Tuned In: How novice teachers navigate personal, professional, and political influences

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the faculty at Joelton Elementary who truly saw me as a novice teacher. I am thankful for your leadership and continue to reflect and rely on the standards you set for what it means to be a teacher. You are simply the best.
Thank you for being you!

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to begin to unlock how novice teachers navigate the tensions between their personal beliefs and those demonstrated or experienced through interactions with people and their environment. It should be of particular interest to administrators, schools, and teacher education programs that seek to support novice teachers. This study examines novice teachers' identity as seen through the stories they tell about their experiences to answer the research questions: How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities? How do they embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities? What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

Through art, interviews, and a story circle, six participants shared stories about what it means to them to be a teacher. My participants' stories offer clues as to how we can think about novice teacher identity formation and how these novice teachers navigate a complex educational landscape. I addressed the themes found across participants as well as an outlier in my analysis. I found *you control the narrative, your voice matters, keep the main thing the main thing, and we get by with a little help from our friends* as the primary themes seen across the six cases. *I see you,* explored a theme found in two cases that stood out as important to how they consider narratives of teaching. The implications of this study are valuable to novice teachers, teacher preparation programs, districts, and school administration.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This narrative study sought to understand the experiences of novice teachers as they navigate their personal conceptions of what it means to be a teacher in light of their experiences and the stories they hear others tell about teachers. The impetus for this study was my time working with both preservice and novice teachers and the tensions they encounter as they come to terms with what it means to be a teacher in today's schools. In this introduction, I contextualize the study's problem and the questions the study seeks to answer.

Background

I was assigned to a 4th-grade classroom in a small urban school for my student teaching under the guidance of a teacher entering her third year of teaching. On my first day in the classroom, she stepped out of the room to handle a behavior incident leaving me in charge. I got the class back under control and continued teaching the lesson she had prepared, while it was far from perfect, learning continued in the classroom. When she reentered the room, she was surprised at the lack of chaos and commended me for being a great teacher. However, I knew that my life prior to that moment greatly impacted how I could step into the role of teacher so quickly. My prior work experience with students in a different setting, along with being raised by an educator and spending a lot of my formative years in and around a classroom, gave me a specific set of beliefs and skills that enabled me to feel comfortable stepping into the role.

When it was my turn to support student and new teachers as an established classroom teacher, I found that each one brought a different set of skills or experiences that impacted the ease of their transition to the classroom. In my current role supervising interns, I continue to see how who someone is as a person—their life experiences and beliefs--impact who they are as a teacher. As a result of these experiences, I have wondered how novice teacher support could be

designed to respond to this diversity of experience in a way that helps teachers become more skilled, developing their identity as a teacher and allowing them to see the connections between their personal and professional lives.

Induction

Throughout my ten years in the classroom, I developed and ran the mentorship program for new or struggling teachers at three different schools in two different districts. Each year, the team of administration and coaches with whom I worked would lament that while we offered a lot of programming and support for new teachers, it did not seem to help; making matters worse, it seemed to be a burden on both the new teacher and mentor. As a team, we kept coming back to the idea that what seemed to be the most helpful for new teachers was actually the least structured and centered on relationships. Our new teachers needed veteran teachers with whom they felt comfortable building relationships in which they could safely observe, problem-solve, and collaborate. When I entered the doctoral program, I found that this challenge was not unique and, in fact, broadly documented in the literature (Anderssen et al., 2013; Colliander, 2018; Connolly et al., 2018; Garcia & Weiss, 2019a).

Environment

For the past three years, I have continued to lead the mentorship program at my former school and have noticed a new dynamic affecting novice teachers: our new teachers are navigating the waters of discontent. Morale among the school staff has fallen, and the typical excitement of new teachers also fell more quickly as they encountered the stories of what it means to be a teacher today. Over the course of the year, I observed the new teachers begin to absorb and embody this negative view of teaching despite positive mentoring relationships focusing on the individual novice teacher's growth.

Garcia and Weiss (2019) recently published *The Perfect Storm*, a series of reports highlighting the state of education in the United States. They indicate teachers are burning out and leaving education, with many citing lack of control and not being seen as professionals as reasons for their departure (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a). Most teachers across the United States report feeling as if they have little to no voice in the policies that directly affect their classrooms (Garcia & Weiss, 2019b). These reports come in light of the nationwide push to restrict teachers in multiple ways. As described by Walker (2022),

> Over the past 18 months, state legislatures and local school boards have taken action to ban "controversial" subjects, in effect imposing gag orders on classroom teachers. These restrictions often include book bans but are usually aimed at restricting actual instruction or discussion in the classroom. (p.1)

Novice teachers hear the stories told by their colleagues, families, media, and politicians defining what it means to be a teacher. New teachers, who begin their journey often excited and driven by their own school experience, are affected by these narratives and question their desire to stay in education (Flores & Day, 2006; Olson, 2008).

These experiences and wonderings raised questions for me. How can we support new teachers in owning who they are as a teacher? How are novice teachers navigating the tensions in education right now? What stories do they begin to embody and what do they ignore? Is there an opportunity to support new teachers in ways that help them stay in education?

Statement of the Problem

Today's classroom is challenging, and the role of a teacher is evolving and changing to meet the current demands of parents, schools, and districts (McLean et al., 2020). Both the constant evolution of the job and deprofessionalization are influencing teachers to leave the profession at alarming rates (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a). The reasons for their departure are varied,

with data suggesting a relationship between harsh climates and quitting. Teachers in high-poverty schools face such barriers as demoralizing stress, threats to physical safety, little autonomy in their classroom, and a lack of supportive peers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019a). Studies have shown that low teacher retention negatively impacts student achievement (Milanowski & Odden, 2007), exacerbates teacher shortages (Ingersoll, 2003), and strains the economics of local school districts (Carroll et al., 2000). Communities must establish key ways to better support and retain teachers. Research has shown that two ways that districts and communities can respond to this crisis is through new teacher induction (Garcia & Weiss, 2019e) and teacher voice (Poldolsky et al., 2019).

New Teacher Induction

In response to this building crisis, new teacher induction programs are now commonplace nationwide, implemented as a mechanism for meeting the needs of new teachers' pedagogical challenges and helping retain teachers in the classroom (Garcia & Weiss, 2019e). Van der Wal et al. (2019) found that new teachers begin to develop their professional identity by recognizing and attaching the label of teacher to themselves at the beginning of school their first year in the classroom. Embedded within a particular context, these novice teachers, each with unique personal strengths and challenges, have deeply held beliefs about what a good teacher looks or sounds like (Warner, 2016). Schools', colleagues', and parents' differing core beliefs challenge new teachers' identities and ideas. The stress associated with this intersection of expectations and beliefs may make even strong teachers question their desire to be in the classroom, resulting in some teachers overcoming the tension and remaining with others, leaving the profession altogether (Warner, 2016; Meijer et al., 2011).

Role of Teacher Voice

Teacher voice is regularly brought up as essential to school improvement. However, throughout history, what teacher voice means and how it can be harnessed varies. Typically, when brought up in policy forums or debates as necessary, people are not referring to the voice teachers use when talking to students, families, or colleagues and are instead referring to teachers using their intimate knowledge of life in the classroom to speak out and try to influence the policies and practices of those in charge of education, schools, districts, communities, or states (Allensworth et al., 2012; Poldolsky et al., 2019).

While policies outside of principals' control often define their leadership, studies have shown that a leadership style that allows teachers to feel their influence and make a difference in school-level policies results in lower attrition rates (Poldolsky et al., 2019). Researchers recommend that school leaders "cultivate opportunities for teachers in general to exercise influence over decision-making in the school. Teachers need to feel that their concerns are being heard and that their professional judgment is valued within the school community" (Jackson, 2012, p. 895).

Schools that are traditionally hard to staff typically have high proportions of low-income students and students of color, and teachers are more likely to view their principals unfavorably (Grissom, 2011). When identifying the possible reason for lower attrition rates in certain schools, researchers found teachers' perception of principal quality as a critical factor (Boyd et al., 2011; Goodpaster et al., 2012; Marinell & Coca, 2013). Three fundamental tenets were identified in a synthesis of studies examining what made teachers perceive their principals as high quality. First, they can manage the school. Teachers have what they need, clear communication, and budgets are appropriate to school needs. Second, principals are instructional leaders. They seek out and hire strong candidates and then support their growth. Finally, they are inclusive. They

include teachers in the decision-making process by listening to their opinions and incorporating them into the change process. Connectedly, they also promote teacher autonomy within the classroom, demonstrating trust in their staff (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Directly connected to teachers' satisfaction and career decisions, professional collaboration provides an outlet for teacher voice and could provide a solution to novice teachers' retention (Poldolsky et al., 2019). Schools that embrace a culture of collaboration where teachers are directors of their professional learning and share a common purpose influence their teachers' career decisions positively (Allensworth et al., 2012). This culture is created from the top down with systems to encourage and empower teachers to "improve the school so that all students can learn" (Allensworth et al., 2012, p. 14). These schools also account for the expected collaborative work by creating time and places for it to happen and showing evidence of shared decision-making so that "teachers feel they have control over various aspects of their work" (Ladd, 2011; Marinell & Coca, 2013, p. 25).

Schools with leadership that support teacher voice through strategic planning and decision-making reap the benefits of high rates of teacher improvement (Kraft & Papay, 2014), problem-solving success (Hord, 1997), increased sharing and attempts of new instructional practices (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Snow-Gerono, 2005), and overall higher student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Not surprisingly, this overall improvement in school culture through the inclusion of teacher voice in decision-making allows for a higher self-efficacy of teachers (Schleicher, 2015).

Voice over Exit

Albert Hirschman developed a theory of voice or exit that posits that individuals will either use their voice against dissatisfaction or they will silently exit (1970). When people exercise their voice, they speak out, vote, organize, and identify ways to have their opinion

heard. This contrasts with the idea of exit, where people choose to select something else in the face of dissatisfaction. Hirschman also proposed that between voice and exit is loyalty. The idea of someone staying in the face of dissatisfaction relates to their commitment, or loyalty, to the situation. Out of loyalty to their students and community, teachers may stay even in the face of unhappiness. However, loyalty is not always enough. Currently, in the choice between voice and exit, too many teachers choose to leave, destabilizing the profession and negatively impacting the students they serve (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Present-day teachers receive mixed messaging about who they can be in and outside the classroom (Quan et al., 2019). Novice teachers receive messages about what it means to be a teacher from friends, colleagues, administrators, parents, and the community while they find daily classroom life being controlled more and more by those outside the school setting. Their professionalism is challenged, and teacher voice is left out of important policy decisions (Ball, 2003; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). While identity research typically focuses on individuals, it can be helpful to consider how different identities respond and react to tension within their profession. What determines whether an individual chooses voice over exit?

While much research exists on the value of induction programs, we need further investigation into the relationship between professional support and teacher retention (Garcia & Weiss, 2019e). Given our current knowledge of the specific teacher needs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and the diversity of induction program components (Garcia & Weiss, 2019), we must explore innovative ways to empower new teachers and respond to their evolving needs.

Significance

This study aimed to provide an in-depth look at what messages about teaching novice teachers bring into the classroom and how their experiences and what they are told about teaching affect their view of what it means to be a teacher.

The significance of this work lies in a lack of research on how the larger messaging about teaching affects novice teachers' identities. The research literature addresses identity development through many differing approaches. In reviewing their findings, I separated the studies into two main themes: identity development through social interaction and identity development through awareness. I found several sub-themes about teachers' professional identity in each category based on the common understanding that identity combines an individual's personal and professional experiences.

This study begins to unlock how novice teachers navigate the tensions between their personal beliefs and those demonstrated or experienced through interactions with people and their environment. It should be of particular interest to administrators, schools, and teacher education programs that seek to support novice teachers. Those involved in education must look beyond the job title of the teacher to deepen our collective understanding of how teachers develop and understand that "who one is as a person has a lot to do with who one is as a teacher" (Olson, 2008, p. 39).

Research Questions

This dissertation study aimed to understand how novice teachers bridge their personal, professional, and political influences to create their evolving teacher identity. The following questions are the basis of the research:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do novice teachers embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

I delineate between refusal and disregard. The refusal of a narrative of teaching is when a teacher acts against a story of teaching while disregarding a narrative is when it is ignored.

Limitations

This research involves two conditions that could affect the findings. First, this study is limited by a sample of voluntary participants. Due to the size of the participant group, the smaller group of participants limits the study's ability to generalize to a larger group. In addition, the participants' particular school environment and support offered to novice teachers varies. These contextual differences made it difficult to generalize to a larger population.

Assumptions

I assumed that my participants are telling honest and complete versions of the stories they tell and are told. I also assumed that my participants' explanation of support offered to novice teachers is a complete version of what the school provides. In order to further support the novice teachers' trust in me, I was clear that I do not serve in an evaluative role, nor was I in contact with those serving in evaluative roles at their schools.

Subjectivities

Subjectivity is the way that who I am as a researcher affects my study, including how I chose my research question, my established knowledge of the topic, and my personal beliefs (Creswell & Báez, 2021).

In my first year of teaching, a school hired me after the year began, and I was given an empty classroom and told I would have a classroom full of kids in two days. I remember the panic and insecurity about what steps I should take first. A strong veteran teaching team and administration rescued me and helped me find my way. From then on, I made a point to reach out and support new teachers when they joined our staff. I formally organized learning and social gatherings in my second year of teaching to help new teachers. As I transitioned into the district I served, I took on a teacher leadership role that provided instructional support to novice teachers.

The issue of new teacher support and development has been a large part of my life for a long time. I chose to pursue this study to investigate what experiences new teachers share.

During my time as a teacher leader, I led and watched schools and districts implement induction and mentoring programs that were viewed as just another thing on teachers' to-do lists and not helpful. This study aims to build on emerging research investigating what new teachers need so that they can be supported and encouraged to do their best for the students they serve.

Positionalities

Positionality reflects how my identities may impact my participants, data collection, or analysis. As the researcher, I decide which identities to share in my study (Creswell & Báez, 2021). The following explains my pertinent identities as related to this study.

I identify as a teacher. I still work with schools weekly and often interact with kids in a learning environment. I am proud of my identity as a teacher and feel that it represents hard work and care. I delight in learning and sharing strategies to help kids learn new concepts or master a skill. This identity is relevant to this study because it may have made a new teacher more comfortable to know that I understand the reality of life in a classroom and have been there before.

I identify as a mother. This identity is essential to the study because new teachers are responsible for a classroom of children. My children are entrusted to teachers daily to help me raise them to be kind contributors to our community and world. I feel a responsibility to the kids in the classroom because I want someone to care for my children with such passion and respect.

I identify as a supervisor. I am currently working with students completing their year-long internship. I meet with my interns weekly to reflect on their lessons and celebrate their wins while problem-solving their challenges. This experience gives me an understanding of current policies and challenges new teachers may face within the local district.

I am a white female. I am within the majority population of the teaching workforce. I was sensitive to how that may affect a teacher's willingness to share their experience.

I am not a member of the school community. I do not work with the staff in the building. I am unfamiliar with the community, including the support available to teachers or students. Distancing myself from the established hierarchy within a school helps the participant to feel confident there will not be retribution for honest reflection. This reassurance was vital to disclose to the participant to encourage full participation in the interview.

Definitions

Identity – "Identity development is ongoing; multifaceted but simultaneous; it is a culmination of all past, present, and future experiences; and it is made up of subidentities that work in harmony with one another in order to make sense of and act within given contexts." (Gibbons, 2020, p. 68).

Induction – support programs offered by schools and districts specifically to new teachers (Garcia and Weiss, 2019a)

Novice or new teacher – teachers within their first five years in the classroom (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011)

Preservice – students at the university level training to be a teacher (Ingersoll et al., 2018)

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one contextualizes the problem and explains the purpose and significance of the research questions as well as the limitations and assumptions of the study. In chapter two, I briefly introduce the research base on teacher identity and review the research literature about teacher identity development. Chapter three explains Nicole Mockler's conceptualization of teacher identity and its use as the study's theoretical framework. This chapter also includes a description of the methodology that will be used and

details about participant recruitment, study protocols, and analysis. Chapter four details the narrative findings for each of my six participants and the findings of the cross-case analysis. In Chapter Five, I provide a discussion of the narratives, and implications for practice and research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers are more than just transmitters of knowledge to students. Behind each teacher is a unique, complex, and moving identity of what it is "to be a teacher" (Mockler, 2011, p. 517). Throughout the day, teachers prepare for and respond to their students' needs, guided by their decision-making and modeling their beliefs (Olson, 2008). In education research, this interaction between individuals' personal and professional identities is evidence that a teacher's professional identity is a weaving of multiple identities working together as one to guide and mediate a teacher's reactions and actions within a specific context (Hsieh, 2016). Parker Palmer's book, *Courage to Teach* (2007), responds to the ongoing battle between a heart for teaching and professional reality. He spoke on the weaving of the personal and professional when he said

> As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a good chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject." (Palmer, 2007, p. 2)

The past thirty years of teacher identity research agrees with Palmer; teachers' personal lives are intricately a part of who they are as a teacher (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004; Gibbons, 2020). In a synthesis of studies on teacher identity from 1988 to 2000, Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) found that researchers in 19 of 22 studies on teacher identity defined teacher identity as integrating the personal and professional to become a teacher. Building on this synthesis, Gibbons (2020) examined novice teacher identity studies through 2019 and arrived at the following definition of teacher identity:

> Identity development is ongoing; multifaceted but simultaneous; it is a culmination of all past, present, and future experiences; and it is made up of subidentities that work in

harmony with one another in order to make sense of and act within given contexts. (Gibbons, 2020, p. 68).

This definition incorporates the common themes identified in his literature synthesis. It demonstrates the complex nature of teacher identity as an ongoing process whereby teacher identity and sub-identities may grow from various experiences, contexts, and interactions.

This literature review includes themes developed from studies into novice teacher identity development and teacher identity development more broadly. First, I summarize the implications of studies on identity development through social interactions such as mentoring and within teachers' school communities. In the second section of the chapter, I review and summarize research into the role of awareness in identity development, such as teacher education and reflexivity.

Identity Development Through Social Interaction

Teaching is a team sport. Novice teachers are surrounded by people and influencers with a wide variety of knowledge and experience from day one (Brown & Heck, 2018). Their professional identity development "does not happen in isolation" (Gibbons, 2020, p. 73). Mockler's (2011) conceptualization of teacher identity centers on what it means to "be a teacher" (p. 521). In a webinar discussing how to support teachers for OECD, she explained that teachers view other conceptions of being a teacher by interacting or talking with other teachers and staff, observing or spending time in colleagues' classrooms, and learning from professional development and their school community (Mockler et al., 2022). She then expanded her view to include how the larger social community defines what it means to be a teacher as communicated through policy, media, and societal systems. Novice teachers must then navigate what they embody or discard in their own identity (Mockler et al., 2022).

In their study of three alternative school teachers, Brown and Heck (2018) found that an individual's identity influences how they perceive their community. The interaction between an individual's personal identity and their professional context or political environment is where Mockler conceives that teachers define what it means to "be a teacher" themselves (Mockler, 2011, p. 521). Identity development through social interaction revolves around the following themes: mentoring (Colliander, 2018), prior beliefs (Flores & Day, 2004), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), acts of recognition (Gee, 2000), and discourse (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010).

Mentoring

In many schools and districts across the county, novice teachers are provided a mentor or veteran teacher to help them transition into the profession (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). While the structure of this support varies by district and school, it speaks to the common understanding that teachers with a few years under their belt have something to offer those who are just starting (Gibbons, 2020). In a study of nine practicing teachers, Colliander (2018) found that more experienced teachers tended to spend more time on relationships with colleagues than pedagogy. In contrast, novice teachers spend their focused time on instructional practice and shy away from connecting to colleagues as a source of support.

Connolly, Hadfield, Barnes, and Snook (2018), in a study on the effect of mentorship on novice teachers, found that mentors help new teachers with guidance on particular problems and build the new teachers' confidence in their ability to try something new or take an informed pedagogical risk. This risk-taking is essential to teachers' professional identity development. According to Gibbons's (2020) meta-analysis on teacher identity, novice teachers gain positive

and negative experiences by taking risks, giving them more opportunities to decide what fits best with their growing definition of what it means to them to be a teacher.

Prior Beliefs

Each person entering the teaching workforce has their own unique experience in the educational system, whether public, private, international, or homeschooled (Olson, 2008). From those experiences, they have developed ideas and beliefs about the teaching profession. Specifically, each person enters with a story of why they chose to become a teacher that is borne out of their experiences in the world, both professionally and personally. Olsen (2008) interviewed six teachers regarding their reasons for becoming a teacher and concluded that during teachers' first five years of teaching, they build bridges to connect their prior conceptions of what it means to be a teacher with whom they are becoming in the classroom. In his conclusion, he recommends that teacher education programs and induction programs look to teachers' reasons for entry as a starting point in supporting their transition to the classroom.

Flores and Day (2006) found that teachers' motivation for entering the profession impacts their ability to cope with the realities of teaching. They identified that teachers driven by personal, internal reasoning for why they became a teacher were more likely to demonstrate a professional identity that showed a positive outlook and readiness to tackle challenges. This bridge between teachers ' personal and professional identities is consistent among teacher identity studies.

James Noonan (2018), in a phenomenological inquiry study of 25 teachers' experiences with professional development and its effects on their identity, found a connection pattern between participants' beliefs and how they interpreted their professional learning experiences. He cited Mockler's (2011) overlapping teacher identity domains of personal, professional context,

and political to frame the importance of teachers' personal lives, including their race, class, and gender, in interpreting and making meaning from their professional experiences.

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger built on the veritable importance of the intersection between individuals and their community in their theory of communities of practice, or ways people learn and share knowledge within a specific context and community (Holland & Lachicotte; Jr., 2007). Situated learning sparks conversation about the 'figuring out' or 'on the job' learning that teachers do, and scholars have continued to look to it to navigate novice teachers' acclimation to the classroom (Barnard et al., 2022; Kothagen, 2017; Mayer, 2019) Individuals, teachers included, participate in multiple communities of practice (COP), further solidifying the idea of multiple identities as they alternate, I position between contexts (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of Practice evolved to include the three ideas within one theory. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger argued in the 1990s that learning is social interaction and happens unintentionally while situated in a specific historical and cultural context. They called this phenomenon the theory of situated learning. Situated learning theory additionally proposed that a novice engaged with a community will learn the habits and skills to become an expert over time. Lave and Wenger labeled this situated learning theory phenomenon as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As defined by Lave and Wenger, COP was the community formed through social interaction in any shared human endeavor. Wenger defines communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011, p. 1).

As the theory began to evolve after publication and more people attempted to apply its underpinnings within empirical studies, Wenger expanded on the concept of communities of

practice in two publications: *Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier* (2000) and *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (2002). In these two publications, Wenger was explicit that communities of practice are socially situated and practice-based. He clarified that in communities of practice, people learn through events and interaction as a process of identity formation. The goal of learning is not a knowledge product but to become a different person. In a 2014 interview, the interviewer challenged him on how the theory can be molded to fit many interpretations. He did not question its ability to be modeled to fit a given situation and instead highlighted its usefulness across many domains. He stated that he feels the "identity aspect of the theory is underappreciated" (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014, p. 272). He continues to theorize that communities of practice should embolden people to be "learning citizens." He believes that people interact with and through many communities in today's world. Therefore, the "burden of identity" shifts from the specific community to the individual. He puts forth the concept of knowledgeability, defined as "the complex relationships people establish with respect to a landscape of practice" (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014, p. 272). This shift is an integral part of the evolution of the communities of practice theory when considering novice teachers' inclusion across multiple groups such as school, grade level, leadership team, and new teacher cohort and the effect on teacher identity.

As novice teachers move between multiple groups, they experience Lave and Wenger's legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). They are learning from their involvement in the groups in which they are a part (Wenger, 1998). Wenger proposed that identity is developed in the COP through cycles of participation and reification. He further suggested that a COP is an active process with participants cycling through participation and reification continually. Participation is not simply taking part but also demonstrating your participation through social practices. He

believed that "in participation, we recognize ourselves in each other; in reification, we project ourselves onto the world, and not having to recognize ourselves in those projections, we attribute to our meanings an independent existence" (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Identity is formed in day-to-day existence through a call and response between the individual participating in the community and the communities' reactions to and labeling of the individual (van der Wal et al., 2019). The key to this exchange is participation. Reification cannot happen when individuals fail to genuinely participate and hide portions of themselves (Barton & Tusting, 2005). Lave and Wenger acknowledge that in analyzing communities of practice, researchers must include the social and historical effects on learning (Esmonde & Booker, 2016).

Acts of Recognition

Acts of recognition, or "being recognized as a certain kind of person," are a way people negotiate artifacts into their identity (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Gee, 2000, p. 99; Estaban-Guitart, 2016). Gee proposed acts of recognition as a definition of identity, "Being recognized as a certain kind of person, in a given context, is what I will mean by identity" (Gee, 2000, p. 99; Estaban-Guitart, 2016). This conceptualization of identity is fraught with the tension of misrecognition. What happens when mirrored back to you is demeaning or confining? Taylor proposes that this misrecognition "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor, 2021, p. 249). Arvaja (2016) found that when mentors speak or act in ways that a preservice teacher perceives to mean they are inadequate results in one of two options (1) they believe and take on the misrecognition that they are inadequate or (2) push them to seek out new experiences that build their skills as a teacher.

