

3-2011

Diary of a Downfall

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DIARY OF A DOWNFALL

by

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B.A., University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, 1992

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

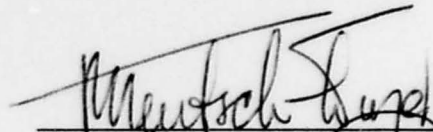
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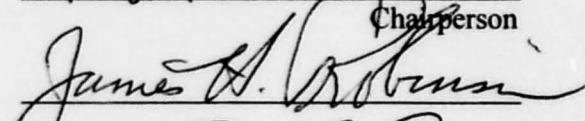
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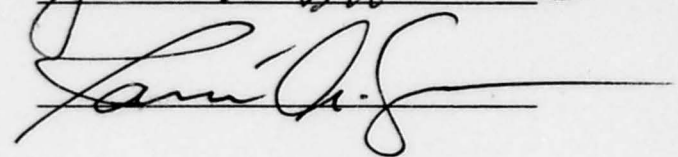
This thesis submitted by Christa J. Theilen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.



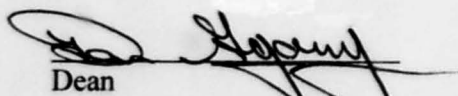
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DIARY OF A DOWNFALL

Christa J. Thelen

A diary study is an intense, reflective look at teaching experiences or learning experiences kept in a journal by an individual and analyzed for recurring patterns or themes. When done by teachers, these studies can show how teachers' perceptions of themselves and their attitudes about teaching change over time. I started keeping a personal diary of my teaching experience when I began my first teaching job in a small, rural district in southwestern Minnesota. As the district's first ESL teacher and coordinator, I faced many problems, frustrations, and setbacks. The way I dealt with my negative experiences was to write about them in a teaching diary. Keeping a teaching diary allowed me to document my hopes, goals, small triumphs, frustrations, and insecurities as a first-year teacher and in the two years that followed. I have discovered the diaries to be a personal account of my transformation from ESL teacher to student advocate or counselor over the span of three years. They document the frustrations and challenges I faced as a first-year teacher placed into a leadership role I was not prepared for and my subsequent experiences in that leadership role in the two years that followed. The focus of this thesis is to analyze my personal identity transformation using my teaching diaries as my research data. Although this study focuses on entries of personal teaching diaries, the information garnered may be of interest to novice teachers going into the field of ESL or going to teach in small districts in rural areas.

April 2011
Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A diary study is an intense, reflective look on teaching experiences or learning experiences kept in a journal by an individual and analyzed for recurring patterns or themes (Bailey, 1990). When done by teachers, these studies can yield insight into their own teaching processes, their comparisons of themselves to other teachers, and their development as teachers (Mackey & Gass, 2005). They can also show how teachers' perceptions of themselves and their attitudes about teaching change over time.

I started keeping a personal diary of my teaching experience when I began my first teaching job in a small, rural district in southwestern Minnesota. The district had never had an ESL teacher before but needed one due to a recent influx of Laotian families who had originally settled in Stockton, California and followed friends and family to Southwestern Minnesota in the 1990s. The town did not have any industry, but served as a home base for the immigrants who chose to live there and travel 30-60 miles to the nearest meatpacking plants. Neither the town nor the district was prepared for these immigrants. School administration decided to hire an ESL teacher/coordinator to try to remedy the issues that were presenting themselves. As that

teacher and coordinator, I faced many problems, frustrations, and setbacks. The way I dealt with my negative experiences was to write about them in a teaching diary.

Having been an active journal writer for most of my life, keeping a teaching diary was a natural expression for me. Keeping a diary allowed me to document my hopes, goals, small triumphs, frustrations, and insecurities as a first-year teacher and in the 2 years that followed. These diaries were kept for my personal use. I never showed them to anyone, nor did I intend to. They were simply a means by which I could do some self-reflection on my teaching and a way for me to express thoughts I did not feel comfortable sharing with my colleagues or the school administrators. I kept these diaries starting on my first day of teaching in September 1996 through my last day with the district in May 1999.

During my recent look through this collection, I have discovered the diaries to be a personal account of my transformation from ESL teacher to student advocate or counselor over the span of 3 years. They document the frustrations and challenges I faced as a first-year teacher placed into a leadership role I was not prepared for and my subsequent experiences in that leadership role in the 2 years that followed. The focus of this thesis is to analyze my personal identity transformation using my teaching diaries as my research data.

"The Story"

In the years that followed my resignation from this first teaching job, I was often asked why I left. People were confused because when I talked about that experience, I became animated and expressed my positive feelings towards the

students. The answer I gave evolved over the years. At first I told people that the town was too small and too conservative. Later I explained that I had gotten burned out on teaching. Eventually I explained that I wasn't a good teacher. I admitted that I was not really a teacher at all, and that I did not enjoy teaching. This was the story I created for others and for myself.

The truth was, I had never thought I was a 'real' teacher. I did not think I knew how to teach and believed I wasn't good enough. I never quite felt that I was capable or effective or doing the right things. I felt I floundered along the best I could, and came to believe that I was a good social worker or counselor, but was convinced I was never a teacher. The fact that I did not feel like I was teaching and was not a 'real' teacher grew from a number of factors that now, analyzing the data of my diaries years later, seem obvious to me. Looking back on my experience from my present situation in 2010, I can clearly see my detailed downfall as an ESL teacher written out in the pages of my diaries. I can also now realize, appreciate, and accept that I was indeed a 'real' teacher, I was teaching, and I was doing the absolute best that I could. As a more mature person, I now see what I accomplished and can give myself credit. I can finally change the story I created about myself.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on diaries I kept as a novice ESL teacher and draws from other diary studies, research done on first year or novice teachers, and research on teacher preparation programs.

Diary Studies

Diaries allow people to take a look at the psychological and social aspects of their daily lives. Many studies have been done on the diaries of second language learners or on those of teachers in teacher training programs. My interest lies in what can be learned from a diary study using a novice ESL teacher's personal journal.

Mackey and Gass (2005) discuss the use of learner diaries in diary studies. Researchers often specifically solicit learner diaries in order to obtain data for qualitative studies. While my diary study does not use learner journals, nor was my diary written with the purpose of becoming data for a future study, I can gain insight into my own study by reading about the practice of analyzing learner diaries and learning from what insights they contain. In essence, I am the participant in my own diary study as both a teacher and a learner. Although I was not a second language

learner in the setting, I can glean information from diary studies of second language learners that can be applied to my own study.

Dornyei (2007) notes that people have used diaries for centuries in order to keep record of their daily lives and their feelings, but only since the 1970s have diary studies been used as a data collection method by researchers. Diary studies were first used by psychologists to study people's emotions and moods in everyday situations. Dornyei (2007) points to the importance of recognizing that the term 'diary studies' is generally used to refer to data gathered from participants that was specifically asked for by the researcher. An example of this is when a researcher investigating the attitudes of new teachers asks the teachers to answer specific questions in their diaries that are meant to elicit responses that will uncover the teachers' attitudes about their jobs.

There are definite disadvantages to diary studies. First of all, as mentioned by Jeffrey and Hadley (2002), diary studies can be very time-consuming and require a great deal of difficult work. Dornyei (2007) mentions that when personal diaries are used, even though the data may be relevant to answering a research question, using personal data becomes tricky due to ethical issues and issues of research validity. In his diary study, Hall (2008) points out that participants' perceptions of a situation change over time. This fact could cause a researcher to doubt the current validity of information that was recorded in one particular moment in the past. Hall (2008) also raises the question of whether or not participants are able to clearly express their ideas in their journal entries and argues that some participants obviously have more and

deeper insight than others. This can cause problems for the researcher in comparing and contrasting data. Hall (2008) does not suggest that diary studies are all invalid, but rather that they can be difficult and messy for researchers. His suggestion is for researchers to clearly state for their audiences the problems they encountered in analyzing the data. My diaries will avoid these issues primarily because they were written without any audience in mind and without any motivation or desire to use them as data for future studies or any kind. They were simply personal journals kept for personal reflection and for the release of various emotions brought on by the job.

