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# Crystallizing Alex: A Qualitative Case Study of What Influences One Second Grade Teacher's Literacy Instruction

Jill Ostrow

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CRYSTALLIZING ALEX: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

OF WHAT INFLUENCES ONE SECOND GRADE

TEACHER'S LITERACY INSTRUCTION

By

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A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

(in Literacy Education)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August, 2003

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Brenda Power

New teachers face enormous pressure—to understand and assess student learning, to work well with parents, and to ensure their curricula are aligned with state and national standards. Nowhere is this pressure more evident than in literacy instruction, where competing notions of best practice can be confusing and overwhelming.

This qualitative case study of an early career teacher, Alex Christopher, explores in-depth what influences her second grade literacy program. Her decision-making process during reading and writing instruction is analyzed within the context of local, state and national literacy reform initiatives, university/school partnerships, and professional development opportunities. Alex was selected for study because she has been teaching less than five years, is involved in a university/public school

partnership, and has recently completed a series of professional development experiences designed to improve her literacy instruction.

The research was completed using qualitative case study methods. Data collection included interviews, classroom observations, classroom and school artifacts, email exchanges, and informal conversations. Data analysis included triangulation, peer review and debriefing, and member checks. Special emphasis during the data analysis phase of the study was placed on crystallization, a newer analysis technique developed by Richardson (2000), and further extended by Janesick (2000). Crystallization provided multiple lenses for viewing the changes in Alex's practice and belief system throughout the course of the study.

Crystallization techniques are also used in the presentation of the findings. The research draws on both traditional research reporting methods, and emerging artistic or aesthetic methods (Eisner, 1998) through poetry and visual representation of implications of the study.

The findings of the study support a need for more sustained support of new teachers beyond preservice preparation, a more systematic understanding of how teachers can develop reflective skills, and a reconsideration of the role of university faculty in professional development school partnerships.


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*Tests that are aligned with high standards, clear objectives, and*

*rigorous curriculum are our best tool for identifying where*

*students and schools are succeeding.*

-Rod Paige


*In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple*

*truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations,*

*restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revisiting texts if*

*we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource*

*called the teacher on whom so much depends.*

-Parker Palmer


These two quotes represent the sharp debate taking place today among those

who want reform in education.  The words by the Education Secretary Rod Paige are

intended to bring the public to agreement about the best path to education reform, but

they paralyze many teachers, researchers and advocates for children who don't

believe testing is the solution to school problems.  Looking through the available

speeches by the Education Secretary, the pattern to his comments is quite clear:

statistics, testing, scientific-research, and mandates from policy makers are the way to

better schools.

In contrast to the comments made by Paige, Parker Palmer focuses not on tests, but on "the teacher." In his widely read book, *The Courage to Teach,* Palmer advocates careful nurturing of individual teachers as the best path to school reform.

Any reforms in education will have implications not just for teachers, but for the work of teacher educators and literacy researchers. However, instead of mandating new curricula and promoting high stakes testing, I believe we need to zero in to look systematically and carefully at the human resource called the "the teacher."

Like Paige, I support the idea that we need high standards and clear objectives. But my research begins from a stance that is much closer to Palmer's—it is ultimately understanding how and why teachers make individual instructional decisions that will lead to enduring change in schools. As Lee Shulman (1983) writes:

> The teacher remains the key…Debates over educational policy are moot if the primary agents of instruction are incapable of performing their functions well. No microcomputer will replace them, no television system will clone them and distribute them, no scripted lessons will direct and control them, and no voucher system will bypass them. (p. 504)

My dissertation study examined the changes one early career teacher, Alex Christopher, made in her second grade literacy program over a four-month period. This case study considers these changes in the larger context of literacy reform, debates about teacher preparation, and ongoing pressures at all levels for teachers to adopt mandated standardized programs.

This sweeping context of reform is much broader than what is typically presented for framing a dissertation study. But I want to begin with a brief explanation of these policy debates in literacy, school reform and teacher professional development, because they are having such an impact on the work of literacy researchers at all levels.

Literacy Reform and Teacher Development

In the preface to his book, *Big Brother and the National Reading Curriculum*, Richard Allington (2002) compares reading reform to the movie *Groundhog Day*. "I'm seeing the same things happen over and over again. I awake every day now and have to remind myself that is isn't 1972" (p. *v*). He is talking about the report put out by the National Reading Panel (NRP). He writes,

> Phonics is back. The vendors have dusted off all those 1970s materials, stuck new covers on them, gussied up the artwork a bit, and put them up for sale. That the two most heavily promoted reading curricula have barely changed since 1970 seems to bother almost no one. (p.*v*)

Allington is wrong. The NRP report bothers many, and has sparked a wide range of spirited critiques (Coles, 2000; Cunningham, 2002; Garan, 2002; Krashen, 2002; Pressley, Dolezal, Roehrig, & Hilden, 2002). Pressley (2002) writes, "The United States cannot afford the narrow-mindedness of those who believe that the National Reading Panel's report should be a guide to primary-grade literacy instructional reform" (p. 85). Because the NRP "positions teachers on the receiving end of change and sees children as variables in research studies," school change is

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difficult (Toll, 2002, p. 147). In spite of these critiques, many school administrators are requiring that teachers change their reading instruction methods based on the NRP report, mandating much more phonics instruction in the early elementary grades.

Yet exemplary teachers have always reflected and made adaptations to their literacy practices regardless of what is mandated to them (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Collins-Block & Morrow, 2001; Shockley-Bisplinghoff, 2002.) Pollack-Day (2001) writes, "Rather than promote a method or program for its own sake, [exemplary teachers] look at it in light of the specific children in front of them and whether it would be better or worse in meeting a need" (p. 217). Coles proposes research in reading be based on "a consideration of children and children's learning" (p. 109). Teachers and school leaders must grapple with these very different and competing visions of research and best practice—either using mandated programs for all, or making instruction choices by considering the specific children in front of them.

Given the pressures novice teachers face, it is not surprising that the retention rate for early career teachers is alarmingly low. According to the National Educational Association (2002), "Some 20 percent of all new hires leave the classroom within three years. In urban districts, the numbers are worse—close to 50 percent of newcomers flee the profession during their first five years of teaching."

Because of this staggering statistic, I wanted to choose a teacher for my study who was on the cusp of this vulnerable period in his or her teaching career. Alex Christopher is in her fifth year of teaching, and she faces the same stresses of many teachers in these early critical years. She is dealing with an influx of state testing, and

she is working with new administrators who are sometimes demanding new measures of accountability through mandated and standardized literacy programs.

The teachers that do stay in the profession, according to Bullough (as cited in Rogers & Babinski, 2002), "end up teaching in ways that are inconsistent and even contradictory to their initial pedagogical beliefs, goals, and expectations" (p. 3). I met Alex Christopher when she was a student in a graduate literacy inquiry class I taught on-site at her school during the 2001-2002 school year. One of the reasons I chose to do a case study of Alex for my dissertation research is that she is in the midst of questioning some of her literacy practices. She is consciously exploring whether some of her instructional methods are "inconsistent and even contradictory" to her own stated "beliefs, goals, and expectations."

What I found so interesting about Alex before I began my dissertation study was that her questioning of her teaching was often based on the observations she was making of her students. This continuous reflection on teaching, students, and literacy provides an opportunity for a close-up view of how early career teachers deal with the gap between the ideals of reformers like Rod Paige and Parker Palmer.

Personal History: The Researcher as Research Instrument

Alex's history was important to know before I began my study. But, I did not enter her classroom as a blank slate either. My research questions are rooted in my own history as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, and teacher researcher.

In qualitative research, the instrument used to do the research is the researcher (Jansesick, 2000; Patton, 2002). So, it is important that I not only bring my history to my research, but that I be very conscious of my history before I even begin. Patton

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(2000) writes: "The credibility of the qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork" (p.14). I couldn't ignore the fact that I have been an educator for the past twenty years and I walked into Alex's classroom, with seventeen years of classroom teaching experience.

Autoethnography lets me add my personal culture within the larger cultural context of my study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; and Patton, 2002).

Reed-Danahay (as cited in Glesne, 1999) describes autoethnography:

> The term autoethnography is used in a variety of ways: to describe narratives of a culture or ethnic group produced by members of that culture or ethnic group; to describe ethnographies of the 'other,' but one where the writer interjects personal experiences into the text as in the confessional tale; and more akin to autobiography, to investigate self within a social context, whether it be your own or that of another culture. (p. 181)

Beginning with my personal narrative, I as the researcher can use my "own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture" of what I am studying (Patton, 2002, p.86).

> I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I

write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to

understand a way of life. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737)

Exploring my own professional history helps me understand how this history colors

my perceptions of Alex.

<u>My Starting Point</u>

I was a classroom teacher for fifteen years from 1982-1997. My experience

included working in inner city Chicago, Southwest London (UK), and Suburban

Oregon classrooms. For the first several years of my teaching career, I thought I was

just a little out of the ordinary. I didn't understand why I did some of the things I did

-- I certainly didn't have the background or the knowledge behind the choices I made.

I didn't always feel like I fit in to the educational communities of which I was a part.

I remember going against the grain though, when I didn't agree with what I was asked

to do.

For example, during my first year of teaching in an inner city Chicago private

school, the kindergarten children I worked with were tracked for reading into high,

middle, and low groups. I was given the highest group. My curriculum was

mandated—it was a program basal reader (a scripted reading program.) I was taught

to use basal readers in my undergraduate teacher preparation program and I had never

been presented with curriculum alternatives. But using the readers just didn't feel

right to me. Even with my "highest" level group of five-year olds (which only

consisted of a group of four children) I was working with a group of four different

readers.

Every morning these young children walked into my classroom for their thirty-five minute reading session. Sharing a large classroom with another teacher, I was given one half of the room for my four students, which consisted of two half-circle tables. I decided to take those two half circle tables and split them apart. I sat in the middle of the two tables and gave each of my group of four a different book to read. I had no idea what I was doing--I just knew it felt right. I spent the first fifteen minutes of my session having my group fill out their basal workbooks, and the last twenty minutes reading and sharing their own books. I took notes on what they were reading and what they were sharing. They worked on individual projects based on their choice books and as time went on, we spent less and less time on the basal readers. I learned more about what they could do based on my observations than from correcting the workbooks pages. This was the start of my journey as a teacher researcher.

I moved to Oregon in 1987 and made the decision to get my Masters degree at Lewis & Clark College. Reading Nancie Atwell (1987), Don Graves (1983), and Linda Rief (1992) for the first time, I felt validated. Suddenly I was in classes where reflecting on the work I was doing in my classroom was the norm. I was able to participate in discussions with other teachers who were also "splitting the tables" during reading. Being surrounded by like-minded educators was something I didn't know I was missing until I found it. I was able to talk about my choices and decisions in ways I was never able to before. I had a context for my beliefs.

It was during my time at Lewis & Clark that I met Ruth Hubbard. Ruth was a professor of mine for several of my courses. In the early 1990's, when I was teaching

a first, second, and third grade blended class she asked me if she could do research in my classroom. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I did know that having her in my classroom once a week could only be wonderful. It was more than wonderful--having Ruth in my classroom was absolutely life changing for me.

Ruth spent nearly three years in my classroom researching the creative process of children. During those years she encouraged me to look at my own teaching and learning processes. Ruth taught me how to be a teacher researcher by asking questions, and collecting data from my students to answer those questions and then write about what I learned. With her guidance I published my first article (Ostrow, 1994) and went on to publish my first book about working with a multiage group of children (Ostrow, 1995). I went from feeling odd and out of the ordinary and to having a context for my beliefs, to finding an audience for my writing.

Ruth had subjects for her writing as well, my students, so we both benefited from her research. I began to look at her being in my classroom more as a partnership. We were collaborators and she was my model of an effective researcher. Coles and Knowles (2000) write, "The relationship between outsider and insider is multifaceted, nonhierarchical, and mutually beneficial. Learning that occurs in and from this relationship is not linear but complex, reflexive, and multidimensional" (p.175).

Ruth was an outside researcher from the university, and at first I was nervous that she might enter my classroom in a supervisor or evaluative type role—since this was my only experience with university connections in my classroom before. However, she offered information and advice that was not evaluative at all. She asked

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questions or made comments that encouraged me to reflect on my practice. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) reiterate this vital distinction between evaluative and informative communication:

> Within reflective practice, performance feedback is not evaluative but informative...In reflective practice, the facilitator is not a superior assessing performance quality but a collaborator stimulating professional growth...(p. 179)

But outside of my collaborative relationship with Ruth, my teaching experiences were not all positive. I had strong opinions and I resisted mandates. Looking back, I can't believe some of my more immature responses didn't get me fired. When we were given curriculums to use, for instance, I didn't adapt them. I just didn't use them. My stance toward administrators was more often "I don't care what you think" rather than "How can I explain my thinking to you so that you understand?"

It wasn't until I started to work with teachers in new professional contexts like teaching courses at Lewis & Clark college and holding workshops for teachers that I began to understand the complexities of working within the school community. As a teacher, when I spoke of my classroom community, I was referring to my students and myself. When I moved further away from the classroom I saw how much broader that community needed to be.

I was asked to be a visiting assistant professor at Lewis & Clark for three years (from 1998-2001). During those years I was an elementary coordinator for a

graduate Masters of Arts in Teaching preservice cohort. I taught graduate courses ranging from mathematics methods to writing development. Those were three years of transition for me as I lived between two worlds. I wasn't a classroom teacher anymore, but I wasn't a university professor either. Once again, I felt like I didn't fit in. The difference now was that I knew what was missing. This dimension was important, but I needed another perspective. I wanted to blend the worlds of classroom teacher and university researcher, so I made the choice to go back to graduate school to get my doctorate.

Specifically, I wanted to learn about more formal research traditions. I learned that "research" especially qualitative research, has many different roots. Eisner and Peshkin (1990) write:

> There is, moreover, no general agreement about the conduct of any of the types of qualitative inquiry; perhaps there never will be or can be consensus of the sort that is embodied in the standardized procedures of quantitative research, for example in path analysis or single-subject design. In quantitative research, the good may be found in fidelity to design, whereas in qualitative research, relatively lacking in canons and conventions, the good is more elusive because its procedures are more idiosyncratic. (pp. 1-2)

I have found that the beauty of qualitative research is not the lack of canons and conventions, but the blurring of the boundaries of those canons and conventions. Through my doctoral program I have explored many research studies and carefully analyzed the diverse methods used by qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Denzin &

Lincoln, 2000; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Patton, 2002).  I have honored these

traditions of qualitative research by trying to adapt them to the unique circumstances

of my study.

Much research has been done on the need for reflection in teacher education

programs (Calderhead, 1988; Cruikshank, 1987; Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston,

1987).  Yet little research has been done that considers the role of reflection in

teachers' professional lives.  As Risko, Vukelich, and Roskos (2002) note:

> We know little about what teachers actually do when asked to reflect on their
>
> own learning and whether reflective practice has any impact on enhanced
>
> teaching abilities and decision making. (p. 134)

Research on this issue is needed, but it may not be as valued in a time when

the call is for studies that document the "best" literacy programs to lead to high

student achievement on standardized tests.  Short, Schroeder, Kauffman, and Kraser

(2002) write:

> The growing emphasis on scripted teacher-proof programs and regimented
>
> student tasks has marginalized time for purposeful thinking and meaningful
>
> dialogue. This loss is significant because reflection supports students and
>
> teachers in connecting with what they already know, considering alternative
>
> perspectives, solving problems, and organizing their experiences for future
>
> use. (p. 91)

Alex Christopher is a teacher who questions and reflects upon her reading and writing teaching practice. But her professional experience also offers many other intriguing lenses for looking at literacy reform and professional development. Alex participated in many different types of professional development programs—a wider variety than experienced by most early career teachers because of her proximity to a major university and the designation of her school as a Professional Development School site within a university/public school partnership. Through this partnership, she has been a mentor for preservice university elementary education students, and she is also a university student herself, working on a master's degree in literacy. She recently became a fellow in the National Writing Project.

Alex's professional context provides a lens for considering three different aspects of education reform efforts: changing literacy practices, the effects of university/school partnerships on teacher development, and how professional development experiences affect teachers. As I combined these themes, I came up with three questions that I explored during this research study:

1. What are the connections between literacy theory reform and actual practice in one second grade teacher's instruction?

2. What impact do university/school partnerships have on the literacy practices of one teacher?

3. What forms of professional development support effective change for one teacher?

<u>Writing Up/Presenting Findings</u>

The chapters in this dissertation are written in a way that highlights the different perspectives of the intersecting questions and themes that emerged from my case study. Chapter 2 is an in-depth description of my methodology. I give a detailed description of some of the different data gathering and data analysis techniques I used. In chapter 3, I write about the tensions Alex faces, as she makes changes in her literacy program. Chapter 4 describes the different researcher roles that surfaced throughout my study. Chapter 5 explains Alex's professional development experiences and how these have impacted her career.

In chapter 6, I experimented with an alternative form of qualitative write-up (Richardson, 2000). Contemplating writing a chapter describing how Alex and I were mirroring each other in our professional growth—she as a novice teacher and me as a novice researcher, I struggled with structure. Then it came to me. The only way that made sense was for me to write a poem--a poem for two voices. The poem is intended to be read by Alex and me together simultaneously. Glesne (1999) writes:

> "Writing in different modes helps you to think about your data in new ways…When writing up data as a play, poetry, or narrative, you still code, analyze, and interpret data, but which chunks of data you select and how you order them will vary with form, stressing, in the process, different issues. (p. 179)

Writing the poem helped me to not only analyze and interpret my data, it helped me to process through the data I had in a new way.

Darling-Hammond (1997) believes that "Policies that support teachers' professional learning can make a major difference in student success. But, figuring out what kinds of policies will support teaching that meets today's new and very different goals for students is not that simple" (p. 35).

My study is a "not that simple" look at what policies might help teachers handle the challenges they face when they juggle mandates, debates about literacy practice and the needs of individual children in their classrooms. The study explores the intersections of these internal and external calls for literacy reform, the unique pressures faced by early career teachers, and the role of reflective practice in teachers' decision-making processes through a case study of the daily decisions made by one teacher. What's missing in so many of the debates about literacy reform are close-up views of how teachers and students are affected by rapidly shifting mandates. By understanding why and how one early career teacher makes literacy instructional decisions, I hope to find larger implications for how teacher educators and researchers might help all novice teachers develop the reflective tools they need to make wise teaching choices.

## 2.    RESEARCHING ALEX: MY METHODOLOGY

*Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied.*

-Robert E. Stake

I was interested in exploring the connections between literacy reform and actual practice in instruction, university/school partnerships, and professional development. Alex Christopher was beginning to question her own literacy practice, she was involved in a university/school partnership, and she had many professional development experiences. Therefore, a case study of Alex was an excellent choice. Creswell (1998) describes the case study as an "exploration of a 'bounded system', or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61).

Patton (2002) explains case study as an approach to qualitative analysis that "constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data" (p. 447). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify the structure of a case study as the problem, the context, the issues, and the "lessons learned."

Case studies have an interesting history. Because of the influx of immigration to Chicago from the 1900's through the early 1930's, poverty, unemployment, and other issues stemming from immigration were popular topics for social researchers to explore (Tellis, 1997). "The [case study] methodology in the United States was most closely associated with The University of Chicago Department of Sociology...The Chicago School was preeminent in the field and the source of a great deal of literature" (p. 12). Qualitative inquiry methods became dominant during this time

period because of the work being done by sociologists using participant-observation

techniques to study their subjects; the "Chicago School" movement (Creswell, 1998;

Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Hamel, 1993; Tellis,

1997; Yin, 1994). During the 1930's The Chicago School was criticized by

researchers for being "unscientific" in their approaches to sociology. Tellis (1997)

writes:

> In 1935, there was a public dispute between Columbia University professors,
>
> who were championing the scientific method, and The Chicago School and its
>
> supporters. The outcome was a victory for Columbia University and the
>
> consequent decline in the use of case study as a research methodology. (p. 3)

It wasn't until the 1960's and Strauss & Glaser's (1967) idea of "grounded

theory" that case studies began to resurface as a popular methodology for social

scientists (Tellis, 1997). Charmaz (2000) explains grounded theory methods as

"systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-

range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data" (p.509).

Case studies have been a common methodology in qualitative research in

literacy education for over three decades. Glenda Bissex whose book *GNYS AT*

*WRK: A Child Learns to Write and Read* (1980) was a classic literacy case study of

her son's emerging literacy, describes a case study as "a way of learning, not a

method for proving" (p. 71). Stake (1995) eloquently explains the value of case

studies:

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A case study is expected to catch the complexities of a single case. The single leaf, even a single toothpick, has unique complexities—but rarely will we care enough to submit it to case study. We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its context. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (p. xi)

There were many "unique complexities" in Alex Christopher's professional context that made her an ideal case study for my dissertation.

I met Alex in the fall of 2001 during a course I was teaching on-site at the school. The topic of the course was curriculum inquiry, and Alex was a fourth year teacher at that time. She was a mentor to one of the preservice students in the literacy methods course I also taught on-site at the school. Over the course of the year, I was able to stop by her classroom for supervision observations of her intern as well as informal visits if Alex had questions about class.

Alex was exploring new literacy strategies she was learning in her graduate courses during the 2001-2002 school year. I became interested in what influenced Alex to try certain new methods and to eliminate other instructional strategies she had been using since she began teaching. We had some informal conversations outside of class where she shared with me comments that her students were making about the way her books were organized in her classroom. She told me then that she was thinking about changing the way she organized her classroom library and letting her

students choose their own books. I asked Alex if she would mind a researcher in her classroom the following year and she was excited about the possibility.

I selected Alex to study because I was interested in a teacher who was:

- new to field with between 5 and 7 years experience,

- questioning literacy theory and practice

- involved in a university/school partnership

Alex has the same stresses as many new teachers who drop out during the critical early years of teaching. She is dealing with a flood of state testing and she is working with new administrators who are mandating more of the literacy curriculum, and demanding more accountability from teachers through increased student testing. Alex is required to give a district writing prompt three times a year, a pre- and post-district and state math test, and a reading assessment profile twice a year.

This bounded intrinsic case study, meaning it took place over a specific period of time on one unique case (Creswell, 1998), grew out of a pilot study that I conducted in Alex's classroom one morning a week from October through December 2002. The dissertation study was an extension of the learning from the pilot study, and was completed from January through May 2003.

Research Location

My study took place at West Ridge Elementary School, in Salem, Maine. Salem is a middle class suburb of a small city. Salem is located ten miles south of the University of Maine. West Ridge serves all of the first and second grade students in the school district. There are approximately 200 students enrolled at the school and of those twenty-five percent receive a free or reduced lunch.

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The students go to one school for kindergarten, Salem for first and second grade, another school for third and fourth grade, a different school for fifth grade, on to middle school for sixth through eighth grade, and then attend Salem High School.

There are eleven classroom teachers, two special educators, two title one teachers, and five educational technicians at West Ridge Elementary School. West Ridge has been heavily involved in a partnership with the University of Maine's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program for the past five years. It is not uncommon to see graduate MAT interns within the building—the year I was conducting my research, there were three.