Discourse

Understanding that an individual's identities are constantly forming and reforming, one can expect different situations to provoke different parts of oneself. For example, a more 'joking' position is less likely to be called on during a parent-teacher conference than a 'professional authority' position. 'Who am I in this moment?' then reflects not only oneself but also a response to the people and environment of a particular moment. Teachers rely on specific jargon, exact words, phrases, or acronyms that carry meaning within their field, district, and school (Gibbons, 2020). As novice teachers develop the patterned behavior of using the embedded jargon, their use of the local language shapes their professional teacher identity (Freeman, 1993).

Most social scientists agree on the role of context and interaction (sociocultural influences) in identity formation (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). However, the dialogic theory goes further when Bakhtin proposes that "voices of others become woven into what one says" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010, p. 314). You can hear the difference in how a teacher speaks to a student instead of a parent, even if the message is the same. Bakhtin highlighted that we consider who is being addressed in how we communicate. "The dialogical self is 'social,' not in the sense that a self-contained individual enters into social interactions with other outside people but in the sense that other people occupy positions in a multivoiced self" (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2001, p. 250).

Vital to understanding the depth of the dialogic identity theory is the understanding that the negotiation between I positions allows individuals to discern parts of who they are and who they are not. A person is comprised of a unitary self through self-dialogue. They are socially constructed and unique people who can influence the identity of others and communities. For novice teacher identity development, this concept is crucial because it highlights the movement

past novice teachers as a vessel to be filled to a dynamic broker who not only is influenced by the community of the school but also adds value through critical questions or pedagogical ideas (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010, p. 314).

The challenge in a dialogic approach is, if I am constantly forming and reforming my identity based on the people and environment I experience, then 'who am I?' (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010). The belief of multiple and possibly conflicting I positions enlightens teacher identity (Gibbons, 2020). Teachers will routinely face dilemmas and serve various roles such as teacher, colleague, friend, parent, and many more throughout the day. Alsup (2006) highlighted the unsettling tension between I positions for six student teachers as they sought to navigate the conflicting beliefs from their personal lives, teacher education program, and school-based practice. This tension resulted in a lack of fulfillment and even doubts about the profession.

Teaching is a team sport. Through each of these themes in identity development through social interaction: mentoring, prior beliefs, communities of practice, acts of recognition, and discourse novice teachers are encountering various narratives about what it means to be a teacher in today's classroom. Because identity is socially developed, novice teachers must then navigate what they embody or discard in their identity (Mockler et al., 2022).

Identity Development Through Awareness

For novice teachers, professional identity formation considers their past experiences and knowledge and connects them to new learning experiences (Salli & Osam, 2018). Salli and Osam's (2018) study of 15 preservice teachers found that their conversations and interactions with local school-based teachers and students "influenced their perceptions of themselves as future teachers" (p. 2). Integral to this concept, in their view, is the need for schools and districts

to view novice teachers through an asset lens, looking for and creating learning opportunities to allow space for them to mediate their knowledge and skills into their professional identity.

In his study of six novice teachers' transition into the classroom, Olson (2008) concluded that identity development should be explicitly explained to teachers to provide them with ways to recognize and respond to how they navigate the conflict of their past experiences and conceptions of education with their current school-based context. When teachers can discuss their identities and the influence of their personal identity on their teacher identity, they then begin to rationalize and build support for their instructional choices (Alsup, 2006). Reeves (2018) conducted a grounded study of four EL teachers that found that teacher identity is teachers' beliefs enacted within their context where those values are confirmed, reconsidered, or abandoned. By increasing teachers' understanding of their professional identity, he believed researchers could more closely examine how identity impacts instructional practice and educational views. Identity development through awareness is developed and influenced by the following themes: exercising agency (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016), engaging teacher education (McLennan et al., 2017), and practicing reflexivity (Fook et al., 2000).

Exercising Agency

Teaching professional identity is not only who you are but also how teachers "construct notions of how to be, how to act, and how to understand their work and role in and outside of the classroom" (Quan et al., 2019, p. 220; Sachs, 2005). Due to the pressures of accountability, teachers have experienced a deprofessionalization of the teaching workforce, which has sought to take away their ability to respond to student needs (Day, 2002; Ingersoll, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). The pressures of the current context have pushed teachers to conform to policies they may disagree with, particularly in schools that are low performing that are closely

monitored by districts and states (Ellison et al., 2018; McCarthey, 2008). This heightened pressure affects teachers, causing them to fear retribution for failure to comply (Picower, 2011). The effects are not limited to teachers' disengagement but extend to students when they follow the teacher's lead and disengage from the curriculum (Scherff & Piazza, 2005). However, research has shown that some teachers engage in acts of resistance. Teachers report that if the mandated program failed to do what was best for their students, they would utilize resistance by asking why, providing evidence, and seeking like-minded colleagues (Rigell, 2022).

In light of this shift toward compliance, teacher education programs have sought to prepare teachers to be more likely to resist and talk back to the biases and inequities affecting their classrooms and reflect on the context of their students' lives (Quan et al., 2019). Understanding that teaching is complex, teacher education programs should seek to draw on Dewey (1964) to develop novice teachers to feel prepared to critically and reflectively collaborate with others to transform education for their students (Mockler, 2005, 2011; Sachs, 2003, 2016).

Understanding conceptions of identity formation is important when considering what may push individual teachers to speak out (Gibbons, 2020). Mockler (2011) conceptualizes that ‘being a teacher’ sits at the intersection between professional and personal experiences and the external political environment. Therefore, according to Mockler, it is not enough to engage preservice teachers in conversations about the context in which they will teach but also, as Dewey suggested, to empower teachers with reflexivity to critically examine their practice and their (pro or re) active responses to stimuli such as scripted curricula, book banning mandates, testing, or other areas of dissatisfaction (Mockler et al., 2022). Wacquant (1989) also advocates for this type of reflexivity, arguing that placing an understanding of professional identity

formation in the hands of teachers empowers them to purposefully construct their identity and reflexively respond to their learning and experiences. This engagement in ‘their own mind’ of teachers' identity development allows them to connect their moral purpose to the context of their community and professional practice (Mockler, 2011, p. 524). The empowerment of a strong teacher identity helps teachers link who they are with why I am here and has been shown to push back against the demoralization that is infiltrating schools and instead remoralize teachers to continue their work on behalf of students (Santoro, 2018).

Engaging Teacher Education

In support of novice teacher identity development, several studies have recommended increased attention on the impact of teacher education programs on identity development (Avraamidou, 2016; Flores & Day, 2006; McLennan et al., 2017; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016; Smagorinsky et al., 2004). Increasing preservice teachers’ opportunities to observe and experience life in the classroom and then reflect on their experiences provide an opening for teacher education to help preservice teachers begin their awareness of the merging of their personal and professional identity and what it means to them be a teacher (Flores & Day, 2006).

Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016) argued that teacher education has already laid the framework for identity awareness by focusing on combining theory and practice. They believe that expanding the conversation on theory and practice to include the impact of pre-service teachers' personal identity teacher education programs can prepare students to successfully navigate the early career challenges to their identity as an educator.

Teacher education programs prepare teachers to step into a classroom environment that may be different from preservice teachers’ lived experience in school. Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, and Fry (2004) recommended providing experiences for preservice teachers in

contexts that may push against some of their preconceived notions and biases, thus catalyzing teachers to question those beliefs within a structured support network of teacher education. Freire (1975) echoes them in arguing that understanding your own cultural identity is vital to understanding students' cultural identities. By intentionally supporting teachers with diverse experiences, teacher education programs can allow candidates to integrate their professional readings and training on diversity into the development of their professional identity (Smagorinsky et al., 2004). In Woods, Barksdale, Triplett, and Potts's (2014) study of preservice teachers, they concluded that it would benefit preservice teachers to offer them a chance to explore their own cultural and personal identity because of the positive benefit for their students whose cultural identity may differ from that of the teacher.

Practicing Reflectivity

Citing Fook, White, and Hawkins (2000), Thompson and Pascal (2012) argue that the social context of teacher practice is inseparable from the broader cultural context and, as Freire (1975) proposed, the social inequalities and power inherent in that broader view. When reflexively approaching a situation, a teacher would see their influence and self-analyze to ensure that they act in accordance with their knowledge and values (Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

In a synthesis of literature about reflective practice, Marshall, Keville, Cain, and Adler (2021) identified factors enabling reflective practice development. From the literature, they identified catalysts as one of their main themes. In their work, the key factors that triggered the reflective process were lack of understanding, proactive inquiry, experience, and emotion. Lack of understanding was when an individual was perplexed about what to do in a given situation. Dewey (1933, p. 58) described this as a 'lack of understanding' whereas Mezirow (1991) labeled it "a situation beyond the individual's typical experience" (p. 42). The proactive inquiry included

times when practitioners engaged in reflective practice in advance, whether through routine or assignment (Asselin et al., 2013). An experience trigger would be a reactive position where an event conflicts with values or prior understandings (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983). The final trigger they identified was emotion or an event that sparked unease in the teacher (Marshall et al., 2021).

The fear of a non-reflective practice is that when teachers respond to issues without consideration, they risk acting against what Mockler (2011) terms their identity moral anchors. The unconsidered action could cause teachers to act against their values. Whereby teacher induction and professional development programs often look to support teachers in the procedural and content knowledge necessary to perform school (Beauchamp, 2014), Mockler's (2011) conceptualization of teacher identity pushes back against this view of reflective practice and asks researchers and practitioners to consider the sociocultural, emotional, and power dimensions of authentic, critically reflective practice.

Teacher preparation programs, schools, and districts should view novice teachers through an asset lens, looking for and creating learning opportunities to allow space for them to mediate their knowledge and skills into their professional identity (Salli & Osam, 2018). Teacher identity development through awareness centers on teachers learning about their identity through exercising agency, engaging teacher education, and practicing reflectivity to provide opportunities for novice teachers to understand and respond to the influences of their surroundings on their emerging teacher identity.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature highlighted several themes on professional identity and how teachers navigate professional identity formation. Decades of teacher identity research have concluded that who one is as a person has a lot to do with who one is as a teacher (Beijaard et al., 2004; Hsieh, 2016; Noonan, 2018; Olson, 2008). Across studies, researchers have found that identity is not fixed but continually evolving and changing as teachers gain experience. A growing body of research is beginning to identify how identity develops through social interactions and awareness. This research has shown some ways that individuals can be supported in their identity development, such as mentoring (Colliander, 2018), prior beliefs (Brown & Heck, 2018; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014), self-awareness (Alsup, 2006; Olson, 2008; Reeves, 2018), teacher education (Avraamidou, 2016; Flores & Day, 2006; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016; Quan et al., 2019), and reflectivity (Fook et al., 2000; Marshall et al., 2021; Wacquant, 1989). However, little is understood about how teachers are navigating the contextual factors of teacher identity such as the stories they hear about teaching from colleagues, families, and society and how they are affecting their teacher identity. This dissertation study addresses a gap in the research by seeking to understand how novice teachers mediate their personal, professional, and political influences into their idea of what it means to be a teacher.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation study aimed to understand how novice teachers bridge their personal, professional, and political influences to create their evolving teacher identity. Teacher identity is generally defined by how we define ourselves in light of the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which we find ourselves (e.g., Gibbons, 2020; Mockler, 2011). The first portion of this chapter explains my theoretical framework and research design. The rest of this chapter describes my data collection methods, participant selection, data analysis, and measures of trustworthiness.

Theoretical Framework

This teacher professional identity development study utilizes a theoretical framework centered around Nicole Mockler's (2011) theory of teacher identity.

Building on the work of Judith Sachs (2009), Mockler developed an ecological model of teacher identity that pulls together the components of personal identity, professional context, and the external political climate to conceptualize how teachers view themselves as a teacher or what it means to "be a teacher" (Mockler, 2011, p. 517), as shown in Figure 1.

Identity Domains

This conception of teacher identity hinges on the idea that personal experience, professional context, and political environment are inextricable from who an individual is as a teacher. Through this study, I sought to make explicit how teachers embody or discard the stories they tell and are told about teaching while navigating the tensions of their first years in the classroom. Understanding where teachers' conceptions of what it means to be a teacher originate or are situated offers clues or artifacts of their identity and may provide clarity on the best ways to support them in the classroom. Thus, the primary domains within Mockler's conception allowed me to consider the avenues from which these stories may originate.

Personal experience includes teachers' own experiences in school, which have been shown to profoundly impact their beliefs about teaching and learning (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Mockler, 2011), as well as why they chose to become a teacher (Olson, 2008). In addition, this domain includes an individual's experiences related to gender, race, and class. The professional context domain relates to teachers' specific training, career experiences, and professional development. The third and final domain is the external political environment. This domain includes societal expectations and conceptions about education, educational policy, and discourse, as well as how political ideology impacts teachers' work (Mockler, 2011). These three domains comprise what it means to "be a teacher," where individuals constantly shift and reform their identity (p.521).

For this study, teachers are active participants who both are influenced by and influence the schools where they work. Teachers are active agents in their schools, where understanding moves away from novice teachers as passive recipients of professional identity and towards an asset-based, dynamic, ongoing teacher identity construction.

Reflection

In addition to the three primary domains, I see teacher identity as mediated by the constant interaction of these three domains, adopting Mockler's view in which domain overlap gives rise to personal development, professional learning, and teacher activism. A vital component of this mediation in teacher identity is the role of reflection. Within Mockler's theory of teacher professional identity, she refers to events or experiences as catalysts to reflection. These catalysts begin an individual's reflection process whereby they weigh a practice, belief, or problem against their personal "moral touchstones." Through this study, I considered how teachers carry identity into the classroom and how that vision changes as they navigate these

catalysts within their own novice teacher story and come into contact with the stories others tell about them and others within their school, district, and community.

In seeking to understand how teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities by choosing to what extent they embody, refuse, or disregard them, I wanted to understand better how teaching identities form and change during a novice teacher's first years in the classroom. I approached my dissertation study through the theoretical framework of Nicole Mockler's conceptualization of teacher identity to seek ways to better understand what it means to "be a teacher" in today's classroom.

Methodology

This dissertation study aimed to consider how teachers carry identity into the classroom and how that vision changes as they navigate their own novice teacher story and come into contact with the stories others tell about them and others within their school, district, and community. I sought to understand how novice teachers bridge their personal, professional, and political influences to create their evolving teacher identity. Specifically, the following questions were the basis of the research:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do novice teachers embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

I delineated between refusal and disregard. The refusal of a narrative of teaching is when a teacher acts against a story of teaching, and disregarding a narrative is when it is ignored.

Justification for the Research Design

Qualitative research is an approach that allows researchers to interact with or observe a phenomenon in its natural context (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1994) described the sociocultural nature of qualitative research as the influence of others on people's viewpoints and understanding of life.

I chose to explore the stories of new teachers as they transitioned into the teaching profession and how those stories provide insight into their professional identity development. This study aimed to understand how novice teachers navigate their experiences in the classroom, embodying, abandoning, or altering their conception of what it means to be a teacher.

Because this work was story-based, the theoretical assumptions and methodological possibilities of Narrative Inquiry and general qualitative research were appropriate. They also reflected my epistemological beliefs that knowledge is socially and historically situated, co-constructed, and multiple realities exist. Identity artifacts can be found within particular stories through roles, collaborations, and storylines (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). I sought to harness narrative inquiry, story circles, and arts-based research to "bring to life that which is unseen in teachers' lives" (Borg, 2019, p. 1160).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that centers on collecting stories to understand participant experiences from their perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is regularly used to examine novice teacher identity development due to its concern with individuals' life experiences from their own perspectives and its ability to provide insight into how individuals construct their identity (Parks, 2023; Barkhuizen & Consoli, 2021; Bell, 2002; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Due to narrative research’s focus on the meaning-making of individuals within a specific context, it is not intended to be generalizable

but instead seeks to give a “thick description” of a participant's life and meaning-making process (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 10). In light of narrative research’s focus on the “thick description” of individuals, the analytic focus is first and foremost individuals and only expands across cases after each individual’s accounts have been thoroughly analyzed (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 10).

In narrative analysis, the researcher collects various data sources: interviews, field notes, art, and other sources (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Then, the data is approached through multiple readings in which the researcher begins the “process of piecing together the data, making the invisible apparent, deciding what is significant and insignificant, and linking seemingly unrelated facets of experience (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 10). Schleiermacher called this recursive process a hermeneutic circle where the whole shines a light on the parts, giving a fuller understanding of the whole and the parts shine a light on the whole giving a greater understanding of the parts (1838/1998). This interpretative process allows for the researcher to analyze both the explicit and implicit meanings in the narratives. The explicit meaning is considered through the “hermeneutics of restoration” (Josselson, 2004, p. 12). Here, the researcher seeks to find the meaning the participant intends to convey. Whereas the researcher utilizes the “hermeneutics of suspicion” when trying to uncover that which is unspoken by the participants (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 12). The analytic practice of the hermeneutic circle allows for this process to attend to both the surface and deeper levels of meaning within the narratives.

Narrative research's focus on participant's voice results in its regular use when examining teacher identity and exploring how novice teachers and preservice teachers respond to conflict or tension in their beginning teaching experiences (Clarke et al., 2014; Thomas & Beauchamp,

2011; Atay, 2007; Badia & Clarke, 2021; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This study approaches narrative truth from Spence's (1984) distinction. That narrative truth does not equal factual, historical recounts of the events but instead focuses on the participants' memory of the event and how it is understood in relationship to how they construct meaning. In this research, participants told stories to the researcher in art-elicited interviews and with their peers in story circles, as explained in the following sections. This approach allows the researcher to elicit small stories about events that occurred in the past and analyze small co-constructed narratives.

Georgakopoulou (2007) classified stories by magnitude. She sought to understand what she calls small stories or the everyday stories that are told between people. These small stories push against categorization as event or socially oriented and instead towards understanding the event from the participant's point of view in light of past experiences. Small stories serve as a representation and interpretation of a particular time and place. The understanding that each story is an examination of micro-social interactions and how they are culturally situated (Andrews et al., 2008). In other words, each small story provides a glimpse into an interaction between the teller and the told, providing an opportunity to examine the function of the narrative and social patterns or why they are telling this story, in this way, in this place. Understanding that participants' stories may change depending on whom they are speaking with or why they are telling a specific story, my study provided multiple opportunities to hear participants' stories in one-on-one interviews and within the social setting of a story circle.

Interviews, story circles, and storytelling through art were used throughout data collection in order to "bring to life that which is unseen in teachers' lives" (Borg, 2019, p. 1160). Participants varied opportunities to tell stories allowed me to gather many small stories, as referenced by Georgakopoulou (2007), understanding that participants varied their stories or the

way they tell the story based on contextual factors such as whom they are telling or why they are telling the story.

Interviews

Interviews were an appropriate method to answer my research questions because I could gather my participants' perspectives and ask follow-up questions to further clarify their responses (Creswell & Báez, 2021). My personal interview style mostly aligned with the romantic style of interviewing. In the romantic style of interviewing, the interviewer seeks to establish an open, trusting relationship with the participant, creating a more conversational approach. The researcher also considers and explores their subjectivities and their effect on the research (Roulston, 2010). In addition, the questions are sequenced intentionally to frame sensitive subjects within the interview.

I created my interview questions based on my research questions (Roulston, 2010; Creswell & Báez, 2021). I considered different prompts or thinking that would encourage my participants to respond beyond a yes or no answer. I followed a semi structured interview protocol with the questions and prompts planned in advance, but I left space for the interview to change or evolve based on the participants (Roulston, 2010; Creswell & Báez, 2021). Each question I developed connected back to a specific research question to ensure that I remained on topic and did not waste my participants' time. I conducted six interviews: four 45-minute interviews and two hour-long interviews via Zoom. Each participant interview was conducted after school hours at a time convenient for the participant.

Visual Storytelling

Arts-based research is an inclusive term that covers, with various methods, the way researchers employ art (Finley, 2008). Using art can provide processes to give participants time to grapple with the topic of study (Bagnoli, 2009).

Visual storytelling is one type of arts-based research that serves as a way to broaden or deepen narrative inquiry. Through the introduction of art, researchers gain access to a novel approach to elicit and examine human experiences (Kim, 2019). Within the interview process or narrative inquiry data collection, researchers may struggle with best connecting to their participants and seek ways to build rapport to encourage them to share their stories and enhance their comfort in displaying their emotions (Julian, 2022; McGrath et al., 2019; Prior, 2017; Seidman, 2019) The addition of storytelling through art can encourage participants to share ideas that are not easily "reducible to language" (Eisner, 2008, p. 5). The narrative tradition posits that the focus of the researcher in the inquiry is to, with as little direction as possible, get the participants to share detailed stories (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). Therefore, the addition of storytelling through art can encourage participants to share ideas that are not easily "reducible to language" (Eisner, 2008, p. 5).

Story Circles

As a university supervisor, I observed a forum for teachers where novice educators shared stories, and others in the room were able to draw on these stories to understand their own experiences in the classroom. Following this experience, I sought out a narrative method that would be socially oriented and would capture these small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2007). Parks (2023) utilized story circles in a study on preservice teachers' identity construction. I like how her method allowed an opportunity to see the participants in a social situation where they gather around these stories of transformation and use them to "explain their emerging teacher identities to themselves and their peers" (Parks, 2023, p. 61).

Story circles provide a socially oriented method to collect small story narratives from participants. The participants tell stories to their peers about events that have occurred in the past. Georgakopoulou (2006) refers to times when people seem to naturally gather following

events to share stories as “breaking news” (p. 6), and story circles are designed to evoke a similar natural feeling for participants (Parks, 2023). Participants are asked to respond to a prompt, with each participant given a selected amount of time to respond. The participants are asked to hold off on questions or comments until the end of the session, when they can debrief and establish the themes or ideas they drew from their time together. The use of a story circle is to provide space to collect stories that are shared socially (Parks, 2023).

Participants and Data Sources

Participants

Participants volunteered to participate based on their response to a recruitment email sent to a cohort of second-year teachers who graduated from the same teacher education program and have gotten a job teaching as a classroom teacher in an elementary school.

Participant Profiles

Aiden. Aiden is a black man in his mid-twenties who teaches Science and Social Studies to four classes at a Title One school in the southeastern United States. During his internship, he was at a different elementary school in another district. He has been at this school for the past two years. He serves on leadership teams within the school and has been provided opportunities to network within the district and education community.

Ali. Ali is a white woman in her mid-twenties who teaches 1st grade at a Title One school in the southeastern United States. During her master's program, she completed her year-long internship at her current school. Therefore, she has been working in this school community for the past three years.

Betty. Betty is a white woman in her mid-twenties who teaches 5th grade math at a Title One school in the southeastern United States. She completed her internship in a Title One school

in another district in a different region of the state. She serves on leadership teams within the school and mentors new teachers in her building.

Dean. Dean is a black man in his mid-twenties who teaches 3rd grade at a Title One school in the southeastern United States. He has been at this school for the past two years. During his master's program, he completed his yearlong internship at a different Title One school within the same community. He serves on leadership teams within the school and has been provided regular opportunities to network within the district and education community.

Melissa. Melissa is a white woman in her mid-twenties who teaches 1st grade at a Title One school in the southeastern United States. During her master's program, she completed her year-long internship at her current school. Therefore, she has been working in this school community for the past three years. This year, she was given the opportunity to loop with her class from Kindergarten to First Grade and has over 80% of the same children.

Meredith. Meredith is a white woman in her mid-twenties who teaches 2nd grade at a Title One school in the southeastern United States. She completed her internship at an elementary school in another district in the same region of the state. She serves on leadership teams within the school and has been provided opportunities to network within the district and education community. She has written multiple grants to fund additional resources for her classroom and school and is currently in school to obtain additional classroom certifications.

Data Collection

A combination of data sources is preferred in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, multiple data collection techniques were used to explore the stories novice teachers tell and are told and their effects on identity development. The data collection methods included collage art, in-depth, semi-structured, informal interviews with participants, and a story circle.

Phase One:

I utilized participant collage art to investigate and prompt participants' views on being a teacher. Participants were asked to meet with me via Zoom to discuss the project briefly for around 10 to 15 minutes. Participants were then be asked to create a visual of their definition of being a teacher before our next meeting. They were encouraged to use any medium they chose or a combination of self-made art, memes, art, or photography (See Appendix B).

Photo and self-portrait art has been used in various research as an elicitation technique (Epstein et al., 2016). However, researchers have recently begun utilizing digital art forms such as memes (Akram et al., 2020; Wiggins, 2019). Researchers use these tools to build rapport with participants. Rapport is defined as goodwill between participant and researcher, opening the door for the participant to feel safe to share their story. My focus on using arts-based research was to both build rapport with participants and to, as Bagnoli posits, "enhance participants' reflexivity and to gather a holistic picture of topics under investigation that could take into account also their different needs and expressive styles" (Bagnoli, 2009, p. 549).