I believe that the benefits of diary studies outweigh the negative aspects. Jeffrey and Hadley (2008) comment that teachers who keep diaries can reflect and discover a deeper understanding of themselves, their classrooms, and their students. Keeping a teaching diary can help develop a greater sense of self-awareness and confidence in new teachers. Lee and Lew state that diaries “have been used effectively to promote dialogue between teacher educators and student teachers” (Lee & Lew, 2001, p. 138). By keeping diaries, new teachers can self-reflect on their teaching in an effort to improve it, and can supply teacher trainers with information that can improve the experiences of new teachers. Hall (2008) states that the findings of diary studies can be of great interest to teacher trainers, schools, and communities by showing them how much teachers need their support.

There are advantages to researchers being the participants in their own diary studies. As Numrich (1996) points out, teachers can analyze their own diaries. They do not need to employ another researcher or worry about not being able to understand

the emotions or sentiments being described in the journal entries. They can do secondary analyses to compare their findings to those of other researchers who have kept similar records. Numrich (1996) states that diarists' data can help other teachers by showing common experiences shared by new teachers which can then inform teacher educators of the frustrations and needs of new teachers. Lee and Lew (2001) echo this sentiment in their article analyzing diary entries of four non-native English-speaking MA-TESOL students preparing to become teachers in the U.S. In their study they found that even though the students came from different language backgrounds, had different language learning experiences, and had different goals, their diary entries all revealed the same thoughts and feelings: anxiety, inferiority, and wanting to become strong ESL teachers.

Novice Teachers

Bartlett (1990) investigates the use of reflective teaching and teacher diaries as a method of insight into novice second language teachers' attitudes about themselves and their roles as teachers. He suggests particular questions that teachers might ask themselves or that they might seek the answers for in their reflective journal entries. Some of these questions include, "What caused me to want to become a second language teacher?" "Do these reasons still exist for me now?" and "Is the teacher I am the person I am?" (Bartlett, 1990). He suggests teachers routinely write in their reflective journals to describe the actions they take in the classroom, the conversations they have with students, and what happens outside of the classroom in their personal lives as teachers. Bartlett (1990) believes that reflection on teaching journals can help

novice teachers identify their own uncertainties about teaching and the underlying principles of their teaching.

In discussing the uncertainties of novice teachers, it is important to look at the culture shock that new teachers go through in their first year. Even after completing rigorous teacher training programs, the reality of the classroom often comes as a shock to new teachers. Sometimes this shock is enough to shake their confidence and make them question their choice of career.

In his article, Farrell (2003) sets out to explain the “reality shock” that new teachers experience when the ideas they formed about teaching during teacher training are shattered as they begin their first teaching job and reality sets in. This reflects exactly what I experienced as a new ESL teacher. My desire to be a good, if not great, ESL teacher was quickly pushed aside in order to simply focus on surviving each day as a first year teacher. New teachers must deal with influences from a variety of sources. One of the biggest influences is that of the classroom itself. Other influences come in the form of parents, administrators, and other teachers (especially highly experienced ones). New teachers have to navigate these groups and decide which one(s) to most closely identify and associate with. As a new teacher, I found myself seeking approval from administrators and other teachers. When I began to believe they didn't have the students' best interest in mind, I discredited their advice and closely aligned myself with the students.

Sabar (2004) echoes this notion of the culture shock of novice teachers in a study that compares novice teachers to immigrants arriving in a new country. The

study was set in Israel and followed 46 new teachers as they participated in a support program for novice teachers. These teachers were interviewed repeatedly during their first year of teaching and again at the end of their second year. The interviews recorded the sentiments of new teachers who were enthusiastic and hopeful before their jobs started, and then later showed how their attitudes had changed dramatically. One example is from a teacher who said during her third month on the job, "It's so different from being a student-teacher. Every day I feel that I am being tested; I'm afraid that I will not live up to my own expectations" (Sabar, 2004, p. 145). Sabar (2004) noticed that the interviews with these teachers all revealed themes of hopes, expectations, despair, compromise, and adjustment. These themes were almost exactly the same as the sentiments expressed by Israeli immigrants to Los Angeles that Sabar (2004) interviewed decades earlier. The similarities between immigrants and novice teachers provides a framework that could help teacher-trainers better understand the experience of new teachers. These two groups both endure a culture shock that often leaves them feeling a sense of failure. In teaching, this feeling often leads new teachers to leave the profession. If addressed in teacher training programs before new teachers enter the field, this awareness of the upcoming culture shock could lead to more successful first-year experiences and reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession.

Goddard and Foster (2001) also conducted a study on the issue of new teacher reality shock. Their research question was: to what extent do neophyte teachers consider themselves prepared for the "real world" of schools? (p. 350). In this study,

nine new teachers in Canada were interviewed over the course of 2 months to determine if they felt their training programs had prepared them for the reality of schools. The researchers hoped that their study would be used to generate more research on why so many new teachers leave the profession. They found that the beliefs new teachers held about the teaching profession were grounded more heavily in misconceptions than previously believed. The data suggested that in order to improve teacher-training programs, changes needed to be made in order to better prepare the new teachers for the realities and challenges they would face in the profession.

Teacher Training

Much can be gained from the diary studies of new teachers. This is especially true for teacher training programs. McDonough (1994) describes the common use in Britain of teachers' diaries as teacher training tools. In her experience, these diaries are used in teacher training programs in which student teachers are asked to keep records of their teaching practice experiences and the feelings associated with those experiences. McDonough (2008) believes that these trainee diaries have very much in common with learner diaries. The students learn about themselves as teachers, and the trainers learn what the trainees' difficulties and concerns are. Attempts are then made to address these issues in the training program.

An interesting study conducted by Sutton (2007) had new teachers write about the emotions they experienced during teaching in journals called "emotion diaries." Thirty teachers were asked to write about specific negative and positive emotions in

their everyday teaching experiences. The results showed that the teachers most often expressed their negative emotions as frustration and anger with frustration being named twice as often as anger. Most of these emotional responses were in reaction to classroom situations when students misbehaved or distracted teachers from their teaching goals. This diary study offered insight into how teachers deal with negative emotions in the classroom and how they feel about those emotional expressions. Most of the teachers felt ashamed that they expressed these emotions in the classroom and felt a strong need to learn how to mask their emotions more effectively. Sutton (2007) stated that this desire to mask emotions is something that needs to be addressed in teacher training programs in order that new teachers learn that even experienced teachers feel these intense emotions while teaching. Sutton (2007) also hoped this research would lead teacher-trainers to help teach new teachers not only how to manage and regulate negative emotions in teaching, but to use effective strategies to manage the classroom to prevent situations that trigger these emotions.

Bailey (1990) also discusses the use of teaching diaries in second language teacher training programs and the use of these diaries by student teachers as tools of self-evaluation. Bailey (1990) used teacher diaries with her graduate students in various practice teaching assignments. The results of these diaries show that student teachers are concerned with their own behavior and practice in the classroom and their conversations with students. Bailey (1990) states that these journals have proven to be extremely helpful in teacher-preparation by helping novice teachers develop self-confidence.

Teacher Identity

Another aspect involved in the development of a novice teacher's self-confidence is teacher identity. Various researchers have studied teacher identity and how it changes over time and throughout stages of the teaching career. According to Lasky (2005), "Teacher professional identity is how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others." Lasky (2005) also discusses teacher professional vulnerability. This is an emotional state influenced by the way teachers view their present teaching situations in light of their beliefs, values, and sense of professional competence (Lasky, 2005). This state of vulnerability and the events or situations in teaching that can trigger its intensity have a great effect on teacher identity. As I found in my study, the identity of a new teacher can change dramatically and frequently during the first years of teaching. Often these changes are based in strong emotions related to how the teacher sees him or herself in comparison to other teachers and based on day-to-day experiences in the classroom.

An ethnographic study by McNally, Blake, and Reid (2009) reflects this idea of teacher identity being influenced by emotions. In the study, 40 beginning teachers in their first year of teaching were interviewed about their experience of learning to teach and of becoming teachers. The findings of these interviews were that new teachers based their identity as teachers more on informal learning such as interacting with other teachers and their students than on any formal gathering of knowledge about content area or explicitly about teaching. The new teachers responded that they felt most valued as teachers when they received support of colleagues. The study also

reported that the experience of new teachers can be viewed as a highly emotional work. A new teacher has almost no choice but to enter into this work of teaching with an emotional commitment. "The roller coaster extremes may lessen with time but the emotional dimension does not fade away" (McNally, Black, & Reid, 2009, p. 325). My study is clearly an example of this emotional roller coaster of a novice teacher's first year experience.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

I was the only participant in this study. The focus of my diary entries was my teaching and my feelings about teaching. There are student names mentioned in some entries when I was using examples of teaching situations that went right or went wrong for me. I also referred to administrators by name when I was detailing my experiences and frustrations with them. There are even entries which name people from the community who had interactions with me in relation to my students. I do not intend to focus on these other people as participants. They are incidental in this study. Where I have used a diary entry in this study that contains the name of a student, administrator, or other person, I have substituted the person's name with a generic identifier. I strove to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the other people mentioned in my study by omitting any identifying details which would compromise their privacy. The diaries were written by me and for me, and their focus is on my teaching and subsequent identity transformation. This study is a reflection of my experience rather than a study of my students or administrative professionals in the district.