Alex's classroom consists of 20 children. There are two boys who have been assigned a full-time educational technician. The physical classroom has four round tables where, Alex assigns the children different seats weekly. The children may also choose to work in the living room area during the day. Figure 2.1 shows the layout of the classroom:

Figure 2.1: Classroom Layout (From field notes 9/27/02)

Coats

Display table

White Board

Computers

Couch, chairs and low round table

Alex's desk

Books
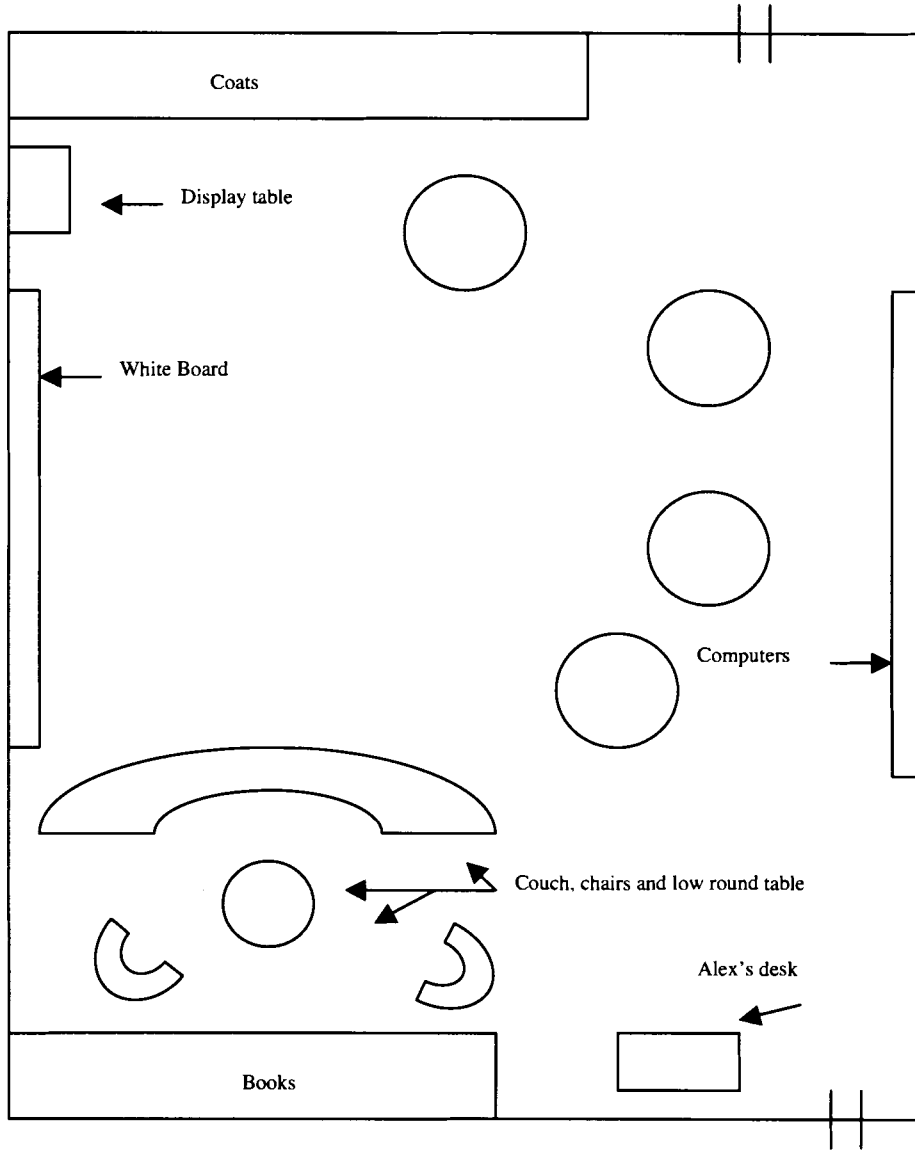
Data Collection Period

The field data for the study was collected during four months of observations of morning work periods. I was an observer in the classroom from 8:45 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from January 6, 2003 to April 11, 2003. Some weeks, I came four times a week depending on what was happening in the classroom. In April and May, I observed and visited less frequently—usually one morning a week.

I purposely came into Alex's classroom during the mornings because this was her established reading workshop time. Below is a typical morning:

Typical Morning Schedule:

- 8:20-8:45 - The children come in to the classroom and work on a worksheet that is waiting for them on their tables when they arrive in the mornings. These worksheets varied. They ranged from math worksheets if they were working on a unit, for example one morning I noticed they had worksheets with clocks on them when they were studying how to tell time. During the weeks leading up to Valentine's Day the work sheets had hearts on them and were around the theme of Valentine's Day.

- 8:45-9:15 - Alex calls the children over to the whiteboard area where they sit in a large circle for morning meeting.

  - During morning meeting the children do the following everyday:

- A morning greeting---the children say good-morning to each other around the circle.
- Calendar
- The morning message on the chart paper---Alex writes a message on chart paper leaving out letters and word endings. One student reads the message and fills in the missing letters and word endings.
- Sing a song
- The "squeeze of love" (Alex asks one child to start the squeeze and they choose they would like to send some "love" to. Everyone holds hands and closes their eyes. The child starts the squeeze by squeezing the hand of the hand he is holding. Then that person squeezing the hand of the person next to her and so on. It goes around the circle and when it gets back to the original child who began, that child tells everyone that he "got the squeeze back.")
- Any other sharing that might happen on a particular day:
  - Sharing of a poem
  - Sharing of a story a student has written
  - Singing a new song
  - Sharing news

- 9:00-10:00

  - Reading Workshop

    - Reading workshop was set up as follows:

      o Alex gave a 15-20 minute minilesson based on a skill or strategy she wanted to teach.

      o After the minilesson, the students choose books from the tubs to read and practice what they learned in the minilesson.

      o Alex floated during this time having individual conferences with the students listening to them read, having small group lessons with students on a particular skill, or reading silently herself.

- 10:05-12:15

  - 10:05-10:20 - Recess

  - 10:20 -10:30 - Snack

  - 10:30 -12:00 – During this time was math, Physical Education, music, library and art.

  - 12:00-12:15-Daily Shares

Alex's students leave the room for one hour on Monday mornings— they have a session at the library with a specialist and then a half hour of music instruction, giving Alex an hour break, which she graciously devoted to me. This gave me weekly uninterrupted time for interviews or other activities with Alex.

## Establishing a Role in the Classroom

My experience as an elementary classroom teacher for fifteen years gave me the benefit of already feeling comfortable in the presence of a classroom of children. During my pilot study I answered questions students had about what I was doing in their classroom and why I was taking notes. I told them that I was curious about how their teacher knew what to teach them and that I was interested in what second graders were learning. They were quick to remind me to be sure to take notes on something if they thought I had missed it.

Even though I most often took on the role of observer during my dissertation study, there were times when I also wanted to be a full participant (Patton, 2002). For example, during one morning in February when the children were busy building inventions they had created, I wanted to support Alex by helping out the children with their projects. In the fall during my pilot study, I made sure that I sat in during the morning meetings. This helped the children feel comfortable with me coming into the classroom and built trust and a rapport for when I asked students questions. The children soon became familiar with me being in the classroom, but also aware of my different roles. If I was sitting at Alex's desk typing on my computer, for example, they knew I was busy concentrating on my note taking. If I was in the classroom with my journal taking notes, however, they felt comfortable asking me questions.

Although my purpose in the classroom was not to observe and study the children, I discovered early on how difficult it was for me to be in a classroom full of children and not pay some attention to them. I focused my research on Alex, but I also needed to allow myself to let relationships with these children grow in order to

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understand her better. The students were at the center of all her literacy instruction decisions, so I grew to know many of them well. I was clearly part of the classroom "family." I often found my name on the bottom of classroom notes. The children wrote my name on Alex's desk and they became accustomed to me entering the classroom at 8:45 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Alex and I had a relationship that evolved into a strong friendship over the months I was in her classroom. Glesne (1999) cautions against this when she writes, "Whether friendship or friendliness is the case, ethical dilemmas can result. You may gain access to intimate information given to you in the context of friendship rather than in your researcher role" (p. 121). I worried about our friendship and how it might affect my study, but Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write, "The *way* in which we know is more assuredly tied up with *what* we know and our *relationship with our research participants*" (p. 182).

I realized I needed to be aware of my changing relationship with Alex. Documenting these changes became an important part of the research process. I have detailed the different roles I had as a researcher in Alex's classroom and their effect on the research findings in chapter 5.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write about reflexivity: the process of knowing that the researcher is the instrument in the research: "It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself" (p.183). I continually reminded myself of my background as a classroom teacher, my history as a teacher researcher, and the differences between Maine and Oregon classrooms.

<u>Data Collection</u>

At the start of the dissertation study, I had three main sources of data for my study: observations, interviews, and documents. Creswell (1998) explains that case study "involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case" (p. 123). Interviews, observation, and document collection are the methods by which data are most commonly gathered in case study research (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Stake;1995; Yin, 1994).

<u>Observations</u>

"Developed mainly through the discipline of cultural anthropology and qualitative sociology, participant observation (as this method is typically called) is both an overall approach to inquiry and a data gathering method" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.78). As I positioned myself as a participant observer in the classroom, I was there to observe and learn as much as I could through my observations. At times it was difficult to remain in that role—especially when the children would ask me to participate in an activity or listen to them read. In these cases, I needed to make a decision as to whether or not it would benefit or hurt my time observing. Merriam (2001) describes this confusion as "a schizophrenic activity in that the researcher usually participates but not to the extent of becoming totally absorbed in the activity" (p. 103).

Wolcott (1981) suggests four observational strategies:

1. observations by a broad sweep (try to observe and record everything),

2. observations of nothing in particular (begin to note what stands out, what appears to be unusual),

3. observations that search for paradoxes (begin to look more deeply into the interactions),

4. observations that search for problems facing the group (begin to look more deeply into the interactions).

Stake (1995) writes about the importance of the observations in order to create the story of the case: "...the qualitative approach usually means finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case" (p. 63) In order to do this, I needed to have detailed notes.

I developed my own strategy for recording my field notes:

- Items written in **bold** were questions I wanted to remember to ask Alex.

- Items written in *italics* were verbatim dialogue from Alex.

- Items written below a dotted line at the end of my field notes were notes just for me.

Below is an excerpt from a February 7th observation:

Excerpt from observation (2/7/03):

> *Today, your only job is to have a character puppet to be you*
>
> *and one character puppet to be Roald Dahl. If you can't find a*
>
> *character you can draw yourself. If you can't find a character*
>
> *to be Roald Dahl you can draw Roald Dahl.*

The kids are handed a magazine and then go to their tables to
look for their character puppets.

- **Where did Alex read/learn about SRI?**

- **What does SRI stand for?**

- **Were the kids confused by those letters?**

- **How will they share these?**

- **What is the purpose for doing SRI?**

- **Will the kids use SRI for their own books too after this?**

  Alex asks the kids to bring their character puppets to her and
  she puts them in a plastic bag.

- **Does that mean they aren't working on these today?  What
  will they do with them?**

  *You should be at your table and I should have all of your*

  *pieces in 10,9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1.*

  The kids are at their tables.


My daily written observations varied in length from four to ten pages.
Normally, they contained observations from the morning meetings, reading workshop
minilessons and the reading workshop activity that the children participated in, but
there were also many variations.  If Alex was working on a specific project, for
example, my notes reflected that project.

As time went on, I became more familiar with the classroom and I had fewer
questions about general classroom structure.  Many of the questions I asked myself in

written observations became translated into interview questions I asked Alex later the same day or week.

Interviews

My interviews were designed in such a way that I asked a variety of questions. Merriam (2001) describes four types of good questions (p. 77):

- Hypothetical questions –An example of a hypothetical question I asked Alex was: "Suppose you were told that writing workshop was going to be mandated next year for all teachers in all schools. How would you feel about that?"

- Devil's advocate questions – An example of a devil's advocate question I asked Alex was: "Some might say that it's not appropriate for teachers to share their political opinions with their students. What would you say to them?" I asked this question one morning after I observed Alex sharing her opinion on the Iraq War with students.

- Ideal position questions – An example of an ideal position question I asked Alex was: "What is your idea for the perfect professional development school?"

- Interpretive questions – An example of an interpretive question I asked Alex was: "Was the reaction of other teachers to the bulletin board what you expected? Why or why not?"

These interviews often began with specific questions or comments I had about something I observed, but were open-ended. We often moved between many different topics freely during these conversations.

For example, in an except from an interview in January, Alex shares her

excitement over her students' work after a lesson she gave on

creating mental images:

Excerpt from interview: (1/13/03)

J[ill]: That lesson, that was great. What did you think of ____

A[lex]: The one on visual images?

J: Yeah,

A: I think it went really well. I'm planning on doing it all week, so I

didn't feel rushed at all and I could really start really small with them.

J: I thought it was so interesting that Linda, and a couple others had no

trees in their pictures.

A: John too. He ended up doing a haunted house. He said, you know

when they talk about the Halloween leaves.

J: I didn't even remember that.

A: Isn't it amazing? And then Gabby, for hers she said, 'I'm doing the

part where they never had leaves to burn at Halloween.'

J: Was that even in the book?

A: No, it talks about burning leaves at Halloween and my image was

the flaming colors of the leaves and she said…I just think that is so

neat!


In the following excerpt Alex was clearly frustrated with a new teaching

strategy, symbolic story representation, she was trying with her students. It is one of

many examples in my notes of how Alex routinely reflects on her practice, analyzing failures as well as successes:

Excerpt from interview: (2/24/03)

A: Right it is going to be hard, but I don't want them to feel yucky about it, I want them to feel good about it and proud about it and that they've accomplished so much.

J: Uh hu

A: OK, I want to write this down, I'd sort of like to have symbolic story representation unit so that if I start again next year.

J: I would write down your reflections.

A: This is what I'd change next year

J: Right, um hm

A: Start smaller.

J: I wonder if that um, I wonder if that the thing about what happened in the story, if they needed that.

A: Well, with a real symbolic story representation, like you do need that because that's how you share it, but how could have I started smaller.

Many of the responses from my interviews led to further inquiries. All of the

information I gathered during my interviews helped me to see interesting patterns and

trends emerge as I continued to gather data during my study.

I gave copies of all of my written observations and interviews to Alex for her

to read. (For a sample of one of these member checks see figure 4.2 on page 102).

These member checks allowed Alex to comment on the accuracy of my notes

(Creswell, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

<u>Document Collection/Generation</u>

Creswell (2001) describes documents as those "ranging from public to

private" (p.120). I collected letters Alex sent home to parents that pertained to her

literacy practice or when she explained any changes she made to her classroom. Alex

and I also kept a dialogue journal throughout my time in her classroom. We also had

an email exchange but we found that the hand written dialogue journal suited us

better. Merriam (2001) notes an entire study based on personal documents:

> Abraham's (1992) case study of Russian Jewish emigration is based solely on
>
> his grandfather's diaries written over a twelve-year period. A well-known
>
> earlier study of Polish immigrant life relied heavily upon personal letters
>
> written between immigrants and relatives in Europe (Thomas & Znaniecki,
>
> 1927). Many of these letters were obtained by placing ads in local newspapers
>
> asking for them. (p. 117)

This dialogue journal we wrote together became an important piece of data.

We passed the dialogue journal back and forth between us once or twice a week. I

was able to take an idea from an observation or interview and expand on it in our

dialogue journal. For instance in one interview I had asked about Susan, Alex's

former principal. She was an important influence on Alex and a support in getting the

university partnership started in the Salem school district. I asked Alex if she would

write her feelings about the partnership now that Susan was gone in our dialogue

journal.

Dialogue journal except: (2/28/03)

I think we were on our way to being a professional development school (PDS)

when Susan was here. She was so supportive of Learning Labs, workshops,

conferences, us visiting other schools, etc. She was even part of the

curriculum and inquiry class. She was always so positive and just refused to

be a part of negative conversation. I feel like we've started going backwards

or downhill or somewhere not towards a productive or professional. A true

PDS needs to have so much more.


Through these journal entries, I could create more interview questions and ask

Alex to expand on a thought she had written. As Patton notes (2002), "Documents

prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as

stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observations and

interviewing" (p. 294).

Trustworthiness

Using multiple data sources such as interviews, observations, and documents

to collect data, which is called triangulation, help to promote credibility or

trustworthiness in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Besides

triangulation and member checks to ensure trustworthiness, I also made efforts of prolonged engagement, peer review of my study, reflexivity, and thick description of findings (Merriam, 2002). Below I have listed in detail how I used each of these strategies to ensure trustworthiness in my study:

Prolonged engagement – I spent adequate time in Alex's classroom so that I became "saturated" with data. I was in the classroom three days a week for four months.

Peer review – I had many discussions with advisors and colleagues throughout the process of my study. These discussions centered on raw data as well as written findings.

Reflexivity – I continually positioned myself within my study and looked closely at my biases as an educator, a former teacher, and a teacher researcher.

Thick description – By writing with enough descriptions of Alex and her classroom, I am trying to "contextualize the study" (Merriam, 2002) for my readers.

Triangulation – I used a variety of data gathering sources and methods.

<u>Generating New Data to "Crystallize Alex"</u>

By early February I was frustrated with the data I was collecting, especially as I tried to make sense of it. For some reason, no matter how many ways I asked a question in an interview or how many times I observed a minilesson, or how many different ways I looked at a document I had collected, I just didn't feel as if I was seeing any new perspectives. I knew I wasn't getting to new understanding Alex: to the core of who she was. How was I ever going to know what influenced her to make changes to her literacy program? Knowing that patience is sometimes a virtue in qualitative research, I tried to be patient and I hoped that what I was experiencing, as

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"flat" data would somehow magically transform itself into three-dimensional splendor during data analysis.

I wasn't sure how to get to new perspectives with my data or expand my data collection so that I would have a richer base of information to work from. I tried asking the same question in a variety of ways and once I even tried observing from a different spot in the classroom than my usual one behind Alex's desk thinking that would give me the new perspective I needed. Needless to say, that experiment didn't give me the answers that I was searching for.

I read an article in Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* that expanded my data collection repertoire, and eventually helped shaped my data analysis methods. Valerie Janesick wrote a piece called *The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design: Minuets, Improvisations, and Crystallization.* It was the concept that Laurel Richardson (2000) coined "crystallization" that caught my attention in the Janesick article.

> I like to think that crystallization incorporates the use of other disciplines, such as art, sociology, history, dance, architecture, and anthropology, to inform our research processes and broaden our understanding of method and substance. (p. 392)

This idea challenged me to create my flat image of collecting data that would eventually serve as points on a triangle during analysis, to seeing data within the three dimensional image of a crystal. (See Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

Figure 2.2: Triangulation

OBSERVATIONS

INTERVIEWS                    DOCUMENTS
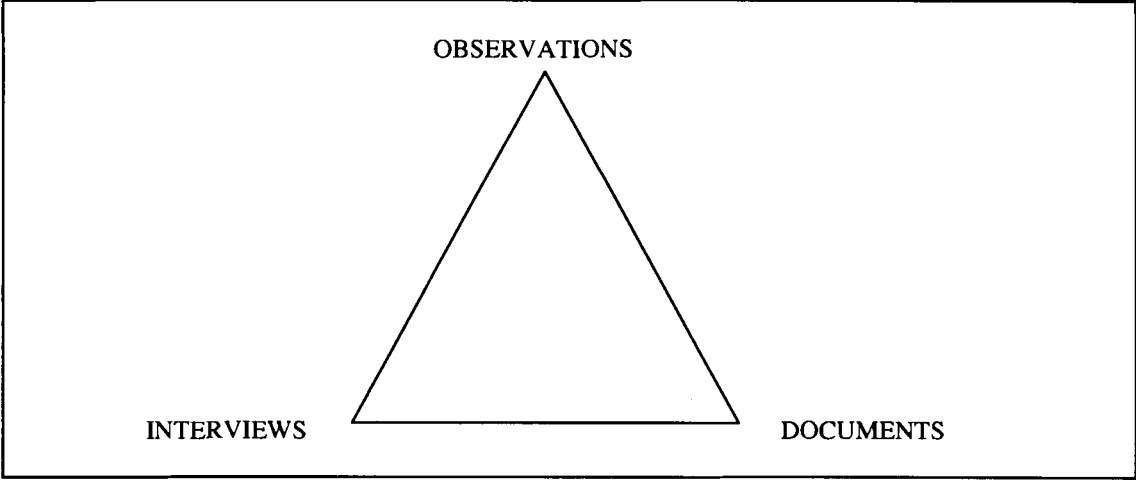
Figure 2.3: Crystallization
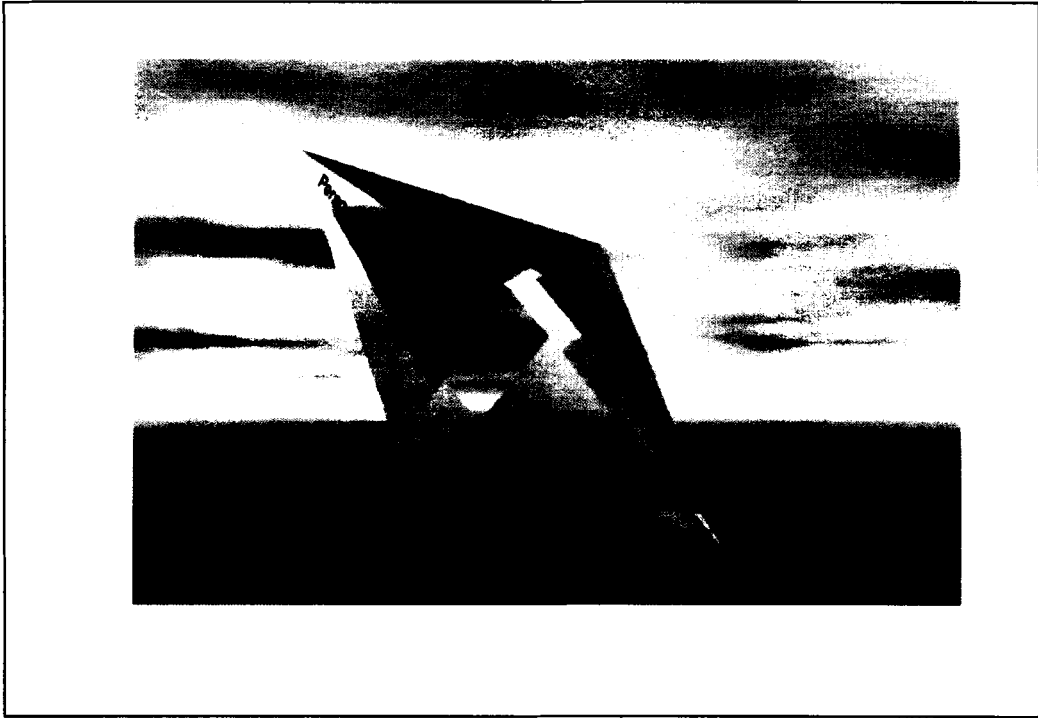
Janesick goes on to write, "Crystallization recognizes the many facets of any given approach to the social world as fact of life. The image of the crystal replaces that of the land surveyor and the triangle" (p. 392).

I understood crystallization to mean incorporating many facets or disciplines during data collection and analysis to get different perspectives on Alex as an educator.

Eisner (1998) writes:

Whether collective or individual, the common function of the aesthetic is to modulate form so that it can, in turn modulate our experience. The moving patterns of sound created by composers, in turn, create their counterparts in the competent listener. The physically static forms produced by visual artists create in the competent viewer a quality of life analogous to those in the forms beheld. In sum, the form of the work informs us. Our internal life is shaped by the forms we are able to experience. (p. 34)

I went back to my roots as an elementary classroom teacher and thought about what forms of expression I asked my students to use when I wanted to learn more about them as learners. When I was learning more about my students as mathematicians, I had them draw pictures of problems, act out problems they were solving, write about their solutions, and think about how they might approach a solution in a different way. By asking my students to look at mathematics from many different perspectives, I was able to learn about them as mathematicians in a much

deeper sense than if I were to just look at answers to problems written on piece of paper. I just substituted this thinking to my research with Alex.

Maxine Greene (1995) writes eloquently of the arts and of looking at things through a different lens:

> When the rationalists are challenged to try rhomboids and cones, they are being lured to allow their lines and squares to move through a spectrum of shapes to the ellipse of the half-moon. They are not being asked to give up thinking or attending to their texts but to exchange their mortarboards for sombreros, at least now and then. They are being challenged to attend to things with a greater sense of play and panache, of the dialectic of the moon and the square room and of margin and text. (p. 142)

Many of the ideas I came up with to try with Alex came from my experiences as a classroom teacher and others from my experiences as a learner. I have been influenced by the work of Parker Palmer and have participated in several retreats based on the work from his book, *The Courage to Teach* (1998).

Palmer writes about bringing a "third thing" into our work--to take the focus off of the student and the teacher:

> If we want a community of truth in the classroom, a community that can keep us honest, we must put a *third thing* a great thing, at the center of the pedagogical circle. When student and teacher are the only active agents, community easily slips into narcissism, where either the teacher reigns supreme or students can do no wrong. (p. 116-117)

I knew that Palmer was talking about students and teachers, but the same principles apply for teachers and researchers. It's easy to slip into narcissism or pat answers about your work and purpose. Looking at art or metaphor or any "great thing" outside of an education context forces a different kind of honesty about practice and a fresh new perspective.

In January I wrote a preliminary list of activities or prompts I might use with Alex to collect data that could give me "multidimensional" insights into her beliefs and practices:

- Artwork

- Responding to poetry

- Creating metaphor

- Acting out role plays

At first I experienced some anxiety around contemplating asking my informant to paint pictures. I wondered if my research would not be considered valid or rigorous. Richardson (2000) writes:

> Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity' (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (p. 934)

My data collection changed dramatically after learning about crystallization. I

still did interviews, observations, and collected documents, but I also "crystallized"

my data by adding the following to my collection:

- Metaphor – I asked Alex to create her metaphor for literacy teaching (1/30/03)

- Collections – I asked Alex to make a collection of everyday items that
  represent who she is as a teacher of reading. (2/3/03)

- Circle that has brought you here – I gave Alex a circle drawn on a piece of
  paper, I asked her to fill in the circle with the question, *what is the circle that
  has brought you to this point?* (2/5/03)

- Parker Palmer – I gave Alex the book, *The Courage to Teach* to read. We
  were going to listen to Parker Palmer speak together and we could talk about
  his work together before we went. (3/5/03)

- Poetry – I asked Alex to respond to poetry—how a poem related to her
  teaching. (4/6/03)

- Mental and Visual Images – I asked Alex to imagine and then draw her mental
  images of the most exceptional and most distressing professional development
  experiences she has had as an educator. (4/12/03)

In February I wanted to interview Alex to get information about how she saw

herself as a literacy teacher. I remembered when I first asked Alex back in October to

tell me about how she begins her reading workshop for her students at the beginning

of the year. She told me, "I begin with teaching comprehension strategies. All second

graders have stories to tell about how they read and how they relate to something in

their life, text to text, text to self, and text to world connections." There was nothing

wrong with this response but hearing the educational jargon around comprehension

instruction didn't help me understand how Alex saw herself as a reading teacher.