Phase Two:

I followed up with the participant at a mutually agreed upon date following our first meeting and conducted a semi-structured interview that lasted around 45 minutes; participants were given an opportunity to explore their art piece and their experiences in the classroom.

My interview questions were based on my research questions (Roulston, 2010; Creswell & Báez, 2021), including prompts or thinking that would encourage my participants to respond beyond a yes or no answer, as included in Appendix B. The semi-structured interview protocol with the questions and prompts planned in advance guided the interview, but I left space for the interview to change or evolve based on the participants (See Appendix B) (Roulston, 2010;

Creswell & Báez, 2021). Given the focus of my study on stories, my primary approach was to actively listen to participants' experiences as they responded to my interview questions or tell me about their art (Belenky et al., 1986).

Phase Three:

I invited participants to gather to tell stories of their time in the classroom. Given the participant selection of teachers who graduated from the same master's program, the participants had prior familiarity with each other. I provided homemade snacks and a quiet place for participants to gather. Based on the interviews and visual art, I developed questions on topics I want to cover more deeply, as included in Appendix C. The guidelines and questions were provided to participants in advance, electronically and on paper on the day of the story circle. The story circle lasted around an hour and was structured to give each participant time to answer a question of their choice with a story. A timekeeper was appointed to help ensure the group stayed on track. Following the hour timeframe, the group debriefed for 15 minutes. This time was used to discuss their thoughts on the stories and any themes they identified.

Data collection began following IRB approval and participant consent (See Appendix A).

Data Analysis

As the data was collected and transcribed in each stage, I completed the process of narrative analysis through several readings. Each of the first four readings involved annotating the transcript as well as writing memos to myself about what I am noticing and learning about each case and participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The final reading involved looking across the participants in a cross-case analysis.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend that researchers approach narrative analysis keeping in mind the trappings of theory, methods, and interpretation while focusing on the

narratives themselves. I chose to use Josselson and Hammack's (2021) structured narrative analysis approach to guide my analytic process because the multiple readings offered an opportunity to think critically about the narratives told, their context, voices within the stories, connections to theory, and across the stories. The procedures of each reading are detailed below.

1st Reading

During the first reading of each transcription, I listened to the recorded audio from the interview and followed along on the transcript. The first step was to identify the small stories by looking for their temporal order, otherwise known as the sequencing and organization of events, experiences, or narratives in the data. It involved exploring the time order of individuals' narratives and how they were retold (Cortazzi, 1993). While listening and reading, I wrote down initial thematic noticings and the gestalt of the narratives. This first reading also allowed me to begin to see how the participants "sequence and make meaning from life events" (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 37).

2nd Reading

In the second reading of the narratives, I continued to annotate any noticings within the transcripts. I began to consider the voices that the teachers were interacting with within each narrative. The idea of voices within the narrative stems from Bakhtin's theory that the language of the self is developed in a polyphonic context (Bakhtin, 1984). This theory centers on the idea that there are many approaches to how an individual speaks in their meaning-making process. The voices may be attributable to significant characters that are referenced in the narrative but may also include voices of "ideologies or master narratives – systems of belief or discourses that the individual must navigate" as they find their language of self (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 43). The number of voices each participant was interacting with meant this reading took a

more extended period of time, with additional memos detailing where I utilized the hermeneutics of suspicion and considered my understanding of the larger social, political, and cultural context in which the narratives occurred (Josselson & Hammack, 2021).

3rd Reading

During the third reading of the narratives, I began grouping the narratives and reviewing the annotations to consider patterns of meaning or unity. To center participants' voices, I chose to return to the participant's words to label the overarching themes and tell a story about how they embody, refuse, or disregard the stories of teaching and learning.

4th Reading

The fourth reading of the narratives involved a shift from inductive views of the narrative towards a deductive approach that considered how Mockler's (2011) Theory of Identity is seen in the stories of teaching and teaching identities. During this reading, I wrote an analysis memo outlining how I was thinking about the theory in relation to the narratives told. During this reading, I examined both the voice in the narrative and the subsequent action or lack of action the participant took.

5th Reading

Finally, the fifth reading of the transcripts involved a cross-case analysis to identify what is shared between participants' experiences and what is unique. During this process, I wrote the significant themes and descriptions on notecards and then moved them into groups, memoing how I chose to compare and contrast the themes between participants.

Validity and Quality

Narrative research seeks to understand the meaning that a participant attaches to a story. By its nature, it is challenging to discuss validity in narrative research. Therefore, Andrews (2021) called on narrative researchers to explicitly describe the measures they put in place to

ensure quality research. Below, I outline how I sought quality assurance set out by Andrews (2021): trustworthiness, co-construction of meaning, and critical reflexivity.

Trustworthiness

I used a story circle, which produced many stories, allowing the researcher to "capture the commonalities between individual experiences" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 475). In addition, I collected data through multi-data collection methods: collage art, interviews, and a story circle which allowed me to view my participants' experiences from many angles, including with a peer grouping (Merriam, 1998).

I utilized peer debriefing to discuss my data analysis process and findings and sought peers knowledgeable in narrative inquiry and identity to critically review the data analysis process. I shared the codes, themes, or categories that emerged from the data and sought feedback on the interpretation and representation of the narratives.

Finally, I utilized member checking to test my themes, interpretations, and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized member checking with all participants. During member checking, I provided my interpretation and analysis of participants' stories to ensure I accurately represented their experiences. My participants felt that I accurately represented their stories and I received no corrective feedback.

Critical Reflexivity

I kept a research journal to track my biases and feelings (Hatch, 2002). In addition, I have acknowledged my subjectivities and ethical considerations in Chapter One. Throughout the research study, I continued to recognize and explore the impact of my positionality and subjectivities.

Co-Construction of Meaning

Narrative researchers must know how meaning is made and "remade by the speaker, listener, transcriber, interpreter, and reading audience" (Andrews, 2021, p. 364). To avoid the trap of *groupthink*, where individuals change their views to conform to a group (Carey & Smith, 1994), a story circle is set up to counteract this tendency. Participants focus on telling their own stories rather than on opinions, making it less likely that a specific viewpoint will sway them (Janis, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

I considered the ethical implications of possibly working with interns I knew and supervised during their internship year. Throughout the internship, many personal details were shared concerning their cultural autobiography projects and during times of crisis across the year. I was initially concerned that this level of knowledge would hinder participation. However, after considering insider versus outsider positionality research, I concluded that I was comfortable moving forward and understanding the implications of this prior relationship. Given their wide range of responses, the prior relationship did not hinder the participant's willingness to participate fully.

Chapter Summary

In order to examine novice teachers' identity as seen through the stories they are told and tell about their experiences, this narrative study was completed in order to answer the research questions:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do they embody, refuse, or disregard stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

Following IRB approval, I recruited six participants from recent graduates in their second year of teaching in elementary school.

Mockler's (2011) theory of teacher professional identity provides the theoretical framework for this study. She portends that teacher identity development is ongoing and spurred on by events or experiences that serve as catalysts for teachers evolving conceptions of what it means to be a teacher. In her conceptualization, teachers serve as active participants in their developing identity. Therefore, I chose a narrative methodology to collect stories to understand participant experiences from their own perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

I analyzed data collected from participant-created artwork, semi-structured interviews, and a story circle. As the data was collected and transcribed in each stage, I completed the process of narrative analysis through several readings. Each of the first four readings involved annotating the transcript and writing memos about what I noticed and learned about each case and participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The final reading involved looking across the participants in a cross-case analysis. Trustworthiness for this study will be grounded in the triangulation of the data through multiple investigators, methods, and data sources, as Merriam (1998) recommended. Using these methods and protocols, I explored the stories novice teachers tell and are told throughout their first years in the classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

"…building a capacity for beginning teachers to 'join the dots' between on one hand, their broad beliefs about education and their desire to teach and, on the other, their classroom practices and interactions" (Mockler, 2011, p. 526)

This chapter's findings emerged from participants' artwork as well as the interview and story circle transcripts. The findings are organized into six main sections, one for each teacher participant. The sections for each teacher are then divided into key parts. In the first part, I provide an overview of the participant and their engagement with the study. This section aims to provide context for the narratives that follow. In the second part, I describe the primary themes from each participant's encountered narratives of teaching or teaching identities. Each individual case has its own thematic clusters, where I highlight where participants heard stories of teaching and teaching identities and addressed participants' choice to embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) the stories to address my research questions:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do they embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

Analysis took place throughout the data collection process. I followed Josselman and Hammack's (2021) approach to narrative analysis, which includes using theory as part of the analytic lens. As such, in the fourth analysis reading, I began to consider my participants' narratives in light of Nicole Mockler's Theory of Teacher Identity (2011).

Mockler views teacher identity formation as a reflexive process by which teachers express through stories to themselves and others what it means to be a teacher. Her view of teacher identity formation as a process, as opposed to certain characteristics, led me to examine

participant narratives where their internal conversations (Archer, 2003) become external or the "stories they live by" (Clandinin et al. 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). I chose to structure my findings section to layer this theory lens throughout the narratives. I have noted were I saw participants engaging in the reflexive process of Mockler's Identity Theory. While I sought to examine these teachers' narratives about what it means to them to be a teacher, in keeping with my epistemological beliefs, I recognize that my interpretive stance is woven throughout the narratives below.

Melissa

Melissa was the first participant to reach out following my email. She quickly set up her first interview and was excited to get started on her art project. Throughout the initial interview, she peppered in stories of her year and the challenges she faced. She communicated how important she thought my study was in light of the challenges currently happening in her school community. Her initial excitement continued when she submitted her artwork.

Her depiction of the moon's phases, as shown in Figure 2, to show what it means to be a teacher provided a launch pad for our conversation. She began the interview by saying she chose this art piece because it addressed the constant flux of what it means to be a teacher and how the seasons of the moon showcase both the good and bad of this role.

> One day when I was driving, it was a full moon. And like we all as teachers make jokes about a full moon. Because things like group behavior increases, they're a little more bouncing off the walls and such. And so, I just in the three years that I've been teaching, there's been multiple times where we are sitting there as a group of teachers and we're like what is going on today? What is happening? Why am I so drained? Why are they on 10 and it happens to be a full moon. I also really liked the phases of the moon to show because I think it not only shows for teachers, but also for students. Sometimes, our students are at that very sliver of the moon. And that's all they've got. They've got other things going on, that are out of my control. And that's all they're willing to give me. That day. And vice versa. Sometimes, I'm drained and I got things going on. So like, I'm that sliver. But then you get some rest and you handle it you also grow to where you can be really full and give it your all.

> So, I think for me, sometimes there's a lot of guilt. When I'm like today, I know wasn't my best day. You know, so maybe I'm like a half. But then there are some days when I go in there and I'm a full moon. I'm there. I'm there for whatever they need academically, emotionally, anything. But understanding I'm not always going to be full, but that doesn't mean I can't teach them to the best of my ability and do my job well. I just really liked it because we can fill ourselves up. And as teachers, we have to find things. There are things within that building that make me a full moon again, but there are some things that make me the most low so it's like finding that balance and recognizing that even when you are a sliver you'll get back to being full.

Throughout our second interview and the story circle, she used the analogy of the moon to center her agency in responding to both positive and negative messages about teaching, indicating moves she would take to move her toward a full moon versus those that made her feel more like a sliver. Her perception of the movement between the phases of the moon reminded me of Mockler's conception that teacher identity is not static but constantly shifting. She stated in the narrative above, "There are things within that building that make me a full moon again, but there are some things that make me the most low so it's like finding that balance and recognizing that even when you are a sliver you'll get back to being full." Mockler's theory derives that these shifts are in response to catalysts; in the following themes from Melissa's narratives, I have sought to consider the catalysts and her response thoughtfully.

"be ready to be everything for those kids."

Melissa chose to embody the narrative of teachers that it is all about the students from her personal experience in school and society, her personal values of education, and conversations during her internship year of her master's program. Melissa's response to this narrative is similar to Mockler's overlap between her personal and professional experiences, and gives rise to changes in her instructional practices as outlined below. I chose to label this theme within the narrative with a quote from the story circle when Melissa stated that teachers should "be ready to be everything for those kids" when describing her advice for new teachers. The excerpt below is

from interview two, where she shared things that fill her up in reference to her artwork's analogy of teaching being like the phases of the moon.

> I mean, I'm very fortunate to be at the same school that I was at when I was an intern. And those third graders that I was an intern for are now fifth graders and they see me in the hallway, they're happy to see me! They ask to eat lunch with me. I have a couple of boys in fifth grade who eat lunch with me every Friday. That's what they want. And if they do what they're supposed to do all week, that's your reward. You can come to eat lunch with Miss C. So that's something because I obviously made a big enough impact on these kids. Like they don't want to eat in the cafeteria with their friends. They want to come eat and talk with me and tell me about things that are going on. So those teacher-student relationships are really big. That like helped me like feel full.

In this reflection on her role in student's lives, she shared how interactions and relationships with students support her when she feels more like a sliver of a moon or less of a teacher.

Other narratives that I categorized under this theme were stories of her class. Throughout her narratives in all three data collections, she talked at length about the opportunity to loop with her class and retain over 80% of the same students for another year. She talked about the relationships they have built where she feels confident in knowing their needs and them knowing and understanding her commitment to them. She loves seeing students' growth and the pride they have in themselves. Her ownership of her students showed her embodiment of the belief that the most important thing in teaching is the students.

"what can we do."

This theme within Melissa's narratives referenced the message she received from fellow teachers and educational trends that teaching isn't sustainable. Below is a narrative where she talks about the effects of teacher turnover within her building.

> You know, you build you build these relationships with these teachers who then leave. But also, I get it. For some of them, it's not the right fit. Like, I get that there are reasons why people leave. But for some of our teachers, when they leave, it's kind of discouraging to such a young teacher in the profession, and I get it. I work at a school that has different difficulties than another school would. But with that comes a lot of negativities sometimes. And it really can be really difficult to walk in there with a positive outlook when everybody around you is

> so negative, and, “oh, this is my last year here.” We talked about, like, what can we do? What can we do to make it better?

This section highlights the negative voice effects on her and her perspective that her school may be more challenging than other schools. In the following section of the narrative, she moves from this place of negativity to connecting what is happening with teachers to the students. This connection begins her response to the narrative that teaching is not sustainable and sets up her refusal of this belief.

> On the flip side, those kids walk into the building every year and do not recognize half the people. They don't do well with it. Right? They don't because the expectations are unable to stay consistent. There are so many new people in and out all of the time. And you know, in the last two years, we've had teachers leave after Christmas break, spring break, but it does make me question why they're leaving. The world can be so negative. These teachers are like, I had to leave, and I get that. So what was their why? And maybe this is not a career that they want anymore. Right? I try not always looking at it as like a school thing or a student thing because there are a lot of good people in our building. But it can be very discouraging. To continue to show up every day when you're around so much negativity from the staff.

In my memos from interview two, I noted that she shrugged her shoulders as she shared this portion of the narrative as if to say how they do not see that it affects the students. She concluded the narrative below.

> Yeah. I know from talking to some kids that sometimes they feel like they already have stuff against them. So, if I can be there and say I'm not against you and I'm here for you and I'm gonna consistently be here for you. And them knowing that and then seeing the relationships built over the years. That's what gets me out of it. Yeah, because everybody needs a good teacher, everybody. Everybody needs good teachers. Those kids, they need someone who's going to believe in them.

Melissa here takes action. She commits to consistently being there for the students. She affirms her belief that “everybody needs good teachers” and rejects the belief that teaching is unsustainable because to her it is too important for the kids to not stay and push back. “I don’t think I’ll ever leave.”

According to Mockler's Theory of Identity development, moments when individuals have experiences or events that go against their "moral touchstones" can serve as catalysts to action. In the case of teacher turnover at Melissa's school, her narratives show she grapples with the understanding that there are challenges in choosing to teach at her school and stay for the long term. However, for Melissa, this goes against her "moral touchstone" that the kids she serves need constants in their lives, and she commits to wanting to stay and make it work for the kids (Mockler, 2011, p. 522). Mockler (2011) describes this reflexive action as evidence of the flux of professional teaching identity whereby novice teachers determine what it means to them to "be a teacher" (p. 522).

"a good amount of people who aren't hating everything."

In interviews one and two, as well as in the story circle, Melissa referenced voices from her fellow teachers that everything about teaching in her school or county is awful. In interview one, she referenced the voices of fellow teachers who shut down and complained at length when the new curriculum was presented and enforced. While she references not agreeing with the curricular decision of the district, she also notes the refusal of the idea that everything is bad about teaching in her school or district and took action to recenter her experience in alignment with her values. She seeks what Mockler (2011) refers to as a congruence between her personal and professional values and her moral anchor. In the narrative below, she explains what she did in response to her peers' attitudes.

> I joined a couple of those groups on Facebook. I made one for kindergarten from last year, and then one for first grade, obviously also some for our curriculum. That's also really nice to share with people in this Facebook group. They've been teaching it way longer than me. Why wouldn't I ask them for help understanding the essential parts of it?
>
> I don't really ever post but I do read it. Because it's very relatable. I go through and I see hundreds of teachers being like, I had the same thing happen and these are some strategies that I tried. I don't claim to know everything, but there might be a strategy that I can read on

> there. And try and it may work and it may be something that I've never thought about or don't have in my toolbox. But now I do.
>
> I don't necessarily ever post. But I do read it to see because it is people from all over the country. So is this something that's just isolated? To my class, my area, my state, or is this something that we're seeing? Is somebody else across the country saying the same thing? And it's also not always negative or something like that, it's teachers being like, I'm so proud of my students. This is where they were, you know, a month ago with their writing and this is where they are now and not that people outside of the profession can't appreciate that. But there's a deeper appreciation for that growth when you're talking about it with teachers.

This narrative shows her action to seek out additional voices and opinions so that she can develop her own thoughts and opinions about the curriculum adoption or issues in her classroom. Here, we see her responding to the catalyst of her peer's voices, saying everything is awful by seeking out additional voices when hers didn't align with the group. This response shows her agency in the mediation of the stories she hears about teaching that do not align with her "moral touchstones" as catalysts to action where she seeks out professional learning and changes to her practices (Mockler, 2011, p. 522).

In the excerpt below, she refers back to her experience during her master's internship and the importance she places on having a "teacher bestie" outside of her school who understands what it is like to be a teacher and how it helps her push through the noise of discontent to recenter her why.

> Find your teacher bestie. This was something that was said to us when we were in our master's program. And I just think it's important for everybody to know to have, and I've said this, but have a teacher bestie because, like I said, you might go home. You might have a partner, or friends you talk to. You're gonna be exhausted by the fact that they don't get it. So you've got to have somebody in our profession that you can go to, because at the end of the day, it's just my work. They're the only ones who are gonna get it. And that was something that Alice told us that really stuck with a lot of us. Honestly, I call Sally all the time. She calls me, and we work in two different states. And I just think that it's important. We all say you have to remember why you do it, but what if you've come home and your why was not big enough that day to overcome your frustration? You and your bestie can talk it through, so you remember your why. But you have to you have to want to do it in order to teach those kids that they deserve to be taught.

She refuses to be trapped in the negativity that envelopes some within her school community and intentionally reaches out to include additional voices that help her understand the problem (Is this happening where you are?), are solutions-oriented (What have you tried?) and center her values (How does this affect the kids?).

Under this theme, I also included narratives that spoke to her desire to model a more positive outlook in her building and her grade-level team. She viewed school culture as a give-and-take. She said, "I know I don't know everything, but I do feel confident about some things." She goes on to talk about sharing her knowledge in a confident way, and a positive, can-do attitude that has helped her find other voices within her school that she can trust. Her desire to share her learning and grow as a member of the community demonstrates how her personal and professional identity mediation is also leading to greater engagement within her profession overall.

"it's not something I just like turn off."

I chose to label this theme with a quote from Melissa, "it's not something I just turn off," as she shrugs off the narrative that she encounters from the community and administration or coaches that teachers aren't doing enough. Her narratives point to her awareness of this story about teachers, but she downplays it and rolls her eyes when recounting the narratives below.

> I'm not doing enough. I definitely feel that at a county level. I'm not doing enough. There's just always more than I could be doing. Which I know this isn't true.

> It is definitely something that I felt. In just conversations with people, you know, oh, your job is so easy. And I'm like, it's not. Then I talk to people who have come into my classroom and they're like, I don't know how you do this all day.

> Taking it further at a country level, I don't always feel like that teaching is a profession. But it's one of, I think, one of the harder professions on the person doing the job. Their mental health, physical health, all of that suffer, and I don't think that people understand that. Because, as I said, it's not something I can turn off and not think about. Yeah, I come home, and I'm thinking about, I gotta do this, and I got to do this, and what do we have tomorrow?

> And you know, they say, do things for yourself, go on a walk, go to the gym. You can still do that. But it's still there. It's in the back of your mind. Yeah, yeah.

In these brief narratives she acknowledges the story of "not enough" and counters with her knowledge that she is doing more than enough.

When considering this message when it comes from administrators or coaches within her building, I saw a similar response. She was confident that she was working extremely hard on behalf of her students and dismissed their position as ignorant of what was actually happening.

> I feel like all of the pressure from the district and the like all the other people that we have come to the building all the time. It just goes back to, like, I'm not doing enough, right? spending my time *(pause)* I can't. There is no possible way, especially in a *curriculum* lesson. That I can deep dive into every single one of those lessons for the entire year. Yeah. That would be the only thing I would be doing. And that's not feasible.

Within this theme, she also references administrators, coaches, and district officials' lack of knowledge about what is actually happening in her class or what she does each day. She dismisses their pressure that she should do more because she does not believe they are knowledgeable about her work effort at all. She says, "This year, no one has been in my room except for the head of the math department for like 10 minutes."

According to Mockler (2011), at its heart, teacher's agency in their professional identity seeks to connect 'What I do' with 'why I'm here' (p. 522). In the narratives within this theme, we see Melissa's ownership and keen awareness of both of these facets of her teaching identity. This tension between her professional acuity and political pressures from district mandates and state policy bore out an unlikely activism that empowered her to ignore their messaging about teaching because she was confident in her vision of what it means to her to be a teacher.

Throughout these narratives, Melissa spoke openly about the increased presence of district officials within her school due to their inclusion in a group of lower-performing schools in the state and district. This was reflected in the voices she encountered throughout her

narratives, commenting that there were many people in the building, though not necessarily in her classroom. Therefore, my findings showed district officials, administration, academic coaches, and state and district policies played a large role in how she thought about teaching.

When referencing things that helped move her toward a full moon or those that sustained her, she regularly looked to more curated voices. She talked about her "teacher bestie," students, her grade level team, support staff in the building, and fellow intern friends as those that she turns to remind her of her "why." In her narratives, she references choosing to avoid voices within her school or social media that are overly negative or positive, instead looking for people to keep it real about the good and bad of teaching.

Aiden

Aiden laughs as we chatted about the study and quickly began throwing out ideas for possible art projects. He seemed pleased to be asked about his thoughts and reflections on life as a teacher. His schedule is busy, and it was hard to pin down time to get back together for interview two. He addressed his use of time outside of school during the story circle saying he has to give himself time away from being Mr. D, when he can step out from under the pressure of running into students or talking about school. He values time just to be himself. This framing of the importance of maintaining his personal identity as a key part of who he is as a teacher. Moving into his second year of teaching, he was reflective over what was and was not working for him and found he needed key time away from filling the role of teacher. This type of mediation is shown in Mockler's Theory of Identity when a catalyst, in this case high levels of frustration, initiates a reflective action whereby individuals consider their teaching identity and adjust. Aiden explained during the story circle that maintaining this boundary has been important for him to preserve his desire to remain in teaching.

When we gathered for our second interview, he brought along his artwork in the form of a video. He set up the video to compare and contrast his thoughts on what he thought it meant to be a teacher versus what it actually means to him now. The movie was set to the song *Wake up Everybody*, by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, from their performance on *Soul Train*. He mentioned his choice of song, noting that he wished people were more knowledgeable about what is happening in schools. The interview focused on the narratives he told while he explained the inclusion of each image in the film. Throughout the story circle, he would mention the desire to continue to share more stories if needed, stating he was pretty sure he had a story for every prompt.

> I guess one big thing that I'm learning as I'm becoming more and more gaining more and more experience in the profession is that being yourself is a big part of it because it's just it's easier to be yourself than to be and sound and try to be what people want you to be.

Here, he is pulling from his personal identity and considering how it interacts with his professional identity as a teacher. This interaction, or tension, for him is ongoing, but as the narrative below expands, he believes that being true to yourself is important in establishing trust with your students. The catalyst for his mediation of this belief into his identity as a teacher was when other teachers labeled him as “too much.”

> I felt that the other day, I was going to school, thinking like I'm doing too much or something like that. But, like being yourself is easier, is more effective than trying to be someone else. So just be true to you is what I learned through all of this is literally being true to yourself.
>
> So yeah, and the kids you know, the kids know that if you're not being true to you the first one that will call you on it is those kids in your classroom.