The data collection instrument used was my personal set of teaching diaries kept over a 3-year period during each school year. The entries began in September

1996 and ended in May 1999. The diaries were written in simple, spiral-bound notebooks. There are a total of seven diaries with 235 entries. The entries range in length from one sentence to 11 pages long. The frequency of the entries is dependant on what was happening at the time and on the intensity of my reaction to various situations. These hand-written diary entries are the only data I used in writing the thesis.

My procedure in keeping the data was simple. I wrote diary entries in my classroom before I went home for the day and kept the notebooks in my desk at school. Writing in the notebooks helped me to process what went on during the day and helped me to see what I needed to change in my teaching. The writing also served as an outlet for my various feelings, ideas, and complaints about my classroom teaching and my role in the district.

I read through all of the diaries and noted various subjects that kept occurring. I kept a list of these subjects, went back through each diary and coded all of the entries and passages within entries to note which subjects were being described. I used the following codes to represent the subjects I found. I then counted up the number of occurrences of each and from this list, found the most common. I have ranked them from most prevalent to least frequently occurring.

Subject Code	Description	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Coded Passages
F	Frustration	503	13
ST	Conversations with students	466	12
EX	Unrealistic self expectations and negative self-image	438	11
CO	Classroom occurrences/lessons taught/reflections on lessons	415	11
T	Communication with other teachers	284	7
PD	Program Development	269	7
AD	Conversations with administrators	183	5
O	Outside influences/community occurrences	163	4
SN	Individual students' educational needs	118	3
OB	Observations and insights	112	3
A	Actions I took for my program	109	3
Q	Questions	93	2
S	Scheduling	86	2
CON	Conflicts with teachers or administrators	75	2
PA	Positive attitude (mine)	71	2
ADEX	Administration's expectations of me	70	2
DIS	Discipline issues	68	2
TOO	Taking on too much/burnout	65	2
UP	Unpreparedness	65	2
R	Racism - racist attitudes, comments, etc.	64	2
C	Confusion	61	2
BA	Bad attitude (mine)	39	1
IND	Indifference	22	< 1
I	Isolation	17	< 1
E	Description of physical environment	14	< 1
PP	District's previous ESL program	10	< 1

Chapter IV

DATA ANALYSIS

DIARY CHARACTERISTICS

Diary Descriptions

There are seven diaries covering the three academic years I taught in the district. The first year is described in diaries 1, 2, and 3. Diaries 4 and 5 describe my second year of teaching, and diaries 6 and 7 cover the third year. I counted each individually dated passage as one entry.

<i>Diary 1</i>	September 3, 1996–October 28, 1996	30 entries
<i>Diary 2</i>	October 29, 1996–February 4, 1997	54 entries
<i>Diary 3</i>	February 5, 1997–June 3, 1997	56 entries
<i>Diary 4</i>	August 14, 1997–January 8, 1988	16 entries
<i>Diary 5</i>	February 17, 1998–May 1, 1998	8 entries
<i>Diary 6</i>	September 1, 1998–January 14, 1999	30 entries
<i>Diary 7</i>	February 3, 1999–May 24, 1999	41 entries

Typical Entry

The date of each entry is written at the top. In the first year, I wrote nearly every day. The entries in the first year's diaries are the longest and most detailed.

During the second year, I wrote infrequently, sometimes just once a month. These entries tend to be two or more pages long because I often was trying to backtrack and catch up on events I had neglected to write about at the time they happened. I wrote more frequently in the third year, usually multiple times per week. These entries tended to be about one page long.

Entry Selection

I used verbatim language from entries to show clear examples of the major themes I found in the diaries and which reflect the emotions associated with each theme. When I used direct quotes or direct passages in this study, I only corrected spelling errors and filled in words that were inadvertently omitted in the original writing. These changes were made for the benefit of the reader.

THEMES

After multiple readings of all of the diaries and analyzing the subjects I had found within the entries, I realized that the three main forces behind my downfall as an ESL teacher were self-doubt or lack of self-confidence, frustration over situations I could not change, and confusion that led to giving up. Going back through the entries of the diaries I found that most of the subjects I coded were directly related to these three themes. I also noticed that these themes were usually found together in one paragraph or in close proximity on a page. This fact helped me to see that these were the strongest themes in the diaries and that they were highly interconnected. My frustration over a situation usually led me to believe I was not doing enough, was not a

good teacher, or did not know how to solve a problem which led me to admitting defeat and giving up. Most notably, because of these themes my identity transformed over the 3 years from being a teacher the first year to becoming a counselor in the last year.

Frustration—(associated with the following subjects: F, ST, T, AD, S, CON, DIS). The most frequently mentioned theme in my work is frustration. It is the theme I found in every entry in which I was describing a situation I could not change or control. I defined the theme of frustration by noticing that the words *frustration*, *frustrated*, and *frustrating* kept appearing in the diary entries. Often the words *frustrated* and *situation* occurred in the same passage. The other words I found in these entries and used to define this theme are *angry*, *mad*, and *ridiculous*. I also found that exclamation points were used frequently in describing frustrating situations. Along with being frustrated over my inability to fix or change certain situations, I was often angry and referred to the situations as being ridiculous.

Most entries describing my frustration were short and simple. This entry from October 14, 1997 is a perfect example:

Last week I was feeling that I really needed to say something to someone about my frustrations with the ESL situation.

On the second day of school of my first year, I wrote of my frustration at the middle school and the problem of scheduling students into my ESL class.

September 4, 1996

I came today expecting to have one student for 5th hour, but she wasn't in the room I thought she would be in, and the only way to find out would be to ask the secretary who is working on getting all of the ESL students' schedules for me. So I chose not to bother her. This, of course, is stupid. I'm sitting in a dank room, doing nothing, wasting time. I feel so ridiculous—a teacher who isn't sure what she is supposed to be doing—this just sucks.

Explaining the situation of trying to work with an ESL study hall instead of an ESL class, I wrote:

September 16, 1996

Basically, here at the middle school ESL is just a study hall and this frustrates me. Also, I don't have [a] schedule figured out and this is very frustrating.

November 5, 1996—high school

I have expended so much time and energy on this one, lousy hour of my day. It's ridiculous.

Later on that same day, I became incredibly frustrated with the situation of the high school study hall. I tried to have the students work on writing and language exercises for the first part of the hour, but other teachers kept asking me to help students with various assignments in their classes.

[Health teacher] had left a note and some sheets in my box. [Student] needed to finish a test. She also noted that she'd like him to stay more caught up this quarter. Is she directing that responsibility to me? I can't make sure he keeps up in that class! I can barely do anything to help him! ... I CAN'T HELP EVERYONE PASS ALL OF THEIR CLASSES IN ONE SHORT HOUR PER DAY!

Self-doubt/lack of self-confidence —(EX, UP, BA). Numerous diary entries are focused on my lack of self-confidence and disappointment in myself due to unrealistic expectations. These passages express negative self-image and chronicle my negative

feelings about the job I was doing and my lack of confidence as a teacher. This theme was identified and defined by the phrases (or variations of), "I'm not doing enough" or "I feel/am (negative adjective)." The majority of these passages expressed what I thought I should have been doing but was not, what I would have done had I been a good teacher, and what I was doing poorly. Words that appear frequently in entries showing my negative sense of self are *guilty*, *ineffective*, *lazy*, *useless*, and *worthless*.

A good example of this theme is the entry I wrote on December 17, 1996 after having a meeting with the middle school and high school principals about the type of ESL program I wanted to develop. I had an outline written up and explained the basic components. They seemed supportive at first, but then asked if I was an English teacher and wanted to know what classes I had taken for my licensure. They said maybe I wasn't needed at the high school and talked about pulling me from working there. I became nervous and started doubting my ability to teach or create this program. I was not able to clearly explain my training and thought that they found me to be unqualified. Afterwards I wrote,

Why do I have so little confidence in myself? Why do I always assume the worst?

