the school long before I came to teach there. Teri wanted to honor them at this event—the women who taught her how to teach and how to lead other teachers. As they were introduced, I realized that I had used materials they had made; their names were on old copies of tests I had discovered in the old file cabinet left in my trailer and adapted for my own uses. I have also absorbed from Teri ideas about leadership that probably go back to these women who probably had them passed to them from another generation of teachers. Then to my left were two of the new teachers I work with—one just completed her second year teaching, the other her first year. The one who just finished her first year teaching had been a student at PHS. She commented that every teacher she had taken

English from was at the table—and they all taught her something about teaching. Now she has joined us at the table.

At that moment, I saw myself as part of a continuum that reaches far beyond the two limit points (limit points that are only valid for this moment in time; the limits are always shifting) represented by the women at this table, and I felt honored to be part of this line of people in the teaching profession. I wondered how infrequently an event like this occurs to connect teachers to the past and future of the work we do, to help us see the larger tradition we are a part of. This is what the AHS Group was talking about when they described looking up and down the hall between classes and knowing good things were going on and feeling proud to be a part of that.

When I retire, I want to have just such an event—all of us sitting at a table, finally seeing our place in the larger flow of this work. (MLH Journal)

The image of the stream stayed with me, though I did my best to resist it. For one thing, I knew that stream is a cliché. (Oh God, my life is becoming a cliché!) I also knew that if I tried to explain the metaphor, it would get incredibly complex because the metaphor, while common, is unruly, refusing to settle into a single meaning. As a teacher, I am part of a tradition, part of a stream that began before me and continues beyond me. Like Whitman, I become the water—bits and molecules immersed in the larger stream, touching others, but never as a whole. Teaching as a stream—but not a stream like the saying that one can never enter twice—instead this is a stream that is always the same and always different as people immerse themselves into its currents and are carried along (even as they think they are swimming on their own power) touched by detritus from those who have come before and leaving behind their own detritus but having no control over what happens to that detritus.

When I first taught Song of Myself (2005/1855), I was moved by Whitman's evolving presentation of himself as a soul nurtured, nourished, and inspired by the grass, the soil, the air, and the waters of his environment. He begins an epic journey in what appears to be a state of stasis: "I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass" (1, l. 5). He invites the reader to join him on this epic quest of self discovery, and we realize that what appears to be a state of physical stasis hides a ferment of activity within. This is not just a physical epic quest: while it will take him across the expanses of mid-nineteenth century America, it will also take him and the reader into his soul as he discovers the American experience in others and in himself. The physical stasis belies an internal commotion as Whitman's persona expands and grows, nurtured by the people he meets, the experiences he has, and the very land he traverses. He is Everyman, at once common ("What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me" 14, l. 15) and epic ("I am large, I contain multitudes," 51, l. 7).

From the beginning, Whitman describes the people and land that have nourished him, making him the poet he has become and is becoming: the soil, the people, the water, the grass, the very air of America. By the end, another purpose becomes apparent as he beckons toward the reader, "waiting ahead" for her to join him on this quest of discovery. At the end of this journey/day/life, Whitman's speaker has himself been transformed by his life experiences, becoming not only part of the people of America but of the very land itself:

I depart as air. I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,

I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love.

If you want me again, look for me under your boot soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean.

But I shall be good health to you nonetheless,

And filter and fiber to your blood. (Song of Myself, 52, ll. 7-13)

He pauses ahead of us on the path to self-knowledge, beckoning readers to join him even as he disappears beyond us. He invites us to take his journey toward self-knowledge, examining as he has the people, places, and experiences that have shaped our lives, becoming the “filter and fiber to [our] blood.”

By the end of Whitman’s epic poem (a poem that itself becomes emblematic of his ongoing quest to discover his identity since he continued to revise it until the end of his life), one transformation that the speaker has undergone is a shift from being a force of great appetites—a man nourished by the air, water, people, and places he encounters—to becoming the source of nourishment for those who follow him. He “departs as air” that we breathe, the “eddies” of water in which we bathe, and the “filter and fiber” to our blood. Teaching the poem in American literature classes, I remember becoming quite excited by the end, pointing out to my students the varied ways Walt Whitman does indeed live on in the air we breathe, his ideas the “filter” through which we think about ourselves as Americans and our life journeys as quests of self discovery. After dragging us all through the dull units of early American literature, Whitman was a joy.

Recently, I have reconsidered my understanding of Whitman’s Song of Myself, realizing that the poem has something more to teach me beyond Whitman’s call to youth to set out on a journey of self discovery. He also beckons the older reader who perhaps nears the end of her journey, who should prepare to “depart as air,” to “effuse [her] flesh in eddies, and drift it in

lacy jags.” This is a call to let go of that identity we have struggled to construct in youth, dissolving in the river of existence to be absorbed by others in ways neither we nor they will know or control. Teaching the poem, I had imagined myself like the speaker in the poem, a Pied Piper beckoning my students to begin their own journeys of self discovery, but I had stopped there.

But then there was the luncheon, the day that water imagery began to swirl in my mind. Sitting at that table among those teachers who have come before me and those who will continue to teach after I leave the profession, I began to think about myself as part of something that began long before I came along and that will continue long after I leave. For the first time, I began to see that I would continue to be part of that stream after I depart in ways I will not understand or control. Just as I have taken in ideas, identities, and practices from sources that came before me (with or without my knowledge of sources or how those aspects of my teaching self came to me), so those characteristics that have become my ideas, identities, and practices are being absorbed by others I may or may not know in ways I may or may not recognize.

After living for so long in this stream, I still absorb its waters, but more and more I am dissolving into its flow, less and less separate from the profession I have chosen. I am becoming the experienced teacher new teachers watch, the one passing on what I have learned from the teachers at the head of the table, as well as the teachers I have emulated (consciously or unconsciously) who may not have been at this table, but who sit at a table I imagine. All are filtered through my own work and understanding.

There have been moments this year when I have heard a new teacher say something like, “I found this great essay prompt. I think Susan had it in her files. I’m going to adapt it for the

test I'm giving over Lord of the Flies this week." As I look at the prompt, printed on a dot-matrix printer, I recognize the words because I had typed them years earlier. But was or is the work mine? The idea may have come from a lunch conversation with a teacher across the hall from me at my first school, one of my favorite sources for writing ideas; it may have come from a teaching journal. So I nod and look up to my younger colleague and say enthusiastically, "Looks great! I like your idea for adapting it. Let me know how it works."

We dissolve anonymously into the river. After having been nourished by what has come before, we become what will be beyond our time. Identity is dispersed, but then no identity was ever really ours in the first place. Like Walt Whitman, we "contain multitudes" (Song of Myself, 51, l. 8): We are all that has been, but we are also all that will be: We are everything, and we are nothing.

I spent much of the 2007-08 school year as a mentor to a new teacher in our department; additionally, I found myself the lone "experienced" teacher on a hall of young newcomers to the field. I became fascinated by our interdependence, the ways they were learning the work of teaching together, the ways they used me for advice, and the ways I used them to stay excited about teaching. And I have discovered that Walt Whitman was right: We have the greatest impact by letting go of ourselves and letting people take what they will. We may not have control over what they become, but we do continue to have an impact on future lives.

I think I am now ready to return to the waters of this research project; I hope I am ready to understand what is there.

Homework and covert analysis. Shortly after the follow-up interview with SR, I withdrew from working directly on the research project. I was frustrated by my attempts to understand the

data, so I put analysis aside and reconsidered my career and identity as a teacher, giving myself permission to abandon this recalcitrant project. In retrospect, I can see that I was entering a rich period of what Visweswaran (1994) called “homework” and Ellison (1995/1947), “hibernation” (p. 13).

Visweswaran (1994) envisioned “the actualization of what some writers have termed ‘anthropology in reverse’” (p. 102) in her description of homework in the analytical process of the ethnographer. Drawing on Scott’s (1989) discussion of the ethnographer’s “recursive movement between departure and return” (as cited in Visweswaran, p. 102) and John’s (1989) concerns about the “sanctioned ignorances” (as cited in Visweswaran, p. 103) of Western anthropologists, Visweswaran concluded that anthropology should “enact a different politics of location, one that redirects its gaze homeward rather than away” (p. 104). My return was to the home of my own classroom, where I directed my attention for the next two semesters. Unlike Visweswaran, mine was not an intentionally political move. However, the interlude gave me time to shift my perspective to different contexts, different homes.

In *Invisible Man*, Ellison (1995/1947) defined hibernation as “a covert preparation for a more overt action” (p. 13). I believe this fallow period had a similar sort of covert usefulness, and stepping away from the analysis was the only way I could move forward. Certainly, the data themselves were challenging me to look closely at my own life as a teacher-mentor, to understand my own position in the profession so that I might better hear what my participants were saying. In my classroom, I began the unconscious and unintentional process of analysis that I mentioned earlier and that I refer to as *covert analysis*. As I explained earlier, covert analysis occurred when I was consciously working on other problems—such as the analysis of a poem or the mentoring of a new teacher—when I was concurrently working out a problem in my data. I

did not always make the connections right away, but later when I took time to write about the events, I began to see how to apply what I had learned about the poetry and myself to the data.

During this teaching interlude, I found myself haunted by the voices of my participants, but in a new context. They seemed to be telling me how to mentor new teachers, what really mattered in my teaching, and how to approach the final years of my career. I worked closely with three new teachers who were not only trying to survive their first years in the classroom, but also trying to find their own ways of becoming good teachers while they worked together as a cohort learning from one another and the experienced teachers who surrounded them. I found myself wondering what I could offer them that was not too outdated, too specific to my own temperament, and too constrictive to their own development. I also wondered how to find the balance between interfering and giving them freedom to make their own mistakes and find their own answers. As I wondered what was important to know about teaching, *I began to live my data*. Covert analysis occurred daily, without my knowledge, as I worked with these teachers.

Covert analysis also occurred as I thought about poetry during this time. As I shifted toward the research at the end of the school year, I wrote about some of the poems that had preoccupied me during this time, realizing that the lines of poetry that had swirled through my mind were actually related to the issues in my research project. The poems functioned as metaphors, places where I could work out the research problems indirectly and in different spaces. I have included three of these covert analyses—interruptions in my research that actually advanced my understanding of the data and the analytical process—as interludes in this chapter to illustrate this aspect of data analysis and one in Chapter 5 to illustrate how I came to terms with creating meaning for the project. These interludes helped me clarify what was most

important to me as a researcher and as a teacher—the aspects of my research that I could not compromise merely to complete a knowledge project.

After six months, time I had thought I had abandoned this research project, I returned to an intentional consideration of the data and what I had already tried to write, hoping for a new “line of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980) to emerge, a line that might connect more of the data, that would incorporate more of what my participants had said. However, it was theory, Plato’s (1968/c. 360 B.C.E.) theory of virtue, in fact, that finally gave me the structure in which I found the connections among the myriad voices, experiences, and themes of my participants, of the teachers I mentored, and of my own experiences. This theory was supple enough to accommodate not only the diverse themes my participants had addressed but also their diverse ways of being successful teachers who had stayed in teaching for diverse reasons. This theory also accommodated what I had come to understand in my year away from the project thinking about my own career and the careers of the young teachers I mentored—a year that turned out to be critical to my becoming ready to hear and shape the data so that I might pass on what my participants had told me in a useful form for other readers.

As I returned to the data with Plato’s (1968/c. 360 B.C.E.) theory of virtue in mind, I wrote and read concurrently and purposefully. Once I understood how I could organize/interpret the data within the structure of Plato’s theories, what the participants had been discussing gained a new clarity I had not seen before. I also conducted two more follow-up interviews to clarify comments of two participants about how teachers acquired practices of good teachers. However, this time, the follow-up interviews felt simple—I asked questions that did not take my participants in new directions but that expanded on what they had already said in an earlier interview. The participants who were involved in the follow-up interviews talked and talked. I

felt their comfort and freedom was the validation I had been seeking that I was finally understanding their perspectives on their careers as teachers and asking useful questions. What the participants said in the follow-up interviews worked well with other comments in both written and group interviews. I was not enlightening them through my careful questioning; they were enlightening me through the opportunity to clarify what they had said before.

[Stevens Interlude] The Researcher as Artificer

I have known from the beginning that eventually I would fail. Ultimately, research is the work of the researcher, and no matter what steps I took to diminish my impact on data and analysis, at some point I had to step in to take control of data interpretation and of analysis. I would have to interpret my participants and their lives in terms of my own understanding, not theirs, because it is my pen on the paper, my hand scripting the story of their lives.

I resisted. I almost refused. When I stepped away from the project, I suspected I would not return. But I began the project believing that what these teachers had to say about their lives as teachers was important. Their commitment to their work as teachers and to my work as a researcher made me feel obligated to find a way to honor their work. Plato's theory of virtue, which I read by chance before formally returning to the project, offered a structure for interpretation that not only made sense to me but also gave dignity and beauty to the work of teachers who dedicate a large part of their lives to the endless challenge of becoming good teachers.

It was a paradox. To honor the authority of my participants, I tried to resist the "burden of authorship" (Geertz, 1988, p. 138), the authority of the researcher who interprets the lives of others. To honor the work of my participants, I ultimately had to accept the very burden of

authorship I had tried to resist. I had to fail in my attempt to not be the researcher who interprets and shapes the data to make meaning of others' words.

Like Visweswaran (1994), I have found "the practice of failure [to be] pivotal" (p. 99). I suppose this has been an exercise in seeing how far I could go in a knowledge project before admitting failure—how far I could walk in the woods of research without a map or compass, without seeking the signs I was accustomed to following, instead listening and watching for signs that I could not predict or know for sure to be reliable. It has merely been a question of when I admitted failure, not if I would have to give up. I suspected all along that my "Blessed rage for order" (Stevens, 1972, p. 98) would lead me to take control of the direction and thereby take charge of the meaning. I could only stand close to chaos for so long before I had to turn away.

Lather (2007), who advocates "getting lost" as a research methodology, also acknowledges that eventually the researcher's perspective must become the center of the project. The question for her is the extent to which the researcher will foreground that perspective, attempt to make obvious to the reader the impact of that perspective on the knowledge produced. Of course, one's own perspective is the most difficult to see, and determining its impact is perhaps best accomplished by others who can better see it from outside (Hartsock, 1983a, 1983b). Knowing from the outset that failure is the only possible outcome when the goal is to extend one's vision completely outside of oneself can lead one to wonder about the foolishness of the attempt. However, Visweswaran (1994) notes that "our failures are as much a part of the process of knowledge constitution as are our oft-heralded 'successes'" because they signal that a project "may no longer be attempted, at least not on the same terms" (pp. 99-100).

The "epistemological crisis" (p. 99) that Visweswaran (1994) described as a desirable condition for feminist research leads to constant questioning of assumptions about methods and

truth, but it also eventually leads to admission that one can never escape oneself or the fact that one sees with one's eyes, hears with one's ears, and constructs with one's mind. In his 1934 poem "Idea of Order at Key West," Wallace Stevens (1972) described a singer who stands at water's edge and sings the world into an order that is "beyond the genius of the sea," thereby becoming more than the sea because in her song, her meaning-making, the sea itself becomes her own:

*She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
 As we beheld her striding there alone,
 Knew that there never was a world for her
 Except the one she sang, and, singing, made. (p. 98)*

My subjects, my data, and my research become the self that is my work and I am the maker. No matter how much I seek to privilege the wisdom of my participants, in my project, my participants become my own—the subjects of my project and my thoughts. The truth that I construct is the world that I make. My order is an idea, no more real than any other idea. My failure, to rephrase Lather (2007, p. 29), is that I cannot escape the manipulation of the data or the truth; it is what we do. When Lather referred to "we," she referred to researchers, but I imagine she would agree that the term also applies to what we do as individuals attempting every day to make meaning of the data of our experiences, perhaps singing something beautiful into being, but something that cannot last for long except in the minds of those who might stop for a while in their own journeys to listen.

