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The self on the page: Using student teachers' written stories as a reflective tool during the student teaching internship

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**THE SELF ON THE PAGE:
USING STUDENT TEACHERS' WRITTEN STORIES AS A REFLECTIVE
TOOL DURING THE STUDENT TEACHING INTERNSHIP**

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Deborah O. Farina

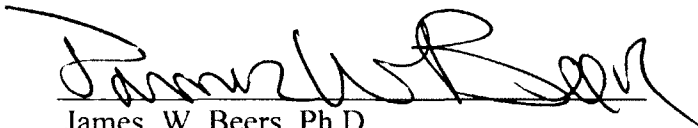
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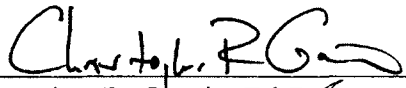
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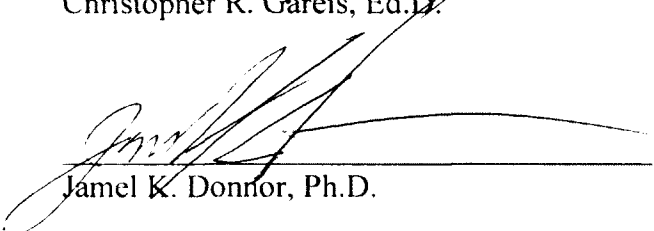
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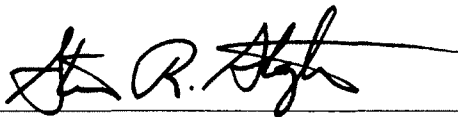
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Dedication

For my mother

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Preface

Undertaking this study and writing this dissertation has been both a professional journey and a personal one. Throughout the time I have worked on this, it has been important for me to engage with the material in a way that was meaningful, not only for me, but also for readers. As a result, I have written this dissertation in a mode of discourse that is, perhaps, more informal than expected; I have also included a poem at the beginning of each chapter as a means of introducing and discussing essential elements, while also serving to tie them together. As a result, it has been a pleasure to engage in this work and to explore not only the realm of writing from the student teacher perspective, but also that of myself on the page.

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Abstract

The Self on the Page:

Using Student Teachers' Written Stories as a Reflective Tool During the Student Teaching Internship

Current traditional reflective practices in teacher preparation may be failing to address the needs of teacher candidates in terms of their identity formation as teachers. This qualitative study, utilizing a participant group of six graduate students in their student teaching internships at a small public liberal arts university, explored whether writing stories could enable student teachers to make better sense of their internship experiences and develop understanding of who they are as teachers. After an initial training session on “story,” data were collected at three key points during the student teacher internship. This data consisted of participants’ written stories, focus group discussions, and individual exit interviews. The data were then systematically coded using grounded theory methodology. The six themes resulting from this study indicate support for written stories as an alternative or parallel reflective tool to traditional journaling in teacher preparation.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Background of the Topic

When I was twenty-one

my mother planted her feet
in front of my Honda
and dared me to run her over

At that strong age
I'd no head for thought

But when she draped herself
across the hood, embracing it
like a barrel

I did think a moment

right foot a hair's-breadth from the gas
engine idling impatiently

mascara slashing our cheeks
like war paint

When I first wrote this poem more than five years ago, it looked very different from the way it looks today. Originally, it was a lot longer, mostly full of bits and pieces that distracted from the essence of what I was trying to say; and it also had a different title—in fact, it has had about six different titles, each one trying to focus the direction of the poem.

Here is the reason, though, I include this poem as part of this introduction: I am a writer. Of course, I am a lot of other things; but in the entire realm that makes up the *what* of me—wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, worker, chef, etc...—writing is the one thing most central to the *who*. It is the thread that carries throughout all of my lived

experience; it is how I make sense of the world and my place within it. But as with this poem, I do not always say things the way I want the first time out. Maybe the perspective is off, or the details are not right, or a line break is not shifting emphasis correctly. So I play around with what I have written, trying to get it right because getting it right is of the utmost importance. But what does this mean, *getting it right*? When I am writing, I engage in an act of deep reflection that allows me not only to relive an experience and retell it in a way that brings order out of chaos, but also affords me the incredible gift of *enacting meaning*. In short, through writing, I realize what I know, what I think, what I feel—and who I am.

For the past nine years, I have worked at a small public liberal arts university, teaching graduate courses in education to pre-service teachers. But for more than 15 years prior to this, I taught high school English— literature, drama, grammar, composition—to adolescents. My favorite subject to teach was creative writing. I loved getting to know my students through the things they wrote and seeing them blossom through a meaningful piece of work. But what I came to realize is that even though I had left the K-12 world behind, the K-12 world had not left me. I missed the frenzy of writers in the midst of a hot-streak. I missed the struggle of students wrestling with words. I missed the sense of accomplishment they felt when a piece got finished. And, most of all, I missed the discoveries they made about themselves along the way.

Thus, as I found myself nearing the completion of my doctoral program, I began to wonder if there was a way I could meld my current love of preparing teachers with my first one, writing, and entwine them both into a coherent dissertation. At the time, I was reading *The Freedom Writer's Diary* (1999), a collection of autobiographical stories

written by teacher Erin Gruwell and 150 of her students from Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. These stories riveted me. They had personality. They had depth. They had insight and heart and drama and guts. I could picture these students wrestling with words. I could picture them celebrating a successful piece. Most of all, I could *picture them*; I could see them and feel them. And, what is more, by the end of the book, I *knew* these students—probably more so than they had intended. And so I realized that writing stories was the perfect vehicle for which I had been searching. Through writing stories, I could not only bridge my two loves, but also explore something about teacher preparation that had been challenging me since I first took the job.

In my role as Director of Student Teaching at the university where I work, I require student teaching interns to write reflective journals about their internship experiences. Twice, I have adjusted the requirements for the reflective journal—and twice I have come up feeling there is still something lacking. When I read my students' journals, I often develop a general understanding of what happened in a situation and how they chose to deal with it; I even learn why they dealt with it in that way and what they would do differently if it happened again. And while all of this is good and has unquestionable value, unfortunately, it is usually what Moon (2004) calls “descriptive reflection” (p. 134)—reflection that gives the who/ what/ when/ where/ why/how—rather than “deepen[ed] reflection” (Moon, 2004, p. 135)—reflection that tells how students felt going through their experiences and whether this “felt feeling” informed them about their practice, who they were as teachers, or, more importantly, as human beings.

It is this “felt experience” that I became interested in, the “deepened reflection,” the nuance, the subtext, that informs both reader *and* writer. As a reader, I wanted to

know if, by writing their stories, my student teachers, like the kids at Wilson High, could show me more about themselves and what they were going through in their internships by reliving an experience rather than recounting it. Most importantly, I wanted to know if, by writing and sharing their stories, the student teachers themselves could grow both as individuals and as future teachers.

Statement of the Problem

While I am a relatively new to the teacher preparation field, it has not taken me long to realize that two of the loudest buzz words are “reflective practitioner.” In a majority of preparation courses students take at my university (and at other universities), they are required to engage in some act of reflection. Teacher educators want to know, *What did you see? What did you think? What did you learn from this experience?* This suggests to me, then, that as educators preparing educators, we value the notion that reflection improves practice; we believe that the act of delving into *what happened-what worked-what didn't-and-why* assists our students in making sense of their experiences and ultimately helps them to become effective teachers.

From both purposeful and accidental reflective acts, we can see that reflection, which comes from the Latin *reflectere*, meaning “to bend back,” can actively assist new practitioners in “think[ing] back on what is seen and heard” (Valli, 1997, p. 68), and in so doing help them make sense of their experiences by providing an avenue for personal and professional growth. Such growth is vital, for as Kagan (1992) notes, “There is some evidence that beginning teachers who fail to reconstruct their images of self as teacher appropriately may encounter frustrations sufficient to drive them to other occupations” (p. 155).

Within this conceptual framework of development from novice-to-expert, then, the need for active, consistent reflection becomes evident; however, as Bullough (1990, p. 357) notes,

the emphasis [in current teacher preparation programs] on developing skill and rating performances results in a serious oversimplification of the process of becoming a teacher, which must be viewed in relationship to biography and conceptions of self-as-teacher and to the teacher's entire life situation... (as cited in Kagan, 1992, p.12)

The issue, then, becomes not necessarily one of *why* encourage reflection but *how*. Syllogistically, the current argument goes something like this: (1) Reflection promotes growth from novice to expert. (2) Cassie is a novice. (3) Therefore, Cassie should engage in reflection to move toward becoming an expert. In fact, it is under this premise that many schools of education across the United States (and, indeed, worldwide) have instituted strategies for promoting the reflective process. But the question is, are we engaging in the right kinds of reflection?

Bullough and Stokes (1994) write:

[There is] no set of images more slippery, nor perhaps more abstract, yet of greater importance educationally than those associated with conceptions of self, the kind of person we imagine ourself to be, and how that person is supposed to relate to the world...(p. 199)

Yet, when one examines the actual types of reflection being done in most education programs, one comes to realize that, for all its intents and purposes, the way many teacher educators are handling reflection, including myself in my own program, seldom does this.

While we are very good at asking students to address the *what* and the *what next* of their experiences, we often fail to address the *who*.

The Need for Writing Stories as a Reflective Tool

Valli (1997) divides current educational reflective practice into five distinct categories: (1) technical reflection—reflection focused on strategies or skills, often having a research base; (2) reflection-in- and on-action—reflection focused back on significant events; (3) deliberative reflection—reflection around decision-making, utilizing multiple sources; (4) personalistic reflection—reflection centered on personal growth and relationships; and (5) critical reflection—reflection aimed toward social improvement of marginalized groups (pp. 74-79). All of these have inherent problems in what she calls “scope” (p. 80)—meaning deficits either in their quality of thought or selection of content. Despite this deficiency, Valli (1993) finds that technical reflection is the most widely used reflective tool in teacher preparation programs across the country (in Valli, 1997, p. 79). She suggests, however, that use of this one type of tool represents a narrow view of reflective practice and that preparation programs need to adopt a more flexible stance that utilizes multiple reflective means. Reflection, she states,

will be endangered if it becomes merely one of many goals to accomplish. It will also be endangered if undue emphasis is placed on instructional strategies to implement reflection apart from broader considerations of reflective content and improving the quality of students’ thinking. (Valli, 1997, p. 85)

In fact, reflection is at the forefront of the national scene in teacher preparation.

Standard 1c: *Professional and Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills for Teacher*

Candidates of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Standards

(NCATE) (2008) advocates reflection as a means of developing expertise and enhancing student learning (p. 18, 22). Additionally, the Introduction to the *InTasc Model Core Teaching Standards: A Resource for State Dialogue* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011) goes even further, stating, "...teachers must have a deeper understanding of their own frames of reference (e.g., culture, gender, language, abilities, ways of knowing), the potential biases in these frames, and their impact on expectations for and relationships with learners and their families" (p. 3). However, while many of the preparation programs in the United States undoubtedly encourage active reflection on practice, one wonders how many are actually assisting novice teachers in achieving "a deeper understanding of their own frames of reference" (p.3) or in recognizing their "biases" (p. 3) and "impact[s]" (p. 3). In fact, it is probable that even within the realm of Valli's technical reflection, the actual structure of the reflective responses varies widely across programs, falling into everything from wide-open, student-chosen topics, to more narrow, proscriptive prompts that focus on specific, other-directed concepts or issues. And while the criteria for the reflective journals in my own program falls somewhere in the middle (we do provide direction as to *how* the reflection should be written, but not as to *what* it should be written about), I am concerned. I feel, as a field, we are dangerously close to what Valli (1993) calls "indoctrination" (in Valli, 1997, p. 81)—having too much reflective criteria established by outsiders, leaving little or no room for teacher input (p. 81)—and thereby we are potentially creating a situation which "tend[s] to devalue teachers' [and student teachers'] voices and craft knowledge" (p. 81).

For me, this is an unwelcome realization. As a teacher educator, I value reflection for its ability to focus student teachers' attention on what happened and what is next; but

as a writer, I value voice and identity— and I feel the type of reflective requirements I have been making as Director of Student Teaching may not be giving my students the opportunity to make meaning for themselves.

Writing is both a constructivist and an interpretivist act in that when writers write, they consciously and subconsciously order their experience in terms of personal and social worlds. Events that occur in the classroom, and thus during the student teaching internship, cannot be divorced from their context, as there are myriad interactions, both intended and unintended, that happen daily within the four walls. However, with traditional reflection, like the weekly journals I require in my program, we often do precisely this—divorce our students' experiences from the context in which they happen, and in so doing, unintentionally take away the opportunity for individual professional identities to grow.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) observe that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 2). In fact, as Bruner (2004) writes, “We seem to have no other way of describing ‘lived time’ save in the form of narrative” (p. 692). Because stories are dependent upon selection of *an* event, rather than a brief chronicling of many (as with much reflective journaling), I believe writing stories can provide student teachers with a means to delve more deeply into their personal experiences; and further, because of the freedom from outside criteria, such as superimposed structures or guidelines for content, writing their stories can also give student teachers a voice. After all, arguably, there is no such thing as a meaningless story. The stories we live, tell, and write always have meaning—if only, and perhaps most importantly, to ourselves.

Operational Definitions of “Deep Reflection” and “Story”

Deep reflection, as previously mentioned, is best described as reflection that tells how students feel going through their experiences and whether this “felt feeling” informs them about their practice, who they are as teachers, or, more importantly, as human beings. In other words, it is reflection that involves not only the *what* of student teaching, but also the *who*, encompassing thoughtful consideration of both self-as-teacher, as well as role. As such, deep reflection is often emotional, conflicted, and self-revelatory.

Story, on the other hand, is more difficult to define. The kinds of personal stories I am interested in as reflective tools are closely akin to autobiography and memoir—both forms of narrative—which is defined by Zinsser (1987) as “some portion of life” (p. 21). But unlike autobiography, which proceeds in a line from birth forward, memoir/narrative focuses on a particular aspect of life or experience. In this sense, memoir/narrative puts lives in perspective, both for the reader and for the writer, and as such is closer to the heart of true storytelling. Thus, I deliberately chose the word “story” for this study, because the words “autobiography,” “memoir,” and “narrative” have so many varying definitions. To illustrate, Rudrum (2005) cites over seven definitions of narrative, three of which include, (1) “...the representation of an event or sequence of events” (Genette, 1982, p. 127, as cited in Rudrum, 2005, p. 195); (2) “...the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events” (Scholes, 1981, p. 205, as cited in Rudrum, 2005, p. 195); and (3) “...the representation of at least one event” (Prince, 1982, p. 43, as cited in Rudrum, 2005, p. 195).