January 6, 1997

I felt very useless during 5th hour. I helped [student], but it was just helping her find answers, not helping her understand. ... I felt worthless.

7th hour sucked today. The kids weren't bad, but I was. I felt useless and ineffective. I helped [student] with his health worksheet, but that was it. And basically, I gave him the answers. I tried to get him to find the answers himself, but to no avail. ...I should be teaching him something, but I'm not.

Confusion/giving up—(ST, T, AD, Q, S, CON, DIS, C, BA, IND). I defined this theme by passages that contained the words *defeated*, *hopeless*, and *overwhelmed*. The passages containing this theme express a tone of indifference, exhaustion, and defeat. In these entries I seemed to have no energy, no emotion, and no drive. I did not know what to do in a given situation, and instead of trying to figure out a solution I gave up. Whoever or whatever the opponent was, won. The phrases, *I have no idea what to do* and *I have no idea what is going on* often appear in these passages. The situations I described had me feeling hopeless and worn down. Over time, it became clear that I did not have the passion to keep teaching or to fight for what I felt was right.

September 11, 1998

I don't think I'm a great teacher. I'm ok with that. I don't think I really want to teach anymore.

April 8, 1999

I saw [student] at the high school today. He said he finished up the quarter at the [alternative school] and then quit and moved to [city]. He said he's going to get a job and finish school. I didn't even know what to say, so I just told him to stop by the study hall if he wanted. I can't worry about him anymore.

April 20, 1999

Today I told [principal] that I'm resigning. I felt no emotion really. Just said I was... I didn't want to talk about it but told him a little, just because I felt defeated.

Overlapping Themes

Many of the entries and passages that I coded contain two or even all three of the themes.

The following passage from Diary 1 was coded as F, CON, and EX. It shows my frustration over the ESL study hall situation at the high school and also is an example of my self-doubt and confusion:

November 4, 1996

When will I figure out what to do with this damn class? I am at my wit's end!! I need help. ... Nothing is working. I feel like a complete loser in here. I'd like to cry. ... This is a goddamned study hall. ... Dammit! This whole situation infuriates me. I am completely lost. I have no idea what to do here.

The issue of scheduling ESL times for all the students at three schools was always a problem for me. It was a source of continual frustration and confusion as exemplified in this entry in which I described a conversation I had with the elementary principal about starting to develop an ESL schedule for the next year:

March 12, 1997

... He doesn't know what the best plan would be. He said it will be too much for me to go to all three (or four) schools in one day – too much driving. He thought maybe I/we could come up with a plan like M, W, F in [first town], and T, TH in [second town] one week and switch the next. I kinda said maybe, but now that I think about it, that won't work either. ... What the hell? ... The confusion and frustration never ends.

DESCRIPTION OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION

Year One

Diary 1—September 3, 1996 to October 28, 1996

The entries of this diary focus on my attempt at scheduling all the ESL students at the three schools, creating lesson plans, and trying to develop an actual ESL program rather than a study hall for ESL students. There were also numerous

mentions of discipline problems at the high school and problems with teachers at the middle school sending me students that did not qualify for ESL. The tone of the entries is that of frustration. I continuously wrote about feeling inadequate, about not really teaching, and how I was not receiving any help from administration.

I started the school year feeling very excited about my new job. I felt proud to be a professional, and I set high ideals for the program I wanted to create and for myself as a teacher. My first teaching diary entry was written on September 3, 1996. This was the first day of school, my first day of teaching, and the day the realities of my situation started to become clear. I began the day at the elementary school and saw no students because the classroom teachers wanted the students to adjust to their classrooms before sending them to ESL. In the first diary entry I wrote about my frustration at not being able to work with students. Even though I saw myself as a teacher and a professional, the attitude of the administrators on my first day confused me. I expressed my confusion over my role in the district.

September 3, 1996

... (I) feel useless with no students ... frustrated due to lack of concrete schedule – trying to coordinate with all teachers. Everything [is] up in the air. ... I spoke with elementary principal ...[he] basically said [the] program is up to me. [He said] I will be a friend and contact for the ESL students and their parents...the middle school interim principal [is] unsure of what's needed or wanted for ESL.

During my job interview the principals had explained to me that in the past, ESL had been a study hall situation in which an aide had worked at each school and helped the students with homework. They told me they were very excited to finally have a licensed ESL teacher for the district and were eager for me to develop an ESL

program. After this first day on the job, however, I was confused as to whether they still wanted me to develop a legitimate ESL program for the district or if they had changed their minds and wanted me to just be a friend, contact, and study hall supervisor.

The main problem was that two of the three administrators that hired me had been replaced by the start of the school year. The new administrators had conflicting views of what they wanted for ESL or did not have any opinion on the issue. They all told me that I was the expert, it was up to me, and I could do whatever I wanted. After explaining to each of them that I did not know where to begin, I was told to talk to the school secretaries to find open classrooms and to get lists of potential ESL students. I was also supposed to figure out a schedule for each school. On my own, I decided I would create an ESL program consisting of language classes and would make myself seen and respected as an ESL teacher.

My vision and goal was to use Whole Language at the elementary school where I would pull students out of their mainstream classrooms for short periods each day. At the middle and high schools, I planned to create an actual ESL class to replace the mainstream English classes the students were floundering in. It was my intention that the students in the ESL class would receive their English credit from me. I planned on building a curriculum around reading, writing, grammar, and most importantly, I wanted to base the class on what the students wanted to learn and what they felt was important to them.

September 3, 1996

I wasn't expecting students, but three showed up. I was unprepared—had to wing it. ... since I hadn't talked to [principal], I wasn't even sure what was expected of me at the high school. When I was interviewed for the job, those principals indicated they didn't want ESL to be a supervised study hall but these three students had ESL down as their study hall on their schedules. The students seemed pleasant yet very reluctant and had poor attitudes regarding school. All three had spent the summer in some sort of juvenile detention. They say they hate school, hate reading and writing. [Student] said, "Why do we need to read? We're just going to work at [meatpacking plant]." I asked if that's what they wanted—"no, but that's what there is." We talked about what they would like to do and what their talents are. I tried to encourage them. ... I asked them what they will need help with and let them know I'll do all I can to help.

The situation at the high school declined as more students were scheduled into the class. In fact, it was not a class. The principal told me that I had to keep the study hall format until the second semester. This fact along with the fact that I had to hold class in the media center frustrated me to no end. I started having discipline problems with half of the class. They refused to do work and argued that if they did not have homework, I could not force them to do anything because our class was a *study hall* and they were not getting a grade from me. A typical hour at the high school went something like the description I wrote on September 16, 1996:

I spent half my time helping [two students], and the other half disciplining [four other students]. ... I caught [two students] wrestling in the back computer room one day. Talked to them both away from the group. Told them if they don't do work in ESL, they'll get switched to regular study hall. Then I talked to [student] alone. He looked like he was going to cry. I said I knew he had work to do, and he'd be smart to take advantage of my help while he could.

In order to clarify the study hall situation, I talked to the principal and guidance counselor after school.

Went to [principal] and asked if kids get graded for ESL study hall. He said no, but to ask [guidance counselor] to make sure. [Counselor] said they definitely do. I talked about the problem of no one bringing work and how I spend the hour disciplining them. He said I was too valuable a resource/person to put up with that. If the kids don't want to be in there, they'll go to mainstream study hall. [He] said I have his support. I decided that kids must do work, or I'll assign something [because] they're getting a grade and 3 or 4 credits!

A big problem I had at the middle school was that teachers began sending any student with a Hispanic or Asian surname to me for help. The special education teachers were also telling me that I needed to work with a number of their students. I questioned this, but felt I had no right to argue with these more experienced teachers. On October 3, a new girl showed up in my class and was very confused.

She asked why she had to come to ESL. Before I could even think of an answer, (since I was wondering myself), she said, "At [elementary school] I went to ESL for a while, then they realized I didn't need it and put me in [special education teacher's] class—you know—it's like ESL for white kids." So that hit me in the gut. I realized ESL (my class) was a dumping ground. I asked her if she spoke Spanish at home. She said no. Only her parents did.

I told the student she did not need to come to ESL anymore and could stay in her regular study hall. A week later, the special education teacher confronted me.