Failure leads to a change within the one who has failed or at least to some awareness of the positionality of her perspective, so failure is perhaps the success I have sought. At least, failure has led to a partial success in that it has taken me to an epistemological crisis that has demanded that I critique my methods and my findings (in my everyday life as well in my academic life) even as I deploy those methods (feeling all the while that the work is failing even as I attempt to perform the work) and come to the findings (assured as I write that what I am writing is a “supreme fiction” and I am little more than the “artificer” of that fiction [Stevens, 1972, pp. 207, 98]).

Perhaps the only success I have found is the crisis I have faced by nudging my center just a bit off its axis. Indeed, movement itself may be a success. Perhaps, as Fecho, Graham, and Hudson-Ross (2005) suggest, such “intellectual disquietude precede[s] meaningful change” and such change should be my ultimate goal (p. 176). Perhaps failure can be a worthy goal because we learn at the point of failure the limits of our methods and the limits of what we can know about others. By attempting to keep my knowledge project open to the meaning-making of my participants, I have tried to extend my own perspectives toward others; however, ultimately, my knowledge is only that—my knowledge. What I have constructed is a highly personal version of the worlds and knowledges of my participants. I have tried to use their data to challenge my assumptions and to extend what I can know and see, but what I finally see most clearly are my limits, and what I produce is finally my construction, my artifice.

Fields of failure and homework. I have found my “field of failure” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 98) to be the point at which I had to give up trying to produce a research project without the authority of the researcher. I could not ask my participants to write my thesis for me; I had to

abandon the chaos of the field and begin to shape the data into some sort of meaning that I could write about for the academic world. I had to abandon fieldwork and return to another sort of homework—the work of the academy produced in the language of the academy for the projects of the academy. I had to find a manageable and reasonably coherent way to put the material together. I could no longer avoid manipulating data, my own meaning making that feeds cannibalistically on the ideas, stories, and lives of my participants. I could, however, try to insure that the theory do little violence to the voices and experiences of my participants by including their voices as completely as I could hear, understand, and interpret them. With the data of my participants and the theories of Plato, Foucault, and Butler, I constructed a final set of research questions that represent the questions I could finally hear my participants answering:

1. What is a good teacher? How does one become a good teacher? How does one know who to become?
2. What resources, constraints, and freedoms for becoming a teacher are available to teachers in the public schools where they taught?
3. What makes teaching a good life?

These questions represent their interests in the conversations we shared, their directions in the research they conducted on my behalf.

Looking back at what she felt was very limited data analysis in *Troubling the Angels* (1997), Lather noted in an interview that if she did it again, she would provide more interpretation despite her reservations about adding her own “interpretive voice” to the voices of the women with HIV/AIDS whose stories make up the book:

There’s always the manipulation of data. So, whether you want to make your manipulations visible, whether you want to foreground or back ground that manipulation,

that's the decision you have to make as the researcher. But you can't get away from manipulating the data. That's what we do! (in Dhunpath & Perumal, 2007/2001, p. 29)

Britzman (1995) described the seductiveness of the researcher's position "behind [the] backs [of participants] to point out what they could not see, would not do, and could not have said" (p. 237). She warned against this privileged position, this tendency to assume the superiority of the researcher's ability to "understand" those in the field. Visweswaran (1994) similarly noted the flaws in the paradoxical perspective of the traditional ethnographer, at once knowing less than those she observes about their world and assuming the attitude of superiority by analyzing the field and those who live in the field.

As I began interpretation of the lives and words of my participants, I chose to foreground and background my manipulation of the data. I continued to try to understand the value of my positionality—not as superior or inferior to the positionality of others, but as an interesting vantage point that might offer a temporary bridge between two worlds. My participants saw, heard, and thought from valued positions both within and beyond the classroom—some were retired and some continued to teach. I saw, heard, and thought from a position between the classroom and the academic world. All of us occupied positions from which we considered questions of our own lives in the teaching profession: the retired teachers as they reflected on that work and its impact on their lives; the practicing teachers as they considered what leaving the classroom would mean to them in the near future; and me as I elected to continue in the classroom while most of my doctoral cohort embarked on university careers. Those positions have not so much been silenced as overlooked in the discussion of what a teaching life might be, how one acquires the skills necessary to do this work, and the impact of this work on the larger life of a teacher who lives in this identity for most of her professional career.

But ultimately, this work is “homework,” not “fieldwork.” What is most accurately described in this project and in my “findings” are my own positions, my own thinking as a teacher who has attempted to co-inhabit spaces between the academic and the professional worlds, the teaching life as it is experienced and as it is theorized. Complicating these vantage points, I add a new perspective for theorizing practice, one that, like the academic world, is beyond the school classroom: the perspective of retired or soon-to- retire teachers. My own position is one of possibilities because I could become an academic after graduate school, I could continue to teach for another decade, or I could decide to retire in the near future and move completely out of education toward other interests. My “homework” was a way of trying out these varied possible identities, like a child playing dress-up in some adult’s clothing, and of trying to understand my own identity as teacher—and the extent to which that identity shaped the person I have become today and the extent to which it determined the decisions I have made for my own future.

Validity criteria in open spaces. What is an appropriate framework for evaluating the validity of qualitative data collection and analysis? Is it the validity of non-existence when participants forget about the presence of the researcher during data collection? Is it the validity of the authority of the other when participants take over interviews by asking the questions and writing their own analyses? If so, can I ever really obtain validity if participants still ask if they “got it right” at the end, or if they laugh and say I will give it meaning? Can validity be measured as a validity of purpose when participants talk about how the project has changed their thinking?

Lather (in Dhumpath & Perunal, 2007/2001) named the dilemma of validity in research employing experimental methods when she asked, “How do you bring the quality criteria to bear on the more experimental?” (p. 24). Because of the impossibility of establishing universal

validity criteria, Lather required that her students bring their “own validity criteria that were immanent and accessible” (p. 24). The framework for validity that I have constructed was based on my desire to open up spaces for meaning-making for and by my participants. My validity criteria were grounded in my attempt to represent the truths my participants constructed in conversation with themselves (in written interviews), with me, and with one another. I knew from the beginning that this was a doomed attempt, that the data would become mine once I began to shape it into a set of findings, that the analysis would become mine when I applied and constructed theory with the data, and that the only truth I could report with assurance would be my truth. I have, however, measured validity in my efforts to avoid smoothing over unruly data or ignoring difficult data and in my willingness to discard theory that seemed to impose too much of its own structure on the conversations of these participants. I finally accepted that I must become the artificer of the meaning in this project, but only when I convinced myself that the artifice I was constructing used as much of the data provided by my participants as possible.

Chapter 4

Findings

This social constructionist study used a combination of written narrative and oral interviews with six high-school teachers, each with a minimum of twenty-five years of classroom experience in public schools. These participants shared at least ten years teaching in Temple County Public Schools (TCPS) (names of the school district and schools are pseudonyms; participants are identified with initials), the third-largest school district in what is now the sprawling metropolitan area of a state in the southeastern United States. Three participants taught together at least ten years at Adams High School (the AHS Group) and three at Conway High School (the CHS Group). My original goal was to understand how they constructed, adapted, and/or reconstructed professional identities throughout their lengthy teaching careers. However, as I attempted to relinquish authority over the project to privilege the expertise and interests of my participants, the focus shifted toward their interests in the practices of good teachers and how those practices are acquired over a teaching career.

I report my findings as they evolved with my growing understanding of what my participants told me about their lives as teachers. I began this project with certain ideas about teacher identity that derived from my academic reading (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1994; Clandinin, 1993; Gergen, 2000/1991; Holland, Lachiotte, Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Lightfoot, 1983) and my interests in the opinions of experienced teachers. My original research questions reflected those interests and concerns:

1. How do experienced teachers understand the concept of teacher identity?

2. How do teachers describe their professional identities and the development of their professional identities?
3. What experiences and relationships affect a teacher's identity?

These questions led me to develop a set of writing prompts that I asked my first set of three participants, the AHS Group, to respond to in order to help me understand how teachers construct identity over long-term teaching careers. I designed the writing prompts primarily to help the participants think individually about their careers and identities as teachers.

After reading what my participants had written, I began to consider how I could further move the authority of this research project from me, the researcher, to the participants' knowledge of the teaching life. Seeking to further remove my perspective from data collection, and also desiring to create a more open and stimulating data collection environment, I asked the AHS Group to meet for a freewheeling discussion in which they could respond to one another, taking the conversation in any direction they discovered as they talked. In response to the data I collected in the AHS Group conversation—that is, to the participants' concerns and perspectives on teaching careers—and to my own evolving concerns regarding the role of the researcher in the research project, I revised the research questions as follows:

1. How do experienced teachers understand the concept of teacher identity?
2. How do teachers describe their professional identities and the development of their professional identities?
3. What experiences and relationships affect a teacher's identity?
4. To what extent can the researcher move the center of authority toward the participants in a study by relinquishing control of the interview process?

At this point, I imagined the shift in my research goals would only affect data collection as I sought to tinker with interview methods to open more space for participants to control the interview process. I repeated the data collection process with a second cohort of similarly experienced teachers, the CHS Group. The CHS Group completed a slightly streamlined and less specific version of the written prompts used for the AHS Group because I continued to attempt to leave meaning-making to my participants. Shortly after two of the three participants in the CHS Group completed the written prompts (one participant never completed the writing but did participate in the group's conversation), this group also met for a group conversation.

Since I sought to give my participants as much freedom as possible in the research process (by having them make decisions about data collection, interview protocols, participant selection, and data analysis), their questions and interests overtook mine as they rejected or dismissed the concept of teacher identity and elected to think instead about their careers using discourses different from those about teaching identity I had brought to the project as well as a different set of research questions about teaching careers. In fact, their references to identity seemed contrived, as if they sought to “do the interview correctly,” and their use of the term seemed to lack a consistent referent. Sometimes they used ‘identity’ to refer to practices, sometimes to refer to personal attributes, and occasionally to refer to how they were understood by others. In fact, their conversation seemed to be pursuing entirely different themes sprinkled with confusing references to identity. Consequently, I constructed the following research questions in reverse, after analyzing their conversations to determine the questions they brought with them to the research project:

1. What is a good teacher? How does one become a good teacher? How does one know who to become?

2. What resources, constraints, and freedoms for becoming a teacher are available to teachers in the public schools where they taught?

The shift in the focus of the project—from a consideration of teacher identity to the practices of good teachers—was effected by the lines of conversational flight taken by my participants in their group interviews. Only one of my own research questions, the one related to data collection methods, remained a central focus in the project:

3. To what extent can the researcher move the center of authority toward the participants in a study by relinquishing control of the interview process?

While I considered how I could conduct research with more free space for participants to control meaning making, my participants determined how they would think about teaching. Group conversations were followed by individual follow-up interviews with three of the six participants. Those interviews were conducted in response to preliminary data analysis to clarify or expand comments these participants had made in the group conversations. I developed individual prompts for each follow-up interview to better understand ideas that had emerged from my analysis of the group conversations and in my continued research.

Throughout data collection and analysis, I attempted to minimize my authority as the researcher/interpreter and privilege the knowledge of my participants. This strategy is most clearly illustrated in the group conversations during which I tried to direct the conversation as little as possible, instead asking the participants to ask one another questions in response to what each other said. I first produced a thematic analysis of the individual written responses that five of the six participants completed. Not surprisingly, the themes were to a great extent dictated by the questions I had asked them and the research questions I had in mind when I began the project and were, therefore, influenced by the knowledge I had gained by reading about teacher identity.

I grouped those responses by the prompts I had provided and examined the responses for insights into how the participants understood teacher identity, how they developed professional identities, and how their experiences and relationships affected those identities. However, those themes, while interesting and revealing of the effects of spending long careers in teaching, did not cohere neatly into any consistent overarching ideas about teacher identity that I could discern.

As I read over transcripts that emerged from the group conversations, I hoped that, with more data, a larger thematic would emerge to give coherence to the data I had collected to that point. However, the second group conversation was so different from the first that I began to wonder if I could ever find a way to think about what my participants had said without being overselective (e.g., selecting only bits of data that fit a theme), thereby eliminating data that seemed interesting and yet unruly—unruly not only because it did not answer my research questions but also because it did not seem to fit my themes. Looking back, I think this problem in analysis occurred because my participants simply did not think about identity or teacher identity the way I did. During group interviews, I (fortunately) had resisted “educating” them on what I had learned about the subjects in my studies. I was actually pleased during the first group conversation when a participant, NE, began the conversation by taking a bit of a shot at the very idea of a “teacher identity”:

NE: Did any of you think you were “acquiring” an identity? I mean, I’d never thought about teacher identity until you asked the question. I mean I never thought “Okay, I’m getting an identity.” Now I did think I had a *rep* at one point.

ML: Did you think the rep was different from the identity?

NE: Well, I never used the word ‘identity.’ I just knew it was a good thing that I had taught your cousin, that we had come over a hurdle because of that. So that’s identity in

beginning to think somebody knows me for being nice or fair or hard or things that I wanted to be known for. . . . It was a comfort. (AHS Group)

At the time, I felt that her comment implied that my methods were being validated, and that I had been correct in suspecting that traditional interviewing techniques shaped responses toward the discourse of theory and research. This challenge to the terminology (and theory) of my research continued with the second group. One member, LF, said she had not completed the written interview because she had no idea what a “teacher identity” might be. And while both groups sprinkled the terms “identity” and “teacher identity” through the course of their conversations, I realized that their use of the terms was the result of my having introduced them in the initial prompt and that their meaning when using the term could not be assumed to be related to what I had read in the literature. As I said, at first, I was thrilled that my participants proved to be unruly by challenging the “authority” of academic discourse. However, when it came time to make sense of what they had said, I found myself somewhat chastened. What does one do when participants do not understand or think in terms of the key concept of the research study? What does one do with data that does not address the research questions, indeed, does not have a readily apparent structure?

My next attempts at analysis involved deploying various theories (theories of identity, theories of culture, and the ancient Greek theory care of the self, which Foucault described) in an effort to fit the various interviews and conversations into an overarching theory. This approach was not successful because each theory seemed to require that I ignore data that had seemed important to my participants.

My frustrations with using both thematic analysis and *a priori* theories to organize data concluded when I simply stopped formal analysis for six months and focused on my own

teaching. Two weeks before I had planned to return to concentrated data analysis, by chance, I wandered into the local public library and came across a set of recorded lectures on Plato and Aristotle (Kosman, 2002) that I thought might help me better understand Foucault and simultaneously make my hour-long summer commute more bearable. Somewhere in morning rush-hour traffic, while listening to the third set of lectures, I realized that what my participants had said was not as disjointed as I had first thought. Reading Foucault, I had focused too much on the details of his analysis of the care of the self, such as *practique de soi*, *telos*, and *rappor a soi*, and my efforts to interpret the data using those details frustrated me because I felt I was missing the larger picture of what my participants had said. And while Foucault elaborated on ancient Greek ideas in his discussions of ethics, in Plato, I found a more general consideration of *virtue* that helped me see that the most consistent themes of their conversations related to the practices necessary to be a good teacher and how teachers learned and adapted those practices. Sitting in my car in traffic, I heard the lecturer (Kosman, 2003) explain that Plato's Socrates defined virtue as that which enables a person or thing to do whatever it does well. While Socrates discussions of virtue are essentialist in that he situates identity before practice, in contrast with my own thinking that practice precedes identity, Kosman's words helped me realize that in my participants' conversations about their teaching lives, the common theme had been discussions of what they had done as teachers, not of who they were.