What further complicates the matter, though Rudrum agrees with most scholars that narratives move in a logical temporal sequence, is that event and chronology “[are]

not, in and of [themselves], enough to provide a full definition of narrative” (Rudrum, 2005, p. 198). Instead, he asserts that a narrative is distinguishable by its intended *use*. To illustrate, he gives the example of an instruction manual for assembling a model airplane. Although sequentially the instructions could be read as narrative, generally they are not, because neither their use nor their structural conventions call for it. Nevertheless, some could still call it narrative, and therein lies the problem. Thus, for the purpose of this study, I chose the more relatable term *story*.

By “writing stories,” I mean the specific re-creation of a situation or event *as it actually happened*. Stories are not the kind of reflections for which I typically ask my student teachers, though, which often go something like, *Choose one positive and one negative event that happened in your classroom this week. Discuss what happened, why it matters, and what you will do next*. What I am talking about here, whether in the form of a personal diary entry or a chapter from a best-selling novel, is an artifact characterized by its purposeful re-creation of events and situations, in temporal sequence (meaning, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end), containing all or most of the essential elements of story (plot, character, theme, setting, dialogue, conflict), *so that meaning is made*—in other words, it shows, not tells. Consider the following three excerpts:

Example one. I did a lot of organizing, planning, and grading this week, making me feel quite a bit closer to a “real” teacher. Now that I am getting into the more technical activities that teachers do, I feel much more prepared and sure of how I will organize my classroom and grade book when I become a teacher on my own. It was so hard to keep track of which student was absent for what assignment and how long they had to make it up that I have thought of a new way to organize myself for absences: I will be sure to set aside any and all work for every absent student from this day on, and write the date that it will be due on it so that once they return, they know what they missed and when it needs to be turned in by. Another positive event that occurred this week was the eagerness of all of my honors classes to earn marbles. Extra effort was being put into working quietly

on their journals, moving quickly to the next activity, and volunteering to pass out papers. I was so happy to see them working so hard that a few marbles were easy to give to each class! (Christopher Newport University Student Teacher Reflective Journal, 2010)

Example two. Dear Diary,

5:00 A.M.—The sound of my alarm clock woke me to a dark room this morning. The sun wasn't out yet, so I decided not to get up. My clock saw things differently and kept beeping.

So I thanked my clock by throwing it on the floor. The beeping stopped. As I looked over to see where the clock had landed, I realized I, too, was lying on the floor. Why? Because I don't have a bed. I turned on the lights so I could get started on my day. I walked past the closet mirror in the room to get my clothes. The mirror showed my sleeping space—a thick blanket and a pillow.

The mirror's reflection also revealed that the room does not belong to me. It made me feel sad. Almost at the point of crying, I grabbed my clothes from the closet and walked down the long hallway to the bathroom. During my shower, I cried. Tears mixed with the water streaming down my face. I welcomed the pain that came with the tears. It's the only way I can deal with my current situation. The room, hallway, and bathroom don't belong to me. This is not my home. My mom is down the hall sleeping in a room, but this is still not my home. I don't have a home anymore. (*Diary 24 in The Freedom Writers Diary, 1999, p. 51*)

Example three. The student's eyes were squinted as they stared at the screen waiting for their turn to come to read the next line. It was musical to hear their voices come together and read something line by line together. The best part was that they got it and they were enraptured by it. "Wow that was deep," came from one dark corner of the classroom. I felt a smile creep across my face.

"What's this poem about?" I asked. Hands shot up everywhere. "Okay Janna, what do you think?"

"It's about love."

"Okay, what about love?"

"Her mom doesn't want her to have it."

"Good! Why doesn't her mom want her to have this love? Micah?"

"Because she thinks she's too young."

"Great! How many of you have felt that way before where you say you truly care about someone or truly love someone, but no one around you believes you?" Almost all the hands in the room go up. "How many of you have been

told that you can't know what true love really is because you are too young?"
Hands stay up, more join.

"Okay, this time just listen to the words."

I hear students shift in their seats.

"Wait, this was a poem, not a song! This poem is a song?"

They're starting to get it, I smile to myself. I just proved to them that music is poetry. They had no idea that they listen to poetry every day and now the light bulbs are going off - awesome.

My favorite song starts to play and I slowly walk around the outskirts of the room and watch the students' faces; they are all glued to the smart board watching the youtube clip of the animated lyrics while the song plays. It's amazing how still the room is. Not one student is distracting another. I get chills thinking about how they will be able to understand poetry even better now because of my lesson. *This feeling rocks. This is why I teach.* (Susan Story 3, Pilot Study, 2011).

In the first example, the more traditional reflective journal, I get a sense of what the student teacher has been struggling with, as well as what he or she is beginning to get a handle on. In other words, I know the truth of the circumstances. But in the second and third examples, I see evidence of circumstance as well as deeper reflection. Because these examples are more storied, I have not only a clearer idea of the contextual factors of each situation, but also an understanding of what the writers themselves are thinking and experiencing. In short, the first one—which is primarily descriptive reflection—gives me a sense of the *what* and *what next*; whereas the second and third bring voice and identity—the *who*—exhibiting, as Bleakely (2005) says, movement beyond factual truth toward establishment of personal meaning.

Written as such, I believe stories can tell us much about not only the experiences of student teachers, but can also give both teacher educators and the interns insights into their own complexities of thought, action, and emotion. Not only do written stories lend themselves to both authorial and audience interpretation—such as that which Gruwell's

students experienced as writers when writing *The Freedom Writers Diary*, and that which I experienced as a reader while reading their work—but the very act of re-creating an event and bringing it again to life can actually *construct* interpretation, thereby creating meaning.

Consider the poem I included at the beginning of this chapter. Although it is very much condensed, one recognizes that some sort of story has occurred—in this case, a conflict between my mother and me —and that some sort of meaning-making is called for. Because it is a poem, it does not have all of the details that a full-blown story might have; rather, it is pared down to its most essential elements. However, when I initially started to write, the poem was full of details about the argument, what we were doing when it happened, what my mother said/ I said, how we ended up outside with me in the car. But by the time I'd revised it, it was more in the state it lives in now, a distillation of a single event into its simplified meaning. In order to get it to that point, however, I had to engage in a deep examination of what this whole event meant. Was it merely another late night argument, a typical mother-and-daughter clash, or was it something else? As Zinsser (1994) explains, “Ultimately the product that any writer has to sell is not the subject being written about, but who he or she is” (p. 5). In phenomenological terms, this notion is best expressed as “lived experience”—the idea that this is *my* story according to *me* and what *I* went through. In other words, through writing the poem, I had to come to grips with who I was at that moment. That the argument occurred and included a degree of high drama is something I am certain other 21-year-old daughters have gone through with their mothers; but it took the act of writing about it for me to understand that, for me

personally, it was more than that: My mother and I were at war, and I was not the victim, but rather one of two equally strong opponents.

Purpose of the Study

This study, in which a small group of student teachers were invited to write and share stories about their internship experiences, is situated within the conceptual triad of (1) novice-to-expert literature, (2) the role reflective writing plays in growth, and (3) the ability of writing stories to enact meaning and promote professional and personal growth in identity. Through writing and sharing their stories, student teachers had an opportunity to reflect deeply not only on their experiences but also on who they were as teaching professionals. The purpose of this study, then, was ultimately to discover if writing stories could promote sense-making—i.e., some new realization about self, others, situation, or experience—and also to explore whether writing their stories enabled student teachers to reflect deeply on their internship experiences, and in so doing develop better understanding of who they are as teachers.

Research Question

In this study on writing stories as a reflective tool during the student teaching internship, there was one primary research question, which was synonymous with the study's purpose:

In what ways, if any, does writing stories about their student teaching experiences assist student teachers in reflecting deeply and making sense of their experiences and in developing their personal and professional identities?

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Making Mandalas While Waiting for the Death of My Mother

You, making bruise-colored Mandalas,
inking lines in hopes that clarity will come,
that beauty will arise and infuse
this scene—you will not see me
though you vigilantly watch
as you have watched and will watch
each moment till she's gone

When you rise to eat
When you nod off over
the geometry of your book—
when humanness reminds you
of your earthly limits and, giving in,
you drift away from your careful guard

— that is when I'll enter—

not dark-cloaked with a scythe
in my hand; not in shrill thunder
astride a fiery horse—

but when your frailty
speaks

I will dance into her room
lightly, with a smile,
in patent shoes with silver soles
that cast a tiny spark,
and take her, lover-gently,
in my white-gloved palms

Astaire and Rogers

As with the poem I included at the beginning of Chapter One, this poem, too, involves a situation with my mother. I include this one here not to predicate a discussion of writers and writing, but rather to illustrate several of the conceptual strands I have had to follow in conducting this review of the literature. These strands—(1) growth from

novice to expert, (2) the role of reflection in growth, (3) the importance of identity formation, and (4) how stories address all of these three—may not seem apparent from the poem at first. However, if one defines my professional role within the poem’s context as being that of “daughter,” then one might better perceive the strands about which I speak.

As a daughter dealing with the imminent death of her mother, I found that I had to grow quickly from a novice to an expert in the area of handling death. I also found that reflecting on my experiences enabled me to gain insight not only into myself, but also into the situation at hand and the whole concept of death. My identity in the role of mother-daughter was about to change, and along with it my preconceived notions of what it meant to be a daughter. Thus, writing this poem assisted me in making sense of a critical situation that was highly emotional. While it is true that Death did not speak directly to me, nor that I was actually coloring Mandalas at the time I conceived of the poem, the fact that these are these departures from literal truth does not detract from the meaning it created.

This literature review, then, situated within the strands enumerated above, establishes the idea that writing stories about one’s personal experiences may be a viable reflective tool for use in teacher preparation programs.

Novices-to-Experts

That there are novices and experts within the field of education is certainly no surprise, for, within any existing field there always have been, and always will be, people who are at the beginning of their careers as well as seasoned veterans. What makes the education profession perhaps a bit different from others is that there is so much at stake,

which creates a sense of urgency that perhaps does not exist in some other professions. Thousands of classrooms of PK-12 students and their parents count on teachers being competent in their abilities to know their content and to foster student learning. Berliner (1988), however, suggests that it takes 3-4 years for a novice to move to the level of competency. Juxtapose this against the fact that so many new teachers are leaving in their first 3-5 years (30-50%, depending upon which report one reads), and the reality of having fewer and fewer competent teachers in our classrooms becomes a very genuine risk—and the sense of urgency even more pronounced.

Berliner (1988), Fuller and Brown (1975), and Kagan (1992) have each identified various stages of teacher development. Novices, according to Berliner (1988) depend primarily on their acquisition and formation of standardized procedural routines in order to move toward experts. Fuller and Brown (1975), however, posit that novices are initially concerned with self, and growth toward expert is marked by a distinct turning outward toward awareness of pupils and their learning needs. He terms these stages *self-, task-, and impact-oriented*. Both Berliner's (1988) and Fuller and Brown's (1975) theories are somewhat supported by Kagan's (1992) literature review of 40 studies dealing with learning-to-teach. However, unlike Fuller and Brown's (1975) model that suggests that preoccupation with self is a negative stage of development, Kagan's (1992) research implies a model of teacher development that

accounts for the shift in concerns from self to pupils in terms of the resolution of a novice's image of self as teacher. The new model suggests that the novice's initial inward focus constitutes necessary and valuable behavior, for, until the initial self-image is adapted and reconstructed, the novice cannot progress. (p. 161)

This necessity of initial inward focus is supported by Symanoskie and Hall (2003), who in studying preservice-, student-, and inservice teachers, discovered, like Fuller and Brown (1975), a distinct higher concern with self in novices versus concern with tasks in experienced teachers. This suggests, as discussed by Tan et al (1994), that novices require different approaches to meet the demands of their jobs, especially as they relate to student learning, content knowledge, and reflective practice. This is especially true because novice teachers process information less easily and at a much lower level than experienced teachers, who also have numerous ways of handling situations (Lin, 1999). Thus, because they do not process information as easily or as quickly, nor perceive themselves to have as many options for action, novices need direct opportunities to assist them in identifying their concerns and resources (Symanoskie & Hall, 2003) and to share their thinking about their teaching decisions (Burn, Hagger, Mutton, & Everton 2003). One way to do this is through the vehicle of reflection.

The Role of Reflection in Promoting Growth

In a study by Norton (1997), novice teachers identified what they believed to be the five qualities of effective teaching. Among these qualities was the ability to be a reflective thinker. John Dewey (1997), a philosopher and educator writing in the early 20th century, defines reflection as, “[the] active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 6). It’s importance lies in its two distinct “subprocesses” (p. 9), which he terms “a state of perplexity, hesitancy, or doubt” (p. 9) and “an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts with serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief” (p. 9). In other words, for Dewey

(1997), reflection involves both *sequence* of ideas and *consequence*—“a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome” (p. 2-3). He believes it to be central to individual learning and growth, as well as that engaging in reflection will eventually help individuals develop grounds for their own belief.

It wasn't until about fifty years after Dewey that Schön (1983) began writing about the epistemology of practice, in which he divided reflective thought into what he called reflection-in-action—the skill of “thinking on one's feet”—and reflection-on-action—the ability to reconstruct events. Although both are central to professional educational practice, reflection-on-action—the thinking we do about something after it has occurred—may be the more valued, for as Schön (1983) observed,

...as a practice becomes more repetitive and routine...the practitioner may miss important opportunities to think about what he is doing...he may find that he is drawn into patterns of error which he cannot correct....(p. 61)

Thus, it would follow, then, that through systematically and deliberately thinking back on events, situations, or experiences, practitioners can improve areas of their practice they may have otherwise overlooked. Berliner (1988) found that novices, compared to experts, have difficulty interpreting and making sense of what they see, and he suggests that reflection done after the fact, mitigated by intervening time, may present a means of enabling them to grow toward experts. This is supported by Dunlap (2006), who in using guided reflective journal entries with both undergraduate and doctoral computer science students, found that written reflection helped bridge the gap between theory and practice and influenced their perceptions of their own abilities. Further, Peel and Shortland (2004) note that in their own conscious use of reflection as student teachers in higher education,

they “experienced a sense of discovery of both the external (the classroom) and the internal (our selves) learning environments” (p. 50).