October 11, 1996

[Special education teacher] came over and asked to speak with me. She said she has noticed that [student] hasn't been coming down [to ESL] and said I need to make sure she does—I "need to follow through" on this because it is on her IEP. I think she was a little bit angry with me. But I was angry with the situation, too. ...After class I went to the office and looked at [student's] file. She came to [town] in 2nd grade. They said she wasn't technically an ESL student because English was the primary language spoken at home, but in order to catch her up in reading, they put her in ESL. Then, she was tested and put in special ed—EBD. They discontinued ESL in 4th or 5th grade.

Later that day I talked to the special education teacher to clear things up.

I was nervous and wasn't sure how to approach it with her, but I just went in and very nicely said that I'd love to help [student and student], but they don't need ESL. I had looked at their files in the office and saw that ESL had been discontinued in the early grades at [elementary school]. I told her this, and she also looked on their IEPs and found no mention of ESL. She apologized and seemed genuinely embarrassed and sorry. I think I handled it well.

Fortunately, things at the elementary school were going well, and I was happy with the way I was teaching.

September 16, 1996

What I'm doing here is exactly what I want to be doing. I've got small groups of kids, all of whom were identified last year as those most in need of ESL. [The] teachers are cooperative [and] bring concerns to me. I believe that they feel I'm valuable—doing a necessary job.

October 1, 1996—First grade

... Then we read through The Farm Concert. The students indicated an interest in reading the story to me one at a time. I got the small copy of the book and had one student read it to me while the other two worked with the big book. Then I passed out the sight word cards—three to each ... Then I had them point to certain words in the book ... Finally, I gave each student two slips of paper. Each one had an animal written on it. I explained that we were going to make a play tomorrow and they were to draw a picture of each of their animals to be the characters. They were very excited about this. [Student] suggested/asked if we could cut the animals out and put them on sticks to have a little puppet show. I agreed and they were happy.

Diary 2—October 29, 1996 to February 4, 1997

In the second diary, I moved away from describing my teaching and the details of lesson plans and became more introspective. There was much written about the progress I was making with discipline at the high school and the conflict I was having with other teachers and the guidance counselor there. I talked at length about what the students were saying to me, how they were feeling, who they were as individuals, and on the relationships I was building with them. Many entries told of students who were

confiding in me about their concerns, frustrations, and questions about school and problems they were having outside of school.

I first mentioned the idea of being an advocate for my students in an entry on November 25, 1996. The professional role I identified with in the beginning of the year was definitely that of 'teacher', but in just 2 months I was so frustrated that I was deciding that my identity as an advocate was more important. After a lunch with a friend who was a first-year ESL teacher in Minneapolis I wrote,

I had lunch with [friend] yesterday, and we talked for about two hours about teaching ESL. We came to the conclusion that above everything else, we need to be advocates for our students. This is our real job. Teaching them is second to advocating for them. We're both so frustrated as first year teachers, and we're both so frustrated with ESL. ... This is driving me crazy with frustration!

Later in the same entry I wrote about some students I had at the middle school and how much I enjoyed working with them. I felt a need to do more for them and again questioned my ability as a teacher.

I just wish I could help them more. I just smooth over the rough spots. I only help them finish their homework – I don't think they learn anything. That's why I'd like to have a class for them. Although I'm not certain I actually have the ability to teach anything. I think I'm actually a much better tutor than a teacher.

By January, the entries are filled with feelings of self-doubt about being a teacher or being a good teacher. I started questioning my idea to create an ESL program for the middle and high schools and whether or not I was capable of doing so. The first day after the Christmas break, I wrote,

January 6, 1997

The whole issue of me starting classes was good before vacation, but I got stressed out about it during vacation. And now, I'm filled with fear and panic. What have I been thinking? Or, why haven't I been thinking? I just realized and saw that second semester starts on Jan. 21. That's just two weeks away! Before then I have to come up with a class list, a classroom, materials, and a curriculum. ... I really don't know if any of this will be possible. ... I feel crazy! I really feel that I'm doomed. ... I am starting to realize how incompetent and unprepared I am. Now I wish I could have study halls for the rest of the year.

January 7, 1997

I've now fully realized that the only place I'm doing my job is at [elementary school] and even that is questionable. I have no direction and no control at the high school. I have things ok at the middle school, but it's still just a study hall. The only thing that works is that the kids are great. I'm not doing much though.

I had fought so hard in the fall for the opportunity to create ESL classes at the middle and high schools, but by the end of the year I had lost my confidence and energy. I was actually teaching language at the elementary school but somehow felt that was not enough. I did not feel I was a 'real' teacher unless I was actually *teaching* an ESL *class* at the middle and high schools as well. I was very conflicted in my desire to keep striving for my ideal while at the same time being too frustrated and overwhelmed to do so.

Diary 3—February 5, 1997 to June 3, 1997

The main focus of Diary 3 is the deepening of my relationship with the students, my helping them after school with all of their subjects, and conflict with administration. The entries describe classroom occurrences, my growing frustration and feelings of inadequacy as a teacher, and documentation of individual students'

personalities, needs, and concerns. My identity as a teacher became weaker and my inclinations toward helping students solve personal problems became stronger.

During the entire month of March, I struggled with physical illness and exhaustion. Even though I was legitimately sick, I felt guilty about taking time off.

March 5, 1997

I'm home sick today. It's probably a good thing. I've felt out of control for a while now. This week hasn't been good. I mean classes have gone ok, but I haven't felt like I was doing my best. I just feel run down and burned out. I feel like I'm only giving about 50%. And that's not good enough. I just feel like a lousy teacher. So, maybe a lot of sleep today will help me get back in control of my teaching. I need to start doing better.

March 6, 1997

Yet another sick day. I feel like crap. ... I feel guilty and like a bad, irresponsible person.

March 10, 1997

I felt lousy about my teaching this weekend. I just feel that I haven't been doing a very good job lately. I have no energy, no enthusiasm, and no ideas. I don't know if it's because I'm sick, because I'm burned out, or because I'm a bad teacher. I really have to get serious again.

My illness and exhaustion exacerbated my frustrations, confusion, and self-doubt. I was unable to see my physical weakness as a contributing source of my negative feelings. During this period I found another teacher at the middle school that was very supportive of me and of ESL. I began to voice my frustrations to him and felt I could confide in him. In one conversation with him I explained how I was not prepared for the reality of my situation and admitted to him that I did not think I was doing a good job.

March 19, 1997

I told him my ESL student teaching experience was so far removed from regular classroom teaching that sometimes I don't feel like a real teacher.

This statement captured exactly how I felt about myself in this job. Other teachers who wanted to know what I was doing with the ESL students were confronting me at each of the schools. They questioned the amount of time I was asking for to work with certain students, and administrators and teachers alike questioned whether I was licensed to actually teach English. Their skepticism made me question my qualifications and myself. Because I was starting to believe I was not a real teacher, I found myself getting more involved with helping and counseling students.

A big issue with the high school students during this time was the drivers' education class. As all teenagers are, my students were extremely concerned with passing the driving exam. I devoted many hours of ESL study hall time to helping them study for the test. When they all failed it, I was quite upset.

March 20, 1997

[Four students] came in and told me how all the Laotians failed the drivers' ed test but all the whites passed. They were really upset. They said [drivers' education teacher] had told some of them that they can't read and are lazy. They accused him of being racist. I was really upset, too.

I ended up spending the entire class period discussing this with the students, and after school went to the teacher with their complaints and my concerns. We ended up negotiating a deal allowing the students study again and retake the test.

I began to take note of my own personality. I started to realize that I was very sensitive, almost to a fault. If a student came into ESL class at any of the schools and started talking about something that was bothering him/her, I put the lesson aside and listened to the student. I admittedly was becoming very emotionally involved and tied

to my students. I took a short break from blaming the principals, other teachers, and even my teaching ability and started to realize my part in my own frustrations.

March 21, 1997

I was upset last night, thinking and worrying about my high school kids. This ESL is a tough job for someone with a soft heart. I take all their problems personally.

April 22, 1997

Last night I realized that the problem I'm having (in general) is not with the school or what I am or am not doing there, but it's with me.

Near the end of the first year, I became increasingly concerned with helping my middle and high school students pass all of their classes. I was overwhelmed, frustrated, and never felt I was doing enough. I felt it was my responsibility to fill in all of the gaps.

