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TEACHERS' LIFE HISTORIES AS
CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Rebekah D. Kelleher



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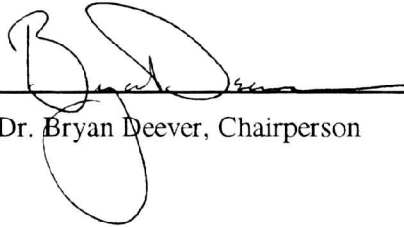
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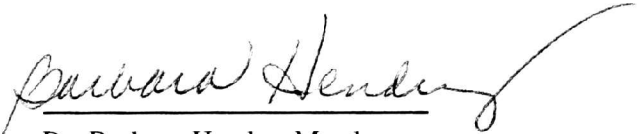
To the Graduate College:

This dissertation entitled "Teachers' Life Histories as Curriculum Context" and written by Rebekah D. Kelleher is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Curriculum Studies.

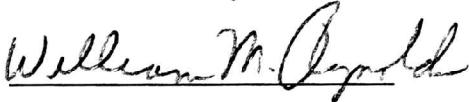


Dr. Bryan Deever, Chairperson

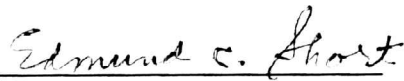
We have reviewed this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



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Acknowledgments

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To my dissertation committee, Dr. Bryan Deever, Dr. Edmund Short, Dr. William Reynolds, and Dr. Barbara Hendry: thanks for your unwavering support and encouragement of qualitative research in general and of this study in particular; thanks also to Dr. Natalie Adams for sparking my interest in life history and helping me to develop my voice as a researcher.

To my friends and study participants, Annie, Laura, and Lyn: this would never have been possible without your willingness to share your lives and give of your time.

To Keith, Jessica, and Daniel and to the rest of my family (Liz and John, this means you, too): Most families are not as resilient as ours. Thanks for your patience and support throughout this crazy year. I love you dearly.

To the Angel: I saw you!

In memory of Tee.

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Abstract

This qualitative study focuses on the teacher as curriculum enactor. Using life history methodology, the study explores how ordinary teachers' life experiences impact their present classroom decisions. The purpose of the study is three-fold: to give voice to the classroom teacher as curriculum expert; to encourage reflective practice; and to contribute to curriculum knowledge by focusing on the enacted curriculum. Three female middle school teachers participated in structured and unstructured interviews in which they shared their life stories and reflected on the origin of their teacher knowledge and behavior. The researcher reviewed transcripts of interviews and notes from observations of participants' classrooms, using a constant comparative method of analysis. Emergent themes provided the basis for narratives of each participant's past experiences and present professional context and possible interactions of these two factors. The three narratives were then comparatively interpreted, noting commonalities. The narratives showed that childhood experiences appear to shape classroom decisions far more than do professional experiences. One commonality across the narratives was the dialectic of forces of reproduction vs. human agency in shaping each participant's classroom decisions.

Introduction

In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is critical we know about the person the teacher is. (Goodson, 1992, p. 4).

At the heart of this study are questions regarding the nature and origin of curriculum. In the Handbook of Research on Curriculum, Jackson (1992) notes that since the 1600s, the term "curriculum" has been used to denote a course of study. Over the years this traditional, "official" definition has been adapted, modified, and broadened to include not just content, but the range of experiences encountered by the student under the guidance of teachers or direction of the school (Bobbitt, 1972; Caswell & Campbell, 1935; Oliva, 1982). This study accepts the "real-life" view of curriculum offered by Schwab (1970) who speaks of a "curriculum in action [which] treats real things: real acts, real teachers, real children, things richer than . . . their theoretical representations" (p. 27). This curriculum-in-action is a "stream of situations requiring discrimination of deliberative problems and decisions thereon" (p. 3); in this study I refer to these deliberative decisions as "curriculum decisions". An active, real-life, experiential view of curriculum positions the teacher as a powerful curriculum shaper, "the fulcrum upon which theory and practice balance" (Miller, 1992. p. 16). Serving as the

"lens through which the curriculum is filtered" (Millies, 1992, p. 40), the teacher determines how the official curriculum is actually enacted, what experiences are emphasized, and, to a great extent, the social and personal interactions in which experiences are contextualized. "It is in the lived situations of actual teachers – rather than in, for example, the educational commissions, policy panels, or research institutions – that the teaching enterprise exists and can best be understood" (Ayers, 1989, p. 4). The teacher's life experiences, and the meaning the teacher makes of them, are the context in which the curriculum is enacted. This study attempts to "trace connections . . . between the teachers' past experiences and their current story" (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p. 225).

Traditional educational inquiry has failed to address teaching as lived experience and questions of how teachers see their work and lives (Goodson, 1992). According to Goodson, traditional research has not "confronted the complexity of the schoolteacher as an active agent in making his or her own history" (p. 4). The inadequacy of decontextualized research is illustrated by Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992) who cite the limited impact of curriculum innovations research on actual classroom practice; reformers had neglected the central role of the

teacher in implementing significant classroom change and failed to give teachers a voice in determining needed reforms. Because of the isolation of the researcher (in traditional research models) from the world of those being researched, the reputation of educational research, among practitioners, is one of "irrelevance, secrecy, and egocentricity among researchers" (Goodson & Walker, 1988, p.112). Goodson and Walker argue for adding "new dimensions to our interpretations of classroom events" (p. 120) through the inclusion of teachers' biographical material as an integral part of accounts of classroom life.

Study Question and Purpose

The aim of this study is to establish through life history research the personal and professional context from which the teacher makes curriculum decisions. The guiding question is both substantive (concerned with description of a particular context) and formative (concerned with interactions of contexts with one another), as suggested by the work of Butt et al.(1992). This study asks "How have elements of a teacher's perceived past shaped the teacher's present professional context?"

My purpose in conducting this study into the lives of teachers is three-fold: (a) to validate and promulgate the voice of the classroom teacher as curriculum expert; (b) to

encourage personal and professional reflection and insight for myself, the participants, and those who read this research; and (c) to contribute to the field of curriculum knowledge by focusing on curriculum as enacted by the classroom teacher. Each of these purposes warrants further clarification.

Recognizing Teachers Voices. The first purpose of the study, to recognize the voice of the teacher as curriculum expert, has its roots in feminist research. Feminist research is "characterized by an emphasis on lived experience and the significance of everyday life" (Weiler, 1988, p. 58). For the feminist researcher, personal narratives serve as essential primary documents to present and interpret life experiences by "listening to women's voices, studying women's writings, and learning from women's experiences" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 4). In Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective, Maynard & Purvis (1994) note that a driving force of feminism is to "challenge the passivity, subordination and silencing of women, by encouraging them to speak about their own condition and in so doing confront the experts . . . with the limitations of [the experts'] own knowledge and comprehension" (p.23). Voice, as I use it in this study, refers to the right to speak and be represented as well as

"the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings that are conveyed" (Butt et al., 1992, p. 57) when teachers speak. Cortazzi (1993) notes that the teacher's voice emerges strongly in narrative accounts because teacher knowledge is structured by events and ordered by narrative. Proponents of the study of teachers' lives (Butt et al.; Casey, 1993; Cortazzi) note that voices of practitioners have been largely absent in the vast majority of studies of curriculum and teaching. Teachers' perspectives, like those of women studied by feminist researchers, are "not absent simply as a result of oversight but [have] been suppressed, trivialized, ignored, or reduced to the status of . . . folk wisdom by dominant research traditions" (Anderson, Armitage, Jack, & Wittner, 1990, p. 96). Studying teachers' lives counteracts the tendency to keep teachers in the shadows of educational research and takes seriously teachers' individual and collective voices, allowing those voices to be heard loudly and articulately (Goodson, 1992). My focus on life history properly positions the individual (woman, person, teacher) as the expert on her own life.

Encouraging Reflection. The second purpose of the study is to encourage personal reflection and insight. Schubert and Ayers (1992) note that the collection of teachers' stories is valuable not as a goal in itself, but as a basis

for teacher reflection. They suggest that "it is only reflective teachers (not those who teach by recipe, technique, or doctrine) who are able to grow continuously" (p. x). Based on Dewey's (1916) definition of education as the "reorganization or reconstruction of experience . . . which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p. 76), various definitions of teacher reflection have been offered with differing emphases and levels of sophistication. Emphasis shifts from the simple, "examining past experience in a considered and focused way" (Millies 1992, p. 27), to the more involved "continuous critical review of practice" (Henderson & Hawthorne, 1994, p. 19) and "excavation of underlying assumptions about teaching and research" (Miller, 1992, p. 17).

Henderson and Hawthorne (1994) note that although there are not and should not be criteria to judge "good" teacher reflection, the process "requires a deepening commitment to authentic self-assessment" (p. 35) and is "generative, never summative" (p.33). Smith (1994) notes that reflection occurs as an "essentially pragmatic perspective arises" (p. 302). From this pragmatic perspective, neat technical theories are inadequate when applied to complex problems of practice, problems

characterized by "uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (Schon, 1983, p.50), problems requiring thinking both in and on action. Critical reflection is closely allied to *praxis*, "practice informed by critical personal and social analysis" (Henderson & Hawthorne, p. 125). Praxis combines teachers' "evolving ideas and personal belief systems . . . [with] their reflective action" (Schubert, 1991, p. 207), resulting in a "reciprocal shaping of theory and practice which . . . [is] at the center of an emancipatory social science" (Lather, 1991, p. 172). Reflection and praxis are thus joined in a "cyclic unity" (Butt et al., 1992, p. 61) which reflects the synergistic and dynamic nature of teaching.

The teacher reflection that I am encouraging as a result of this study is embodied in the definition of reflection provided by Schubert and Ayers (1992):

Reflection is thinking and feeling carefully about what is done and how it is done; using experiences as a basis for fashioning responses to similar situations. . . .[Reflective teachers] imagine new possibilities and try to anticipate the consequences of acting on them. . . .[They] continuously monitor their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning . . . [and] tune in carefully to the way their assumptions both

guide and are created by practice (p. ix).

Advancing Curriculum Knowledge. The third purpose of this study is to contribute to the field of curriculum knowledge by focusing on curriculum as enacted by the classroom teacher. Goodson (1992) notes that, although teachers have historically been a marginalized group, "much truth resides in the margins" (p.15). In the prologue to Teacher Lore, William Ayers (Schubert & Ayers, 1992) emphasizes the importance of drawing on the perspectives of teachers. "The secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail and the everyday life of teachers. . . .Those who hope to understand teaching must turn at some point to teachers themselves" (p. v). Narrative research offers a way for teachers voices to be heard and culture to be understood from the inside (Cortazzi, 1993). Narrative appropriately positions teachers as "important partners in the creation of knowledge about education" (Schubert, 1991, p. 207). In his foreword to Teachers' Stories (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995), F. Michael Connelly notes that narrative is now widely accepted as a legitimate research approach and that "a new landscape of teaching and thinking about teaching . . . will emerge from such works . . . a landscape where boundary lines between theory and practice are blurred and faded" (p. xii - xiii). O. L. Davis (1991), in his discussion of historical

curriculum inquiry, notes the contributions of life history and other personal narratives to the development of curriculum theory that is grounded in its historical context. Personal narratives serve as reminders of what we already know, illuminate what has been obscured, and add "texture and vividness and tones" (p. 78) to curriculum research. Fully grounding curriculum research in its historic context results in an "enriched and enlivened narration" (p. 79). For the curriculum researcher, "life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 124). Life histories of teachers help curriculum researchers (including classroom teachers) fill in the gaps and silences in existing theories of curriculum and teaching. Understandings gained from life history research lead us to discard or modify existing theories to more fully reflect the range of human experience and consciousness. Because it explores consciousness as well as behavior, life history provides an appropriate interpretative framework for the reconstruction of a "more inclusive, more fully human conception of social reality" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 3).

Definitional Issues

In fully establishing the focus of this study, clarification of some definitional issues is appropriate.