Aiden references his belief in himself and his perceptions of what is happening in his school. Throughout the narratives and the themes that emerged, his own voice remained a key checkpoint for Aiden.

“school as a safe place”

Aiden chose to embody a narrative he remembers from his own childhood that school is a safe place. His personal story of experiencing teachers and school as a place to step away from the pressures of home and into a new space he embodies as he strives to create that space for his students. A place where, even if you cannot be yourself at home, you are welcomed, supported, and loved for who you are. In the narrative below, he talks about his personal experience and how he embodies that belief in his classroom.

> I've seen the difference teachers can make in school and in myself because I always look to my school. I tell myself I had like middle child syndrome, you know, the middle child they say, like forgotten about, almost left at school. But school for me has always been a place where I receive certain praises that I might not receive at home or receive certain attention, or I receive certain like, wow, I'm kind of like my own person here. I feel the love here. And that's one thing that I tell my kids that I'm big on and that I pride myself on being. This place is not, you're not at home right now. You can just be a kid; you can just be yourself. You can just be you, and by being you, you also like molding yourself and learning skills that you can take back home and apply.

Aiden talked above about the importance of school as a safe place in his own life and then below describes how and why he chooses to embody that for his own students.

> So like that's one of my biggest things that I pride myself on and also when they come to school, and because the relationship is so whatever, they start to tell these things and like they start to share what's going on at home or how they feel or how certain people make them feel. And it's just, I want you to have a place where you can relax. Where you can let the guard down. You can just breathe a little so and I think that's a big part of education in general because if they're always on guard if they're always like, in defense mode, if they can't relax, if they can't breathe, I don't feel like that we'll be able to learn and apply the material fully. So, I always try to make this place like school, but I don't want you to feel like you're at school because that's when the best learning happens when you're relaxed and free.

Additionally, Aiden, within this theme, references his embodiment of school as a safe place when he raises concerns about behavior management within his school. While the narratives around behavior management show action in response to the narrative, I felt when analyzing the stories and conferring with Aiden during member checking that his actions stem from his belief that school should be a safe place, not a refusal of an additional narrative of

teaching. An example of this narrative is seen below as Aiden explains his response to significant behavior issues that include sexual references, weapons, and fighting between students that were, in his view, ignored when the students were sent back to class without consequence.

> I try to take control of the consequences and things into my hand because I don't want them to ever feel like these things are acceptable. These things are not the way you are supposed to treat people or go about school. But, when they send them to PBIS or send them to the principal there is no consequences being given. Then they will go on and on talking about the district plan of knocking down suspensions, knocking out all these punitive things, and I agree we should be able to lower those but also, no consequences is going to set the kids up for failure moving forward, because it's going to be hard for them to understand why in the future they're receiving these huge consequences for the things that they've been doing the whole school year in elementary school. And I just don't agree with the whole saying to the kids they won't be suspended or anything like that for it. Because with these certain things *(more severe behavior issues)* like the things with the young ladies it's sending the wrong message to my young lady students that you can be treated like that and nothing that's going to happen. That is not okay. And it shouldn't be okay.

Here, Aiden's embodiment of school as a safe place pushes him to challenge practices and beliefs about what is best for students within his classroom. The catalyst of his administration's response to behavior challenges is pushing him to advocate and speak out on behalf of students.

"best tool in my toolbox right now"

Aiden refuses the message that teaching is all about learning and content as told to him by his administration. He sees relationships with students and his fellow teachers as integral to his job. In the narrative below he is describing a picture from his video submission of a group hug.

> So I knew relationships are important but what the students are working with, like in this school year I think that's the biggest thing. And I think that's the like the best tool I have in my toolbox right now, just because if we didn't have these relationships, if I didn't have these relationships with these students, they wouldn't even attempt to behave for those five minutes. I feel like they're more cooperative, understanding, and willing to try because they know it comes from a caring place. They know I might get onto them, but then I'm going to say I love you. I might say hey, get your stuff. (*removed from the classroom*) You gotta go. But before you go. I'm gonna call you, and I'm saying hey, I love you, see you tomorrow. Have a good day.

He rejects the message that teaching has to be about the transfer of information and takes action to ensure that he understands his role to be more expansive and include the social-emotional skills found in relationships.

> Just because even if you receive consequences, it is not because I want to see you fail or anything like that. It is just because *(pause)* it's just life. Sometimes, life has consequences. And I want you to know that, but it's coming from a place of I want you to be better now because I don't want to see you down and out.

> So the group hug thing, people say a teacher is like a counselor, but really when you build strong relationships, it's really like you're a counselor, you're a therapist, you're an escape for them, and that I didn't expect it to be so just in your face and like it's it's like it's literally on you and which is a good thing and I just wasn't expecting it to be such a big responsibility and I kind of take pride in their responsibility of being that person. For them.

Aiden also rejects that professional relationships with colleagues must always center on improving their teaching and instead recognizes the importance of connecting with others who understand you and the unique situation of your job. He seeks out connection with others in his building to problem-solve, vent, celebrate, and hangout.

> I guess the biggest thing, and one of the most important is relationships because it sounds so simple. But we can't just like talk to anyone about it and so we vent to each other about it. And that gives the impression of you're not alone in this and you're not going crazy. It kind of validates how you feel in a sense but also like reassures you that you're not the reason, and since you're not the reason, it gives me personally like a little boost and be like, okay, okay, I'm not going crazy and since I know I'm not going crazy. Well, maybe I should try this or do this and then just support. We just support each other in different ways. Whether it is my partner teacher needing to tap out, I'm gonna go. If she's having trouble with one kid who just can't get it together I'm going to take him off your hands. So she can get back to her class, and it's just that type of support; we're in it together.

Within this theme, I also included Aiden's narratives about using teachers' social media as a way to feel seen. I chose to include this under this theme because he talked about choosing certain accounts to follow in which he felt seen, that were not overly negative but were entertaining as a way that he break up the tension after school on a hard day. His regular

interactions with social media in this way allowed him to push back on the narrative that teaching is only about learning.

“inadequate to do our job”

Aiden refused the narrative that teachers are incapable of doing their job. At Aiden’s school, the new school year brought new district and school policies. As represented by the district, these policies were put in place to raise end-of-year test scores. From Aiden’s perspective, however, the message from district officials and then his administration was that it was the teacher’s fault students were not performing and that teachers were incapable of doing their job. He reflects on this transition below.

> It kind of made me as a teacher feel like, they felt like we were not doing our job or were inadequate to do our job. But, we're doing our job. The biggest thing for me at the beginning of the year was that I was going into the year thinking that it was going to be a long, rough year, as far as having these new ideas and new requirements, new guidelines to follow, but personally, I see no benefits to the kids.

Next, when I asked for an example, he talked about a specific portion of the policy that stuck out to him.

> Well, one of them really stuck out to me, and it was the way that they said it. They were saying that we had to dress professionally every day because we want the kids to see what success looks like or not. And that kind of bothered me and rubbed me the wrong way. Just because you wear a suit. I mean, just because you wear a dress shirt and slacks or business casual clothes, that doesn't mean that you're successful. And just because you don't doesn't mean you're not successful. Our kids they go home, and they see their parents, they don't see their parents or the people around them in those clothes. They don't see our school custodial staff in those clothes. So, are you trying to give the message to our kids that you have to do this, look this way, or do these things to be successful?

When he was relaying this portion of the narrative, I noted his attire in my memo. He was dressed in slacks and a hoodie. He looked down at his hoodie and smirked before continuing.

> I feel like a lot of those things, that they're trying to push from the top down. I didn't think it was gone about the right way. I just feel really strongly about the whole new district initiative because it's kind of isolating. It feels like it isolates our group of kids, and granted, our group of kids does need different supports. But every kid around the county needs different support. It's not just exclusively one reason. And then it's like they're literally trying to single them

> out. I don't know. I really didn't like it. But I'm growing to kind of deal with it, navigate through it, and just not get over it but just learn how to work it to the best of my ability inside of the school.

Aiden references his refusal that teachers are incapable of doing their job in light of this new policy. He talks about working the policies to the best of his ability within the school. I interpreted this phrase in his narrative to indicate the actions he is taking to subvert or act against the policy. During the story circle, he referenced the administration's decision to change the dress code slightly in response to him speaking out about some of his concerns. This narrative grouping also highlights one way he refuses the belief that teachers are inadequate is by feeling comfortable speaking back when he observes potential inequalities.

Throughout this narrative theme, Aiden is grappling with what it means to be a teacher advocate. The changes brought through new district initiatives have struck his moral touchstones and his reflection about his role in pushing back against unfair policies has him looking for ways to not only advocate on behalf of his students but also fellow teachers. This is seen in Mockler's (2011) theory of identity when the overlap between professional and political results in teacher activism.

Feeling judged as inadequate was also seen in the narratives through a direct voice from the administration. This was seen when Aiden discussed behavior management at his school.

> It's like they feel like it's kind of our fault that they're doing these things. It's kind of our fault that they're behaving the way they're behaving.

It is his perception that the administration feels his skills are inadequate, as evidenced by the behavior of his class. He goes on to discuss how his team works together to support each other and seek out strategies that might help students be more successful. He felt vindicated when district visitors to the school affirmed the challenge and the work that teachers were putting into trying to support students.

“I don’t even try to indulge”

Aiden dismissed the narrative from the media that anybody can be a teacher. He notes that most of the people making this type of statement do not know anything about being a teacher or what it is like to be in the classroom. Their ignorance of what teachers do each day resulted in their rebuke being ignored by Aiden.

> Sometimes people don't value a teacher. They try to minimalize it or minimize what is actually going on or what a teacher does. The media presents it as anybody can go be a teacher.
>
> Most of the people commenting about teachers on a daily basis are people who have never been in a classroom. The same people who are making decisions nine times out of 10. They’ve never been in the classroom.
>
> So, I kind of just take it with a grain of salt.
>
> I feel like with the teacher shortage and all of those things, eventually, the importance and how essential teachers are will be shown when there are so many vacancies.
>
> I can feel it but don't let it get to me. It's all entertainment to me because these people aren't even in the educational field or have that experience.

Aiden was aware of the narrative in the media that anyone can be a teacher. However, he dismissed this story as one of ignorance and felt that eventually, the public would realize all that teachers do each day. He seemed confident in his belief that teachers work hard on behalf of students.

Aiden referenced five primary voices of teaching and teaching identities that interacted within his narratives. Due to his school's inclusion in a focus district, district officials and policies featured regularly throughout his narratives as he navigated the changes within the school. As a part of this transition, school administration also featured prominently within Aiden’s narratives.

While both district officials and administration are direct interactions, he also speaks to voices such a students and fellow teachers. Unique to his stories was a thread of personal experience as a voice on what it means to him to be a teacher.

Dean

My first meeting with Dean happened unexpectedly when I ran into him at his school. He laughed when he saw me and mentioned that he had been meaning to email me back. He had a minute, and we conducted the first interview right then. He seemed a little frazzled, but every person who saw him stopped to speak, and he offered hugs, high fives, and fist bumps to pretty much everyone with a quick smile. He was happy to join the study and seemed to look forward to contemplating how his idea of what it meant to be a teacher has evolved over time. During our second interview, his artwork focused on this comparison as well.

During the second interview, he chose to talk through the images and how, today, he is an amalgamation of these parts of his teacher identity. He mentioned on numerous occasions how hard he is on himself and how he wanted his artwork to hint at the chaos in his life.

Dean's school is currently experiencing a high level of engagement by state and district officials in response to the most recent year's test scores. While these voices are present in his narratives, they are stunted by how he centers his voice and the voices of people he cares about as more important. Therefore, in his narratives, he often speaks of his mentor coach, teammates, and intern friends to justify his refusal of negative narratives.

"sees you higher than you see yourself"

This theme within the narratives relates to Dean's belief in himself as an educator. As referenced in his introduction, he is hard on himself and often feels like an imposter. However, the administration and coaches in his building see him higher than he sees himself, and over his time at his school, he has embodied this message, recognizing the unique gifts and talents he has to offer. Below, he responds to a question about the inclusion of the image of a handshake in his artwork.

> I mean, first off, just being invited to that. I told you about it, right? The NIET Conference. Yeah. That conference was literally filled with superintendents and then, like everybody but first-year teachers. So it was just like the fact that I was present and with that opportunity so early. It just gave me a chill feeling when people see you as higher than you see yourself, especially as a first-year teacher. I didn't really know what I was doing, you know. And I think that's the volume for them to invite me to something like that and then to you like, even this year. I'm on one of the leadership teams. and I think this may just be my pride speaking. But in the one part meeting they call me an expert and I was like, oh, even like in a room to, you know, teachers who've been teaching for like 10 years. They're like, Hey, mister? If I'll have any questions y'all can go to Mister B about. You know this or situation I don't know. I just felt like it may sound small to other people, but I think it was huge for me, just because it's like, Okay. you know, I don't know. It's kind of kind of maybe, like you said make me make me feel very confident.

In his reflection, he references the magnitude this message of him as an expert in front of his peers had on him as being the spark which helped him embody that confidence.

Also included in this narrative theme were stories about a coach in his building who listens and believes that he can handle both negative and positive feedback. He references her willingness to speak to his strengths and weaknesses as a way he feels seen. More than one narrative throughout the interviews focused on this coach's ability to speak to him in a confidence-building way that resulted in shared respect.

"I've been exactly where you are"

Numerous times throughout Dean's narratives and when we met for his first interview, his relationships with the people in his building were evident. This theme centers on Dean's embodiment that teaching is a team sport and that we are all in it together. In the narrative below he discusses how his grade level team his first year at the school set the tone.

> I probably was visibly stressed in my classroom and it was literally the day I was moving in. And. Kate, when I tell you the school that I had just started, and yet, I was just on the brink and just be like man, forget this, cause. I was like trying to figure out my seating chart, but also trying to figure out how I was, gonna you know, make the first day happen, and I didn't have help to move anything, my car was broken down. It was literally all odds were against me.
>
> And so I kept my head down. I was trying to hurry up and sneak my boxes past all my teammates, so that they wouldn't see me like on the break of tears. Stuff some of my things in

> my classroom, and just sit. I was about to get up to close my door. But then my team literally came to my door. And they're like, Yeah, like, we just wanna check in on you. I mean, they didn't see me walking past or anything. We just want to check in and see if you need any help. And they saw all the boxes like in the hallway and stuff. and I think just then. I mean, cause we all were setting up our class, you know, but they literally stopped what they were doing. Just to come, help me, and get me back in the right mindset. It really set the tone for the school year.

Also included in the theme were stories about Dean's supportive relationship with his friends from his internship and the role that teacher social media plays in his life. Dean talked about how he embodies teaching as a team sport, seeking to both give and receive support within his building and the profession.

His professional identity continues to be supported and honed through the relationships he forges in his school and the profession at large. The recent oversight of the district has acted as a catalyst; he has felt pressure from his own uncomfortableness with the changes, but as he began to hear and see the effects the changes have on his peers, it pushed him to take action. During the story circle, he took a more activist stance, and he began to wonder, "What about the teachers!"

"you ain't always going to like your crew"

In this theme, Dean talks about his repulsion of the phrase "remember your why" that he hears from fellow teachers, district officials, and administration. He takes action to push others to consider why they do this job. Below, he references advice he would give to teachers new to the profession.

> I feel like the whole. "Remember your why" is such a triggering statement for me right now? So I definitely wouldn't tell them that, but I do think they just need to sit and reflect on now, at least they need to go into the profession knowing their why? Because it's gonna come a time where it's just like you're not always going to be too fond of your crew, you know. So it's like liking the kids is not always going to be a test. So just really make sure this is what you're doing. And like, I feel like teachers should never be like a backup plan, or like your second choice, because one that's not fair to the kids. And I think that's why, just at the end of the day, if you say I want to do this for the kids, I need you to really understand what that means, you know, because like. if you. you know, said, Oh, we'll become a nurse is too

> difficult. So I became a teacher. Well, now, you in this profession. hey? You're not really too fond idea of doing these icebreakers with this group, because you already don't want to be here, you know.

Within the above narrative, he also hints at the narrative that teaching is a fallback job. This is continued in the story below from the story circle of why he became a teacher.

> So I'm gonna just do the why I became a teacher because I feel like I've just been really reflecting on that a lot this year. And now, I'm gonna just be real. Like, I feel like, my, I don't want to say perspective. But, like, it was harder for me to (think of stories) because, I mean, I saw this when she sent the email, though, and it was harder for me to just think of specific stories just because of how it is going with students.

He begins his story with the idea he references above about how relationships with students are fickle and unpredictable. The students may be challenging at times. He then continues his narrative below on why he became a teacher.

> It might be me personally, but I felt like, like growing up, I didn't want to be a teacher. Like that was never, it never crossed my mind. You know, especially like the school that I went to being a teacher was, you know, a girl job, you know. And so, I just wanted to show how much I didn't know about the position and who they actually work for me.

In this first part, also refers to the narrative he heard or observed that teachers were girls.

> And so I got to middle school, and I started to see you know, more men in these positions, but they were only like science and social studies teachers, which I didn't care about either one of them. And so I got to high school and I finally got to see you know, teachers in different kinds of positions and also like, in high school, I started reflecting more on how big of a role people outside of my house played in my growth. Especially when it came to like getting ready for college. So when I got to college, I just wanted to, like, specifically help the youth just because there are too many instances and it's gonna be full circle but there are so many instances where I saw the youth be put down strictly because they were youth not about how prepared they were, what they knew what they were gonna know. It was either how old they were or what they looked like, you know, and it just wasn't fair. So they have the world already against them.

Here, it refers to giving back to the youth after recognizing the role that people outside of his own home had in his life. He wanted to provide help and support without judgment. However, when he started working with schools, he connected to the experiences of the students because they were similar to his own.

> On top of that, the schools that I grew up in were the ones that I wanted to work in. They barely had anybody to support them at home, too. So you mean to tell me I have nobody at home? I barely know what's going on. At school and the whole world is just already against me. What the heck am I supposed to do? What's the point of me and doing anything? You get I'm saying? So it's like it started off as I just wanted to help people see their fullest potential and that's like I started doing a lot of, transitional programs that help like college students get into the mindset of college and I just liked helping people.
>
> So when I started working with kids, and actually I started seeing I don't know. I don't know how to say this without being cheesy but it's just like seeing kids grow in confidence. Like at the ripe age of like six, seven or eight, you know, I'm saying it's like when they feel a part of something, and they start speaking back from stuff that people didn't even know they understood. It's like I it was such a satisfying moment for me because now they have some sense of purpose and direction in life.
>
> You know, because they all have a purpose. They just don't all have the luxury of someone helping. I say all that to say because I've worked with kids since freshman year of high school. And honestly I have countless stories about thinking specifically just these last two years of teaching.

Throughout the beginning portion of this narrative, we hear Dean begin to explain his personal reasons for getting into teaching and how he views his role as a teacher to be an intersection of the three parts of his identity personal, professional, and political. He recognizes his own experience in young people and finds teaching to be a way to speak into kids' lives by providing a safe and supportive place for them to grow, while at the same time talking back to societal injustices that may look at kids and judge them unfairly. This overlap of all three parts of his identity connects to Mockler's (2011) Theory of Identity whereby this overlap mediates key moral anchors by which he judges his own teaching and the policies and practices that affect his students.

> Like we are with our group of kids every single day. And too many times. I've been told like Mr. T you won't see the progress. So stop being so hard on yourself, but it's like that's just how my brain works. You can always say, like, like it's so hard like No, no, they are hard headed or they're not listening or all these negative thoughts, but like when I watched that video, I don't know if y'all got to watch it but our school made a video of our kids talking about what they liked about the teachers. And especially the student that I chose to go speak I was like, okay, he's probably gonna play too much and like not really take this serious. But

> the things that he said about me just really revealed a lot about like our relationship you know, and it was just like, wow, okay, so things are moving in my classroom. You know, like, I may not see it. I may not ever see it for some students, but like, moments like that is why I became a teacher.
>
> You know, it's like I'm not here to be recognized by my crew. I'm not here to hear why they love me so much. No, I want them to feel like they have a space in my classroom. So it's like when they do vocalize that, at their age of seven, eight or nine. Like, one of my coaches came to me and they're like Mr. T. She's like starts crying to me; it was like, you would have been so surprised that the behaviors your kids were showing last year and just the growth that they've shown this year. They asked them, " Do you feel like or how do you feel in Mr. T's class" and they straight up said, "I feel seen." The love that they feel cared for and supported. It's all that kind of stuff. Like all the stuff that I want my kids to feel.
>
> So it's just it's such an insane and trippy experience when something that you've been working towards, you don't feel it everyday, but when like we do by set time aside to actually reflect on okay, like, what's actually going on? You can actually see like the fruits of your labor if you like. So that was a very messy story, but just a rough reason. Why I do this and why keep going back because especially this year, I found a lot of reasons to not go back. But the numbers of me going back, definitely overweigh it now.

As he experiences, things that challenge him in his school setting they serve as catalysts to action. Dean speaks back to the narrative from culture and other teachers that kids should be your "why" by speaking out about what drives him when the kids are being challenging. In other narratives, on this theme, he talks about actions he takes, such as seeking professional development in response to a challenge, advocating for students' needs, or honing his own practice through reflection. Each of these actions is seen in Mockler's (2011) theory at the intersection of personal, professional, and political identity. He centers his moral anchor on providing supportive, safe environments for students to grow.

"broken record"

Dean refuses the narrative of what he views as toxic positivity that tells teachers they can do it on their own, that they have got it. He takes action by asking for help and pushing for the needs of teachers to be heard and seen within his building. In the first narrative below, he refers to speaking to the administration and coaches about a challenge he was facing in his classroom.

> You know, it just really sucks when like you just like you're talking to a wall sometimes, or like it's kind of like a broken record, you know, like I don't know cause I feel like. I mean, especially this year. I've just run into a lot of toxic positivity when it comes to like looking for support.
> Just I will. “I know you could do it, but you're really good at X,Y, And Z.” You know bandaids, but not really effectively giving me strategies. And so I think that's for a lot of us least for this school year. I think that's where a lot of my frustration comes from. It's not an everyday thing. But I do feel like there have been more times than one where I express something. and they're just like I hear you. But there's nothing changing, see?
> You know, and I get that like some things are out of their control. But like, I think, a simple, I don't know. I feel if they were actually to show that they hear me and see me, rather than just saying that. I feel like that will make me a little bit more, seen. I guess, I don't know, it's already hard for me, cause I already feel needy. But I asked for help. So when I do ask for help, and nothing happens. I'm like, Well, I should never said anything, you know.

Dean refers again to his struggle with confidence when he says, “I already feel needy,” and when his efforts to be heard go unanswered, he laments that he should not even ask next time. Here, Dean’s personal identity, or this belief that he is “needy” intersects with his professional disposition (Mockler, 2011). He recognizes in himself that he is unlikely to ask for help, and so when he does, it is a communication of real need, and if it goes unanswered he is unlikely to ask again.

As he concluded this portion of his narrative, I inquired if he had any stories of when asking for support went well and allowed him to feel seen. He responded with the following narrative about his math coach.

> Yeah. My math coach just across. I kind of expressed to her how like it was during one of our personalized coaching meetings, and I was just frustrated because I didn't really understand what the disconnect was between me and my kids and it was just simply me asking her to model the instruction for me. This is like, so I can kind of sit back and see. You know, another teacher engagement. And I think that was huge for me personally, because I asked a lot of people to do something like that, and I think she was the only person who had to followed through with it. you know.

After he shared about his math coach stepping in to model, I asked why he thought she was willing to step in as opposed to what he feels in interactions with other administration and coaches.

> Funny enough, I feel like she followed through because she sees my potential as a teacher you know, and I felt like that's kind of like you would think it would be. They won't come because they trust that you would do it, but I feel like she just cared so deeply about me and my teaching. She wants me to grow. You know, I mean cause it's a sacrifice for everybody's time, and I think she was willing to sacrifice that time just to better prepare me. I don't know if that's making sense, but I think it is mostly because she just wants to do everything in her willpower, too. Make sure I feel equipped, I mean, cause it is only me in here.

I included the narratives of Dean's math coach supporting him within the theme of his refusal of the narrative of teaching that says that you can do it on your own because his acceptance and desire for this type of support speaks as a rebuttal to the individualistic narrative of toxic positivity, "you've got this" he is hearing from others in his building.

Circling back to his identity of feeling "needy" and unseen, his math coach can mediate a new narrative through professional support. He views her willingness to step in and help when he asks as a way of displaying confidence in his knowledge and skills as a teacher. In a way, she flips the script. It is not that he is needy but instead that he is so capable he knows when to ask for help. Therefore, this interaction between his personal and professional identities bears out a reflexive positionality that allows him to view getting support as a part of what it means to be a good teacher. The mediation of this positionality goes so far as to now he views the lack of response from administration or coaches as a catalyst by which he speaks out on behalf of other teachers in his building.

Additional narratives in this theme centered on Dean's experience with behavior management in his school and how, with the new district policies, the administration is more likely to leave students with teachers despite teachers' repeated calls for help. During the story circle, he spoke at length on the importance of teachers feeling heard and how he has been trying to use his voice in the school to raise awareness about this issue with both district and school administration.