May 14, 1997

Oh, I am ready for this year to be over! I feel pressure (from myself) to make sure each of my students gets all of his/her work done and passes all classes. It's driving me crazy. ...I really don't know what to do with these [high school] kids. I'm grasping at straws. I'm trying to teach adjectives, and I'm not having much success. These kids are already done for the year—tuned out. ... Part of it is my fault. I need to get something decent planned to carry us through the end of the year. [Student] has 14 days to finish all his work for [English teacher]—good luck.

May 19, 1997

I just feel overwhelmed lately. It's the end of the year, and everything is catching up with me. I'm out of energy.

It is evident that I had given up at this point. The diary entries became incredibly negative and self-critical. I had no energy left and was only thinking about the last day of school. I wrote a little about how all my students were missing ESL because of end of the year field trips and other activities and then wrote about how unprepared I was when they did come to my class.

May 21, 1997

I just don't want to write in here anymore. Nothing is going to happen in the next 9 days that will be exciting enough to write about. Actually, I'm just lazy. Lazy as hell.

May 22, 1997—Elementary school

Today was a total wash. I wasn't prepared with anything. I just decided to read [the students] a book, and it just didn't cut it. [Students] were ornery, [other students] weren't much better, and the third graders were very restless. It was my fault for not having a lesson ready. I felt like a horrible, worthless teacher.

The last entry of my first year of teaching summed up the feelings of frustration and lack of self-confidence that had plagued me throughout the year.

June 3, 1997

The end came too quickly. I'm not ready. ... I came back to school last night—I thought I was going to get some work done. [Principal] was there and he talked to me for quite awhile. He had all these ideas of things I should do next year. They were all great ideas—a lot of them were things I thought I should do this year, but couldn't seem to get done. I wrote them all down and felt like crap. I felt like I hadn't accomplished anything this year. I wanted to cry, and I was close to doing so.

The diary entries of my first year as an ESL teacher showed that at the beginning, I was an enthusiastic, idealistic new teacher who believed she could change the system and students' lives. The entries described how I was concerned with being seen as a legitimate teacher and with being respected as an ESL professional. In Diaries 1, 2, and 3, I wrote detailed descriptions of lesson plans, lessons taught, and reflections on what went well and what didn't in my teaching. I wrote about my work to try to create an ESL program at the middle school and high school as opposed to the ESL study hall system that had been used by the district before I was hired. I also wrote about how I received very little help or clear direction from any of the administrators.

Year Two

The shocking fact about the second year's diaries is that the number of entries dropped to one-sixth the number of entries from the first year. The clear difference in the content of the entries is that I turned my focus from the elementary and middle school students almost exclusively to the high school students. These entries are filled with angry passages chronicling my personal frustrations about teaching, conflict with administration, and the ongoing problem of scheduling. Also interesting and important was the evidence that I was questioning my identity as a teacher. I asked myself questions about whether I was a teacher and if I was not, what was I? My identity during the second year became ambiguous. I was not certain whether I was a 'real' teacher or if I was just a friend or advocate for my students.

Diary 4—August 14, 1997 to January 8, 1998

Before this school year began, the district I was working in consolidated with a nearby district. My concerns in the first entries of this diary were on how the consolidation would affect my job in terms of providing ESL service to all the students and how to schedule my days as an itinerant teacher traveling between two towns and four schools. Two weeks before school began, I had a meeting with the principals to discuss the ESL program I wanted to implement. They were supportive at first, but when the complexities of scheduling became clear, they suggested I go back to supplementing the existing middle and high school English curriculum by pulling the ESL students out of their mainstream English classes to help them with their work. A week later, after I had worked very hard on an ESL schedule for each of the schools,

the middle school principal told me I would have to redo my schedule in order to accommodate class changes. I was extremely frustrated by this.

August 26, 1997

He said we'll have to "re-group." We have to do more than that. I'm starting to panic. I feel that everything (ESL) is in chaos. I can't begin to function until I have some idea of where I am going to be—which school, when. I don't know who to ask for help. Once again, I feel isolated and ignored. Round 2.

On the first day of school, I went to the middle school to find out if there was an open room I could use for ESL.

September 2, 1997

[Principal] was there. Before I could say anything, he said, "Christa, what you need to do is decide what you're going to do, get the kids' schedules, and pull them out of class." I explained that I knew what I was going to do, but needed a room. He was all frustrated with something else and passed me on to [secretary].

Scheduling was the main problem I faced in developing the kind of ESL program I wanted to. It was nearly impossible to schedule time for over 30 students at four schools including the 20-minute trip between the two towns. In order to provide service to all of the ESL students in any manner, I had to make do with whatever time and storage room, choir room, or library was available. By mid-September, I had the schedules figured out and ESL was well underway. I was very happy to be able to actually teach language at the elementary school and was almost satisfied with what I was doing at the middle and high schools. Even though I was feeling good about things, my self-doubt was still active.

September 15, 1997

It's hard to believe this is already the third week of school. I feel pretty good about it, but those feelings of inadequacy and not knowing what

I'm doing sneak in from time to time. I have a schedule now. (!) I'm pretty happy about it. It doesn't feel insane at all, even though it kind of is.

Once the school year started, I wrote about accommodating the needs and wants of classroom teachers in terms of their ESL students. In trying to appease them, I gave up on the idea of a true ESL program and began focusing on the 'ESL as study hall' concept. I was tired of trying to teach and be everything for the students. In Diary 4, I began turning my focus away from teaching high school ESL and towards changing the behavior and attitude of the high school students. It was not that I had given up on the elementary and middle school students, but I was more comfortable with the program I had set up for them and the way I was teaching at those schools thus, the lack of entries describing what went on at the elementary or middle school.

Diary 5—February 17, 1998 to May 1, 1998

There was almost no mention of the elementary or middle school students or of teaching lessons in this diary. The focus was on the high school students. My idea seemed to be that the younger children had a much better chance of succeeding in the school system and were already more proficient in English than the high school students, so I chose to try to save the older students. In this diary I described disciplinary actions taken against some of my high school students who had been truant or involved in crimes outside of school. The tone of these entries was that of concern for the students, but I also sounded as though I was tired and not sure what, if anything, I could do.

February 18, 1998

Yesterday [student] was absent from class at the high school. [Two students] told me that the cops picked him up after school last Thursday and

that he is in some detention center in [neighboring town]. That's really all they told me, and I didn't ask much more. You know, I didn't want to know. I don't have the energy or the heart to deal with it right now.

Today I decided to ask [secretary] about it. She said [my student] and [other student] got into a fight after school on Wednesday with some other kid. Those two against one. They claimed it was racially motivated. They said the other kid had been using racial slurs against them or something. So, they got him after school and beat him up. Then Thursday, I let [my student] out of class to use the restroom. (I had no idea what had happened on Wednesday). Well, he never came back to class. I guess the cops got him and [other student] and hauled them out of school in cuffs. They spent the night in jail.

February 26, 1998

Yesterday [male student] was back after two days of skipping. I told him it was unfortunate that they were unexcused absences, and he said he didn't care. I asked him if his dad could call in for him, but he said his dad works the late shift and is either sleeping or working when [male student] goes to school.

[Female student] was gone again. I think she's been gone about five days now. I asked [other female student] about it since [female student] was/is staying with her. I found out [female student] is the girlfriend of [other female student's] brother. And I guess she's off with him or something. I don't know. [Other female student] didn't/wouldn't really say.

[Second male student] had to leave early – he had his court hearing (stolen car). I hope it went well.

I just had asked the class about [male student in fight], and he popped in to give something to [male student]. He's back in [neighboring town] at the alternative school there. Under orders of his parole officer. So our class is back down to five (probably 4–female student)?

Later in the day on February 26, I described my conflict with the guidance counselor who wanted to put another student in my high school class. This student was Asian and had just moved from Hawaii. I had gotten information about him already and knew he was not limited in his English proficiency. He did not need ESL, and I told the counselor he could not be in my class.

I don't need any more high school students in my class. I don't need any more kids who don't really need ESL, but need a friend—need some support. I can't take any more kids into my life—especially at the high school

level when I never know whether they're going to show up or drop out (of school and my life) completely.

In this second year, many teachers and administrators referred to the ESL students as "your students" when talking to me about the trouble some middle and high school students were getting into. I made reference to this on March 4, 1998 when I wrote,

I resent the whole 'your students' deal. They are everyone's students. When things go wrong, why are they all of a sudden 'my' students? It seems like they're just passing the buck. ...It makes me mad.