Ferry and Ross-Gordon (1988) used Schön’s theories to conduct their own study of 52 novice and experienced educators. What they discovered is that experience alone is not the best indicator of reflective practice; rather, teachers who do not regularly and deliberately engage in reflection—whether novice or veteran—are closer to novices in their practice, versus teachers who are deliberately reflective, who are more similar to experts. This suggests a definitive link between the deliberate act of reflection and professional growth, which Kelly (2006) calls “teacher learning,” (p. 514), the process by which novices move toward expertise. Kelly (2006) further suggests that reflective writing, particularly autobiographical writing, may be the key to this growth (p. 517), an idea that is corroborated by various others (Bolton, Field, & Thompson, 2006; Braid, 1996; Bruner, 2001; Jackson, 1997; Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Kelly (2006) also states that *affordances*—those things novice teachers expect about what can be said, done, or thought as teachers—cannot be divorced from how they see themselves within that context. This is supported by Kagan (1992), who also believes that the pre-existing beliefs novices hold about themselves and about their profession must be modified in order for growth to occur (p. 142). Kelly (2006) suggests that creating opportunities in which teachers are encouraged to be “mindful of issues of identity and affordance might allow them to develop more robust preferred identities and so be more deliberate in their actions and...stances” (p. 514). This closely relates to the important role of identity formation in the growth from novice to expert.

The Importance of Identity Formation

As mentioned in Chapter One, Bullough and Stokes (1994) discuss that the “slippery” and “abstract” “conceptions of the self” (p. 199) are extremely important educationally. If this is so, then logically, it would follow that the areas of PK-12 and higher education that should most be thinking about the addressing self-concept are those dealing most with areas likely to cause changes to it. One such area is teacher preparation.

Arthur Levine’s (2006) study, *Educating School Teachers*, suggests that three out of five teacher preparation program (TPP) graduates do not feel prepared for the rigors of the classroom (p.32). Further, he finds that TPPs, on the whole, are seriously falling into what he calls “irrelevance”—not so much because teachers no longer need specific, explicit training and preparation, but rather, he believes, because the kind of training they are receiving is no longer appropriate. He suggests that the current educational turn from focusing on teaching to focusing on learning is at the root of the problem, primarily because TPPs are preparing teachers for classrooms that no longer exist (p. 12) in today’s accountability focused world.

So what, then, is the role of the TPP? At the heart of it, it is to prepare novices to become competent teachers in today’s classrooms. TPPs attempt to do this through both classroom- and field-centered experiences, bridging the gap between educational theory and practice in as meaningful and efficient a way as possible, But what I am wondering is, if in doing so, TPPs are forgetting about another important purpose: assisting teacher candidates in bridging the gap between *their own* personal theories and personal practice.

When Kagan (1992) developed her stages of teacher development and linked those stages closely with identity formation, she delved into the realm of social psychology and, in particular, the concept of social cognition—the study of how information is processed and knowledge is created. Howard and Renfrow (2003) discuss this concept as closely associated with the concept of schema—those cognitive frameworks we hold about ourselves, others, and the world, the “everyday theories that shape how people view and use information” (p. 263). In particular, Howard and Renfrow (2003) identify three specific schema: self, person, and role.

Person schemas organize knowledge about particular individuals or specific types of people.... *Self schemas*...organize knowledge about one’s self...[and] *role schemas* organize knowledge about the norms and expectations associated with particular social positions. (Howard & Renfrow, 2003, p. 263)

Howard and Renfrow’s (2003) discussion of the interaction of schemas, such that one can influence the development of another, supports Kelly’s (2006) findings about the overlapping influences on student-as-teacher identity. This finding is further supported by research on cognitive structures. Because cognitive structures are generally stable, Howard and Renfrow (2003) state that recent social psychological research has turned toward examination of the self-concept in order to study enduring cognitive changes. Citing the work of Hormuth (1990), Howard and Renfrow (2003), like Kelly (2006), suggest that significant change in an individual’s self-concept may be directly tied to “changes in the ecological system” (p. 271), i.e., an individual’s immediate “audience or active group” (p. 271). This translates, then, to student teachers’ new relationships with

cooperating teachers, students, and other peers within a school, and also to their views of what makes an effective teacher (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008).

Student teachers enter their student teaching internships with preconceived mental images of what it means to be a teacher (Kagan, 1992). These mental images represent both person and role schemas, in that student teachers begin their internships with mental images of what a teacher *is* (person schema) as well as what a teacher *does* (role schema). The person schema is formed from particular past experiences with teachers, who then become the embodiment of the person schema for “teacher.” Thus, a “teacher” may be someone like “Mrs. Smith, my 6th grade math teacher,” a person who possesses vast content knowledge, manages students well, attends to the learning needs of students, is caring, friendly, professional, etc... Similarly, student teachers’ formation of role schemas are dependent upon their past experiences with what a teacher does. This mental image may look something like: *A teacher is someone who gives information to students*. The self schema, then, of student teachers *as* teachers, must necessarily become influenced and defined by the student teachers’ preconceptions of the role and person schemas, because the schema of self-as-teacher has not yet been completely developed. Instead, it is initially a hybrid of the students’ own preconceptions of person and role, which come from the students’ past experiences with teachers and classrooms (i.e., social contexts).

Understandably, then, as student teachers actively begin the process of teaching and assume the role of teachers themselves, they must confront challenges to their existing schemas, which can potentially cause conflict. This is supported by a case study conducted by Upadhyay (2009), which concluded that telling one’s story may promote identity formation and prevent alienation when experiences do not connect to previous

notions concerning self or place. This is because identities are constantly changing as a result of the various tasks with which people engage, and, as a result, individuals often “see themselves in response to the actions of others toward them” (Kelly, 2006, p. 513). This situation can be further complicated when student teachers see their identities as different from socially-assigned roles. (See also Peter, Ng, & Thomas, 2011).

One possible way to address this conflict is through the act of story writing. In a discussion of writing programs at the university level, Rose (1985) states:

Writing is central to the shaping and directing of certain modes of cognition, is integrally involved in learning, is a means of defining self and defining reality, is a means of representing and contextualizing information...[it] is not just a skill with which one can present or analyze knowledge. It is essential to the very existence of certain kinds of knowledge. (as cited in National Writing Project, p. 24)

Stories, Identity, and Meaning

Narratives, writes Grossman (1982) mediate between our experiences and life, knowledge and its object; it is a means of negotiating the real (p.415). Bruner (2004) suggests that not only do narratives and stories mediate, they are central to life itself—we become the narratives we invent about ourselves. (p.694). In fact, they are a “mirror experience” (Tooth & Renshaw, 2009), enabling us to show our selves to ourselves.

According to McAdams (2006), stories “[put] things together for a person...they lend coherence to a life by organizing its many discordant features into synchronic and diachronic structures of character and plot” (p. 13). And who can deny this? As people, we are inundated with stories. They are present on our televisions, our print media, our

Internet, and in virtually every aspect of our personal and professional lives. They are the means by which we tell our spouses about our day, and also how we relate to our employers and friends. We are daily creators and consumers of stories, attracted to that which illuminates self, and to that which illuminates community and world.

As author and teacher Ronald Cramer (2001) puts it, “We write to learn, to teach ourselves, to justify our existence, to recall, to discover our mind, to empty our mind, to know, to think” (Introduction, p. xiii). Yet for all this potential power, writing one’s story has somehow become relegated to the worlds of K-6 teaching and semester-long courses in creative writing. In my experience, it seems that by the time most students reach middle school, cultivating the “soft” craft of storytelling has often been forsaken for the “harder” modalities of exposition and research. This case is even truer in the realm of higher education, where often the only means of telling one’s story are the abbreviated reflective assignments sometimes called for by instructors. As noted in Chapter One, Valli (1997) believes that TPPs are placing too much emphasis on single types of reflection, particularly technical reflection, and that a wider variety of reflective opportunity is called for, particularly those types of reflection (such as story) that value teacher’s voice and craft. This reliance on one or two reflective strategies seems a certain oversight, for, as Stein (2004) writes, “All knowing, and consequently all clinical work, is mediated by who we are, consciously and unconsciously, and not only by what we have been trained to do professionally” (p. 178). Thus, engaging in the act of writing one’s story, or what Valli (1997) calls personalistic reflection (p. 77), may be a viable means of bringing not only alternative and varied means of reflection into TPPs, but also of allowing teacher candidates to meld *who they are* with *what they do*. This is due to the

“integrative ability” (McAdams, 2006, p. 13) of stories “to put things together for the person, [to] lend coherence to a life by organizing its many discordant features” (p. 6) into organized structures.

Because writing stories is dependent upon selection of *an* event, rather than a brief chronicling of several, it can also provide individuals with the ability to delve more deeply into their own perceptions of their experiences. Further,

writing about stressful events can...be a self-regulative process, in which writers represent themselves handling challenging experiences, and, over time, [craft] effective selves that, whether true or not, are the basis for ongoing self reflection and motivation. (Daiute & Buteau, 2002, p. 56)

In point of fact, the very act of re-creating a chosen event and bringing it again to life may not only be a basis for reflection and motivation, but also actually *bring about* interpretation. Why is this so?

Convery (1997) writes of his own experiences with creating stories, “I learned that the act of writing stimulated the generation of new ideas and relationships, and that writing down my experience provided a concrete focus for reflection” (p. 136). This is supported by Bruner (1984), who believes that the language of narrative, or story, suggests a cognitive thought process that is “factive [affective] and functional... [rather than] functional and formal” (as cited in Eisner, 1985, p. 105). In other words, *stories* are about the real world, real people, the real occurrences in it, and are full of personal and subjective substance. As such, written stories not only tell much about individual experience, but also give insight into complexities of thought, action, and emotion. As

Bleakley (2005) notes, storytelling can give us meaning, whereas more scientific writing can only give us truth (p. 536).

But what does this mean, *meaning versus truth*?

Because the actions and thoughts of one's life are situated within a particular place and time, narratives, or stories, can enable a means of reflection in which "experience and significance may be arrested and examined at given moments in its progress" (Grossman, p. 405). Thus, in re-creating events, "narratives supply endings through which the individual events ... may be rationalized" (p. 405). This idea of rationalization implies a sense of "untruth" or "perceived truth" rather than literal fact and indicates a certain degree of "untruth" as an inherent factor in stories. However, while it is true that the very nature of writing a story involves an act of "restorying"—meaning that certain details may be included or excluded, magnified or minimized, at the author's discretion—Freeman (2006) proposes,

The bottom line is, there is plenty of meaning to go around....[stories] are extremely valuable for showing how identity gets renegotiated and reconstructed in and through social interaction, and, perhaps most centrally, they are a lot 'closer to home.' (p. 132)

"The central concern," writes Bruner (1991), "is not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (p. 6),

[for] eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide self-telling or life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life.'" (Bruner, 1991, p. 694)

“Stories,” state Burchell and Dyson (2000),” convey a view of the world—the writer’s view—and in that sense they are ‘true’ (p. 447).

However, because of this apparent incongruity between perceptions of truth vs. fiction, I turned to the literature generated in the humanities to establish writing stories as a valid means of reflection. Ochs and Capps (1996) suggest, “Narratives [or stories] are versions of reality” (p. 21) that “shape how we attend to and feel about events. They are partial representations and evocations of the world as *we know it* [italics added]” (p. 21). Braid (1996) calls this a “reframing of perceived events” (p. 9), which is necessary to “grasp the coherence that informs the narrative [story] and gives it meaning” (p. 9). In fact, “the construction of [story] is an essential activity of the human mind. The articulation of experience into story is the primary process through which individual and collective subjects disclose themselves” (Grossman, 2002, p. 398). Thus, meaning- and sense-making—not literal truth—are integral to the idea of identity formation.

Kelchtermans (2008) proposes that writing stories performs both “referential” and “evaluative” functions (p. 28), allowing individuals not only to relate and describe their experiences, but also to position themselves within them. This is necessary because personal stories exist within the larger context of social stories (McAdams, 2006; Watson, 2009), and the point of conflict or struggle is often at their intersection. This is particularly true of student teachers, who, as newcomers, are often peripheral to the community of school and need viable ways to establish their identities within that culture. This is borne out by Viczko and Wright (2010) who, in a self-study examining their own movement from graduate students to teacher educators, discovered that writing stories about their personal experiences gave them greater insight into this transitional period

and afforded them the opportunity to put their changing identity at the head of their reflective thinking and practice.

Interestingly, fiction, which is most often taken to be an invented, or “untrue,” means of storying, has also been shown to have reflective merit. A self-study by Convery (1993) concluded that even though the characters and events of his writing were “made up,” the very act of writing in this fictional way “allow[ed] even greater control of what [could] be interpreted, as primarily the writer acknowledge[d] what [was] significant” (p. 148). “The fiction” he writes, “[was] contrived; my personal responses and realization on revisiting the fiction [was] not” (p. 149).

Research on Writing Stories in Teacher Preparation.

The idea of using stories as a means of reflection in teacher preparation programs—which, in the literature, can mean anything from personal/ autobiographical writing to traditional reflective journaling—is relatively new to education, though other fields such as medicine, anthropology, and psychology have a longer history of collecting personal stories to glimpse learning and growth (see Hinckley, 2005; Sierpina, 2006). Some of these, as with Hinckley’s (2005) aphasia study, and Kuechle, Holzhauer, Lin, Brulle, and Morrison’s (2010) vignette study, also seek to promote understanding of practice through the perspective of others. However, studies that examine story in the sense that I am defining it, and in particular those conducted with preservice teachers, are scarce.

Beginning in 1994, Bullough and Stokes studied the use of metaphor, which they define as a story’s theme or line, as a means of developing beginning teachers’ self-concept. This was closely followed by Rust (1999), who used oral storytelling and group

discussion in his work with preservice, novice, and experienced teachers. Though neither of these studies used written stories, both used the *relating* of stories, whether orally or through metaphor, as a vehicle to promote teacher identity exploration.