Plato's definition of virtue gave me the perspective to stand back and see what my participants had been talking about—though their discussions were seldom as essentialist as the dialogues of Plato's Socrates. Once Plato's early considerations of virtue helped me identify themes in the data, Foucault's discussion on the ancient Greek theories of the care of the self

gave me more openings for understanding how my participants talked about how they enacted care of the self to become virtuous—to become good teachers.

In the following sections, I first discuss virtue as described by Plato’s Socrates, the limits of his essentialist assumptions for analyzing the data for this project, and how Foucault’s discussion of other Greek ideas about the human subject, of the care of the self, yielded different opportunities for me to interpret the data. I then define the terms I used to organize and explain the various discourses of the participants. After explaining the terms, my findings follow: first, a discussion of how the participants described the goals of teaching, and second, the sets of practices they believed were necessary in order to become good teachers. My discussion of the participants’ descriptions of how and where they learned the practices of good teachers conclude this chapter.

Virtue and the Care of the Self

In each of Plato’s dialogues, Socrates engages one or more interlocutors in a discussion of a quality that is related to *arête* (virtue)—temperance in *Charmides*, justice in *Republic*, piety in *Euthyphro*, for example—by questioning the interlocutors about the nature of the quality. Virtue itself is discussed in the *Republic*, its first mention in Book I when Socrates, in conversation with Thrasymachus, speaks of the virtue of animals (335b) and then later connects virtue to the *work* of something, whether that thing be dogs, horses, eyes, or ears: “does there seem to you also to be a virtue for each thing to which some work is assigned?” (Plato, 1968, 353b). Kosman (2003) explained that in this dialogue, Socrates connects virtue to function, “the characteristic activity or work that something engages in” (p. 22). More importantly, virtue is “what enables something to perform its function well,” that is, “a quality something has that allows it to be itself in a good fashion” (p. 22).

According to Plato's Socrates, certain qualities (piety, temperance, justice, courage, and good) are necessary for humans to live virtuously (by performing well the necessary functions of society). Except for the essentialist nature of the necessary qualities for this concept of virtue, the participants in this study might agree. Rather than discuss teacher identity as it has often been discussed in academic literature, where identity relates to an internal state of being (an essentialist approach), they described various practices—such as being fair, finding humor, being consistent, having poise, and demonstrating judgment—that they developed or acquired to become good teachers.

Plato's Socrates shifted my thinking from how teachers acquire an identity in the classroom to how teachers select and acquire practices that enable them to perform their function well. But unlike Plato's Socrates, who described qualities (e.g., sharpness, strength, justice) necessary to *all* subjects within a category (e.g., knives, horses, leaders), the participants in this study described numerous and variable *practices* that could help one become a good teacher. However, the practices they described did seem to fall into larger categories that I refer to as related *sets of practices*, and each set of practices needed to be represented in some way by the good teacher, as I will explain below. Each related set of practices enabled one to assume a particular *virtuous quality* of a good teacher. The three virtuous qualities I identified are *orderliness, energy, and passion*, and I will discuss the related sets of practices at length later in this section. More problematic for me was Socrates' belief that the qualities of virtue were native because that is an essential position. Furthermore, the participants in this project brought with them their own theories about character formation: some described finding the qualities they needed within, some described disciplining bad qualities into submission, and some described enacting practices that created the quality that they desired. All described this work taking place

within two communities: the communities of colleagues in their schools and the communities of students in their classrooms, which I elaborate on in the section below on the virtuous community.

Foucault's (1984/1983, 1985/1984, 1986/1984, 1997/1984) third domain of analysis (after archaeology and genealogy), *ethics*, drew from his study of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and was "a study of the self's relationship to itself" (Davidson, 1986, p. 228). Foucault (1984/1983) identified four aspects of ethics: the ethical substance, the mode of subjection (*mode d'assujettissement*), self-forming activity (*pratique de soi*), and *telos*. The third and fourth aspects helped me work with contradictions in how these participants discussed acquiring the practices they needed to perform well as teachers. The third aspect, *pratique de soi*, "concerns the means by which we change or elaborate ourselves in order to become ethical subjects" (Davidson, 1986, p. 229), which is less limiting than Plato's Socrates' belief in inherent (essentialist) virtues. This "elaboration of ourselves in order to behave ethically" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 354) was supple enough to include the varied ways my participants reported acting, mimicking, and developing character traits that they felt they needed to become good teachers. The fourth aspect of the care of the self, *telos*, refers to "the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 355). My participants' descriptions of how observations of their colleagues influenced their work in becoming good teachers seemed more compatible with the flexibility of this aspect of Foucault's ethics. Participants did not have one fixed image of the good teacher nor one fixed procedure for becoming a good teacher. However, they did describe practices they enacted to improve as teachers.

Foucault's (1984/1933) observation that since "self is not given to us, . . . we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (p. 351) more closely describes the self-forming activities of some of the participants in this study than Plato's more essentialist ideas about identity. While they did not describe the work of becoming effective teachers as "art," they did see it as a process that had multiple possible outcomes insofar as the product (the teacher) is concerned. Foucault's description of self-forming activities also included practices one might enact both with and without conscious attention to how one is changing. These participants admitted that many of their changes took place without conscious consideration of what they were doing. Foucault also opened space for self-forming activities to take place within constantly shifting social settings.

The terms the participants used to describe practices of a good teacher were not consistent. Because I did not control the terms or directions of the conversations as Plato or another interviewer might, I was faced with a diverse and, at times, seemingly random set of practices and personality traits these teachers employed to describe "good" teachers. To make these terms manageable for discussion in this report, I grouped the specific *practices* described by the participants (such as being fair, planning carefully, being diligent, and working hard) into larger categories (orderliness, energy, and passion) that I refer to as the *virtuous qualities*. These virtuous qualities, necessary for becoming a good teacher, may be manifested in myriad and variable practices, which individually may or may not be necessary, as I explain in the sections below on each virtuous quality (i.e., orderliness, energy, and passion). In these sections, I describe the practices that can produce the virtuous qualities of good teachers. However, the participants also described personal attributes desirable for teachers without mentioning specific practices that demonstrate or develop those attributes. In these cases the participants seemed to

move toward an essentialist perspective, making it difficult to determine the practices that could help a teacher acquire the desired quality. Where I could, I have suggested practices that I saw implied in these discussions.

For these participants, a good teacher is one who performs his/her function—teaching students—well. In the discussion below, related sets of practices are organized by the virtuous qualities those practices produce (orderliness, energy, and passion) that enable one to be a virtuous teacher. The participants noted that, for them, the practices desirable for becoming a good/effective teacher had been learned within the school environment in relations with students and colleagues. Colleges of education, while useful for learning a number of teaching methods, were, for them, not places where all virtuous qualities can be obtained. They believed that those qualities are obtained through practices accomplished in relations with students and colleagues in classroom and school settings. They also noted that each teaching environment is different, making different practices useful within different cultures. Thus, a standard model of the good teacher or a standard set of good practices could not apply to all teaching situations or to all teachers.

What Teachers Do

Before discussing the virtuous qualities these participants identified as important for teachers to do what they do well, it might help to explain how they described what teachers *do*. Despite the fact that the nominal profession, *teacher*, implies the *doing* of the profession, what teachers say they do by teaching varies from teacher to teacher. Certainly, most teachers begin each school year with a subject to be covered, a syllabus, a course calendar, and some sort of established curriculum; but teachers in this study rarely spoke of specific content-related subject matter when discussing what they felt they *did* as teachers. And while they frequently mentioned

a passion for the subject matter as essential to *being* a good teacher, the subject matter itself was mostly described by my participants as a means to accomplish larger goals they felt defined their work as teachers. BC, who of the participants in this study most conveyed in her responses a social justice approach to teaching, explicitly stated this position in her written interview:

In dealing with literature, I found that in addition to teaching analysis and comprehension, there existed an opportunity for me to help kids examine human values and think more deeply about their own attitudes. I told myself that I had to be careful not to impart my own views to the kids, but in leading discussions, I encouraged them to reflect on and debate issues such as war and political systems; blind adherence to authority; attitudes toward diverse cultures, the poor and oppressed, the environment, materialism, sexuality, unbridled ambition, power, and so on. Some of my students said I'd make a good talk show host as I probed them with more and more questions and pushed for more debate. However, I felt more like a guide or coach. (BC written)

The CHS Group, of which she was a participant, echoed this idea in its conversation. SR, a member of the CHS Group who teaches language arts, math, and science to special-needs and behavior-disordered students, described his primary goal as a teacher to be changing how his students see past social roles in which they have been placed and helping them see their own value and potential for contributions within their worlds, a goal shared by his colleagues who had taught gifted magnet students in the same school. The teachers in the CHS Group agreed that the most important work of teachers involved helping students see beyond what they perceived as the limits of the students' environments:

SR: I do think that, that our kids live in a very narrow world a lot of times, and it's our job to show them, at least let them look out the windows and see what else there is and

what other ways there are of being than the narrow ways—like I think a lot of those magnet kids think that they're just the most elite thing that's ever walked on the face of the earth and that the world should come to them, and that's their world. That's the sum total of their world for a lot of them. They have a long way to go and a lot to learn. My guys think, a lot of them think that they're the worst piece of crap that's ever been—walked around on two legs. And that there's no place for them in society, and that nobody could ever possibly want them around. So for them, just being able to see that they're worthwhile and can do something, contribute, that's a very big deal. . . . I'm really a big proponent of getting kids to think about why do they think what they think.

LF: I like that.

SR: How do you know what you know?

Like BC, SR described the content of the curriculum as a means for teaching students to think about their lives and to examine what has shaped their thinking. As the group continued this discussion, the participants, rather than discussing traditional classroom subjects, stressed the importance of teaching students values that would make their lives better:

LF: That there's something about learning that's not just imparting knowledge, but leading somebody to figure out to learn themselves.

BC: Hopefully, influence kids to be, to love, and I know this doesn't happen with all of them, or maybe with most of them in your classes, but to instill a love of learning and give them tools to continue learning.

SR: And I think help them to see their relationship to the world maybe in a different way.

That the way that they may have, and I think this is kind of, it's somewhat specific to my

guys, but I think it's true of all the guys, that the way that they have learned that they fit in the world isn't the only way.

LF: That would be true for the top magnet students as well.

SR: I think that's true.

BC: --an appreciation for other people and other cultures and, I mean I think that's extremely important in our world today.

LF: Tolerance for other people, tolerance for all ideas,

SR: Right.

LF: Liberal education has got to be about that, not about rote learning.

BC: And to be better human beings.

LF: Which if you're being tolerant and you're open to ideas, is going to come. It's all related to each other.

BC: And to be responsible human beings, too. (CHS Group)

While the AHS Group never had such direct discussion of what teachers do, the members of this group did allude to similar transformative goals that were not content specific. They similarly reported a desire to shape the lives of their students, but in a slightly more academic direction than the CHS Group. Describing a moment in the classroom that had made her feel very satisfied with her work, DS spoke of times when students who were not normally interested in academics took over their own learning, demonstrating the traits of "life-long learners":

DS: . . . a very satisfying day—it comes from working with sometimes, I think NE can attest to this, kids like the general kids we had in Pacesetter [a curriculum NE and DS used] which were a very mixed lot . . . anybody who wasn't advanced or AP was in the Pacesetter kind of class. And so some of them had very, very poor skills. And I think, um,

I think a really satisfying day was just with those kind of classes where—I could finally leave the room and they could be in their groups and they would keep right on working in their groups. Or we’d have the groups scattered about the building doing their Pacesetter projects—

NE: --and they were actually—

DS: --and they were actually doing it. And I felt, “Yes, we are teaching these people how to be self-directed learners!” And that’s very important. So all that kind of stuff to me—wasn’t it satisfying to you?

NE: Oh yeah—

Teachers in both groups spoke of using the content of their subject areas to effect a shift in the lives of their students by making them life-long learners (learning about the world around them) or leading them toward what Plato’s Socrates famously refers to in the “Apology” as the examined life (learning about the world within). They sought practices that could help them change the ways students understood their place in the world and their relation to learning.

Virtuous Qualities of Teachers

I have named three broad qualities (orderliness, energy, and passion) to organize the practices my participants found desirable. In the interviews, the participants identified over twenty desirable practices, many of which overlapped. For example, being organized, being consistent, and being fair seemed to cluster around a common quality—orderliness—as teachers explained how these practices helped them by giving order to their work and their classroom.

Before I discuss the three broad qualities and accompanying practices in detail, I want to point out that much of the conversation among the participants in this study focused on what they did in their everyday lives in educational communities. My own experiences working in such

communities has shown me that teachers are notorious for borrowing from one another—whether staplers, erasers, or practices. When asked where a great idea came from, the teachers will often admit that they don't know: "I'm sure I got it from someone, and I adapted it some, I guess. Who knows? But I think you may be able to make it work with your class."

In a similar manner, participants in this study also "borrowed" the practices of good teachers. They described watching teachers, listening to teachers, and thinking about how to adapt practices that would help them become more effective in working with their own students. JL described this process of selecting and acquiring practices as if she were going through a buffet line, selecting according to her own needs and desires: "after you've been in a school long enough to see teachers who've fit an identity, you know which parts you would like to choose for yourself" (AHS group).

Orderliness: Management of students and work. The practices of orderliness I describe here create order for students and teachers. These practices include *managing time, managing the workload, managing the classroom and materials, planning lessons, being fair and consistent, being diligent, and having poise.*

Teaching takes place in an environment that is frequently chaotic. Announcements, pep rallies, office requests, and student life experiences that they bring with them every day (e.g., conflicts with parents, boyfriend/girlfriend and friendship dramas) can make the classroom feel more like a multi-ring circus than a learning environment. Participants interviewed in this study identified a number of practices they found helpful for creating an orderly framework in which they and their students could function productively. And while orderliness might be established and expressed in different ways by different teachers, it seems to be a necessary quality

according to these participants, not only to help the teacher maintain control of the teaching environment but also to help students thrive in the classroom.

Asked the most important skills of a teacher, NE responded, “Class management and organization. For me those two skills seem crucial.” She underscored their importance when she noted that in the classroom, she was “Creating order for students and thereby for myself in what could always hold the potential of being chaotic” (NE written). For NE, while curriculum and materials might change, effective management was the constant characteristic of a good teacher. These teachers felt that successful work in an environment with so many different people (most of whom are adolescents) and interrupting variables (announcements, fire drills, office requests for students, and student behaviors) requires an orderly structure of some sort. This orderliness extends into three interrelated realms: the tone of the classroom; interactions with students; and the teacher him/herself. And while the types of order sought by each participant might differ, each participant revealed some type of order he/she desired in his/her work.

Participants observed that in the classroom, it is important to not only have well constructed plans, but also to convey to students that there are plans and goals for the day and that those plans and goals are important. The AHS Group described this as setting a tone for the class:

NE: I control the environment pretty much I think part of my pride in teaching was controlling the class. Not controlling, “You will sit up—“

DS: Yeah, I know what you mean.

NE: But “we have something we’re going to do today, and this is what we’re going to do. I think, this is the way I’ve kind of thought about it; I have some ideas—and so let’s do it this way.” And when it actually happens, then that control leads to that thought. But if

you don't have the control, you're not gonna—even with the very, very bright students, they could be for numbers of teachers the worst nightmare in the world—.

DS: It's the tone you set.

NE: The 'tone' is a nicer word than 'control.'

ML: Well, I think control is a part of it.

DS: No, it's part of it, but you set that—but even the control is part of that tone. It's like once you step in outside the door . . . you were ready for them; you had things for them to do.