Many scholars (Dollard, 1935; Goodson, 1992; Langness & Frank, 1988; Connelly & Clandinin, 1991; Smith, 1994) have noted the plethora of terms for various methods of studying life experiences, arising from diverse disciplines (including anthropology, sociology, history, psychology) and thus possessing different emphases and vocabularies. Smith (1994) uses the generic label "life writing" to include "profiles, memoirs, life stories, life histories, case studies, autobiographies, journals, diaries . . . each suggesting a slightly different perspective under consideration" (p. 287). Smith notes that one type of life writing is biography, which moves beyond storytelling to a concern with how the subject makes sense of life experiences. Smith's conception of biography focuses more on the subject's perspective than the observer's perspective, yet Smith recognizes the importance of insight and creativity on the part of the biographer in the studying, constructing, and writing of lives.

Though the life writing in this study encompasses Smith's (1994) concept of biography, I prefer to use the term "life history" as defined by Ivor Goodson (1992):

The life story is the 'story we tell about our life'; the life history is a collaborative venture, reviewing a wider range of evidence . . . by interviews and

discussions and by scrutiny of texts and contexts. The life history is the life story located within its historical context (p. 6).

Throughout the study, I use the term "life history" to refer to the contextualized life story, regardless of the particular terminology used by the researcher. Where it seems appropriate to the context, I also use terms researchers employ as well as such umbrella terms as "personal narratives" and "life stories." The difficulty of distinguishing between various life writing terms is illustrated by the work of Hatch and Wisniewski (1995). They conducted a survey of life history and narrative researchers to determine what, if any, distinction could be made between the terms "life history" and "narrative". While the respondents failed to reach agreement on definitions of the two terms, most agreed that life histories are a type of narrative and are "individual, contextually situated stories" (p. 115). According to the survey, life history a) focuses on the individual and uses individual lives as the units of analysis; b) emphasizes the personal nature of the research process, in which researcher and participant work toward shared understanding of the life story; c) has a practical orientation, providing insight into the process of change; and d) emphasizes subjectivity, moving beyond

questions of generalizability that arise from more empiricist methods. Though most of Hatch and Wisniewski's respondents attempted to distinguish between the related terms, the distinction remains unclear and, for me as well as other researchers, irrelevant to the purpose of this type of inquiry, as illustrated by William Ayers's response to the survey:

This [distinction between "life history" and "narrative"] is not a useful distinction to me. Both approaches to inquiry are unabashedly genre blurring. They tend to tear down walls - anthropology, sociology, history, linguistics - and why should we resurrect them? . . . Each focuses on life as it is lived - an experience not easily fitted into disciplines, categories, or compartments. Each assumes a dynamic, living past, a past open to interpretation and reinterpretation, to meaning-making in and for the present (Hatch & Wisniewski, p.114).

Adequacy and Legitimation

In addition to clarification of definitional issues, a discussion of issues of adequacy and legitimation of life history research seems appropriate. In the traditional positivist paradigm, adequacy of a research study has been equated with validity, generalizability, and reliability.

The difficulty of application of these terms, derived from the positivist paradigm, to qualitative studies had led to what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) call the "legitimation crisis" (p.11), which has necessitated the reconsideration of adequacy criteria. Lincoln and Guba (1985) replace the criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity with their naturalistic equivalents of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In a more marked departure from positivist criteria, others (Donmoyer, 1990; Janesick, 1994; Wolcott, 1990;) have rejected these concepts as irrelevant in the study of individuals and meaning-making. Harry Wolcott holds that validity neither guides nor informs his qualitative work; preoccupation with validity is a distraction to the more appropriate criterion of understanding, "a quality that points more to identifying critical elements and wringing plausible interpretation from them, something one can pursue without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, the correct version, the Truth" (p. 147). Valerie Janesick (1994) uses the term "'methodolatry', a combination of 'method' and 'idolatry'" (p.215) to refer to slavish preoccupation with methodological issues (such as validity) to the exclusion of the actual substance of the human story. She calls for the abandonment of methodolatry and a return

to the:

human and passionate element of research. . . . For too long we have allowed psychometrics to rule our research and thus to decontextualize individuals. In depersonalizing the most personal of social events, education, we have lost our way. Now it is time to return to a discourse on the personal, on what it means to be alive (p. 217).

Plummer (1983) conducts a validity check for life histories by returning to the purpose of the study and notes that slavish adherence to positivist criteria actually decreases the validity of life history research:

The closer one is to the phenomenon one wants to understand, the nearer one usually is to validity. . . . If the subjective story is what the researcher is after, the life history approach becomes the most valid method. . . . It simply will not do to classify, catalogue, and standardise everything in advance, for this would be a distorted and hence invalid story (p.101- 102).

The rejection of traditional criteria as inappropriate or irrelevant does not negate the need for established criteria to judge the adequacy of qualitative studies and to meet challenges of legitimacy. Wolcott (1990), Janesick

(1994), and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that adequacy in qualitative studies arises from a focus on the substance of the inquiry, the richness and thickness of the description. Sikes and Measor (1992) note the ability of a good life history to evoke an accurate sense of reality, to possess the ring of truth, and, when teachers' lives are studied, to present a view of teaching that teachers recognize. Wolcott (1990) underscores the need for accurate recording of words and events to minimize selective recording and overinterpretation, so that readers are allowed to "'see' for themselves" (p. 129-130). A good qualitative study is "told largely in the (edited) words of a key informant . . . is well focused . . . and attempts to offer some insight at the same time that it raises a host of provocative questions" (p. 138).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two major theoretical frameworks, feminism and poststructuralism. The relationship of life history research to feminism was demonstrated previously in the discussion of the endorsement of the teacher's voice as a purpose of the study. The relationship of life history research to poststructuralism is demonstrated in several ways. The first is the propensity of both poststructuralism and life history to acknowledge the

existence of multiple realities (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Maynard and Purvis, 1994), what Lather (1991, p. 109) calls a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" perspective.

Secondly, both poststructuralism and life history research reject the idea that any research can adequately represent an independent reality (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). The assertions of life historians that "there is no such thing as 'raw' or authentic experience which is unmediated by interpretation" (Maynard and Purvis, 1994, p. 7), and that "every telling is a partial prevarication" (Grumet, 1991, p. 69) mesh with the poststructuralists' notion that "there are no objective observations, only observations filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 12). Thirdly, both life history and poststructuralism are concerned with subjectivity, "the conscious and unconscious thought and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Both see subjectivity as complex, fragmented, nonunitary, shifting, and nonlinear (Hatch & Wisniewski, p. 122; Kenway & Modra, 1992; Lather, 1991). Both see the individual's identity as being constructed by language, which has the power to produce, rather than simply reflect, meaning (Josselson, 1995; Weedon, 1987). Recognizing the

ability of language to construct our realities, Grumet (1991) notes that "we are, at least partially, constituted by the stories we tell to others and to ourselves about experience" (p. 69).

Methodology

An exploration of teachers' life experiences as curriculum context cannot be adequately accomplished through traditional positivistic, quantitative methods. To explore the question posed in this study (How have the elements of a teacher's perceived past shaped the teacher's present professional context?), an approach which recognizes the complex, affective nature of human experience (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998) and intersubjectivity of the researcher and researched (Campbell, 1988) is needed. Eisner (1981) suggests an approach modeled on art rather than science, focusing on individualization rather than standardization. Josselson (1995) underscores the absurdity of applying positivist criteria to the study of human lives:

To study whole persons, we cannot rely on logical positivist methods that isolate simple factors and trace their effects through statistical analysis. Such analysis aims for elucidating universals but effaces the intending individual. . . .I propose that empathy and narrative are routes to imagining what is real in whole people in their world (p. 29).

Studying real, whole people involves "moving beyond quantification to understanding . . . to pierce the veil of facts . . . to discover things like meaning, value,

significance and context in our search for understanding" (Ayers, 1988, p. 5). The personal, emotive nature of qualitative research makes it the method of choice for studies such as this one which seek to explore meaning on a very personal level (Ely, 1991).

Life History Model

Life history methodology borrows heavily from the ethnographer. Ethnography is concerned with the "meaning of action and events to the people we seek to understand" (Spradley, 1980, p.5). Ethnography focuses on obtaining the "emic" (insider) view rather than the "etic" (outsider or scientific) view. "The aim of emic descriptions is to produce a view of the world that the participants accept as real, meaningful, or appropriate" (Harris, 1997, p. 96-97). Spradley notes that ethnography ranges in scope from macro-levels (study of a complex society) to micro-levels (study of a single social situation). This study is situated toward the micro- end of the continuum, since it focuses on the individual classroom rather than on more complex settings such as the school or education as an institution. Each of the life histories in this study is a "limited life document" (Plummer, 1983, p. 108) which focuses on a particular issue (in this case, those life experiences which bear upon the teacher's curriculum decisions), rather than a

"comprehensive life document" (p. 108), a much larger undertaking which attempts to represent all aspects of the person's life.

The specific life history methodology employed in this study follows the model presented by Plummer (1983). He identifies five processes in the "doing" of life history research: preparation, data gathering, data storing, data analysis, and data presentation. Though this listing and the following discussion of each process consecutively seem to suggest a sequential model of research, this is not the case. These processes overlap, with, for example, analysis occurring alongside each of the other steps. Plummer's model may be compared to that of Spradley (1980), who conceptualizes ethnographical research as a cyclical, rather than a linear, pattern of investigation, in which the steps of framing questions, collecting and recording data, and analysis are repeated over and over again. I believe that the use of a nonlinear model of research is particularly appropriate for this study, since such an approach mirrors the complexity of the lives being studied: "The good teacher's life is not an orderly professional pathway; rather it is a personal journey shaped by context and choice, perspective and values" (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. xvii).

Preparation. Plummer's conception of the preparation process involves selection of the research problem and participants, the theoretical framework, and strategies for implementation of the other processes. I discussed problem selection and theoretical framework in the previous chapter and will address strategies for implementation of the other processes later in this chapter. Therefore, my discussion of the preparation process concerns itself mainly with the selection of participants. (I chose the word "participants" rather than more passive terms, such as "subjects" "informants" or "respondents", to indicate the active role of these people as co-constructors of the life histories.) Plummer suggests that the question of how to select the subjects of life history research has been approached in two ways: pragmatism (such as logistics or willingness to participate) and formal criteria (such as marginality or uniqueness). My choice of participants was guided more by the former than the latter. I chose as participants in this study three female middle school teachers who teach at the school where I have been employed for five years.

Selecting participants with which I had already established a personal and professional relationship, from within a culture with which I was already familiar, greatly reduced preparation time and eliminated concern with issues

of entry. I was able to begin collecting data immediately, without the added tasks of obtaining access, developing rapport, and learning layout and jargon (See Bernard, 1995; and Ely, 1991). Logistical problems were also reduced, with ease of access facilitating the prolonged engagement and persistent observation that Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest are necessary to authenticate this type of study. Conducting research in the context of an ongoing professional relationship lessened the tendency towards exploitativeness and voyeurism in life history research described by Measor and Sikes (1992), since my relationship with participants existed before the study began, and will continue after the project is complete.

Selection on the basis of convenience in no way reduces the suitability of the teachers as participants. The three participants represent different ethnic, religious, and geographical backgrounds and various life- and career-stages. (The selection of three individuals to represent the range of experiences of the group being studied follows the 1995 model of anthropologist Caroline Brettell who studied the lives of three Portuguese migrant women.) All three participants teach core academic subjects in sixth grade (and thus teach the same official curriculum) in the same ethnically diverse public middle school. Aside from

practical concerns (and the fact that we liked and respected each other), these women were chosen because my own professional association with them had shown them to be aware of and involved in the culture of teaching (Spradley, 1979), articulate (Plummer, 1983), and representative of the "ordinary" teacher (Casey, 1993, p. 27). By "ordinary", I mean that they do not teach specialized, remedial, exploratory, or special education classes; they do not work with innovative or experimental programs. They are what Casey calls the "plain old vanilla-ice-cream type teachers" (p. 27). While life history studies of teachers have focused on fictive composites (Connell, 1985) or exemplary individuals (Spencer, 1986), Kathleen Casey suggests that both emphases fail to capture the integrity, voice, and energy of the ordinary teacher. Plummer suggests that a focus on the ordinary person comes closest to providing a source for generalization to other members of the group to which participants belong.