“there’s nothing really to buy into”

Dean’s school is currently a focus school and is under heavy oversight from the district and state. This has resulted in a lot of visitors to the school and heavy pressure on teachers from the administration and coaches for them to commit to the goals of the school. Dean interpreted this message of teaching that good teachers commit to the school's goals. However, he disregards this message. He says the lack of structure, consistent messaging, and supports for teachers allows him to dismiss their message and ignore the pressure to “buy in.”

> I feel like every meeting that we go to and express our frustrations. it's like we're told that it's policy. So I guess it would be District versus State expectations. But I think in terms like inside of the school, I think a lot of our priorities are not really in line. I thought, we are very focused on buy-in this year, which does play a huge role. But I say, we can't really get any buy in. If there's no structure. you know that there's really nothing to buy into. If there's no structure or consistency or even accountability, you know. I think that's why it's so frustrating is because it's district and school decisions that are being made, and I don't want to speak for my school, but I think just a consensus is like a lot of teachers just feel like they they don’t matter. you know. and I hate to say that.

The lack of clarity about the message has made it easier for Dean to dismiss it. He reflects that not only is it their lack of clarity in their message, but it also makes other teachers feel as if they don’t matter.

Ali

My first interview with Ali went way over my expected timeframe because she jumped right into telling stories about her class and her students from last year. This enthusiasm for her students and focus on their experience in her class continued into our second interview. For her artwork, she created a ten-minute slideshow of pictures showcasing her class's growth from the beginning to the end of the year. She was so proud of the relationships they had formed and that they continue to share today. Her stories of teaching and teaching identities in interview two and the story circle often returned to her commitment to her students.

Ali, from our first interview through the story circle, referenced her students as a primary voice with which she interacts. In fact, through each of her narratives, she would return to the role of students in either the primary interaction or when referencing actions she took to refuse a story of teaching or teaching identities. Her students were clearly central to her professional and personal identity of what it means to be a good teacher. In the narrative themes below, she refers to the current tensions she is experiencing as the situation in her class and school begins to shift and push against this "moral anchor" (Mockler, 2011, p. 522).

In addition to students, Ali referenced a support network of fellow interns and teachers that she has begun to rely upon to challenge the narratives about teaching and teaching identities that she was hearing from administration, coaches, society, and other teachers. She referred to seeking out these voices in her support network and avoiding interactions with those that perpetuated a negative perception of teaching. I chose to consider her curating of voices as a reflexive response to weighing those voices against her benchmark belief about the importance of teachers for her students. Below she is referencing her response to a former teacher of six of her current students.

> I mean, one of the teachers that had like six of them last year, she came by. She kind of has this personality and is someone that I just can't. (eyeroll) I keep my distance. Because there are a lot of things that can just be extremely toxic. I've heard about it, and I don't want to be a part of it. But I know how she is, and I know how she likes to kind of passive-aggressively make comments just to kind of like, "well, they didn't do this with me."

This is a reflection on Ali's intentions to curate the voices she listens to about teaching. She had previously identified this teacher through prior interactions as a negative voice and had been avoiding her. The teacher's visit to Ali's classroom saw Ali judge her motives and disregard her message as toxic.

“this is why I do this”

This first narrative theme, compiled stories that centered on Ali’s embodiment of the narrative of teaching from our society that the students are her why. In the images from her slideshow, her students were engaged in a wide range of activities and memories from across a school year. In the narrative below, she describes her thinking about how to approach the project.

> So I think in my head, I was trying to think about what shows the relationships that I felt the most. And it's funny because that slide show is all of my first-year students, and I think it just shows like the year’s growth that we had just building those relationships and the relationships the students have with each other.

I followed this brief explanation with a question about how she views the effect that connection has on her as the teacher.

> Thank you, because something that I've struggled with this year has been this year has been so much harder because I mean, every class is going to be different, and every student's going to be different but as a whole, this class is very, very active and very energetic. And so some of that has been in a good way and some of that has been more kind of like hey, we've got to learn some self-control and I think we're starting this year. I'm working with them on trying to teach them some virtues and character values that I want to instill in them. And it has been for this year, and I think that video kind of helps me remember. Like, we may not be there yet, but like, this is why I do this. And so last year it may have come a little bit easier. It may have been a little bit more natural but this year, I think it helps me kind of establish a goal point of where I want to get with it.

As previously mentioned, Ali holds her central value of teaching as being for the students and challenges other narratives of teaching by their alignment with this moral anchor. Ali, in this passage, admits to this year being harder for her to connect to her students, and yet she commits to keep trying and working to problem-solve the issues they are facing as a class. This seeking out of professional development to support her is found in Mockler’s theory of identity when personal and professional values cross, creating a space for new learning.

“I’m 50 strategies past that”

Ali hears a narrative about teaching that teachers are inadequate and unimportant to do their job. She takes action by continuing to seek out information and best practices for her students

and to continue to advocate for their needs. Below she recounts her experience when she asks for help in response to a student behavior issue in her class.

> I've been told things like, strategies, intervention strategies for a behavior, and I've tried that. It literally was the first, second, or third thing I've tried and I've tried 50 things since then. That also is like, because then I feel like I'm not seen, right?
> When a thing isn't even seen by them, if they didn't know that, that was one of the first things I tried to know,

Ali goes on to reference how, while restorative conversations are a focus in the new district policies, it is natural to her. She has been doing them her whole time in the classroom. She continues below.

> and then I'm like, did they think that I wouldn't have tried that? Like to me restorative conversations are so something so natural, I feel like they are mandatory. Like if there is a child and they are going to do something not right and then the expectation is a conversation after because why would they not do it again? If they don't know? So that's something that, like, I've been doing, so then it's like when that's the first recommendation for something that I could try, then it's like, like you really don't know me. You don't know me because that is the first thing that happens regardless. That may be coupled with another strategy, but that's going to be there. And so, when people you know offer their input, the advice can sometimes be not as helpful as they think it is.

Ali refers to feeling invisible because the administrators and coaches with whom she interacts are ignorant to what is happening in her classroom or how she, as a teacher, responds by seeking out strategies or solutions. Evidence of the action she takes in speaking back to those who view her as incapable can be found in the narrative below.

> I think it kind of brings in to a perspective of why I'm there, and then it kind of, I guess, stinks in the moment, but then it's almost like well I think I would be hurt if I wasn't able to teach them that and it seems like a lot of them get it and understand it the best from me, because if we've had that decision made, like if we were together, then other people that may talk to them don't know what happened because they weren't there.

Here Ali begins to distance herself from the narrative and refocus on her students.

> And so it kind of helps the conversations because I do spend the most time with them. And I think if that relationship was built, not that I don't want them to have extremely strong relationships with other adults in the building, but if I'm spending the most time

> with them, but yet they have stronger relationships with everyone else, because of me sending them out, then that's not what is there for like that relationship.

She continues justifying why it is best if she is the one that figures out ways to support her students.

> And that's kind of like a wakeup call, like, hey, now you need to talk to them about this, because right now, that's kind of like, Hey, get out. We'll deal with that later. And then I don't want to risk not revisiting it. Because if they don't understand why, then it's most likely going to happen again.

Here again, she continues to justify why she should continue to problem solve for her students and handle all issues without administration.

> But I think it has kind of reminded me to like, it's those are the issues that we're having. Then those might be affecting their learning and their relationships a lot. So what better place to fix it than where it started? You know, if I want to show them that our class is a family by the end of the year. They may not teach that message if they're sent to learn a lesson elsewhere. So, it's been hard to realize that too, because I'm like, well, it keeps happening because what I'm doing isn't working. And so, then it's like self-blame just a lot because we are responsible for the kids. And so sometimes I feel like if I'm not doing a good enough job about teaching them those character traits, or if I'm not setting an example with them, or if I show too little patience, what is it teaching them so it's kind of been one of those things where I have specifically tried to talk through every way that I can just to help teach them.

Throughout Ali's narratives about her interaction with those who doubt her capability, she takes action to shut down the interaction and focus on her students. It is important to note that in her perspective she carries the responsibility and guilt of the success or struggle of her students.

Additional narratives within this theme focused on Ali's experiences with the adoption of the new curriculum and pacing expectations from the district. Similar to the narrative above, she recounts feeling inadequate or invisible and responds by focusing on her students and putting as much separation as possible between her and the voice that says she is incapable so that she can focus on her students.

“we need each other”

Ali was told a story that it is sustainable to close your door and teach by her teacher preparation program. As seen in her reflections in the prior theme, her interpretation of this belief led her to isolate herself at times. Her narrative reflected a change in her beliefs, and she took action to intentionally connect with her fellow teachers in her building, former interns, and social media creators. In the narrative below, she recounts how her relationships with students were enough in her first year of teaching. However, this year, as she has experienced more challenges, she has recognized the need to connect outside of her classroom.

> It's been more of a struggle this year because the relationships (*last year*) were strong within the classroom. Last year that was what I needed. And now I've noticed myself just needing more breaks or more tap outs. I've had to figure out where like I'm still figuring it out. What can I do to help? Because I know my mindset, and I do not want that to change. I don't want to lose my why, I want to stay. I want to stay and for more than five years. So this year some different things have helped. I've spent time with people, like Mr. T and M, another intern. Two other interns, just like a few of us teachers went to eat after school one Friday, and like, that was something so small, and I don't know that they realized how big of a deal that was to me but like, that was so fun just to see, just to spend time with people outside of an area that may be stressful sometimes.

Below, I noted how Ali expanded her understanding of the role of adult relationships beyond herself and how she could share what she had learned with other teachers in her building.

> And just like with kids, I feel like if adult relationships are stronger within the building, some of the negative feelings wouldn't be so prevalent. Right as that's been. I don't know sometimes it feels really cliquey and it still does and some teams are just so close that they don't need to. (*hangout outside of school*) I mean, that's perfectly fine.

Ali references her perspective on the challenges of connecting with established groups in the school. She continues to explain below what action she takes in light of this perception and why she thinks it is important.

> But trying to figure out how I can have what they have with people there too. That's been something that I've been trying to figure out in our team this year. We mesh so well together. And I think that it always feels weird for me to be like the planner or the initiator or something because I'm like, I've only been here three years like I can't do that. But like, I mean, that one day that we went after school, I'd asked Mr. G like “can we do something

> please?" I just wanted, "I mean, it's really pretty outside," or whatever. I've realized sometimes, even though it may be uncomfortable initiating, that is going to be what helps me because people like it and I've heard over and over and over again. People want to do something but they don't want to plan it.
>
> And so more often this year than any other time I've been trying to think about like, well, what can be simple that doesn't have to be planned. Like one day I was like, Okay, well I need to tell everybody just meet at a dog park because that would be so fun. Like bring your dogs, right? You don't have a dog? Well, come anyway, but, I never did it because I'm like, Well what are they gonna think? They're gonna think I'm weird. So like, that's it hard too.

Ali is navigating the tension in the narrative she is told about being able to teach on her own and her own vulnerabilities about speaking up to her peers. Below she continues to push herself to make those connections.

> I don't know, I feel like everybody realizes that I want teachers to see the good in other teachers, too. Sometimes I feel like tensions can get so high that it's like, well, her class is a wreck, and I know why it's because she has no control over things like that, and that can be so damaging. And I know that that exists so much. And it's so hard to accept that some people can just make comments like that with not a care in the world. And I feel like, too, if we do more outside of school, we'd be like, hey, oh, that person's really cool. And I never would have hung out with him otherwise.
>
> So yeah, I'm still trying to figure out what can help but things like that. I mean, when Dean interned at ABC Elementary he went on and on about their staff connections. Those relationships help so much.
>
> It's like an endless cycle. If you don't do that, because some people may not like it. Some people may not show up. And that's what keeps people from offering or planning it. And then it's like, well, we don't we need relationships and we never do anything.
>
> So it's just one of those things like you do it and the people that come, come. Then you can meet somebody that you've barely talked to or see the mindset of somebody else. And, like, I think that can be the strongest thing for us right now.

Ali references seeing the power of adult relationships through the eyes of a friend who interned at a nearby school. This narrative that it was a positive force in that school helps support Ali, and she considers the importance of offering events to help her find like-minded peers. Below, she reflects on the positive and negative ways these connections are supported through school-wide structures.

> We do some restorative circles within the school, but they can feel so planned that they're almost pathetic. There have been some with N.W. I don't know if you know the name. Yeah, he's great. And he'll come, and I just mean him as a person. I'm like, wow, you are so genuine you promote good vibes here. Right? And so, like, when he comes along, it's great.
>
> And I just want that to spread throughout the school year. It's been hard this year. And there are so many changes that I feel like people are spending less time with each other than normal. Or if they are, it's, you know, I mean, I'm guilty. Of this too, like just complaining sometimes. And I feel like that can be like it can go downhill so fast.

Ali concludes this narrative by referencing the trap of negativity she sees in the casual relationships with peers. Her perspective that additional time together would help push them to reframe their connections in a more positive light connects to her action of speaking back to the narrative that teachers can sustain themselves in education alone.

Additional narratives within this theme discussed Ali's attempts to continue to build on strong relationships with her internship cohort and her grade-level team. She also references curating her social media feed to locate voices of teachers that are in similar classroom settings and problem-solving similar problems as a way she feels connected to a larger voice of teaching than just her own or her schools.

Throughout this narrative theme, we see Ali consider various parts of her identity, her vulnerability in speaking out (personal), her motivation to problem solve on behalf of her students (professional), and her recognition that staff relationships may benefit the school culture overall (professional). As she navigates these various positionalities, she begins, through reflection, to take action. She reflects on the role that positive relationships had in a peer's experience at another school and then begins to consider an activist position whereby she promotes what she views as a teacher-sustaining practice in the face of demoralization from mandates.

“I’m going to be here”

Ali hears a narrative that teaching is not worth it and certainly not worth it at a school like hers from her fellow teachers, the community, and her mom. She recognizes the consistency of the message but takes action to try and prepare herself to stay in the classroom long term. In the narrative below she recounts conversations with her mom about her choice to teach at her school despite all of it challenges and their effects on her mental and physical health.

> My mom she has asked me, she knows that I love *my school* and she knows that that's where I want to be. And she was like, Do you know though that there are other options? And I was like, Yeah, I was like, I think everybody does.
>
> And the kids know, the kids are seeing how many other options there are because I'll see them try trying to think who their first-grade teacher was and they can't remember because they they're not here. And so I was telling her like, my little [*girl]* from last year, she’s one of the ones. (*pause*) I have such strong relationships with them all but like her behaviors and her relationship with me is special. I’m a very like, embrace and I will tell you I love you so much and she would just be like I love you so much Ms. A and stuff like that. I’m like you were so mature. Also like her maturity even as a first grader and the way she handled things was just so graceful and so like she is one that I’m like, I will be there for you as much as you allow like I would. I would go to any of their birthday parties, but I’m always like tell me when you’re graduating, like tell me when your in fifth grade, you know. And so I was telling mom, think about [*this girl]* when she’s in fifth grade, I still want to be there because so many of the kids don’t have a constant.

Here, in her answer to her mom, she transitions from speaking more from her personal experience to her reaction to the turnover in her building and the effect that turnover has on students.

> They don’t have people, some of them don’t have people that stay. And so if they don’t have anybody in their life that has stayed yet. I want to be the first. And even if they do, if they have that strong support system, then great! Hopefully, I can be just an additional and, but I think for me, like the turnover makes me want to stay even more because I see how much you know, these kids look up to their teachers, and then they're gone. And some of them I mean, they have completely valid reasons for leaving and like, I totally understand, but I think for me, I'm like no, like if I can stick it out and if I want them to stick it out. I'm gonna be here.

She concludes her narrative by noting the narrative that the kids do not have any constants in their lives by adding that she wants to be an additional support.

In other narratives within this theme, she discusses the importance of having faces at school that are consistent for kids. While some of them may have strong support at home, the effects of teacher turnover have left them without that support at school. She talks about wanting to be the teacher that when kids are in fifth grade, they can come back to her and know she was their first grade teacher.

Here again, we see Ali weighing her moral touchstone of how the narratives she is told about teaching intersect with her values of what is best for her students. As she considers where she wants to teach and the effects of teacher turnover on her students her reflective action results in an increased understanding of herself and the "political sphere" of how policies and decision making ultimately affect students (Mockler, 2011, p. 522).

"we know its tough but you're doing great"

Ali chooses to disregard messages of praise for her teaching that are generic. The title of the theme within this section offers an example of that generic praise, "we know its tough but you're doing great." She references her disregard of this message, saying that the general comments are easy to discard because they lack knowledge of anything going on in her classroom. She continues that the messages of support that are targeted to a specific strategy or noticing in her classroom mean a lot to her.

> And there'll be short little comments like, well, you're doing great like you're, you're appreciated and no soreness. I do appreciate those comments, but it's more specific things that maybe I've done that, this is gonna sound really like braggy, and I mean things that I've come up with like the ticket system. I think that things like that being recognized for those types of things are a lot more fulfilling, then you're appreciated.

She continues below to explore how she views the specificity of the comment when noting whether to discard or embody.

> We even got these, like they handed out little printed-out notes, and it was like, "We see what you're doing in your classroom," and another teacher was in my room, and I was like, did you get this too? and she was like, yeah. If you take that away issue like there's nothing

> heartfelt at all. You know what, it's yeah, like I get that because it didn't really feel like it boosted my mood. I think they are fine because I so appreciate the gesture and like whoever did it went to a lot of work. And that's where I'm like sitting there trying to be like, Okay, be empathetic. What did they do? Like they went to a lot of effort for that. But like, things like that. I'm like, handwritten notes go far, because then they're not going to be the same for everybody and like, specific things, that's when I feel the most recognized by another person. So like, if somebody's like, Hey, you're really good at being patient with kids that are having tantrums. Like even that even if it's not something that's like a direct compliment, but like, it's something that they see in me as a teacher that they appreciate. Those are the things that go the furthest with me, I think.

When she and another teacher recognized that they had been given the same note and candy, she reflected on how it diminished the message to where she thought the note was nice but it didn't really affect her. She just discarded its message. She goes on to note how people noticing something specific about her teaching has the largest effect on her.

Other narratives within this theme focused on experiences in her classroom where other teachers or coaches offered platitudes of support when she was struggling in her classroom and how she ignored their meaning because they lacked accurate knowledge of what was happening or how she was responding.

Ali's disregard of messages about teaching that she deems to be ill-informed are seen in Mockler's (2011) conception of identity as the mediation of ideas that inform who she is as a teacher and who she is not. Her belief that those who offer platitudes lack an understanding of her identity as a teacher shows her firm grasp of her own teacher identity.

Meredith

Meredith responded to my email, happy to talk more about her life as a teacher and her goals as an educator. While Meredith is currently in the classroom, she is also chairing her school's application to become a STEM school and completing coursework toward additional certification in educational technology. She serves as a second-year teacher on multiple

leadership committees in her school and district. However, she is also exploring possibilities to continue her teaching career in another state. For her artwork, Meredith chose to create an acrostic poem, as seen in Figure 4. She admitted that her first draft of the poem was written on a hard day, and she didn't feel like it appropriately included the positive side, so she reworked it until she felt like it was a more accurate picture of what it means to her to be a teacher. During her second interview, she used the component parts of her poem to prompt her narratives.

According to the state metrics the year prior to this study, Meredith's school performed at level one, or the lowest scoring metric. This resulted in an increased focus from state and district officials as well as pressures from the administration to meet expectations this school year. As a leader in her school and district, her narratives reflect the pressure that she feels on behalf of her school and students to improve. However, this pressure is tightly bound to her doubt in the state policies that enforce this level of accountability and structure. Central to her narrative themes, is her struggle to center her values and establish outlets for her move toward activism. Throughout her stories, she discusses the flux in identity that Mockler (2011) refers to as she grapples with her future in education.

"I love this so much"

Below she speaks of teaching being similar to how her family and friends reported it to be. Meredith chose to embody the narrative from family in education that in teaching there will be good and bad days but that the kids are the most important. She embodies their message of go with the flow and shares how the knowledge of what she needs to accomplish energizes her to plan for her students.

> I have a unique personal situation where a lot of my friends or their partners are teachers, and even my family members, although they may not directly teach, still, like in a traditional setting, but they still have some sort of capacity to teach. So I think it just kind of varies for the most part, but a lot of times I describe it that we take it day by day. What I have planned could be completely different than what we do. I know the time that I have to show up and

> the time that I should leave, um, but at the end of the day, it's we could go down a rabbit hole of what's happening and that's why like, I personally love teaching is that I know like what I need to accomplish or what my standard objective is, and I like taking the unique approach and not using an overly scripted curriculum. To be able to achieve that because I know my students don't respond well to it, especially since I don't respond well to it as an adult who's like, been through so much in education so that mostly I say that I have 18 best friends that are seven and eight years old, and I just get to act like a kid and get paid for it mostly. So it's pretty awesome. Yes, which is pretty awesome.

She ends this narrative circling back to the idea that teaching is both good and bad but that ultimately for her the joy of working with the kids each day is worth it. This overlap between the personal stories she heard growing up at the feet of educators and her current professional understanding of as she terms it, "the realities of the classroom" align with Mockler's (2011) Identity Theories position that out of this overlap can emerge a touchstone or central focus for what she expects as a teacher. Just like Meredith, this overlap could lead to a heightened interest in professional development as she aims to address any conflicts with her guiding principles by actively seeking solutions.

Additional narratives within this theme, looked at how she thought about and approached stories that she perceived as hard times or bad days. In each of the narratives she came back to the same message shared above, "take it day to day" or "I love this so much" For her riding the waves of good and bad days was possible because she had embodied the narrative from friends and family that, that is a natural part of working in education and that her love for the classroom can survive the hard times.

"TRUST ME"

Meredith refutes the message that teachers are incapable or can't be trusted to lesson plan for their students. While she never reports being told that she has to follow a script, it was encouraged and purchased by the district to improve learning in her school. Therefore, I chose to categorize this narrative as being told by curriculum companies, administration, and state

policies that encourage their use. Meredith recounts a story below of a time when she felt confident in herself as a teacher.

> One time for sure stands out to me. I had every principal and academic coach of elementary (*schools*) come and watch me teach a math lesson plus small groups for an hour and a half. And I was like okay, well that's very interesting. Me being a first-year teacher, new curriculum, and you're gonna come watch me teach. That's really fun. And then hearing the post conference from my principal and academic coach, they're like, we were really picking at straws trying to figure out like, what to improve on your lesson. And they were like even the head of elementary for the county. was like, I don't really have anything. And the funny thing was, I didn't use the actual math curriculum. It was like, just the standard for it. And everyone was like, We had no idea. And I was like, I know I'm like, you can just trust me to teach and I can do it. Um, so that was a time where I felt really confident and kind of like calling out the curriculum and that, just because it needs to work for the majority doesn't mean it has to, work for people who actually know what they're doing. Or can prove that they know what they're doing. So that gave me a lot more leeway for the rest of the year, which was really nice, which is really nice.

Meredith chose not to follow the curriculum the day the officials came in to observe and instead taught a lesson she had created addressing the same standards but in a way that she felt was better for her class. She was confident in her professional identity or who she is as a teacher and her unique strengths. As conveyed in the narrative, she reports the confidence and freedom this choice provided her when the administration, coaches, and district officials praised her knowledge of content and her students.

However, in other narratives within this theme, she tells stories of her school and her grade-level team's perception of expectations. Again, she hears a narrative that they were not capable or knowledgeable on how to address gaps in student learning best. The narrative from administration and district officials positions her in a reflective stance where she questions the touchstone of confidence she has in her capability as a teacher. She relayed that information in the next story. In the beginning of the story, she notes the change in mindset of the staff and herself since the state test results came out.

> I feel like recently there's been a lot more rough weeks than there has been really positive weeks. Which to me is kind of, I don't want to say, disappointing, but just kind of like man, that's not how I envisioned teaching to be to me. So this past year, my school we just found out that we were a level one school. We kind of knew that that was going to happen. And so now we're trying to stay off the list, and there's all this pressure on these fourth, third, fourth, and fifth-grade students you know, like the pump these numbers, pump these numbers, and it's like, no, that's not what school is for, like the student is not just a number. So I think that whole atmosphere has just been really stressful, and it's changing like a lot of attitudes and a lot of mindsets.
>
> Um, so I mean, they're well aware of that (*the frustration with data conversations*). And kind of like the attitude is, do the best that you can. And then we're just gonna move them (*students*) up and I was like, that's not *(pause)* but we're not doing anything to solve it. Like, we're just putting kind of a band aid over it or some little stitches, but it's a botched job.

Above, you hear her grapple with what she views as a lackluster response. This tension went against her moral anchor of doing what is best for students and served as a "catalyst" (Mockler, 2011, p. 522). She continues and outlines how this catalyst propels her toward action whereby she puts faith in her own identity and ability to best meet her students' needs.