After learning about crystallization, I had new data collection strategies for

finding out about how Alex sees herself as a literacy teacher. Going back to my

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beginnings as a classroom teacher and I asked myself what I would ask my students to do if I wanted to learn more about them as learners. That was easy. I would ask them to bring in a collection of objects that represented themselves as learners.

In February I asked Alex to bring in a collection of objects that she thought best represented herself as a teacher of reading. Below is the collection, and description, of what she brought in during one of our extended Monday sessions: Field notes: (2/3/03)

1. The Golden Compass by Phillip Pullman – A current reading book to always remember to model my own reading.

2. A magnifying glass – To see into my students reading lives.

3. A map – To help me find where to guide my students.

4. A lock and key – To unlock the magic of reading for my students.

5. Two five pound weights – To help me stay strong as I try new things in my teaching.

6. My husband's camera with a zoom lens – To help me stay focused on what's important to me and my teaching.

7. A candle – To help me see my immediate surroundings with the children and not the outer forces---testing, writing prompts, DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment)

This collection is an example of how the artifacts collected and analyzed (through crystallization) gave me a much deeper sense and crystallize of who Alex is as a teacher and learner.

Not all of my crystallization strategies for data collection worked well. Alex never fully developed a metaphor for teaching. She struggled through this every time I asked. The first time I asked her in January, I made the assumption that everyone thinks in metaphors like I do. One Friday in January I quickly asked her if she would think about her metaphor for teaching and we could talk about it when I returned on Monday. When we met she gave me a blank stare and told me that she hadn't come up with anything. For the next few weeks, she looked at me and said, "I'm thinking about it, I'm thinking about it." On January 30, she sent me an email:

Email excerpt: (1/30/03)

> I've been thinking about a metaphor for teaching and so many actually come to mind, but I want my very own to be perfect so I will continue to think on that one!

I tried to make the process easier for Alex. During one of my courses at Lewis & Clark and then again here at University of Maine, I had a professor bring out dozens of photographs for us to look through to help prompt ideas as we wrote metaphors. I decided to try that strategy with Alex. I borrowed photographs from a friend of mine and brought those in for Alex to look through as she tried to create a teaching metaphor.

She shuffled through the stack and kept coming back to a photograph of an elderly woman. I told her she could take that picture and hold onto it for a while and let it sit with her. When she was ready, she could let me know what she had created. In the beginning of February, she sent me an email.

Email excerpt: (2/5/03)

OK, about this metaphor. I wanted to come up with something original,

not like baking, gardening, house building…ones we have all heard.

Teaching is like growing old.

Most of us hope we do it gracefully,

it happens when we're not even looking,

some of us make it artificial

others of us treasure each moment as we are in it

people may tell you that you can't do it and be happy

it may take your whole life before you are happy with what you have

accomplished…

This is a beginning, but it's bedtime and I'll keep adding more.


I thought Alex's metaphor was great and I would have loved to spend time

developing it further with her. But, I also felt as if I was hounding her with it. This

was definitely a time during my research when I sensed Alex was doing something

just to please me. I had great metaphors from her collection of objects and I didn't

need to keep pushing her on this particular metaphor of teaching to enhance my

research data.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) offer advice for data management to make sure to

be well organized. I had an organized system for my data before I became too

overwhelmed with the amount of data I would collect. I bought binders for each type

of data I collected. For example, I had one binder for interviews, one for observations, and one for documents. I dated every piece I collected and organized the data chronologically. I realized that I needed more binders for my emails with Alex, personal notes I was taking, and for back-up copies.

When I began to code my data, I looked through the binders chronologically by topic. For example, as I was searching for patterns, I looked through my entire binder of observations before going onto interviews.

I coded my data using an inductive approach; meaning that the themes and patterns emerged from my data (Patton, 2002). Three major themes surfaced: literacy, professional development, and researcher roles. After generating my major themes, I coded using a deductive method of coding, which means I looked for data that related to the codes I had identified (Patton, 2002).

In the sample below are the data points for the subcode *our relationship* under the theme of researcher roles. I pulled these points from my data as moments or extended periods of time when I felt as if I was in a mentoring role with Alex. According to Lipton and Wellman (2002) effective mentors offer support, challenge, and facilitate a professional vision. As I looked through my data I kept these aspects in mind.

Data Subcategory: Our Relationship---mentoring role

- Word endings drama (Observation field notes:Jan.8,2003 p.3; 1/22/03, p.1;
  Interview Jan. 13, 2003 lines 21-42)
- Inventions (Observation field notes: Jan. 24, 2003, p.3)
- The list of skills we came up with from the inventions

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- Parker Palmer (Phone calls: Feb. 16, 2003 and Feb. 28 2003; Interview March, 3 2003 line 3)

- Offering support (Interview March 3, 2003 line 82)

- The professional board

For instance, I asked Alex if she might try letting her students use drama to help them make sense of word endings. This was a challenge for her because she told me during our interview that she had never tried this before. But she decided to see what would happen. Since I felt as if I mentored her through that process I wrote "word-ending drama" in this category.

After I had my codes and subcodes I developed a "so what" technique as a way to make a first analysis of different data points. Getting ready to do some coding, I looked through all of my observations and interviews toward the end of my time in Alex's classroom and said to myself, "OK, I have all of this information. So what?" I went through the stack in front of me and chose pieces from my data that I found important and noteworthy. Then, I created categories that matched my major topics at that point: literacy development and professional development. I wrote my "so-whats" under each heading. (Table 2.1)

For each data point, I did some free-writing on that topic that I called my "deeper-so-what's." Below is an example of a "deeper-so-what" free-write I did from the spelling data point.

Table 2.1: "So-What" Analysis (4/9/03)

| DATA POINT | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT | LITERACY INSTRUCTION |
|---|---|---|
| -Professional Development Board | -A reflective time-line of Alex's project<br>-Invites questions, comments from others<br>-Many have written on the graffiti board<br>-Alex showed her confidence and she grew professionally by sharing publicly. | -Other teachers learning something new.<br>-Her intern tried it.<br>-She had to reflect on what was and was not working for her students. |
| -Spelling Program | -Do the teachers understand how they are supposed to use it?<br>-What was the process to choose this one?<br><br>-She respects the parameters of a district mandate.<br>-Where's the research behind it? | -Alex values other things more than spelling in her writing program. |
| -SRI "Fix-up" confusions | -Through professional conversation | -Differences between synthesis and sequencing<br><br>-Listening and observing students |

Data excerpt (4/11/03):

The spelling program was chosen by the district's curriculum coordinator.
When I asked Alex how it was selected, she said, "With the meeting at the
beginning of the year, this is the spelling curriculum this is what you will do."
The teachers were not given any input as to which spelling curriculum to
choose. This could account for the animosity over having to use it. During
my pilot study, she was very frustrated by the time it took to use this program.
On a day I had visited, the children were just finishing up an hour and a half
spelling session. Besides the time factor, Alex was bothered by the fact that
the weekly lists consisted of 15 words. And, 15 words randomly selected. She
wrote me in an email exchange, What's nagging me? There are 15 words, too

many. The words are from a resource book, not from individual children's writing. The TIME factor is insane! And we know kids don't carry over spelling of random words they study for Friday's test into their own writing! Being told what to do without any teacher input seems like a dangerous way to introduce curriculum to a staff of teachers. The teachers were simply given the program, had no training, and instructed to use it with their students. The district is choosing a math program too, but it is being carefully selected through a district math committee. I wonder if Alex would have been more accepting of the spelling program if she could have had her voice heard. She is on the math committee precisely for this reason.

When I had completed all of the free-writes and exhausted the data points selected what remained were the major themes that became the topics for chapters for my study. For example, one of my themes became my relationship with Alex. When I began to think more closely about this relationship, I went back to the data and recorded all the spots in the data where our relationship was mentioned or significant to the data.

By writing these free-writes on my themes, I was able to connect back to the research questions I was exploring: what are the connections between literacy theory and reform and actual practice in one second grade teacher's instruction, what impact do university/school partnerships have on the literacy practices of one teacher, and what forms of professional development support effective change for one teacher?

Case study data analysis is based on description and finding patterns (Creswell, 1998). My free-writing helped to create rich descriptions and find deeper patterns within those descriptions, which ultimately led me to my final written report.

After discovering crystallization, I felt confident in the manner in which I was thinking about and collecting and analyzing my data. "Data analysis is one of the few facets, perhaps the only facet of doing qualitative research in which there is a right way and a wrong way. …the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection" (Merriam, 2001, 162).

Since so much of my data collecting strategy built upon what I was learning from the data, analyzing as I went along was imperative. For instance, when I asked Alex to fill in the circle of what had brought her to this point in her career, I saw how many professional development experiences have influenced her. I used the information to dig deeper and learn more about Alex's experiences with professional development by asking her to do some mental and visual imagery artwork. These data points became significant pieces of my study.

Writing Up the Report

"Like the choreographer, the researcher must find the most effective way to tell the story and to convince the audience of the meaning of the study" (Janesick, 2000, p. 389). As I began to think about my final written dissertation, I thought about a way to bring together all of the different perspectives of my study. I was excited about the possibilities of how to write my dissertation and also terrified about where to begin. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write, "The bad news is that the multiple selves

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we create and encounter give rise to more dynamic, problematic, open-ended, and complex forms of writing and representation" (p. 184).

I've organized the findings into separate chapters in the areas of literacy, collaboration, and professional development. In this way, I have crafted multiple stories centered on one central theme: Alex; and what influences her to make changes in her classroom.

The next chapter focuses on the tensions and reflections Alex made in her literacy program.

### 3.    LITERACY TENSIONS AND REFLECTIONS: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON CHANGE

*What happens in such an educational bureaucracy when a teacher begins to think and act not as a technical expert but as a reflective practitioner?*

-Donald Schön

Donald Schön's (1983) words have intrigued me ever since I was an elementary teacher years ago in such a bureaucracy. As a new teacher, I had the opportunity to test what I had learned about teaching reading in my preservice program over and over again. But it wasn't until I began to reflect on the experience of what was actually occurring with my students that I became aware of the uncertainty or tension I was feeling about my reading instruction.

All I had been taught in my undergraduate language arts methods course was how to use a basal [a textbook series] reader. The more I used this systematic way of trying to teach my students how to read, the more uncertain I became. And yet, it wasn't until I began to reflect on my uncertainty that I began to make changes in my reading program. It is this mix of the confidence that grows from understanding routines and norms in the profession, and finding a willingness to question them, that Schön uses to define the "reflective practitioner":

A professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again...As a practitioner experiences many variations of a small number of types of cases, he is able to 'practice' his practice. Through reflection, he can surface and criticize the tactic understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can

make new sense of the situation of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience. (pp. 60-61)

When I began listening to my students more than the curriculum guides handed to me at the start of each year, I knew I was beginning to become what Schön calls a reflective practitioner. But how and when do other teachers, especially early career teachers, become reflective practitioners and use those reflections to drive their practice? More importantly, what drives these reflections?

During my months in Alex's second grade classroom, I observed as she reflected upon three changes to her literacy program, and witnessed how these reflections influenced her view of herself professionally. Some of the changes she initiated, based upon new understandings of literacy instruction from professional development opportunities and her own inquiry. Other changes were mandated, like an extensive new spelling program required in all primary classrooms in the district the year I completed my research. In this chapter, I will consider how changes in Alex's literacy program are connected with her development as a reflective practitioner.

Non-leveling Books

Throughout the four months of the dissertation study, Alex questioned the ways she should use "levels" in her reading program. This questioning and reflection was an outgrowth of inquiry she had started the previous year, as part of a graduate curriculum inquiry course.

It was during this course that Alex became very interested in the work of Debbie Miller, and more specifically the research on reading comprehension strategy

instruction (Harvey& Goudvis, 1999; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002; Tovani, 2000). She would often share mini-lessons with other teachers in class that she presented to her students on making connections, questioning the text, synthesizing, making inferences, or creating visual images.

Alex had been using the guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996) approach to teaching reading since the start of her career, and this was the reading method that most of the teachers in the school were using as well. Alex explained that the books in her classroom were "leveled" based on the guidelines outlined through guided reading. I asked Alex during the spring of 2002 if she understood how the levels were determined--in other words, what the guidelines were based on. She gave me a blank stare and said, "Well, you know, I'm not sure. We're just sort of given a list."

"What happens if you have a student who is interested in something that isn't in their leveled basket?" I asked.

"Well, funny you should ask! They aren't supposed to read it and you know what? That just happened. Tyler said to me yesterday that he couldn't find any interesting books in his basket. And, Ryan said that he wanted to read the book about battleships but it's in a level that's too high, so he just walked away from the basket without looking at it! That just doesn't seem right to me."

The comment "that just doesn't seem right to me" led Alex to dig deeper with the questions that seemed to be bubbling up about leveling books in her classroom.

The "leveling" of books in classrooms is part of a larger scheme of categorizing students by ability, and then matching students to texts at an appropriate level of difficulty (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999; Szymusiak & Sibberson, 2001).

Mooney (1988) classified readers into three groups as part of a hierarchy:

emergent, early, and fluent. Teachers Szymusiak and Sibberson (2001) write:

> Emergent readers have not yet learned many strategies for understanding
>
> print. They have minimal decoding skills and often rely on pictures for most
>
> of the information they get from books. Early readers rely less on pictures.
>
> They are beginning to recognize high-frequency words automatically as they
>
> read familiar texts with fluency. (p.5)

These categories of learners have been used and expanded upon by many

teachers over the years. After early readers, there has been a shift in the research

regarding the label given to what Mooney labeled "fluent" readers. Szymusiak and

Sibberson (2001) refer to these readers as transitional readers. Readers "understand

they can readily use decoding skills to decipher texts. They have many strengths as

readers and a great variety of weaknesses" (p.5). The goal for teachers is to move

their students beyond the transitional level of reading, to independent reading.

Fountas and Pinnell (1999) have separated the independent level into two groups:

> Self-extending – readers use all sources of information flexibly in a smoothly
>
> orchestrated system. They can apply their strategies to reading texts that are
>
> much longer and more complex.
>
> Advanced – Students who are advanced in reading have moved well beyond
>
> the early 'learning to read' phases of literacy learning. They are still learning
>
> and developing their strategies while they have varied experiences in reading.
>
> (p. 3)

Leveling texts is a way of helping teachers assist those readers they have

identified as early, emergent, transitional, self-extending, and advanced (Fountas &

Pinnell, 1999; Szymusiak & Sibberson 2001; Weaver, 2000). Using techniques

developed by Marie Clay (1993) and others, teachers assess the reading ability of

individual children by completing "running records." The teacher listens to a child

read texts that have been defined with specific readability and comprehension

components, noting errors as the child reads. By completing a detailed record and

analysis of a child's reading, the teaching can then determine what book level is most

appropriate for that child.

Because the use of running records and text levels is common in many

elementary schools, there are many professional resources available that provide

information on the levels of most children's books. For example, in guided reading

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) give *Danny and the Dinosaur* by Syd Hoff a level "J" on

their scale of levels which range from A-R. The rationale for this is below:

> Level J approximately marks the beginning of second grade; however,
>
> advanced first graders will already be reading books at this level. Other
>
> children, especially if they have not had much reading experience over the
>
> summer, will need easier books. Texts at this level and the next allow children
>
> to orchestrate their reading strategies on a greater variety of texts,
>
> consolidating and extending what they know.
>
> Stories are longer and more complex, although they still deal with
>
> subjects of interest to young children. Most concepts and themes are familiar,

from either personal experience or previous experience with books. There are a variety of texts – nonfiction, folktales, realistic stories, more. (p.127)

Alex was very familiar with these levels. She had been completing running records on her students since her first year as a teacher as her primary assessment tool. The district also now requires the Developmental Reading Assessment (Beaver, 1997), which provides additional data for determining the reading level of each child.

Because of this emphasis on reading levels as the best tool for matching kids to books, Alex had been organizing her books and classroom library based on levels ever since she began teaching. Children were expected to choose books from the appropriate basket at their level, so each student was limited in their options for selecting new books. But Alex became frustrated by what she was observing in her classroom. Her students were asking to choose other books from different tubs, and she heard more conversations among students comparing levels in a competitive way, rather than conversations where students were discussing what they liked about the books they were reading. She was ready to try something new.

Alex often spoke of Debbie Miller's (2002) book and how much it had influenced her teaching. There is a photograph, for example, on the cover of Miller's book that shows a round table low to the ground where children can sit on pillows while they work. Alex decided to add a low table to her living room area this year because she was so impressed with that photograph.

Regarding leveled books, Miller writes:

I worry when we methodically move children through book after book, level

after level, all to achieve some target number that labels them – and us –

proficient. I worry about their engagement and enthusiasm for reading and

learning, I worry about their concluding that reading fast is reading

well...Readers of all ages need a variety of text type and level of difficulty.

(p.43)


During the curriculum inquiry class, Alex decided to focus her inquiry project

on leveling books. The title of her inquiry project became: *The power of choice:*

*What happens when the children are encouraged to read any book in the classroom*

*versus instructional level trade books?* That spring, Alex took away the leveled

categories of her classroom library and regrouped her books by topic.

The idea that tensions teachers have lead to teacher research questions is not

new (Hubbard & Power, 1993, 1999), but what impressed me about Alex's question

was how she was asking a question about something she had learned to be a "best

practice" in teaching. Questioning best practice was new for Alex, and she informed

me that the she was frightened a little by this new questioning.

"What if I'm wrong?" she shared with me one morning during an interview in

October 2002 as part of my pilot dissertation study.

"Well, what if you are? You might be wrong. What will happen?"

"I guess I could always go back to what I was doing before, right? I just have this gut feeling that I'm right about this, you know? I know that everyone else is leveling their books, it's just not working for me or my kids," she said.

Pressley (2001) would agree with Alex's assessment:

When things do not go well, the excellent teacher recognizes that the healthiest response is to change reading tactics, rather than persist with an approach that is not working, blaming the kids for not 'getting it' (e.g., believing that the reading program is just too hard for her or his students), or hoping that someone else (e.g., the remedial reading teacher, district consultant, teacher aide, or parent) will solve the problem (p. 224).

Szymusiak and Sibberson (2001) write more specifically on the limits of book levels as the only tool for reading teachers:

The recent practice of 'leveling' books in the first years of reading instruction has become a standard component of literacy instruction (see Fountas and Pinnell 1996), and leveled books can be an enormously helpful tool. However, we must remember that they are just that – one tool among others. (p.15)

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) also caution against using levels as the only tool to assist a young reader:

Individual students cannot be categorized as, for example, 'level M Readers.' Their background knowledge varies widely according to the experiences they

have had at home, in the community, and in school. Their reading ability

develops along many dimensions. (p. 225)

Alex made a professional choice to try something different with her students.

Her decision to take the levels off her books was well grounded. She had many

observations of her students to show that the levels were getting in their way of

choosing books they wanted to read, and from having conversations about the content

about the books they were reading.

Alex had other sources that she had read in her graduate courses outlining

other ways to organize books in a classroom--she didn't just blindly throw out one

idea without first thinking through carefully her reasons for it.

Alex also had a solid reading program already in place before she made this

major change. Her students were used to having minilessons and practiced what they

had learned in the minilesson during reading workshop. Alex's workshop was still

based on the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

Gradual release is a model of teaching including teacher demonstration, guided

practice, and eventually individual work—the end goal is to provide enough support

so that students acquire the skills they need to accomplish tasks on their own. "This

gradual withdrawal of instructional support is also known as scaffolded instruction

because 'supports' or 'scaffold' are gradually removed as students demonstrate

greater degrees of proficiency" (Gambrell et al. 1999, p. 16).

Alex's gradual release model was similar to Miller's (2002, p.11) model in

table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Components of the Workshop from Miller

| Phases of Gradual Release | 15-20 min. Read-aloud, Minilessons (whole group) | 45-50 min. Reading, Conferring (small group, independent, pairs) | 15-20 min. Reflections, Sharing (whole group, small group, pairs) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Modeling Reading Behavior | X | X | X |
| Thinking Aloud | X | X | X |
| Guided Practice | X | X | X |
| Independent Practice | | X | X |
| Application on their own | | X | X |

Alex began her inquiry in the 2001-2002 school year by allowing her children to choose any book they wanted in her classroom, regardless of the level they were assigned. She did want her books to be organized in tubs, just not by ability levels, so she led several discussions with her students about the types of categories in which they wanted the books to be.

During the next several weeks the children helped to separate the books into groups such as, animals, seasons, and poetry. They choose books from these tubs based on interests they had and determining reading levels on their own.

The following are some of the observations that Alex wrote as a result of her 2001 inquiry project:

- The children are reading books that interest them.
- They are sharing good books and parts of good books with peers.
- They are reading nonfiction books
- They are listening to recommendations from peers
- They are making more connections
- It has created a less competitive environment (not comparing which tubs they are reading in)
- They know themselves better as readers (likes, dislikes)
- They are reading for pleasure
- They ENJOY reading!

Knowing that the goal of an inquiry is to inform teaching and hopefully sustain a change in practice, I suspected Alex would continue to question and refine her reading program the following year while I worked as a researcher in her classroom.

I wasn't surprised on my first visit in September, when I began my pilot study in her classroom, to see baskets of non-leveled, topic-grouped books sitting on the windowsill, but I was surprised by Alex's confidence with her decision. In October 2002, she sent me an email in response to a question I had asked her about her decision to continue with the nonleveling of her books:

Email excerpt: (10/1/02)

I am tired of leveling books and therefore leveling children's reading abilities. My last years of teaching where I did level books led me to hearing children say too often that they couldn't read books that were above their level and that there were no interesting books in their tubs!

It wasn't anger; but I did read frustration in her response, as if she should have known this all along. But Alex had learned that by listening to her students, by observing their learning, she learned what decisions she needed to make as their teacher:

Email response: (2/2/03)

> I learn so much from the children I teach beginning with what's important to them and what they want to learn. I have also learned that to teach reading through making guided reading groups where I choose leveled books for the kids just doesn't work. They taught me that they *could* read with much more fluency and understanding when they read what was important to them. I remember listening to a conversation last year from some groups of kids. They were talking about the levels they were reading *not* the books they were reading. Is that what we want kids talking about books?

Fountas and Pinnell (1999) write that matching books to readers depends on three "interrelated sets of understandings, all of which are critical to effective teaching:

- Knowing the readers
- Knowing the texts
- Understanding the reading process. (p.3)

Alex believes she will be able to match children with text without needing to level her books. She knows her readers. She assesses her students using the

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Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) as a tool to help her see where her students are developmentally after she has had a month to get to know them, Alex has been collecting children's books since she was a child (her mother is an elementary classroom teacher), she has taken a graduate course in Children's Literature, and she has an extensive personal classroom library.

Alex demonstrates her knowledge of the reading process by how she sets up and implements her reading workshop. She assesses her students and determines what they need. She helps her students learn to assess what books are possible for them to read determining which books are "too easy," "just right," or "too hard" as they choose books to read. She holds individual and small group conferences with students for continuous discussions about book selection, and she has whole class time for students to share what they have read.

By questioning the place of levels in her classroom Alex also learned to openly reflect on an internal tension she was having. She had learned that leveling her books was best practice teaching and to challenge that was not easy for Alex. By listening to this internal tension, and reflecting on it, Alex was able to make changes to her reading program that she felt had a positive effect on her students' learning.

In March 2003, I asked Alex to reflect on how she thought things were going with her new organization of books. In a dialogue journal entry she wrote: "I think the non-leveling of books has gone amazingly well! The children are learning to challenge themselves and also how to make good, conscious decisions about books they choose to read."

Not only does she feel the children have benefited from this change, though. She has heard many positive comments from parents as well:

Interview excerpt: (3/3/03)

I have heard from other parents in the community that their children love reading this year. They aren't stressed out because they aren't worried about what level they are on. And you know what? It's not just the kids who stress about the levels. Parents stress just as much. I've had parents tell me how much better it is not to know what their level child is at and what their friends child level is. It's great to know that. Instead of coming home and talking about the level they are on, they are talking about loving reading. What could be better than that?"

The significance of Alex's reflections on questioning the tension she had surrounding what she was taught to be "best practice" was important for her in becoming a reflective practitioner. She questions terms such as *best practice* now. She wants to stay current in the field while at the same time paying attention to the observations she makes of her students and how her students are learning. Her observations and reading of current practices in the field are lead-ins for her to do further inquiry and research.

Altering the District Mandated Spelling Program

In September of 2002 I visited the classroom to set up the observation schedule for my pilot study. I found a very flustered Alex trying to use a brand new mandated spelling program. "This is the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen!" She

sounded enraged as she described the last hour and a half she had just spent trying to figure out how to administer one of the lessons to the students. "This can't go on," she told me.