Though I felt defeated at the high school and was frustrated with the students, I had grown very fond of them. I was very sensitive to their troubles and concerns and wanted more than anything for them to be successful in school and to feel good about themselves. I began to realize that caring about them was taking its toll on me. I was fiercely protective of my students, yet frustrated by that self-appointed responsibility at the same time.

Year Three

The third year was marked by my seemingly giving up on being a teacher. My identity transformed from the ambiguity of the second year into my deciding that I was a counselor and advocate. While I continued to teach actual lessons at the elementary school, I gave up on teaching at the middle and high schools, accepted the ESL as study hall model, and focused on the personal problems of the older students.

Diary 6—September 1, 1998 to March 2, 1999

This diary was marked by my fear of failure and of other people's perceptions of me as a teacher. I no longer felt I was making a difference and decided it would be my last year with the district. I realized I had been trying to do too much and was not able to meet my own expectations. I decided that I did not enjoy teaching but that I was a good advocate, listener, and counselor. I was very strongly tied to the high school students and because I only was able to work with them the second half of the year, I felt I lost touch with them and let them down. I blamed myself for their problems and failings.

In the very first entry of Diary 6, I wrote,

September 1, 1998

Tomorrow is the first day of school. I'll be starting the year frustrated, just like last year.

I had just had a meeting with the elementary principal before I wrote this entry. The background for the meeting was that in May 1998 before I left town for the summer, I gave the elementary principal a proposed ESL schedule for the 1998-99 school year. (This principal was my direct supervisor). I also included a paragraph stating my concerns and hopes for the next year including hiring an aide to help me provide ESL service to the students in the four schools. He told me he would look at it over the summer and talk to the other principals.

I spoke to him on August 31, and he admitted that he had never given my proposal a thought. I was disappointed and upset and asked for a meeting with him on September 1 to discuss it all. I had prepared an outline for myself so I would

remember and cover all the issues that were making me so upset. I let him know of my disappointments and frustrations. I told him I felt unappreciated and mistreated (I had not ever had a prep hour), and I needed help with scheduling and making the decisions for the program.

I was so angry about things. I felt really mistreated. So I decided I was going to let him know how I felt about the whole situation ... I think I blindsided him. He had no idea I was going to react the way I did. He tried to interrupt a couple of times, but I didn't let him. Then he was silent. He got defensive towards the end. He said he was so sick and tired of being the one who had to organize my stuff.

He told me there was no budget for an aide and made the executive decision to have me work only with the elementary and middle school students and to discontinue the high school ESL program. I let him know I was not happy with it, but it seemed the only way.

In the next entry on September 2 (the first day of school), I wrote,

Started out the day feeling down and a little scared. I almost decided to resign. I kept going back and forth between quitting and staying. Agonizing. I wanted to leave the district high and dry and wondering why they pushed me so far. I wanted them to feel the pain of not having me here. I wanted to really shake things up. But eventually I realized that I couldn't do that to the kids.

Later that day I met with a friend who lived in town and was doing her ESL student teaching in Mankato at the time. In talking with her, I made the decision not to return for the 1999-2000 school year. I wrote,

I just let her know that I won't be back next year, so she'll probably have a job here if she wants. I also asked if she'd be willing to take over for me when she's done student teaching. I just felt this was the answer for me. I felt relieved knowing she would be able to step in, and I would be out of this mess!

The relief I felt knowing I was not returning the following year did not last long. I began to worry about my friend who would be the new ESL teacher and started worrying about the students.

September 8, 1998

... But then my mind races ahead to next year when I don't be here. What will [new ESL teacher] do? Will they hire an aide for her? What will happen to the high school kids who don't pass the Basic Standards test? It's enough to make me crazy.

The next day, I had an epiphany. I suddenly realized how detrimental the expectations I had placed on myself were.

September 9, 1998

I have to take on a new attitude and a new plan of action if I'm going to survive this year. I felt very defeated and hopeless yesterday. I can't let that happen anymore. I have to convince myself that I am doing the best that I can in this situation. I have to stop kicking myself and stop blaming the system. I have to make the most of what I've got. I'll do the best I can with the students during the day. I'll try to stay in contact with the high school kids – maybe work with them after school. When my day is done and I go home, I forget about school and have a life. That's what I need to do to make it this year. I can't do everything and be everything to these kids. I have to let go of the idea and the pressure that I can be and do everything.

My identity transformation from teacher to counselor and advocate was solidified by the second week of school.

September 11, 1998

I've come to realize that I really don't enjoy teaching that much. I understand that now that I don't see the high school kids. I enjoyed connecting with them and helping them. I enjoyed listening to them and talking to them. I don't feel the same type of satisfaction with the younger kids. I don't teach that well. I'm a good listener and a good advocate. I'm a good friend/counselor.

On October 8, the entry included this passage,

I am so burned out this year. I feel now like I felt in May the past two years. I feel I've been trampled. I don't socialize with the staff. I avoid

talking to people. I still do a good job with the kids, but something is different. The drive is gone. I used to feel that I really could make a difference. Now I don't. Now I want out. Out of this town, out of the profession. It's too frustrating for me. Education is too complicated. ESL is too crazy.

My self-confidence as a teacher spiraled downward as time progressed.

October 12, 1998

I feel pretty inept in my English teaching capabilities. Many days I don't feel qualified to be teaching middle school English.

October 19, 1998

I feel like someday, someone is going to question me about what I do, and I'll have trouble defending myself. To be honest, I don't want the responsibility of teaching. What am I going to do with my life?

During the winter of 1999, I became extremely frustrated with not being able to work with the students at the high school. Some of them had dropped out of school, and I wrote on January 13,

I had been trying for a while to think of a way I could find time to work with the high school kids during my day. I really felt it was important that I maintain some contact with those students. And I felt I had already lost ground with them by this point. I worked and reworked my schedule until I got it so that all I had to give up was my lunch.

I met with the high school principal later that day and asked if I could start a study hall there for 1 hour a day. He agreed. While at the high school, I stopped in to see the secretary who informed me that two of the ESL students had dropped out.

This news hit me in a strange way. ...I felt sad that after coming so far, both of those kids just gave up. And then it made me angry at them for giving up. I also felt responsible. I felt that if I had really cared about them, I would have fought harder at the beginning of the year to work with them. Or, I would have kept in better contact with them this fall even though I wasn't at the high school. I felt I had failed them.

On January 20, one of my high school students informed me that yet another ESL student had dropped out of school.

Then [student] told me [other student] had dropped out and was moving to [city]. That was it. I felt sick. Of all the high school questionables, I thought he'd make it. I was so sad, angry, and frustrated. I felt I'd let him down. I felt he'd let me down. Then I started feeling numb. The whole range of emotions—from sad to numb—took only a few minutes. I think I felt completely defeated and that I had nothing left. I couldn't do or feel anything about it anymore.

Things did not change in the New Year. On February 17, 1999 I expressed my feelings of inadequacy.

I'm counting how many weeks are left until school is out. And it's not because I hate what I'm doing. I'm just tired of it, and I'm not sure I want to do this for the rest of my life...I don't like thinking that I'm not doing enough or that what I am doing may be wrong.

No classroom occurrences were noted in Diary 6. I had decided it was my last year, and I realized I could not be perfect; I could not do everything or be everything that the students needed. I did not feel as though I could make a difference, so I decided simply to do my best. The entries focused on the fact that I was worn out; I had taken on too much. When I was not allowed to work with the high school students, I really lost my enthusiasm. When some of the high school students started dropping out of school, I felt completely defeated. My lack of self-confidence had caused me to irrationally correlate my perception of not doing enough with the students dropping out.

Diary 7—March 9, 1999 to May 24, 1999

The last diary is focused on working with the high school students once again and with the troubles they were having. Four had dropped out of school, and one was

pregnant. My relationship with all of them was disintegrating. The majority of the entries focused on my feeling of defeat and my being frustrated with the high school students. I almost never mentioned the elementary or middle school students.

On April 20, I gave my resignation. The entry states,

Today I told [elementary principal] that I'm resigning. I felt no emotion really. Just said I was. Said I was going to apply for the job in [another town]. I didn't want to talk about it but told him a little, just because I felt defeated. He did say he'll be sorry to see me go and that I've done an excellent job here. He said he'd call [other district] and put in a good word for me. Then he had to say that my students will really miss me. I had been completely unemotional up to that point, and then I had to get a little teary-eyed.