> So it's not a okay, you know what, let's just hold off on, you know, teaching according to the pacing guide, and let's really, like dive deep into this. So they really have a good understanding.
>
> So it's taking away from, like, my small group time then because that's when I'm doing a lot of reteaching. And instead of doing, you know, just quick, "Oh, you know what? You keep forgetting to carry your one over when we're adding it's okay" whole class. Now. "Remember, when we do like nine plus two, it is 11. It is not 10." And so really like going back to those basics, but they're (*administration*) like, we're not gonna give you support for it because we care about third, fourth and fifth grade because they're the test grades and we don't want to be responsible for us being a level one school again.

Her frustration is evident, and she continues the narrative to detail how she feels confident in her ability to both modify instruction to meet student needs and justify her choices with her belief that the data will show over time and that the social emotional growth of her students is equally important.

> So it's like, we hear you, but also nothing's gonna really change for you. So that's where I'm like, Okay, there's a lot of like, I'm being vulnerable and saying, Okay, I'm using all these different strategies. I'm like, teaching my heart out at this point. I mean, I'm pulling out you know, all these different activities, hands on things. We're using magazines, you know, we're doing all the different games and it's still just like, it's not being shown, I guess, and the data or how they're judging, essentially whether or not these kids are learning that's like these kids are kids. Like there's so many different aspects that are going into it that are not being accounted for accurately.

These two narratives highlight Meredith's refusal of the narrative that she is lacking in the knowledge to best meet the needs of the students in her care as well as the action she took to demonstrate her commitment to students and her teaching ability. At several other points in the additional narratives in this theme, she would recount the title of this narrative section, "TRUST ME!"

"so much more to it"

Meredith initially hears a narrative from society and her personal schooling experience that school is for academic growth. This narrative is retold to her by administrators, parents, fellow teachers, and teacher preparation programs. However, her experience as a teacher has led her to refuse this message and instead tell a story about another viewpoint on the purpose of school.

> I think they I, that one, really this first aid and educating those leading future generations and more than academics (*referencing her poem*). I think that one is a really big piece just because like school is that place where everyone always thinks that oh, you learn how to read you learn how to do math, but I mean, there's so much more to it. Like there's teaching of the social emotional skills. There's like your soft skills how to be a leader. How to cooperate, how to work within a team. Having art class, having music class, like school, its that all-encompassing environment where like, further encouraging those students to pursue those different outlets other than just academics is to me like what I love seeing of like, oh my gosh, that drawing is so cool. Thank you for doing that during a brain break instead of you know, running around the room crazy like a student for free time and figuring out like those interests for students. And really using those to my advantage and then allowing them to continue to practice those skills is amazing. And I love it. Yeah.

Following this story in Interview Two, I asked for further clarification on how her perspective on schools' importance for more than academics has changed over time: Can you tell me a story about how that's evolved as you move into your second year of teaching?

> Um, I mean, I can think of like, last year, I had one kiddo who, like for the most part, everybody else in my class loved doing like our brain breaks and she was like, I don't, just, I don't really feel it. She has an issue walking where she's super inward and pigeon toed when she walks. So it's hard for her to do those movements and she gets frustrated really, really easily. And she was also a behavior (*problem*) where I would have to have someone come in to help escort her from the room, or like take her from the room or have my class like evacuate from the room. Because she was so overwhelmed. so frustrated that she would just break down and scream or cry, and there was no way to get her back. And then we figured out Oh, okay, things don't work because we just throw those at people (*try a bunch of things*). So then we figured out. Oh, she loves to draw like not just loves to draw is obsessed with it. And it was like, hey, you know, when you're starting to get really frustrated, and you just need that cooldown moment, we have a notebook for you, and seeing like the progression as well as like how many notebooks we had gone through in the year was absolutely amazing. And then our spring art show, I think it was like one of her like doodles as she calls it was like actually selected to be put in the art show. And I was like, Oh my gosh, look at this. This is amazing. You didn't even like try to do this yet. Here we are. And it's in an art show. Like that's fantastic. So now instead of being I think it was like a YouTuber. In the beginning of the year, she's like, I want to be a comic book artist. And I was like I love that for you. So just very, very different than seeing that like progress happen.

This narrative theme demonstrated her evolvement as an educator. Mockler (2011) describes this mediation of experience into her professional identity as a reflexive process whereby she reflects on individual experiences and moments, holds them up against her notion of what it means to be a teacher, and changes her perspective over time. The narratives within this theme are examples of how she has internalized the importance of meeting her class where they are and finding strategies that will help them grow beyond the believed purpose of teachers to demonstrate student growth academically.

“speak up”

Meredith hears a message of disrespect for teachers from her community and state. In the following two narratives, we hear Meredith discuss the message she received from her state and community about education and her reasoning for considering a move to the Northeast.

> I know within like the state, it's like, I don't think teachers are as respected as other states. And I think this system kind of prevents teachers from being able to take action and ownership with that, which is really sad. Whereas I had seen on the news that I think it was either Oregon or Washington where there was a huge strike of the teachers, and it was like, 50,000 students were not reporting to school. And I was like, Oh my gosh, like, imagine that

> and then I saw like, their starting salary and I was like, at 50,000. I was like, Oh my gosh, what are you kidding me?

She references seeing teachers on strike in other parts of the country and recognizing that this avenue allows teachers to have a voice in conversations around education. This realization is in contrast to her experience where teachers are not respected and due to state policy are unable to organize to have a voice at the table. She pauses for a moment to reflect on specific policies within education as a whole that she does not agree with, such as standardized testing and lack of social support for students before recognizing the role of messaging or communication with the outside world about the role of education within our greater society and community.

> So, I think, especially in the United States, the message of education is so gray at this point, that it's very alarming. And like, we as a country, I think, could should kind of like step back and reevaluate what education should be especially like within a K through 12, especially within an elementary setting. I'm sorry, third, fourth and fifth graders do not need to be taking tests that determine whether or not they can go on to a next grade level. But I think having that the joy back in teaching and back in schools is so important. Just because schools, for whatever reason has become that pinpoint of targeting vulnerability for them (*politicians*). And I mean, it makes sense, but as far as targeting the most vulnerable populations, it's not something we need to do. We need to re-educate people on why they're in school. And the value of it as well. And I think that can change the message of what education is, who teachers are, and like why we go into education, knowing like, where it is currently, where it has been, and like where it will be, or hopefully will be. But I definitely think there needs to be a lot of change within the messaging that is perceived.

This focus on messaging leads to a story on her current plans to possibly relocate from the Southeast to the Northeast and why a move appeals to her beyond being closer to her family. She continues to address this narrative theme and recounts desiring the option to have a voice in some way about policies she views as detrimental to students and teachers. Here, she goes further, proposing that the communities or cultures of the schools in the stories she has heard of in the Northeast show respect for education by funding schools with the resources they need and paying teachers a living wage.

> So I was talking with one of my mom's cousins who's a teacher in upstate New York. She's been teaching for like 15 years I think with a master's and is clearing six figures and the cost of living where they are is relatively pretty low. I was like, okay, that's kind of like a no, a no brainer. Like I already have my master's degree. I have two certifications working on a third for the state of Tennessee. I heard back that I might be losing one of my certifications, because it's not going to be a direct transfer. But in the long run, I know just because one, there's a union within New York. So I'm going to actually have what I say matter to some degree and I'm gonna have a lot more support and a lot more respect from people in the community. Parents, just that message is so much different because whatever they are doing, they're getting it done to where they are spending money on students, they are focusing on education. So it's a very drastically different message. I've submitted my application, I started doing the workshops for what I need for my license. And I have to study for my like, two praxis tests essentially for New York, possibly a third one, so I can get one of my licenses transferred over. But yeah, but excited and I just need to change to I feel like I've kind of like outgrown my span, and I want at first I was like, I'm not ready for change. I was asked last year if I wanted to move up to fourth grade, and said I didn't want to change, I want to know my stuff and really get it. But now I want that challenge. I want that change. And if I'm gonna make a change to like a new school, new grade level, I just want a new place entirely. So I was like, let's do it all.

Meredith ends the narrative with her decision to make the move to the Northeast. The story of teaching told by the policies in her current community and state have made her feel disrespected and unvalued, and she is refusing to accept that; that is the only story of teaching in America, and she is seeking a new place to take the next steps in her career.

Other narratives within this theme, focused on the need for teachers to use their voices for leadership when making an instructional choice outside of the planned curriculum or when speaking up on behalf of students or working conditions for teachers. Throughout this narrative theme, you could feel the confidence in her voice; she felt she had a message about teaching that others needed to hear.

This narrative theme, looks at the convergence of Mockler's (2011) three domains of teacher identity. Throughout this theme we see Meredith navigate her personal needs and beliefs, her professional goals and morals, and the political reality of her context. Borne, out of her conception of what it means to "be a teacher," was a desire for a voice at the table in decisions

that impact classrooms and students (Mockler, 2011, p. 522). Her frustration was limited and bound in her current context due to the policies limiting teachers protections and collective bargaining. Her narrative shows some ways that she is considering what it means for the community to support teachers and her decision that instead of exiting education she will stay but relocate to an area that more aligns with her values.

Betty

Betty joined me from her classroom for our first meeting and was excited to join the study. She began our first interview, recounting a story about a friend who is currently student teaching. She laughed as she remembered the stress of her teacher training but commented that she felt well prepared for the classroom and that she tries to encourage her friend that all the hard work will be worth it. This simple story to start us off foreshadowed the positivity and love for teaching that permeated Betty's narratives. Before our first interview concluded, she was already planning how to use Canva to create her artwork. She created a collage of images, as seen in Figure 5, that each represented a story or component of teaching that is important to her. Betty participated in the story circle via Zoom, and though she experienced some connection issues, she continued to rejoin the group and stayed logged in even after the conclusion of the circle to chat with her fellow participants. Her love of her school community was noticed by the other participants and she ended the night offering to let everyone know if any jobs opened up for next school year.

During her second interview, Betty referenced why she chose to include the graphic of "your voice matters" saying,

> Your voice matters. I like feel like I tell my students that all the time. I've always told them, "I'm like you have a say, like if someone is bothering you, you are important enough to speak up. Stand up for yourself. Tell a trusted adult," but also like their voice matters in their learning. So, I'm all about questioning, like ask me all the questions so that you can understand this, "your voice matters, just ask." As an educator, I've learned

> that my voice is important, especially in like IEP meetings or with data meetings, in all the things, I am the biggest advocate for my students. So, if I'm not speaking up, then like they're not getting the services they need. So just like it matters there.

Her perspective on the use of voice for both teachers and students previews the messages about teaching and teaching identities that she interacts regularly with within her own life.

Betty in this first snapshot of her artwork, hints at a central tenet to how she perceives herself as an educator. This idea of "your voice matters" threads throughout her narrative themes and serves a "moral touchstone" by which she considers mediating narratives about teaching into her identity (Mockler, 2011, p. 522).

Part of the genesis of her positive outlook on teaching and teaching identities may have come from her embodiment of her math coach's narrative about her. In the first two themes, Betty speaks to her ownership of the narratives from her math coach, superintendent, administration, and co-teacher, that she is knowledgeable in both teaching skills and her content area, as well as the importance of her personal presence in the school. In the final three narrative themes, Betty refers back to this touchstone, "your voice matters," as she navigates, refusing and disregarding messages about teaching and her students.

"you need to come in here"

In this first narrative, I chose "you need to come in here" as the title because Betty shared in the narrative below that one story, she is told about teaching by her math coach is that she (Betty) is a good teacher with ideas to share. When weighed against her "moral touchstone" that "her voice matters," Betty took on the confidence bestowed on her by her math coach (Mockler, 2011, p. 522). The narrative below was told in response to her artwork's plant image.

> I would also say my math coach. She was my mentor last year. She was in this classroom before so last year was her first year as a math coach. But she had been in this classroom for, forever so she was always, "Oh, I'm like one step away." And it was never in a way

> like I'm gonna take over your classroom. It was always, in a way, let me help out, if you want me in here, great; if you don't like, let me know. But, she always comes to our math planning meetings and our science planning is every week, we will come together, like me any other teacher, and she's in it with us. And sometimes it's her teaching me how to do math, you know? But I feel she definitely has watered me a bunch in terms of just, teaching me the curriculum, even with like parents like set boundaries ABCD she's also a really good hype man, between me and my administration, she's always bragging about me to them, and saying, "you need to come in here like she's doing great." That's why I feel she's the reason I have a bunch of teachers come into the classroom I had a group of teachers come last week I have another group coming this week. She's all about, let people see you're doing a great job! I know your year two, but, be proud of the things that are happening in your classroom.

Betty's description of her math coach as her "hype man" stuck out to me. She recognizes the effect her math coach has on her overall confidence in the classroom. The ramifications of her coach not only using words to show Betty that she is impressed with her work but also her actions of talking to administration and reaching out to district officials and other teachers to visit Betty's classroom demonstrated her knowledge of Betty's pedagogy and her confidence in Betty's ability.

In this narrative theme, Betty also referenced her co-teacher as another voice in her life that shares the narrative that Betty is knowledgeable and worthy no matter how new of a teacher she is. Her co-teacher has over 12 years of classroom experience but is new to Betty's school this year. Betty noted how from her co-teacher's first day, she viewed Betty as an expert in her classroom and the school. She would seek Betty out for advice and back her up when the kids try to pit them against each other.

Betty's embodiment of the narrative from her math coach and co-teacher that she is knowledgeable and good at teaching has built her confidence and helped fuel her positive outlook on life at school.

> I have a new, I call her my co-teacher, but she not, she is just the teacher I share kids with you know, she's my ELA partner. I guess that's what it would be the partner teacher. She was new to the school this year, but it's like, her 12th year of teaching. She's so great

> because it's like I'm brand new and she's like, “well I want to learn from you. What's it like at school?” It's just, she's very consistent, no kid can be like, “mom said I could do this,” you know, none of the mom or dad stuff. We'd always be like, alright, we're talking to each other, so we have very clear communication between the two of us. And she's always saying, “I just want you to know like you're doing great” I'm, “mom, like I'm barely remembering to write the PLC notes” it's fun. She's just like, “oh, like you're doing a great job.” And I feel like everyone in my school is just very good at encouraging. We have leaders in the school that will create just random things for example during Thanksgiving it was a laminated piece of paper that said, put on a sticky note who you're thankful for and put it in their mailbox, and then they would pass it on to the next person. So, there's just like that sense of like community like all around.

Throughout this theme Betty, continues to mediate the math coach’s and her co-teacher’s confidence in her knowledge and capability into her conception of her own teacher identity. Mockler (2011) refers to this reflexive process whereby others give voice to parts of your identity that then manifest as a way an internal process of identity becomes external or a viewable part of your identity or “stories to live by” (Clandinin et al.,2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

“the school will not function without you”

Starting at the top of the district on down to Betty’s administration and coaches, there is a narrative that teachers are important and vital to the work the district is doing. Betty spoke directly about the ways the superintendent sets the tone for how teachers are viewed within her district when talking about the puzzle piece in her artwork.

At the beginning of the narrative, she notes his insider status as a recent teacher. I interpreted her response to his being a former teacher as one that increases his favorability in her eyes.

> I would say, maybe it's the superintendent the person like in charge of the entire district. He was an educator like not too long ago. So his main concern, I think last year was his first year, and his main concern has been all about the teachers. During the first day of school, the first week when you're in inservice, he visits every school in the district, which is like 150. So, he finds time in his busy schedule because I'm sure it's really busy. And he like spends 30 minutes at each school just introducing himself, staying, waiting

> for questions, etc. That also means, like, teacher raises. He's given us raises both years, so, he's like, we're gonna find it in the budget. Like, y'all need money. And we need you here. Our district is almost as big as [*the local city district]*, but our by employment wise we are, well, more employed. He was like, "I feel like in that county a lot of people are burning out whether it's behavior or whatever. And I don't want that happening here. So, you as a teacher, tell me what you need. How can I keep you here. I need you, like the school will not function without you. The district will not function without you." And so I feel like, overall, as superintendents like we got this. Even before breaks, he'll email us and he's like, "Hey, you're doing a great job. Hang up, like hang up everything right now. go hang out with your family." When he comes to the school every year, he tells us he's like, "if you miss if you stay 30 minutes later in the classroom every day, then you've wasted" I don't remember the hours it was like maybe 60, 70, 80 "hours of time with your family at home." So, he's like "go home, like you have papers. Leave them at school sometimes just know that overall your family is more important. Like, please go home and take care of yourself."

This message of her importance to the district was not directed solely to Betty and yet she perceives his commitment to teachers as deeply personal. She references that when she refers to the ways that he insists on teachers maintaining their personal lives so that they don't burn out. Betty connects his commitment to teachers as one reason why her district is fully staffed as compared to another large local school district.

This message from the district is also found within her local school administration. Betty told a narrative about her principal's response to an upset parent.

> Well, my principal immediately asked me to remove them from Dojo. "They're no longer allowed to contact you." She called me and checked in. She's like, "how are you doing?" She checked in on me first. She was like, "This is it. I'm gonna send it. Let me know what you think."

Here her principal's choice to call and check in on her during a disagreement with a parent demonstrates to Betty how her principal views her as important. The principal wants to ensure that she is okay before making a decision about how to respond to the parent. She continues below with this narrative highlighting her principal's response.

> So she's all about advocating for us. She's even told us in meetings with parents. She's like, "honestly, if you were in the wrong, I'm still gonna take your side and later we'll talk about it but like we are here for each other." She was basically said to me, "here's the

> email and it said, “you're no longer” (*she pauses and provides some background*) Oh, the dad doesn't have any contact info online because he doesn't want to be contacted again.
>
> So, she emails mom and she's says, “Hey, like this happened? Do you know what happened? You are no longer allowed to speak to my educator. You're no longer allowed on Dojo until we have a parent-teacher conference with admin involved and with the student involved because he needs to be reminded of the fifth grade and the schoolwide expectations. In the meantime, you can email my educator, but you have to cc me on every single email” like blah blah blah. “Don't ever speak to my educator like that again,” like that kind of deal. I was like, well, I had someone in my corner. This is good. So, of course, they don't respond or whatever. But I would say, even with hard parents, even situations last year, where, like, my admin is 100%, They have my back whether it means calling the parent after I've talked to them and being like, “Hey, you got any more questions?” So I would say they're right there to champion being just great even in those hard moments.

Betty’s district and administrator’s narrative that teachers are knowledgeable and vital to the school was not only told to Betty and the rest of the staff but also shown in their actions. This has led to a school culture where Betty chooses to embody her knowledge and importance and give back to others. Below, I saw her reference her own and the staff’s taking on this attitude as well.

> I don't know, I feel like if I asked for help, I'm gonna get it everywhere. Like people will send a school email and be like, “Hey, does anyone have like 10 ornament hooks” I need a few” and then within minutes they are like “alright, I have the need met 12 times over.” Like that, like just describes my school and I know it's not the same with other people. Because I've talked to some other teachers, like my friends, and they're like, oh my goodness, “Are you sure?” Like really it is. It doesn't feel real. Sometimes you know?

Following the story circle, other teachers from my participant group were drawn to Betty’s stories of how her district, school, and fellow teachers support each other and back each other up because the district sets the tone that teachers are important and takes steps to make sure it is sustainable for everyone. My other participants, by the end of Betty’s narrative, were asking if there would be any job openings in the Fall. They, too, were drawn to this narrative in her school system.

Betty interacts with the news media, other teachers, and societal narratives that tell her teaching is hard, and not worth it. Drawing on her embodiment of the narratives above as “moral

touchstones," Betty refuses those narratives and takes action to help her focus and remember her worth in the two narrative themes, "I choose joy," and "teaching is good, it is needed, it is valued" (Mockler, 2011, p. 522).

"I choose joy"

In this narrative theme, I grouped stories where Betty referenced challenges in her teaching practice and how she responded. While the majority of Betty's narratives focus on positive stories about her district, school, kids, and classroom, I suspected that it wasn't all sunshine and was interested in how she responds when the narrative told is that teaching is hard. However, without me having to ask directly she brought it up when she talked about her graphic in her artwork that says, "today, I choose joy."

> I choose joy. Just like finding joy in the midst of right now this part of the school year is really weird because it's in between Thanksgiving break, and Christmas break, but it's only like three weeks and the kids keep asking, when's the next Christmas activity? Like what are we doing? So just finding joy in the midst of, the busyness or the really hard stuff, because teachers we deal with so much, whether that's like DCS reports or just like knowing what the kids are coming in with or the parents sometimes are difficult or the attitudes are sometimes difficult, you know. So, just like can I find joy in the hard. I try not to at the end of the day, especially if I have a behavior problem, right a dismissal. It's so easy to leave and be like, "Wow, that was a terrible day." But sometimes I stop myself and I'm like, hold on. That was only five minutes of my day. Like, what were the good parts? Where can I see the joy?

Here, we see her talk about her reframing of hard events in her day or week to intentionally recognize that while the hard is a part of her day, it was not the whole day. She went on to talk about what happens when, in reflection, she finds a mistake she made. Betty teaches 5th grade math and, in the narratives in this theme, references multiple times the challenge of her own content knowledge. She identifies this as a hard part of teaching, but she continues to reframe her weakness below.

> I would say the hard stuff is kind of self-explanatory, too. We learn a lot, like as teachers I'm constantly learning. When they said that you were a lifelong learner. They weren't joking. Sometimes I'll be teaching and then I'll get to block two and I'm like, I taught that

> lesson wrong? I'm gonna have to reteach block one tomorrow. So, I'm like alright kids like I'm a learner with you, it's fine. But then my students are, constantly learning so much that I'm like, your brain is probably going to explode, how do you keep all this up in here? Because sometimes I'll do it, and I'm like, Okay, I got it. But then I realized I have a lot more experience than they do. And then I'm like, Alright, let me get them some manipulatives. Yeah, I feel like learning. It's a two-way street and teaching like you're learning just as much as the kids are it just might be something different, you know.

Here she switches back to the smiley face on her artwork and connects her action of reframing hard times for herself to reframing hard things for her students.

> So back to the smiley face once again. I try and bring lots and lots of joy. Sometimes, like, I'm the only smile they see from the time they leave to the time they get back, you know, so just like being that great face in the mornings. Like they're always like, going on, I'm tired. I'm like, okay, I know you are, but I'm not a morning person. But when they walk through the door, I get going because I'm like, you know, like they need someone just to hype them up and just be like, wow, like you're awesome. Like, it's the kids you know? Like just having fun there.

When, looking over the stories as a collection in this theme, I noted a connection between her embodiment of the narrative that she is knowledgeable and important as a teacher and her refusal of the story that teaching is hard and not worth it. In the next narrative, she reflects on her confidence in having the district math coaches visit her room and concludes the narrative by noting this connection between her confidence and her reframing of hard times.

> I probably had 13 different math coaches between my two blocks come from the county. Like the math coaches. And honestly, I killed that lesson. It was great. My questioning, like, I was going so quick in between groups. No kid was able to be off task because, I just knew the content. I just remember just being like okay, like I know the struggles they're gonna have like, data on just not being able to show their student work and I just like to encourage them. Anytime I have teachers in the classroom, I honestly forget they're there because I'm like, this is about my kids. So, if they leave I just hope they hyped up the kids. Who cares if they say anything about me? You know.
>
> But then, they laughed, and you know, some of these math coaches have been coaches for like 10 years, but they laughed and immediately told my principals, and my math coach, "We want to bring our teachers here. We want to show them how to do the framework." Because I think that's what they were coming in to see that it's possible for, like, a newer teacher to, like, be strict with the pacing, but also following the framework for district. It's really encouraging because some days I do have lessons where I'm like, I did it all but

> there was no retention. I don't know if it was me. Or my kids, you know. So it was nice, just to be, hyped up in that way. I was like, wow, like, I felt really good.

While most of Betty's narratives focus on the positive aspects of teaching, this collection looked at the narrative she heard prior to entering the classroom and heard through her experiences in her school that teaching is hard. But Betty's context and her embodiment of the narratives told by her district and school help her to reflect on her touchstones and refuse that story. She then is empowered to take action to reframe the hard things and remember the joy of teaching again.

"teaching is good, it is needed, it is valued"

Betty hears a narrative in the media and in state policies that teachers are lazy and a narrative from teachers on social media that they are burned out and need more money. But she refuses those narratives and takes action to curate the voices she allows into her worldview. Here, we see the overlap between her knowledge of the greater societal narratives about teaching and its intersection with her personal and professional experience. She is choosing the voices she allows to speak into her teaching identity and is reflective about the impact of negative voices on her mental health.

In this first narrative, she discusses how she discounts news media and society's perceptions of teaching because they lack knowledge about what teaching is really like. She also references burned out teachers voices briefly which she circles back to later in the greater narrative.

> First of all, I try not to watch the news, especially in terms of education, because I'm like some of these lawmakers. They've never been in the classroom. I want to make them come in my classroom and teach and then tell me that, that law is gonna work kind of deal. I would say overall I feel like education has a really negative connotation like to the world, like burnout teachers, post a video and be like, we need more money. Isn't everyone reading the comments in there? Like, you only worked nine months out of the year like, you don't need that and let's be real, that's a whole other topic. Like that's a whole nother conversation. That's like, okay, like there's so many people that are just like, teachers should do x y, z. But then like, they've never experienced the classroom, or their kids are grown like 20 years ago. And it's like older people that are like, well, when we

> were in school, we did this this and that. It's like, times of change, you know, like, buckle up like this is how we're doing it, like whatever.