Of major concern to me in the preparation phase of research were the ethical imperatives that participants (a) enter research projects voluntarily and with full understanding of the nature, purpose, and impact of the study; and (b) be exposed to no unnecessary harm or risk (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For this study, meaningful informed consent was easy to establish and obtain, as I had already

talked to colleagues about my planned research and several had expressed interest in participating. The question of inherent power differentials between the researcher and participants and the possibility of these differentials preventing true informed consent (Maynard & Purvis, 1994) was not relevant in my situation. I view the participants as my colleagues and peers, and our relationship as non-hierarchical and reciprocal, thus allowing for true collaboration (Skeggs, 1994). (See Appendix 1 for informed consent form.) Though neither the participants nor I anticipated any serious harm or risk from the study, we explored the question of whether participants would use their own names or pseudonyms. Although many life history researchers (Bogdan & Biklen; Morse, 1994) contend that the researcher must scrupulously protect the privacy of participants by using pseudonyms and withholding any details that might reveal participants' identity to those who know them or the research situation, I found this impossible to do, considering the personal, revelatory nature of life history research. My contention is supported by Plummer (1983) who notes that those who know the participants will recognize them even when pseudonyms are used, and that attempts to change details to prevent recognition makes "nonsense of the goal of authenticity" (p. 142). The participants agreed that anonymity was not a realistic goal

and two of them expressed a desire to associate their stories with their real names in order to authenticate and claim their stories (For similar findings, see Glucksman, 1994). I left the decision of whether to use real names or pseudonyms to them, and they eventually chose to use their real first names, with no surnames given. This convention is employed by others who have studied teacher narratives (Butt et al., 1992; Koerner, 1992), and follows my own preference. To me, the use of pseudonyms imparts a fictive, composite flavor to narratives. Using real first names personalizes the narratives and preserves the concept of the ordinary teacher without the specificity of surnames, which seem to suggest an exemplary quality. Privacy issues were resolved by my assurance that participants would be allowed to read and approve the drafts of the narratives and analysis before submission.

Data Gathering. The process of data gathering involves the implementation of the strategies selected to gain the data. Much of my data was obtained through interviewing, which has served as a primary technique of the life historian (Plummer, 1983), ethnographer (Bernard, 1995), and the feminist researcher (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). These researchers, as well as others (Campbell, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1983; Morse, 1994), suggest the triangulation of interview data with

other techniques such as participant observation. The aim of this triangulation is not to "produce a single unitary truth" (Maynard & Purvis , 1994, p. 4), but to enrich and increase understanding. Triangulation also allows for a more holistic view of the setting (Morse) and reduces attacks to the adequacy of the research by validating source against source (Lincoln & Guba).

To collect data on which to build the life history of these participants, I conducted unstructured and semistructured interviews to elicit each participant's life story and views about teaching. Though participants were encouraged to share any experience they saw as relevant to their present professional context, I had prepared a list of predetermined topic suggestions to help to shape and guide initial interviews (See Appendix 2). However, I found that once participants began sharing their stories, very little prompting or reliance on the list of topics was necessary. Interviews were tape recorded and later catalogued and transcribed, a process I describe more fully in the next section. In the interest of time, and at the suggestion of the participants, some of the topics I originally intended to cover in the interviews were assigned as written journal topics (See Appendix 3 for journal topics). This did prove to be a time saver (since a step in the transcription process was eliminated) and the written topics served an as

additional form of triangulation with the interview data. Another method of data gathering I employed was to conduct observations of the classroom setting, noting the activities, interactions, and proxemics (use of space) of the teacher and the students. Concurrent with observations, I used visual documentation, specifically photography and mapping, to document the classroom setting, the site of curriculum enactment. The photographs and maps illustrated the complexity of the work situation, helped develop categories and themes for analysis (which was already proceeding as I gathered data), and were used to build rapport and structure for later interviews. As analysis progressed, I conducted additional interviews with the participants in which I gathered additional data, shared my insights, and allowed for verification, negation, or amplification of interview and observational data by the participants. I believe that the strengths of each method were enhanced by its combination with the other methods, with each method providing for verification of inferences and triangulation of data.

The appropriateness of these specific methods of data gathering is supported by the literature. Use of the in-depth interview permits "entering another person's world and their perspectives" (Measor, 1985, p. 63). The personal rapport and intimacy that builds during the interview allows

for the discussion of sensitive issues that otherwise might not be addressed (Bernard, 1995). Pelto & Pelto (1978) support the use of observational data to provide insights and clues necessary for developing interview questions and to serve as a means of checking and evaluating data gathered by other techniques. Ethnographer Rob Walker (1993) emphasizes the ability of photographs to "expand representations of truth, overcome the constraints of language, and open up conversation between people" (p. 84). Crane and Agrosino (1992) note that mapping shares these advantages with photography and that visual techniques serve as good initial research activities and give insight into the proxemics, or use of space, in the situation under study. The use of preset themes, multiple interviews, and individual journal topics to construct the story is supported by the collaborative method of Grumet (1991), a method which "mediates the space between the self that tells, the self that told, and the self that listens: a method that returns the story to the teller that is both hers and not hers, that contains herself in good company" (p. 70). In constructing the life story, Grumet asks for short separate narratives rather than a long continuous account so that "multiple accounts splinter the dogmatism of a single tale" (p. 72). Thus, one story does not become The Story.

Data Storing. The data storing process involves making data manageable and retrievable, through such activities as transcription, coding, and filing. Rather than using a computerized data-management system, I found that a combination of handwritten and word-processed notes of which I could make multiple copies and physically manipulate satisfied my need for a concrete, hands-on approach. I typed notes about observations, maps, photographs, journal topics, and interviews. I catalogued the interview tapes, a process which involved listening to the tapes and making a written record of each topic discussed with the corresponding tape-counter number. As I listened again and again to the tapes and reread my notes, I assigned mnemonic codes to represent emerging themes (an activity I describe more fully in the Data Analysis section) and marked those portions of the tapes which contained passages I felt contained rich or important data; these I later transcribed word-for-word, assigning the mnemonic codes to the transcriptions as well. I made personal notes about photographs, maps, observations, journal entries and interviews, which were coded in the same manner as the interview catalogues and transcriptions. Original tapes, photographs, and journal entries were labeled and filed. Multiple copies of all notes, catalogues, and transcriptions were made and a copy of each item was filed in a sectioned, loose-leaf binder; additional copies

were used as described in the Data Analysis section.

Data Analysis. The data analysis process is the "theorizing and conceptualization . . . [that] entails making good service of the data" (Plummer, 1984. P. 86).

Plummer says of analysis:

In many ways this is the truly creative part of the work – it entails brooding and reflecting upon mounds of data . . . until it "makes sense" or "feels right", and key ideas and themes flow from it (p. 99).

According to Polkinghorne (1995), analysis relates events and actions to one another and "synthesizes the cultural, biological, historical, and individual aspects of the person into a unified story" (p. 20), forming a retrospective explanation of how a particular outcome came to be. Wolcott (1994) defines the term "analysis" more narrowly, as the "systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships" (p. 24). He distinguishes analysis from "interpretation," which "transcends factual data and cautious analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them" (p. 36). I found that, in practice, the two processes overlapped and commingled, blurring any distinction between the two. Therefore, I make no attempt to distinguish between the two and use the broader term "analysis" to refer to both activities until the final presentation of the data, when I

do use the term "interpretation" to distinguish the final stage of analysis from earlier ones.

The method of analysis I employed in this study is called "systematic thematic analysis" (Plummer, 1983, p. 114). The activities involved are aptly described by Bernard (1995) as the

"ocular scan method," also known as "eyeballing," in which you lay out your notes in piles on the floor [or in my case the dining room table], live with them, handle them and read them over and over again . . .

followed by the "interocular percussion test" when you wait for patterns to hit you between the eyes (p.200).

Following the suggestions of Bogdan and Biklen (1992), I made multiple copies of notes, catalogues, and transcriptions, unitizing information into "bites" or "chunks." I read and re-read the notes, looking for regularities of words, phrases, and ideas. These recurring themes were labeled with mnemonic codes (a few letters to represent each theme), which, for me, were easier to remember than numeric ones (See Appendix 4 for list of mnemonic codes and themes). I used scissors to actually cut the sheets of paper so that each slip contained a chunk of information. As I reflected on the meaning of the themes, I physically rearranged slips of paper into piles, revising, combining, and eliminating categories as themes solidified.

Multiple copies of notes allowed me to place a chunk in more than one pile. I used colored highlighters and colored adhesive dots to aid in categorization. These activities were very similar to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) processes of unitizing, categorizing, and filling in patterns which was based on the constant comparative method of grounded theory described by, among others, Hutchinson (1988) and Merriam (1998). From Hutchinson's account, I adopted the additional analytical strategy of memoing, in which the researcher "quickly and spontaneously records his [sic] ideas in order to capture the initially elusive and shifting connections within data. . . . The emphasis is on conceptualization of ideas" (p. 136). Memos were then manipulated along with the other chunks of data and were discarded, appended, or rewritten to reflect new insights. The ordered and reordered data chunks provided the framework for the narratives I developed in the Data Presentation process. As I developed the narratives, I shared them with the participants, who were given the opportunity to review the analyses and original tapes and provide verification, modification, or amplification before the narratives were finalized (See Grumet, 1991, p. 73; and Skeggs, 1994, p.82). The aim of this re-analysis was to move beyond the mere recalling and recording of events to the construction of meaning of the participants' life experiences. Thus we were able to

construct a life history, to "illuminate the course of a life over time and allow for its interpretation in its historical and cultural context" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 4).

Data Presentation. Data presentation is concerned with how the data is finally written up and presented to the readers. In Plummer's (1983) model, the data is "artfully woven into a literate text" (p. 106). In writing the final presentation, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) advocate alternating the particular with the general by incorporating examples and direct quotes into the description, and advise that the researcher concentrate on description and conclude with a brief interpretation.

Wolcott (1994) presents an interesting construct called the DAI formula for balancing Description (D), Analysis (A), and Interpretation (I). He likens the DAI formula to the NPK formula in plant food in which there is no one correct balance of ingredients for all situations; optimum proportions of the elements depend on the purpose. He advocates balancing the formula with a bias toward description, staying close to the recorded data. He suggests that the decision of what to include in the presentation be guided by the relevance of particular segments of data to the study purposes. In judging the adequacy of descriptions, Wolcott says: "The reader ought to have sufficient

information to be able to arrive independently at the same conclusions as the researcher or to arrive at alternate and equally plausible explanations" (p. 58). Wolcott points out that concentrating on description does not result in a lack of interpretation, for, by the very act of selection, the researcher imbues description with an interpretive nature. "Emphasis itself is a critical aspect of descriptive work: one draws attention to some things while slighting others . . . One can give precedence to description without diminishing the influences of analytical or interpretive concerns" (56). Measor and Sikes (1992) point out that both the researcher and the researchee share in the interpretive process through their decisions about selection and presentation of data.

The data presentation format I chose was suggested by the model of Wolcott's "Sneaky Kid" article (1994), and Butt et al.'s (1992) "Collaborative Autobiography and the Teacher's Voice." Wolcott offers "Sneaky Kid" as a model of a presentation which emphasizes description. He presents his subject's personal and cultural context in a primarily descriptive mode and outlines the aspects of the life history that are pertinent to his study purposes. This is followed by a brief interpretation and summary. Butt and his colleagues introduce each participant, describe his or her current context and past influences, and provide a brief

interpretation of the substance and formation of teacher knowledge. The individual narratives are followed by a comparative analysis of the narratives. Following Wolcott's advice to "Tell the story. Then tell how it happened to be the way you told it" (p. 16), I elected to write a narrative for each of the three participants, describing her present professional context, relating those aspects of the participant's life history that pertain to the study purposes, and interpreting the professional context and life history in light of the research question ("How have elements of a teacher's perceived past shaped the teacher's present professional context?"). I follow the three narratives with an "Interpretation" section in which the narratives are examined comparatively for themes patterns that emerged across the narratives, and a "Conclusion" section in which I relate the findings back to the purposes of the study and articulate the contributions, applications, implications of the findings.

Delimitations of the Study

Rather than discuss the "limitations" of the study, which suggests at best a positivist construction and at worst a shortcoming or inadequacy, I prefer to use the term "delimitation" to refer to the circumscriptions which frame the study and determine the appropriate use of the data.