Two studies (Mathison & Pohan, 2007; Kuechle, Holzhauser, Lin, Brulle, & Morrison, 2010) used a form of story with two different groups of practitioners. In the Mathison and Pohan (2007) study, experienced teachers wrote stories about their first two years of teaching. The participants then met with each other to discuss their stories and write reflections about their writing experiences. Later, these stories were given to preservice teachers in an educational psychology class to be read and discussed. Findings from this study suggest that, for the experienced teachers, the writing was cathartic, and made them more aware of student perspectives, interactions with peers, and the emotional significance of sharing their stories. For the preservice students, reading experienced teachers' stories fostered an awareness of broader educational issues beyond the story itself, and also gave insight into the complex nature of teaching (Mathison & Pohan, 2007, p. 69-70).

Similarly, Kuechle, Holzhauser, Lin, Brulle, and Morrison (2010) studied two different groups of preservice teachers. In their study, three elementary education master's students undergoing their student teaching internships wrote seven vignettes focused on specific areas of concern (such as working with a team and classroom management). However, when they wrote their vignettes, they were instructed to do so from the perspective of 10-year-olds. These vignettes were then read by preservice teachers who were in their semester prior to student teaching. One year after the conclusion of the study, comments from the student teacher writers regarding the

experience found that adopting the perspective of one's students gave them "more confidence....and [a] better sense of direction" (Kuechle, Holzhauser, Lin, Brulle, & Morrison, 2010, p. 30), plus "a sense of humor about their own 'greenness' in the role of teacher" (p. 30).

In a third study, conducted by Coia and Taylor (2001), undergraduate preservice students wrote weekly personal narratives after reading texts and action research based on seven course themes, such as identity, curriculum, and multiculturalism/diversity. In addition, they were given guiding questions to help them structure their responses. Using constant comparison analysis, the researchers found that "writing personal narratives became a way to connect educational theory with classroom practice and experience" (Coia & Taylor, 2001, p. 6). As one student wrote,

Because I wrote these pieces, my experience at [the field school] was much more worthwhile. I was able to constructively reflect on my practicum experiences and rethink, expand, and enhance my beliefs from the beginning of the semester...the narratives allowed me to see first hand my growth as a student and future teacher.
(p. 6)

To me, the statement "enhancing beliefs" is interesting, for, as Kagan (1992) notes, preservice teacher's preexisting beliefs are generally inflexible, and the choice of the word "enhancing" suggests that these preexisting beliefs, for this preservice student, were not changed, but rather augmented. However, another student in the Coia and Taylor study (2001) stated that "writing personal narratives was a process of bringing to the surface ideas and beliefs [I] held but of which [I] was not necessarily aware...these narratives forced me to examine many of my own personal philosophies and ideas" (p. 7).

This idea is supported by Convery (1997) who writes about his own self-exploration through story, “I frequently returned to a story and I began to develop an understanding of several aspects of my thinking which I had not realized were so central to my behavior as a teacher” (p. 141). These two statements are important because they suggest the possibility of schematic change, which is a critical first step on the journey from novice to expert.

Another interesting finding regarding the social aspect of narratives/story writing occurs with respect to the element of discussion. In Coia and Taylor’s (2001) study, as with the other two studies mentioned above (Mathison & Pohan, 2007; Kuechle, Holzhauser, Lin, Brulle, & Morrison, 2010), face-to-face interaction about the written work occurred. This parallels the earlier work of Rust (1999), who found that sharing stories became a “way of knowing” and of constructing meaning for his participants. In all three of the above studies, this dimension of group interaction added a power that went beyond what would have been felt if the stories had been written only. Each group also reported experiencing a closer connection with their peers as a result of this sharing and discussion, which “raised students’ confidence about certain teaching ideals and practices and indicated other shortcomings that could be developed” (Coia & Taylor, 2001 p. 12). For Coia and Taylor (2001), this was somewhat surprising.

The tension between the personal and the social evinced by these students reflect one of our initial concerns. We were unclear about the efficacy or even propriety of students sharing their autobiographies. The students, however, clearly saw this aspect of the exercise as one of our most valuable. (p. 12)

This value perhaps occurs because of the various ways in which readers “hear” the messages of others’ writing and relates to the idea of hermeneutics, in that “there is a text...*through* which somebody has been trying to express a meaning and *from* which somebody is trying to extract a meaning” (Bruner, 1991, p. 7). In fact, Amobi (2006) proposes meaning-making only occurs when “interaction with another person or event brings about change, a sense of disequilibrium that causes one to make sense of experience” (p. 27). Thus, according to Atkinson and Mitchell (2010), having an audience makes multiple interpretations—based upon race, gender, culture, etc...—possible. It is the role of TPPs, then, according to Rust (1999) and others (Atkinson & Mitchell, 2010; Pittard, 2006; Raider-Roth, 2011) to deliberately construct opportunities for sharing and collaboration within their certification programs, as intentionally creating these experiences can engage and challenge novice teachers to question and ground their own beliefs.

Discussion

It is generally agreed upon that there is a need for engaging teacher candidates in deliberate reflection as a vital aspect of their growth from novice to expert; similarly, there is agreement that attention to professional identity is of paramount importance in assisting teacher candidates in negotiating the many facets of their chosen careers. Thus, there is a clear link of logic established between written reflection and professional growth. But also emerging from the literature is the idea that central to growth is the importance of sharing one’s experiences in a collaborative setting. As teachers of English will agree, this sharing, or “publishing,” is central to the writing process, as the primary purpose of writing is that it be shared with readers.

What is not clear from the literature is whether the use of narratives—i.e. stories—is a viable means of promoting reflection and expertise. Eight studies (Coia & Taylor, 2001; Convery (2006); Dome et al, 2005; Downey & Holder, 2008; Mathison & Pohan, 2007; Peter, Ng, & Thomas, 2011; Pittard, 2002; Rust, 1999) describe the use of narrative in some capacity with preservice, beginning, and/or veteran teachers, but none of them use the idea of “story,” as I have defined it in Chapter One. The implications of this limited scope, as well as the absence of story as a reflective tool altogether, implies an avenue for further research.

Other implications include the need for TPPs to create opportunities for teacher candidates not only to reflect, but to reflect together in collaborative groups. It follows that if reflection is to be written, then it should also be shared—and shared with peers undergoing similar experiences, not just cooperating teachers or university supervisors. Collaboration illuminates not only the lived experience of the teacher candidate writers, but also provides opportunities for those experiences, in being heard, to be interpreted and made even more meaningful. Although, as Valli (1997) notes, traditional reflective journaling, in which students discuss what happened and what comes next, is still the main type of written reflection used in TPPs today, it should also be noted that she lists personal reflection as one alternative.

As Bolton (2006) observes,

The term *reflective practice* is not a terribly useful one. The metaphor it embodies is limited: a mirror reflection is merely the image of an object directly in front of it—faithfully reproduced back to front. (p. 4)

However, “*reflective practice writing*,”—which I take to include story—“...is a creative adventure right through the [mirror] to the other side of the silvering” (Bolton, Field, & Thompson, 2006, p. 4).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

At Lamanai

The Garifuna guide peals a note of laughter
The tourists walk on the backs of the dead

Framed by trees
by clouds, by heat—
and, oh, the heat!— the Jaguar Temple

Somebody built it
Somebody named it
(We each, I think, climb for many reasons)
Somebody stood on its top-most step
and scattered her mother quietly to the wind

while a family below
teased a tarantula from its hole
with a long brown blade
of dying grass

Two days after my mother's funeral, I had to travel to Belize with a group of preservice teachers to conduct a comparative education course. As I was preparing to leave, my father asked me to take some of my mother's ashes and scatter them there, in some place symbolic. My immediate family accompanied me on this trip, and I remember the surreal feeling we all experienced in being abruptly uprooted from the cold chaos and emotion of a death at Christmas to being roughly transplanted into the equatorial heat of a third-world country.

Central to the notion of qualitative research, and essential to the lens of the qualitative researcher, is knowing who one is and how one's experiences, biases, and assumptions influence the research. Prior to my mother's death, I had had discussions with her regarding her wishes, which, I knew, included being cremated; however, I was

not aware of any special desire on her part to have her ashes scattered in Belize, or for that matter, anywhere. Further, my assumption was that any scattering, if it were to happen, would be decided and undertaken by my father—not left as a decision to me, a daughter. This assumption of mine, however, while valid in my eyes at that time, failed to take into account any conversations my father may have had with my mother; further, it shows me as making assumptions about—and perhaps even having biases toward—a perceived cultural norm that spouses, not children, make decisions concerning death. The fact that my father asked me to do this also caused me to question why I was chosen for this task, and not one of my sisters. Was it that my father was biased toward me, as the eldest? Or was it only that I was the one who was about to travel? Further, as I felt my reluctance to undertake this task growing, I began wondering if I was somehow biased myself against scattering her ashes in a place she'd never been, or just against scattering them at all.

In the poem above, which I wrote in a detached voice as if I were an outside observer, I muse aloud about the Jaguar Temple at Lamanai and how it received its name. I wonder about my family, who is preoccupied with its own task while I scatter my mother's ashes. I watch myself, making note not only of what I am doing but also of all that is going on around me. It is this sense of distance, I believe, coupled with introspection, that a qualitative researcher must bring to a study. "We each, I think, climb for many reasons," and seeking to understand one's self as a researcher is central to the task.

Design of the Study

A paradigm, according to Glesne (2011), “is a framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth” (p. 5). It poses the questions, *How do we know what it is that we know?* and *How does that knowing influence our perception of the way the world works—our worldview?* In other words, do I believe that truth is something objectively known and verifiable by facts and data, or do I believe that truth is something more subjectively realized and thus interpreted by individual experience and feeling? Understanding my ontology, or worldview paradigm, is essential to this research because “what [one] believes about the nature of reality, in turn, affects the kinds of questions [one] asks of it [and] what [one] consider[s] knowledge to be” (Glesne, 2011, p. 5). Epistemology, on the other hand, more “refers to the nature of knowledge” itself (p. 5), or how knowledge is created. This understanding is likewise essential to this study because, “this, after all, [is] what research is about: the creation of new knowledge or understandings” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 33).

As I turned these lenses on myself, I realized that my approach to this study, both ontologically and epistemologically, was interpretivist, closely laced with the ideals of the constructivist. Interpretivists and constructivists are also known as subjectivists, i.e., people who believe that free will or human agency is a critical factor in how individual lives and larger social constructs are developed and patterned (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 42). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), “the interpretivist paradigm holds status quo assumptions about the social world and subjectivist assumptions about epistemology” (p. 46). In fact, it is the role of the qualitative researcher to make certain assumptions (Creswell, 2007, p. 16). Thus, the interpretivist part of me believes that

although, epistemologically, individuals define and interpret their own realities, ontologically these individual definitions and interpretations collectively combine to make up a greater social reality, or “social construction” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Therefore, “accessing the perspectives of several members of the same social group [e.g., student teachers] about some phenomena [e.g., reflection on their experiences] can begin to say something about cultural patterns of thought and action for that group” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Taken altogether, this means that, as a researcher, I believe that I make my own meaning of my own experiences and that others do the same. I cannot say what something means to someone else; I can only define that for myself. But I also know, as a former English teacher and writer, that I hold assumptions about the value of writing for personal growth. It is my predilection that I want to “...understand the social world as it is (the status quo) from the perspective of individual experience” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 46).

In this sense, then, reflecting on events that occur in the classroom is necessarily a social construct because a classroom is, in and of itself, a social microcosm of the larger school society. However, due to the changing nature of interactions within this microcosm, individual experiences and predictions about future courses of action can only be validated against the current social context—even though, at the heart, these experiences will still remain individualized and personal.

For these reasons, stories as reflection-on-action may assist preservice teachers in constructing individual reality and also contextual reality as measured against the internship environment, and also against their previously existing schema about their identity as teachers. It has been my experience that most people do not want to see

themselves and their experiences as being outliers; rather, they wish to see their experiences as indicative of the norm. Though writing stories may or may not orient preservice teachers' experiences *toward* the status quo, the act of writing about their experiences may help them to put their experiences in context *regardless* of the status quo.

This study, conducted in Spring 2012, attempted to learn about the phenomenon of writing stories as a reflective practice by documenting student teachers' experiences during their student teaching internship. I used written artifacts (stories), focus group discussion, and individual exit interviews to attempt to answer the following research question:

In what ways, if any, does writing stories about their student teaching experiences assist student teachers in reflecting deeply and making sense of their experiences and in developing their personal and professional identities?

For this study, as with the pilot I conducted in 2011, I used a hybrid phenomenological and analysis of narrative approach that involved a small group of preservice teachers (six) who were currently undergoing their student teaching internships. The phenomenon in question was the reflective component of the student teaching internship, as described individually by the participants through written (storied) reflections, subsequent focus group discussions, and exit interviews. In a phenomenological study, the focus is on "in depth [analysis] of a particular aspect of experience, assuming that through dialogue and reflection, the quintessential meaning of the experience will be revealed" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 97). Where the hybridization occurs is that by having the participants focus on particular events, or

“lived experiences,” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 98) through their writing, I sought phenomenological answers about how these stories created and informed individual meaning for the participants. However, I also used analysis of narrative to “[create] descriptions of themes that hold across stories...or types of stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Thus, I saw the emergent themes from the stories as being connected back to the phenomenon, i.e., reflection, as well as illuminative of the individual participants’ growth.

Clandinin and Connelly (1989) write that “narrative inquirers tend not to begin with a prespecified problem and set of hypotheses. Instead, they are inclined to begin with an interest in a particular phenomenon which could be understood narratively” (p. 16). As such, though I did have a research question that directed my focus, I did not have any preconceived ideas about the events or situations participants would write about, nor about how the telling of those events would shape meaning for them or affect their growth in personal or professional identity. What narrative inquirers do is identify “three commonplaces...--temporality, sociality, and place—which specify dimensions of an inquiry space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 479). *Temporality* refers to the notion that because stories exist both in the past and the present, participants necessarily have both lived and will relive their experiences (through writing). Temporality, then, affects content, in that the reliving of an experience involves “restorying” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 12-13)—i.e., retelling a story in such a way that original facets of an initial event may be lost, reinvented, embellished, or otherwise changed from how they were first perceived. *Sociality* refers to the idea that experiences occur within a social context and, therefore, cannot be divorced from it. “The environment, surrounding factors

and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 23) have direct impact on the individual actions and reactions that occur within a given story. Similarly, the actual location of a story is critical to event and must be taken into consideration.