The last 13 entries from April 23 to May 24 are composed of incidents and conversations I had with students. It is clear from the entries that I was doing everything I could for the students in my last days as their ESL teacher. I went into great detail about helping the middle school students with their projects for International Day. I worked with them for 2 weeks after school.

May 6, 1999

Tonight after school I worked with [students] on their International Day projects. We worked from 3:30-7:30 and are nowhere near being done! I feel very frustrated about it. A lot of it is my fault. I've been sending them to the library or to work with [classroom teacher], and I've assumed they were getting the project done. I should have been checking on them more. ... I typed for them, because otherwise it would take them 2 months.

I was also dealing with one of my high school students who was pregnant and getting married.

May 13, 1999

It makes me sick and sad. It makes me wonder if it's any of my business. I know it's not, but I still feel like I should talk to her. I want to tell her to have an abortion and enjoy the rest of her life. Get rid of the guy and be a kid. But I can't say any of that. Maybe she's happy. It's part of their

culture. I can't run anyone's life. But I sure wish I could. She's sixteen, and I think her life should be different.

In these entries from Diary 7, I seemed to be wrapping everything up. I discussed students and situations that I would have to let go of once I left the job. I was trying to clean up all the messes or at least straighten them out a bit before I left. I had been having a lot of trouble with the high school girls, but I wanted to remedy the situation. On May 14, I told them I was leaving.

Today I told the high school girls that I won't be back next year. I needed to get it over with. I called them all into the room and said I had some news. They were shocked I think. It was really quiet. I looked at [student] and her eyes were a little watery. ... I feel better now that I've told them. I hope they tell all the other kids. I'm getting really sad about leaving them.

Even though I was exhausted, burned out, frustrated, and ready to move on, I had become incredibly attached to all the ESL students. I was very sad about leaving and felt I was abandoning them.

My final entry was on May 24, 1999. It was 8 days before the end of the school year. I mentioned one of my favorite high school students and how I found out from another teacher that he had been causing trouble in her class and had been kicked out of it twice.

I didn't know about this. I don't know that I could have helped. It makes me so sad. I feel as though I failed with him. He slipped through. He started out the worst and came the farthest. He has so much potential. I wonder if things would be different if I had worked with the high school kids all year.

In this final entry (which is four pages long) I wrote more troubling news about the high school students. One had been kicked out of the alternative high school and rumor was she was selling drugs. Another student that had dropped out of school to

work had been fired from his job. The high school students had recently taken the graduation standards test and many had failed all or at least part of it. And a girl who had had a baby the year before was having real trouble passing her classes and was talking about dropping out. The final sentences of this entry are about this girl and how even though I would have hated to see her drop out, I realized that someone had to stay home to take care of the baby. That was it. I wrote no more. There was no wrap-up, no final words, and no summary of my feelings on the last day of school. I simply stopped writing on May 24.

Before the last day of school, I did have a party for my students at each of the schools. I reconciled with the high school girls and took them to a nearby town for dinner at a Chinese buffet. I also invited the high school boys (all three had dropped out of school at this point) over to my apartment to pick out furniture and household items they could use. I remember being incredibly sad as I drove away from the town but also feeling relieved. I knew I had gotten too attached to my students. I had burned out. I blamed myself for the students' failures. I really believed that if I had tried harder, things would have been better.

I left that job feeling that I was not a teacher and that I did not want to teach. I had been offered an ESL job in a different town, and had reluctantly accepted it. I had no enthusiasm whatsoever but felt I had to take it because I did not know what else to do. I held that job for 2 years and then left the teaching profession altogether.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Although this study focuses on entries of personal teaching diaries, the information garnered may be of interest to novice teachers going into the field of ESL or going to teach in small districts in rural areas. The data may also be of use in informing student teachers of some of the realities that may befall them in their first teaching jobs. This study may also be of use in teacher training programs in order to forewarn new or hopeful teachers of some of the more difficult scenarios they might encounter in the first years as teachers.

Limitations and Significance

The data of this study is highly personal and highly emotional. It reflects a time when I, a novice teacher, was under tremendous stress. Though it was written with no audience in mind and thus reflects very personal, private feelings and thoughts that were not censored, being the author of the diaries makes it very difficult to be completely objective. Even though the diaries were written between 11 and 14 years ago, it was difficult to distance myself from the material. An outside reader might read the diaries and find completely different themes and a different identity transformation than I did. My situation was unique to me, and it would be impossible to generalize

my feelings and frustrations and project them onto other novice teachers. This being said, I do feel that novice teachers could gain perspective on the experience of being a new teacher by reading my study. My thoughts and feelings about my first years of teaching could provide valuable insight into the nature of the teaching profession regardless of whether or not they would be transferrable into any other teacher's experience.

Implications

The implications of this research are that putting a novice teacher into a leadership role can have negative outcomes. Too much responsibility given to an inexperienced teacher may cause tremendous frustration and might compel that teacher to leave the profession prematurely. If possible, new teachers should be set up with an experienced teacher as a mentor. It would be beneficial for the novice teacher to have someone to ask questions of and someone to get advice from. Also, the mentor could be a sounding board or listener for the new teacher if and when they feel the need to express frustrations or concerns about their students, lesson plans, etc. Experienced teachers can give personal examples of how they have grown into the teaching professionals they are, giving new teachers examples of mistakes they made and lessons they learned along the way. A mentor would also assist the new teacher in navigating the system of the school district and in communicating with administration. Perhaps a mentorship program could include a diary writing aspect in which new teachers could keep teaching journals to chronicle their own experiences, feelings and frustrations with the option of discussing them with their mentors.

New teachers need to realize that their idealism or enthusiasm may be tested during the first few years of teaching. The discussion of this issue in teacher training programs would be highly beneficial and a proactive way to possibly lessen the stressful expectations new teachers tend to put upon themselves. Having a mentor on the job would also help to remind the new teacher of this. Most importantly, new teachers must realize they will not be able to do everything they hope to do or be everything they hope to be in their first year of teaching. Teacher training programs would be wise to mention to student teachers that highly emotional and sensitive people may not be the most effective teachers due to the possibility of their becoming overly involved with their students' problems. A teacher needs to be able to separate his or herself from the emotions and non-educational struggles of students. A person who has the personality that makes them feel the need to "save" or "fix" others may have a difficult time as a teacher. A person such as this tends to try to do too much and often becomes overwhelmed and discouraged when trying to take on too much in the service of their students. Overall, novice teachers need to be realistic. They may hold their ideals and work towards them, but in order to be successful teachers, they must ask questions, ask for help, and simply do their best.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

I went into this job feeling I was taking on a real challenge, but one I was ready and eager for. I also went in with a need to be perfect. This is what was so debilitating to me and ultimately, was the cause of my downfall. There are various themes running through the teaching diaries I kept, but they all come back to the fact that I felt I needed to be everything and do everything for my students. I held myself to incredibly high standards. The goal was perfection.

I know that as I re-read all the diaries, the overwhelming tone and theme was my feeling that I was not doing enough. I was not being a perfect teacher, was not doing a perfect job, and therefore, I felt that I was failing. And in an attempt to make up for my failings, I overcompensated by becoming emotionally involved with my students and by devoting all of my time to them. I felt I had to do everything I could for them and make sure they got whatever it was they needed. In the process, I lost sight of what I was doing right and decided that I wasn't a good teacher and needed to resign.

This diary study was clearly an emotional endeavor. Analyzing the data was at times very uncomfortable and evoked memories and feelings I had hoped were forever lost. The process however, was cathartic. Most importantly, this study provided me

with the opportunity to change my perspective on the experience of my first teaching job. It allowed me to change my personal story about those 3 years from a very negative, self-defeating tale into something very positive. Due to the time that has elapsed since leaving that job, I now have a much clearer view of what I really accomplished.

Over the years, I have kept in touch with many of my former students and even visited them in various places in Minnesota and Arizona. Last May, I attended the high school graduation party of my youngest student. I have realized in the years since I left that first position that I was successful. Most of the students I worked with graduated from high school or eventually got their GEDs. Some students went on to college, community college, or technical school. Throughout the years, these first students I had have kept in touch with me and have contacted me to tell me of their personal lives, successes, and troubles. They have sought my advice on personal relationships, college applications, and job searches. Many of the students, especially the ones who were the toughest, have thanked me for helping them when I was their teacher.

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