In an interview in October, I asked Alex to explain the program to me. She told me that this was a new district mandated spelling program chosen by the curriculum coordinator at the very end of the previous year. Apparently, according to Alex, the coordinator was supposed to have had teacher input, but didn't ask for any input from any teachers. The program was hastily chosen and no one from the company came to the school to train the teachers on how to use it. The program included massive amounts of time-consuming activities--workbooks, supplemental workbooks, homework worksheets, and alternative worksheets. Alex found this to be overwhelming.

I think it was more than overwhelming. I think Alex felt devalued as a teacher. The curriculum coordinator didn't ask the teachers for input, even though Alex was under the impression she would be asked, she had no information for any sort of outcome for this program.

Alex was also struggling to reconcile the new spelling program and her own beliefs on how children acquire spelling skills. During my pilot study in the fall of 2002, I asked Alex to respond over email to what was nagging her about the new spelling program:

Email excerpt: (10/1/02)

> We know kids don't carry over spelling of random words they study for
>
> Friday's test into their own writing!...I am a huge supporter of invented

spelling and 'thinking through' words to spell them. The more children write and read the better spellers they will become. I realize they need to practice spelling so I believe children should practice spelling 5 words off the word wall, conference during writing workshop, and focus on misspelled words in each child's own writing.

In April of 2003, Alex informed me that they would be using yet another new spelling program for the 2003-2004 school year. When I asked her what the purpose of the spelling program was, she didn't have a clear idea:

Interview excerpt: (2/5/03)

A: I think what I feel like what happened to me is that there are too many powers that be that have put down this you know, they have to be reading at a level 24 by the end of the year, they have to be spelling all these spelling words in this spelling book they have to, I mean they have to do it MY way, they have to take this math pretest at the beginning of the year and pass it at the end of the year...

J: Oh...

A: They have to, ....

J: ...Is there a huge word test at the end of that book?

A: Nobody knows! Cause the idiot who told us that we had to...I know where it's coming from...this is what you're going to use but I'm not going to train you on it. I'm not having anyone from the company to talk to you about it, I'm sorry if you don't know what to do, read. Read it.

When I was a teacher and I felt devalued, I became angry. In her book, *What Keeps Teachers Going*, Sonia Nieto (2003) discusses the anger and desperation teachers face in their careers. She writes,

> The very nature of the school system is sometimes baffling, leaving teachers bewildered and at a loss as to how to fight. Sometimes they feel as if they might suffocate under the weight of all the rules and regulations. Sonie Felix once said, 'School is like a jail. I feel like breaking out' (p. 69).

The lack of respect shown to the teachers in how the spelling program was chosen baffled Alex. Nieto (2003) writes, "Teachers resent being treated like children, and they become incensed at the lack of respect they are shown by administrators. The reluctance of administrators to involve teachers more substantively…is certainly not a new problem" (p.71).

Alex was also troubled by the larger context of the mandated spelling program. She felt that the major goal of the new spelling program was to show concrete, measurable gains in spelling to the district superintendent.

Interview excerpt: (5/5/03)

> She wants hard numbers. She wants to see that all the kids in the district are gaining. It's not good enough to ask the teachers or to look at their writing assessments. This stupid program comes with a graph. The kids graph their scores each week. Crazy. Like spelling is that important anyway!

The external force of this spelling program was more than just a nuisance for Alex.

The mandated program went against a strong belief she had about literacy learning.

Gitlin, et al (1992) write:

> These curriculum structures allow for efficient and measurable evaluation, but
>
> they treat teaching as a science, while promoting one method of teaching and
>
> only one orientation. Teaching is an art. As in other artistic fields, the human
>
> factor is all important (p.91).

When I returned to the school in January to begin the dissertation study, Alex

had changed the spelling program to fit the needs of her students and the needs of her

teaching. She altered the program from 15 weekly words to eight words with one

bonus word chosen by a student. Alex administers the pretest on Monday, which

takes about 10 minutes. The children only take home the words they have misspelled

on that pretest, which means some children will have a spelling list of eight words

while others may have a list of two words. On Friday, a parent volunteer gives

individual spelling tests to each student. Alex found out that another teacher in the

building had altered the program.

Alex shared with me in an informal conversation on that first day in January

that she had decided to make these changes after she had shared her frustrations with

another teacher in her building. A veteran teacher, who has been a teacher in that

school for many years, had decided to cut the word list in half. This gave Alex the

confidence she needed to make similar changes in her spelling program.

Interview excerpt: (2/5/03)

Right now, I can close my door and do what I want with spelling. It's a battle
I choose not to have...Easy, quick, silly if you ask me, but I'm doing the
damn program.

In this instance, Alex's reaction to what she believed was an unreasonable
demand was to take professional responsibility for adapting a program to meet the
individual needs of her students.

Alex is learning how to look ahead to district mandated programs. She has
volunteered for the district-wide math curriculum committee this year for example,
and will be part of choosing the new math curriculum for the district. Alex isn't just
closing her door anymore. It seems as though she is making more conscious choices
to be an activist for teacher's input into curriculum mandates. By placing herself on
the math committee before the curriculum is chosen, she is assured at least a voice in
the decision.

Symbolic Story Representation Reflections

Trying new teaching methods is important to Alex. She learned a new
teaching idea called symbolic story representation from Jeff Wilhelm when she was a
writing fellow in the Maine Writing Project. Wilhelm (1997) describes symbolic
story representation as a technique in which "students create cutouts or find objects to
dramatize what they have read and how they have read it" (p. 43). Alex shared with
me that Jeff explained how he used symbolic story representation with struggling
high school readers and she was eager to try this strategy with her younger students.

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Digging deeper into the roots of symbolic story representation, I found that Alex was trying what Patricia Enciso (1992) called the symbolic representation interview (SRI). Enciso worked with younger struggling readers in the late 1980's.

> The interview involved a series of tasks: (a) selection of a favorite chapter from a favorite book; (b) reading the opening page of the story; (c) immediate introspective recall of the reading experience...; (d) listing, then creating cutouts for, the characters in the story...; (e)listing, then creating cutouts which represent the reader for his or her experiences; (f) reading the story while using the character and reader cutouts; (g) creating cutouts for the author and narrator... (p.78)

Enciso (1996) describes the process of moving inside and outside of the story world as a reader uses the SRI:

> Research in response to literature points to several possible orientations which may be activated during reading. In this study, the reader's orientations have been labeled as 'worlds.' The *reader's story world* is equivalent to Rosenblatt's evocation or Tolkien's 'secondary world.'...A second 'world' described in this study is the *reader's world* that is, the reader's knowledge of, and experiences with, books, people, places, and ideas. This category is usually referred to as the reader's prior knowledge. (p.83)

Alex's students were very familiar with reading comprehension strategies

(Miller, 2002). Near the front of the room, a chart prominently displays a list of the

strategies the children have learned. (See Figure 3.1)

Figure 3.1: Chart of what great readers do (From field notes 11/8/02)

What strategies do great readers use?
Question the text

Make connections

text to text

text to self

text to environment

Think about authors and illustrators

Make inferences

Answer questions

Make mental images

Besides knowing so much about comprehension strategies, the children in

Alex's classroom have also been involved in a variety of drama experiences this year.

They have acted out poetry, created plays based on books they have read and written,

dramatized assignments during reading workshop and are given free time to play

dress-up during recess. Alex's decision to try using symbolic story representation

was well grounded in her observations of her student's interest in drama and how

much her students already knew about comprehension strategies.

The first day I observed the students doing their SRI's they were making

character cutouts, (or what Alex called their "character-puppets"). Alex chose a

chapter from her current read aloud selection, *George's Marvelous Medicine* by

Roald Dahl, to do the SRI with the students. After reading the chapter aloud several

times the children were given magazines to look through to find pictures that would

represent themselves and Roald Dahl. They also drew pictures of other characters

from the chapter. (See Figures 3.2 and 3.3.)

Figure 3.2: Character Puppets #1 (Photo taken 2/12/03)



Figure 3.3: Character Puppets #2 (Photo taken 2/12/03)

After the children had their character puppets, their next step was to think

about questions or comments they wanted to say to Roald Dahl. Alex gathered the

students around her and explained their next step.

Field Notes: (2/10/03)

> Today we're only going to focus on one thing…what questions would we
>
> want to ask Roald Dahl. I want you to be thinking about what are some
>
> questions you have for Roald Dahl or something you want to ask him. So the
>
> first thing I'm going to do is pass out your own clipboard. You will have a
>
> copy of the chapter I am going to read. When I first did my SRI I liked to put
>
> a star next to a place I had a question. You can circle or put a star or a
>
> question mark, or you can write on this paper. We are going to use these all
>
> week. The second page you will work by yourself or with a buddy and think
>
> of three things you want to tell or ask Roald Dahl. My guess is that you will
>
> have more than three things you want to tell Roald Dahl, but today you are
>
> only going to think of three things.

As Alex read the chapter, the students were busy circling sentences on their papers.

After she finished reading, she asked if anyone had something they wanted to ask

Roald Dahl. The list of student generated questions and comments included:

> -I've never heard of a brown chick before.
>
> -How did he think of this book?
>
> -Why are you making George try this four times?
>
> -Roald Dahl, you're confusing me!
>
> -How did you create this book?

-How can a chicken say "ouch"?

-Was this really real?

-That's confusing.

-Why did you make that book?

Besides questioning the text, Alex has done mini-lessons on synthesizing with her students throughout the year during reading workshop. Wanting the children to synthesize the *George's Marvelous Medicine* chapter before they began creating their final SRI performances, she gathered the students on the floor in front of the easel with her.

Field notes: (2/10/03)

> Alex: Does anyone remember what synthesizing is?
>
> Student: It's what great readers do.
>
> Alex: Yes it is! It's when you remember what you read and you can retell it. Our next step is to synthesize what happened in the chapter. I will read you the chapter again and then we'll synthesize the chapter as a group.

Alex read the chapter again, and then asked her students what was important at the beginning of the chapter. Maddie said something about the brown hen, but this happened at the end of the chapter. Alex wrote Maddie's comment at the bottom of the chart paper.

The students continued commenting until the chart paper was filled with their responses. Alex then passed out their clipboards and instructed them to now

synthesize the chapter on their own choosing the parts of the chapter that they found

important. She explained to the class that they all have different important ideas:

Lani added, "It's 'cause we all have different schema."


It was obvious by observing that the students were struggling with this

assignment. Most of the students were simply copying what Alex had written on the

chart paper. Pulling the class back together as a group, Alex reflected with her

students on why this was so hard.

Field notes: (2/10/03)

> She asked the class, "tell me why this was so tricky."

> No one responded.

> "There is so much happening in this chapter that is was hard to figure out

> what was important to you. That's one of the reasons why we are doing

> symbolic story representation. What else was tricky?"

> No response.

> "I noticed from some of you it was hard to remember what was the beginning

> the middle and the end."


Alex's frustration and internal tensions with doing SRI with the second

graders was apparent during an interview session on February 24, 2003:

Interview excerpt: (2/24/03)

> Alex: First of all, can I do a little reflecting? Would you like to hear it?

> Jill: I'd love it.

Alex: OK. Well, I've been reflecting since I started the SRI with the children. What's wrong with me? Why am I doing this with second graders? I feel overwhelmed.

Jill: Oh.

Alex: I feel that they feel overwhelmed. And then, I sort of pull back and I think oh my god this is so good for them because I think if they don't get it with me when are they going to get it again? And, they are so smart and they can so do it. So then I was thinking, OK, how could I break this down next year to make it more manageable? Like, I really thought that one chapter from a book I had done as a read aloud they didn't have a clue, when they were supposed to go write down the important parts they had no idea. What to...

Jill: That was hard.

Alex: Why was that so hard?

Jill: Well...

Alex: I don't know.  And, I know synthesizing is hard anyway.

Jill: But...

Alex: And we've been synthesizing all year!


Alex spoke with enthusiasm and passion. What we eventually ended up talking about was the difference between synthesizing, sequencing, and determining importance. They were sequencing the events in the story even though they were asked to think of the most important parts of the chapter.

What impressed me most was when Alex was telling me about what she was planning to do next year with SRI even though it was so clear how frustrated she was with this whole project. Instead of giving up, she was thinking about how to change it to make it easier for her class the following year. She was reflecting on what wasn't working in order to make it work for her students. From the tension during our interview, and her look of disappointment when she saw the blank faces of her students, I half expected her to drop the whole idea of using SRI with young children. Not only did she stick with it, but she is thinking about how to use what she has learned this year to introduce this strategy to even younger students next year. (She recently found out that she would be teaching first grade next year, not second.)

Alex is learning how to "look at the smaller pieces," as she puts it. She often reminded her children that SRI was developed for struggling high school readers. She learned to rethink her goals and what she was expecting – not of her students as much as herself. This became apparent during an interview in February 2003:

Interview excerpt: (2/24/03)

> Jill: If your goal was to have your children really analyze the story and understand it in an abstract way, I'm not sure if you accomplished that. But, if your goal was to introduce to your students the idea of moving inside and outside of the story world, then I think you have been undeniably successful.
>
> Alex: You're right. I need to look at the smaller pieces. That's the goal I did accomplish. Yeah, yeah.

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Jill: And, remember that just making those cut-outs and knowing the
difference between the author and character is a big step for some kids.

Alex: Right I know, I just need to start smaller. Start smaller. I want to
write this down. I'd sort of like to have an SRI unit ready for next year.

Along with rethinking expectations and goals, Alex also struggled with the
idea of needing to do the SRI exactly how it was written or introduced to her. For
instance, she explained to me that in a traditional SRI the self-character puppet asks
the author-character puppet questions. I asked Alex if the children might find it fun
to have a conversation with their author. "Oh, but in a real SRI the author doesn't
talk back because the author can't answer the questions."

"So what? I quickly said, "A traditional SRI isn't done with second graders either!"

This was an interesting contradiction to me. Alex broke the rules with the
spelling program, but didn't want to adapt something that she was taught by someone
she highly respected. It reminded me of how she was so nervous to challenge
assumptions about leveling books--something that was known as "best practice."

And yet, a few days after our conversation, I observed the following dialogue
between Alex and her students:

Field notes: (2/26/03)

Jill and I were talking on Monday and thought wouldn't it be cool if Roald
Dahl could talk back to you? So today, you are going to ask Roald Dahl the
things you want to say to him and have Roald Dahl talk back to you.

(Below is a conversation one student had with her author-character puppet):

Student: You're confusing me.

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Roald Dahl puppet: what do you mean?

Student: Well, there are some pieces that I don't get in this book. Roald Dahl

puppet: Well, maybe you should read it over again and recheck it. Maybe

you'll get it if you read it over a couple times.

Student: OK Roald Dahl I will.


When we talked later about this process, Alex reflected,

Field notes: (2/24/03)

"This has been such a learning experience! I'm excited about it, but I'm also

ready to just say...you know, ugh. It's hard. I don't want this to be a yucky

experience for them. I need to think in smaller pieces I think. Have smaller

goals and expectations for them."


The adaptations Alex made during this project were outgrowths of the

reflections she was making on why she was having the tensions she was having, as

well as the outgrowths of her relationship with me.

Dewey (1933) wrote of this as times of uncertainty or as a *forked-road*

dilemma (p14). By reflecting on those tensions and becoming aware of where they

were coming from made it possible for Alex to make adjustments to her teaching and

grow from it. Her "fork-in-the-road" was to give up the use of symbolic story

representation or to use her tension and uncertainty to inform her teaching. (The SRI

project inspired further reflection through a bulletin board, which will be explained

thoroughly in chapter 5.)

As explained, my study was to explore the intersection of the internal and external call for literacy reform, the unique pressures faced by early career teachers, and the role of reflective practice in teachers' decision-making processes through a case study of the daily decisions made by one teacher. By observing Alex closely I was able to understand how she made decisions in her literacy program which will help me to understand how and why other teachers make changes in their programs. Bissex (1996) writes, "The process of observing even a single individual sensitizes us that much more to other individuals. As one teacher commented at the conclusion of her case study, 'I focused on two children but I learned about twenty-three'" (p.172).

Alex learned to listen to her students and to reflect on what she was learning. Through those reflections, she chooses what types of activities and experiences will be best for her students. Ayers (1993) writes, "Most reading experts argue that there is not one best approach for all children at all times, and that effective teachers need every technique at their fingertips in order to invent the best approach for each particular child" (p. 107). Alex had learned one technique in her undergraduate program and was beginning question that program as she reflected on her students learning. Through reflective practice and the tensions she was experiencing through that reflective practice, Alex was able to decide what she felt was the best approach for her students in reading and spelling.

Alex's learning reminds me of Sue Hubbell's (1988) experience as a beekeeper:

Most people who keep bees have only a few hives, and have them all in one place. They find it difficult to understand why practices that have proved

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successful for them do not work for others. But I have learned that I must treat the bees in one yard quite differently from the way I do those even thirty miles away. The thing to do, I have discovered, is to learn from the bees themselves. (p. 45)

Alex's "bees" were her students. Instead of trying to figure out why the practices she was using were proving unsuccessful she changed her practice. I believe Alex learned to change and vary her teaching practice by listening and observing her student's behavior in her classroom.

I too, learned "from the bees themselves" learning from Alex as I explored my roles as researcher in the following chapter.

## 4.    RESEARCHER AS... EXPLORING MY ROLES AS RESEARCHER

*From the point of view of the researcher whose interest lies in naturalistic observation, the teacher is a potential participant observer in classrooms and schools. From whatever standpoint we view research, we must find it difficult to deny that the teacher is surrounded by rich research opportunities.*
                                        -Lawrence Stenhouse

I remember the exact moment my research relationship with Alex changed. It was in February 2003. For 15 weeks before that moment, I had been an observer in Alex's classroom. On my laptop computer I recorded my observations and jotted down questions I had. My notes were precise, concise, and complete. I meticulously wrote verbatim conversations between Alex and her students, drew maps of how the furniture in the classroom had changed from week to week, and listed dozens of questions I had after each session of observation.

I transcribed my interviews and filed away documents I collected in organized notebooks. I was trying to be the textbook-perfect outside researcher. Everything was in place. Everything was moving along as expected in my research. There were no unexpected problems or concerns...except for that nagging persistent voice in the back of my mind. This voice echoed in my head daily. It told me to share teaching ideas with Alex, ask her those *I wonder what would happen if you tried* questions. But, I couldn't, could I? I was the *researcher*. I wasn't there to *share* ideas...was I?

One morning in February that nagging voice won out as I observed the second graders struggle to fill in a worksheet. After a minilesson on word endings, Alex asked her students to choose a book for reading workshop and to notice words as they

read that have various word endings; such as, /ed/, /s/, /er/, /ing/ etc. Alex handed out

a worksheet on word endings that she had created. (See Figure 4.1)

Figure 4.1: Worksheet on word-endings (From data collection 1/8/03)

We talked about the ed ending on different words today. During Reading Workshop, notice all the other endings on words.

Write the main word:                               Write the ending:

Circle the endings you found:

ly ed ing  est  ful  s  er

Write any different endings you found:

Many children labored painfully through this task. Most of the children were

not reading at all. Instead, they were desperately looking for the words they could fill-

in on their worksheet. I found their solutions to be illuminating. During the whole

group discussion, Alex shared a conversation she had had with Anthony during a one-

on-one conference:

> I think looking for word endings is so tricky. I want to show you Anthony's
>
> paper. He found all of these wonderful endings. These are great endings. But
>
> then when we looked together, we saw NEST. So, he wrote N here and the
>
> EST over here. What did we talk about? Anthony found an EST word ending,
>
> but is N a word?

A few more children had found similar words to Anthony. One boy had written R

ED on his paper, another had written MON EY on hers.

As I observed, I wondered what the purpose of the lesson was. Was it to have

the children *find* word endings, or was it to help the children understand the

difference between tenses? I was anxious to ask Alex what she had in mind. Before I even had the chance to ask her this question, other ways she might teach the same concepts teaching ideas flooded into my mind.

The children in the class often acted out poems during morning meeting, made up plays during their free time, and created puppet shows to represent books they had read. I wondered what would happen if the children used drama to show their understanding of word endings? But how could I find out? This wasn't my classroom. I was just the researcher--I was there to observe and learn, not to coach or share. Would I somehow skew my data if I offered my opinions and ideas?

I worried that Alex might feel obligated to use an idea if I offered it. I knew that she had read my published work and had taken a class from me, but the last thing I wanted from this relationship was for her to look at me as some authority figure or specialist. Yet in order for me to have an honest relationship with Alex (a requirement of mine for being a researcher in her classroom) I knew that it would be imperative for me to question the reasoning behind this activity.

I struggled with this until I remembered an important tenet of qualitative research. Patton (2002) reminded me that:

> The researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, a qualitative report should include some information about the researcher. What experience, training, and perspective does the researcher bring to the field?...What prior knowledge did the researcher bring to the research topic and study site? (p. 566)

As mentioned in chapter 1, I had been a classroom teacher for nearly twenty years. During the last four of those years I was lucky enough to experience the power of having Ruth, a university researcher in my classroom. The conversations we had as a result of her observations informed my teaching more than any other professional event in my career. This relationship eventually led me to write two books, publish articles in professional journals, and return to graduate school to earn a doctorate. How could I as a researcher possibly ignore this major influential relationship in my professional life?

Herein lay my dilemma. Was it possible that I had a hidden agenda--to somehow recreate the relationship and experience I had with Ruth through my work with Alex? Becoming aware of my history shed new light on my dilemma, and put to rest some of my anxiety. The previous relationship I had with a university researcher in my elementary classroom evolved, and I needed to let my relationship with Alex do the same.

The quality of the research depends heavily on the quality of the interactions and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the subject (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). During an interview on January 13, I shared my thoughts with Alex: Interview excerpt: (1/13/03)

> Jill: So, last week I woke up in the middle of the night and I had this idea and then I thought, you know, I want to make sure that you know that my role here isn't to give you teaching ideas that you go and try. It's just that my brain sometimes spills out.
>
> Alex: I love it.

Jill: I was nervous, but I don't want you to think that if I give you, if I tell you things that you have to do them, that you are obligated in some way. They're just my ideas because I miss teaching so much. OK?

Alex: Absolutely!

Jill: I was thinking that your kids love acting and using drama so much and that word ending sheet was so difficult for them. Because English is so damn bizarre, so I was thinking wouldn't it have been cool if they each got a word like /walk/ or /talk/ and then in partners they have to act out three different endings?

Alex: Oh I love it!

Jill: Sort of like, I walked, I'm walking, she walks...I wonder if they would get it?

Alex: I bet they would get it. And I bet they could do it much more easily than you or I could do sitting here talking about it!

Jill: Absolutely.


Seven days later, I sat quietly taking notes during a whole class discussion. Alex looked out at her students and said, "In the morning message it says that we will be doing drama during reading workshop this morning. Do you remember when we looked for word endings last week and it was so hard?" I quickly looked up from my computer and found Alex winking at me. And from that point on, my relationship with her changed.

That's not to say every idea I shared with Alex she went off and tried. On the contrary--there were plenty of things I suggested that Alex was a bit more skeptical about, to say the least. For example, I got a skeptical look when I gave her the idea of having her students perform drama during their math time. But the point wasn't that she acted upon all my suggestions--the point was that Alex and I were developing a relationship where I felt I could share with her and she could respond openly and honestly. I found my definition of "researcher" redefined as I took on several shifting roles---mentor, coach, observer, and collaborator.

<u>Researcher as Mentor</u>

> *It's been so good for me to have you here. Because, like I feel this*
> *new sort of renewal that I'm important.*
>           –Alex Christopher (from interview 3/3/03)

When I think of mentor I usually think of someone who is hosting a student teacher. A great deal of the literature on mentoring refers to this relationship or to that of veteran teacher mentoring a new teacher (Correia & McHenry 2002; Fairbanks, Freedman, & Kahn, 2000; Graham et al. 1999; Jonson, 2002; Portner, 2001; Portner, 2003; Villani, 2002).

University mentors have changed since I was an undergraduate student in the early 1980's. I'm not even sure I used the word "mentor." We called teachers we worked with while student teaching "cooperating teachers." My deepest reflective practice though came as a graduate student at Lewis & Clark College during the years I had a university researcher in my classroom. It was then that I learned the power of reflective practice and looking back, it was the beginning of how I have come to understand what it means to be a mentor to a practicing teacher.

Alex has been lucky enough to experience many different mentors in her life.

She recognizes the difference between professional and personal mentors in her life.

"My mother and my grandmother are my first mentors." This was Alex's

response when I asked her to tell me who the mentors have been in her life. Susan,

her first principal, and Alison, her student teaching mentor and teaching colleague

(Alex student taught at the school where she is currently teaching), were her first

professional mentors. Alex appreciates the importance of being a mentor who guides,

supports, and questions. During a conversation we had about mentors in April, I

asked her to share some thoughts she had on being a mentor:

Field notes: (4/7/03)

> I think a mentor is someone you respect at different levels. Like when Ben
>
> [her intern] wanted to have the children say the pledge. I never have the kids
>
> say the pledge, and I don't believe in having the kids say the pledge and I
>
> could have told him not to. But, if he wants to have them do it when he's
>
> there, go for it. I want him to know I respect his decision and I want my kids
>
> to know that we believe in different things.