Certainly, having prepared for class is essential: NE remembered learning from one of her mentor teachers the value of “Being organized. . . . How much easier everything was if one is truly organized,” in her case meaning having materials ready and at hand.

However, a significant part of this tone derives from the instructor communicating a seriousness of purpose that comes with a belief that the subject matter under discussion and learning itself are important to the students' lives. Conveying this seriousness about the work in the classroom is at the top of JL's list of “rules” for a teacher's classroom behavior: “Always make sure that students know that this is important to me. Never treat anything as busy work. Grade everything that can be graded. Dress the part. If I want students to treat me as their teacher, I must always make it clear that that is who I am” (JL written). Conveying this sense of control in the classroom comes also from preparation—knowing the material and planning the class carefully—and illustrates for students the importance to the teacher of the material he/she expects the students to learn.

Order also derives from communicating clear expectations for student behavior and academic performance. Once those expectations for students are communicated, the teacher

needs to appear “fair and consistent” within that framework. This does not mean that the teacher must adhere to rules rigidly. Experienced teachers often break their own rules when an individual situation calls for deviation from the rules. However, these deviations from expectations usually take place outside the classroom or with an explanation to the class for why the change was necessary. Part of what makes the orderly framework in the classroom feasible is that it makes clear the roles each person is to *play*: everyone knows how to *act*.

JL: I have this kid—yesterday-- . . . I was just talking to him one-on-one, and he told me, “Oh I’ve been doing this and this,” and I said, “M___, I would be doing you a disservice if I either believed or pretended to believe your bullshit.”

DS: Oh!

JL: Now he didn’t wince, or say, “Oh my God,” but if I said that in class, he would “Oh my God, what did she just say—“

NE: There are many things I said outside the door—

JL: --and that’s one thing I like about—most students get it. I can talk to you like this.

And my crash of identities—it’s not inconsistent.

Teachers may more freely deviate from a role outside the door of the classroom or during class changes, but once he/she moves into the role of *teacher*, students will expect him/her to behave in accordance with the rules for behavior that have been established in the class. Deviations from the expected roles may make students, and even new teachers, unsure of what to do next. But even outside the classroom, these participants felt that teachers should be careful about maintaining a clear distinction between the roles of student and teacher: as JL observed above, “If I want students to treat me as their teacher, I must always make it clear that that is who I am”

(JL written). That distinction helps students understand the expectations of the parts they play in the classroom.

NE's description of the reputation she desired speaks for most of the participants: "I wanted to be a teacher who adhered to standards and whose students had no question about those standards. I wanted to be seen by students as hard and demanding but one from whom they learned and received praise when warranted" (NE written). Practices that promote clear expectations and fairness create an orderly framework in the classroom that helps students and teachers understand how to function on a day-to-day basis.

The order a teacher creates in the classroom may partly be an order within him/herself. One aspect of this order is self control, which NE of the AHS Group described as an attribute she acquired over time by playing the part of a person with self control; however, participants agreed that it is essential to *convey* self control to students, whether one *feels* that self control or not. The CHS Group observed that losing control of oneself means losing control of the class:

SR: The guys that I teach, not only have they changed my identity as a teacher, but they've kind of influenced who I've turned out to be in a lot of ways. I mean, I was, when I was a young person, I was always a congenial sort, but I was impatient, short-tempered—self-involved a lot more than I am now. And they—I really had to get out of a lot of that with those kids 'cause you just can't be short-tempered with them. You lose your temper, the whole situation goes down the drain, really fast.

LF: How'd you do this?

SR: I could just see the necessity of it. It was just like, you know, dealing with Student A, you lose your cool, Student A disintegrates, you go, "Oh, well hell, I can't do that any more." (Laughter.)

BC: And so the rest of your class disintegrates along with him, too.

SR: Yeah. All you have to do is get a little negative, and they'll go way past your negativity. They've got whole levels of negativity we don't know about.

Aside from not losing one's temper, teachers convey self control in a number of more subtle practices, with voice, poise, and self confidence. Describing a student teacher she had mentored, DS observed the importance of presence in classroom management: "you've got to have some kind of poise and self assurance that communicates—body language that communicates a kind of assertiveness that I'm not scared" (AHS Group). JL added that "the best teachers hardly ever raise their voice" (AHS Group). She related that she often told her students, "'Never mistake my lack of volume for lack of irritation.' Just look at the face" (AHS Group). DS and NE laughingly referred to the various looks they had learned to use in classroom management:

DS: You've got those looks, J. The looks are important! Mastering all those looks.

ML: Glasses helped a lot.

NE: Absolutely! First glasses I got were reading glasses so that I could look at you over them.

These teachers described various practices of classroom management, all for the purpose of conveying to students that he/she intended to maintain order in the classroom and in him/herself.

This orderliness in the classroom was described by these participants as desirable so that the teacher could *lead* students to a desired goal rather than *force* them to march toward that goal. The participants frequently noted their discomfort using the word 'control' to describe what they were doing (control of the classroom learning, control of student behavior, control of self): Speaking of control, NE wrote, "I really don't like that word—lead is better—being able to lead

a group of students in the direction I wanted them to go with engagement in subject matter rather than disciplinary strategies was always a goal.” However, they agreed that whatever one called it, creating an environment in which what the teacher wanted to have happen actually happened was critical to becoming a good teacher.

This control combined with a belief in the importance of the work of teaching can lead to empowerment. As the teacher no longer plays the part of being in control but actually begins to see herself in control of the learning and behavior in the classroom, she can begin to see herself as the center of learning in the classroom and as an effective member of the teaching profession. This does not mean that these participants did not use practices of “student-centered learning.” In fact, DS and NE described classroom activities that most evaluators would describe as student-centered. However, they set the parameters for and monitored the progress of learning in the classroom. They were the centers of learning in that they knew what the students were learning and how the material fit into their larger teaching objectives. They also knew how far students could wander in their own projects and still accomplish the larger class objectives.

DS questioned whether the sense of importance and empowerment that comes with being in control of classroom learning is possible in education today:

I wonder if it’s harder for teachers coming out of college and starting now to forge some sense of identity because of the way things are now, with the focus on testing and meeting arbitrary deadlines for various kinds of things that in some ways don’t have much to do with teaching. I really wonder if—maybe that contributes to why, because if you don’t get some strong sense of identifying with the profession, don’t you think, and with the work you do, pretty early, I mean even if you don’t have that kind of control you do later, which NE was talking that finally where you just—you are, you are it, and the

principal and the counselors and all those people up there—you get a clear sense, I think I got this clear sense, those are support people. They're here to help me; they're not here to make my life more difficult and my students' life. I think once I felt that, I felt really empowered. But I think a lot of people today never stick around long enough to feel empowered by what they've learned, and they're very intimidated by the threats and the, you know, you must show, x number of people must pass this test, and so on. (AHS Group)

A teacher may be able to act her way into orderliness in teaching, in student management, and in self control, but full empowerment only comes with having acquired that “clear sense” of being at the center of learning where one is doing what one knows to be important work and making a difference in students' lives. This “clear sense” DS described is part of orderliness, an understanding of one's purpose in teaching and control of both oneself and the classroom situation. However, the participants worried that the empowerment that results from this sense of order may be more difficult to acquire and maintain in school environments focused on external measures of success.

Energy: Managing physical, psychic, and emotional resources. I define the quality of energy as the *power* required to engage in the work of teaching effectively. The demands of teaching are not merely physical: being on one's feet most of the day, moving around the classroom, and walking halls for duty assignments. Psychic and emotional energy reserves are necessary for grading papers, being attentive to multiple behaviors in the classroom at once, and dealing with student problems. Physical energy reserves can be increased over time by *working hard*, but participants in this study also described a number other practices that could help a teacher either develop or conserve the psychic and emotional energies they needed for teaching.

However, these practices—*being patient, being optimistic, having humor, controlling oneself, being creative, understanding students' backgrounds, avoiding negative energies by acting angry rather than being angry, and controlling anger and frustration*—were sometimes difficult to master and involved a great deal of trial and error. Only one of these practices—being patient—was mentioned by every participant.

The participants reported that when they entered teaching they were completely unprepared for the daunting time and effort the work demands. They described acquiring the physical energy necessary for teaching by simply working hard to build stamina. Over time the job was not so physically exhausting.

NE and DS in the AHS Group credited parents who had grown up during the Depression with teaching them a work ethic that enabled them to persevere and put as much effort into the job as it demanded. All of the AHS Group emphasized that a teacher who demonstrates effort by coming to school every day if possible, having well prepared lessons, returning work in a timely manner, and being completely engaged in teaching (as opposed to having students read and answer questions in a textbook) conveys to students a seriousness of purpose that reinforces orderliness. Effectively engaging in these practices of orderliness required the practice of working very hard. The participants were critical of student teachers they felt were not willing to work hard enough:

DS: I saw it the last few years a lot, I felt—people coming into teaching who weren't products of parents brought up in the Depression, and that solid work ethic kind of thing, that I think most of us got passed on to, at that time. I'm not seeing as much of that, and I don't know how you can ever—if you refuse that part of the identity of the teacher, that you've got to work hard—as you said earlier, it's a hard job—and they haven't done

anything, there's nothing that's changed in terms of the lesson planning, the paper grading, the too-big classes, and all those kinds of things that we've all fought through, there's none of that that's changed. So if you don't have that work ethic—I mean, I've had—that's why I quit taking student teachers, because I saw repeatedly that—they would actually say, “You mean I have to work on the weekend?” (Laughter from group.)

(AHS Group)

All of the teachers commented on the surprising work load they discovered in teaching, a workload that, as DS commented above, did not diminish with experience or with changes in educational policy. However, the workload is only one aspect, the one requiring physical resources, of the energy required for teaching. In addition, the participants identified numerous psychic and emotional energies necessary for successfully working with adolescents. In an interchange among the CHS Group, some of these energies required in the classroom were described:

LF: I have always thought that the kind of energy that it takes for (here she names a number of English teachers) to focus not only on what we're doing, and how we are dealing with kids and the importance of ideas and writing and everything else, grading papers, how difficult that is, how much energy and focus it takes. You know I can think about SR [who teaches special needs students] and an incredible difference, you know. You might not have a million English papers to [grade], but it's a different kind of energy and focus—

BC: Well, it's a different kind of emotional energy—

SR: And they're both hard. They're both hard. I mean they're both really tough, I think.

LF: But you have to have a gift for that; you got to have a patience to be able to do that kind of thing.

BC: Do you find that, do you take a lot of the problems with you at home at night? Or can you leave them?

SR: When it's, when it's—the ones that jump up off the graph, yeah, sometimes. But I'm pretty good at leaving it at this point. Sometimes, I do though; sometimes I take it home with me.

BC: That was one of the things, I guess any time I thought about changing careers, the thing that bothered me the most about teaching was that I could never do that. School was always with me. If I'm out jogging, school's with me. If I'm playing tennis, school's with me. In my head. There's just constantly thinking about—if I'm not thinking about the kids, or worrying about the kids, or a particular problem with the kids—

LF: Grading papers—

BC: That, or just considering “Well, how could I have done this better?” Or, you know, “This is what my plan is for tomorrow, but I think maybe I want to alter that.” Or “That didn't work so well today.” So I could never shut my mind to it, so it wasn't a 9-5 job ever, or it wasn't a nine-month job. I could let go of it a little bit, but the first two weeks of summer vacation, it was still with me 100%. So that was—there was just no relief from it.

LF: It's what wears you down after a while.

SR: For me, it's not so much that I take—you're talking about very specific things that you're concerned about, or want to change—whatever. There's a kind of a general energy that my students put into me that I have to kind of wash off. And sometimes I think about

it deliberately, like washing that energy off. Because they have a lot of negative energy. There's a lot of anger, and, and uh, just a lot of—I don't know what you'd call it exactly, but there's a bitterness and hostility. And that—I really make a point of really trying to leave that behind.

BC: Yeah, see that's a lot different. Because I'm talking—a lot of times here about positive energy; things that are good that I'm still focusing on at the end of the day. That's good and I liked the way that worked, but how can I do it better, and this kid's really excited about this, so what can I do to help him channel that energy in this direction. But it's exhausting.

SR: Yeah—it's the never-ending aspect of it.

The teachers in the CHS Group identified and distinguished between physical, psychic, and emotional, and negative and positive energies that drained them. To do the job well, they found that they had to learn to pay attention to numerous student-related details in the classroom—behavior, attentiveness, and comprehension—to effectively manage the class and engage the students in learning. The energies necessary for maintaining this level of focus could be exhausting but could also lead to exhilaration and fulfillment when the class responded as a teacher hoped, as LF noted:

But you know, evidently, whatever was feeding me about that overshadowed it [the exhaustion]. It didn't make it okay, but whatever I was learning, whatever stimulation I was getting from ideas and interaction and writing and things I had never thought of before—I mean I would learn something all the time, you know. Evidently, that was feeding me more than was being taken from me even though it was exhausting. That's just what I'm thinking about myself. I think that I had to have been tremendously fed by

what I was doing and what I was experiencing to have done it at that level for so long.
(CHS Group)

However, negative energies—anger and frustration primarily—did not yield a positive outcome, in particular for SR working with behavior-disordered populations, whom he described as having “whole levels of negativity we don’t know about” (CHS Group). NE (from the AHS Group) and SR both explained that being effective with their students required learning early on to deal with negative energies by keeping them from seeping inside. For NE, avoiding negative energy within herself required being optimistic, having endless reserves of patience, and understanding her students’ backgrounds:

If patience and optimism can be called “skills,” they were essential to me with the mostly economically and culturally disadvantaged students whom I taught for the majority of my career. . . . I did not believe I would get very far by penalizing my students for what they didn’t have and didn’t know before they came to me, so patience was a necessity because these students were woefully unprepared and optimism that they could and would learn was what kept me going. (NE written)

What her students did not know included how to behave in class. In a follow-up interview, NE described a gradual growth in her ability to manage her own potential for frustration or anger by learning to *act* angry without actually *being* angry:

When I first started teaching, I would get, I would get mad at students . . . but I realized how exhausting it was if I was really angry first period at a class or at an individual. And then I realized if I could *act* as though I was angry, I got the same point across to the children, and it didn’t take as much energy from me. And it could be a look of a certain kind, um, a tone of voice, but if I could save myself from the emotional involvement of

the anger—I don't want you to do this. Initially when I started teaching, if you did it, it would make me angry. After I taught longer, I learned to respond in the same way without, um, the tension . . . or maybe even responding more quickly [that is, responding before she got angry].

In the same interview, she further explained that part of her ability to avoid the negative emotions of her students, whether apathy, anger, or disinterest in class, was by operating on the assumption that her students' negative behaviors were not really directed at her but at something else in their lives. That interpretation of their behavior enabled her to not take the behavior personally; furthermore, her ability to act enabled her to stop the behavior without it disrupting her class or her composure. In a subsequent email correspondence, she reflected,

In retrospect, I think I must have realized, empathized with the burdens students brought into the classroom with them *before* I could have begun to 'act' angry rather than be angry because the acting took—now I think had to take—a bit of a remove from the situation. Understanding of students created a distance from emotional reactions.

It is quite likely that her success in this sort of behavior management without personal emotional involvement was the result of students sensing that she was not personally angry with them. She disapproved of their behavior, but she did not dislike *them*.

Teaching classes of behavior-disordered children, SR also had to master his emotions to keep order within himself and his classroom. And while this is closely related to the virtuous quality of orderliness described previously, in this case, maintaining order within conserved emotional energy in addition to setting a tone for the classroom. As previously described, SR found that he needed to maintain a state of calm in his interactions with his students, who would

feed off his irritation (“negative energies”) if he ever lost control. He noted in his written interview that this state of calm was never easy for him to accomplish:

to be a successful psychoed teacher I would have to be firm but warm, empathetic and extremely patient. In the [psycho-educational] center, I also had to be able to handle physical confrontation coolly and calmly. . . . At age 28, patience and empathy were quite a stretch for me, as were being cool and calm. I still have to monitor my responses and always will I suppose.