In the first part of this narrative, you can hear her flippancy at people having opinions about education but a lack of knowledge about the current state of teaching. Their lack of understanding seems to help her discard this message, but she continues below and details actions she takes to help maintain her mental health and perspective about teaching in light of a larger negative viewpoint in society.

> So I try not to feed into the negativity. I would stay on a bright side. For example, on a state level. I guess just even with standards. It's cool that I can text my friends in Knoxville, and we may not be teaching the same lesson, but we're teaching the same standard. So being like, how did those teachers approach it so it's cool to see, if a kid went from [*one city to another in the state]* they're still learning the same thing just in different capacities. What else? Teachers Pay Teachers. I found some good resources there and that's more like, I guess, countrywide but also being able to look up certain standards, whether that's even just for, morning meeting or, organization and classroom management.

Above, she again reframes policies about standards and content which are divisive in her community right now to seek out another lens that says there is value in having a shared set of goals for each grade level. She takes action to seek out that lens. Continuing below, she returns to the messages about teaching delivered on social media and how she approaches her engagement with those platforms.

> I feel like with social media, you can choose to be on the negative side of teaching or on the positive side of teaching. Like your social media feed is all about your own outcome algorithm. And I've learned when I've interacted with negative things, which I don't even give those the time of day. I will not comment on them or whatever. But, if I interact and zoom in on the picture, the next thing I know, it's like, oh, teaching is terrible. I'm like, Hold on. No, scroll past. You know.
>
> So, I've curated my feed to make it a positive thing because I love it. And I love seeing new teachers or teachers that are student teachers, and you're like, Please give me your honest take. And like, you know, someone here needs to tell you that teaching is good. It is needed. It is valued. I'd say overall, I see it as a positive, but that's because I don't feed into the negative stuff. If I watched the news, I would say that education is very negative from the outside looking in, but I try not to, you know, govern myself like that because I've already got another 100 Other things to deal with.

While Betty is not immune to the negative messages communicated in the media and on social media, she is taking action to curate the voices she allows into her worldview and staying reflective about the affects her engagement with various voices has on her mental well-being. This curation I viewed as a mediation in Mockler's (2011) theory of identity whereby we see her evaluate and decide to remain aware of how she perceives her own teaching identity.

"this is what matters"

Betty's district comes to deliver data talks regularly to her school as a monitoring tool for how students and teachers are performing. These data talks send a message to Betty that the most important thing is how her students data looks in comparison to other teachers, the school, and the district. Betty disregards this message of student data is all that matters and prioritizes a valued voice of her math coach who affirms that she is doing great and that the data will come with time. In the following narrative, she recounts a recent data meeting.

> And even like in terms of data. I have a bunch of kids who came in and their diagnostic their scoring second grade at the beginning of the year. And I am pressured to like get them up and we just did a countywide benchmark. And they showed us our scores compared to the county, and a lot of mine are lower. But then she (*math coach*) was like, remember, you have a high ESL population. A lot of your kids can't read. You have a lot of IEPs so, look at their growth, you know? So she will take the data and where someone from Central Office is just looking at the numbers she will remind me they're not looking at like the smaller picture. She's like, remember this is what matters. So she doesn't want bad data to stand in the way. She's like, you're doing it right. The data will prove itself by the end of the year. So just keep trucking on.

Her math coach's voice of confidence in her teaching ability provides Betty the opportunity to shake off the pressure from the district that all that matters is the numbers on benchmark testing or other diagnostics. Betty again here looks to valued voices and moral touchstones in her teaching identity to help her navigate the pressure from state and district policies concerning data. Ultimately, in this narrative, we see her discard the message that her instruction is not

sufficient for growing her students and tune into the voice of her math coach as she reevaluates her own knowledge of her students and what is best for their instruction.

Throughout all of Betty's narratives, I found her embodiment of the messages from her superintendent and math coach that she is a valued and knowledgeable teacher established touchstones in her teaching identity that she turned to when faced with catalysts such as hard days, negative messages, and data pressure. Out of the catalysts she began to act as a teacher advocate (hosting guest teachers and coaches), hone her professional learning (seek out strategies to meet her kids needs), and commit to personal development (curate the voices in her life) (Mockler, 2011). The perspective of her as knowledgeable from day one, that while she was learning others were also learning from her in these narratives showed a deep effect on her teaching identity.

Looking at 6 Teachers

Following the first four rounds of data analysis, I went back to the transcripts and themes to consider what patterns could be found across participants. The findings of the cross-case analysis revealed four primary themes: *you control the narrative, your voice matters, keep the main thing the main thing, and we get by with a little help from our friends.* In addition, I observed that two participants consistently emphasized a strong voice and narrative in their stories, which stood out distinctly from the other four cases where this particular voice was absent or less pronounced. I titled this theme, *I see you*. In Table 4 below, I detail the frequency of the themes across participants.

You Control the Narrative

Across all six participants, there was an effort to control the voices that they let speak into their teacher identity. Four participants reported ignoring narratives of teaching because they viewed the voice as ignorant. According to Mockler's (2011) Theory of Identity, teachers weigh

experiences or perspectives against their established understanding of what it means to be a teacher before deciding whether to embody, refuse, or disregard the message. Participants' choice to disregard messages they deem as ill-informed establish a metric by which these teachers are weighing the opinions that surround them. This was further seen by all six participants in how they curate the voices they hear in their lives through friendships and social media.

All six participants carefully curated voices from their fellow teachers and social media networks within their narratives, ensuring alignment with their values. Social media use was shared among the participants as a way that they interacted with teaching identities. Teachers referred to curating their social media accounts to avoid false representations by people no longer in the classroom or with an overall negative view. Instead, they referenced intentionally seeking accounts on social media as a way to feel seen and entertained. All six participants sought out this voice of teaching and teaching identities as opposed to having more routine interactions with the voices of district policy, administration, coaches, and students as a part of their job.

In addition, all six participants reported thoughtful consideration of the relationships they build with colleagues to best align with their values. Throughout this theme, we see how participants curate which voices they are allowing to speak into their identity. Mockler's (2011) Theory of Identity addresses this phenomenon as a mediation whereby teachers are discerning who they are as a teacher as well as who they are not. This curation of voices is a glimpse into how teachers may be navigating this process.

Your Voice Matters

Four participants told stories where they spoke from Mockler's (2011) conception of the teacher advocate stance, recognizing themselves as having a voice that matters or should matter in conversations about curriculum, student needs, and the larger profession. Meredith talked about

her perspective on the importance of her voice throughout her narratives. In the artwork she prepared for interview two she referenced the importance of teacher voice in two letters of her acrostic poem.

> A – advocate for those still learning the power of their own voice
> C – change – striving for students, curriculum, system, and attitude to change for the better

Specifically, participants found that grappling with situations conflicting with their "moral touchstones" served as a catalyst, emboldening them to advocate for students and fellow educators. During the story circle, Dean commented on his increased responsibility to the other teachers in his building due to the weight he perceives his voice to carry.

Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

Melissa, Ali, Meredith, and Betty all shared narratives about being in teaching for the kids. They each expressed this narrative of teaching coming from their perception of the profession prior to entry, which has been affirmed as they have entered the classroom. The importance of this story, that teachers love kids, to their identity is seen when Meredith says, "I love this so much!" Or when Ali notes, "this is why I do this." Notably, Aiden and Dean also told stories about centering and wanting to enter teaching for the kids, but both noted that they have also refused this message by adding that the kids cannot be their only reason.

We get by with a Little Help from Our Friends

Melissa, Aiden, Dean, Ali, and Betty all told stories about teacher friends both within their school and in the profession at large. They referenced how these friends "get it" and "know what it is like." The also each noted that they curated this core group carefully to exclude those whose voices tend to get negative. Each of their core groups also included voices from their curated social media feeds that told stories about teaching where they felt seen or entertained. Meredith did not reference a core group of teacher friends with whom she interacted with on a

regular basis but did discuss her family network of educators as a supportive voice in her life. narratives.

I see you

Throughout the analysis phases and in the composition of the narrative findings, Betty's stories stood separate from the other five participants. As referenced in her findings section, Betty showed an embodiment of stories of teacher leadership, competence, and importance from her district, administration, coaches, and fellow teachers. This narrative wove through the rest of her stories as a loud, resounding voice of positivity and joy in her life as a teacher. As noted in her narrative themes of refusal and disregard, she falls back on this story told by the leadership and culture of her school in her decision-making process and how she responds to other stories of teaching.

Similarly, some of Dean's narratives spoke of how those in power saw him as more than he did and provided him with networking opportunities and additional professional development. Throughout his other narratives, he would circle back to this idea of his coaches or administration seeing him as competent and capable. During the story circle, he commented on his increased responsibility to the other teachers in his building due to the weight he perceives his voice to carry.

Ali's narratives provided a glimpse into the downsides of inauthentic praise or support that lacks knowledge of individual teaching practices. In her narratives, she refers to her administration's attempts to both support and praise her, which lacked depth of knowledge about what was happening in her classroom. In each instance, she left the interaction feeling disappointed and unseen for the work she was doing each day.

Chapter Summary

This chapter's findings emerged from participants' artwork as well as the interview and story circle transcripts. The findings were organized into seven main sections, one for each teacher participant. The sections for each teacher were then divided into key parts. In the first part, I provided an overview of the participant and their engagement with the study. This section aimed to provide context for the narratives that followed. In the second part, I described the primary themes from each participant's encountered narratives of teaching or teaching identities. Each individual case has their own thematic clusters, where I highlight where participants heard stories of teaching and teaching identities and addressed participants' choice to embody, refuse, or disregard the stories to address my research questions:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do they embody, refuse, or disregard stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

In the final section, I addressed the themes found across participants as well as an outlier in my analysis. I found *you control the narrative, your voice matters, keep the main thing the main thing, and we get by with a little help from our friends* as the primary themes there were seen across the six cases. *I see you,* explored a theme found in two cases that stood out as important to how they consider narratives of teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research questions that guided this qualitative narrative study were: *How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities? How do they embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities? What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?* Nicole Mockler's (2011) Theory of Teacher Identity ungirded the analysis and conceptualization of teacher identity. Through art, interviews, and a story circle, six participants shared their experiences in the elementary classroom and what it means to them to be a teacher. Chapter five will share findings developed from the narrative themes, recommendations for practice and research, and implications for my own next steps as a researcher.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study began to consider how novice teachers navigate the tensions between their personal beliefs and those demonstrated or experienced through interactions with people and their environment. Through their stories and experiences, participants shared their thinking about who they are as people and as teachers. Those involved in education must continue to look beyond the job title of the teacher to deepen our collective understanding of how "who one is as a person has a lot to do with who one is as a teacher" (Olson, 2008, p. 39). The willingness and vulnerability with which participants shared who they are as a person and how they view themselves as a teacher offered the opportunity for a greater understanding of this unique time in a teacher's career.

The existing research base on novice teachers' developing teaching identity suggested that teacher identity development is ongoing and multifaceted, with individuals constantly forming and reforming their conceptions of what it means to be a teacher. Across studies, researchers have found that identity is not fixed but continually evolving and changing as

teachers gain experience. Research into how identity develops through social interactions and awareness has shown some ways that individuals can be supported in their identity development, such as mentoring (Colliander, 2018), prior beliefs (Brown & Heck, 2018; Omidvar & Kislov, 2014), self-awareness (Alsup, 2006; Olson, 2008; Reeves, 2018), teacher education (Avraamidou, 2016; Flores & Day, 2006; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016; Quan et al., 2019), and reflexivity (Fook et al., 2000; Marshall et al., 2021; Wacquant, 1989). However, little is understood about how teachers are navigating the contextual factors of teacher identity such as the stories they hear about teaching from colleagues, families, and society and how they are affecting their teacher identity.

This dissertation study sought to addresses this gap in the research by seeking to understand how novice teachers mediate their personal, professional, and political influences into their idea of what it means to be a teacher. This discussion will focus on three ideas that emerged to understand further how novice teachers are navigating the stories they hear about teaching and their decisions to embody, refuse, or disregard those stories.

My participants' vulnerability in sharing their stories about what it means to be a teacher today offers some clues as to how we can think about novice teacher identity formation. These teachers' stories provided three themes to support teacher identity formation: cultivate your network, find your voice, and check your mirrors. Each of these themes aims to connect the findings of my study with the existing research on teacher identity formation.

Cultivate Your Network

The existing research suggests that formal programs and initiatives aimed at novice teachers offer modest results and instead suggest that these educators most need relationships with other teachers in which they feel comfortable observing, problem-solving, and collaborating (Anderssen et al., 2013; Colliander, 2018; Connolly et al., 2018; Garcia & Weiss, 2019a). My

analysis suggests that my teachers were honing their own teacher identity through strategic relationships.

Lave and Wenger built on this dynamic intersection of individuals and their community in their theory of communities of practice, or the ways people learn and share knowledge within a specific context and community (Holland & Lachicotte, Jr., 2007). My participants all told stories of their movement in and out of groups in teaching and the variable influence of those interactions. Key to my findings was evidence that my participants were carefully curating those groups with thoughtful consideration for whose voices they value. This was seen not only within relationships in their schools or districts but also in their use of teacher social media.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that social interaction is learning that happens unintentionally within a specific context. They labeled this phenomenon situated learning theory, proposing that individuals will learn the habits and skills to become an expert over time through their engaged relationships with the community. Within my participants' experiences, this situated learning provided a window into the complexity of individual schools and who participants chose to enter engaged relationships with and those they did not. The schools where my participants were each situated were high poverty schools in which day-to-day stress was quite high due to data monitoring, behavior management, curriculum oversight, and lack of support. Garcia and Weiss' (2019) seminal report titled *A Perfect Storm* suggested that these challenges are not unique among teachers in high poverty schools. However, interestingly, in the stories told by my participants, their curated group of voices was outside of school organized groups or gatherings and instead involved teachers choosing voices to form a core group with which they rely on to navigate the at times harsh climate of their schools.

Wenger (2000) expanded the original theory, clarifying that in communities of practice, people learn through events and interactions as the process of identity formation. He proposed that the goal of the learning or interaction is not new knowledge but a greater understanding of who you are. My participants echoed this process of identity development. Through their interactions with chosen colleagues, fellow interns, and social media accounts, they began cultivating their own voice in who they are as teachers. They looked to these interactions for guidance, recognition, or simply friendship, but each spoke of how these relationships served as a sounding board for their growing conception of what it means to be a teacher.

Find Your Voice

For the participants in this study, their conceptions of what it means to be a teacher were closely tied to messages they were receiving from friends, colleagues, administrators, parents, and the community, as suggested in the research (Ball, 2003; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). However, through their acts of refusal and disregard of some of these narratives, they were beginning to forge a unique teacher identity of their own. As Nicole Mockler's (2011) theory suggests, participants were finding that there is not one but many ways to be a good teacher.

All but one of my participants reflected on the pressures of accountability and its effects on taking away their ability to respond to student needs. This de-professionalization of the teaching workforce is well represented in the research (Day, 2002; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). In addition, my participants all work in schools that are being closely monitored by the state and districts due to their low performance on state testing in which there is increased pressure or demands for them to comply with mandates. Picower (2011) noted the fear of retribution that is present in these contexts. However, Rigell (2022) found that some teachers, when faced with programs that did not do what was best for

students, teachers would participate in acts of resistance by asking why, providing evidence, and seeking like-minded colleagues.

Aiden demonstrated Mockler's (2011) theory of identity formation in his narratives when these mandates in a high-pressure situation served as a catalyst for teacher identity formation. The mandates challenged one of his moral touchstones, that school should be a safe place for students where they can be themselves, and he took action by asking why and seeking like-minded colleagues. Wacquant (1989) also advocated for this type of reflexivity, arguing that placing an understanding of professional identity formation in the hands of teachers empowers them to purposefully construct their identity and reflexively respond to their learning and experiences. The empowerment of a strong teacher identity has been shown to push back on the demoralization that is infiltrating schools and instead remoralize teachers to continue to work on behalf of students (Santoro, 2018).

Find your voice, speaks to the experience of the participants reflexively considering the people and experiences that they choose to embody, refuse, or disregard. The pattern of consideration whereby they weigh their thoughts against their moral touchstones enable them to engage in acts that push back on experiences, policies, or narratives with which they do not agree.

Check Your Mirrors

Navigating the waters of who they are as a teacher, participants looked to those around them to see what they mirror back so that they could begin to discern who they are and who they are not. Participants' refusal of certain narratives hints at the idea of dialogic identity theory that the negotiations of I-positions allow people to discern both who they are and who they are not (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010). This highlights the movement past novice teachers as a vessel to be

filled to a dynamic broker who are influenced by the school and community and add value through critical questions.

Acts of recognition, or "being recognized as a certain kind of person," are a way people negotiate artifacts into their identity (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Gee, 2000, p. 99; Estaban-Guitart, 2016). Gee proposed acts of recognition as a definition of identity, "Being recognized as a certain kind of person, in a given context, is what I will mean by identity" (Gee, 2000, p. 99; Estaban-Guitart, 2016). The power of acts of recognition can be seen through Betty's and Dean's accounts of the power of recognition by their respective math coaches. In both cases, math coaches saw something in them that they themselves did not see, but through the interaction, both participants began to embody the narrative that they are capable and knowledgeable with valuable skills to help their schools and students.

However, this conceptualization of identity is fraught with the tension of misrecognition. What happens when mirrored back to you is demeaning or confining? Taylor proposes that this misrecognition "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor, 2021, p. 249). This was seen through Ali, Aiden, and Melissa's accounts of narratives from those in power that they were inadequate to meet the needs of their students or, worse, responsible for their students' failures or mistakes. While these participants chose to refuse this narrative, its effects were clear. Similar to Arvaja's (2016) study on mentors' messages' effects on pre-service teachers, my participants responded to the message they are inadequate in one of two ways. First, these participants each expressed doubt about their competence as a teacher, as if they considered if the assertion might be true. Second, during their refusal, these participants began to take action to seek out ways to build their skills as teachers. My concern when listening to my participants recount their experiences of misrecognition is the

potential for long-term effects. While these narratives included actions taken by teachers to push back, research has shown that over time, if individuals feel as though their voice is not heard or they are not valued, they are more likely to exit the profession (Hirshman, 1970).

Conclusion

This study began to consider how novice teachers navigate the tensions between their personal beliefs and those demonstrated or experienced through interactions with people and their environment. Through their stories and experiences, participants shared their thinking about who they are as people and as teachers. The willingness and vulnerability with which participants shared who they are as a person and how they view themselves as a teacher offered the opportunity for a greater understanding of this unique time in a teacher's career.

Hirshman's (1970) proposes that individuals will either use their voice against dissatisfaction or they will silently exit. Between voice and exit is loyalty. Out of loyalty teachers stay even in the face of unhappiness. The pressures of today's classroom necessitate preparing our teachers to critically navigate tough situations and interactions. Mockler (2011) proposes that teacher education programs and schools move beyond conversations about the context and knowledge that they will teach but also, as Dewey suggested, empower teachers with reflexivity to examine their practice and their emerging teacher identity critically. My participants' stories provided three themes to support teacher identity formation: cultivate your network, find your voice, and check your mirrors. Those involved in education must continue to explore how teachers develop and understand that "who one is as a person has a lot to do with who one is as a teacher" (Olson, 2008, p. 39).

Implications for Practice

Understanding the complexity of what it means to be a teacher today, underscores the vitalness of schools beginning to consider how policies and practices support or hinder teachers.

This is particularly important for our novice teachers who are just beginning to conceptualize who they are as educators. The following implications for practice are not exhaustive but provide ideas for teacher preparation, districts, and schools to consider as they try to support their novice teachers.

Mirror Back What You Want to See

Affirming teachers' identities through interactions and experiences, should be at the heart of the induction and onboarding process of new teachers and extend throughout their career. Gee (2000) said that "Being recognized as a certain kind of person, in a given context, is what I will mean by identity" (Gee, 2000, p. 99). Here the research indicates three types of recognition (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Gee, 2000; Mockler, 2011; Taylor, 1994). First is individual recognition. This is personal; this is how a person perceives themselves. Early in a teacher's career, as evidenced by these teachers' narratives, this conception can be fraught with imposter syndrome. They begin guided by their own conceptions of what it means to be a teacher but are challenged and humbled when given a classroom of their own (Flores & Day, 2006; Olsen, 2008). This can result in new teachers feeling overwhelmed and unmoored from their moral touchstones (Olsen, 2008). Hence, it's crucial for districts and schools to acknowledge in these teachers what the educators themselves may doubt: their potential and strengths in the field of education.

The second type of recognition is of those you interact with or work with. This recognition is from your peers. How do the other teachers in your building view you? Colliander (2018) found that experienced teachers spend more time connecting with their colleagues as a source of support than novice teachers' attention staying focused on their classroom. The structures and routines in buildings should both encourage novice teachers to engage with the larger teaching community and expect experienced teachers to view new teachers as knowledgeable and capable of learning. The impact of this type of recognition was seen in

Betty's narratives about her co-teacher. Her co-teacher views Betty as an expert while also not expecting perfection. She sees her as a key part of the team and in turn Betty embodies this narrative and is more confident to take informed pedagogical risks. The research shows this risk-taking is essential to teachers' identity development because teachers gain positive and negative experiences through those risks, giving them more opportunities to decide what fits best in their growing definition of what it means to them to be teachers (Gibbons, 2020).

The final type of recognition is from those in power positions (Gee, 2000). In my narratives, this was district officials, administration, and instructional coaches through direct interaction as well as through the policies they enact. The impact of this type of recognition shined in the narratives of Betty and Dean. When as Dean phrased it, "They see me as greater than I see myself," or "I think she was willing to help because she believes in my potential." The power of embodying this recognition extends throughout their decision-making process in their other narratives. Again, seeing themselves through those in power positions' eyes as someone of worth who is knowledgeable and capable encouraged them to step into that role and live up to those expectations. District and school officials should carefully consider how they view their teachers because their teachers are likely to mirror it back to them.

This mirroring effect of recognition is fraught with the challenges of misrecognition. What happens when what is mirrored back to you is demeaning or confining? Taylor proposes that this "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor, 2021, p. 249). Unfortunately, this too was seen in my narratives when my participants felt those in positions of power viewed them as "inadequate" or "incapable." These participants, for now, are pushing back against this and refusing this recognition, but it is yet to be seen how long they can sustain in light of this oppressive view.

States, districts, and school leadership have a chance to acknowledge teachers as the engaged, thoughtful, and knowledgeable educators they currently are and aspire to become. When teachers receive this positive recognition, they are likely to reflect it back and integrate it into their teacher identity, shaping who they are as educators.

Push Back Against Uniformity

The education landscape is complex, and the stories offered by my participants were but a glimpse into the varied forces at play for novice teachers. Everyone wants a quick answer to all the problems facing schools and teachers. We search and look for that key thing we can quickly put into place to improve everything. However, decades of research and countless personal stories resoundingly echo that it is not that simple (Mockler et al., 2022). We must own the complexity of the situation and continue to respond with open ears to those on the ground doing the work, up close and personal, the teachers and administrators in our schools daily. Their voices are essential for comprehending the precise context of their work. They possess a keen awareness of the challenges within their communities and schools, demonstrating a profound care for their students as they tirelessly strive to nurture their growth amidst these challenges.

In the face of this pressure, the push for standardization of a one size fits all approach to good teaching is rampant. However, the voices of these novice teachers suggest that though they are new they are acutely aware of both their weaknesses and that they bring unique gifts and strengths to the classroom. Mockler's (2011) theory of teacher identity pushes back on their being one way to be a good teacher. We must recognize and respond to the diversity of voices and contexts within the educational system, celebrating that there are many ways to be a good teacher.

Teacher preparation programs should engage preservice teachers in critical thought exercises that help them establish their own beginning conceptions of what it means to be a

teacher. By establishing an early understanding of how to critically weigh new ideas and methods against their touchstones teachers will be better prepared to respond to catalysts and navigate the constant decision-making in the classroom (Salli & Osam, 2018). By bringing students' awareness of their teacher identity, they are less likely to act against their own moral touchstones and engage in acts of resistance and advocacy when challenged (Mockler, 2011). As indicated by this study and prior research, teachers are driven by a desire to do what's best for their students. A reflective and thoughtful teaching workforce has the capacity not only to adapt but also to advocate for themselves and their students. This enables them to navigate the complexities of their specific schools and students more effectively, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach that has been traditionally employed.

Provide Avenues for Teacher Connection

Teaching is a team sport. Novice teachers' professional identity development "does not happen in isolation" (Gibbons, 2020, p. 73). Woven throughout the narratives was a constant theme of interaction with colleagues, former classmates, social media, and friends. In each interaction, teachers were considering further connection with individuals. They allowed some voices to become integral in their conception of what is means to be a teacher while tuning some voices out completely. Schools and districts should strive to provide a wide range of opportunities for teachers to connect with others. Currently, while teachers are surrounded with colleagues and influencers from day one they generally are limited to the voices present in their building (Brown & Heck, 2018).