The study must be delimited in terms of its primary concerns. One such concern is with meaning, as opposed to the discovery of truth or arrival at an objective reality. Campbell (1988) speaks of meaning as "an artistic way of knowing" (p. 67) and illustrates the power of narrative to convey meaning: "A novel could provide as much, if not more, meaning than an encyclopedia" (p. 67).

A second concern is with contextualization. The life histories "portray the subject as a whole, in the temporal, geographical, socio-cultural context" (Campbell, 1988, p. 61). Thus the stories told herein apply only to the specific place and time in which the participant finds herself here and now. Also, as mentioned earlier, the study is a "limited life document" (Plummer, 1983, p. 108) which focuses the teacher's professional context and is in no way an attempt to represent all aspects of the person's life.

The subjective and contextualized nature of the study means that "it is not possible to replicate exactly, and it does not claim to be generalizable" (Campbell, 1988, P. 61). Therefore, the appropriate use of each life history is not to generalize to other teachers or classroom settings, but to "help us evolve a conceptualization of [teacher's] knowledge that is grounded in classroom reality" (Butt et al., 1992, p. 95). Although we can examine the life histories collectively to identify commonalities that may

inform our understanding of teachers and teaching, this does not imply generalization in the traditional sense.

This discussion of methodology is an attempt to impose a sense of organization on a very disorganized process. The difficulty of communicating the precise methodology of life history is summed up by Plummer:

There can be no rigid guidelines for this kind of work which essentially involves intensive absorption in first-hand accounts, with all the ambiguity and unpredictability that such experiences entail. . . . Few researchers have ever written about the "doing" of life histories – probably because to do so is to give an order and a protocol to work that is thoroughly disorderly (p. 116).

Annie's Story

Annie is in her early thirties and has been teaching for eight years. She teaches core academic subjects, primarily language arts, to sixth graders in an ethnically diverse middle school in Coastal Georgia. In addition to her regular teaching duties, Annie serves as chairperson for the Language Arts Department. She is the youngest of eight siblings from a farming and working class family from East-Central Georgia. Annie is married and is the mother of two preschool children. She is African-American.

Present Professional Context

Annie describes her classroom as "small, but functional". Her classroom is indeed one of the smallest in the school (approximately 20' x 30'). Adjoining her classroom is a vacant room of similar size to which Annie and her students have access. Annie uses this room for small group projects, "chill out sessions," and quiet time for reading or make-up tests. Most learning activities take place, or at least begin, within her classroom. The twenty-eight student desks are grouped in various configurations which Annie says are designed for maximum use of space and accommodation of various social patterns and learning styles. Annie says that she has attempted to create an attractive and welcoming atmosphere. To "make the room less 'blah'", she has painted the cabinet doors, bookshelf, and

trim around chalkboard and bulletin boards hunter green and has made window coverings of a matching fabric. All books and materials are neatly stored in specific places and bulletin boards display student work and commercially and professionally prepared posters related to reading motivation and writing skills. At successive observations, I noted that initial instruction was usually given from the front of the class, with Annie moving about the classroom while students began individual or group activities. Once students were involved in activities, Annie usually sat at her desk, located to one side of the room, and students came to her for assistance.

Annie models kindness and courtesy to the students. She feels that the calm, structured classroom environment, coupled with high expectations for behavior, keeps students focused and prevents most discipline problems.

I have high expectations for their behavior. I rarely have discipline problems. . . . [We teachers] can calm students by what we say and how we say it. If I respond calmly, the student will usually match my manner. . . . If I note a problem behavior, the student and I have a chat (Was that necessary? What were your intentions?). I always end with "I still love you." We may have a "lunch date" [which is Annie's euphemism for lunch detention]. I stay in

close contact with parents by phone or note. If the problem behavior persists, I will refer the student to the office, so that we aren't focusing on discipline problems in the classroom.

During my observations, it was not obvious to me who the "slower" or "problem" children were. All students appeared to be engaged in assigned activities and appeared to be learning and enjoying themselves in the process. Annie's classes are heterogeneously grouped (as are most in this school), and Annie says it is difficult to meet the wide range of needs.

I use peer coaching extensively to help meet the variety of interests and abilities. Students love to be helpers at this age, and the pairing up is a necessity for me – otherwise I'd wear myself out.

. . . I begin pairing students up, considering social patterns and learning styles as well as academic level, during the first grading period. Sometimes the pairings aren't working, students are not compatible for whatever reason, and have to be changed.

She feels that lower ability students would benefit from being in a class that could focus more closely on their needs, and she would welcome ability grouping "if it could truly be done fairly, so that who your parents are or your background wouldn't influence placement." She is very

careful about maintaining ethnic and gender equity in her classes.

I am very conscious of gender and ethnicity in selecting participants in activities. At first I made a conscious effort to select male and female students and the different ethnic groups. Now it has become almost natural. I rarely use the same person twice.

An integral part of Annie's classroom approach is the establishment and maintenance of routine and structure:

I have a set routine each week which students come to expect. I plan a teaching unit for the week. Monday is the day I introduce content, establish definitions and background. Tuesday and Wednesday we develop the content. We do a lot of reading and writing, but we also use other activities such as video- and audio-tapes and dramatizations; Thursday the students usually complete an individual or group project, often involving art, applying or extending the topic. Friday is test day. Sometimes I use commercially-produced tests, but I usually prefer to make my own, based on what was emphasized in our particular classroom.

Annie relies less on detailed planning and routine as the year progresses and relies instead on her knowledge of and sensitivity to the needs of each particular class.

At the beginning of the year, my lessons are very, very detailed. They may even include actual words I intend to speak. As the year progresses and I learn the students, my plans become more general, and I "go with the flow". . . . We often have "rap sessions" – I just throw out or reschedule the planned lesson for the day and discuss important issues and concerns that arise. Kids need to talk about things that go beyond the planned classwork. . . . I think they actually learn more those days.

Annie sees her teaching role as that of a coach, encouraging each student to develop the talents that lie within.

Students are expected to be independent. They already know what they need to learn. I just bring it to the forefront. I am here to help and assist. They understand what I expect at each point in the class. Once I train them, help them understand our routine, they seem to handle it well. . . .If they make a mistake, I tell them, "You will fail at some things; just get up and try again or move on. Don't just stay down. Believe in yourself and no one else can shake that foundation by what they say."

When asked to discuss her greatest frustrations, Annie said, "I have no complaints about the students. And even

though this building is forty years old and the facilities inadequate, my frustration stems from other concerns – not the age of the building.” Annie feels overwhelmed by administrative and bureaucratic demands about which she has little or no voice and which seem irrelevant, or even detrimental, to the well being of the students.

They seem to think we’re super-robots. That’s the biggest gripe I have – the lack of sensitivity to our real purpose for being here I’m supposed to motivate students in the process of all this other stuff. The demands on my time are wearing me down. I could go on and on about the dissatisfying aspects of my teaching situation, but what good is that? I have chosen to void out all the negativity and focus on how I can stand firm and grow outward, to share positiveness as much as possible with those I encounter.

Annie says that her best teacher is experience.

What I learned in my teacher education program has had very little influence on what I do in the classroom each day. I don’t follow any book. I learn by trial and error, do what works for me.

Life History

Annie’s earliest memories are of being the doted-upon youngest child of a large farm family. Born three months

premature, she spent several weeks in the hospital before she was strong enough to come home. "My siblings say I was spoiled, and I guess they are right," she says. Annie has no recollection of her mother, who died of an aneurysm when Annie was only 18 months old. Through determination and hard work, Annie's father raised his eight children with the help of his mother, who moved from her home in Florida. By the time Annie was in school, the family had moved into town and her father had taken a job at a local sawmill. Annie recalls her father's strong work ethic and how it was perpetuated in his children:

One thing I really admire Dad for is he worked — on the farm, at the sawmill. He never depended on anyone for [financial] assistance to raise us. We are all hard workers, all eight of us. We have done well with our families and our children. I think that comes from him. He's not a formally educated man, but he knows how to provide. . . .We didn't come from parents who had it all. We had to work.

While Dad instilled a strong work ethic, Grandma steeped the children in Southern Baptist religious tradition.

My grandmother was more religious than my father, and took us to all the church functions. For my grandmother, going to church, being in good company,

and doing the right thing and having good morals were important issues.

Dad ran a "tight ship" in his home, managing the demands of his large family by stressing responsibility and structure. Both Dad and Grandma were very low-key in their disciplinary styles as well as in expressing affection for the children.

We were structured and had a schedule. It was a simple life. I was raised strictly, when I look back on it. When I was going through it, I didn't think it was a big deal because that's just how it was. It's what the sisters and brothers before me had done. I don't remember my father or grandmother having to discipline me very often. I remember that my grandmother's voice was always low [in volume] and so was my dad's. My dad spanked me only twice in my entire life, once when I was playing with a rake in an unsafe manner and once when I openly defied him by staying out after dark with a playmate. . . . We were not a huggy-kissy people. The way my Dad expressed love, when he came home in the evening, was to pat you on the head or rub you on the back and go on. Grandma and Dad – that was their way of expressing love. They didn't always say "Very good; I'm proud of you." It was not said, but I always knew I was loved.

Annie entered school in the first year of total desegregation of the local schools. She says she can't remember much about that first year except for riding the bus with her siblings and then being separated from them once they arrived at school, and not being promoted at the end of the year. After repeating first grade under the guidance of a nurturing teacher, Annie "blossomed" as a student; she enjoyed school and got along well with her classmates and teachers. Annie's father and grandmother didn't push education, but all the children were expected to "cooperate and stay out of trouble."

We went to school. We didn't miss days. [Annie shared with me on another occasion that she had perfect attendance throughout her elementary and secondary school years]. When school was over, we got off the bus, changed clothes, and did our chores. If it was Wednesday night, we went to Bible Study. I don't remember anyone ever telling me to do homework, I just did it. We could only play at certain times, and in OUR yard. We were at home before dark IN the house. The adults controlled the television; we watched the Lawrence Welk Show, my grandmother's favorite, and the 6:00 news, my father's favorite. Children didn't use the telephone. We were taught to be very meticulous, tidy, and scheduled, not wasteful

of time or resources.

Rather than finding the highly structured environment stifling, she took comfort and security in it.

I led a sheltered upbringing. I can't remember a lot of bad things happening. We were taught "children, obey your parents because this is good." When I look back at it, it was very tight. But growing up I didn't chafe under it. It was normal. I didn't buck the system. I saw no need to.

As a child, Annie never gave much thought to race relations until an incidence of intolerance raised the issue:

My family did not discuss black-white issues. . . . The first racial experience I can remember was in about fifth grade. A new girl came - a white girl - and was placed in our class. No one would play with her or be nice to her, so I went up to her on the playground and said "Wanna play with us?" That's when she said she wasn't allowed to play with black kids. I was shocked. No one had ever said anything like that to me before. . . . My playmates were a [racially] mixed group.

Although there were no open racial confrontations in her community, Annie now realizes that a complex, unwritten set of rules governed relationships between blacks and

whites. Neighborhoods were segregated and employment was offered along racial lines. Annie remembers many times during her high school years being the only African-American student in her "ability" grouped classes. She had many white friends at school, but at home, community racial rules prevailed. Annie recalls two incidents which brought racial issues to the forefront:

What I'm going to share now is the only time I remember my dad ever addressing the race issue in my presence. I was about 16 and this white guy named Al — he was fine! — he was on the football team and I was a cheerleader. He was really nice and we were friends. My grandmother knew his parents — actually she had kept house for them. Al had a Firebird [sports car]. He brought me home from cheerleading practice once. I could have walked; it was maybe a mile, but I really wanted to ride in that car. My father told me "This is not something you will ever do again." It was an issue that he was a boy, and even more of an issue that he was white. My father stressed that for a "nice white boy" to come into our [segregated] neighborhood was a danger. He tried to make it seem as if he was upset only because I would be getting the boy into trouble, but in my opinion they [Dad and Grandma] simply didn't approve of me

riding with a white boy. They tried to make it look like they didn't disapprove, but we all knew the double standard for blacks and whites. . . . [Another incident was when] I won the Hugh O'Brien Award [an essay contest] in 10th grade. The local garden club traditionally chose the winner and sponsored her or him in the next stage of the competition. There were no names on the entries, nothing to identify us. They chose my essay out of about sixty entries. They were fine until they saw me - I was black! - they didn't want to fund my trip. My counselor went to bat for me, and eventually they did fund it. I told my dad about it and he said, "They don't have to fund it. We can pay." But I realized that money was not the issue and that the only reason they didn't want to pay was because I was black.