Alex shared with me that mentors are those people who support teachers

professionally. "Like you. You've supported me professionally all year. You ask

questions and support me in what I do."

Much of my support did come in the form of questions such as the word-

endings-drama activity that grew out of a wondering or a *what if*. The invention day

also grew out of a question. Alex's second graders were studying inventions in

January. Observing one morning, the children were drawing pictures and writing about inventions they created. I assumed they were going to build the inventions they were creating, so I asked Alex when this day would happen so I could make sure to be there.

Field notes: (1/23/03)

> Alex: Oh, we aren't. They are just going to draw them. There just isn't time.
>
> Jill: How come?
>
> Alex: Well, we do such a big unit on oceans at the end of the year. To gather all the materials and to ask parents for all the help [with building the inventions]. It just seems too much!
>
> Jill: Oh. Yeah, I guess. You could just have them make them out of junk they bring in from home. They don't have to actually work!

Off I went to type up more observations. Thinking this was just a quick comment and nothing more than that, I was stunned when I returned to the classroom two days later to find tubs filled with "junk" the children had been colleting from home. Alex had decided to take a day to have the children create their inventions after all.

On the day the children were to build their inventions, (scheduled on a day I would not normally have been in the classroom) I wanted to support Alex by being another adult in the room if she needed one. I walked into a classroom with children spread all over the room with boxes, paint, paper, wood, glue, string, and anything you can imagine a child might use to build an invention they had created. Alex

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walked up to me, smiled and said, "Now, *this* is good teaching," and walked away to glue something for a student with the glue gun.

At first, I was thrilled for Alex that she had an opportunity to see how exciting it is to observe children working so independently and be engaged with what they are doing. There was one boy in the class that Alex observed that day and commented to me that she had never seen so excited about what he was doing. When I was sitting on the floor helping a pair of girls cover a box in blue paint, I had a sudden rush of pleasure of being back in a classroom--I was home. And then, I panicked. This wasn't my home. This was Alex's home.

According to Lipton, Wellman, and Humbard (2001) a "mentor's role within such a relationship is to balance three functions: offering support, creating challenge, and facilitating a professional vision" (p.1). I know I was offering support and creating challenges for Alex. What I worried about was if she was making these changes because of me. Was I facilitating my professional vision onto Alex? I started to question everything. Did Alex take away the levels on her books because of me? Did she reject the spelling program because of me? Relaxing, I realized I was giving myself a bit too much power and took a closer look at the mentoring relationship.

When I think back to my positive mentors, these are the people that I thought through problems with, kicked around ideas with, or listened to. When I was a teacher researcher being studied, Ruth often gave quick suggestions that turned into large projects. This was due to the strong relationship we had built together. I doubt, though, I would have taken the same advice from anyone else as easily as I did from Ruth. Correia and McHenry (2002) write:

Those of you who have been teaching for a while may have encountered a

caring colleague who would offer practical advice and moral support.

However, you probably did not encounter a 'mentor': someone who would

confer, observe, and collaboratively analyze and reflect; who would assist you

in setting and meeting personal goals as well as fulfilling local and national

standards; and who would foster your professional development. (p.2)


My role as mentor in this case was to support Alex in a new teaching strategy

she wanted to explore. Graham et al. (1999) caution against teachers simply

emulating their mentors. But, since I wasn't modeling lessons for Alex, I wasn't too

concerned that this would happen. And she had never tried letting her students

independently build projects from plans they had created before.

During the day of the actual building of the inventions, the room was messy,

busy, loud, chaotic, and extremely active. At the end of the day, Alex asked me what

she would say to a parent if they asked, "OK, sure it looked like fun, but what did

they learn?"

We sat down together and created a list of skills she could include in a newsletter to

parents that described all of the learning that took place with the project. (See Table

4.1)

Table 4.1 List of Skills from Invention Day (Compiled by Alex and Me on 2/03/03)

<u>List of skills during the inventions building day:</u>

**Mathematical –**
- Creating plans
- Problem solving
  - Measurement
  - Estimating
  - Predicting
  - Trial and error
  - Balance
  - Weight
  - Symmetry
  - Material collection

**Writing –**
- Labeling
- Brainstorming
- Collection lists
- What it was and what it would do

**Speaking –**
- Collaboration
- Sharing
- Presentation

**Reading –**
- Their collection lists
- Inventors
- Patent

**Listening –**
- The books about inventors
- Help from each other

**Visual Representation –**
- Drew picture of invention
- Created the invention
- Had to match their plan

**Science –**
- Inventors
- Patents
- Experimented with different materials
- Created an invention
- Color mixing

<u>ALSO:</u>
-Independence
-Helping others

Lyons and Pinnell (2001) list the qualities of a good mentor as a "more expert other" who:

- Give us an idea of what success looks like – just beyond our present expertise.

- Suggest next steps to take in our learning.

- Helps to break down complex processes so that we can see and practice parts if necessary.

- Helps us to keep the big picture in mind so that we can orchestrate components of a process.

- Offers support and encouragement.

- Identifies critical junctures and provides help at those times.

- Helps and evaluates the outcomes and realize improvement.

- Restarts the process at a higher level. (p. 140)

I became a mentor for Alex this year by providing support for her for trying new teaching strategies. More than helping out or supporting a teaching colleague or teaching candidate, "researcher as mentor" offers a new perspective. I have learned the value of integrating the principles of an effective mentor into my research relationships. With Alex, that meant that I was a supportive professional colleague by listening to her when she needed someone to reflect with, and when she needed help creating a list of skills to show parents of what their children used during invention day. Offering guidance when Alex tried a new teaching practice meant that I didn't necessarily insist she use a practice, but I was there for her if she had any questions and if she needed any encouragement. And a good mentor shares

knowledge and past experience. I couldn't hide the fact that I have had many years of

teaching, nor could I hide my passion for teaching. Sharing my passion for teaching

with Alex, I believe, added to the depth of the mentor relationship and thus, our

research relationship.

Researcher as Coach

*Not once have I've felt like you've taken over. You've guided, taught me to*
*see new things along the way. Coaching and mentoring are different.*
- Alex Christopher (from field notes 3/17/03)

What comes to mind as I try to visualize an image of a coach is a man with a

headset on the sidelines of a field or stadium shouting frantically at his team of

players to work harder. With this in mind, thinking of myself as a coach is no doubt a

bit unsettling. And, yet Alex was very clear with me that she sees me as a coach in

her professional life. Had I somehow been cheering her on to do better and work

harder?

In March, Alex shared with me her image of what a coach is, quite different

from my vision of shouting team leader:

Interview excerpt: (3/17/03)

I think of a birthing coach. A birthing coach is there to show you how, to

guide you through. She says, 'you can do this, you can do this. I can't take

the pain away, but I can rub your feet.' That's my image of a coach and that's

how I have seen you this year as my coach.

This image of the birthing coach helped me to break free of my superficial

image of what a coach was. As opposed to a team leader, my image of researcher as

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coach has become more of personal trainer. A personal trainer encourages and challenges at the same time.

The mental picture that Alex gave me of the birthing coach not being able to take the pain away but being able to rub her feet was a powerful metaphor for me. I couldn't take Alex's pain away this year over her frustration of having to administer a new mandated spelling program, but I could *rub her feet* by listening to her reflections regarding how she adapted the program to best fit the needs of her students.

The pain that Alex felt over the loss of a beloved principal leaving, and her closest colleague retiring in June 2002 was something I could not alleviate. But I could listen to Alex reflect on the loss she felt and reassure her about the changes and risks she was taking in her teaching.

During our interviews and our dialogue journal Alex often joked that I exhausted her with my constant questions.

Dialogue journal excerpt: (3/17/03)

> Once again my dear, you exhaust me! In completely wonderful ways – but
> you get my mind wandering in one direction and then racing in another.
> Thank you for making me reflect!

I remember very clearly the first interviews I conducted with Alex. Her answers were very quick and crisp. I felt that I was getting answers to my questions that Alex thought I wanted to hear. Below is a sample from an interview I conducted in October which represents the quick short exchanges that were common early in our relationship:

Interview excerpt: (10/18/03)

A It's sort of like text-to-self we started and it's hard, you know, my
first for my first six weeks of school I just do this family building and
community of caring and it's just so much I want to do with them, and
I sort of want to mesh everything together. I also want to do this
involved symbolic story representation with them, and metacognition,
of course I need to show them what I'm thinking and what I do...

Jill: So what will happen when they're done learning all the
strategies?

Alex: They'll never be done.

Jill: Oh, so you'll just keep...

Alex: Yes

Jill: And is that your reading *lesson*? I mean what else do they
do...was today a typical reading...

Alex: Yes, it was. It wasn't as long as normal. Normally, we would
like have a couple of hours,

Jill: OK,

Alex: But it is. Sometimes, like this um, earlier this week we read
Memory String, and then we did the Aidan Chambers thing what did
you like, what did you dislike...and it was just beautiful.

Jill: What about phonics?

Alex: What would you like to know about phonics? We have the little /ch/ and /ill/ ones we did, I try to do those if I notice that there are kiddos who are having troubles with some certain blend, but I don't have a phonics time.

It wasn't until I began to change the design of some of my questions and data gathering techniques, to crystallize my data, and my role as the researcher began to change, that I felt like I was beginning to challenge Alex (Janesick, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Asking her to stretch her thinking through art, poetry, metaphor, attending workshops, and dialogue journals, encouraged Alex to reflect in new ways on her teaching practice.

For example, I gave Alex a stanza from Mary Oliver's poem, "Wild Geese" (1992). I asked her to respond to three questions that follow the poem:

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –

over and over announcing your place

in the family of things.

1. Before responding at all, read this a few times to yourself, maybe once aloud, and then write down your initial thoughts.

2. What words or phrases stand out for you in terms of your professional growth as a teacher?

3. Just free-write about how this part of a larger poem speaks to you – connects with you – as a developing professional educator.

I wrote this in our dialogue journal in April and I had no preconceived notions of what her responses might be. I had been given this poem to respond to at a retreat a few years ago and that is why I chose this particular poem. Alex's response gave me some new insights into where she might be heading in her career. For instance, she wrote:

Dialogue journal excerpt: (4/6/03)

It's so exciting to think that even though I'm where I should be right now – that something else will announce my place and lead me to where I need to go next – get my Masters, PHD, teach a new grade level, write an article, present at NCTE, teach a class…the possibilities are endless!

I could see my coaching influence in this response. I often would say things in passing about her writing an article or presenting at NCTE. The significance of the line in the poem announcing my place for Alex appears to mean moving to the next phase in her career.

My constant questioning challenged Alex to continue to try new things with her teaching and explore new types of reflecting as well. It came to the point when I would excitedly dash up to Alex and declare, "Oh, I have something new to try out!" And, she would sigh heavily, smile widely and say to me, "Let's hear it."

I have a personal exercise trainer who pushes me and challenges me. If my trainer didn't *exhaust* me, I wouldn't improve or I wouldn't push myself to want to exercise harder.  Much of the literature puts mentor and coach in the same definition, but I have separated them.  Whereas mentor is more of a supportive guide to me, researcher as coach has meant that I have asked constant questions from a variety of perspectives and angles.  It has meant that I have challenged Alex to reflect on the constant questions I have asked and to try new and different ways of reflecting on her teaching.  And, it has meant that I have *exhausted* Alex until I felt that I had covered all facets of the questions I wanted covered.

## Researcher as Observer

*I sure have had some awful observers! From a college supervisor to a new principal who doesn't know what he's looking for. I think a good observer is someone who reflects and shares what they see, like what you do with your observations.*

-Alex Christopher (from field notes 3/17/03)

I gave Alex a copy of my written notes after each observation I took in her classroom, beginning with my pilot study in October.  She was free to comment or reflect on these observations as she pleased.  Often, a question I asked would spark further inquiry and other questions would require a simple clarifying answer for me.  It was essential for me to be able to reflect and converse with Alex though and not simply observe her teach.

Having a clear purpose, or protocol for my observations was an important first step (Creswell, 1988).  Knowing that I planned to share my written observations with Alex, writing questions as I observed became standard practice.  During my pilot

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study in the fall, she would write answers directly on the observations. After our relationship grew, conversations sparked by a question in an observation happened during our one-on-one sessions reserved for interviews or informal discussions. (See Figure 4.2)

The reflections and discussions that grew out of these observations at times may have encouraged Alex to try new teaching strategies and to make changes in her teaching. For example, one question in my notes during the invention project reads, *I wonder when the children will be building the inventions they create?* Would Alex have had that experience of what she so excitedly made a point of telling me "Now this is good teaching," had I not shared my question with her? Would Alex have let her students try using drama during reading workshop as a way to understand word endings? The point is that she tried something new because she responded positively to a question in an observation. Did she answer all of my questions? Goodness no, I wrote too many and my intent was not to have answers to questions. My intent was to observe her professional growth, and to learn what influences her to make changes in her literacy program.

# Figure 4.2: Alex's handwritten reflections on my observation notes (10/18/02)

The timer goes off and asks the children to come back to the sharing circle. A few children share about their books.

- What did Jenny learn about her students as readers?

- What's the next step?

- Some kids wrote questions instead of schema...will this be pointed out to the student?

- The sheet didn't have a spot to write the name of the book. Was this on purpose or was it just an oversight?

- Are there days when all the children get a chance to share their books?

Before the kids leave. Jenny says that she wants to teach the children a new word. She directs them to the word written on the white board...Megacognition. She tells them that she is learning and researching this at her school, and that it means thinking about your thinking.

[Will she keep referring back to this term? What is the decision behind that?]

Being an effective researcher-as-observer meant that I had a clear purpose for my observations of Alex and that I shared my observations with her. It meant that I made time for reflecting on the observations I made with Alex with her and that during those times of reflecting I asked questions in a non-threatening, non-evaluative way.

## Researcher as Collaborator

*We've collaborated this year. Collaborating with someone, well, you have to want to learn from each other. You have the same goals in mind, and you have to be willing to work together. But, you should do it naturally I think. We did on our board. That was so cool.*
                                      -Alex Christopher (from field notes 3/17/03)

Collaborating with Alex left me with the most anxiety as the researcher, and by far the largest reward in my research experience. I was struggling enough with my apprehension over sharing my ideas and reflections with Alex let alone contemplating collaborating with her. And, yet, as Alex said above, collaboration happens naturally and ours did too. Cole and Knowles (2000) write on the importance of collaborations between teachers and outside researchers:

> Researchers often work closely with a second party for the achievement of a common goal but the matter of mutuality and the importance of relational elements are largely ignored either for ideological reasons, convenience, or through just plain oversight. We also are aware of a great deal of research-generated literature in the field of education that points to the value of collaborative enterprise. On perusal and from our perspective, however, much of this literature falls short. A great deal of that written is in practice merely evidence of cooperation, not collaboration between two parties. (p. 173)

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The difference between collaboration and cooperation was an intriguing new idea for me. I didn't want Alex to simply cooperate by being my research subject--I wanted her to collaborate with me on my research journey and I wanted to collaborate with her on her professional growth journey. As Cole and Knowles write: "Cooperation is simply not good enough since it reduces the possibility that all members of a research may in the end be truly benefited." (p. 173)

Alex and I both benefited when we made the decision to collaborate on creating a professional bulletin board in the front hall of her school. Our choice to even attempt this, however, couldn't have happened if our relationship wasn't first built on trust and the foundation from my role in Alex's professional life as a mentor, coach, and observer.

Each day I came to the classroom, I photographed the steps of the project I observed. Then, I interviewed Alex specifically about her reactions to how she thought things were going, listened to her reflections, took notes on those reflections, collected all classroom documents that pertained to this project, and continued in my roles of mentor, coach, and observer. As a mentor, I supported Alex in the decisions she made. As a coach, I asked questions and challenged her responses. As an observer, I listened to her and shared my reflections and observations on the project. The idea of the professional board grew out of these reflective discussions. In my new role as researcher as collaborator Alex and I were working together to create the board.

The photographs I took along with excerpts from interviews, journals, and informal conversations between Alex and me formed a visual display and an informational time-line describing her decision-making process during the project. I included quotes from the students they had shared with me on what they had learned from symbolic story representation, a handful of their character puppets from the actual project, and a graffiti board where visitors as well as teachers, staff, and administrators in the building could record their own questions and comments.

Alex and I discussed our different purposes for the professional board. Her purpose was to try to resist the negative tension she was feeling in her school. She has been frustrated by the lack of sharing the teachers in the building do with each another. "I think it would be fantastic. And I think it is something we should all do anyway."

The moment we had made the decision to venture into this public collaboration, I began to question the ethics of my research. Was I "allowed" to enter into such a collaborative role with my research subject?

My relationship with Alex and my stance as a qualitative researcher were equally important. Greenwood and Levin (2000) write:

> The validity and value of research results are tested through collaborative insider-professional researcher knowledge generation and application processes in projects of social change that aim to increase fairness, wellness, and self-determination. For us, action research is the only form of social research that enacts this agenda adequately. (p. 94)

The social change that would occur from the professional board would be a public display of Alex's thoughts on a project she had done with her students. The purpose of the board was to encourage other teachers to ask questions about the project in order to spark collegial conversations in the school. Knowing how important establishing a trustful relationship is in qualitative research did not deter me from pursuing the project (Christensen & Devitt, 1997; Cohn, McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Kapuscinski, 1997; Stewart, 1997.) We had already spent many months having reflective conversations and bouncing ideas off each other and I knew that this project would entail a deep level of trust from Alex. And yet, with that trust, comes responsibility. Fine, et al. (2000) write,

> The greater the intimacy...the greater the danger. And yet...they recognized that we could take their stories, their concerns, and their worries to audiences, policy makers, and the public in ways that they themselves could not, because they would not be listened to. (p.115)

One unique aspect in my decision to create the board, as Fine. et al noted, is that I could be the one to help Alex get her ideas out in a public forum. I doubt this type of board would have happened without our collaboration.

Collaboration between university researchers and classroom teachers is not new (Clandinin, 1986; Clandinin, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988; Cohen, McLaughlin, & Talbert, 1993; Davies, Kennard, & Hogan, 1993; Oja and Smulyan, 1989.) Kapuscinski (1997) writes, "Establishing roles within a collaborative project is essential" (p.9). I made sure that Alex knew that this project would not cause her

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any extra work. I knew how busy she was already and I didn't want to put any undo pressure on her.

Even though I would be putting together pieces of the board, the essence of what went into the creation, I wanted to be jointly done. In other words I may have taken and mounted the photographs, but the words that went up on the board were carefully chosen by both of us. Olson (1997) writes: "Collaboration implies a 'working with' which is mutually beneficial to each participant" (p.25).

I checked in with her periodically before we put the final board up in the hall to make sure, that she still was comfortable with the project. I was beginning to feel nervous that I had asked Alex to put these very open and honest reflections of hers out in a very public area of her school. The tension I was feeling had more to do with my protecting Alex from doing something she wasn't comfortable with. She ended up reassuring me more than I did her.

Clandinin (1993) writes about tension between the university and classroom teacher partnership:

> Standing immersed with teachers in their lived worlds is not the usual way that researchers have stood in relation to practice. It is a new way of constructing our work with teachers and it is a way of working with teachers that is not valued in the universities where we work...There are now calls in the research literature for stories of teachers and teachers' stories, stories in which teachers and those working with teachers talk about the ways that teachers make sense of their practice, their knowing-in-practice as Schön would say. (p. 178)

Working collaboratively with Alex added to the richness of my relationship with her and therefore my research. I learned that the importance of my research stance as mentor, coach, and observer is something that needs to be firmly in place before I can even contemplate collaboration. These other roles that were already solidly in place made in possible to bring this new dimension of collaborator to the surface.

Because I had the opportunity to collaborate on this project with Alex, I learned how important that my roles of mentor, coach and observer were firmly in place first. This helped us to build a trusting relationship before embarking on this type of collaborative project together. I learned that the collaborative process with Alex took constant reflection and feedback. I also learned that it was important, and valid, that Alex and I had different goals for our board but that we both equally benefited from our collaboration.

> This does not mean each participant will leave with the same knowledge.
> Rather, each will come with his/her own goals, purposes, needs,
> understandings and through the process of sharing, each will leave having
> learned from each other. (Olson, 1997, p.25)

Researcher and Teacher: Mutual Benefits

The benefits to me as a professional because of my exploration into the many stances of a researcher are undeniable. Alex found in me someone to reflect with, someone whom she felt professional support from, and yet, I felt the same from her. I had the support of a teacher who was willing to try new ideas and teaching strategies.

I was researching a teacher who was eager to share honestly and openly with me. I was spending time in a classroom with a teacher who was receptive to a researcher who asked many questions, challenged her to think from a variety of different perspectives, required time out of her busy life, and never once did I feel unsupported or that I was somehow getting in the way.

Alex experienced many changes this year. She often told me how good it was for her to have me there for her and how much she feels she has grown this year. But, it wasn't until I saw her response to my question: *What is the circle that has brought you to this point in your career?* that I realized how important my presence was. I asked Alex to write about the important moments in her professional life that had brought her to this spot in her professional life in an interview on March 12. She began with her teaching degree and went around a circle until she ended up with our professional board. On the circle she had listed, *Being the subject of Jill Ostrow's dissertation and having all of her professional support.* I realize that Alex lives in the moment and it did not surprise me that I would show up on her circle. What did surprise me was the wording she chose to use.

Interview excerpt: (4/12/03)

> Alex: Are you kidding? You support me in everything I do! What am I going to do next year? You can't leave.
>
> Jill: Really? I just feel like I'm just sort of here.
>
> Alex: You're that Monet Principle from that list of staff developers guiding principles you gave me last week. Remember that? It talked all about reflection through observation and feedback and encouragement? You aren't

about changing me, you are about wanting to learn about me and that helps

me get better.

Jill: We make a pretty good team.

Alex did have all of my professional support and it was she that led me to explore my

role in her classroom as a mentor, coach, observer, and collaborator.   But more, I

learned how critical the university/school partnership was for Alex. Exploring the

impact of this partnership was one of the themes of my study.  Ayers (1993) writes:

> The secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail of the everyday life of
>
> teachers; teachers can be the richest and most useful source of knowledge
>
> about teaching; those who hope to understand teaching must turn at some
>
> point to teachers themselves. (p.v)

By being in the classroom with Alex she was able to reflect with me on what she was

struggling with, questions she had, or issues she wanted to discuss.  McCallister

(1998) writes:

> I recall, as a beginning teacher challenged by the immediate demands of the
>
> classroom, that I always benefited most from the opportunity to discuss my
>
> particular problems and receive immediate and specific feedback.  That is not
>
> to say that the theoretical knowledge I encountered in my graduate course
>
> work didn't inform me or help me improve my teaching. But as a beginning
>
> teacher I practiced something akin to knowledge triage—I sorted out helpful
>
> sources of advice and council to determine priority. (p. 26)

It is this type of connection that is important to Alex and what teachers are looking for (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Rogers & Babinski, 2002; Schoonmaker, 2002). Arhar et al. (2001) write:

> Mostly, we need human understanding and connection. We need to see and be in relationship—with the land, with ourselves, and with others. Although we may not be able to control the future in ways we once thought we could, the good news is that with historical consciousness, sensitivity, and social purpose, together we can influence and help shape it. (p. 9)

In the next chapter, I explore the influences on Alex's literacy instruction and beliefs through professional development. I look at what forms of professional development support effective change by looking closely at Alex's experiences.

# 5. THE MÖBIUS STRIP: LEARNING FROM ONE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Teachers need to give sustained attention to the problems and possibilities of their classrooms and schools...Equally essential, teachers need to be involved in setting the agenda for their own learning. Simply providing workshops, seminars, or other professional development, in which teachers have no say, no matter how timely or well intentioned, is doomed to fail.*

-Sonia Nieto

Sonia Nieto's words intrigued me. What would it look like if a teacher did have say in her own professional development? I was curious about how Alex perceived professional development in her career, and how those experiences have influenced her professional growth.

I know what did and did not work for me in my professional development experiences during my years as an elementary classroom teacher, and I am familiar with what the literature says about the failure rate of one-shot workshops. One type of staff development that has been consistently unsuccessful is the *inservice* day (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Sparks and Hirsh (2000) reiterate the problem of inservice programs: "This failure may be due to one-shot workshops and school wide presentations of new methods that lack connections to the challenges teachers face in the classroom" (p.4).

Darling-Hammond (1997) contests that most professional development opportunities separate theory and application. In other words, teachers are learning new theories and ideas in a large room from someone who has no personal connection to the group.

Large groups of teachers amassed in auditoriums after school had brief

encounters with packaged prescriptions offered by outside consultants.

Divorced from daily concerns and practice, these hit-and-run events were

generally forgotten when the next day's pressing events set in. Difficult

problems of teaching and learning (How can I explain quadratic equations?

What's keeping Ellen from being able to explain what she reads?) were never

raised in these training contexts, much less explored and discussed. (p. 320)


Often these "adult pull-out programs" as Sparks & Hirsch (2000) call these

one-shot workshops, do nothing to lead to teacher improvement, instead "leading

some to collect course credit without ever using these courses to change their

instruction" (p.4).