Social media and teacher preparation programs offer alternative ways that teachers can connect to others outside of their building. The narratives in this study demonstrated the long-lasting effects of community in teacher preparation programs. These novice teachers continue to reach out to each other even as Melissa recounted, "across state lines." Preparation programs

should consider new ways to facilitate this continued network of support to help carry teachers through their first years in the classroom (Gibbons, 2020). In addition, social media emerged as way to find others that share your values in which you see the challenges you face as an educator reflected back to you in a way that supports you feeling seen. The narratives from the teachers in this study found that even one-sided engagement where they are simply consuming the content left them feeling encouraged or with new pedagogical ideas to try. Districts and teacher preparation programs should consider ways to encourage connection with teachers across the country.

Implications for Research

Given the current crisis of teacher retention and the influx of new teachers it remains vital that research continues on how to support teachers best as they are beginning their careers. Based on the findings of this study, several avenues of potential research emerged.

While this study provided an in-depth look at how these teachers are conceptualizing their teacher identity at this point in their career, it is only a snapshot of this current moment. Understanding that each school year is different and that teachers may over their lifetime as an educator fill many roles within a school. I would be interested in continuing to examine teacher identity development over time in order to gain a greater depth of knowledge around how changes such as Meredith's decision to move states or Melissa's ability to loop with her class affect their understanding of who they are as a teacher.

Dean's worry over his ability to stay in light of the increased pressure of district mandates highlights an additional avenue for research. While the stories shared and heard in this study talked about the crisis of retention, the time constraints limited my ability to consider teacher identity and longevity in the profession.

Finally, all of the participants talked at length in the study about their social media use as a tool to cultivate voices of teaching and teaching identities in which they saw themselves. Further investigation into the possible uses of social media by novice teachers could illuminate how social media can be utilized to connect novice teachers across the country and how that might impact their conception of what it means to be a teacher.

Chapter Summary

In order to examine novice teachers' identity as seen through the stories they are told and tell about their experiences, this narrative study was completed in order to answer the research questions:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do they embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

Nicole Mockler's (2011) Theory of Teacher Identity ungirded the analysis and conceptualization of teacher identity. Through art, interviews, and a story circle, six participants shared their experiences in the elementary classroom and what it means to them to be a teacher. My participants' vulnerability in sharing their stories about what it means to be a teacher today offers some clues as to how we can think about novice teacher identity formation. These teachers' stories provided three themes to support teacher identity formation: cultivate your network, find your voice, and check your mirrors.

The implications of this study are valuable to novice teachers, teacher preparation programs, districts, and school administration. Similar studies would be valued in contexts that are different from those represented in this study. In addition, studies that considered the implications of social media and continued support from teacher preparation programs on novice

teacher development could help expand positive networking opportunities for novice teachers beyond their own buildings.

The interweaving of who one is as a person with who one is as a teacher is vital to the heart of teaching. Continued exploration of teacher identity can help empower teachers to understand themselves so that as models at the front of the room, they can mirror back to students their whole selves, both personal and professional.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: Who am I as a teacher? How novice teachers define themselves during their first years in the classroom

Researcher(s): Kate Bentley, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amy Broemmel, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you recently graduated from a teacher education program with your master's and are beginning your second year teaching elementary school.

What is this research study about?

This study will explore the stories teachers tell and are told about what it means to be a teacher and how these stories provide insight into novice teachers' professional identity development.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will be a brief 10 to 15-minute interview followed by your choice of time spent creating a piece of artwork, one 30-45 minute interview, and a one-hour gathering with other novice teachers to tell stories in the Fall of 2023.

What will happen if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research study"?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in the following procedures.

1. Collage Art Piece (estimated time frame of Fall 2023 prior to interview) – Participants will be asked to briefly meet with the researcher via Zoom to discuss the project (10 minutes). Participants will then be asked to create a visual of their definition of being a teacher before our next meeting. They can use any medium they choose or a combination of self-made art, memes, art, or photography. Participants can spend as much or as little time on this as possible.
2. Interview (estimated time frame of October 2023 via Zoom)– using a semi-structured interview, participants will explore their art piece and their experiences in the classroom.
3. Story Circle (estimated time frame of November 2023) –Participants will be asked to join a group of fellow graduates and new teachers to tell stories about their teaching experience. The guidelines and questions will be provided to participants in advance and on paper on the day of the story circle as well as homemade snacks.

What happens if I say "No, I do not want to be in this research study"?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later.

Either way, your decision won't affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say "Yes" but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time.

If you decide to stop before the study is completed, please contact the researchers at **mbentl10@vols.utk.edu**, 205-937-3200. Any identifying information will be permanently deleted, and your data will no longer be included in the study.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form. Again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and consent can be taken back at any time.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about new teachers' experiences. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by holding it in a safe place at all times, and by using pseudonyms instead of actual information to represent every participant.

- All recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a secure, password protected and encrypted Google Drive folder until the study ends, at which point they will be permanently deleted.
- Any researcher's field notes will be stored in a secure, password protected, and encrypted Google Drive folder. Any handwritten notes will be transferred to this folder, and the physical copies will be locked in the principal investigator's office. All field notes will be permanently deleted or shredded when the study ends.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.
We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.
- The Otter.ai platform will be utilized as the recording and transcribing application for this study. Due to the limitations of the application, it must be known that Otter.ai may use

participant transcript information for testing, tuning, optimizing, validating, or otherwise enhancing the analytics, models, or algorithms underlying the service of the platform.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will keep your information to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

We may share your research data with other researchers without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers, Kate Bentley, mbentl10@vols.utk.edu, 205-937-3200 or Amy Broemmel**, broemmel@utk.edu,** 865-974-4225.

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
1534 White Avenue
Blount Hall, Room 408
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
Phone: 865-974-7697
Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the study to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to be in the study.

Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

Appendix B

Interview Protocol:

- How do new teachers interact with the stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- How do novice teacher embody, refuse (act against), or disregard (ignore) stories of teaching and teaching identities?
- What stories or experiences are shared by novice teachers?

Interview 1	
Purpose	**Interview Questions**
Informed Consent	● Before we get started with our interview questions, did you receive the study's consent document? o If yes: Great! o If no: Oh, I'm so sorry for the inconvenience. I'll share it with you now. You will be able to open it by clicking on the chat. I'll give you a few moments to read over it. ▪ Link [Copy/Paste]: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a5rvDGmK4iWrMxvk0lSxpjRWakZ2-VO3/view?usp=sharing ▪ Do you have any questions about the consent document or about this study? ● Do you consent to participate in this study? o If yes: Great! Thank you! Let's get started, then. o If no: Thank you so much for your time. We will go ahead and wrap up here. Goodbye.
Introduction Building Rapport	● First, let's start broad… Tell me about yourself. This can be anything that you feel like is important to you to share, but I can also ask specific questions if you aren't sure of where to start. o Probes/Specific Questions: How is the school year going so far? What grade are you teaching this year?
First Steps	● For the first step in the project, we would like for you to create a piece of visual art that represents your identity as a teacher or what it means to you to be a teacher. This can be done in any visual medium (paint, digital collage (memes, etc.), drawing, fabric-based arts, sewn work, stitching, etc.), and in any style (abstract, realist, etc.). Do you have any questions about that step of the project? 1. I'm going to share a link in the chat that you can use when you're ready to upload a photo of your artwork. Please do this at least 24 hours before our next interview.

	● How much time do you think that you will need to complete the project? Let's go ahead and find a time on our calendars to schedule our next interview. ● When we write about your journey, we will use a pseudonym in order to maintain your confidentiality. You are welcome to choose your own pseudonym, or we will make one up for you. Would you like to choose your pseudonym?
Wrap-Up	● Is there anything that I didn't ask you about that you want to share with me? ● What questions do you have at this point?

Interview 2	
Purpose	**Interview Questions**
Follow-Up	● [Ask any follow-up questions brought up in reviewing the transcript for Interview 1].
RQ1, 2	● Let's talk about your artwork. Tell me what this piece means to you. 1. Probes: Can you describe the individual elements that make up the whole? What is the story that you hope viewers see when they look at this piece? What is the meaning of [specific element]? ● Please describe your process of making this piece. 1. Probes: Did you plan each step in advance? Did you go by what felt right? Did you draft it out before finalizing your ideas? How did you decide what to NOT include? How did you feel about making this piece?
Building Rapport	● ● First, let's start broad… Tell me about yourself. This can be anything that you feel like is important to you to share, but I can also ask specific questions if you aren't sure of where to start. 1. Probes/Specific Questions: Where are you from? How did you get to where you are? Why did you become a teacher? ● How did you choose your school? 1. Probes: What kind of thoughts went into this decision-making process? ● How long have you worked at your school?

RQ1, 2	● Tell me about your experience as a teacher so far? 1. Probes: How do you describe your experience so far to friends or family? ● Please tell me a story of when you felt confident as a teacher. 1. Instructional, classroom management, families, relationships with students or coworkers. ● Please tell me a story of when you felt vulnerable as a teacher. 1. Where have you not been confident? Where have you needed to ask for help? What do you worry about?
RQ1	● What stories about teaching do you hear in your school or district? 1. Prompt: What are your thoughts on this belief? How did you come to that conclusion?
RQ1	● Can you tell me about how teachers are portrayed in our society or state? 1. Prompts: Do you have a favorite movie or film that showcases teachers? How do you perceive the media coverage of teaching? Do you think these are accurate portrayals? Why or Why not?
RQ1	● How do you define what it means to "be a teacher?"
Wrap-Up	● Is there anything else about your artwork that I did not ask you about that you want to share with me? Or anything you have thought about since our last interview that you want to share? ● Would you be willing to have your art piece published with credit to your pseudonym?

Appendix C

Story Circle Protocol:

Story Circles start with everyone in the same space in groups of eight or less people. Each group has a facilitator and a computer to transcribe the stories using Otter.ai.

“A story is anything that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Today we ask you to tell a story of up to 5 minutes based on your chosen prompt.”

- Share a story of where you find joy in the classroom
- Share a story of where joy dies for you in teaching
- Share a story of a time when you made a different decision in the face of a recommendation or mandate
- Share a story about your school grade from the state
- Share a story about coaching or professional development
- Share a story about why you became a teacher
- Share a story about what you do on a rough day or season in the classroom
- Share a story about life outside of school
- Share a story about something that is uniquely you in your classroom or teaching style

Some Guidelines:

- Please tell a story with a beginning, middle and end and refrain from opinions or commentary about others stories.
- This is a brave space. Please keep all stories to yourself as you go.
- Listening is as important as speaking. Please give each speaker your full attention.
- You are welcome to pass.
- You will be given five minutes to tell your story. The timekeeper will let you know when you have one minute left.
- At the end of the story circle we will ask if there are additional stories anyone would like to share.
- Finally, we will reflect together on what was revealed by the stories. Were there common themes? Differences? What stood out for you? What did you want to learn more about?

Appendix D

Date: July 11, 2023

Jane and David Bailey Education Complex - UTK
1122 Volunteer Boulevard
Knoxville, TN 37916

TO (Participant Email address): johnsmith@gmail.com

SUBJECT: Re: Novice Teacher Research Study at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Dear Mr. Smith,

We are reaching out to you to inquire if you are interested in participating in a research study being conducted at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville involving novice teacher experiences. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville recruits individuals to participate in these research studies.

The following information summarizes the study and what it involves:

Novice Teacher Experience Research

Study Purpose

This study will explore the stories teachers tell and are told about what it means to be a teacher and how these stories provide insight into novice teachers' professional identity development. Our research intends to deepen our understanding of novice teachers and how support can be improved moving forward.

Contact Information
For questions about this study, contact Kate Bentley mbentl10@vols.utk.edu or reply to this email.

Participating in research is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, this will not affect your involvement at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Sincerely,

Kate Bentley

Table 1

Brief Overview Participant Schools

	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	***DEMOGRAPHICS***	***TITLE ONE***
SCHOOL A	*1*	*92.2% White* *4.9% Two or More Races* *1.6% Hispanic/Latino* *1.2% Black or African American*	*yes*
SCHOOL B	*4*	*66.3% Black or African American* *12.3% White* *11% Hispanic/ Latino* *10.2% Two or more races*	*yes*
SCHOOL C	*1*	*37.1% White* *35.5% Hispanic/Latino* *16.1% Black or African American* *5.5% Two or more races* *4.6% Asian or Asian/Other Pacific Islander*	*yes*

Table 2

Brief Overview of Participants

	Internship Grade Level	*Current Grade Level*
Aiden	*5*	*4/5 (different school)*
Ali	*1*	*1 (same school)*
Betty	*5*	*5 (different school)*
Dean	*2*	*3 (different school)*
Melissa	*3*	*1 (same school)*
Meredith	*1*	*2 (different school)*

Table 3

Descriptive Timeline

Date	Item
July 2023	Sought IRB approval
September 2023	Received IRB approval and began to recruit participants (See Appendix D)
September 2023	Distribute teacher consent (See Appendix A)
September/October 2023	Interview 1 – Art Introduction (See Appendix B)
November 2023/December 2023	Interview 2 – Follow Up Interview (See Appendix B)
January 2024	Story Circle (See Appendix C)

Table 4

Frequency of Themes Across Participants

	Aiden	***Ali***	***Betty***	***Dean***	***Melissa***	***Meredith***
You Control the Narrative	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*
Your Voice Matters	*x*		*x*	*x*		*x*
Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*
We get by with a little help from our friends	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*	*x*	
I see you			*x*	*x*		

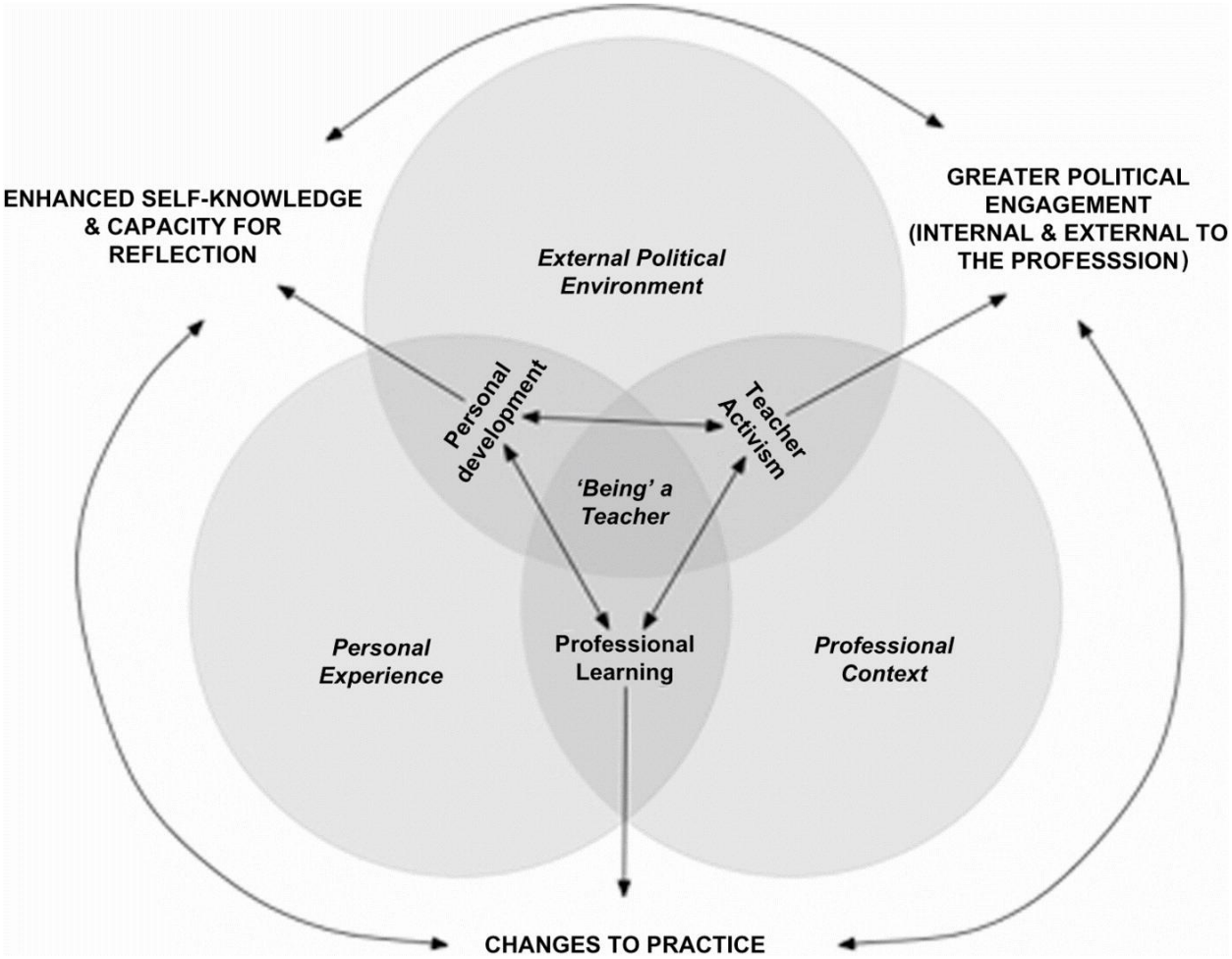


Figure 1

Mockler's (2011, p. 521), Formation and Mediation of Teacher Identity Graphic

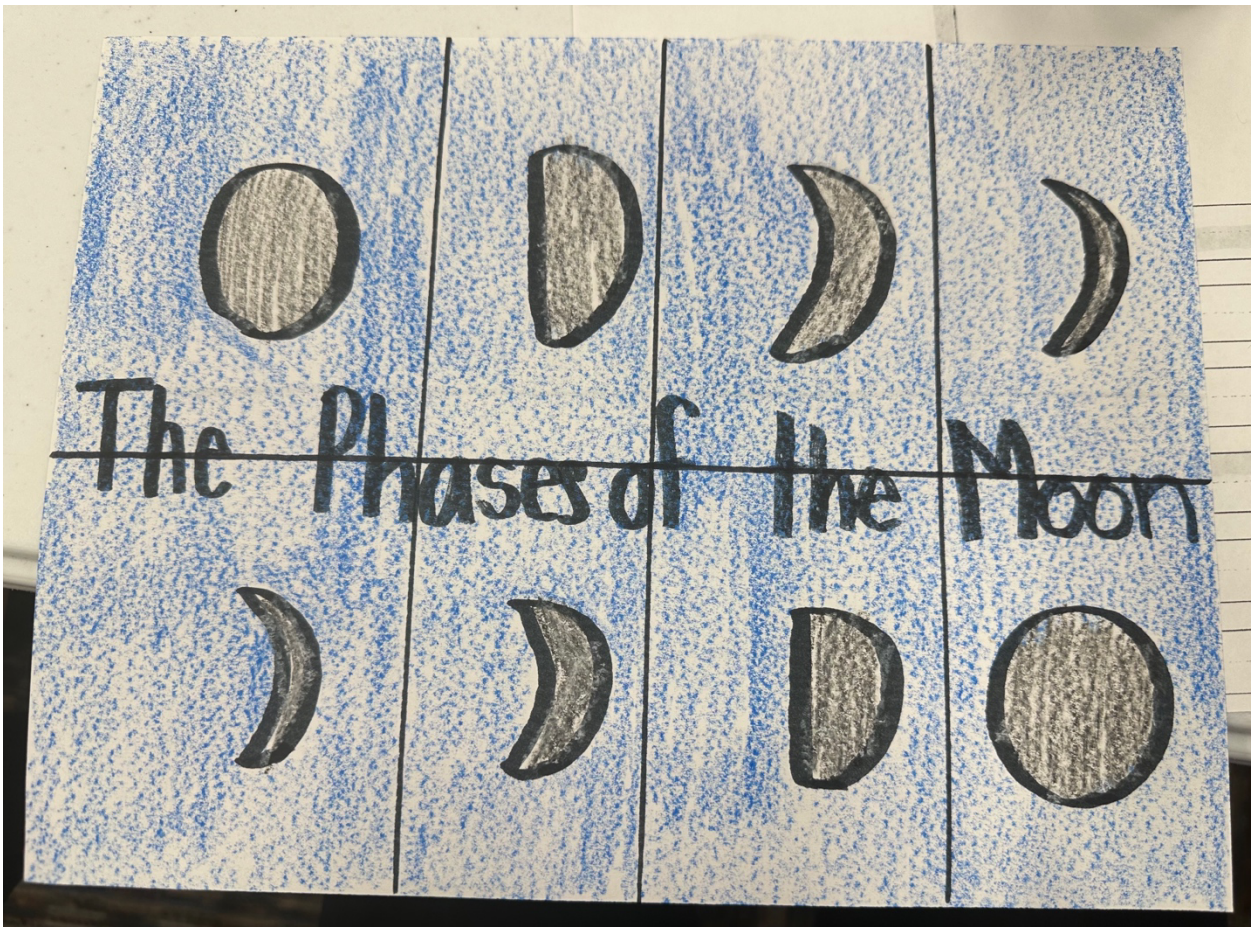


Figure 2

Melissa's Artwork



Figure 3

Dean's Artwork

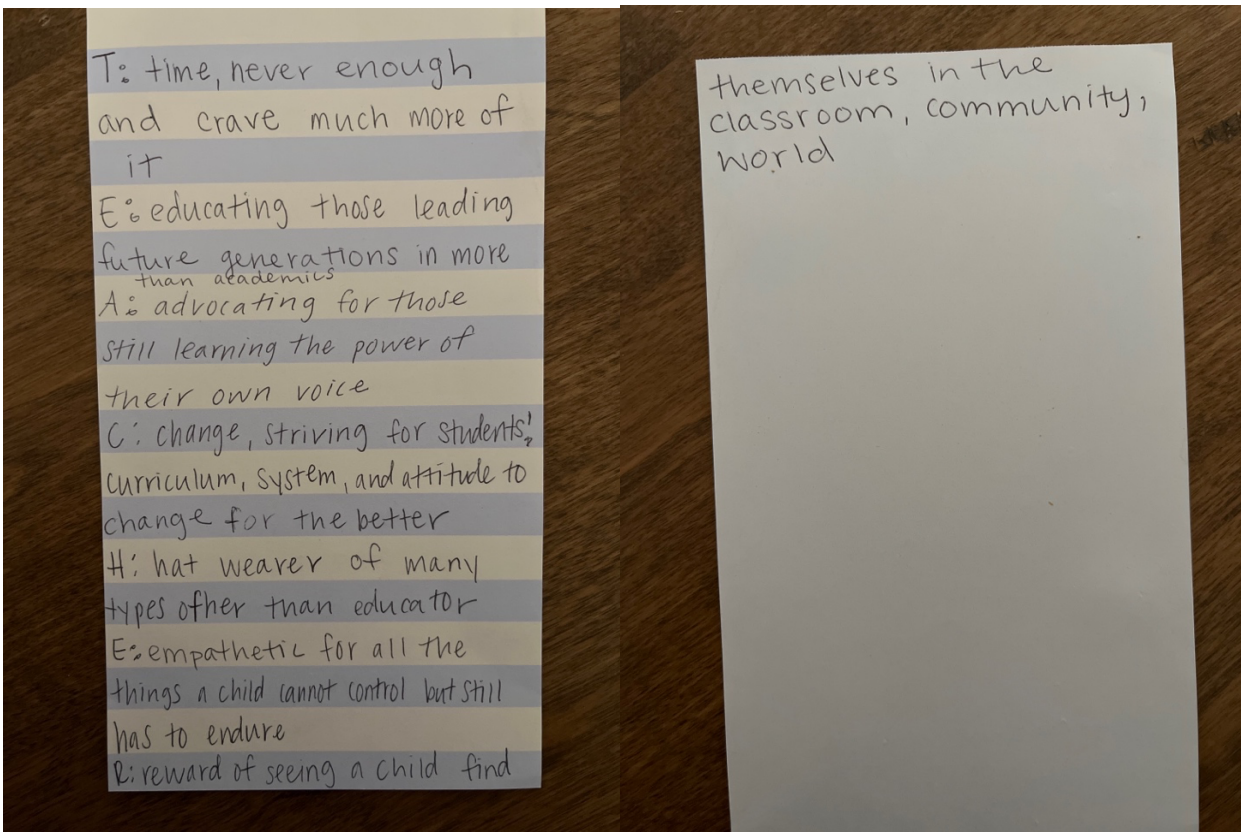


Figure 4

Meredith's Artwork



Figure 5

Betty's Artwork

VITA

Kate Bentley grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. After high school, she attended Birmingham-Southern College, where she graduated with a degree in religion. She returned to school to pursue her Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Southern California. After graduation, she taught first through fifth grade. During this time, she continued to expand her education, including graduate certificates in Educational Leadership and English as a Second Language at Lipscomb University. Her research interests include novice teacher development, pre-service teacher education, and diverse children's literature. She is thankful for the support of her family, friends, colleagues, and committee in her pursuit of a Ph.D. in teacher education.