Annie's inspiration to go to college came from her counselor (who had gone to bat for her in the incident described above) and two other women, agents for the County Extension Service where Annie had started to work at age fourteen. These three women recognized Annie's potential and opened her mind to new possibilities. Annie's father's strictness almost prevented her from attending college. Having heard of a friend's daughter's rape on the nearby state college campus, he forbade Annie to go. So she

continued to live at home and attended a local junior college, a choice which proved to be a fortuitous one; she loved the small, family-like atmosphere and the individual attention she received. She worked her way through college, transferring after two years to the state university and graduating with a business degree. She married and anticipated combining a successful business career with raising a family.

Upon graduation, Annie found it hard to obtain suitable employment in a town "where jobs were awarded on the basis of race rather than qualifications." Finally landing a job as a school secretary, she was encouraged by teachers and administrators to go back to school for her teaching certification. Throughout the two years of preparation for teaching, memories of her favorite high school teacher helped shape her teaching identity:

He was stern and firm, but loving in speech. He had faith in his students when they didn't have faith in themselves, and encouraged them to attempt what they viewed as impossible. He nurtured many students who seemed not to want to be nurtured. He met us where we were academically and moved us as far as we could go. Now that I'm a teacher, I try to be him to my students.

In many ways, Annie and her husband are raising their

children differently than Annie was raised.

My husband is from a very religious and very loving family. . . . As I have become a wife and parent, I look at religion in a new light. Looking back, religion was a tradition, something we did several times a week. For our family today, religion and spirituality are life processes, part of our everyday lives. . . . We're more expressive [of emotion]. I encourage my children to be more vocal than I ever was, and things are less structured. The children are involved in more things. . . . The times are different, but the basic values are the same – hard work, self-discipline, and determination.

Influence of Life History on Professional Context

Annie's classroom context appears to be strongly influenced by her life experiences. Annie approaches student discipline in the same calm, low-key manner demonstrated by her father and grandmother. ("I remember that my grandmother's voice was always low and so was my dad's." "We can calm students by what we say and how we say it. If I respond calmly, the student will usually match my manner.") Like them, she rarely raises her voice and has few discipline confrontations. ("I don't remember my father or grandmother having to discipline me very often. . . My dad spanked me only twice in my entire life." " I rarely have

discipline problems. . . .We aren't focusing on discipline problems in the classroom.") She is encouraging, "loving in speech," and nurturing like her favorite high school teacher who "had faith in his students . . . and encouraged them. . . . He nurtured many students." ("I try to be him to my students." "I always end [discipline chats] with 'I still love you.'" "I tell them 'Believe in yourself. . . .'"") Just as her father did for his children, she maintains high expectations for her students and instills in them a strong work ethic. ("I have high expectations for their behavior." "Students are expected to be independent. . . .They understand what I expect at each point in the class.") Her reservations about the use of ability grouping in her classes, questioning whether "it could truly be done fairly so that . . . background wouldn't influence placement" and her "conscious[ness] of gender and ethnicity in selecting participants in activities" may have resulted from her own experiences with racial marginality (as the only African-American in her "ability" grouped classes) and discrimination (the playground, sports car, and essay contest experiences). Her classroom arrangement advances the values of neatness, meticulousness, and tidiness that her grandmother emphasized, and her curriculum decisions reflect a concern with the establishment and maintenance of structure and routine ("I have a set routine each week which

students come to expect." "Once I train them, help them understand our routine, they seem to handle it well."), a concern also central in her childhood home ("We were structured and had a schedule." "We got off the bus, changed clothes and did our chores. If it was Wednesday night, we went to Bible study . . ."). She emphasizes the influence of life experience by her recognition that she perpetuates her father's values in the next generation: "The times are different, but the basic values are the same – hard work, self-discipline, and determination."

Laura's Story

Laura has been a teacher for over twenty-five years. She began her career as a physical education teacher, grades one through twelve, and served for many years as a substitute teacher in various grade levels and subject areas in New York and Georgia. This is her third year teaching sixth grade social studies and language arts in an ethnically diverse South Georgia middle school. In addition to her teaching duties, Laura serves as Student Government advisor and coordinates the school's annual walk-a-thon to raise money for the American Cancer Society. She is from a Western New York farm family, and has one younger brother. In her mid-fifties, Laura is divorced with two grown children and one grandchild. She is Caucasian and describes her ancestry as English, Scotch-Irish, Dutch, and German.

Present Professional Context

Laura's classroom is among the smallest in the school (approximately 20' x 30'). She describes her classroom as "too small" and "interesting". The twenty-six student desks are arranged in rows, with very little space between them. Laura's desk is situated at the rear of the classroom in front of fixed shelves, and worktables occupy the two corners next to a wall of windows and the front wall of the classroom. Movable carts containing reference materials occupy various spaces in the room, depending on the day's

activities. Successive observations indicated little change in this room arrangement throughout the year. Laura says that this arrangement is far from optimum, but she has not discovered an alternative arrangement which will accommodate all the students and necessary furniture and materials. During most observations, Laura rarely remained seated, but moved about the room among the students, instructing, encouraging, and assisting. "I'm up and around, moving all the time," Laura says. She would prefer that students also be able to move freely, but says that crowded conditions prevent it. She admits that many would consider her classroom "cluttered." On most days, magazines, newspapers, and unfinished projects in various stages of completion cover the worktables and shelves. Posters are displayed all around the room, on walls and window shades as well as on a bulletin board designed for displays. During one typical observation, I noted displays on a wide range of topics: a bulletin board display related to the social studies unit (Africa) with articles and pictures selected by Laura and brought in by students; a display of student drawings and writing related to conservation and the environment; anti-drug and anti-smoking posters; a cursive alphabet with each letter corresponding to an unusual or endangered animal species name; a "Where in the World?" display of photographs from Laura's recent visit to Europe; cutouts of

international children dressed in traditional native costume with countries identified; a large world map and several smaller regional maps; and grammar charts and proofreading checklists. Laura explains these displays as "an attempt to stimulate all types of learners to do further research or reading. . .to make the subject at hand interesting to a wide range of learning styles and abilities."

One of the most consistent characteristics of Laura's teaching approach is variety. Laura offers a wide array of topics for consideration and avenues to explore them.

I don't think there's a typical day in my room. We do different things all the time. I use the textbook as a basic framework simply because the students need a reference they can use at home. I don't go chapter-by-chapter. I skip around. I use the textbook as the broad outline for the unit, then I bring in resources and have students bring in resources (newspaper and magazine articles, books from the library, personal effects, and computer and internet resources) so that there are many different resources on the same topic. Laura then makes decisions about how students will explore the topic, based on individual abilities and interests. Activities take such varied forms as readings, reports, art activities, dramatization, and videotapes. Students complete one or more activities (usually several) individually, in

small groups, or as a whole class. This flexible arrangement allows Laura the time to provide remediation to students who need it while others are engaged in projects. "Ultimately," Laura says, "my hope is that they will recognize places and ideas mentioned in the media, locate the ideas in space and time, and understand how one aspect of a topic affects another, how it all correlates."

Laura strives to create a learning environment where each student experiences success. She continually adapts materials, strategies, and content to suit the variety of learning styles, ability levels, and interests of her heterogenous classes.

I hate to see students fail. . . . If students feel they are "low" they lose desire to do anything. My students like to read aloud in class, even the poor readers. I don't want to take that opportunity away from them. I try to structure reading opportunities – assign easy passages, short paragraphs – for them to have success.

Sensitivity to student needs and interests means that prepared lesson plans are often discarded to suit particular student needs on a given day.

My lesson plans are never set in cement. There is a teachable moment for every class, every day, – especially with middle school students – so much is

happening to them and they need to talk about it.

Often this necessitates digression from the planned topic. But they're learning something, and eventually we do get back to the topic at hand.

Laura's concern with individual student needs extends to how she handles behavior and discipline problems. She does not follow a structured discipline plan, but simply expects "basic human kindness and consideration." She deals with behavior problems on an individual basis, taking into consideration the students' emotional development. She illustrates this by explaining how she handles a common problem, the use of profanity:

In dealing with profanity, I try to look at what's in their heart and soul – someone may just explode that you normally don't hear using that kind of language – and they will at this age level – you have to realize they may be hurt or upset and may not have learned any other way to deal with the particular emotion – we talk about it, about ways to better express themselves – it is addressed on an individual basis.

Laura is frustrated with the seemingly ever-growing number of students with emotional and behavioral problems.

We have so many needy children with emotional problems far beyond what we can deal with in the classroom. We're coping as best we can, but we

really need more counselors who have more time and training than we do. . . . Drugs have a huge impact on our youth. It's no longer just a big-city problem. With today's peer pressure of drugs and gangs, it's a tough world. . . . Many students must return home each day to very negative situations. Without a doubt the most frustrating aspect of teaching is the lack of discipline in many homes and a lack of cooperation or follow-through from some parents. . . . [In many homes] there is far too much emphasis on material goods vs. really important values, like being kind, clean, considerate, and helpful.

A significant aspect of Laura's approach to teaching is her concern with the mind/body connection.

I use movement in the class, connect the mind and body. It's great for those having trouble sitting still. . . . I may have students go to the board and point out something rather than just answering orally. We use the body for measuring things, such as using the hand span to estimate relative sizes of countries on a map. . . . If students are [physically] aware of where they are in relation to other people and things in the classroom, they can transfer that to an awareness of their place in the community, the world.

Laura is concerned about the lack of physical fitness of most students, and believes that this correlates with a general sense of apathy and lethargy that pervades our society.

Many students are out-of-shape. If I'm walking with students across campus, I'm hoofing it and often they can't walk that fast. It's a general reflection of the unfitness of the kids in our country. . . . A big part of the problem is television. Its just sinful the number of hours and the types of programs most of my students watch.

Laura says that her ideal classroom would contain a mini-gym, so students could take frequent breaks from their academic projects for physical activity. This would increase not only their physical fitness, but their overall well-being.

Laura's teaching metaphor is that of gardener. Just as the gardener carefully tends a tender sprout, Laura closely watches and provides guidance, rather than just leaving students to develop and grow on their own. When Laura discovered that many of her students seemed overwhelmed by the research process, she set up mini reference centers in the classroom to make the task less formidable: "When I take students to the media center, many of them have no clue what to do. So I have reference books in my room and teach from

there, where I can guide their research and be helpful." She expresses the gardener metaphor thusly:

My goal is to help them become all they can be – and we don't always know what that is at this point.

. . . My biggest thrill is to plant a seed and have them discover for themselves – they are so excited that they've found something.

Life History

Laura was born just before the end of World War II in Western New York's Finger Lakes area. Her father had graduated from high school at 15. Too young to enter college or the military, he worked on his father's farm and held a series of jobs, including truck driver, until he finally found success as a poultry farmer moonlighting at various times as bus driver, tax collector, and dog catcher. Laura's mother was a "country girl" who blamed her failure to be accepted to college on her rural roots. Laura relates, "Her college admissions interview was her first time away from home. She was petrified. She said it was the only time in her life when she ever stuttered."

Perhaps because of their own failed college aspirations, Laura's parents had high expectations for Laura and her younger brother to work hard and get a good education.

I had many advantages because of the way my family

felt about education. College was seen as a steppingstone to achievement. There was never a question as to whether or not my brother and I would go to college or achieve. We were expected to work hard. . . . I remember writing tax receipts at age ten when my father said I was old enough for that responsibility.

Her father's desire to see his children succeed academically often led to family tensions.

I think my father was always extremely frustrated because he was very intelligent and felt like a misfit in society. He was a perfectionist and wanted us to be perfect as well – God forbid if we would have dared to come home with anything less than an A. . . . My father was a verbally abusive person. We had to sit and listen to the news (on the radio – we didn't have T.V. yet) at lunch and dinner and he would give us a quiz on what we heard. Often we'd have to locate the places we heard about on a map. If we couldn't answer, we might wear a glass of milk. . . . In the long run, it wasn't so awful; worse things have happened in my life.