To maintain this composure, SR, like NE, learned to distance himself from any potential emotional involvement with power struggles in the classroom, a practice that seemed to work for both him and for his students in accepting the fact that he would be in charge of the classroom:

[I learned to] back off emotionally from getting personal with a kid about power, you know, so that my style now is, “Look, I have the authority, I am the authority figure, you’re going to need to accede to that now. When you get to be an adult, maybe you’ll be a person that’s got power. Right now I do; it’s not about me or you; it’s not personal. It’s just the way it is.” (SR, follow-up interview)

This practice of separating themselves from emotions that could drain them of energy or take them into non-productive power struggles with students enabled SR and NE to both maintain order in the classroom and conserve emotional energy.

All participants described other practices related to conserving psychic and emotional energy that they found useful in helping them manage their classrooms effectively and obtain desired outcomes from students, both behaviorally and academically. Most frequently mentioned of these practices was being patient, sometimes discussed as a practice that was never fully mastered. DS in particular identified being patient as a goal for every teacher, but noted that it

was one that she could accomplish less successfully toward the end of her career. Consequently, she decided to deal with her lack of patience by moving to a less frustrating teaching situation at a magnet school with students who were less likely to provoke her. SR described using humor to defuse situations in which his students might lose control. Both patience and humor worked to enable teachers to maintain order and to avoid negative emotions that can make the teaching environment difficult and exhausting.

Passion: The reason to return each day. Passion could be classified as one of the positive emotional energies from the previous section, but the participants in this study emphasized its importance so strongly that I created a separate category for it. Another reason passion might be seen as distinct from the emotional energies described above is because they felt passion “kept them going” rather than draining them of energy. The practices of passion were the most difficult to discover in the interviews because they often discussed this quality in vague, essentialist terms. They recommended that one should communicate that one cares for students, believe in the importance of the work, and love one’s subject matter. However, I have identified a number of practices they alluded to that can develop communication, belief, and love: *greeting students at the door each day, having a birthday party, reading widely in one’s subject area, sharing new ideas one has read, encouraging open discussion in the classroom, pushing students to debate issues and see connections to their lives, being available to students, providing emotional support for students in crisis, and advocating for students.* I discuss these practices after describing my interpretation of the quality, passion.

Passion is the only virtuous quality that my participants asserted could not be faked. They gave various names to this quality, some of which may not carry the emotional excess we normally associate with passion but all of which carry some degree of personal conviction. They

described effective teachers having conviction, a love of learning, a seriousness of purpose, a genuine concern for children, compassion, and a love of subject matter. They described passion as a conviction that was not *acted* but sincerely felt by good teachers. When asked to name the most important features of good teachers, these convictions were the most frequently and prominently mentioned, often in essentialist terms. SR said, “I try to convey that I love the subject that I am teaching and that I enjoy their company. These last two cannot be faked and have to be *part of who the teacher is*” (SR written, italics mine). When asked to identify her most significant skills as a teacher, NE included a number of practices that she developed such as being patient, being flexible, and having self-confidence, but then she added, “A genuine liking for students and for the subject matter, even in the roughest of times.” This was the only time she used the word “genuine” to describe a characteristic of a good teacher. Indeed, she often spoke of acting the part of teacher. She also noted her pride when a colleague had complimented her by observing that “I was very good at communicating to students that I was glad they were in the class by greeting them every day at the door” (NE written). Greeting students at the door is a practice that conveyed her appreciation of each student. However, while NE reported sometimes *acting* in her role as teacher, she described her feelings for her students as sincere and natural: “I was glad,” not “I acted glad.” As described by these participants, the virtuous quality of passion derives from what Palmer (1998) called “the human heart that is the source of good teaching” (p. 3), another essentialist viewpoint.

Being passionate, as described by the participants in this study, was demonstrated in three areas: a belief in the importance of teaching, a love for the subject matter, and a concern about students’ lives. Participants did not necessarily claim to be passionate in each area; however, every participant identified at least one of those forms of passion that was important, if not

essential, to his/her success in working with students and persevering in the field. Often, the references to being passionate about teaching, subject matter, and students overlapped as participants described a commitment to teaching that inspired their work.

Teachers in this study agreed that a fundamental belief in the importance of the work of teachers had been necessary in their careers, a belief that they had identified as important to convey to maintain orderliness. However, for orderliness, *conveying* the importance of the work was enough to establish a tone in the classroom. Passion involved *feeling* the importance of the work. JL and DS addressed this in the AHS Group conversation when JL mentioned that she always let her students know how important her work was to her:

JL: I say, “If you don’t pay any attention to me, if you don’t come to class because you’re sleeping late, I take that very personally. Don’t ever say, ‘It’s nothing personal, Ms. L’— . . .this is what I do and this is who I am, and if you disregard it, I take it very personally.” And after a while, they realize, “Oh, she really does think this is important. This is what she does all day.” I’m not waiting for my modeling career to kick in. (Laughter.) This is what I *do*.

DS: I think the thing, I think as part of my identity as a teacher, is always the sense, at the core of it, wasn’t it for y’all, that the kind of work you do as a teacher though is important work. I think that helped give me a real sense of identity. I never got up and hated—I mean there were times it was hard because of other kinds of circumstances—but like you said, J, get inside the room, closing that door, you kind of create your own world that you can control and hopefully get these kids with you, but always this sense that you did have things that they could use. You know, that you were doing something important. I think that always—that took me through a lot of hard times, in identifying myself as a teacher.

I was always proud to be a teacher, I've never felt—I've never felt once when I've said, "I'm a teacher," I've never felt like saying "Oh, I'm *just* a teacher." I've felt like, "I'm a teacher; you know, that's a damn good thing."

DS's comment demonstrates the importance of being passionate in helping teachers through hard times in their lives and careers. Believing that the work was important and that what she gave to students was useful to their lives "took [her] through a lot of hard times" so that she could continue to devote herself wholeheartedly to teaching. NE, who had not planned to be a teacher when she left college, added "I cannot imagine having done anything else with my life" because of the satisfaction she received from believing in the importance of her work as a teacher.

In the CHS Group, the conversation about the importance of teaching revolved around discussions of transforming the lives of students. BC noted that when she began teaching, she "wanted to change the world." The joy she found in the work also derived from her faith that the work mattered, but she described this pleasure as something she found working within a group of teachers who shared her belief that "we could give them skills that could lift them out of poverty and widen their narrow vision" (BC written).

A belief in the importance of teaching can overlap with love for one's subject matter. Participants in many of the written interviews and in both group conversations mentioned being drawn to teaching because of love for their content area. JL wrote about the importance of "enjoying my subject matter enough to never get bored teaching it." DS saw this passion for subject matter as intermingled with passions for teaching and for students. The teachers she most admired and saw as most effective in the classroom were those who demonstrated these passions in their work:

DS: You know, I don't love math, I loathe math, but I have great respect for good math teachers, too, just because they do their job well, and it's a necessary subject. And I can like somebody like Dr. H, I respect her a lot because she loves her subject. You know, she posts articles about math out on the hallway bulletin board. That's one of the things kids take from anybody, and I think that's why JL's always been so successful wherever school she's taught and they loved her. NE used to say the kids would genuflect to JL (laughter). I think that was because that is one of the things she conveyed, a seriousness of purpose and also that she *truly* loved her subject and she cared about them. And that'll take you a long way. (italics mine)

Dr. H exhibited a passion for math by posting articles on the hallway bulletin board, a practice that conveyed her passion for the subject. She read articles and found them so interesting that she was sure everyone else would want to share what she had learned. Reading widely in one's subject area is a practice that can keep one excited about the field and that conveys a lifelong passion for a subject.

Four of the six participants in this study reported that they entered teaching at least in part because of a passion for the subject or for learning. LF declared that her love of learning not only led her to teaching as a career, but also it kept her in the classroom six years beyond her eligibility for retirement. Engagement in learning and literature continued to motivate and excite her. She believed that her love for both her subject and for learning was the foundation for her success as a teacher because her students could "catch" her passion:

But I think it's that kind of thing; it's that reaction to, as you were talking about, reaction to ideas, to the wonder of experience and exploration and thinking and all this kind of thing—I think that's catching. I think that is catching in the classroom. I mean that's

certainly something of an influence, and I think that's what influenced me with teachers that I had a lot. And I think that—I mean, I don't try to do that; that's just who I am. I mean, I'm not putting on a show. I think that for some people, yeah, that's going to be an influence. They're going to say, like you said, "You really love this, don't you?" (CHS Group)

Being excited when discussing literature and being interested in her students' ideas were practices that helped her convey her passion, even though she dismissed what she was doing as "just who I am."

An interesting distinction appears between the passion of the five teachers who described their love of subject matter (JL, and DS of the AHS Group and SR and LF of the CHS Group) and the passion of BC, who frequently alluded to her commitment to social justice. DS described herself as a person "born with a better-than-average facility with language . . . drawn to reading and writing from the time I entered school" and asserted that "a lifetime committed to wide reading is essential" for a teacher (DS written). For BC, literature was a *vehicle* for pursuing her passion, social justice:

having developed a bit of a social conscience over the years, I thought I might want to teach public school. As I began to reflect on where my life was headed and how I might begin to ease into the adult world without compromising the values I had begun to embrace, I thought that maybe teaching literature wouldn't be such a bad choice. In literature I had discovered a vehicle for discussion and analysis of all of the values I'd been tossing around in my own head. (BC written)

For BC, teaching itself was the practice that helped her accomplish a separate goal. Toward that end, she encouraged her students to "reflect on and debate issues such as war and political

systems, blind adherence to authority, attitudes toward diverse cultures, the poor and oppressed, the environment, materialism, sexuality, unbridled ambition, power, and so on” (BC, written). She noted that she “probed them with more questions and pushed for more debate” (BC, written). Her practices to encourage open discussion in her classroom were part of her commitment to changing the world—or at least, the worlds of her students.

All of these teachers described a passion—either for the subject or for social justice—as critical to how they saw themselves as good teachers; in fact, in one interchange, JL and DS admitted to being baffled by teachers who did not teach with passion, wondering why they even came to work each day:

JL: See, I just can’t believe that people would stay in it who stand up and teach, and think, “Well, you get it or you don’t.” That just kills me when somebody says they can either get it or not, you know? Because I’ll tell them, I’m doing this, and this may not be true, but I really believe that your life will not be as worthwhile or as well-lived if you don’t know the difference between procedural and substantive due process. (Laughter.) And it will add value to your life. And, so, it’s important to me that I at least try, and you will at least pretend to try. So I just can’t imagine standing up there and teaching stuff that you thought—

DS: Me either—Well, that goes back to your own passion about your subject. Because those people to me are not passionate about their subject. (AHS Group)

NE observed in the context of this interchange that devotion to the subject is also “connected to the depth of knowledge” one has about the subject, which participants felt was important for being a good teacher. Similarly, DS added in her written interview that the “wide reading” she engages in because of her passion for her subject “gives the skills necessary to adapt to teaching

any course at any level.” In other words, being passionate leads a teacher to acquire the *techne*, or expert knowledge, of a great teacher. However, her references to passion were usually essentialist. She reported that she read because of her passion; her passion preceded and improved her practice. However, as LF noted, reading and learning new things about one’s subject keeps one’s interest in the subject alive.

None of these participants mentioned beginning to teach because of a desire to work with adolescents. Only BC came close to voicing a commitment to working with young people in her desire to “change the world.” But even she said that when she began teaching, she was not “comfortable” with personal relationships with her students. However, she noted that the students crept into her life, becoming more important to her as she became more involved in their lives:

I have observed many teachers who developed with their students close relationships in which both the teachers and their students share the intimate details of their lives. Many students seem to thrive in this atmosphere, but I’ve never felt comfortable with that arrangement. I wanted my students to feel welcome and at ease in my classes and to sense that I was warm and caring, but I didn’t want to encourage friendships or familiarity. When students came to me with personal problems, of course, I helped them work through them, and offered advice when asked. Although I attended their ball games, choral programs, and drama productions, I was never a “regular” at all of these events. Instead, I preferred to remain a little detached.

However, despite my attempts to remain “professional,” inevitably, most kids touched my heart as I got to know them, and often they pulled me into their lives. I found myself pouring my heart into writing college recommendations and recommendations for

summer programs; I never failed to accept those late night phone calls when a teenager needed a shoulder; and I enthusiastically accepted the role of advocate when there was no one else in a child's life to take on the responsibility. There were periods of time when I taught the same kids four or even five years in a row and sometimes felt as if I were raising them. I guess in many ways I became a surrogate parent and a life coach to many students, but I certainly didn't begin my teaching career wanting to be! (BC written)

Like BC, all of the participants reported caring deeply about the students, but none identified that concern as what brought them into teaching. In the case of BC, practices such as accepting late night calls, accepting the role of advocate for a neglected child, and providing a shoulder of support seem to have "pulled [her] into their lives." Seeing that she was making a difference in their lives with these practices may have developed her passion for her students.

SR, a special education teacher who did not become a teacher directly out of college and did not expect to stay in the field, also described becoming "hooked" on the impact a teacher could have in a student's life:

I was hooked on helping this group of kids who are on the outside looking in, and who just had just the worst kind of lives, a lot of them. They just haven't gotten anything like a break. And being able to get them through school, get a diploma maybe, vocational training—where they could go out and do something. And also, I think a lot of our kids haven't been parented, and we really kind of function as surrogate parents in the school system in some ways, and kind of grow them up over again, give them the stuff that they didn't get at home. Just doing stuff like, we make sure every kid gets a birthday party at school, and for a lot of those kids, that's the only birthday party they're going to get.

(CHS Group)

Giving a student a party that helps him feel he is worthwhile is a practice that can lead to deep satisfaction with the work. So while caring for the students may not have been a passion that brought these teachers into the profession, being passionate about their students kept them there. For SR, teaching offered a challenge to improve the lives of students who might not otherwise have many chances.

SR also reported that teaching offered him opportunities to engage in self-forming activities. In fact, he seemed to engage in a conscious crafting of self as a work of art:

SR: I was watching Wayne Dyer for a few minutes on TV today, and he was talking about how everybody, no matter what their upbringing or what their problems are, have a kind of an anchor that is the sense that they have as human beings of what's right and what ought to be happening. And no matter how disturbed kids are, I find that they have that in them. There's something they have, 'cause if you read their files, you expect Atilla the Hun to come walking in that classroom. (Laughter.) A lot of times they're close (more laughter), but there's also this—there's also a core in there that's worthwhile and knows what's right. And seeing that, it gives you a motivation to do more, to give them the opportunity to be like that . . . rather than the thuggish stuff that they want to do, or whatever, all that acting out.

BC: How did you go about tapping that core?

SR: Well, it's going to sound really simplistic. But it's mostly about just being somebody who believes in them, who acts like he genuinely likes them and wants to be around them. It often makes an amazing transformation. Just knowing that whatever happens, you're going to be there. They really rise above what they've been able to do in the past.

LF: You know, I think most all students are like that, too. They, you know, no matter what students that you have, they come with all sorts of problems that we have no clue about. And just being okay—

SR: Yeah.

LF: --in who they are and to express what they express—

SR: Right, right.

LF: --is a big thing, and I think it's—more than academics is that issue when we're in the classroom, no matter what class.

SR: It's unconditional love.