Setting the Agenda

Alex has attended a variety of professional development opportunities in her

five years of teaching ranging from becoming a National Writing Project fellow to a

whole host of half-day "sit & get" workshops. During a long interview session with

Alex one morning in April, I asked her to list all of the professional development

experiences she had attended in her five years of teaching. She organized her list into

four categories. (Table 5.1)

Table 5.1: Alex's Professional Development Experiences (From interview 4/12/03)

| Classes: | One-shot workshops: | Self-selected: |
|---|---|---|
| Current Practices in Reading | Technology (laptops) | Courage to Teach |
| Maine Writing Project | Tons, but too unimportant to | Jill's dissertation |
| Children's Literature | to remember them all... | Being an MAT mentor |
| Mentoring Seminar | E-Days (4 per year) | Math team: |
| Teacher as Researcher | | -researching programs |
| Curriculum Inquiry | | -observing classrooms |
| (Master's Degree) | | Social Studies Curriculum |
| | | Committee |
| | | Community of Caring |

**Conferences:**

Literacy Conference

  -with Gail Gibbons and Ralph Fletcher

Math Conference

  -exposure to different math programs.

Several of these experiences have had a major influence on Alex's career. A few months before, in January, I had asked her to respond to my question, *what is the circle that has brought you to this point* [in your professional life.] (Figure 5.1)

Not surprisingly, knowing Alex as I do, her first stab at filling in her circle was with all very positive events in her professional life. When I pointed this out to her, she was quick to add a few incidences that had more of a negative effect, but she told me that it is "hard for me to focus on the negative." What I discovered, however, was just how much both positive and negative professional development experiences have informed Alex's teaching and professional life.

I was curious to know more about these positive and negative experiences that Alex had shared with me back in February. I took out the circle and decided to ask Alex about one exceptional experience she had been involved in and one distressing one in more depth.

Figure 5.1: Alex's response to: *What is the circle that has brought you to this point?*
(From interview 2/5/03)
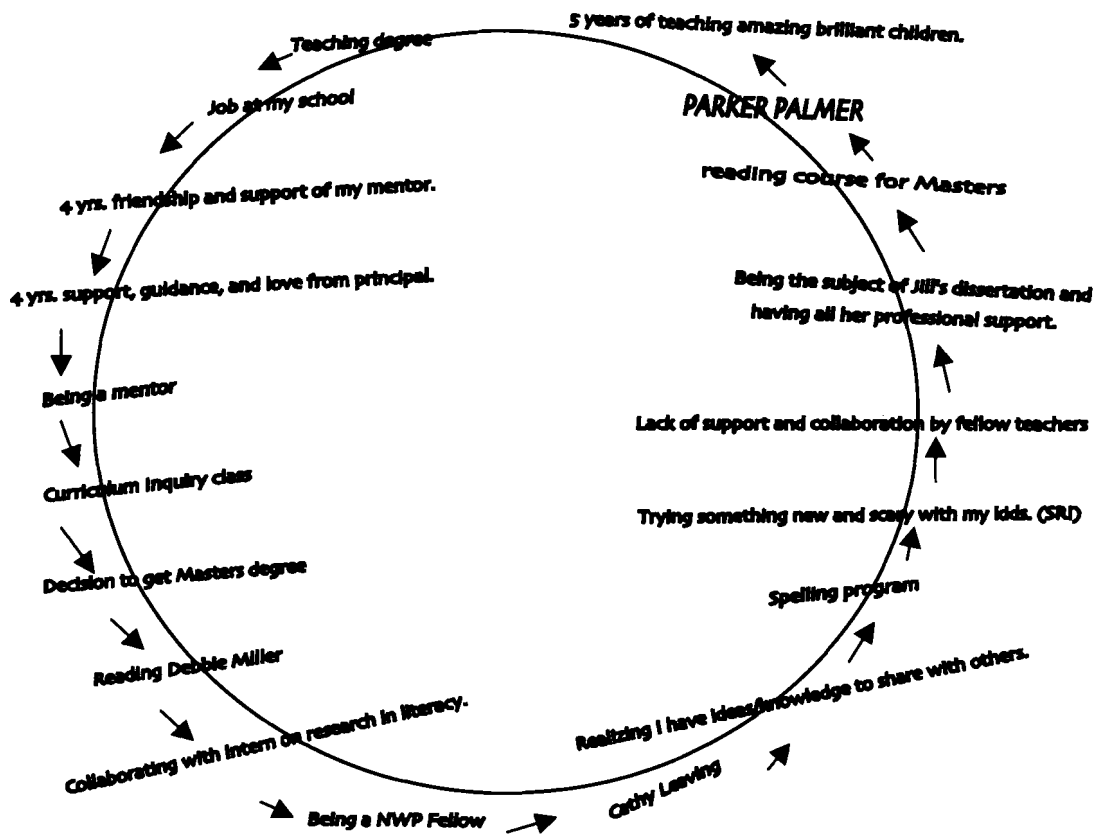
<u>Snapshot From an Exceptional Experience</u>

"Take a minute now, and think about all of these professional development experiences you have just listed. OK, do you have them all in your mind? All sort of racing around in there?" I asked.

"Yup."

"So, now, think of one of those experiences that you would consider to be exceptional. One that you would say has made a tremendous exceptionally positive impact on your teaching and hold it in your mind."

"Parker Palmer," came out of her mouth very quickly. I wasn't surprised. Alex is very "in-the-moment" and we recently heard him speak, but I was curious to hear about the impact he has had on her teaching.

The moment I heard that Parker Palmer would be holding a day-long retreat in Southern Maine (on March 5, 2003), I wanted to take Alex to hear him. Having already been to several weekend retreats and read *The Courage to Teach* several times, I wanted to share a piece of what I valued in teaching with Alex. His work has had an enormous impact on my teaching. The Courage to Teach retreats, and Palmer's work, focus on teacher renewal; the inner life of the teacher, they are very personal—not workshops based on teaching technique or school reform.

Since I was getting to know Alex so well and learning about what she valued in her teaching, I bought her a copy of *The Courage to Teach* and reserved two spots for the daylong retreat. Days before we left, Alex called me at home several times to read me excerpts from the book that she was excited about. During one of my visits to her classroom I was prepared to do an interview but we ended up talking about her

reflections from *The Courage to Teach*. So, knowing that Alex responds in-the-moment it did not surprise me at all that she would choose this particular event in her professional life as exceptional.

"OK, so you have the Parker Palmer retreat in your mind. Now, think about one image from that day. Think about something, some image that solidifies what you experienced or learned, it can be a metaphor for the day if you like. Do you have the image in your mind?" I asked her.

"I do."

"Alright, now using the art supplies I have here, draw the image you have in your mind." And, without a second thought, she grabbed colored pencils and proceeded to draw a möbius strip. (See Figure 5.2)

"The children need to know what I'm thinking and how I'm feeling. The möbius strip reminds me to share with the world what's inside," she shared with me. I asked her if she could give me some examples of when or how she has shared her inside world with her students this year. She wrote three words next to her drawing of her möbius strip:

- The war
- The pledge
- God

Figure 5.2: Alex's drawing of a möbius strip (From interview 4/12/03)
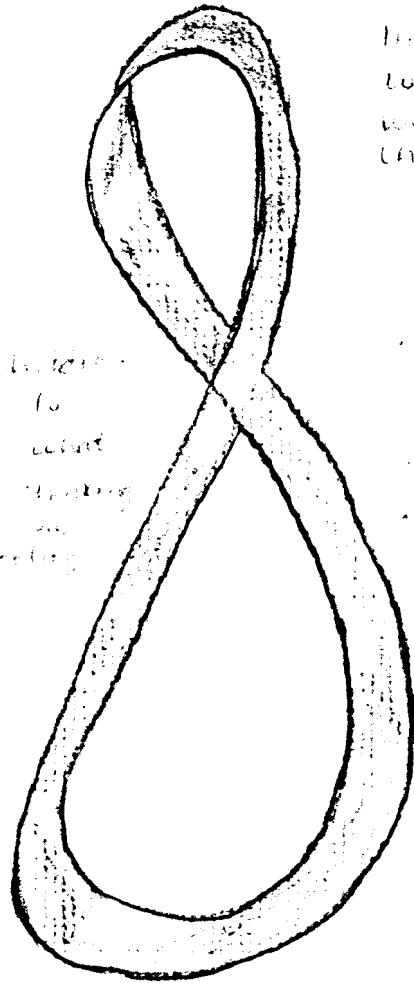
I was observing in Alex's classroom in March 2003 at the beginning of the U.S invasion of Iraq. Alex and her students were discussing the war together but I had entered at the tail end of the conversation. I made a note to myself to be sure to ask Alex how she handled this type of discussion with her young students. During our interview, she breathlessly told me about her decision and her conversation. Interview excerpt: (3/3/03)

> Oh my God it was so cool, I think, I don't know, before I started reading this book [pointing to *The Courage to Teach*] if I would have told my kids that I don't support war. It's all in that book! It's all who you are, and if you aren't should you be here? I did it. I told them I don't believe in war I don't believe that's the way to solve anything. Innocent people get killed. You know, we are so smart we can solve it in different ways. And, Jacob said, 'Well, I'm not going to be a civilian when I grow up I'm going to be in the army.' And I told the kids, you know, I don't believe in war. I think it's this awful thing and here's my good friend Jacob who really really wants to be in the army and probably be in a war, can we still be friends? Yeah, yeah, it was just a nice conversation. And I don't know if I would have had the courage to say that to them. I think I would have just shut up and let them have the conversation.

Since that experience Alex has also shared with her students, in the same thoughtful manner, her thoughts and opinions on why she chooses not to say the Pledge of Allegiance in her classroom. She also shares her beliefs about God when a

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student asks her. "I just feel so thankful for the experience of having had heard Parker speak. I just feel validated."

"Feeling validated" was a strong theme that emerged for Alex in this experience and others that she listed as positive. Being validated through professional development is important for Alex, and yet she has also validated herself with the metaphor of the möbius strip. By sharing her inner self with her students, she is validating who she is as a person and as a teacher.

Snapshot From a Distressing Experience

Alex finished drawing and reflecting on her exceptional professional development experience and I asked her to do the same image activity for an experience she found distressing. Knowing that thinking in negative terms was more difficult for Alex, I worried that this would be trickier for her. Once again, though, she quickly grabbed the colored pencils and began drawing. What I saw mystified me. (See Figure 5.3)

Alex had drawn an outstretched finger in front of a closed mouth with the following words next to the picture: *Shhh---Don't share your ideas with others!* She titled her drawing, *Where the hell am I?* "What is this about?" I asked curiously.

Alex has been a part-time student in a literacy master's degree program for the last three years. Her decision to get her masters degree was an important part of her professional development, since she listed it on her circle of what brought her to this point in her career. She had specifically mentioned a few courses on her circle that made an especially positive impact on her professionally. However, one of the

Figure 5.3: Alex's drawing of her distressing experience (From interview 4/12/03)
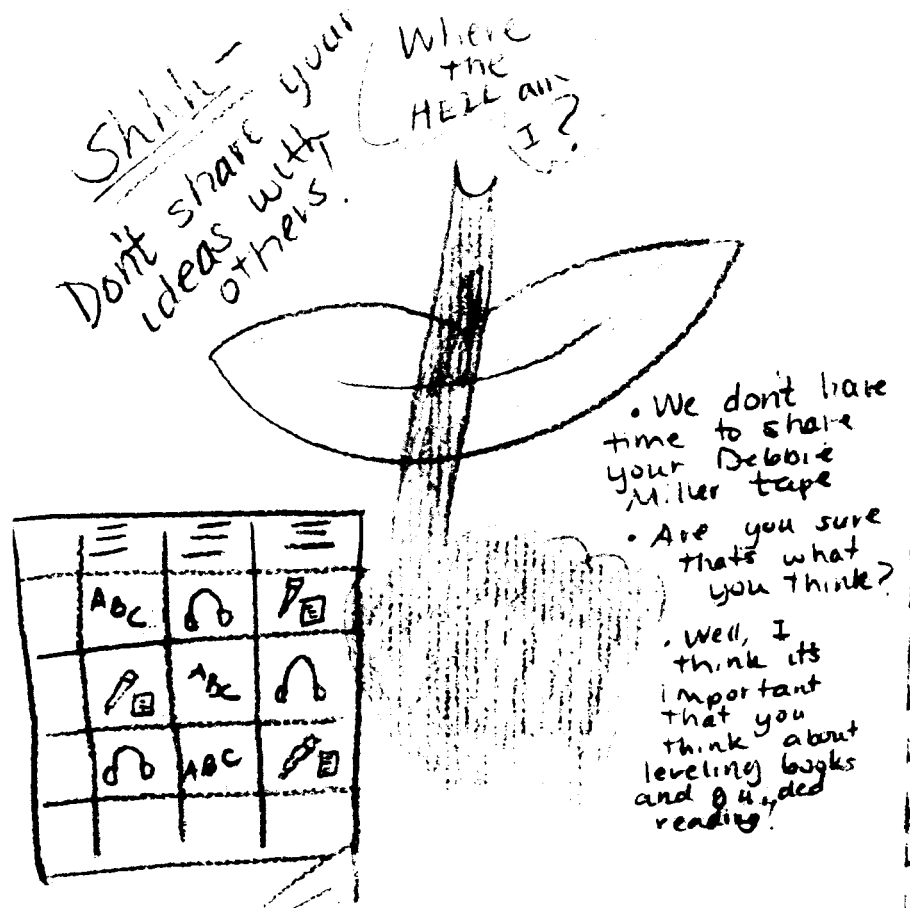
negative experiences Alex added to her circle was a graduate course in reading she had recently completed.

She shared the frustrations she was having with this course about halfway through the term during my pilot study in an email:

Email: (11/17/02)

OK, first of all, I am frustrated not to have a professor or even an adjunct who isn't passionate about teaching! I'm being told how *good* teachers use guided reading groups and spend time daily on sight words, word charts, interactive writing, and explicit phonemic awareness lessons. Is this the latest teaching practice? Maybe I'm so defensive because I feel so inadequate since I don't do these things. I am trying something completely new and scary…this was not a good choice for a class for me. You know, I've done guided reading groups for years and it's not new! What's going on?

Alex wrote more when she completed her drawing in March about some of her irritations with the course. "These are actual quotes from my professor," she shared with me as I read what she had written.

- We don't have time to share your Debbie Miller tape.
- Are you sure that's what you think?
- Well, I think it's important that you think about leveling books and guided reading.
- You must not have been doing it right then [guided reading]--this is brand new.

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As much as Alex felt validated for her ideas by Parker Palmer and *The Courage to Teach*, she felt invalidated for her ideas by her professor of this course she was taking. But, more importantly, and what is essential about professional development, is that Alex found a way to use this experience to grow professionally. As she was completing her drawing, she told me:

Field notes: (4/12/03)

> You know, I did learn a lot from that class. I learned how strong my beliefs are. I learned how much I believe in what I believe and I'm proud of what I believe in. I wish I could have felt more confident to share, you know? But, I know what 'best practice' is for me and that class was not best practice for me! She taught us her agenda and if she could have been up front with that, it would have been more honest. It just taught me that it's OK to question courses I take too.

I suddenly felt guilty. I thought back to my three years of teaching inservice teachers at Lewis & Clark and wondered how many teachers I must have devalued with my quick comments. I'm sure at one point or another my beliefs came spilling out before I questioned my student's decisions. After listening to Alex and knowing how this made her feel, I know I will change the way I react to students I teach in the future. I will be sure to get more information from them before I react with my opinions.

The Alex Christopher Principles of Professional Development

On April 12, for the rest of the interview, I asked Alex to get at her ideals for professional development.

"So, now, imagine you were in charge of all professional development experiences for teachers in your school district," I began.

"Oh boy! What a dream job," Alex said.

"Well, good. What would your values be, or your principles?" Figure 5.4 shows Alex's list of principles complete with examples.

"What are your hopes for the outcomes of such an experience?" I asked. "For example, what would you want from an experience that was self-selected, reflective and ongoing?"

"I'd want it to validate my teaching for sure. I'd want to make sure that it could inform my teaching and that I'd be able to grow from the experience. But that's why I listed all of those. From my experiences, those three things *do* do those things for me," she answered.

Alex seems very clear now about what does and what doesn't work for her in her professional development experiences. Unacceptable professional development experiences for Alex include those listed in Figure 5.5.

I knew that the literature written on one-shot professional development workshops fail. Adult pull-out programs designed to change and inform teaching practices don't work. But it's not enough to just say the current system doesn't work. Teachers like Alex do know what type of professional development is effective and they can provide us with models.

Figure 5.4: Alex's Professional Development Principles (From interview 4/12/03)

1. **That it be self-selected**
   a. Courage to teach

   b. Math team

   c. MAT mentor

   d. Graduate school


2. **That it be reflective, personal, and meaningful**
   a. Working with Jill

   b. Parker Palmer


3. **That it be on-going**
   a. Not one day (E-days)

Figure 5.5: Alex's Unacceptable Professional Development Experiences (From interview 4/12/03)

1. **Are one-shot workshops where there is:**

   a. No input wanted from people attending

   b. Attendance was not a choice


2. **Classes where my input is not valued**

3. **E-day and inservices that are:**

   a. Not teacher directed

   b. Chosen by the administration

   c. Have nothing to offer my teaching

The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) recently conducted a national survey to find out what teachers wanted for professional development (5/31/03). Many of their responses echoed what Alex shared with me. One of the recommendations calls for "teachers assuming responsibility for their own professional development" (p.1).

I learned that one teacher values professional development opportunities that are self-selected, reflective, meaningful, personal, ongoing and that validate her teaching and respect her as a human being. What could I do as a university researcher to combine these principles for this teacher to give her a positive professional development experience that might also lead to a broader school-wide audience?

## The Möbius Strip in Action

For Alex, an important criterion for professional development is that it involves reflection and sharing her inside self with the outside world. As a researcher from the university, I decided to make part of my research agenda helping her to achieve this.

Initially I played around with several ideas: presenting at a conference, writing an article together, but I wanted to collaborate on something that would benefit my research as well. I thought about Alex's concerns:

- She was frustrated at the lack of collegial conversations in her building
- She was in the middle of a difficult new teaching strategy with her students

I thought about what Alex told me she wanted:

- She wanted to keep reflecting with me on the symbolic story

  representation

- She was ready to share her work with a larger audience

- She was busy, and pregnant at the time, and didn't have the time nor

  energy to embark on something that would take her away from her

  family

I looked at the photographs I had been taking during the symbolic story

representation project and wondered how I could somehow get that project to a wider

audience. I had taken photographs on different parts of the school for Alex to talk

about with me, and the lost and found bulletin board popped up. (See figure 5.6)

Figure 5.6: Lost and Found Bulletin Board (Photo taken 1/13/03)
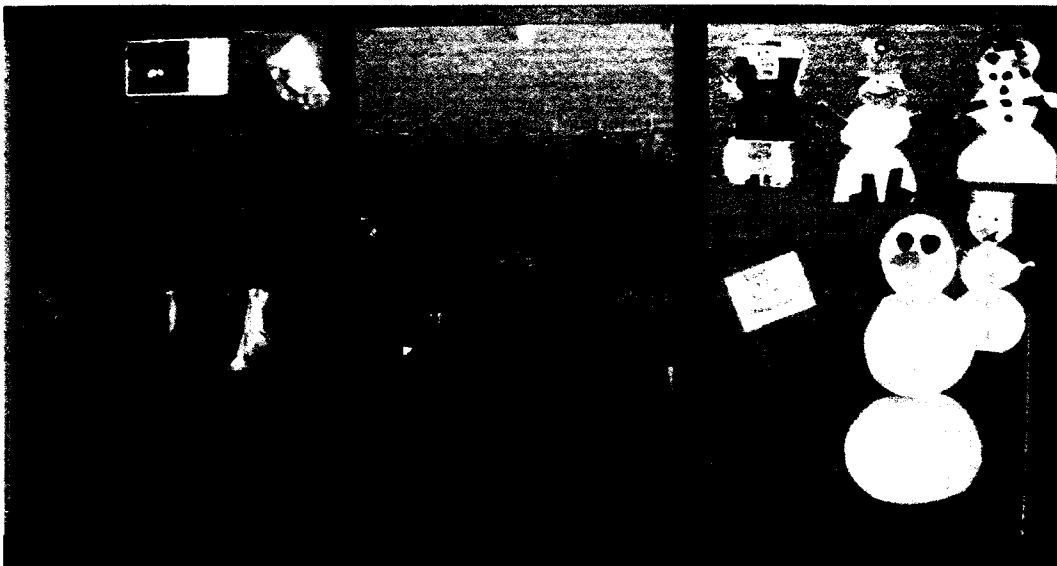
I wondered why such a prominent, six-foot high three-panel, display board in the school was used as the lost and found since the beginning of the school year. This is the first view of the school visitor's see upon entering the building. I decided it would be a good idea to use that as the space for our professional board. The front of the school was a perfect place to show the thinking process of a teacher reflecting on a project with her students. Alex and I asked permission from the principal to transform the lost and found board and thus, the idea of the professional bulletin board was born.

### The Professional SRI Board

Alex and I didn't realize just how many of the professional development principles she believed in were evident in the professional bulletin board we created. As a researcher in Alex's classroom, I was very aware of some new teaching strategies she was trying from one of her college courses and this would become the surface for the deeper reflections she would be sharing with the outside world.

My hope was that Alex would feel comfortable enough to share her honest reflections publicly. She was feeling negative tensions among her teacher colleagues this year. Her principal of the last four years, who was a very positive force in the building, had left. I wanted to make sure this board was very inviting and not just a showcase of Alex's work.

I also wanted the board to be a professional development opportunity for teachers and administrators. What went up alongside the photographs were long

paragraphs of writing as opposed to quick labels that are more common on bulletin boards.

The board included personal responses from the children, a blank graffiti response chart paper for other teachers, parents, students, staff members, administrators, or visitors, Alex's goals, and the children's character puppets.

### Our Purpose

Alex's reflections on trying symbolic story representation with her second graders were significant. Her self-doubts over whether she should have embarked on such an abstract project with second graders were interwoven with spurts of exhilaration when she thought her students had finally "gotten something." Interview excerpt: (2/24/03)

> OK. Well, I've been reflecting since I started the symbolic story representation with the children. What's wrong with me? Why am I doing this with second graders? I feel overwhelmed. I feel that they feel overwhelmed...I just don't know if I'm asking too much of them...This has been such a learning experience! They have done such an incredible job. I think I just need to think in smaller pieces...I feel like I don't know yet how to make it manageable for them. Like they get the whole thing about you have different schema, they see the story world, they see the author, I think that's cool too that they can talk to the author. They are just so smart.

Alex and I both believe that professional development should be about personal reflection. This entire project was about meaningful reflection. After each

lesson that Alex presented with her students that I was there for, we discussed how she felt it went, asked questions, and talked about what was next. I offered suggestions, which usually came in the form of questions and Alex came to further understanding by talking through confusions she had.

Dewey (1933) wrote eloquently about reflecting through confusions long ago when he wrote, "One can think reflectively only when one is willing to endure suspense and to undergo the trouble of searching" (p. 16). Alex was more than willing to endure the suspense and undergo the search. We decided that our professional board must include Alex's open and honest reflections to share with the world her inside thoughts of the struggles she was going through with this project.

So often professional development workshops show the clean pretty side of teaching. The message seems to be, "Here, take this, use it and your teaching life will be so much easier!" When in fact, teaching is messy, hard, and scary if you are willing to take risks. We wanted to show that side of teaching.

The Process

Our process was quite simple. Alex introduced a new comprehension strategy to her students called symbolic story representation, which I described in detail in chapter 3. Her students created character puppets from a chapter from a read aloud Alex was currently reading. Using the character puppets, the students move in and out of the story world asking questions of the author and characters in the story (Ensico, 1992 and 1996; Wilhelm, 1997). I took photographs of the children working throughout the project and kept notes on our conversations and transcribed our interviews. We sat down during one lunch period and created a time line of the

project. When it came time to create the board, I dug through my notes and transcripts, typed up verbatim dialogue or journal entries of Alex's reflections and mounted all of the photographs. We included quotes from the children on what they had learned from doing symbolic story representation and those were added to the collection as well.

Not wanting this to be a bulletin board that went unnoticed or noticed for the wrong reasons (because it was *pretty* or just a showcase of Alex's teaching) I purposely chose long paragraphs to accompany the photographs. Below, are the reflections in the order as they appeared on the completed professional board. (See Figure 5.10)

Compiled from interviews and field notes: (3/17/03)

- Last year I learned about Symbolic Story Representation and I wanted to try it out with my second graders. I performed a Symbolic Story Representation that I did on a book for the children.

- I asked my students what they noticed as I was doing my Symbolic Story Representation. Some of their responses were:

  -Your character moved in and out of the story world.

  -Sometimes you were above the story world.

  -You asked the author questions.

  -The chapter confused you.

- I was so excited to hear what my students had noticed, but I was also a little frustrated that they hadn't noticed connections I had made and questions I had asked the characters.