With all of this in mind, then, the specific methods for this study consisted of five distinct phases: (1) participant selection, (2) participant instruction, (3) data collection, (4) data analysis, and (5) data reporting/ discussion.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were selected from a convenience sample from the 2012 cohort of student teachers at the university at which I work. The size of the cohort was 87 student teachers. Within the convenience sample, final selection of participants was done by random purposeful sampling and was based on three key factors: (1) the participants had to be currently student teaching, (2) they could not be employed or taking any additional classes (because I recognized that participation in this study would impinge upon their time), and (3) they had to be representative of one of the three grade levels typically found in teacher preparation programs (elementary, middle/secondary, and PK-12). Because my university does not offer programs in special education, there was no opportunity for this representation.

The invitation to participate in the study went out as a blanket email to all of the students in the cohort, who all had equal teaching preparation. The email specified the above criteria and included that participants would receive \$100 for participation in the study. The email further outlined the expectations for the study, including the initial training session, and the expectations for writing, focus group meetings, and exit

interviews. It also explained that the final participants would be chosen randomly. The goal was to have a total of six participants, two from each grade level group, in order to get a representation from various content areas and grade levels. Once the initial pool of possible volunteers meeting the criteria was identified, the names were grouped by grade level (elementary, middle secondary, and PK-12) and assigned a playing card number. Two cards were randomly drawn for each level, yielding a final participant group of six student teachers.

Table 1

Demographics of Study Participants

Name	DOB	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Hometown	Program	UG GPA	Grad GPA
Rebecca ¹	06/22/ 1989	F	white	Fairfax	5 year- Spanish MAT	3.48	3.34
Morgan	12/10/ 1987	F	white	Richmond	Math MAT	2.96	3.91
Kelly	10/26/ 1988	F	white	Sterling	Soc. Sci. 5 year-	2.81	3.79
Alec	05/17/ 1989	M	white	Richmond	Elem. 5 year-	3.00	3.20
Julia	01/31/ 1989	F	white	Stafford	Elem 5-year	3.01	3.95
Amy	01/23/ 1988	F	white	Alexandria	ESL	3.77	3.94

¹ Names have been changed

The final participant group included two elementary teachers, two middle/secondary (one math, one social science), and two PK-12 teachers (one ESL and one Spanish). All six of the participants were from Virginia; four were from Northern Virginia and two from Central Virginia, and none of the participants were minorities. Additionally, each was a student in either the 5-Year Bachelor's-to-Master of Arts in Teaching program or was in the traditional Master of Arts in Teaching program. Each

was 23-24 years of age and had graduate GPAs within the median range of students within their cohort.

After being notified of their selection via email, each participant received an Informed Consent Letter (see Appendix A), which included discussion of expectations for their participation in the study, as well as discussion of potential harms. Although I did not anticipate any particular harm as being inherent in this study, there was the possibility that participants could feel discomfort at disclosing personal events, thoughts, and feelings. For this reason, I told them that names would be changed for this dissertation, and that they were to keep the actual content of the stories, as well as the nature of group discussions, confidential between participants of the study group. The informed consent letters were signed and returned to me at the initial training/study meeting.

Participant Instruction

The second phase of the study involved direct instruction regarding the nature and craft of writing stories. For this phase, and throughout the study, I had to adopt the stance of participant-observer, someone who was both interactive with the participants yet also strived to maintain distance and objectivity. At the initial training session, I gave participants examples of stories to read. These included excerpts from *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* and *The Freedom Writer's Diary*, as well as one non-example, a traditional journal reflection from a student teacher in an earlier cohort. After reading the examples aloud, I led a brainstorm exercise in which the participants listed the elements of story as they saw them in the examples (see Appendix B). This list was then further refined to include the essential elements of story (plot, character, setting, dialogue,

beginning/middle/end), and it was agreed upon by all that this list would serve as the guideline for their own written work. It should be noted here that in the pilot study, I did not engage in consensus building about the concept of “story” and found that what participants wrote sometimes did not align as closely as I had hoped. Thus, this instructional element of the study was crucial, as without it there was a danger that participants would write more traditional reflections—i.e., more “thin” than “thick” pieces in terms of the deepened level of response I was hoping to receive.

This instructional phase was also important because it introduced participants to the sometimes uncomfortable experience of reading their work aloud to a group and then having it “discussed.” After consensus was reached, I introduced the participants to the “discussion” technique that I would use with them in subsequent meetings. My role, here, was to create an atmosphere where participants felt as comfortable and safe as possible, as well as to act as “cheerleader” and facilitator, encouraging them as they read and discussed what they wrote. The technique I used to help dispel discomfort and build trust, as well as possibly to elicit the story subtext in which I was interested, is called “pointing” (Schulz, 2006). The strategy consists of “ ‘pointing to’ resonant words and phrases in an evocative text, followed by freewriting, and poetry writing” (p. 218). Operating under the belief that “writing begets understanding” (Schulz, 2006, p. 218), “ ‘pointing’ works at revealing a kind of ‘felt meaning’” (Schulz, 2006, p. 218) implicit in a story. “The process of ‘pointing’ ...is necessarily experiential; thus, understanding, in the practice of ‘pointing,’ unfolds as an *act* of understanding” (Schulz, 2006, p. 221). The strategy for pointing is as follows:

1. A brief, evocative story is brought in for shared reading.

2. As the story is read aloud, participants are asked to “point” to [write down] words or phrases in the story that “resonated” with them.
3. After reading, participants should “say back” some of the words or phrases they noted, without explaining or prefacing their choices.
4. Next, participants choose one of the words or phrases they chose and freewrite for ten minutes about a memory of their own.
5. Participants then read these pieces back to the group, again noting words or phrases that resonate with them (pointing).
6. After everyone has read, participants use their new lists to create a poem using these words and phrases. Poems are then read back to the group. (Schulz, 2005, pp. 220-221)

Although I only used steps 1-3 of this technique (reading aloud, writing down resonant words, and saying them back to the author), this approach was useful in helping participants to discuss and reflect, as well as to set the procedural process for subsequent data collection periods. For the purposes of this study, the evocative story used was the student teachers’ own writing. At each focus group session, participants read their pieces aloud, during which time other participants listened and wrote down words or phrases that “resonated” with them (see Appendix C). After reading, participants “said back” their lists to each other, without comment or discussion. The objective here was to take note of how the words/phrases helped [participants] to “rehear” (Schulz, 2005, p. 220) their texts, shedding light on the “‘felt meaning’ the story produced” (Schulz, 2005, p. 220). It was also to ensure that participants’ voices were heard, but that their experiences and writing skills were not personally critiqued.

Data Collection

There were three distinct periods for data collection in this study: at the beginning of the internship (week 4), at the middle (week 7), and at the end (week 11) of the 11-week student teaching internship (see Appendix D). One week prior to each data collection point, I asked participants, via email, to select one student teaching event that had occurred within the intervening weeks (between weeks 0 and 3, or between weeks 4 and 7, for example), to write about in a storied way. When we convened at each study session, participants read their stories aloud and participated in the pointing strategy. During the read-aloud portion of these meetings, as with the initial instructional session, I again was a participant-observer in that I listened to the stories as they were read aloud and also participated in the pointing strategy. These read-aloud/pointing proceedings were not audiotaped or transcribed, as the stories themselves were the artifacts I collected to analyze and code.

Following the readings, I conducted focus group discussions with the participant group. For these discussions, I generated a list of six open-ended questions that were intentionally derived from and linked to my research question (see Appendix E). Generally, there was no set order for participant response during these discussions, as participants “jumped in” when they felt they had something to say. However, if I did not hear from someone on a particular question, I intentionally redirected the question to that person so his/her response would be included. These discussions were audiotaped and later transcribed, then sent to the participants via email for member checking. Corrections from the participants were then incorporated into the final transcript. This procedure was repeated at each of the three data collection points.

Because I was a participant-observer during the study sessions themselves, I had little to no opportunity to make field notes, as such, though occasionally I was able to jot some quick thoughts based on my impressions. However, after each focus session, I used the driving time I had between my university and home to record my thoughts via audiotape. As such, these “brain dumps,” as I came to call them, served *ex post facto* as my field notes for this study. These notes were also transcribed and added to the overall data collection (see Appendix I).

As a final data point, after the conclusion of the third study session but before the end of the internship, I interviewed each participant individually using the same six questions I asked in the focus group sessions. The interviews lasted from thirty to forty-five minutes, depending upon the length of the participants’ answers. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed, then sent to the individual participants via email for member checking. Corrections were then incorporated into the final transcripts.

Data Analysis

The participants’ stories (N=18) and the focus group transcripts (N=3) were coded using grounded theory in combination with phenomenological analysis (see Appendices F, G and H). These 21 artifacts and transcripts were hand-coded, resulting in 890 individual data bits which I entered into an Excel spreadsheet, which became my code book. Using grounded theory, I analyzed the data bits for open, axial, and thematic (substantive) codes, which represented subcategories of information about the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007, p. 67).

From the original 890 data bits, I derived 422 open codes, representing a data collapse of almost 50%. From a phenomenological analysis standpoint, open codes are

called “horizontalization” (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Cresswell, 2007, p. 61) and seek to “provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 61). For me, assigning the open codes was the most difficult aspect of the coding process. As Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007) note, “There are no ‘pure,’ ‘raw’ data, uncontaminated by human thought and action” (p. 27), and further, “the significance of data depends on how material fits into the architecture of corroborating data” (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 27). But what, at this early stage, was my “corroborating data”? And how much was my analysis contaminated by my own perceptions? According to Lincoln (2002), in order for something to be “data,” a researcher first has to recognize it as such; and second, it has to be analyzed systematically in congruence with some question or argument (p. 6). Taken in this light, I systematically analyzed each sentence individually in relation to both my research question and conceptual framework, often concluding that there were multiple data bits within each sentence. Thus, I generated the first set of codes based on what I perceived the participants to be experiencing or acknowledging, such as their own emotions or their relationships with others. While doing so, I also engaged in memoing, or making notes to myself (see Appendix H). These notes later served as reminders about insights and connections I had while coding, which included thoughts about participants or the events they wrote about, as well as potential linkages between various data.

I then reorganized the open codes into axial codes, which allowed me to “assemble the data in new ways” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 67) by identifying central categories (grounded theory) (p. 67), or “clusters of meaning” (phenomenological

analysis) (p. 61), about the phenomenon of storied reflection. In order to do this, I looked for similarities between the open codes and organized them accordingly, a process which took several trials. Eventually, I was able to derive 58 axial codes from the 422 open codes, representing a data collapse of between 70-75%. These codes were then entered into my code book, alongside their corresponding open code (see Appendix F).

For the third stage of the coding process, I again looked for similarities and organized the axial codes into overall thematic codes, which allowed me to develop a broad sense of the whole as it related to my central research question and conceptual framework. According to Glesne (2011), coding data in this way “[creates] a framework of relational categories for data” (p. 195) and allows the researcher to see patterns or new ways of fitting data together. After printing and cutting out all of the axial codes from both the written stories and focus group transcripts, I laid them out and moved them around until I was satisfied that I had grouped them appropriately. Overall, there were six themes that emerged from the 52 axial codes.

Finally, I assigned each of the six themes a color and holistically coded the exit interview transcripts for their relational value to the themes. In this way, I was able to triangulate the data (written stories, focus group transcripts, interviews, and literature) for reliability purposes.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were a number of assumptions I made about this study: first, that I would be able to get the number of participants I was looking for (six), and second, that these participants would represent a demographic cross-section of the entire student teaching cohort (elementary, middle/secondary, and PK-12). I was also operating under the

assumption that each of the participants would be able to write stories in the way that I was seeking, and that one instructional session would be enough to model for them the operational definition of “story.”

With regard to assumptions one and two, I plain got lucky. As with the pilot study, the initial invitational email sent to the entire cohort generated enough response (12 overall) that I was able to randomly select the number of participants I desired (six). However, in the pilot study, one person dropped out, leaving me with only one representative of PK-12, whereas with this actual study, all six remained. Too, with the pilot study, three of the participants came from English, social studies, and art backgrounds—fields that may have a predilection for storied writing—with no participants reflective of math or science. However, in this actual study, one of the participants was student teaching in mathematics.

My third assumption, that all participants would be able to write stories in the way that I envisioned, was predicated on the notion that all participants, being products of American educational systems, had had some prior experience with story writing as grade school students. Thus, it was also my assumption that one instructional session, in which participants were provided with models and reminded of the elements of story, would be enough to reactivate prior knowledge concerning story writing. The resulting list of story characteristics they generated (see Appendix B), as well as their subsequent written stories, appears to have borne this out.

Limitations of the study were likewise present. First, the reliability of the data collected (written stories, focus group discussions, and exit interviews) was based on the ability of the participants to be honest in their self reports about feelings and experiences.

As previously noted, because “data are produced from social interactions and are therefore constructions or interpretations” (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 27) there “are no ‘pure,’ ‘raw’ data, uncontaminated by human thought and action” (p. 27). Thus, it is generally recognized that all qualitative information is interpreted information, both by researcher and by participant, and further,

[that] data and information are not evidence until two things happen: first, someone recognizes it as data, and second, an inquirer subjects it to some form of systematic analysis, which turns it into evidence directed toward some question or argument. (Lincoln, 2002, p. 6)

Thus, through the process of grounded theory coding, I attempted to control for this limitation by systematically engaging in data analysis that was connected to both my research question and conceptual framework.

Second, because the targeted participants were selected from a convenience sample, and also because this study is qualitative, the results of this study are not generalizable, as the term is typically used, to a larger population. However, because this study describes what people do, say, think, and feel, within particular situations, it is within the parameters of interpretivist research, because “the goal is not to generalize to predict and control but rather to describe what people do and say within local contexts” (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007, p. 29).

Further, because the participants were volunteers, the possibility exists that their participation was based on previous positive experience with writing or, moreover, that they personally enjoyed writing on their own. This limitation may have served to produce a participant pool that, consciously or unconsciously, produced written artifacts that were

more “storied” or detailed in the way I was seeking. However, because this study did not seek to examine the quality of writing nor to judge or strengthen expertise in it, it would not have made sense to seek participants who only had negative experiences with writing, disliked writing, or otherwise had no experience in writing. This, I fear, would have generated a participant pool of zero. Still, even though this study sought to analyze what the writing revealed about the participants rather than their writing ability, it is possible that the level of detail may have changed with a non-voluntary group.