SR at first asserted that his love of his subject and his care for the students “could not be faked,” but in this interchange he talked about being a person who “acts like he genuinely likes them and wants to be around them.” However, he ended this interchange referring to “unconditional love,” which seems to refer to a sincere emotional engagement that he has developed with his students. SR's work with some of the most challenging student populations led him to discover in teaching a life of spiritual renewal, which he described in his written interview:

For me, there is a spiritual basis for what I do. I consider myself to be a Christian/Buddhist/Unitarian/Secular Humanist kind of guy. (I like to keep it simple). All of those traditions have a strong element of compassion and service to others. I know that all humans need compassion and unconditional love but my students are the poster children for these needs. Some of them have to be taught basic civilized values and many of them have never been told that they are worthwhile. They are the kids everybody wants to be rid of. When I am having trouble staying motivated, I try to forget AYP, and NCLB and CYA and think about my spiritual roots. Then I think that the main thing that

I am in the classroom to do is to offer basic human kindness and concern, often but not always within the structure of instruction. (SR written)

As difficult as it may be to stay enthusiastic and committed to the job in the midst of administrative and political upheaval, and no matter what brought these teachers to the field in the first place, commitment to the students and their needs brought them back to the classroom, in most cases (four of six participants) for many more years than they had anticipated when they first entered the profession.

Acquiring Practices of Virtue within the Virtuous Community

Each of the six participants in this study had taught in more than one school, and all stressed the importance of working within a teaching community that enabled them to develop professionally and inspired them to become better teachers. For BC, this virtuous community—a place where important things happened and where caring professionals made a difference in the lives of students who benefitted from the involvement of those professionals—was critical to her becoming comfortable in her role as a teacher. It also made her feel that teaching was important and worthwhile:

I began to feel like a teacher, like a member of a team. Here were kids who needed help and guidance, and here were teachers who felt they could impact kids who seemed to have little direction. I think we all felt that we could give them skills that could lift them out of poverty and widen their narrow vision. (BC written).

Her “membership” in this teaching community led her to decide that she would continue in the profession though she began her teaching career thinking it was a temporary vocation: “I always believed I would at least test the waters in some other professions. At last I felt content and settled and began viewing myself as a teacher” (BC written). Her acceptance by other teachers

into the teaching community and her comfort seeing herself as a member of a virtuous community—for BC, a community of people engaged in making positive social change—led to her decision to continue teaching. She also reported the importance of working with teachers as a team to find the best practices for reaching students.

The potential of the teaching community to be a virtuous community echoed in each written and group interview. The virtuous community was described not in terms of who the members *were* but in terms of what they *accomplished*. At one point in the AHS Group interview, each participant engaged in an almost choral interchange in which they completed one another's thoughts. This dynamic part of their conversation illustrated how they saw themselves working within a community of teaching professionals, at least in one school, where teachers could be inspired to become better because of the presence of collegial role models and the support necessary to inspire and improve both novice and experienced teachers:

DS: Even when things got tough, and administration changed, and got worse and all that, I think it's because we were all there for each other, and we all trusted and liked each other, that core group of us, and we respected each other and what we were doing or trying to do.

JL: See that's the thing. If I looked across the hall and I saw NE, I was proud—

DS: yeah—

JL: --to be a teacher.

NE: We did have that kind of feeling. I mean, I know exactly what you mean.

JL: If you're in school, and you're embarrassed by your—

DS: Neighbors outside the door?

JL: --then you certainly don't feel proud of yourself, no matter how superior you may think you are, you're still one of them. At AHS, I was proud to be one of "them."

NE: And you know that what's important to you is important to all these other people, and then when that bell rings, all kind of wonderful things—I mean just think about the people that were on the hall at one point. What in the world was going on in that hall during those classes! It's just incredible to think about, and to think about being a part of that.

These teachers measured virtue in the teacher and in the teaching community in terms of what was done to transform the lives of students, not in terms of a state of being of the teacher. They were proud of their profession because they had come to see themselves as part of a virtuous community where people accomplished great things on behalf of their students.

To learn the practices of effective classroom teachers, these participants found their most significant lessons in observing the teachers they admired and listening to the students they taught within the virtuous community. BC in particular stressed the importance of working with peers who were "like-minded" and "pushing to solve problems." Specifically, she observed other teachers' "love of teaching, rapport with their students, and ability to reach difficult kids" as practices she sought to emulate. DS counted herself lucky to have had "good colleagues almost everywhere I taught, women who were quick to share ideas, to encourage, and to give advice and feedback. A long marriage to an English teacher who was an excellent teacher was also a big plus" (DS written). In fact, the one time she seriously considered leaving teaching occurred when she taught in a school without that camaraderie: "It wasn't because I lost any love for teaching English, it was because of the school I was in—the only place I have ever taught where I did not have a group of encouraging, creative, and sustaining colleagues" (DS written). She transferred,

“got to teach in a fabulous school among an outstanding group of professionals” (DS written), and stayed in the field for over twenty more years.

Within these communities, teachers saw practices to emulate, as described above, but they also saw practices that they knew they could not acquire or did not want to acquire:

Through the years, I have known teachers, very effective teachers, who were imposing and intimidating and, thus, had no difficulty maintaining order in even the most challenging classes. Even though students often complained about these martinets, they seemed to blossom and learn in the rigid environment. However, my personality has never lent itself to this kind of teaching. I have never been a strong disciplinarian and discovered early on that I would have to keep my students engaged and interested to maintain order and survive in some of those classes that included difficult personalities!

I always perceived my non-confrontational personality as a shortcoming in the classroom, but it also made me a more creative teacher. Out of necessity, to survive, I had to develop innovative ways to approach both students and the material I was teaching them. I loved this part of the job and considered it a rewarding challenge to come up with ways to make seemingly boring aspects of learning palatable to students. (BC written)

Sometimes the lack of a desirable teaching practice can lead to the development of an alternate practice, such as the “innovative ways to approach both students and the material” that BC felt she needed in order to compensate for her “non-confrontational personality.” A teacher can also change over time, engaging in practices that once felt unnatural: BC admitted to being uncomfortable early in her career with being overly friendly with students because her temperament was to remain “a little detached.” This aversion changed over her career as “students pulled me into their lives” (BC written).

The AHS Group also discussed the impact of students on the practices a teacher acquires to successfully achieve teaching goals. DS and JL taught all gifted classes for at least the last decade of their teaching while NE continued to teach students at all academic levels throughout her career. JL noted that her reputation for being a “nice” teacher was earned primarily because she *could* be nice in her classes since her students were not generally confrontational. In fact, she said that she frequently explained that to her students when they told her she was nicer than most of their teachers:

JL: I always tell my students this, if they say that I’m nice, I say, “Do you know what a luxury it is for a teacher to be nice? Do you know how many teachers in this building would love to be nice? Would love to ask what you would like for your birthday, or what treat you would like for your birthday? Or free peppermints whenever we have a test, whatever, and not worry about anybody stealing?” (AHS Group)

She and DS agreed that teaching students who make it difficult to use the practices they are comfortable employing can create unbearable conflict for a teacher:

JL: I think if I had taught really hard-nosed kids who were confrontational, almost on a daily basis—first of all, I would have left because there would be such a disconnect between who I wanted to be and who I was having to be.

DS: I never thought about that, but I think that’s very true—that probably teaching the types of students that we teach really does have a lot to do with how we see ourselves as a teacher. And I think sometimes that made my identity as a teacher because I taught 6-12, every possible ability level just about. I think, for me, there were years where that identity was not very strong, there were years that I felt very frustrated, and I wanted to get out. . . . I had several instances of thinking about leaving and not teaching. And I

think those were the years where I sometimes had very difficult classes and non-supportive administrators, so it does have something to do with it.

NE: Your identity comes into conflict with the authority in the school or the students in the classroom—

DS: I think it can.

NE: --and your identity then either changes or you remove yourself from the situation where your identity as it's already formed can't continue?

DS: Yeah. (AHS Group)

For DS, this conflict between her teaching situation and temperament once led her to find a new teaching situation. She came to lack the patience to deal with the personal aspects of students' lives:

I'm not very touchy-feely, which means I usually worked better with more able or at least the more motivated students. I don't think I always reached the undermotivated types who brought lots of baggage to the classroom. I was perhaps better about that as a young teacher—used to make lots of phone calls to parents. As the years wore on, I just didn't always have the emotional energy to deal with all the tragedies within the lives of students. (DS written)

This realization was part of her decision to transfer to a school that served a primarily gifted population: "I wanted to teach, not be a social worker" (DS written). NE, however, stayed in a school where the demands for working with less and less motivated students increased over her career as the school population changed. Perhaps what she saw as her native optimism and acquired ability to *act* negative emotions rather than actually *feel* those emotions (as described

above) enabled her to persevere with this demanding student population when her colleagues did not.

Not all teachers brought up the impact of students in their individual written interviews, though three (BC, SR, JL) of the five did. However, all agreed when the idea arose in the group conversations that students might have as much impact as peers or temperament on the type of teacher one becomes in the classroom:

I certainly did not learn these skills in an education class. Most teachers learn the most important lessons from their students. Students tell you in many ways when your lesson has piqued their interest, when your instruction has been effective, and when your evaluation techniques measure what needs to be measured. Students let you know if you have earned their respect. Using this feedback is what makes a teacher effective. (JL written)

However, while students told teachers what and how they needed to change, it was peers who illustrated for these teachers the practices they needed to work well with their students. The inspiration of working with respected colleagues in a virtuous teaching community motivated them to improve.

Learning the practices a teacher needs to teach well is, as reported by these participants, the result of seeing what works by a process of trial and error in the classroom; however, they also described this process as the product of self examination and self understanding. What works for one teacher does not at all necessarily work for another teacher or for another set of students—or even for the same teacher in a new teaching situation or at a later point in his/her career. Learning the specific practices one needs to teach well is a career-long endeavor. The

ever-changing nature of the teaching environment necessitates that one always has more to learn as a teacher.

The Master Teacher as Craftsman

In *Charmides*, Plato addressed the virtue of *Sophrosyne*, usually translated as temperance. The part of this dialogue that most interested me concerns the definition of *Sophrosyne* as the “effortless and tranquil performance of what he/she truly wants to do.” In his lectures on Plato, Kosman (2003, disc 2, tracks 3-4) used an analogy of a potter shaping clay to illustrate this aspect of temperance, an aspect important to the mastery of self that is essential to Plato’s discussion of temperance as “a sort of quietness” (159b). To support his explanation of how the concept of temperance as “quietness” is necessary for mastery, Kosman used examples from *The Republic* that illustrate the mastery of the leader over his subjects and over himself. “Quiet” in this context refers to the effortless control that the master exerts over his material. Kosman further illustrated this sort of mastery by describing the practice of a master potter, who appears to use his skill to effortlessly shape clay into a bowl. I want to extend Kosman’s analogy, adding some description of how the craftsman’s mastery is acquired to describe the way teachers move from being novices to being masters in the field. But first I would like to change Kosman’s analogy from shaping clay to cutting glass since I have some experience in glass cutting and can better extend his analogy with what I have myself experienced.

According to Kosman, mastery occurs when one has achieved an “effortless control” over the material with which one is working (clay, glass, or the self). The common mistake of the novice glass-cutter is pushing down on the glass with the major force coming from the hand and forearm. Ideally, one extends pressure across the glass while envisioning the entire cut and exerting a powerful yet sure pressure that originates from one’s center of gravity. Beginners who

push down on the glass shatter the entire sheet. They also tire the muscles of the forearm and hand by clenching the glass cutter with unnecessary tension. Basically, they use the tool to battle the material rather than instigate a change in the material. As the student gains mastery, the center of motion moves toward the center of the body and the motion itself becomes more relaxed and controlled. The master no longer fights the material.

This mastery of motion comes after making hundreds of cuts, repeated until the knowledge of the motion is physical, embedded in muscle memory. We could say the knowledge of the motion has transferred from outside the craftsman to inside via experience. That is, the knowledge is no longer what one has seen someone else perform but what one has oneself performed, what one has felt oneself do over and over again. This mastery of practice also comes with a more perfect understanding of the material, the glass, and the ways different pieces will respond to the application of force to their surface tensions.

Mastery of practice requires intense and persistent attention to *practique de soi*, “the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects” (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 354). The work of becoming the ethical subject, in this case, the good teacher, is the care of the self that can lead to an “art of existence” (Foucault, 1986/1984, p. 43): “From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art” (1984/1983, p. 351). Over time and with practice, we might accomplish what Foucault (1984/1983) described as *techne tou biou*, “the economy of exercising a perfect mastery over oneself” (1984/1983, p. 348), a mastery that appears effortless and natural but has been acquired through change and elaboration of our practices.

In my conversations with veteran teachers, this is the sort of mastery they described acquiring after years in the classroom: a knowledge that seemed intuitive and natural after years

of practice. Of all my participants, SR, the CHS teacher who worked with special education students, spoke most directly about what appeared to be effortless and intuitive knowledge of how to respond to a situation in class. This knowledge of how to respond to a new problem came from past performance and past experience with students, knowledge that helped him adapt quickly and calmly to changing situations in the classroom. In a follow-up interview, I asked him to elaborate on an incident with one of his autistic students he had experienced in fall 2008.

The student had refused to comply with a request by his Spanish teacher. SR was present as a co-teacher in the class, and his autistic student did not want to choose a Spanish name for him to use in the class. SR saw the student working himself up to a state that might lead to trouble with the teacher all year. What SR did to intervene—whispering in the student’s ear, “Go with the frikkin’ flow. If you’re gonna be a pain in the ass, you’re never gonna get a diploma!”—probably would not appear as a standard intervention method in a special education textbook. I asked him how he knew this was what the student needed at that time:

Gosh. It just felt like it—it felt totally like a gut reaction. It was just a feeling that I had that, that saying standard kinds of things to him—“Come on R__. Stay on task. Follow directions”—that none of that was going to work for him. Just it was a gut feeling that none of that was going to be of any use. And that I had to, I had to shock him. And it is probably based on doing this sort of thing for a long, long time and seeing how kids react. Because every now and then I’ll zing a kid because it just seems to—kind of snaps them into, into some semblance of reality that they weren’t functioning in before that.

For a teacher such as SR, the classroom is even more unpredictable than for regular-education teachers, not only because of the problems his special-education students bring but also because he often, as in the above situation, has to work within the classrooms of other teachers where he

has little control over how the classroom is managed and how students are approached. If mastery is indeed effortless control over the material with which one works, perhaps this is an example of teaching mastery—the point when a teacher knows intuitively how to respond to and with students—the point when the teacher can effortlessly draw on the practices that work. He no longer has to think about what a mentor would do, or what he should do within “rules.” He finally just *does* without having to analyze. Once this sense of mastery is attained, the job of working with students in the ever-changing classroom environment is easier.

Returning to the glass analogy, most novice glass cutters learn to cut glass with machine-made glass because it has consistent surface tensions and texture, making it much more predictable to use than hand-made glass. Once the glass cutter masters working with machine-made glass, the shift to more beautiful and elegant hand-made glasses is not too difficult but does require some adaptation in practice. I think it really takes a greater understanding of the nature of glass, a “super-hard” liquid with tensions masked by what appears to be a solid surface. Almost anyone can cut clear window glass because it lacks the diversity of minerals and chemicals that contribute the rich vibrant colors and textures that cause art glass to refract light multi-dimensionally. It also lacks the imperfections of hand-made glass, imperfections that make the glass more interesting and desirable. Cutting hand-made glass well requires attention to surface details, even pressure applied over bumps and dips, and focused steadiness. One cannot fight the glass; one must understand the glass and work with it. While each sheet of hand-made glass is unique in color and texture, the master craftsman recognizes each surface detail from his extensive experience, enabling him to work with the material rather than against it. The artist understands how to use the unique properties of each sheet to his best advantage to accomplish a larger vision. Experience with the material is necessary.