Laura's mother and father were often at odds over what was best for their family. Laura recalls that disagreements between her parents began to escalate when, in the mid-

1950s, her mother took a job outside the home working as an insurance agent.

At first my father was all for my mother working. The idea was that she would go to work to save for our education. After she began to have success in her career, he decided he didn't like it. But Mother was determined to succeed.

Laura recalls that "World War III almost broke out" over a television set Laura's mother bought soon after she went to work. Regardless of her husband's opposition, she was determined that her children would have the benefits of television, which, up to this time, they had seen only in the home of a wealthy neighbor. A local merchant, knowing Laura's mother had her own job and income, extended credit to her.

My mother broke many [gender] barriers. . . . She was the first successful woman in her company. My mother had tunnel vision. When she set a goal, she didn't deviate. . . . I guess that's where I got my competitiveness and desire to achieve and be successful.

In retrospect, Laura believes that the television incident marked the beginning of the end of her parents' marriage, and a couple of years later, when Laura was in junior high school, her parents separated. Laura's brother

went to live with their father. Laura chose to stay with her mother; the two lived briefly with Laura's aunt and uncle and then got their own place nearby. Laura was very close to her aunt and uncle, both teachers. They provided Laura emotional and financial support and served as role models for her future profession.

My aunt was a wonderful person and teacher, but totally different from me – she was always dressed to the nines – beautiful suits, dresses, hose. She had been through Normal School [teacher training] during the Depression, when a student had to board with a family and work as a domestic. . . . My uncle was my high school math teacher. He was tough, but treated everyone fairly. His interests were very diverse. He was senior class advisor, drama coach, and sports official. . . . At one point in his career, he gave up the opportunity for a lucrative job in industry to continue to teach.

Success in school came easy to Laura. She could read, write, and count before entering school. She quickly learned that not everyone shared her academic aptitudes and attitudes. She recalls:

We were grouped by ability, and I was in the "top" class; even so there was still that range of abilities in any given group. I remember feeling

frustrated with the slower learners, and sensing their frustration. Even then, I hated to see students fail.

Laura grew up in a community that was economically poor but rich in educational tradition.

Even though we lived in the poorest area of the state, we had many [educational] opportunities afforded us. We were fortunate, for example, to have the school of music nearby. [Our school district] always had symphony and other performances, and excellent teachers who were working on their masters and doctorates would come in and teach. . . . There was a strong community commitment to education. Everyone in the community went for some type of higher education after high school, whether it was college or technical or trade school.

Laura says she was fortunate to have excellent teachers in elementary school. In retrospect, she believes that her early learning experiences would have been even more effective if teachers had correlated subjects with one another and with previous learning.

There was no correlation whatsoever – and I don't understand how this happened in a self-contained class – each subject area was taught as a separate entity. I can remember questioning [possible

interrelations] and being put off. . . . It would have been easy to bring it all together.

Laura was involved in many extracurricular activities in high school, including band and cheerleading. She became involved in competitive team sports through the efforts of her physical education teacher who, in a time when there were few organized sports programs for women, "cared enough to see that we [girls] had the opportunity to play and volunteered her time to set up intramurals for us." Laura was class treasurer and handled a great deal of money. To this day, even with inflation, she still holds the school record for salesmanship in the annual school fund-raiser.

As high school graduation approached, Laura began applying to state colleges for both physical education and elementary education programs. She admits that the interest in elementary education was the result of a brief "identity crisis" when she wasn't sure she could live with the "dumb jock" label or the old saying that "those who can't teach, teach P.E." Eventually she did enter a physical education program at a nearby state college.

I always wanted to be a P.E. teacher. The healthy body/healthy mind thing appealed to me - and I could wear sneakers! . . . I saw P.E. as a way to help people really improve. . . . Back then, people didn't exercise. Walking, golfing, these things were just

coming into being.

Laura was attending college in the 1960s, a time remembered by many as being turbulent and full of social and political change. Though she shared the nation's "shock and horror" at the Kennedy and King assassinations, and questioned our presence and purpose in Viet Nam, Laura was not a "hippie or protester" and her college campus was quiet and conservative except for the occasional beer bash.

For me the sixties weren't a turbulent time. I suppose that's because I lived in a small rural area. The community had a family atmosphere and few people were very active politically. Though our immediate neighborhood was white, our community schools were never segregated. There were no class distinctions between blacks and whites; we were all from farming or working class families.

Laura married in her senior year of college, graduated, and taught physical education for two years until her first pregnancy necessitated her staying home.

At the time I was pregnant with my daughter, 1969, you were not allowed to teach if your pregnancy "showed". . . . My son was born two years later; this time I just worked anyway and nobody said anything. . . . My children were one and three when I was divorced, and I was able to support them and myself,

and keep my sanity, by substituting. I found that teaching P.E. worked out well with raising my kids – I didn't have as much take-home work as most teachers did and could spend more quality time with them. I was also able to go back to school and pick up my general elementary education license, which allowed me a wider range of teaching positions.

In 1976, Laura married a second time, this time to an army clerk, and moved to Georgia with the U.S. Army. With the marriage, Laura acquired "what would today be called an ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] or hyperactive, emotionally disturbed" stepson. Although problems with the child created great stress on the marriage, which soon ended in divorce, Laura says that the experience "helped immeasurably" to broaden her teaching skills and vision.

At the time that I remarried and my stepson came to live with us, I wasn't familiar with, hadn't worked with, special-needs children other than those with physical handicaps. Since my husband was in Korea, I had to attend all the conferences and deal with the child's adjustments. . . . Having an ADD child helped me to understand that success for the [ADD] child depends on a family structure of support, stability, and supervision. . . . I'm better prepared than the average teacher to handle the needs of the ADD

children in my classes.

Laura is proud of her teaching heritage, which she has now passed down to yet another generation. "I come from a long line of educators. In my family, we have four generations of teachers. My maternal grandmother, my maternal aunt and her husband, myself, and now my daughter.

Influences of Life History on Professional Context

Laura's curriculum decisions reflect the influence of her life experiences. Her love of variety is evidenced in her childhood by her involvement in a variety of activities and her admiration for the "very diverse" interests of her uncle, and in her classroom by her assertion that "We do different things all the time" and her provision of "many different resources on the same topic". The importance of the mind-body connection are evident both in her life history and in her teaching approach("I always wanted to be a P.E. teacher. The healthy body/healthy mind thing appealed to me." "I use movement in the class, connect the mind and body . . .If students are [physically] aware of where they are in relation to other people and things in the classroom, they can transfer that to an awareness of their place in . . . the world."). Her sensitivity to student needs and concurrent structuring of learning situations to ensure student success ("I hate to see students fail . . .(I) assign easy passages, short paragraphs for [poor readers] to

have success") seem to be rooted in her early school experiences when "even then, [she] hated to see students fail" and perhaps in her memory of her father's verbal and minor physical abuse when she or her brother couldn't answer a question about the news. Laura's life experiences dealing with her own family, especially her "ADD hyperactive, emotionally disturbed" stepson, has helped her "immeasurably" to deal with special-needs students in her classroom. Although her techniques are more understated, Laura strives to instill in her students the same global awareness ("that they will . . . locate the ideas in space and time, and understand . . . how it all correlates") that her father attempted to instill in Laura and her brother in his daily quiz sessions. Just as Laura's parents strove to help their children achieve their potential ("He wanted us to be perfect." "There was never a question as to whether or not we would . . . achieve"), Laura fosters maximum growth in her students: "My goal is to help them become all they can be."

Lyn's Story

A former social worker, Lyn entered the teaching field at age 40. She has been teaching for three years, during which her assignment has been in an ethnically diverse public middle school in Coastal Georgia. After teaching exploratory Spanish for two years, this is her first year teaching in a "regular" classroom, where she teaches language arts to sixth graders. In addition to her regular teaching duties, Lyn serves on the Student Support Team (which determines appropriate interventions for special needs students) and as advisor to the student newspaper. Lyn is married to her high school sweetheart and is the mother of two teenaged sons. Lyn is the oldest of five siblings of a South Carolina middle-class family. She is Caucasian.

Present Professional Context

Lyn's classroom is one of the largest in the school (approximately 25' X 40') She describes her classroom as "open", "comfortable", and "functional". With the exception of fixed cabinets with a sink in the back of the classroom, all furniture is moveable. Successive observations in Lyn's classroom indicated a flexible furniture arrangement and the addition of five computer stations for student enrichment and remediation. Students' desks and worktables are re-arranged according to anticipated activities, with the exception of Lyn's desk, which she keeps front and center.

Lyn generally moves about while students are beginning group and individual activities ("not to make sure they're doing exactly what I said, but to see if they have the general idea") and then moves to the area near her desk, where students approach her for help or guidance.

Student work (compositions, posters, art activities) is displayed on a large bulletin board at the back of the classroom and sometimes on the walls as well. These displays are changed frequently during the year. Permanent room displays consist of posters depicting inspirational and conservationist themes and reminders of school events, rules, and policies.

Lyn says that she feels student learning increases with the level of student involvement and interest. She takes an active, hands-on approach to teaching. Specific activities have included making posters, diagrams, and drawings; creating dioramas and dramatizations; and making murals and sidewalk-chalk creations. "I think students have enjoyed this a lot more than completing worksheets or having me say 'read this; answer the questions; do this exercise.' They've learned more, too." In selecting activities and materials Lyn says:

I basically go on my instincts and what I think I can expect the kids to understand. I choose reading selections that I think are interesting. If it's

boring to me, I figure the kids won't like it either. Instead of reading excerpts like Sounder and Hatchet from the literature book, we read the whole books.

Lyn strives for diversity of materials and activities to meet a diversity of needs.

Diversity is more than a color issue. There's diversity of learning styles and teaching styles. You wouldn't want all the teachers to be like me, or Mrs. X, or Mr. Y. Diversity is what makes the world beautiful. If we were all the same color, or had the same idea of what was worth studying, it would be a very boring place.

Lyn describes herself as "a flexible person" who does not find highly structured lesson plans very useful.

I write down a general objective and the type of activity. . . . When students are interested in something, I deviate from my planned routine. If they're antsy, we might change activities. . . . If there's a teachable moment, I'll go way out on that limb and teach anything (content-wise) that will help them grasp, understand, or apply a concept. . . . I don't worry about subject labels. My teaching is very interdisciplinary.

Lyn sees her teaching role as primarily that of nurturer. She strives to provide a warm, consistent

classroom environment

I've always been a very nurturing person. I like teaching middle school because of the nurturing aspect. Consistency is important – not consistency of routine – flexibility is the key there – but consistency in how you treat people. Consistency in terms of “you can count on me.” If my students know that I'm always going to be kind and treat them with respect, they will be comfortable enough to be open to new learning.

This nurturing role carries over to the way she handles discipline.

I'm very patient – I will talk to students and parents when most teachers would write an office referral. I'm not here to be the enemy. Most students and parents feel I'm on their side and working to help them.

Lyn considers herself a Christian and a humanitarian, and believes in being a “good person,” which she defines as “someone who wants to accomplish something that doesn't hurt but helps people, advances society”. Lyn believes that part of her job as a teacher is to help her students explore humanitarianism and social activism and develop a strong sense of values.

Sixth graders need guidance in how to care for the

world and each other. We have studied environmental issues and participated in Earth Day activities. We have done volunteer things – collected money for a needy family at Christmas time, and donated food to a local food bank. . . .Everyone’s trying to figure out “Who am I? What does that mean? What is the purpose of my life?” [I tell the students to] find out what you’re supposed to do . . . find something that makes sense in your life and stick with that.

To Lyn, building values is more important than the “hard” curriculum.

What difference does it make if you know the parts of speech if you don’t know what the world is about? The most important thing I teach is how to get along with people and how to be respectful; how to take care of yourself and what’s around you. . . . I don’t think the details of what they actually study are all that important. . . . I try to see if the student has gotten the basic idea and can apply it to whatever they encounter in life.