A fourth limitation existed because I am the Director of Student Teaching and the participants in this study were student teachers under my purview. As such, there may have been some desire on their part to “write to please”—meaning that the participants may have given responses because they believed what they wrote could impact their student teaching grade. In order to control for this, I made it clear to the participants that my position as Director of Student Teaching had no influence on their grades, as those were assigned by the University Supervisor. Further, explanation was given in both the Informed Consent letter and at the first training session that their participation in the study would in no way impact their student teaching grade or their relationship with the university. They were further told that they could opt out of the study at any time with no penalty. During the focus group sessions themselves, I also took conscientious pains not to question participants about the situations they wrote about, or to deviate from the focus group questions. I have to admit, however, that the Director part of me *was* noting particular information, especially when it concerned disconcerting revelations. This put me in a tenuous situation. However, I was reminded of a time when I was a young teacher and a student in my school committed suicide. It was later revealed that his

English teacher had known about his suicidal thoughts, but, because they were written in a private journal read only by himself and his teacher, she did not come forward and was later blamed. Keeping this scenario in mind, after the focus group sessions were over, I did occasionally pull someone aside to ask more about a situation. Not to have done so would have been irresponsible, particularly in situations I felt were serious.

Finally, the largest and most prohibitive limitation was my own bias toward writing as a reflective tool. As previously discussed in Chapter One, the writing/reflection process is central to who I am. And while it is true that on a personal level I did find some of the stories to be more entertaining or expertly written than others, I took a number of steps to insure that my personal thoughts about the individual writing did not contravene or impede my objectivity. First, when I received each participant's story via email, I immediately downloaded it and printed it—but I did not read it. In fact, I did not read any written story until it was being read aloud by its author. This enabled me to hear it for the first time at the same moment as the other participants, which was important in terms of observing how it was perceived by others. I also did not want to pre-formulate opinions about the content of the story. Second, several of the questions I asked during the focus group discussions (see Appendix E) were deliberately crafted to probe participants' views and feelings about their writing and its relationship to my research question and conceptual framework. Thus, any incongruities between my perception of their stories and their own could be revealed. And finally, my use of grounded theory coding severely restricted my biases toward writing as a viable reflective tool because I employed a systematic process of sentence-by-sentence coding that aligned with my research question and conceptual framework.

Reliability of the Study

Because I protected the integrity of my data through member checking, grounded theory coding, field notes, and memoing, I believe that the interpretations I made have reliability, or “trustworthiness” or “integrity,” as it is more often called in qualitative research. Further, by disclosing my biases and informing readers of who I am as researcher (discussion of which appears in Appendix J and also in Chapters One and Three), the stances that I brought to the study were transparent and promoted even further integrity.

I also triangulated the data to further insure the trustworthiness of my analysis. Glesne (2011) writes of triangulation, “From an interpretivist perspective, [one is] not seeking to elucidate the ‘truth’ of a setting or situation since [one] believes no underlying reality, but rather [one is] trying to understand the multiple perspectives available” (p. 47). Further, Gibbs (2007) maintains that “it is always possible to make mistakes in [ones] interpretation, and a different view on the situation [which triangulation gives] can illuminate limitations or suggest which of competing versions is more likely” (as cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 47). Triangulation utilizing the focus group transcripts, written stories, exit interviews, and literature served not only as a means of cross-checking information I perceived across this data, but also gave me the opportunity to cross-check the data as it related to my research question and conceptual framework.

All of this speaks to the notion of “trustworthiness,” defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) as the ability of a study to meet standards for “acceptable and competent practice” (p. 63), as well as standards for “ethical conduct with sensitivity to the politics of the topic and setting” (p. 63). They elaborate, saying, “The purpose of a study should

be *use* [emphasis added]: to contribute in some way to understanding and action that can improve social circumstances” (p. 63-64). They also observe that, although guidelines for determining a study’s trustworthiness, and, therefore, integrity, vary with audience, all “qualitative researchers pursue multiple perspectives about some phenomenon: they search for truths, not Truth” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 65). To this end, I believe that this study met both of these criteria. For one, it has practical significance to practitioners in the education field, and therefore, fulfills the “use” criteria; and two, it does not search for one specific truth, but rather multiple truths, or perspectives or themes, as the participants revealed them through their written stories and subsequent discussions. Likewise, I believe the rigor of the study to be intact. My position was clearly defined, both *in situ* through ontological and epistemological discussions directly discussed in this chapter, and through the *ex situ* revelations as expressed in my Researcher as Instrument Statement, contained in Appendix J. Moreover, I believe that the description of my methodology, coupled with appended material such as code book excerpts (see Appendices F and G) and field notes (see Appendix I), further establishes that this study was “well-conceived and conducted” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 67).

Discussion

Although the literature is abundant on student teacher reflection and reflective practice, there is little research in the education field that supports the use of written story as a viable tool for this end. Although alternative means of reflection are currently being explored (e.g., blogging), the storied approach previously used in education has generally focused on the relation of oral or researcher-constructed stories, rather than on participant written ones. Thus, I believe that this study could lead to a new line of inquiry in the field

of education, and, moreover, could potentially lead to a new means of engendering both deepened student teacher reflection and growth in personal and professional identity. In contrast to oral storytelling—which does have somewhat of a history in the field—the creation of written stories yields permanent record of individual experience, and so invites study—by both writer and researcher. Being able to examine and re-examine a written story affords continuous opportunities for insight into not only individual experience, but also collective ones.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

One o'clock in the morning

and you are three years dead

I have your ashes and two small bones
—a pinch I could crush between thumb
and finger—in a red oval box beside the bed

My head with its thousand restless horses
urges me to rise from sweat-tossed sheets

I tuck you into the heat of my palm
and take us into the moon-cooled night

I lift you to my ear
where with the tiniest shake
I listen for the echo of my own hoofbeat

and in that moment
somewhere in the distance
a delicate settling
of leaf on leaf

In the poem above, I write about the process of grief, how, even after a number of years, it is still part of my life. However, within the poem there are various interpretations, based both on the literal topic of the poem and on the poem's theme. The topic of the poem could be said to be an event or situation indicative of grief (a sleepless night in which I miss my mother), but the theme could be one of several things. For example, one possibility is the ongoing nature of grief (three years have passed), while other possibilities could be the manner in which grief is manifested (sleeplessness), or even how people cope with grief (keeping ashes by the bedside or carrying them around).

These themes are at once related to each other, but at the same time completely independent.

For a qualitative researcher, the poem above could be considered one piece of data to be analyzed and interpreted in light of a study's overarching conceptual framework and research questions. As such, it could offer multiple means of providing support for a study's purpose. But it is only one artifact, and by itself is not a strong measure of results or findings. Therefore, in order to provide strength, additional evidence is needed. Thus, if I look across all of the poems included in this study and apply the same type of systematic analysis to each, I may discover not only individual themes within each work (anger, sadness, grief), but also horizontal ones that thread through them all and, therefore, could potentially be considered as findings. It was this kind of strategy I employed in my analysis of the data in this study.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether writing stories enabled student teachers to reflect more deeply on and make sense of their internship experiences and in so doing to develop understanding of who they are as teachers. It was situated within the conceptual triad of (1) novice-to-expert literature, (2) the role reflective writing plays in growth, and (3) the ability of writing stories to enact meaning and promote personal and professional identity.

Summary of Thematic Findings

As seen in Table 2, data from the written stories, focus group transcripts, and interviews yielded six substantive themes. These findings were derived by horizontally analyzing the written artifacts and transcripts for common thematic threads.

Table 2*Analysis of Codes from Written Stories, Focus Group Transcripts, and Interviews*

Theme	Thematic Code	# of Axial Codes	# of Open Codes	# of Data Bits
1	Influence of and Importance of Others	11	76	216
2	Awareness of Self and Self as teacher	14	106	181
3	Awareness of the Role of Teachers	11	69	143
4	Affirmations, Growth, and Realizations	11	34	133
5	Perceived Value of Written Stories	9	58	125
6	Emotion	3	53	92

In relation to my research question, themes 1 and 2 indicate that the written stories demonstrated aspects of participants' personal identity as teachers; theme 3 that participants showed awareness of their professional identity as teachers; themes 4 and 6 that participants engaged in sense-making of their experiences; and theme 5 that the participants believed the stories to have value in helping them to reflect deeply on their experiences.

The starting place for my data analysis was to look at the topics and broad themes of the written stories. As shown in Table 3, there were several recurring topics (management, instruction, relationships, role of teacher) and themes (doubt, professionalism, affirmation).

Table 3

Summary of General Topics and Themes of Written Stories

Story	Participant	Participant	Participant	Participant	Participant	Participant
	Rebecca	Morgan	Kelly	Alec	Julia	Amy
Story One: Weeks 1-3	Management (PT) ¹	Instruction (PT)	Relationship with Community (PT)	Relationship with Parents (PT)	Instruction (PT)	Relationship with Coop (PT)
	Self as Teacher-doubt (PTh) ²	Achievement of Students/ Self as Teacher-doubt (PTh)	Self as Teacher-confidence (PTh)	Self as Teacher-fear, professionalism (PTh)	Engaging Students-doubt/ affirmation (PTh)	Self as Teacher-doubt (PTh)
Story Two: Weeks 4-7	Management (PT)	Management (PT)	Role of Teacher (PT)	Relationships with Parents/ Students (PT)	Role of Teacher (PT)	Role of Teacher (PT)
	Self as Teacher-affirmation (PTh)	Self as Teacher-forgiveness (PTh)	Self as Teacher-mistakes (PTh)	Self as Teacher-professionalism-management (PTh)	Self as Teacher-doubt, fear (PTh)	Teacher Limitations (PTh)
Story Three: Weeks 8-11	Management (PT)	Role of Teacher-flexibility (PT)	Relationships with Students (PT)	Relationship with Students/Management (PT)	Instruction (PT)	Instruction (PT)
	Self as Teacher-affirmation (PTh)	Self as Teacher-affirmation (PTh)	Self As teacher-affirmation (PTh)	Self as Teacher-professionalism (PTh)	Self as Teacher-affirmation (PTh)	Self as Teacher-affirmation (PTh)

¹ PT=Primary Topic

² PTh=Primary Theme

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, doubt characterized four of the six participants' first stories, while it was the focus of only one participant in the second, and of none in the third. This closely parallels my own experiences with student teachers, in that in my role of Director of Student Teaching, I have witnessed multiple occasions—indeed, almost universal ones— in which doubt is the prevailing emotion within the first couple of weeks. In these early stages, it is not uncommon to find concerns with school routines

and procedures, planning and preparation, management, and instruction—and also with self. What is unusual, perhaps, is that while all six student teachers in weeks 1-3 did write about themselves in particular situations, and, thus, showed concern with self as proposed in models of teacher development (Berliner, 1988; Fuller & Brown; 1975; Kagan, 1992), two of them (Julia and Morgan) also showed distinct awareness of the instructional impact they were having on students. This suggests that, contrary to some of the research on teacher development (Berliner, 1988; Fuller & Brown; 1975; Kagan, 1992), some student teachers are not totally concerned with self in their earliest stages and are capable of looking outward toward the needs of students. By the end of the internship experience, however, all six had displayed awareness of and/or concern about the students in their classrooms, which does support the models of teacher development (Berliner, 1988; Fuller & Brown; 1975; Kagan, 1992) within the novice-to-expert literature.

Indeed, it was not just concern with self or students that the participants wrote about, but also relationships—with students, with cooperating teachers, with supervisors, and with parents. In fact, six of the eighteen written stories had some sort of relationship concern as either its primary topic or primary theme, and even those stories that had classroom management or instruction as their main topic still dealt with negotiating relationships in some way. This suggests that even more prevalent than concerns with classroom management and instructional expectations are concerns about the student teacher's self in relation to others, i.e., the self-as-teacher within the social context of the classroom. In fact, 112 of the initial 890 data bits explicitly addressed these relationship issues.

The Written Stories and Personal Identity: “I’m not a hugger.”

Two of the six thematic findings, *Awareness of Self and Self-as-Teacher* and *The Importance and Influence of Others*, were particularly elucidative in the area of personal identity. Evidence of growth in identity formation, important to the transition from novice to expert (Kagan, 1992; Kelley, 2006) was evident in the written stories, focus group transcripts, and exit interviews, and closely relates to the concepts of *self* and *person* schema as defined by Howard and Renfrow (2003).

Through this study, it became apparent that participants were engaged in negotiating their individual identities as teachers, particularly as they came to grips with their own idiosyncrasies and inexperience, and as they strived to build relationships

This awareness of self within the context of the classroom was first introduced by Alec, an elementary student teacher, who wrote,

I usually shy away from human contact—it makes me uncomfortable. In fact, when students try to hug me, I tell them that ‘I’m not a hugger.’ This serves two purposes: It means that I don’t have to come up with an excuse not to touch anyone, especially germy children who would cough all over me. It is also useful because, like it or not, especially with men, even the briefest, most well-meaning hug could be misconstrued as sexual abuse. Therefore, I remove myself from any possible sticky situations by just repeating a dozen times a day, ‘I’m not a hugger.’ (Alec Story 2)

Similarly, Morgan, a student teacher in math, wrote,

Being dyslexic, I am always very nervous about writing words on the board in front of people, so to be the teacher and have to do it in front of my class was horrifying. I know that I make easy mistakes. (Morgan Story 3)

In these stories, both Alec and Morgan wrote about confronting an insecurity they had about themselves. In Alec’s story, in which a child with autism is the only child in the

class not invited to a birthday party (and subsequently throws a tantrum), Alec had to come to terms with his reluctance to being touched. Through reaching out to this child, Alec realized that, both for himself and for certain students in his class, touch was an important aspect of teaching—as was setting aside one’s own personal fears. The same can be said to be true of Morgan, who, when asked to teach English one day instead of math, came directly up against her fear of looking inept in front of her students. Like Alec, Morgan was able to find a way to successfully overcome this obstacle— mostly through good-humoredly involving students in correcting her misspellings. And even though “one student blurted out, ‘Ms. _____, NEVER become an English teacher! You are SO MUCH better at math!’” she was able to look back on the situation with humor, saying, “It’s nice to know I picked the right subject!” (Morgan Story 3).