SR noted that knowing how to work with the human materials (students, administrators, other teachers, parents) of his craft came from experience. Such knowledge after years of practice yielded confidence and the quiet mastery of craft that comes when one asserts effortless control over others to lead them toward what the craftsman sees as good results. Perhaps this is what people in educational leadership mean when they refer to the “master teacher”: the teacher who works with students, parents, and administrators rather than on or against them. There is no fighting in this sort of mastery because the master knows his subjects well enough to get them to work with him:

SR: Well, I think it’s just—um—it just gets so much easier. Just because you can, like I said, you can think of so many times, you’ve seen this kind of parent before, or you’ve dealt with this kind of administrator before. I’m kind of to the point now, where I can take a hostile parent and turn them around and have them eating out of my hand in a fairly short period of time. Because I know how to charm their socks off! And I didn’t know that years ago. When I go into a meeting, even when I know the parents are going to be relatively hostile, I know that—now I’m not sure, but with reasonable certainty—by the end of the meeting, they’ll be on my side. Almost always, not always, but almost always. And that’s a lot of—it just makes you so confident about what you’re doing. I can’t tell you how many people have said, “Oh this parent, this parent is terrible. You’re going to hate this person.” And in a twenty-minute conversation with them, and we’re (snaps fingers) clicking, and we’re on the same page, and we’re working for the kid. Because I’m doing everything I can *not* to set up a power struggle with the parent. And yet it’s on the same page. And a lot of it is just, you know, people skills. Saying little things—like you might notice something about their clothing, or their kid told you

something about a hobby they've got, or something that breaks the ice and gets them on a better personal level with you before you even start talking about the academic problems the kid's having, whatever it is and then we can establish that personal connection with little tricks that you pick up over the years, that you've got this whole toolbag with you . . . that when I was twenty-five, I didn't have.

ML: And there's no other way to get it?

SR: I don't think there is any other way to get it. And it's not—ML—I don't think it's just about being a teacher. I think you bring everything you are as a person into those interactions. You know what I mean? Everything you've learned in you—you know, marriages (in my case marriages!), your own children. (SR follow-up interview)

Mastery of practice, however, comes at a cost. While the master teacher has achieved a seemingly effortless practice through repeated experiences, those accumulated experiences can also lead to emotional exhaustion. What has become easy has also become wearisome:

SR: But I think the job is much easier now because I've had so many experiences. If I started to go down that road again [referring to a problem with a student he encountered early in his career that he feels he handled unsuccessfully], you know, I'd see it. On the other hand, much more fatigue, you know, because you're talking about, "Oh yeah, I know how to do this. I've done it 700 times. I'm tired of doing it." So you've got that. There's a point in there where you're at your optimum, and you're not tired of it yet. And I'm kind of headed toward the latter part of that where I'm just getting burned out on fighting the same battles.

Master teachers differ from novice teachers in their ability to draw on accumulated, personal experiential knowledge of desirable teaching practices rather than external knowledge gained

from other sources such as observation or coursework. While each situation they encounter may be unique, the components of each situation are seldom new. The master teacher may respond in what appears to be an intuitive manner but is actually relying on acquired practices. And while the experience leads to an apparent ease in performance, it also leads to weariness.

Perhaps it is a great irony; perhaps it is just the nature of any craft. Teachers acquire through mimicry, repetition, mentoring relationships, and/or supportive environments the practices they need to be effective—that is, to do what well what they characteristically do as teachers—but once they acquire the practices that make the job seem effortless, they get tired. We finally become good teachers—and then we are ready to stop.

Chapter 5

Implications

[Eliot Interlude] Implications in a World of Shadows

In Part V of “The Hollow Men,” T. S. Eliot (1962/1925) described a world in which all action is colored by shadows of uncertainty, constant reminders that we cannot know our efforts have meaning or purpose:

Between the idea

And the reality

Between the motion

And the act

Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception

And the creation

Between the emotion

And the response

Falls the Shadow

Life is very long (ll. 72-83)

*If the quest of the postmodern researcher cannot be toward Truth, what is its purpose?
That question shadows every keystroke I make as I try to profess that my work has significant
implications for other researchers, other teachers, and other teacher educators. I can willfully*

ignore the shadows, refusing to doubt that what I see is real, that what I believe is true, and that what I discover is generalizable. However, like Eliot's speaker in "Ash Wednesday" (1962/1930), I cannot "turn again" (I, l. 1) to a time of faith in which we can discover fixed truths, and "I cannot drink / There, where trees flower, and springs flow" (I, ll. 14-15). Instead, I have elected to study the shadows and try to understand the effect of the shadows (a priori theories, memories, poetry, and my own career as a teacher) on my research as well as the effect of my research on other aspects of my life, in particular, on my teaching.

The danger of ignoring the shadows is that one presents to the world a false clarity. The danger of focusing on the shadows is that one is paralyzed by indecision and purposelessness, unable to move beyond the shadows. If all data are corrupted, what is the point of data analysis? If all findings are subjective, how can we suggest their generalizability? If the quest of the researcher cannot be toward Truth, what is its purpose? Can we finally study anything other than ourselves?

As a researcher, I have conducted this dissertation study slowly and occasionally as purposelessly as possible. Shadows of indecision have stopped me, redirected me, and left me uncertain of how or even whether to proceed. As I complete this report of my project, I find myself wondering what sort of solid forms I can offer the reader, what implications I can point to as lessons to be learned from my experiences in pursuing this knowledge project. Whatever reality, act, creation, and response I offer requires that I do so despite my awareness of ever-present shadows that have already corrupted and undermined my findings.

Even the words with which I report my findings are shadowed by imprecision and my inability to capture neatly the animation and excitement of my participants or how their lives as teachers shadowed my life as teacher, and how I came to understand their data by living it. To

capture my understanding of their discourses, I have created categories (virtues, qualities, practices) to describe overlapping ideas and concepts that resist categorization. Like Eliot's speaker in "East Coker" (1962/1940), I am

*Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. (V, ll. 3-11)*

Rephrasing Eliot's lines, I find myself trying to use the shabby equipment of language to articulate something coherent from my general mess of imprecise data, interpretations, and theories. I suspect that when I finally achieve clarity and precision, I will have only "learnt to get the better of words" (l. 5). Truth continues to elude me.

For Eliot, man has few options. He can ignore the shadows and pretend that we live in a world without the shadows that cast doubt over our lives/actions/research. Or he can become paralyzed, unable to act, like J. Alfred Prufrock (1962/1917) who cannot even muster the will to leave a room filled with idle chatter and meaningless forms—or like the hollow men (1962/1925) who, like Dante's most despised souls, gather on the shore of the river where they are denied even the possibility of damnation.

I return to T. S. Eliot again and again because I always find a pessimistic hope in his life and poetry. Living in a world of meaningless gestures and dubious purpose, he chose to believe. Working with words that could only fail to express his emotions, he chose to write poetry, the literary form that demands the most precision from its language.

Perhaps the only purpose to the postmodern quest is the denial of inaction and thereby rejection of inertia, which surely is the worst of outcomes. The beast we challenge on our quest is that slippery shadow, that lack of clarity or sure purpose that makes epic quests appealing. The hero of the postmodern narrative does not ultimately vanquish the beast. Rather the hero acts while acknowledging the shadow and rejecting false certainties. When the hero finally acts, it is with knowledge that action is the only victory:

*I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice.*

*And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer*

For what is done, not to be done again

May the judgement not be too heavy upon us (Eliot, 1962/1930, "Ash Wednesday," I, ll. 9-33)

The truths of my results are shadowed, imperfect conclusions with implications I hesitate to name because I must construct those implications among the shadows. However, the limits of my truths and predictions are preferable to the results of inaction. We speak our truths because we must speak something, aware of the shadows that flicker over the light we attempt to cast with the imperfect words at our disposal. "May the judgement not be too heavy upon us."

Introduction

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty (1979) managed to "deconstruct traditional epistemology by undermining its central metaphor, the idea that the purpose of the mind is to reflect reality" (Nicholson, 2003, p. 20). Standing with him on the rubble of modernism's assumptions, this researcher wonders what implications can be ascribed to data that may or may not represent reality and interpretations that are merely personal constructions of these suspect data. However, Rorty (1982) also offered a cheerful, purposeful alternate path for one who has lost the capacity to believe in her ability to speak Truth. Rorty (1982) reframed the concept of truth from a universal concept to something we seek in a quest to solve practical problems. For Rorty, the test of validity of a given truth is in its capacity "to meet human needs or to solve human problems" (Nicholson, 2003, p. 20).

And even though I am unsure that the truth I constructed for this report addresses some need or problem effectively, I find that Rorty's (1982) position offers me some ground on which to cautiously proceed. What advice can I give to researchers seeking to remove themselves from

the data collection process? How might the wisdom that I have received from my research participants help me deal practically and pragmatically with a long career in education? What have they said that might be useful to other teachers, taking on this life in other times under other conditions? And what might their insights offer those who train teachers, preparing them for careers in education? While I can only know what this experience offers me, I can hope that this offering might be useful for others in ways I cannot anticipate.

T. S. Eliot's "East Coker" (1962/1940) begins and ends with a pair of lines that I find helpful for thinking about the implications of this project. The opening line, "In my beginning is my end" (l. 1. 1), reflects my suspicion that most research projects begin with the seeds of failure already planted. Research questions and data collection protocols influence the nature of the data collected and the analyses performed. Preconceptions, *a priori* knowledge, and fixed terminology inhibit researchers from sampling the worlds of participants. We carry into the field knowledge and structures of understanding that corrupt our findings.

To learn about teachers' lives, I drew on the knowledge and experience of teachers who had lengthy careers in the classroom. The six high-school teachers who participated in this study had taught an average of 33 years when this project began in spring 2007. Four were retired and two were still teaching. They began their careers as teachers between 1967 and 1973 and ranged in age from 55 to 63. The very criteria that made these teachers interesting to me—age and longevity in the classroom—could also make them irrelevant to beginning teachers today. However, even in a time of widespread emphasis on student-growth models of testing as measures of teacher productivity, teaching remains a human transaction, and my studies in classical literature and philosophy suggest to me that people have not really changed much over the millennia.

Like T. S. Eliot (1962/1940), I chose in the end to believe that my work had some purpose, that it might in some way “meet human needs or . . . solve human problems” (Nicholson, 2003, p. 20). The last line of Eliot’s “East Coker” offers the hope that we can find ourselves reborn in the ashes of our failure: “In my end is my beginning” (V. l. 38). The new perspectives I gained from my participants and the insights I gained from my analyses yield a new set of questions that might enable me to produce different truths in my next project. I now have new questions I would like to ask new participants, new methods to deploy to gather new data, and a new framework for thinking about teachers who have long careers in the classroom.

In the following consideration of the implications of this study, I describe the beginnings that led to problems or ends in this research project, and the ends that open up new possibilities for my thinking about research and teaching. Sadly—or perhaps happily—each beginning contains the ends that will lead to my next failure.

Implications for a Researcher

In my beginning is my end. As I mentioned above, the limits of *a priori* knowledge/discourse and structures of theoretical frameworks shape the research questions that lay the foundations for any project. Research questions lead to protocols for data collection, which also dictate the nature of the data collected. Interview questions can “educate” participants in the discourse and theories of the project, but in doing so, researchers risk colonizing participants into the knowledge structures of the project rather than exploring their approaches to thinking about the research topics.

By opening spaces within the project for participants to determine the questions asked, discourse used, and conversational paths explored, I believe I found a way for my participants to produce data that reflected their thinking in their terms about their concerns. However, data

collected without the structures of established and common discourse and interview prompts can be chaotic and difficult to analyze. If one is in a hurry, do not try this. Old formulae for analyses will fail and their replacements will be elusive.

As long as I clung to the research questions that framed this project, I floundered in the data I had collected. Once I abandoned those questions, I could begin to hear the questions my participants brought to the project. After giving my participants freedom in how they produced data, I ultimately had to let them dictate the questions for the project. However, I could not rely on them to construct the meaning for the project. Their meanings were at times inconsistent and incompatible. I tried to find a structure (theories) that could give some momentary order to the chaos of meanings in their data, and ultimately, I had to accept that the meaning of the project would be my meaning. I do not mean to suggest that the researcher should not bother to risk chaos by taking steps to open spaces that allow more freedom for participants to influence the meaning of the project. The work will not be easy, everything (even one's most cherished themes and theories) will be subject to revision, and the researcher will have to take control of the interpretation. However, the researcher can interpret with an easier conscience if she has taken steps to open some space in the project in which she might better hear what the participants want to say.

Implications for a Teacher/Educator

In my end is my beginning. The questions my participants asked related to the value of their work as teachers. What is a good teacher? Why do we teach? What qualities are necessary for one to be a good teacher? What practices help one acquire those qualities? How are these practices learned? I now find these questions more interesting to me than those related to teacher identity that initially framed this project.

I would love to ask these questions to new cohorts of educators, expanding my participant pool to include administrators and new teachers. However, I would most like to expand my understanding of the virtuous qualities of teaching—orderliness, energy, and passion—and how those qualities interact. I would also like to ask teachers how longevity is related to the qualities and practices of good teachers. Does the belief that one is reaching students and affecting their lives give teachers a reason to come back to teaching year after year? Does that belief create the passion and energy necessary to good teaching? And what changes before a teacher decides it is time to leave? Is it a diminishment of passion or energy?

The participants in this project offered descriptions of teacher quality that have little in common with the “quality teacher” discussion currently in vogue among education policy-makers. They sought to capture a much more elusive definition of the “good” teacher—a teacher who does not pay a great deal of attention to test results, but who continues to be represented in narratives and memoirs about favorite teachers. In Ravitch’s (2010) recent critique of the student-growth testing models driving American educational policy, she included a chapter entitled “What Would Mrs. Ratliff Do?” that is part homage to her favorite high-school teacher and part meditation on the sort of score today’s “value-added assessments” would give to this teacher who influenced her:

I think she imagined herself bringing enlightenment to the barbarians (that was us). When you wrote something for her class, which happened with frequency, you paid close attention to proper English. Accuracy mattered. She had a red pen and she used it freely. Still, she was always sure to make a comment that encouraged us to do a better job. Clearly, she had multiple goals for her students, beyond teaching literature and grammar.

She was also teaching about character and personal responsibility. These are not the sorts of things that appear on any standardized tests. (pp. 169-170)

Clearly, orderliness was a significant part of Mrs. Ratliff's practice. But the more essential practices of passion (teaching character and personal responsibility, making an encouraging comment) were the ones that made students care about the basics of grammar and writing. I suspect that if we could speak to Mrs. Ratliff, we might discover that these practices were also the source of her commitment to teaching. In its journal *PAGE ONE*, The Professional Association of Georgia Educators includes a column in which educators write tributes to teachers who shaped their lives. Describing his high-school science teacher, Thomas (2010) echoed Ravitch (2010) when he described practices of passion that ignited his own "love of life and learning":

she believed in me and expected me to give her my best with no excuses. . . . I remember her positive attitude and willing smile each day during class. We became a family unit in her classroom by learning how to proof each other's papers, thus becoming better writers. . . . I remember Mrs. Huff giving up her personal time to help us before and after school. . . . We knew she loved us as much as we loved her. (p. 20)

Practices of passion such as "instilling a learning community within the classroom, helping students learn how to be more responsible . . . and caring about students" (p. 20) now guide Thomas' own work as a teacher.