When asked to relate the greatest frustrations she faces on the job, Lyn responded:

The most dissatisfying aspect of my job is that discipline problems take up TOO much time. . . . Disruptive students, and the processes we must go

through to deal with them, use up other students' learning time. . . . I take the rights of those students who behave and want to learn as seriously as those who don't.

She feels that one of the weaknesses of teacher education is the focus on pedagogical skills to the exclusion of adequate exposure to content. She feels that this shortchanges students and leads to their frustration.

One of the problems I see with the way we approach teaching is the idea that we must spend so much time teaching teachers how to teach. . . . Most students need teachers who love, and are experts in, their subject matter. Middle and high school students cannot be fooled – they know when a teacher does not know something. I believe this leads to problems in middle and high school. Children begin to understand that the system is not doing what it is supposed to do. Why should they perform as requested by the system?

Lynn says that the most unexpected challenge she faces in teaching is maintaining her enthusiasm and vitality.

The burnout rate really surprised me. I've seen too many teachers who do not enjoy teaching and who don't seem to like children very much – maybe they never did; maybe they just burned out. I hope to be able to

maintain a nurturing environment for students as long as I teach.

Lyn is generally satisfied with her teaching assignment. "I love the age – the curiosity, innocence, and the teachable nature of the children at this stage in their development – this constantly teaches me."

Life History

When Lyn first related her life story to me, she talked first not of her parents (as did the other participants), but of her grandmother, who she says influenced her more than any other person.

My most important teacher was not a teacher at all, but my grandmother. She lived across the street from my school and every day after school I would visit her, and I spent many weekends at her house. She had bookshelves lining her living room. As soon as I learned to read, I started reading "real" books. Grandma would take me on her lap and tell me these great stories. She had the gift of storytelling. We took walks together and talked about everything. It was Grandma who encouraged me to go to college, stressing how her own degree had been vital for her family's survival when my grandfather had died when she had two small children. . . . She was a very straight-laced, strict, by-the-book person. I

learned some of these qualities from her, but I also learned from her the importance of doing good for the world and contributing.

The quality of life in Lyn's own home was controlled by one factor - Lyn's father's alcoholism.

The worst thing I remember is that things were so inconsistent. You never knew from day to day if things were going to be okay or bad. My father was the sweetest, dearest person when he wasn't drinking. When he drank, he was someone else, a monster, not my father. . . . My mother always tried to be there for me and provided for us, but I realize now that she was worn down and discouraged most of the time by my father's drinking. . . . It was very isolating for the whole family. We were reluctant to have anyone over because we never knew whether he was going to be drunk or not. We stayed away from church and community activities. "No one has to know," we thought, "We'll avoid humiliation and embarrassment." Then when I was in junior high, my father was in a bad wreck due to drinking. . . . Everyone in our small town knew about it. I was an emotional wreck. It tore my family apart. . . . It's what eventually led to my mother divorcing my father.

As the oldest child in the family, Lyn often took upon

herself the role of "fixer."

I feel I had to do a lot of caretaking because my father drank and he and my mother argued all the time. I would scoot everybody into the bedroom and we would play school. . . . I was trying to distract them from the problems.

For Lyn, school provided a haven. "I tried to get away from the house as quickly as possible and go to school," Lyn says. She worked very hard to be a good student and please her teachers.

I took a lot of comforting and got a lot of nurturing from teachers. I always loved and respected my teachers. That was the thing that made me want to play school. They were such good role models. . . . I was rather a chameleon. I did whatever they wanted. She recalls that she had excellent teachers, particularly her sixth grade teacher and her high school math teacher.

I had a teacher in sixth grade who made learning fun. She was very nurturing and always had interesting projects for us: dioramas, plays, murals. . . . My high school math teacher was a retired Marine. He taught me how a real man acts - stable and consistent. That was important for me. Sometimes he would share with the class something he was reading. It didn't matter that it wasn't math. We were

fascinated.

The social climate of the sixties and seventies awakened Lyn's involvement in social activism and justice. She remembers early desegregation efforts and their effect on the community.

A few selected African-Americans were placed in our [previously all white] school. One of the boys was in class with me grades 6-12. People had fits; we were friends. My parents wanted to put me in a private school (of course they decided that wasn't logical and was too expensive). Most people feared interracial marriage. . . . My mother didn't want me to try out for cheerleading because it would be a [racially] mixed squad. I thought her attitude was disgusting. . . . I joined the human relations committee which worked for racial harmony. My parents were very irritated. That was when I took my stand, away from what my parents thought. It wasn't rebellion; I just didn't see the division of humanity based on skin color.

In high school, Lyn met her future husband, who was one year ahead of her in school, and married him just prior to her graduation.

People thought we were crazy, or that I was pregnant (I wasn't - it turned out that we waited 10 years

before having children). . . .I'm sure that had things not worked out, had our marriage not been happy, I would say that I married young to escape an unhappy home. . . . instead, I say we were just lucky to have found each other so early in life.

Lyn and her husband went to college, and Lyn studied psychology and sociology "to try and figure out what was happening in my family. I found out that only they could do what had to be done and I had to learn to live with it." Lyn did finish her bachelor's degree, but felt ambivalent about completing her master's. In retrospect, she admits that she was secretly happy to abandon her educational plans in order to have children.

I stupidly chose to do a thesis [for my master's]. I never finished it. I kept seeing Ph.D.'s not getting jobs and wondered where I'd go with a masters. I really wanted to have a family, and worried I'd waited too long. I was relieved when we had to move for my husband's job and I could leave school. Then I could say "I didn't want to quit. We had to move."

Lynn became a social worker, but felt she "was only applying a band-aid" to problems. She knew that she could have a much greater impact on society by working with children all day. She had wanted to be a teacher from an early age, but had always felt discouraged from the teaching

profession by her grandmother.

Grandma always said "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." This discouraged me from becoming a teacher, even though I think I always wanted to teach. Because I thought so much of her, I just thought, "I won't do that. I'll be a doctor or a lawyer." Then I thought I'd be a professor, one who teaches, but a more credited job, more of a real profession, and that would suit her – she would be happy.

Lyn's involvement with her own children led her back to her childhood ambition.

After I had my children, I realized that I was teaching them and that that's what I wanted to do. . . . When I became a volunteer in my sons' school, I saw a lot of things I didn't like, some disturbing and unsettling experiences – a teacher who let my first grader sit in wet pants all day; another who let students watch television instead of reading; another who got students' attention by regularly blowing a whistle in their ears. . . . I knew that I was competent, intelligent, involved, and willing enough to do well what I saw being done, often poorly, every day.

Lyn went back to school to earn her teaching license.

Here, she encountered what she considers her most negative learning experience, student teaching under a supervising teacher with whom she was completely incompatible.

Her approach was totally the opposite of mine. She didn't respect the students at all. She was hateful to them – screamed at them and called them names to their faces and talked negatively about them all the time. She told me, "You have to act like a witch and then go home and forgive yourself". . . . Students read silently, answered questions, and took tests. She never talked to them or explained anything. She treated me poorly also; just left me, and never observed me doing anything, then gave me grades which were based on her feelings about me. It was a devastating time for me, but in the long run, my most negative experience taught me the most. I learned a lot about myself and about how much I wanted to teach.

Lyn sums up her life thus far:

The biggest thing I've learned in the past ten years is that life has a place for me, but not by the path I thought. I thought my life was going to be a, b, c, d. . . but it's a, d, f. . . and there's nothing wrong with that – it actually makes more sense now the way it is. I just wish I'd known ahead of time –

I could have relaxed and not worried so much.

Influences of Life History on Professional Context

The impact of Lyn's life history on her professional context is evident in Lyn's attempts to emulate the teachers she admired. Lyn's hands-on, active approach is very similar to that of her own sixth-grade teacher. ("She . . . always had interesting projects for us: dioramas, plays, murals.") Her desire to provide a climate of nurturance and stability, qualities Lyn saw as lacking in her home growing up ("The worst thing I remember is that things were so inconsistent.), reflect attitudes demonstrated by her favorite teachers. ("I took a lot of comforting and got a lot of nurturing from teachers." "I hope to be able to maintain a nurturing environment for students as long as I teach." "My high school math teacher was . . . stable and consistent." "Consistency [in terms of how you treat people] is important.") Negative experiences with teachers (such as her student-teaching supervisor and the negative examples in her sons' school) impact her classroom decisions by serving as examples of what not to do in the classroom. ("She didn't respect the students at all. She was hateful to them - screamed and called them names"; "I'm always going to be kind and treat them with respect." "When I became a volunteer . . . I saw a lot of things I didn't like." "I knew that I was competent . . . enough to do well what I saw

being done, often poorly.") Lyn's classroom emphases on humanitarian and social issues ("how to take care of the world and each other . . . environmental issues . . . volunteer things) reflect the values taught by her grandmother ("the importance of doing good for the world and contributing") and Lyn's high-school experiences with desegregation issues (when she joined the human relations committee and "took [her] stand, away from what [her] parents thought").

For Lyn, negative experiences seem to have impacted her teaching attitudes perhaps more than did those which she remembers as positive: "My most negative experience taught me the most. I learned a lot about myself and about how much I wanted to teach."

Interpretation

At this point in a traditional dissertation, the researcher is concerned with matters of analysis. In this study, however, analysis has taken place from the beginning of the study, as data were collected and manipulated and narratives were constructed. Therefore, as discussed in the Methodology chapter, the concern here is with what Wolcott (1994) calls interpretation, which "transcends factual data and cautious analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them" (p. 36).

Narratives represent both the individual and the collective voice. Read separately, each narrative presented a unique individual, situated in a particular social and historical moment. Read together, the narratives reflect commonalities and transcendent themes that inform our knowledge of teachers and teaching (See Butt et al., 1992; Yow, 1994).

One commonality underscored by the narratives is that childhood experiences shape teaching identity and impact curriculum decisions far more than teacher education programs or professional experiences. In discussing what influenced their teaching approach and identity, none of the participants mentioned their teacher training experiences (with the exception of Lyn, who talked about her **negative** student teaching experience). When asked specifically about

the impact of professional preparation, participants discounted its importance in shaping the day-to-day classroom decisions which comprise the curriculum-in-action, as illustrated by Annie's comment: "What I learned in my teacher education program has had very little influence on what I do in the classroom each day. I don't follow any book. I learn by trial and error, do what works for me."

A second commonality across the narratives confirms the findings of Knowles (1992) that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught, and of Cortazzi (1993) that classroom practice is shaped by the teacher's own experience as a student. All three participants viewed their elementary and secondary school experiences as positive, and all three women identified teachers which they later emulated, as illustrated by Lyn's recollection: "I always loved and respected my teachers. . . . they were such good role models." Annie expresses the desire to "be" for her students her nurturing and encouraging math teacher, and Laura strives for a diversity of activities that approximates the "many [educational] opportunities" her school provided. Lyn uses the same activities-oriented approach as her own sixth grade teacher and strives for an atmosphere of nurturance and consistency that made school a haven for her as a child.

Taken together, the narratives also demonstrate the complex, non-linear, non-prescriptive nature of the

teaching-learning situation. All three teachers talked about the importance of the teachable moment and the necessity and even desirability of deviating from carefully planned lessons. Lyn said, "I basically go on my instincts." Laura said, "My lesson plans are never set in cement." Annie said, "Kids need to talk about things that go beyond the planned classwork." This contrasts sharply to the neat, clean studies produced by traditional experimental researchers. Such "hygienic research" (Maynard and Purvis, 1994, p. 2) is stripped of complexity and paradox, giving a false impression of a neat, linear progression.

A significant theme which transcends the narratives is the interaction of forces of reproduction with forces of production or agency. In Women Teaching for Change, Kathleen Weiler (1988) explains the two terms: "Reproduction . . . is concerned with the process through which existing social structures maintain and reproduce themselves" (p.6), while production is "concerned with the ways in which [individuals] assert their own experience and contest or resist the material forces imposed upon them" (p. 11). Forces of reproduction are evident in the individual narratives, especially in the last section, "Influences of Life History on Professional Context." For the most part, each participant preserves and perpetuates in their teaching approaches and classroom climates the material and

ideological forces which shaped their own school and early home experiences. For example, Annie demonstrates in the physical arrangement and decor of her classroom the tidiness and meticulousness taught by her grandmother and emphasizes in her teaching approach the routine and strong work ethic stressed by her father.