In fact, finding and using their personal sense of humor became an important aspect in navigating the incidents about which the participants wrote. Kelly, a student teacher in social studies, stated in one focus group (FG) session, “I can’t speak half the time when I talk because I can’t get my thoughts out. I just say things that aren’t real words. Seriously. Today I said ‘they’re borned’ when I was teaching, and I thought, “*What??*” (Kelly FG1). Likewise, in Story 2, Kelly speaks lightly of all the “dumb blonde moments” she had on a day she kept forgetting to do simple routine tasks. Similarly, Alec stated in his interview that writing the stories “allowed [him] to see the events with more humor,” which is clearly indicated in the following excerpt:

As I returned to school that Tuesday, after nine days away from the classroom, I was confident, calm, and relaxed. I felt poised, ready to take on the world. I was days away from completing the internship—I was practically a teacher. Then the students began to file in. It was pandemonium. Apparently, over the break, the students had been adopted into families of Orangutans. (Story 3)

Not all of the participants, though, were naturally as light-hearted as Alec and Kelly. For several of them, coming up against their lack of skill and experience was disheartening. Julia, a student teacher in elementary education, reflected,

I just assumed that I could use the rules [my cooperating teacher] laid out at the beginning of the year and the students would automatically treat me like they treated her; however, I realized this was not the case. I didn't have the same relationships she had with students and I also did not possess the same level of respect she did. (Story 2)

I sat there and thought, I really let them walk all over me that day. I was like, I cried so many times. (Interview)

And Amy, a student teacher in ESL, wrote of one of her earliest teaching experiences,

Charged up from another all-nighter of planning, I teach my carefully prepared second lesson on the rock cycle, but stumble through my explanations, eroding students' interest. I jump from topic to topic, an avalanche of information—it buries their engagement. The students leave confused...I am confused...I've hit the runner's wall. I feel three years old again, yelling "I'm stuck!" from under a pile of rocks. How did I ever think I could actually teach? (Story 1)

But as important as dealing with matters of idiosyncrasy and inexperience were in negotiating the self-as-teacher identity, perhaps even more important to the participants were aspects of relationship-building. The stories the participants wrote included examples of building collegial relationships with cooperating teachers and supervisors, traversing the difficult territory of parent confrontations, and reaching out to students. For the participants, the way they interacted with others—and others interacted with them—heavily influenced their perceptions of self. In many instances, the participants were dismayed by the situations they were dealing with, but there were also personal triumphs. Rebecca, a student teacher in Spanish, struggled with classroom management throughout

her internship. At best, her relationship with her cooperating teacher was one fraught with personal frustration, as seen in this example:

“Also, one of your students had his phone out behind his text book. Did you even notice that?”

“No,” Rebecca mumbled. She was staring down at her notebook with her arms folded. She knew that she looked visibly frustrated and angry, but she didn’t have the energy to fix her body language. Her cooperating teacher had just spent the last 15 minutes criticizing the lesson she had just done for her Spanish I class. It was constructive criticism, of course, but that didn’t stop it from being difficult to take in such large volumes. (Rebecca Story 1)

Rebecca stated in the first focus group session, “I’m constantly [seeking approval] from my coop. Like I feel like I need him to approve every little move I make because I want to make sure that I’m doing it right” (FG1). This, to me, is a clear manifestation of doubt and lack of confidence in her self-as-teacher abilities. Interestingly, however, at the end of the same story referenced above (Story 1), Rebecca’s entire attitude improves. This mercurial shift serves to illustrate the importance of relationships in building personal self-worth:

He [the cooperating teacher] told Rebecca that if she was as horrible as she thought she was, he would not have let her teach for whole class periods or even consider leaving her alone the following week. But most importantly, he told Rebecca that she had nothing to prove to him. He already knew she was tough. (Rebecca Story 1)

Alec and Amy both experienced difficult—and very serious—dealings with parents. In Story 1, Alec wrote about being indirectly accused of sexually abusing a child by a parent, while in Story 2, Amy wrote both about bullying and about witnessing a mother physically abusing her child. In both of these situations, the participants were frightened and appalled, and, because of their inexperience as teachers, uncertain how to behave. In his story, Alec recognized his own limitations.

I was terrified...In true manly fashion, I was close to tears and unable to defend myself anymore...I allowed myself to become cowed by his anger and instead of trying to diffuse the situation, I let [my cooperating teacher] take care of the issue. I learned several techniques from watching [her], but I do not think that I will be able to handle a similar situation with the skill that [she] showed for a long time. (Story 1)

For Amy, too, there was an overwhelming sense of personal helplessness. After the incident between the mother and son, she found herself thinking about the responsibility teachers—and therefore, she— had to their students:

Of all the hats that teachers wear, there is one that can never be removed. Once we connect with students, we inevitably—we must—care more and more about them and their lives, and carry that caring whoever we are. And caring brings a burden—this sense of helplessness, weighing heavily on our heads. We can be there for the kids, we can support them, advocate for them, be there sometimes.... But what happens when we can't? (Amy Story 2)

Kelly, however, was more successful in her relationship building, particularly with one student. “There was a part of me that was kind of scared,” she wrote, “when he walked in the room because of the way I have seen him treat other teachers” (Story 3). However, the eventual relationship she built with this student was “one of my proudest moments of student teaching” (FG3). She attributed this success to her refusal to become like some of the other teachers she had seen, thus demonstrating her growing sense of personal identity:

“He’s too disrespectful,” some said. “He just doesn’t care about anything or anybody,” another said. “He’s just a waste,” another one chimed in. They may be right, for they are far more experienced in teaching than me. I may just have stars in my eyes because I’m a student teacher and think I can fix every problem student that comes in my path. But here is one thing I do know for sure. If you show a student that you care, you want them to succeed, and you do not just dismiss them immediately like every other teacher does, they may just come around. (Kelly Story 3)

Kelly's success story was not unlike that of other participants in the study. Amy, who initially felt so overwhelmed, was also eventually able to see herself as a teacher. As she wrote in Story 2, which occurred between weeks 4-7 of the internship, "[I've] start[ed]t to call the students 'my'." And Julia, who "didn't want parents to get mad at me for something I was doing" (FG3), was able in the end to feel proud of herself: "None of them said anything...They were all very supportive" (FG 3).

The Written Stories and Professional Identity: "Tell them you'll call home—and then *follow through*."

Out of the six thematic findings, one theme in particular, *Awareness of the Role of Teachers*, most demonstrated that writing their stories became a way for participants to clarify, expand, and navigate *what a teacher does*. Embedded in this theme were awareness of teacher fallibility and limitations, as well as awareness of teacher responsibilities and actions—and the consequences of those actions, including their impact on student learning and achievement. These strands closely relate to the notion of *role schema* as defined by Howard and Renfrow (2003).

When most people think of the role of teachers, they think about planning, instruction, and management; for the participants, however, the internship opened their eyes to a whole new realm of teacher responsibilities. As Kelly noted, "... it's the whole hidden curriculum thing. It's not just about content or whatever. You have to deal with so much more" (FG2).

I guess I had this false mindset that I go to school at 8:00, I teach my instruction, and then I leave at 4:00...But it's more than that. It's being able to form relationships with kids who maybe don't have the greatest relationship with their actual parents. I feel like you do almost become that "mom way from home." I mean, I've gotten called "mom" countless numbers of times...(Julia FG2)

It was sort of the idea, sort of what I've taken away... that I might actually be talking to my students and seeing my students for a longer period of time than their parents or their grandparents or whoever takes care of them do, on a daily basis. So I'm like "Oh, okay. Well, I'm your parent away from home and I actually talk to you more often than your parents do. And so, I have right now, a greater influence over you than you parents do." And that's, that's, hard. That's hard, especially because I'm 24 years old and have no children—I don't know what that's like. (Morgan FG 2)

This first teacher responsibility, the role of parent, was evident in both elementary and secondary participants' stories and discussion. For Julia, this realization came with the unwelcome acknowledgement that "I've never been able to give discipline very well. I'm a very smiley person... I guess I didn't really realize how hard it was actually to be mean when they need it" (FG2). Thus, this parenting role seemed to closely align with that of classroom manager. However, it was more than just management; in fact, this role was sometimes closer to that of counselor—which came as a surprise.

Kids tell me things that they wouldn't feel comfortable telling another teacher. Not that they were bad things, but just, *This is what's going on.... I just need to tell someone.....* They came to me. I sort of knew because I did that with my own teachers' sometimes, but I didn't remember that as a part of my role. (Morgan Interview)

I'm understanding my role as teacher better and what it means to be a teacher more... As I've written the stories, I've learned more about collaboration. With the first one, with my cooperating teacher and how much she's taught me. Then with the second one about, like the almost social services' roles that teachers play and how much they're supporting kids' lives outside the classroom and not just academic stuff. (Amy Interview)

This counseling aspect, however, was not without its difficulties.

I'm already careful with my words and aware of how much more careful I need to be. ... and you know, the distance that you go to to open yourself up to allow students to open up to you. And then you worry about crossing boundaries and all that sort of stuff and sort of juggling all of this in the air. (Morgan FG2)

As if this role of parent-counselor were not conflicting enough, two of the participants struggled with their realization that teachers are sometimes powerless in that role. Amy, who with her cooperating teacher, tried to diffuse both a bullying and a parental abuse situation in a single day, wrote,

We can stay after school with the kids, tutor them, give them extra help in academics, counsel them, give advice or just listening ears, hold parent-teacher conferences in the attempt to make things just little bit better. But what happens when these interventions go awry, like in the conference today? What happens when we are not there? (Amy Story 2)

This issue, that of not being able to “be there,” was particularly troubling to Amy. In her role as teacher, working with both administrators and social service personnel to help resolve her students’ problems, she became confronted by the reality that some issues just can’t be resolved.

Before, I thought teachers could basically fix everything kind of. But they really can’t... Teachers are powerless in a lot of ways... but they also have so much influence in a lot of ways... but because there’s so much that we can’t do, we really have to focus on what we can. (Amy FG2)

Alec had a similar disillusionment experience. Although recognizing that it is not a teacher’s role to “play favorites,” Alec readily admitted that “Michael is definitely my favorite student in the class” (Story 2). “He has a smile that will melt the coldest of hearts... There are moments when something Michael says will make my day” (Story 2). Thus, it is not surprising that when Michael, a child with autism, throws a tantrum because he is the only child not invited to a birthday party, Alec became enraged.

I could not believe that E____’s mother could stand there in cold blood, watching a single boy be left out. Where was her humanity? How would she feel if her son was treated that way? [My cooperating teacher said] there was nothing we could do. This made me furious. (Story 2)

But in his new role as teacher, Alec learned, "...I was starting to understand that it wasn't my place to say anything about anyone's parenting skills, I would just have to bite my tongue and go with it" (Story 2).

Morgan, the math student teacher, admitted to having problems being flexible. "Before this, I kind of generally thought I was a flexible person, like go with the flow kind of person. But after this, I don't think I am" (Interview). However, after several situations in which her flexibility was tested, she came to realize how important flexibility is in being a teacher.

This particular day, we were taking the math predictor test. That morning we received the modified schedule and realized that the administration had decided to not include a math period for the day, just an English and social studies/science period. ... In situations like these, I am reminded that I learn a new lesson in flexibility almost every day. So far, no day has gone as planned, and there always seem to be something that messes up the day somewhere... (Morgan Story 3)

I know on this next Wednesday, I'll have to become an English teacher and a history teacher all over again because they are doing another crazy day like before. But I know now that my flexibility is definitely there. (Morgan FG3)

Part of the participants' struggles in these situations stemmed from assimilating new information into preconceived notions about what a teacher is and does—or, as noted in Chapter Two, their role schema. For a few of the participants, this disillusionment brought with it an increased recognition of the enormity of a teacher's task. For Amy, the scope of her cooperating teacher's job was overwhelming.

I've seen her schedule before, but following her all day, I realize the magnitude of thirty groups a week, all the planning and preparation she had to do. She hefts a heavy cart three times a day into her car, shifting between schools to teach at the times that fit each student's schedule best...besides the planning, I see her catch

all the parts you can't plan for, those ephemeral teachable moments that rise like blown bubbles and burst just as fast if not seized. She handles two schools, six grade levels in each, and countless varieties of language proficiency, from the students who have only just entered the US to those who have known it as home since birth. She adapts to every learning style and encourages them to stretch the limits of their intellectual growth... I am receptive, excited, grateful for her invaluable help, but secretly wonder: *How can I do this?* (Story 1)

For Alec, however, the recognition of the enormity of his cooperating teacher's job also came with the insight that her challenge was made more difficult by the make-up of her class.

I had been slowly taking over the classroom duties from Ms. W____. One of the duties I had taken over during the past weeks was the writing of notes in the students' agendas-notes that informed parents of wrong-doing, student challenges, and many other incidents that may have arisen. In my second grade classroom, a collaborative one filled with students with unique challenges, this was no small task. Out of a class of nineteen, there are twelve IEPs, with two more on their way. It would be a challenge for any teacher to have perfect student behavior. (Story 1)

Even with all of these challenges, though, each of the participants was eventually able to navigate the role of teacher by stepping up and acting like one. When Julia recognized that, without her cooperating teacher around, her own management skills were weak and she "wanted to pull all [her] hair out" (FG2), she knew it was up to her to make a change.

Because of the disrespectful and rude behavior my students displayed throughout the morning, I decided to have them write a letter to their parents informing them of their drastic change in behavior.....At the end of the day right before students went home, I informed the class that after they left I would send an email home explaining what I observed, letting parents know that a letter is coming home, and if they have any questions they can feel free to call. (Story 2)

Further, Rebecca, who also struggled with management, was finally able to get one unruly class under control. After consulting with her supervisor, who told her to make sure she “followed through” (Story 3), Rebecca wrote:

“Juan, can you please come sit over here by Raoul?” Rebecca asked. He got up and moved. The class was silent. Rebecca felt extremely uncomfortable but she did her best not to show it. It was a breakthrough moment. Even though she needed that push from her supervisor, she did it. Rebecca actually told a student to move seats and he did it. And she could do it again. (Story 3)

And Alec, who also had one particularly harrowing day, was, in the end able to state,

At the end of the day, I was shaking but alive. They had done their worst and I had made it through the fire without getting burned. No one had been seriously injured or damaged. The students seemed happy and healthy; my stress levels had receded a little bit. If I could survive this, I could survive anything. Bring it on... (Story 3)

For Julia, Morgan, Rebecca, and Alec, then, these challenging experiences actually served as gateways to success and did much to affirm them as actual teachers. But this newfound confidence also represented a significant learning experience about the skills teachers needed to perform their roles.