My participants have helped me think about these practices of passion, how they can be taught to new teachers, and how I might cultivate them in my own work as a teacher. The teaching methods classes I have taken throughout my career have addressed two sets of the virtuous qualities of teachers: orderliness and energy. We learned to make lesson plans in

accordance with local curricula and how to manage the paper load. We learned to make rubrics and how to manage a gradebook. We also learned conflict-resolution skills and how to avoid power-struggles. Those are important practices of teaching, but I believe they only make a teacher competent. As my participants noted, competence can bring pride, especially in the early years of teaching. However, passion inspires the long-term careers of good teachers. In this essentially human business, teachers who have acquired mastery in practices of passion leave an indelible mark on the intellectual, emotional, and/or personal lives of students.

In the school where I teach, I can model practices of passion, but first I must also engage in an ethical study of my self. By paying attention to and identifying the practices that inspire me and my students, I might be able to pass on to beginning teachers practices more important than the lesson plans and projects they typically ask to borrow—perhaps because these are the only ones they have learned to seek. Instead, I should seek to develop and elaborate the practices of passion that can inspire my work and potentially inspire my students. If I were a teacher educator, I would ask prospective teachers to identify the practices of passion by remembering the teachers they admired and identifying the practices that made them influential. I would also warn them that the passions they take with them into teaching may fade—from lack of practice (when they are too busy or too stressed) or from disillusionment. When that happens, they will need to reinstate their early practices or develop new ones. “Look around,” I would say. “The practices are all around you. Engage in those practices and the passion may come.”

Implications for a Skeptical Teacher-Researcher, Myself

In the fold where beginning and end overlap. I have just completed twenty-four years of teaching, and I find myself, as always, wondering what I have accomplished this past year. By all accounts, it has been a successful year for my students: standardized test results were good,

performance goals were met, SAT scores improved, and my students won writing contests. Furthermore, I received a number of awards because of my students. I was selected STAR Teacher by the student with the highest SAT score. I was named Most Inspiring Teacher by my school's PTSA because of essays by two other students and Most Inspiring Teacher by a local Toyota dealership because of an essay written by yet another student. I will go to Washington DC this summer because a student who has been named a Presidential Scholar has selected me as her most influential teacher.

When I read through these award-winning essays and the thank-you notes that appear on my desk at the end of the year, I wonder about that teacher. Who is she? Each description tells a story about a person or an event that I may vaguely recognize, but even when I do connect with the student's memory, I feel like the languid woman in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" discarding her shawl, dismissing poor Prufrock's attempts at meaningful conversation when she says, "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all" (Eliot, 1962/1917, ll. 97-98). I wonder if the persona I present to my classes is so ambiguous that they can read what they need to into my performance.

At the end of this study, however, I think that whoever I am in the classroom is based on a number of decisions I have made about how I perform "teacher." I look again at a kind letter a student wrote and see practices of passion I had never fully appreciated as a significant part of my work. The baseball poem I read and printed out for an athlete, the after-school interview workshops for Governors' Honors nominees, the editing of essays for contests, and the lengthy comments on a graded essay—these are practices that I learned watching the teachers I most admired and responding to the students I needed to reach. The decisions I made that created a person my students chose as "most influential" or "most inspiring" have not been decisions I

made seeking awards or the admiration of my students. I made those choices while emulating the teachers I most admired and focusing on practices that I thought would reach my students and meet their needs, needs the myriad standardized tests they take each year cannot measure. In honoring me, my students honor those teachers. The decisions I made in emulating their practices have also led to satisfaction and willingness to sign another contract each March and to teach another year. I don't know how long teachers can find satisfaction in meeting the sorts of performance standards many states now mandate. I am sure many bright and eager young people will take on the challenge of raising test scores, but I wonder how long their accomplishments will give them the passion that can generate the energy teaching requires over a lengthy career. I also wonder whether students educated to pass standardized tests are those who will participate in and lead our democracy.

As for me, I will seek to identify, cultivate, and make visible my best practices—those that have enabled me to do the work that I do well. Before I leave the classroom, I hope to disperse as many of those practices in the stream of the teaching profession as I can:

I depart as air. I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love.
If you want me again, look for me under your boot soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean.

But I shall be good health to you nonetheless,

And filter and fiber to your blood. (Whitman, 2005/1855, *Song of Myself*, 52, ll. 7-13)

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Appendices

Appendix A

Research Calendar

Spring 2006	Dr. Jim Marshall's teacher education class raises questions about how teachers learn to teach
2/2006	Interview with IA*, a first-year teacher
<i>4/2-6/2006</i>	<i>Beach Trip</i>
4/15/2006	Invitation for written interviews from Adams High School** (AHS) Group, three experienced teachers
9/26/2006	Dissertation proposal defended
Spring 2007	St. Pierre's POMO research methods class and re-vision of methods for research
4/2007	Invitation to AHS Group for Group Conversation
4/18/2007	AHS Group Interview
2/21/2007	IRB Approval
5/2007	Redesign study
6/6/2007	Invitation to BC to form Conway High School (CHS) Group, three more experienced teachers
6/17/2007	Invitation to AHS Group for Data Analysis
6/6-6/10/2007	Invitation to CHS Group (extended by BC) and discussion of who will make up the cohort (between MLH and BC)
6/13-6/23/2007	CHS Written Interviews received
6/15/2007	<i>Retirement luncheon for TW, my department chair at Princeton High School (PHS)</i>

8/4/2007	CHS Group Interview
10/10/2007	SR's Follow-Up Interview
10/2007-5/2008	<i>Teaching/Writing Interlude: confusion about data, mentoring new teachers, immersion in teaching, reflecting on work/career, winning awards</i>
5/6/2008	Invitation to AR to form Mayfair High School (MHS) Group
6/2008	<i>Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project Summer Institute (Teaching Teachers)</i>
6/2008	<i>Reading Plato</i>
7/2008	Data analysis using Plato's theory of virtue, organizing new thematic analysis of data
7/12/2008	JL's Follow-Up Interview
7/17/2008	NE's Follow-Up Interview
7/19-7/20/2008	NE's Follow-Up Questions (email)
7-8/2008	Writing findings
9/2008-5/2009	Writing Chapters 1 and 2 (heavily revising proposal chapters)
6-7/2009	Writing Chapter 3
10/2009-4/2010	Revising Chapters 1-3
5-6/2010	Revising Chapter 4, Writing Chapter 5, revising all chapters
6/21/2010	Dissertation defense

*Names of the schools are pseudonyms.

**Participants in the study and other teachers I allude to in this calendar are identified with initials.

Appendix B

AHS Written Interview Guide

Please write your thoughts in response to the following questions about your life as a teacher.

Don't feel you need to answer all questions; write in response to those that interest you—as many or as few as you wish. Thank you for your time doing this!

--In what ways have you thought yourself to be a good teacher? What are your most significant skills? How have these skills been important to your work as a teacher?

--How did you acquire/learn these skills?

--What do you wish you had been better at as a teacher? Why? How might that have made you a better teacher?

--How hard was it for you to create/construct an “identity” as a teacher?

--Looking back at your career as a teacher, how would you describe the development of your teacher identity. For example, has it been a linear progression, or has it moved in different directions as you matured?

--What were the points during your career that you considered leaving teaching? Why did you almost leave?

--What helped you decide to stay in teaching at these critical points?

--By the end of your career, would you say that your personal identity has become your teacher identity, or had your teacher identity become your professional identity become your personal identity? In other words—how has your personal identity shaped your professional identity? How has your professional identity shaped your personal identity?

Appendix C

AHS Group Invitation to Group Interview

Email to AHS Group
April 10, 2007

Dear N, D, and J--

As you all know by now, the work I did with you back in April of last year has instigated in me an ongoing interest in teachers who stay in the classroom over long-term careers. I would like to continue to work with all of you for this project if you are interested.

The next step for me would involve having you participate in a group interview. This will be a very informal gab session, and D___ has generously offered her home since it is the most central location. We have tentatively set the date for Wednesday April 18 at 6 in the evening.

The group interview will be in an experimental format I am trying out with you. What I will ask you to do is talk about your how you formed a teaching identity over your careers in teaching. The most interesting part of the group interview is that I ask the group members to be responsible for asking each other questions; this is a departure from the normal interview protocol in which the researcher controls the conversation with a set of planned prompts. I will be sitting to the side listening to what you say, but also to what you ask each other. The questions you ask will help me think about what I have not thought to ask.

I hope you can all participate. I have always learned a great deal from your advice as teachers, and I look forward to learning even more from your experiences and insights about teaching careers.

Sincerely,

MaryLynn

Appendix D

Prompt for AHS Group Conversation

April 18, 2007

ML's Explanatory Comments: The three of you participated in a project that I worked on last year—a project that led to my current research interest in teacher identity—how it is shaped and how it shapes a person over a long career in education. You know that I began this research because of my trouble with authority in academia—too many ‘authorities’ with four-six years teaching experience out there describing and proscribing education.

This trouble with authority extends to me as a representative of the academic world: the next logical victim of my “healthy disrespect for authority.” I really have reservations about doing a large research project and positioning myself as an authority since most such projects begin with a lack of knowledge. The people we talk to are the authorities—we just have the inclination or compulsion to write and analyze. But that inclination/compulsion does not mean we know what we are doing.

There are a number of “normal” steps researchers take to address this problem, such as member checks and follow-up interviews. However, I want to try something different, something that gives me less control of the interview and helps me listen to what is being said rather than to what I expect to hear being said.

I want you to dictate more of the direction of the group discussion by asking questions of one another. I will give you a question to begin with, but after that, I want you to decide based on what you are hearing each other say and what you are thinking about to determine the direction of the conversation. Listen to one another's stories, comments, analyses, definitions, and

observations—and ask the questions that come to you. This will help me think about the questions I am not thinking to ask and evaluate the interview questions that I have already come up with.

As I mentioned, you all wrote in response to a set of questions I had about teacher identity last spring. And while we have chatted informally about my project, you have really read one another's responses. So I thought you might begin with one of the questions from last year's project as a way to go back to and share what you were thinking about then: **How did you acquire an identity that worked for you in the classroom? How did this identity happen?**

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

• **Demographic Questionnaire for Participants**

All data, data analysis, and reporting of findings will employ pseudonyms for participants and for the names of schools and school systems.

Date of Birth: _____

Pseudonym: _____ Ethnicity: _____

Please list all degrees you earned and the dates you earned them: _____

What is your certification field? Please list any additional endorsements you have and the level of your last certificate.:

What year did you begin teaching? When did/will you retire?

As of June 2007, how many years teaching experience did you have? _____

Please list the schools at which you have taught, the number of years you taught at each, and what subjects you taught at each: _____

Appendix F

Invitation to BC to create a cohort from CHS

Email to BC

June 6, 2007

Hi B____--

Welcome back to Atlanta, the new desert city! Your return coincided with rain at my house, so I am seeing that as a good omen.

I think you know that N____, D____, and J____ have participated in individual and group interviews with me as part of my research project. This interview method has gone so well that I am now thinking of creating another group of three teachers for a similar interview session. I would like to have teachers who have taught together for at least a portion of their career. All should have at least 20 years classroom experience. I talked this over with D____ a while back, and she thought that a group of C____ High School teachers would work.

Here is what would be involved: first, each participant would respond to a set of writing prompts about her career in teaching. This "written interview" is followed by a group interview on the same topics, though it will probably wander off into interesting new directions. The most interesting part of the group interview is that I ask the group members to be responsible for asking each other questions; this is a departure from the normal interview protocol in which the researcher controls the conversation with a set of planned prompts. The AHS group led the conversation in new directions I had not anticipated; I expect the next group to do the same thing.

Anyway--if you are interested, I would love to talk with you about ideas for who might make up a good group. I know you are busy with travel, dogs, and pottery (and a much more interesting life than mine!), but if you think this might be fun, let me know.

Enjoy the sun! Eat something blue!

MaryLynn Huie

Appendix G
Invitation to Participate for CHS Group

Email to CHS Group
June 10, 2007

Dear S____, B____, and L____--

As many of you know, I have been working on a research project related to teachers who stay in the classroom over long-term careers. This research has been part of my doctoral program at the University of Georgia. I would like to invite you to become part of this project if you are interested.

Participation in the project involves some time commitment from each of you, so I want to make sure you understand what I will be asking of you over the coming months. I will first ask you to write about your identity and career in the classroom. I will send you a few questions to get you started, and you may respond to the questions as you feel is most appropriate.

The next commitment would involve having you participate in a group interview. This will be a very informal gab session, and B____ has generously offered her home since it is the most central location. We have tentatively set the date for August 4, 2007, at 6:30 in the evening.

The group interview will be in an experimental format I tried with the AHS Group. It worked so well with them that I cannot wait to see how it works with all of you. What I will ask you to do is talk about how you formed a teaching identity over your careers in teaching. The most interesting part of the group interview is that I ask the group members to be responsible for asking each other questions; this is a departure from the normal interview protocol in which the researcher controls the conversation with a set of planned prompts. I will be sitting to the side listening to what you say, but also to what you ask each other. The ways you discuss your

experiences in the classroom will help me think about teacher identity and how it is shaped over long-term careers.

I may also ask you to meet with me for a follow-up interview as I analyze all the interviews from both your group and from the AHS Group; however, follow-up interviews will be short and informal.

I hope you can all participate. I have found that experienced teachers always have something to teach me about my own life as a teacher and about my work in the classroom. I look forward to learning even more from your experiences and insights about teaching careers. Please let me know if you can participate in this project by June 17.

Sincerely,

MaryLynn

Appendix H

CHS Written Interview Guide

Please tell me how you created a professional teacher identity over the course of your career as a teacher. I am interested in what you think is most important to this development as you look back over your teaching years. You may use the following questions to help you think about this process, but you should feel free to respond in the way you think works best.

- How did you acquire an identity that worked for you in the classroom? How did this identity happen? If this identity changed over time, how and why did it change?
- What experiences and/or people affected your identity? How did they affect you?
- What would you like to write about your career, work, or identity that I have not asked about?

Appendix I
Prompt for CHS Group Conversation
August 4, 2007

ML's Explanatory Comments: The three of you are participating in a project that I have been working on for the past year about teacher identity—how it is shaped and how it shapes a person over a long career in education. You may not know that I began this research because of my trouble with authority in academia—too many ‘authorities’ with four-six years teaching experience out there describing and proscribing education. One of my goals in this research project has been to tap the authority of teachers with significant experience in the classroom, teachers who for me represent voices that are under-heard in the academic literature.

This trouble with authority extends to me as a representative of the academic world: the next logical victim of my “healthy disrespect for authority.” I really have reservations about doing a large research project and positioning myself as an authority since most such projects begin with a lack of knowledge. The people we talk to are the authorities—researchers just have an inclination or compulsion to write and analyze. But that inclination/compulsion does not mean we know what we are doing.

There are a number of “normal” steps researchers take to address this problem, such as member checks and follow-up interviews. However, I want to try something different, something that gives me less control of the interview and helps me listen to what is being said rather than to what I expect to hear being said.

I want you to dictate most of the direction of the group discussion by asking questions of one another. I will give you a question to begin with, but after that, I want you to decide based on what you are hearing each other say and what you are thinking about to determine the direction of the conversation. Listen to one another's stories, comments, analyses, definitions, and

observations—and ask the questions that come to you. This will help me think about the questions I am not thinking to ask and evaluate the information I already have gained from research in light of your experiences in a long teaching career. You ask the questions of one another; I will try to keep my comments and questions to a minimum. However, at the end, I have a question I would like to add to your session that has arisen from my analysis of the group discussion of another set of teachers.

Most of you have already written in response to a set of questions I have about teacher identity. And while some of us have chatted informally about my project, you have not read one another's responses. So I thought we could begin with one of the questions from the written interview as a way to go back to and share what you were thinking about then, so that you can hear each other, what each of you wrote: **How did you acquire an identity that worked for you in the classroom? How did this identity happen?**