- To begin their Symbolic Story Representation, I made the decision to have all of us work on the same story together. I was reading Roald Dahl's, George's Marvelous Medicine to the class so I decided to use this book. I read a two-page chapter from the book and then I handed out a clipboard with a copy of that chapter on it for each student. I asked the kids to follow along as I read it again aloud.

- Before reading for a third time, I explained that I wanted them to circle any sentences from the chapter that they might want to explore by talking to the author.

- The children listened to the chapter again on the following day. On their clipboard, was the chapter and also a sheet where they could write down three questions or comments they had for Roald Dahl.

- OK...this was the 5th time they had listened to the chapter and yet many of them were unable to think of just three things to say to the author! I was stumped. My plan had been from there to share our ideas, but instead, I figured we had better back up a bit, so we brainstormed a few together. The

children then went off to work on their questions or comments alone or with a buddy.

- After 20 minutes of working, we came back together to share. I felt fabulous! I was excited that they had gotten it. I learned that they just needed some time to think and chat with others. It was important to me that everyone had at least three things to say so even if they didn't, they could add what someone else had said to their list.

- The following day, the children created their own puppets to represent them as a reader and one to represent the author, Roald Dahl. They were then invited to have the conversation between character puppets on those three questions or comments.

- The next step was to create character puppets on the rest of the characters from the chapter.

- Oh my. What have I gotten myself into! I am overwhelmed and I feel as if I'm expecting too much from the students. Here's why. I think I had too many goals. I wanted them to not only synthesize the chapter, but to also be able to pick out the important parts of the chapter—to each of them individually. Now, we have heard this chapter and read this chapter over 6

times!  When we went to synthesize the chapter together, I saw 20 blank faces!  But why?  We have synthesized all year long!  What went wrong?

- I had discovered that they weren't really synthesizing at all…they were sequencing.  And I wondered what I could have done to have helped them more, to make this easier for them, and how I could have broken this up into easier pieces.

- So, here's what I did.  The plan was to use the story world characters, Roald Dahl, and the puppet of themselves.  But I decided to scrap that and just have them move in and out of the story world to talk to Roald Dahl.  This change worked very well.  The children were able to move in and out of the story world with their questions and comments.

- After a day working on moving in and out of the story world, I asked who would feel comfortable doing a demonstration for the class.  This helped those who were still struggling.

- I was amazed that they could move in and out of the story world.  This should have been my main goal and I don't think I put enough importance on how difficult that was.

- My goal was for my students to be metacognitive…aware of their thinking. And, they are definitely moving toward that. Now, they are doing SRI on their own books they are reading.

- I realized how much time they need to think and how important cooperative work is.

- When I'm frustrated I can stand back and reevaluate my goals. And, it's OK, and important, to do that!

- This reaffirmed my belief about how brilliant the children are and that they never cease to amaze me with what they are capable of doing.

- What's next:
  - We took a two-week break.
  - I did a SRI on a book we have read aloud in class, Lon Po Po
  - I invited the children to create their own SRI over any book they wanted.
  - Be sure to ask them about it!

We organized the board as a flowchart---arrows connecting the paragraphs directing the reader where to go next. (See Figure 5.7) The written reflections were Alex's very raw honest feelings of the process she was going through during the project. (See Figure 5.8 and 5.9)

Figure 5.7: Flow Chart (Photo taken 3/20/03)
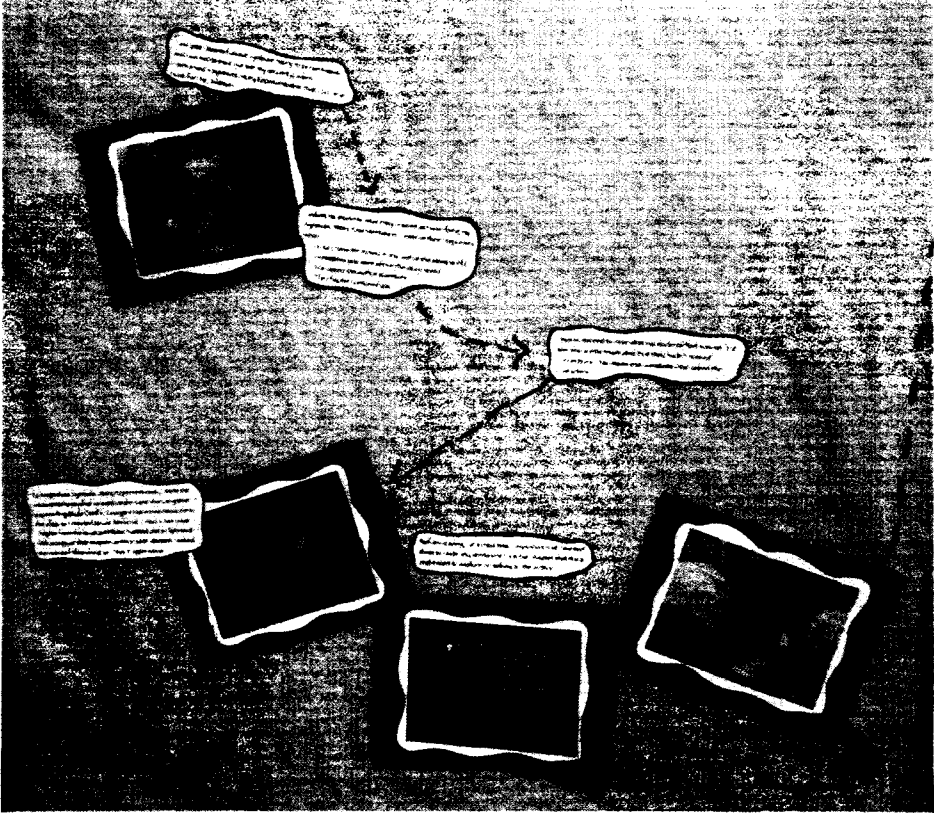
Figure 5.8: Alex's reflection #1 (Photo taken 3/20/03)
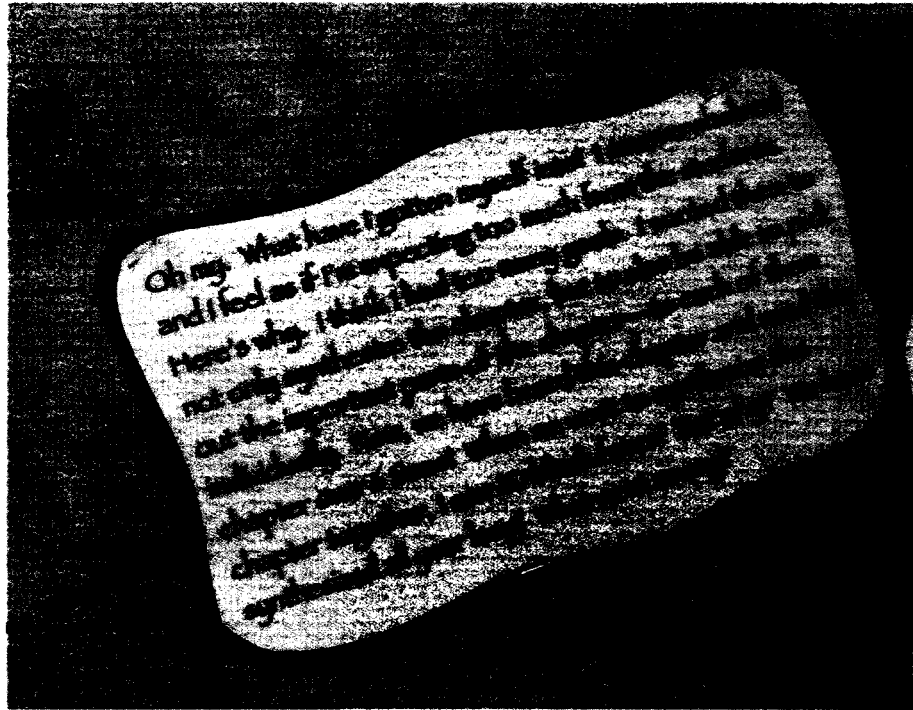


Figure 5.9: Alex's reflection #2 (Photo taken 3/20/03)
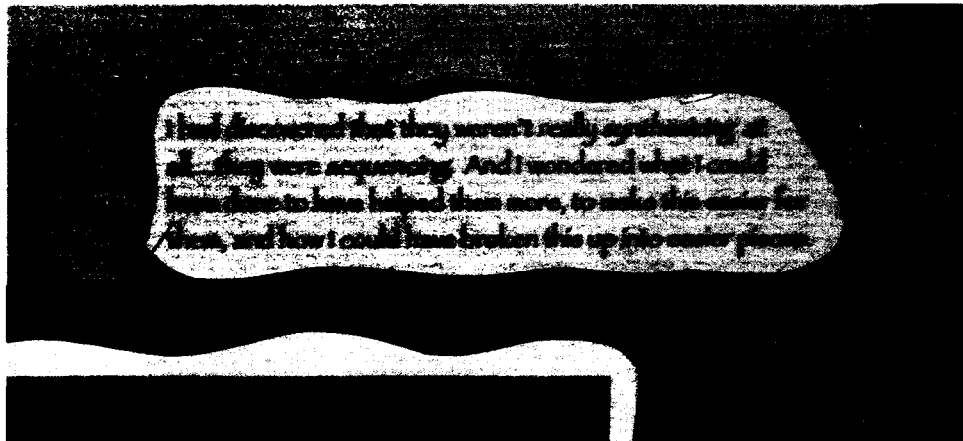
Figure 5.10: Professional Board (Photo taken 3/19/03)
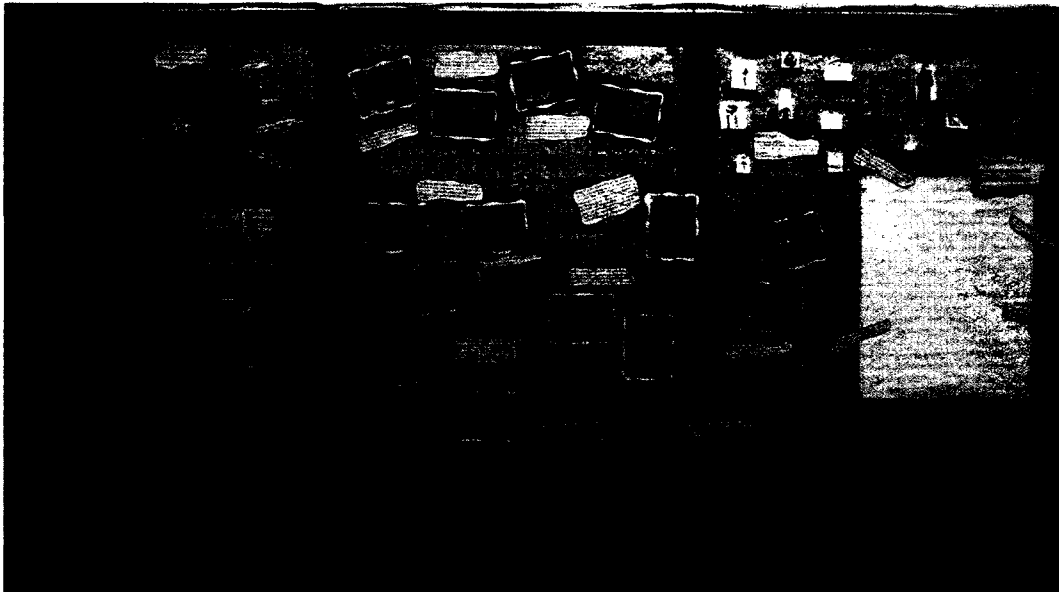


This board was a way for her to reflect on her internal tensions about literacy

instruction described in chapter 4 and share them publicly. It was also a way for her

to share a new teaching strategy with other colleagues in a very non-threatening very

inviting manner.

The very physical nature of classrooms make teachers feel isolated. Cole and

Knowles (2000) describe this isolation in terms of collegial collaboration:

> Many experienced teachers sadly announce that they would be very
>
> uncomfortable within their own schools should they actively seek to locate a
>
> peer who has similar inquiry goals. Many teachers are wary about publicizing
>
> their 'private' professional development projects. There may be some
>
> resistance among peers to the notion of seriously studying elements of one's
>
> practice. To be seen as overly ambitious and to be criticized for that is an act
>
> of professional development sabotage (p. 143).

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Alex was defying this resistance of what she calls the "hush hush" syndrome in the building---not sharing the teaching that teachers are doing in the school. "For some reason, nobody wants to share. We never talk about teaching." Cole & Knowles (2000) agree: "Conversations with peers remain mainly superficial; conversations about perplexing matters of the day-to-day teaching and the intellectual rigors of being better teachers seldom happens" (p. 141).

Alex was adamant in her decision to do the board. During a casual conversation in March:

Field notes; (3/17/03)

Alex shared with me her thoughts on the board and how others might react: "If my goal is to try and do something positive in this place, then I want to share my honest reflections. I loved doing this with the kids but it wasn't easy, and it wasn't all peaches and cream. Maybe others here will finally share what they do if they can see that we don't all have to be perfect. We aren't all perfect."

Our hope was for other teachers, parents, and administrators to learn, ask questions, and comment on what they had read, so a graffiti pad was added as a place for them to do just that.

Reactions

The reactions from others were interesting. The first few days after the board went up, I heard many positive comments about the physical appearance of the board,

such as, oh it looks great, it's so bright, sure is better than having the clothes up there---but not many comments about the content. This was disappointing for us. Over the next several weeks, the graffiti board filled up with questions and comments, although Alex still felt frustrated by the lack of professional conversation the board sparked among her faculty. (See figure 5.11)

Field notes: (4/12/03)

Alex talked today about her reactions to the board.

"Parents have been impressed with the board and have made really positive comments to me, but I'm so disappointed in the lack of support, the lack of conversations it has started, and ideas it has sparked in my colleagues. I love doing it! It was hugely reflective. This was so out there for me, so scary, I love that. But, part of the reaction from the others isn't my fault. I mean, my new principal should have mentioned it in a staff meeting and he never did. He never did! The only comment he made to me was 'Great bulletin board' as he gave me a thumbs-up walking passed me in the hall, I mean come on!"

Alex's disappointment with her colleagues however, has not spoiled her sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with the professional board.

Alex had hoped that the board would spark more professional conversations perhaps even encourage others to share their work. This has not been the case.

Figure 5.11: Graffiti board (Photo taken 3/26/03, two weeks after the board first displayed.)
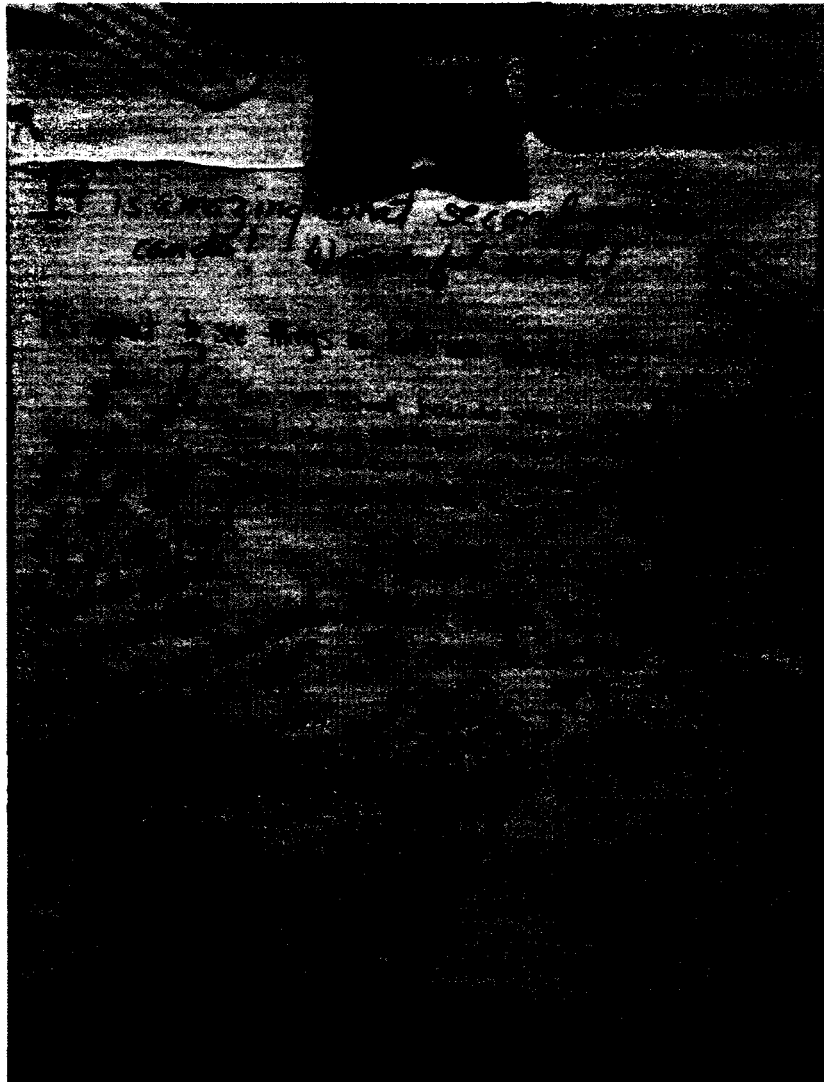
"You know, I don't feel any responsibility for other people in the building," Alex shared, "After that incredible board went up, it should have been mentioned in the staff meeting. A sign up sheet should have been posted and just said, 'OK, so who is next?' I tried. We tried. I feel great about the growth I have done. It's sad that others here can't. But if [my old principal] were here though, there would have been a cake, a celebration."

Alex's professional development principles had been met. Figure 5.12 shows how each of her principles have been met throughout the project.

I can imagine a future for these types of reflective professional bulletin boards. If indeed professional development should incorporate meaningful reflection, be on-going and self-selective and somehow mirror the inner self to the outside world while informing teaching, this board encompassed all of that beautifully; I saw Alex's möbius strip loud and clear.

Parker Palmer (March 5, 2003) described professional development workshops as those where the participants spent most of their time taking notes on what the leader says and the least amount of their time taking notes on what they themselves are thinking. Professional development workshops or experiences should, instead, be times for personal reflection that lead to further professional growth (Palmer, 2003; Richardson, 1994; Rud & Oldendorf, 1992). The growth that Alex had was due to the amount of time she was allowed to reflect one-on-one with me. The board was an artifact of that reflection.

Figure 5.12: Alex's principles related to the professional development board (Compiled from interview 4/12/03):

---

**Self-Selected**:

- It was Alex's choice to participate in the creation of the professional

  bulletin board.

- Alex chose the topic she wanted to highlight.


**Reflective, Personal, Meaningful:**

- Alex was able to reflect deeply on each step of the project.

- We made periodic "checks" along the way to make sure this was still a

  good idea

- Alex was showing her inner-self to the outside world...a very

  meaningful new idea she had learned about professional development.

- Her reflections and our discussion informed her teaching and those

  reflections were included in the board


**On-going:**

- I was in Alex's room for the better part of a year, I knew the dynamics

  of the classroom and the background of the project.

- We wrote a *what's next* section on the board so Alex was clear on

  where she was headed.

---

The collaboration between Alex and me during the board was an important process of our relationship (Christiansen & Devitt, 1997; Clandinin, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). Creating the professional board together was a creative process. Beyond gathering the photographs and quotations, they needed to be mounted and arranged on the board in a visually appealing way. Alex and I worked together to make sure the board looked the way we wanted it to look.

The professional board was an artistic expression of representing Alex's learning (Eisner, 1998). In the following chapter I further explore our collaboration and forms of artistic representation.

# 6. A TEACHER AND A RESEARCHER TOGETHER GROW PROFESSIONALLY: MIRROR IMAGES – A POEM FOR TWO VOICES

*Researchers must be encouraged to look for flexible research practices*
*and different ways to produce the final research story.*
<div align="right">-Maxine Birch and Tina Miller</div>

Throughout the research study, I continually reflected upon how Alex and I were both changing--she as a novice teacher and I as a novice qualitative researcher. One of my advisors, Jan Kristo, had the idea for me to explore these changes using the metaphor of mirror images. Creating new ways of analyzing and representing data are becoming more common in research. Eisner (1998) writes:

> But stories and narrative by no means exhaust the ways in which the processes of education in and out of schools can be studied or described. Film, video, the multiple displays made possible through computers, and even poetically crafted narrative are waiting in the wings. I believe that we won't have long to wait before they are called to center stage. (p. 125)

Thinking of a different way to represent my data was intriguing. There were many possibilities for how I might pursue this chapter but I struggled with the direction I wanted to take it. Greene (1995) emphasizes the feeling of being released from the confinement of writing when expressing oneself through poetry:

> All this meaning, too, is wrought by means of metaphor and through the kind of disclosure of unexpected relationships that brings something new into a

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reader's world. Experiencing the poem either from without or from within, the reader cannot but feel released from a confinement and a one-dimensionality that both depend on having a rationalist's gaze. (p. 142)

The idea of the metaphor was both a blessing and a curse as I began to write the chapter. In the back of my mind I kept imagining Alex and I speaking about our collaboration. If I was going to write a chapter that expressed how we mirrored each other, I wanted her voice to be heard. I decided to try creating a poem to convey my thoughts, a poem for two voices. Eisner (1998) writes, "Poetry and literature, for example, were invented to say what words can never say, and through what they say, we can come to understand what we cannot say. Science, Dewey (1934) reminds us, states meaning. Art expresses it" (p. 105). Eisner's words helped solidify my decision to construct a poem that would state the meaning I was trying to convey with this chapter.

Richardson (2000) states, "When we read or hear poetry, we are continually nudged into recognizing that the text has been constructed. But all texts are constructed – prose ones, too; therefore, poetry helps problematize reliability, validity, transparency, and 'truth" (p. 933). I took Richardson's challenge on in my research. The first poem for two voices I read was written by Paul Fleischman in his book, Joyful Noise (1988). He describes these as:

Poems written to be read aloud by two readers at once, one taking the left-handed part, the other taking the right-handed part. The poems should be read from top to bottom, the two parts meshing as in a musical duet. When both

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readers have lines at the same horizontal level, those lines are to be spoken simultaneously. (unpaged)

The poem I have written follows the pattern of Fleischman's description.

As I was constructing the poem, I pulled pieces of Alex's words straight from my data. Although not all of the words are verbatim, most of her words are direct quotes from the data: interviews, observations, or email exchanges.

The process was fascinating and difficult. I started out by looking through data points and thinking about what I had learned from Alex that I could relate to my own learning process. That didn't work. It seemed too contrived. So, I pulled back and asked myself, "If I were Alex, what would I say about my learning process?"

I put myself in Alex's shoes. I "became" the teacher I had been researching for the past seven months and looked through all of the data I had and pulled together what I imagined she would say.

When I had completed Alex's side of the poem, I started to craft my side. I actually found this to be more difficult. I had been much more focused on the development of Alex as a teacher and the changes she has made than I have been on my changes as a researcher. It was quite enlightening to look in the mirror.

Draft in hand, I let Alex read it to make sure I had represented her voice correctly. We edited the poem together from that point on.

"Within our poems, we found ourselves and were able, then, to listen and to respond to each other, making space for both voices as we found our places beside one another." (Kennard & Johnston-Kosik, 1993, p. 84)

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What is the circle that
has brought me to this point?

Five years

of teaching

brilliant children.

New questions forming

how do my students learn?

Come into my classroom!

And, our circle intersected.

Challenging professional risk

I became a Maine
Writing Project Fellow

powerful

What is the circle that has
brought me to this point?

Twenty years

of researching and teaching

brilliant children
and teachers

New questions forming

how do teachers grow professionally?

Can I come into your classroom?

And, our circles intersected.

Challenging professional risk

I moved to Maine to get a
doctorate

terrifying

they want to see
see my best practice

Can I do this?  What if I fail?

they hooted

they might not hoot

and clapped

or clap

and wowed

or wow

and here I am with brilliant people!    and here I am with brilliant people!

Taking classes

Teaching classes

New and exciting    New and exciting

Teaching practices

Research practices

.

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Schema
     Creating mental images
          Determining Importance
             Asking questions
               Synthesizing

              Patterns
                Multidimensional
                  Prisms
                    Reflections
                      Refractions

Metacognition

              Crystallization

Thinking about thinking.

              Knowing there is always more to
              know.

There are always risks to take.           There are always risks to take.

Taking risks                 Taking risks

Risk to non-level my
books.

              Risk to crystallize my data

       Should I?               Should I?

       Why Should I?         Why Should I?

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My kids aren't choosing
books they want to read.

I want to establish
a stronger rapport with you.

They choose books only from
assigned tubs

I wanted to be honest and open

Why should I?                          Why Should I?

My kids are now having real conversations
about books they choose

New possibilities for

researcher roles are emerging

That's why.                            That's why.

That's why I let my students
choose their own books

That's why I crystallize my data

But, I'm still nervous.                 But, I'm still nervous.

Nervous                                 Nervous

Nervous on Invention Day

Nervous to try new methodology

Boxes, glue, string
      paper, paint

                                                   Metaphors, workshops,
                                                   art, journals, poems

building inventions created from plans

                                                   creating collections to
                                                 represent self

Learning is messy

                                                 Research is messy

         spontaneous                                            spontaneous

              learning is play

                                               research is art

Teaching is letting
learning happen

                                               Research is being open
                                                         to methodology

       This is good teaching!