Yet we also see in the narratives participants exercising agency, making choices and developing consciousness apart from structural forces. For example, Annie resisted and challenged the unwritten racial codes of her community, chose to go to college despite her father's misgivings, and today chooses to raise her children to be vocal and active, thus resisting the perpetuation of the codes of behavior with which she grew up. Lyn resisted the segregationist attitudes of her community and, in her words "took my stand, away from what my parents thought" by becoming involved in social activism. Although Laura perpetuates the "long line of educators" in her family, she has resisted the traditional model of the teacher who "dresses to the nines", epitomized by her aunt, in favor of a more relaxed personal style; she has also used her personal experiences with her ADD stepson to broaden her teaching skills and vision beyond established structures.

A superficial examination of the forces of production and reproduction in the lives of the participants seems to

suggest an oppositional or dichotomous relationship between the two. More careful analysis, however, reveals a complex dialogic relationship. A particular behavior or condition is rarely the product of one of the forces acting alone, and often it is not easy to identify which force has the greater impact. For example, Lyn's involvement in social and humanitarian causes may be viewed as a form of agency and resistance to her parents' segregationist attitudes, or as a perpetuation of the structures which compelled her to please her grandmother (who Lyn admits had the greatest influence on her) by "doing good for the world and contributing." Annie's resistance to racial codes at school (having racially mixed groups of friends, and participating in activities in which she was often the only African-American) was coupled with her adherence to community racial codes at home. Laura's expressed desire for student movement in the classroom appears to be a challenge to traditional ideology of student passivity, but her declaration that material conditions prohibit student movement serves to perpetuate traditional structures.

A second transcendent theme is the attempts of the life history participants to produce a "coherent, socially acceptable account" (Langness & Frank, 1988, p. 108), more coherent than the actual life. In so doing, there is evidence of what Langness and Frank call "retrospective

repair work" (107), in which contradictory themes are resolved through reinterpretation. For example, Laura's overall positive picture of her upbringing conflicts with her father's verbal abuse; she resolves this conflict by declaring that the abuse "wasn't so bad", even though the degree of detail with which she remembers instances of abuse indicate that the events were significant to her (See Yow, 1994). Lyn recognizes the tendency toward retrospective repair work when she admits that her account of why she married young would probably be very different had her marriage turned out to be unhappy. Annie seems to engage in retrospective repair work when she says "I can't remember a lot of bad things happening" though her life experiences included racial discrimination, being retained in school, and loss of a parent. Plummer (1983) points out that since all accounts are subjective and context-bound the tendency to remember selectively is inherent in constructing one's life history. According to Grumet (1991), "We are, at least partially, constituted by the stories we tell to others and to ourselves about experience"(p. 69). Butt et al. (1994) remind us that the important question is not what actually happened, but what the individual believes is significant in shaping behavior. Yow (1994) refers to this as "'untrue' statements [being] psychologically 'true'" (p. 22). Thus it is psychologically true that Laura's parents were

supportive, that Lyn did not marry to escape an unhappy home, and that Annie's childhood was pleasant and uneventful, since these "truths" are what participants see as significantly impacting their current realities. Cooper (1991) provides a metaphor for the construction of the coherent life story:

Past selves have evolved to form a present collective self. This present self can be discerned through a journey back in time, a journey that threads past selves, like beads on a string, forming a necklace of existence, a present complex whole" (97-98).

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I focus on the congruence of the study with stated purposes. I also point out the significance and implications of the study.

Congruence with Study Purposes

In any research study, it is my contention that the researcher should revisit the stated purposes of the study to determine the congruence of the study results with those purposes. As stated in the introductory chapter, the purposes of the study are: (a) to validate and promulgate the voice of the classroom teacher as curriculum expert; (b) to encourage personal and professional reflection and insight for myself, my participants, and those who read this research; and (c) to contribute to the field of curriculum knowledge by focusing on curriculum as enacted by the classroom teacher.

The first purpose, to provide a forum for teachers' voices, was accomplished in the individual narratives. Inclusion of the actual words of the participants provided not only the chance to be heard, but conveyed "the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings" of the participants (Butt et al., 1992, p. 57). The satisfaction of having one's story heard is reflected in the words of Lyn: "It's nice to think someone is actually interested in what I have to say."

For participants, involvement in this study encouraged

personal reflection as they began to share their stories, "examining past experience in a considered and focused way" (Millies 1992, p. 27). Their movement towards a more complex definition of reflection, "continuous critical review of practice" (Henderson & Hawthorne, 1994, p. 19), was evidenced as interviews became less structured and participants indicated that they were applying ideas discussed, as evidenced by comments such as, "I was thinking about what you said about . . ." and "After we talked about teacher role models I thought about. . . ." I believe that participants will "tune in carefully to the way their assumptions both guide and are created by practice" (Schubert & Ayers, 1992, p. ix) as they read and reflect on the final presentations of the narratives and interpretations.

Conducting this study has deepened my own capacity for reflection as I engaged in "excavation of underlying assumptions about teaching and research" (Miller, 1992, p. 17) as I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. It is my hope that a similar pattern of deepening reflection will develop in other teachers who read this study as they "[use the] experiences as a basis for fashioning responses to similar situations" (Schubert & Ayers, p. ix) in their own practice.

This study contributes to the field of curriculum

knowledge by confirming, enlightening, and enlivening previously held notions, and thereby fulfills the third stated purpose. For example, the study confirms the work of Knowles (1992) that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught, and of Cortazzi (1993) that a teacher's classroom decisions are shaped by the teacher's own experiences as a student. Cortazzi's work is enlightened by the suggestion of the participants' narratives that these childhood influences have a greater impact on teaching than does professional preparation. Annie, Laura, and Lyn enliven, with their accounts of how they address the teachable moment in their classrooms, the concept furthered by Maynard and Purvis (1994) that teaching is not a neat, linear progression. Additionally, the study confirms the dialectic relationship of forces of production and reproduction, as described by Weiler (1988), in the participants' lives and classrooms, and the desire of life history participants to present a cohesive life story, engaging in retrospective repair work (Langness & Frank, 1988) to resolve conflicts between past experiences and present realities.

Significance and Implications

A major significance of this study arises from its contribution to the body of knowledge resulting from the study of teachers' lives. Life history researchers, including Butt et al. (1992), call for the development of a

collection of narratives which "build and image of what is common and unique" (p. 94) about teacher knowledge and behavior. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that such a body of teacher narratives is valuable not as a source of generalization but a "basis for understanding new action episodes by means of analogy" (p. 11).

This study is also significant because of its focus on the ordinary teacher and on the use of ethnographic methods in studying teachers' lives. Rather than focusing on composites or exemplaries often central in studies of teachers' lives, Casey (1993) calls for a focus on the integrity, voice, and energy provided by "plain old vanilla-ice-cream type teachers" (p. 27). Butt et al. (1992) suggest the use of participant observation and other ethnographic approaches to refine life history methodology. Goodson (1992) underscores the need to "build methodological procedures . . . which will widen and deepen understandings.

Implications for the use of data are suggested by the contribution of the life histories to the body of teacher narratives. As discussed previously, the body of stories can be analyzed for uniqueness of each narrative and commonalities across the narratives, or to "identify [a] new episode [not] as an instance of a general type, but as similar to . . . [another] episode" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11).

Implications for extensions of this study arise from the contextualization of the narratives in a specific temporal and social context. Revisiting the participants one, five, or ten years from now or in a different social or professional setting would likely result in a very different story, indicative of how "past selves have evolved to form a present collective self" (Cooper, 1991, p. 97). Other research topics suggested by the study are the collection of more narratives to contribute to the body of teachers' life histories or for the further refinement of life history methodology; more in depth study of the dialogic relationship of factors of production and reproduction in the classroom; and examinations of successive narratives for the presence of restrospective repair work.

The most significant impact of life history in shaping our understanding of the art/act of teaching lies in the sheer, vibrant power of the human story. Many a product has been sold, a jury moved to a verdict, a "soul saved from sin," and a curriculum decision enacted, not based on statistics, chronologies, or syntheses of research, but on the testimony of one individual speaking from the heart.

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Appendix 1
(Next page)
Informed Consent Fo

Informed Consent Form

I, _____ (“participant”) agree to participate in life history research being conducted by Rebekah D. Kelleher (“researcher”) of Georgia Southern University. I understand that this research is to be used in the researcher’s doctoral dissertation, Teachers’ Life Histories as Curriculum Context. In this study, the researcher will use life history research to explore how ordinary teachers’ life experiences impact their curriculum enactment decisions. In the course of the study, I will be asked to share life experiences and perspectives orally in taped interviews and in writing through journal assignments, and to permit the researcher to observe and take notes on the teaching and learning activities and environment in my classroom. Estimates of the time required for my participation in this study are 6-10 hours for taped interviews and 4-8 hours for journal assignments.

I give permission for my voice to be recorded and understand that tapes and transcripts of interviews and notes from observations are the property of the researcher and will not be released to a third party without my written permission. I understand that my written responses to journal topics assigned as part of the research are the property of the researcher and will not be released to a third party without my written permission.

Since this is a collaborative study, I will be given the opportunity to read and approve of the report and analysis of the data before it is published, and to request that any particular piece of information not be used in the published report. I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. My name will not be used in the published report unless I give my written permission.. Upon completion of the research, I will receive a copy of the dissertation. There is no anticipated risk to me due to my participation in this study.

Participant’s signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher’s signature _____ Date: _____

Use of Actual Name or Pseudonym

_____ I give permission for my actual name to be used in the dissertation and publications related to it.

_____ I do not give permission for my actual name to be used in the dissertation and publications related to it.

I wish to be called by the pseudonym _____

_____ I choose to have the researcher select an appropriate pseudonym for me.

If you have any questions about this research project, please call the researcher, Rebekah D. Kelleher, at (912) 876- 9264. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study they should be directed to the IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912)681-5465.

Appendix 2
Topics for Interviews

General structuring question: What life experiences have most significantly shaped your personal and professional identity/identities?

Family Structure/Relationships

Religion

Values/Morals

Race/Class Issues

Gender

Education/Schooling

Recreation

Schedules/Routine

Traditions/Holidays/Customs

Career Influences

Friendships

Economic Issues

Work Ethic/Chores/Responsibilities

This list of topics is designed to provide structure for the life history interviews. Other topics the researcher and/or participant feels are relevant to building the life history may be discussed.

Appendix 3

Journal Topics

Assignment 1:

- a. Identify and explain the most satisfying aspects of your teaching situation.
- b. Identify and explain the most dissatisfying or frustrating aspects of your teaching situation.

Assignment 2:

Consider the question: "What would you do if you could teach exactly as you liked and were free to design the teaching/learning situation?"

- a. Design and/or describe your ideal classroom.
(Consider physical arrangement of materials, furniture, etc. as well as how learning would be organized and structured)
- b. Describe one or more ideal teaching/learning sessions.

Assignment 3:

Profile the best teacher you ever had and/or the worst teacher you ever had.

Reflect on how your experiences with this/these teacher(s) may have impacted your teaching.

Assignment 4:

- a. Write about your most successful learning experience(s).
- b. Write about your least successful learning experience(s).
- c. Reflect on how these experiences may have impacted your teaching. You may wish to give (a) specific example(s).

Assignment 5:

Write about any topic(s) we have not covered that you feel will contribute to the life history research.

These are suggested topics intended to reflect the nature of journal assignments. Other topics may emerge from the interviews and data analysis.

Appendix 4

Analytic Themes and Mnemonic Codes

career influences CAR	goals GOAL
mentors MNT	kindness KND
control CTRL	adventure ADV
global awareness GLO	independence INDP
structure/scheduling STR	autonomy AUT
routine ROU	orderliness ORD
compliance CMP	tradition TRD
rebellion REB	cooperation COOP
manners/etiquette ETQ	education EDU
gender GEN	discipline DISC
race RACE	variety VAR
class CLS	flexibility FLX
media MED	consistency CNS
economics ECO	hands - on approach HO
religion REL	correlation COR
morals MOR	social activism SA
nurturing NUR	humor HUM
parenting PAR	Body image BDI
values VAL	