                                               Could this be good
                                             research?

                                             I know good research.

                                             I know bad research.

External forces I resist
       district mandates

                                 External forces I resist

                                      federal mandates

Teaching frustrations.

                                    Education frustrations.

Spelling
       This damn mandated program

                           No Child Left Behind
                              This damn federal mandate

Look-say-cover-see-write-check-rewrite

                           Look-phonics-check-phonics-
                                 see, no workshops.

'We want numbers to show the kids
are progressing!"

                           'We want numbers to show the kids
                           are progressing!'

Waste of time.  Silly.

       This isn't how kids                This isn't how kids
            learn how to spell          learn

                           this isn't what new teachers should be
                                learning about teaching.

That's what I think about their mandated program.

That's what I think about their               That's what I think about their
reliable replicable research                    reliable replicable research.

I'll do it,

    but I'll do it my way.

                                        My way

    will meet

    the individual                  the individual

       learning

                                    research

    needs                            needs

    of my students               of my students

                               and my teaching community.

My teaching community encourages
     me to develop professionally

I develop professionally            I develop professionally

                            Professional development should be

    self-selected

                            not forced

    reflective

<div style="display:flex">
<div>

a mobius strip

share what's inside


meaningful
    Parker Palmer


ongoing

our partnership
You've mentored me


    you support me


    you reflect with me


    you help me take risks


You've taught me what it means to
    be coached.

    You exhausted me!


We were collaborators.

    We created a professional

</div>
<div>

a mobius strip

with the outside


Parker Palmer

avoid the one-shots


our partnership


    You've taught me
        to be a mentor


    you support me


    you let me ask questions


    you allow me to take
    risks


You taught me what it means to

    be a coach.


You let me challenge you.


We were collaborators.

    We created a professional

</div>
</div>

display board.                    display board.

You supported me to do it.

                                  You took the risk.

My reflections were honest and open.

                                  I challenged you.

You were right.

I worried.                        I worried.

                                  But it worked.

I was so proud of that board.

And of our work together.         And of our work together.

Our intersected circles          Our intersected circles

will separate for a time,

but will forever be joined in the    but will forever be joined in the

lessons of teaching

                                  and research

we have both learned.            we have both learned.

# 7.   REFLECTION REVISITED:
## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

*To prepare children for a hopeful future, teachers must be able to do more than implement a handful of strategies they have learned in a teacher education program or on the job. They must have an experimental mindset.*
-Frances Schoonmaker

On a gorgeous September day in 2001, Brenda Power and I were co-teaching the MAT Literacy Methods course onsite in the library of West Ridge Elementary. It was 10 a.m. and we had just let the interns go on break. Many stood outside the library in the bright sun, chatting with teachers from the school. One of our students walked in and told us that she had just heard some odd news--a plane had hit one of the twin towers in New York City. It was my second week as a doctoral student, and it was my second week meeting with these interns in this class. I was thinking about what we had planned next and I looked at Brenda for directions.

Soon, more reports were coming in from other interns who had been on break. The moment Brenda turned the television on for the news it was clear that we would need to cancel class. Student reactions varied. One woman worried about her husband who was flying from Boston that day.

Brenda was nervous about a colleague whose son lives near the World Trade Center. Another intern immediately took over the classroom of her mentor, a first grade teacher in the building who was concerned about her daughter who attended college in New York City. Another young intern just needed comforting from us as she sat in shock watching the images on television with tears streaming down her face. Being from Oregon, I suddenly felt more aware of my geographic closeness to New York.

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Reflecting back on that day as a teacher educator, I am reminded how much more goes into preparing students for teaching than just introducing strategies and programs for potential teachers. Teachers need to think on their feet, or as Schön (1983) calls it, "reflecting-in-action." Brenda turned the television on, and we canceled class that day not because we had learned in our teacher preparation programs that this is was we were supposed to do in situations like this. There had never been a situation like this before. We saw the reactions of our students and we responded to the observations we made. Our decision, our reflection-in-action, was made in a moment.

Teaching is about moments--moments based on the passion that brought us to teaching in the first place. Parker Palmer (1998) hit the nail on the head when he describes this passion:

> I meet teachers around the country who remind me of Rosa Parks: they love education too much to let it sink to its lowest form, and—whether they know it or not—they are sparking a movement for educational reform by deciding to live divided no more. These teachers remember the passions that led them to become academics, and they do not want to lose the primal energy of their vocation. (p.170-171)

I can't remember a time in my life when I didn't know I would become a teacher. Teaching truly was my calling. I have been blessed with incredible mentors along the way. During my first years of teaching in an inner city private school in Chicago I team-taught with a woman I had heard about during my undergraduate

studies. I was able to try new teaching strategies during this critical time in my early teaching career because of her mentorship.

There are many pressures on new teachers today (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). New reading mandates are being implemented in schools as well as new debates among educators (Coles, 2000; Cunningham, 2002; Garan, 2002; Krashan, 2002; Pressley, Dolezal, Roehrig, & Hilden, 2002.) My study explored the calls for literacy reform, the unique pressures faced by early career teachers, and the role of reflective practice in teachers' decision-making processes through a case study of one teacher. I also looked at what impact the university/school partnership has on the literacy practice and what forms of professional development support effective change for one teacher. Alex, in my opinion, was not in danger of leaving the profession, but she was at that critical juncture of being in her fifth year (Darling-Hammond, 2003; NEA, 2002).

As I observed, interviewed, and crystallized my data, I looked broadly at the three areas of literacy reform, university/school partnerships, and professional development and how these areas affect Alex's practice in the classroom. My findings helped me to understand what might be playing a role in keeping Alex in the classroom. Merriam (2001) writes:

> The idea that the general resides in the particular, that we can extract a
> universal from a particular, is also what renders great literature and other art
> forms enduring. While we may never live at the South Pole, we can
> understand loneliness by reading Byrd's account; we can come up with

concrete generalizations about power and corruption by listening to the

Watergate tapes, although we are not likely to be president. (p. 210)

Even though my study was a single case study, I can use my findings to look at the

larger context of early career teachers and literacy reform.

Celebrating Teaching

We need to keep new teachers teaching. We need to help new teachers

remember the passions that brought them to teaching and to appreciate the moments

of teaching. Unfortunately the federal government is under the impression that

teacher education programs are wasting the time of students who want to become

teachers. Secretary of education Rod Paige recently announced plans to revamp

teacher education to certify teachers more quickly:

> To achieve our goal of a quality teacher in every classroom, we need to do
>
> two things: Raise academic standards for new teachers, so they are prepared to
>
> teach our children to high levels, and remove the barriers that are keeping
>
> thousands of talented people out of the classroom. (American Board Press
>
> Conference, March 18, 2003.)

In my opinion, Mr. Paige needs to pay closer attention to the research. The

statistics show that teachers who lack initial teacher preparation are much more likely

to leave the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2003;

Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). "In California, the state standards board found that 40

percent of emergency-permit teachers left the profession a year, and two-thirds never received a credential" (p. 286).

The demands on teachers today from federal standardized testing, accountability and new policies being brought to districts by the No Child Left Behind Act may be adding to numbers of teachers leaving the field (Nieto, 2003.) And yet, with support through university partnerships, and ongoing professional development, teachers will be far more likely to remain in the profession. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) write, "New teachers will choose to stay at schools where sustained and consistent supports are in place, where they can do their day-to-day jobs with confidence, and where they can grow in their profession over time" (p.24).

Teachers want to feel valued and respected for the work they do in their classrooms. "We need to celebrate teachers who are as excited about their own learning as they are about the learning of their students" (Nieto, p.18). Ruth Hubbard celebrated my teaching during the three years she spent in my classroom by sharing her passion about teaching with me, supporting my teaching decisions, sharing what she had learned about me and my students with a wider audience, and encouraging me to share my own work publicly. I have tried to celebrate Alex's teaching during the months I spent with her in her classroom by observing and supporting the decisions she made in her teaching. She questioned and eventually changed assumptions she had about her literacy program.

So how do we celebrate teaching to keep early career teachers teaching? The fact that Alex views her professional development as an ongoing supportive process, as opposed to series of one-shot workshops is significant. Sweeney (2003) writes:

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One-shot inservices fail to give teachers the time and support they need to learn...No wonder one-shot inservices usually feel like a waste of time. They usually are. (p. 4)

If we want to retain new teachers we must start paying attention to what teachers are telling us about what keeps them teaching and improving their practice. It was clear to me having supportive relationships that Alex could reflect on her teaching practice with was important to her. Professional development opportunities, especially for new teachers need to shift their focus from quick-fix one-shot workshop models to more ongoing sustained support from colleagues and outside researchers and university partnerships (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Moore-Johnson & Birkeland, 2003.)

Inviting and Respecting Questions

As university professors, we should be open and encouraging of teachers' choices and adaptations of programs and theories we teach. Harwayne (1999) states:

People given the honor of helping teachers must be grounded in something that they believe in. They can't switch gears every time a new mandate arrives. In fact, we need to count on staff developers to be outspoken in their skepticism of passing fancies and whimsical approaches. There are too many teachers with file cabinets filled with short-lived pilot programs and useless curriculum guidebooks. (p. 252)

We must remember that these are the teachers who are observing their students using programs we are teaching them. Just because a program works for one

classroom teacher doesn't mean it will for another. And we need to understand that teachers are also researchers in their classrooms. Richardson (1994) writes:

> Teachers make decisions on the basis of a personal sense of what works; but without examining the premise underlying a sense of 'working,' teachers may perpetuate practices based on questionable assumptions and beliefs. Thus, the concept of teacher as inquirer provides a vision of a teacher who questions her assumptions and is consciously thoughtful about her goals, practices, students, and contexts. (p. 187)

In a few years for example, Alex might observe that symbolic story representation does not help her students comprehend text the way she had thought it would and will have by then learned a new strategy that she is exploring. Or, Alex might discover that next year when she begins teaching first grade she might find that using leveled books to be a useful guide, more than the hindrance as she felt they were with her more advanced second graders. The point is the decision will be based on observations that Alex will make from what her students need.

My research reinforced my belief that we need to listen and value what teachers share with us. I learned how devalued Alex felt in a graduate course when Alex believed a professor would not accept the changes she was making in her literacy program. Instead of asking questions and showing a genuine interest in Alex's inquiry, the professor made Alex feel as if she was doing something wrong. I need to remember this when I teach graduate students. Zeichner (1994) writes:

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Vigorous exploration of the social and political implications in classroom research does not entail withdrawal from the kind of schoolwork research and community action which directly confronts institutional policies and structures, or from the kind of work that directly challenges the gatekeepers of what is considered 'real' educational research. These efforts should be encouraged and supported, but not at the expense of the classroom research and the dignity of teachers. Moreover, all educators no matter where we choose to focus our research efforts—in the classroom, in the school, in the university or college, or in the larger community—need to continue to speak out against the policies that we view as educationally unsound or morally bankrupt. (p. 81)

I believe that Alex's reaction against leveled books had much more to do with the reaction from the professor that from the program itself. I have learned through my research that I need to ask the right questions and respect the decisions of the teachers I teach whether I agree with their decisions or not. This will not always be easy, especially when students express beliefs that are different than mine. If a teacher comes up to me, for instance, and tells me that invented spelling is not working for their students, and they are going to stop letting their students use it as they write, I'm going to do a lot of lip biting before I ask my questions. But I will.

And I will respond:

- Tell me what your decision is based on.

- Show me, or tell me, some of the observations you have made to base your decision on.

- What have you read to back up your decision?

- What do you have in place during writing time so that your students can still write?

- How will you monitor their progress?

- Who will you share your reflections with?

- What happens if you find out you made a mistake?

I believe we should also be teaching our preservice students to become reflective practioners (Calderhead, 1988; Cruikshank, 1987; Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). The earlier we teach our new students how to reflect on their practice, the earlier they will begin to observe and learn from students they work with in their student teaching. Grumet (1991) writes:

If my work permits the teachers I work with to examine their own work with a seeing that is more inclusive, that surveys an ever widening surround, that is a search I would gladly join. But if my work certifies me as an agent of the state to peer into what is hidden from public view, if it is my look that discovers and appraises, then I might as well approach the classroom with

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bloodhound as well as briefcase, and they ought to demand to see my warrant before they let me in. (p. 71)

Reflection that supports thinking for my students so that they are continually challenging themselves is what I hope for. I don't want students who simply reflect back what I am saying. I don't want to "approach the classroom with bloodhound and briefcase." I welcome students who will challenge me so that I make sure to continually reflect on my practice as a teacher.

Forming Partnerships

Many contend and I agree that we need new teacher induction programs for early career teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Johnson and Kardos, 2002; Rogers and Babinski, 2002). Feiman-Nemser (2003) writes:

If we leave beginning teachers to sink or swim on their own, they may stay, clinging to practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students. A high quality induction program should increase the probability that new teachers learn desirable lessons from their early teaching experiences (p. 27)

The phrase "if we leave beginning teachers to sink or swim" struck me. As university teachers, we teach new teachers and send them on their way with a good luck and a "keep in touch." But, in the back of our minds, we are wondering if they will last the first five years. Schools also don't seem to be doing much better at keeping their new teachers in their buildings either. Teachers are leaving the field

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more than ever. "Since the early 1990's, the annual number of exits from teaching has surpassed the number of entrants," writes Linda Darling-Hammond (2003, p.7).

We need to form more partnerships between universities and schools that support these early teachers. Somehow we need to support new teachers without cutting the cord so abruptly.

But we can also change or add to our existing programs and courses. Instead of focusing on specific programs to learn, we can teach our new teachers how to reflect on their teaching. New teachers may not know how to do this. Instead of pouring federal money into rushing new teachers into the field, the money might be better spent on the induction of new teachers and professional development opportunities. Retention is at least as great an issue as teacher retirement rates. Rogers & Babinski (2002) write about the value new teacher reflection groups as opposed to a variety of workshops to teach technique to new teachers:

> This kind of professional training imputes that learning how to teach requires only that beginners accumulate a variety of techniques and skills—skills seen as so simplistic that they can be learned in afterschool workshops....teachers are seen as technicians...(p.5)

Even though much has been written on the need for reflection in teacher education programs (Calderhead, 1988; Cruikshank, 1987; and Zeichner & Liston, 1987), little is known about what teachers actually do when asked to reflect on their own learning (Risko, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2002). My study set out to learn the role

of reflective practice in Alex's decision-making processes and how those reflective tools helped her to make wise teaching choices.

During her first five years as a teacher, Alex had the support of the university when she was a mentor, she took courses onsite in her building as part of the university partnership, she began a graduate program, she was a Maine Writing Project Fellow, and she had an outside researcher in her classroom for nearly a year. When Alex reflected on her professional development it was these that she mentioned as her most influential experiences, as opposed to the one-shot workshops she had attended.

Alex's reflections on the value of long-term experiences over one-shot workshops do fit the findings of numerous research studies (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000; Sweeney, 2003). An on-going supportive relationship is one facet of professional development that Alex values and is one aspect that has influenced changes she has made in her literacy program.

Observing and Reflecting

Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Collins-Block, and Morrow (2001) describe exemplary teachers who make changes to their programs:

> Exemplary teaching ability is not a magical, mystical thing that people either have or don't have. It develops as teachers become expert observers of students and learning, as they seek continually to learn and grow, and as they reflect on their own teaching and experiences in learning. (p. 216)

Alex reflected on her teaching when she decided to non-level her books and when she decided to alter the spelling program. She listened to her students. Again, Pressley et al. (2001), refer to exemplary teaching:

> Exemplary teachers believe that excellent teaching consists of observing and understanding student perspectives on what they are learning, and examining materials in light of how well they fit with a particular child's needs. Rather than promote a method or program for its own sake, they look at it in light of the specific children in front of them and whether it would be better or worse in meeting a need. (p. 217)

If we are going to continue to promote specific literacy programs and teaching strategies, as university professors we also need to be teaching our students how to observe and listen to their students. We need to share moments with our students about when those reading programs might not work. Alex learned that leveling her books wasn't working for her when she listened to the conversations her students were having. Because of this as well as the support she had from her classmates in her curriculum and inquiry class, she was able to explore other options.

Having support, listening and observing to her students, and reading new literature in the field influenced Alex to make changes in her literacy program. She made changes based on her own inquiry and professional conversations with colleagues; not because of some training she was given or a new mandated program. Sweeny (2003) writes:

The trend in school reform has moved toward schools purchasing 'canned' professional development programs: programs that include lists and teacher scripts telling teachers exactly what to say and do. These programs are "grounded in educational research" and espouse the potential to "dramatically increase student achievement." This is an oversimplified view of student and teacher learning. No two schools are alike, and one needs to take into account the complex nature of learning, for both students and teachers. Effective professional development is cyclical, ongoing. (p. 6)

I would like to see more university and school partnerships working together on long-term professional development experiences. The benefits to both the university and the schools would be undeniable. Below I have listed possible ideas for university/school partnerships for professional development experiences (Clandidin, 1993; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Rogers & Babinski, 2002; Schoonmaker, 2002):

- New teacher support groups
- Small inquiry groups facilitated by a university researcher
- University/classroom teacher research partnerships
- Professional development bulletin boards
- Joint presentations together at local and national conferences
- Co-teaching at the university
- Dialogue journals between members of groups

- Collaborative writing projects

- Learning Labs (teachers observing teachers and reflecting together on what they observed)

It is my opinion that the university/school partnership is crucial for the future of education. The partnerships "create spaces that are responsive, flexible, and inventive" (Miller, 2001; 117). In order for that to occur, though, the researchers need to understand the role they play in the classroom.

## Outside Researcher Roles

Researching Alex has reminded me how important it will be for researchers in teacher education to be in classrooms for sustained periods of time. Not just for the above-mentioned professional development experience it brings to the teacher, but for the researcher as well. Having the contact with the school, the students, and the teacher is invaluable. If I am going to teach undergraduate students to become teachers I need to be in the classroom. If I am going to be teaching graduate level courses to practicing teachers, I need to be in the classroom. It's not enough to just interview teachers—I learned this during my interviews with Alex. If I were an outside researcher simply interviewing Alex on symbolic story representation, for example, I would have received very skewed information. Our relationship grew over an extended period of time that was built on trust. During my first interviews with Alex I received very positive, but superficial, responses. They were not the deep reflections that we came to after I had begun to crystallize my data. This only happened because of the amount of time I spent in Alex's classroom, and the amount of trust we had established between each other. If I was just interviewing her on how

her experience was with the process, I have to wonder if I would have received the same honest and open reflections.

Ruth Hubbard devoted time as a researcher in my classroom when I was a classroom teacher and I appreciate that time much more now. Developing relationships with teachers and outside researchers is not only important for the relationship--it is crucial for the research. "Gone are earlier research and development models which viewed universities as knowledge producers and schools as simply sites for research; the newer model sees school-university cooperation as a jointly owned venture aimed at achieving mutually beneficial change" writes Castle (1997, p. 59).

The "mutually beneficial change" is something that I hadn't fully appreciated when Ruth was a researcher in my classroom. Even though Ruth was doing research in my classroom, where she eventually wrote a book, several articles, and presented at numerous conferences, the benefits to me personally and professionally were unquestionable. Had Ruth just came to me for periodic interviews and observations, the benefit to me may have been much more limited.

Collaboration in research with classroom teachers is something to embrace as a partnership, not as a hierarchical structure (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Christiansen et al, 1997; Clandinin, 1993). Had I gone in to Alex's classroom as the "expert" and not a partner, our relationship would not have been the same. Shockley-Bisplinghoff and Allen (1998) write:

> Collaboration offers one of the most promising possibilities. While genuine
> collaboration takes time—the development of trust, shared leadership, and the

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negotiation of difficult issues can be a structure that facilitates both divergent and convergent decision-making. (p. 67)

As it was, I was nervous to just share an idea with Alex. I made the right decision to ask first if she minded if I shared ideas with her. I felt as if it put us on equal footing. And yet, even so, there was a still delicate balance to maintain. For example, back when Alex told me she was removing the levels on her book tubs, I could have reacted in one of two ways. I could have shouted for joy, or I could have told her she was crazy. I did neither. I simply asked her to explain to me why she made that decision. By keeping my judgments out of the picture, I gave Alex the time she needed to reflect openly, and honestly, about her decision.

This wasn't always the case, however. There were times when my opinions did seep into our discussions. Sometimes this was due to an assumption I was making. For instance, when Parker Palmer was coming to Maine, I made an assumption that Alex would love to hear him speak. Knowing her as I did, I gave Alex a copy of his book and reserved two spots for us for his workshop. This was a time when I felt as if I did push something that I valued so deeply, Parker Palmer's work, onto Alex. Fortunately, this assumption turned out to be appropriate. She valued his talk and from what she read in his book. But, I still have to remember to be careful what I share with whom and what my purpose is for sharing.

If I had more time in the school, I would have extended the invitation personally to other teachers to create the next board. Since the new principal didn't announce that in the staff meeting, I felt some responsibility for not letting other

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teachers know that they could create the next one. I did speak to two teachers, but it was informal and I can imagine how overwhelming it may have seemed to them. I wish I could have helped more teachers put their work out on public display as Alex had done. This would have made a nice transition into a school-wide professional development project.

Qualitative Research Implications

Learning to crystallize data made an impact on my research that I will carry throughout my career as a researcher as well as a future advisor of doctoral students. Eisner (1998) writes:

> Another potential consequence for educational research relates to the education of doctoral students. As the relevance of different forms of representation for understanding schooling grows, schools of education will be pressed to develop programs that help students learn how to use them. Film, for example, will need to be regarded not only as a way of showing pictures but as a way of understanding some aspects of schooling, teaching, and learning that cannot be understood as well in any other way. Furthermore, the artistic features of film are not merely ornamental but essential to the display of particular messages. (p. 127)

Having the creative and artistic freedom to express myself helped me to analyze and write up my data (Baff, 1997; Denzin, 2000; Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 2000). For me,

it was difficult to separate the artistic from the political during my interpretation.

Denzin (2000) agrees as he writes about the future directions of qualitative research:

> Aesthetics, art, performance, history, culture, and politics are thus intertwined, for in the artful, interpretive production, cultural heroes, heroines, mythic pasts, and senses of moral community are created. It remains to chart the future—to return to the beginning, to reimagine the ways in which qualitative inquiry and interpretive ethnography can advance the agendas of radical democratic practice, to ask where these practices will take us next. (p. 914)

Denzin's future directions remind me of the image of the crystal with its many different faces. As I continue with new research I will keep this image close at hand.

But beyond crystallization, I have become more aware of how crucial the arts are in helping me to construct meaning in my research. Greene (1995) writes:

> We need to recognize that the events that make up aesthetic experiences are events that occur within and by means of the transactions with our environments that situate us in time and space...Made aware of ourselves as questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, we may communicate to students the notion that reality is multiple perspectives and that the construction of it is never complete, that there is always more. (p.131)

<u>Future Directions</u>

I would like to do a follow up study of Alex in three years. I will be curious to see what influences her in her career. The research seems to be clear about what is causing teachers to leave the profession and I would like to see what is keeping Alex teaching. In three years she will be in her eighth year and I will want to know how she continues to make changes in her literacy program, how her professional development has grown, and if she has participated in more university/school partnerships. Alex has so much passion for teaching that I trust she will remain in the field. In another year she will have completed her Master's degree and I imagine she will be thinking about starting a post-graduate degree. I am hoping she will agree to present some of our work together at the National Conference of Teachers of English and I am encouraging her to try writing an article.

I hope Alex becomes a leader in some of the ideas I have laid out for professional development. For instance, I think Alex would make an excellent facilitator for a new teacher group. She is compassionate, a good listener, very positive, and willing to be open and honest with her experiences.

I am headed back to Oregon. It seems as though the educational system in Oregon has been struck and is collapsing to the ground since I have been gone. In Portland, teachers are working without pay for ten days until the end of the 2003 school year. In some outlying districts, budget cuts forced schools to close three weeks early. Class size in some schools is reaching forty students. In Maine, teachers complain when they have over twenty-two students in their classrooms and I wince. I agree. Twenty-two is too large! Teaching teachers to become reflective

practitioners in an Oregon classroom is causing me some anxiety. But, just because I don't like what is happening in my state shouldn't keep me from teaching there, should it?

Alex didn't like what was happening in her classroom and she made changes. I won't change what is happening politically or economically in Oregon. But if I can instill a passion for teaching in my students, and to teach them the importance of reflective practice, it will be worth it.

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In 1983 Jill began teaching in Chicago, Illinois. She taught there for five years before moving to Portland, Oregon. Upon arriving in Oregon, Jill enrolled in Lewis & Clark College in the Master of Arts in Teaching program She received her MAT degree in 1994. She continued teaching in Oregon for twelve years. During that time, she published two books on teaching.

Jill moved to Maine in 2001 to pursue a doctorate in literacy education. After receiving her degree, she will be moving back to Oregon. Jill is a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in Literacy Education from The University of Maine in August, 2003.