I learned that I need to work on improving my self-confidence, my demeanor under pressure, and my negotiating tools. I wish never to be in that position again, but I want to be prepared. Just in case. (Alec Story 1)

Something that I realized about teaching is that kids need rules. That they can't, you can't just expect them to know what to do. And what was a big thing for me to realize, that I can't always be their friend, and I can't be buddy-buddy in their gossip or whatever. I have to be that authority figure while still being nice and building that relationship... If I just pretended that that horrible behavior day didn't happen, when I get my own classroom what's to say that it's not going to happen again? I don't want that to happen again, so the only way I can ensure that it doesn't is to realize that there was a problem and that I need to do something to fix it (Julia Interview)

Two of the participants, Julia and Morgan, were frustrated by how their lack of instructional skill was impacting their students. After unsuccessfully reviewing inference-making with her class, Julia wrote about their lack of engagement,

[None] of my classes [had] adequately prepared me for that look of un-interest on the faces of almost my entire class. Because I didn't have a back-up plan...I progressed with the lesson and hoped for the best. (Story 1)

In reflecting on the situation, however, Julia devised and implemented a more creative strategy. After re-teaching the review, she wrote, " [Having] students' attitudes change from one of dread to one of excitement in a matter of minutes is quite possibly one of the best feelings or experiences to have while teaching" (Story 1).

Morgan struggled with student achievement. After giving a quiz that only four students passed, she realized that she wanted the next "quiz day" (Story 1) to be different. After changing her instructional strategies, nearly every student passed, and two students—"two students who struggle the most" (Story 1)—received 100s.

That day, I was able to sit in my car on the way home and not feel like I needed to walk to the registrar's office and drop out. Quiz day gave me hope that my teaching makes a difference. (Morgan Story 1)

The Written Stories and Sense-Making: "I can't beat myself up if I'm not perfect."

It is quite difficult to divorce the notion of "sense-making" as separate from perceiving personal and professional identity. Negotiating the self-as-teacher and the role of teacher are, inherently, sense-making acts; this became even more evident as the participants struggled with forming ideations of who and what they were as teachers. However, as a stand-alone aspect of my research question, this thread, sense-making, is best represented by two thematic findings: *Affirmations, Growth, and Realizations*, and *Emotion*. Consisting of those pieces of data that most closely validated or offered

participants insight into themselves or their experiences, the *Affirmations, Growth, and Realizations* and *Emotion* themes were, for me, some of the most compelling aspects of this study because they were two sides of the same coin—i.e., there was no growth or change without participants’ emotional involvement in some way. This supports Dewey’s (1997) position that in order for reflection to be meaningful for growth, there must be the two subprocesses of “a state of perplexity, hesitancy, or doubt” (p. 9) and “an act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts with serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief” (p. 9). Thus, out of the participants’ emotional states came opportunities for affirmation, growth, and realizations.

In order for sense-making to occur, there must be some degree of change in perception, meaning that *before*, where there was previously some form of conflict or confusion, *now* there is not—or, at least now there is some new kind of understanding. Although not all participants were able to negotiate “happy endings” for themselves in the incidents they wrote about, all were able to reach conclusions that signified an internal change. For some participants, this change occurred because of being affirmed in some way; for others, it occurred because they realized something about themselves.

From the stories, focus groups, and interviews, negative emotional themes such as doubt, lack of confidence, frustration, anger, fear, guilt, anxiety, and despair emerged, while so did positives themes such as confidence, happiness, relief, and pride.

Table 4

Examples of Emotion in Written Stories

Negative Emotions	<p>My anxiety was rising as I walked out of the classroom and saw his face. Although I had been alone with my class before, this would be my first time alone with them all day.</p> <p>What if students don’t think they did anything wrong? What are the parents going to think?”</p>
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Table 4 Continues

	<p>What do you do in a situation like this? In my mind, I kept thinking about how this was going even worse than I imagined. It felt demoralizing to have so little control over the class Rebecca wanted to sink into the floor. In true manly fashion, I was close to tears and unable to defend myself anymore. The growing mountain of constructive criticism was weighing heavily on her shoulders. She felt her throat get tighter the more she typed.</p>
Negative Emotions	<p>“Should I just hang it up now? Let you take back over?” I asked. I went from feeling confident that I was going to have a great day, to second-guessing everything that was planned. I was mentally kicking myself for believing that I’d ever have the teaching thing down.</p>
Positive Emotions	<p>I am receptive, excited, grateful I begin to relax, I have confidence that while he is in my class he will do his work and keep the disruptions at a minimum. If I could survive this, I could survive anything. Bring it on... I was confident, calm, relaxed. I felt poised, ready to take on the world. I was days away from completing the internship-I was practically a teacher. As the second-to-last week began, I figured that I had this teaching thing down. There was nothing that the second graders could throw at me that I would not be able to handle. I was so excited! I was so proud!</p>

As seen in Table 4, the negative emotions present in the stories indicated profound personal turmoil, while the positive ones indicated growth and confidence. It has been my experience as an internship director that such emotional “swings” are not uncommon. However, the prevalence of multiple incidences of emotion across the stories suggests that, in their new role as teachers, novices are in a constant state of emotionality. But although the participant’s feelings may seem disturbing, it is important to recognize that their discomfort was also vital for growth—for without some disequilibrium, there can be no change.

In each focus group discussion, one of the questions I asked the participants was, *Why did you choose this topic?* In the first focus group discussion, Rebecca said, " [This story] ...was the one that I felt the most compelled to put on paper. Because I wanted to get it out of me." Similarly Alec, who felt he was "being attacked" (Interview) in his first story, stated, "I wrote this story because it was the easiest one to write. I was angry" (FG1).

This feeling of emotional unease still remained in the second and third stories and focus group sessions. Morgan told us, "I think there are just still things that frustrate me, so I write about them" (FG3), and Amy related,

I was feeling completely helpless...it was just so shocking when it happened. I felt like I kind of had to write about it. Because otherwise I didn't know how to process what was going on. (FG2)

What is clear from these statements is each of these participants was experiencing a state of emotional unease and felt the need to write about it as a cathartic exercise. However, Amy's statement about "not knowing how to process what was going on" was particularly telling, because it also spoke to the underlying process of sense-making that was occurring.

When I write, I can unscramble all the thoughts that are kind of floating around in my head and make them organized and cohesive in some form. And sometimes as I'm writing I'll actually realize what I really think about the topic just as I'm writing. I might be confused about it before, but while I'm writing, it will become clearer. (Amy Interview)

In fact, in order for sense-making to happen, the participants had to move from a place of emotional confusion to one of relative emotional clarity. Each had to come to

some sort of realization they had not previously recognized—and in so doing, were often affirmed.

When my fourth period got quiet for the first time ever, I was like, This is luck, I got lucky! But then my coop was like, “No, that was you.” And I was like, well, I *did* lay out the expectations...so maybe it was me. Maybe I did actually just do something right! (Julia FG2).

Even though I quizzed all day, I really had issues keeping the classes under control. But it seems like so did the rest of the school. I continue to see the areas in which I can grow, but also the areas in which I can't beat myself up. (Morgan Story 2)

In these two examples, both Julia and Morgan had a realization that led directly to a new understanding of themselves. For Julia, the realization was that her actions had direct correlation with her students' behavior; and for Morgan, it was that she was not alone in her management difficulties. Because of these insights, both of these participants were able to pass from a state of emotional unease to one of affirmation (Julia) and self-forgiveness (Morgan). In other words, they were able to make sense of their experiences. In fact, as Morgan observed about the entire groups' topic choices, “[I think] we sort of pick things that we don't know we're growing in but we are” (Interview).

A second question I asked in each focus group discussion, and in the exit interviews, was, *In what ways, if any, did writing these stories help you to make sense of your situations or experiences?* Although the answers from each participant varied, all six were clearly able to articulate realizations they had had because of writing their stories. Rebecca, who wrote her stories in third person, explained that using this literary device helped her “to be more objective” (Interview), which, in turn, led her to realize that her management situations were not as dire as she had first thought.

It was like I was talking about someone else. I was able to, like when I sat down to write it, I was able to take a step back and be like, “Ok, pretend that you don’t know Rebecca and she’s telling you about what her teaching experience was like...” It just helped me to maybe look at the situation not as like the end of the world. If it was a bad thing that happened...I was able to make it sort of lighter and just kind of see the humor in it. (Interview)

Similarly, Alec, through his writing experiences, was able to come to a new understanding of someone else’s perspective:

I think part of writing stories is you kind of have to put yourself in the shoes of the other characters in the story if you’re going to try and accurately represent their actions and what they say. And so, especially in that first one, I had been totally in my head at the time, just kind of feeling attacked...but while I was writing it, I kind of had to think that this is what he [the father] was probably feeling and why he was feeling it. (Interview)

And Kelly, after having had a difficult day in which she made many minor mistakes, was able to be more realistic about herself: “It’s kind of like therapy...I think now that just by writing it, I shouldn’t have freaked out” (Interview).

Rebecca, however, had one of the most compelling things to say the second time the group met:

Well, something interesting that I noticed was the last time we met all of our stories were kind of, had the tone of, ‘Oh, my gosh! This is awful! What is happening?’ We’re all in a new experience and we’re kind of like scared, and we don’t always know how to act. And this time, a lot of us started saying, how ‘we used our teacher voice,’ how ‘we were firm with the students and laying out expectations and trying to have a voice of authority.’ So I think now we’re starting to be able to look at ourselves as teachers, because we’re becoming teachers more so, and when we talk about it, [we can] see the change from last time to now. (FG2)

“Seeing this change,” as Rebecca put it, is affirmation of the participants’ growth as teachers. “And writing down the stories just makes us more aware of it. And that’s

important...because even though you know you do [things], you might not, like, see the change if you don't become aware of it" (FG3).

Part of this awareness of change also came from external validation the participants received from others. For example, whereas previously there had been both a lack of student engagement and management in her class, Julia was affirmed when her class got excited about what they were learning and responded well to a marble reward system. Amy, who anguished over whether she could ever make a difference in her students' lives, watched one of her struggling ESL students teach her little brother the same concepts she had just learned; and Alec successfully gained the attention of a special needs student:

I had tried about a million and one ways to focus his attention, when one day inspiration hit me. "M-bot," I said in my best robot voice, "This is Optimus Prime. You need to go do your work so you can help me save the planet!" M _____'s grin was so big, it almost wrapped around the other side of his head. He looked up at me and said, "Right away, sir, Mr. G-bot!" (Story 2)

And the insights kept coming:

...as the stories went on, it was more like we were finding our footing. I was able to see that with everyone else, and then I was able to see that with myself, too. "Okay. I'm not having breakdowns anymore, I'm actually kind of in a routine now." (Rebecca Interview)

[My students and I] weren't just students, workers, anymore—instead, we'd been actors, mystery-solvers, philosophers, today. Authentic, active engagement—it caused my students to learn, and I learned even more. If I can provide that kind of experience for my students, the kind where they dig into concepts, delve into ideas, dive into reading—that's how I can really teach. (Amy Story 3)

The Written Stories and Deep Reflection: “We’re lobsters in a lobster pot, and they’ve slowly been cranking up the temperature.”

Taken altogether, the previous sections of this chapter speak to Moon’s (2004) concept of deep reflection versus that of descriptive reflection (p. 134). As discussed in Chapter One, deep reflection is signified when people reveal not only what happened to them in a particular experience, but also how they felt during it and how that “felt feeling” informed them about their practice or themselves. Thus, thematic finding 5, *The Perceived Value of Written Stories*, which encompasses the participants’ thoughts and feelings about writing their stories, speaks directly to the aspect of deep reflection in my research question. This finding, based primarily on focus group discussions and exit interviews, extended what the participants indirectly revealed through their stories by asking them directly to explain their thoughts and feelings about the writing experience.

When they were asked, *Tell me about this story. What was writing it like for you?*, the participants reported that writing the stories was “fun,” “more interesting than journals,” and that some of the stories were easier to write than others. Further, they also felt free to add their personalities, inject humor, and be emotional. Often, they chose their topics because they were uppermost in their minds—or because they could not think of anything else to write about; and, while some of them had had experience with writing before (two were bloggers and one was an English major), none of them had ever seriously delved into writing their own stories and sharing them with a group. Four of the participants admitted to wanting to make their stories more entertaining for the others, but they also stated they had changed very little from the way things actually occurred.

From the very beginning of the study, though, the participants readily distinguished between what they wrote for their traditional journals and their written stories. The traditional journals, which were submitted once a week to their university supervisors, were perceived to be less in-depth and less-focused.

When I email my supervisor, it's more like I'm trying to cover a lot of different bases and I'm trying to just get out all of the different things that happened to me. But when I wrote this [story], I had to really narrow it down and focus on one event and think...and make it really detailed. (Alec FG1)

In the reflections, it's all matter of fact: This is what happened, this is what I learned from it, here's what I think I can do. And here [in the story], I got to go into more what it means to me, what I learned from it. (Amy FG1)

I put more details in mine...like about the atmosphere. I don't really tell the supervisor that the room is just so...like I put in more details about how people felt. I don't put how people felt or how the students felt in my reflections. (Kelly FG1)

Interestingly, it was this specific attention to detail that seemed most meaningful for them in terms of reflection.

I think the detail adds to, even if I look at this story a week or two later, it helps with the reflection part. If I were to go back in my email and read the blurb I sent my supervisor the very first week, it might not help me as much today as it did the night I wrote it. Whereas I feel like this story, because we add so much detail, would allow for further reflection a week from now or two weeks—from now until the end of our experience. (Morgan FG1)

It made me focus on some of the details more...it helped me reflect on points where I could get better rather than just writing a short paragraph and being like I'm done...I was able to pick out points which I could have done something different to change the outcome of what was going to happen. (Kelly FG2)

But writing and sharing their stories had other reflective benefits, as well. It gave the participants a sense of motivation and purpose that went beyond the kind of

motivation they typically felt when writing for their supervisors. Part of this motivation lay in the fact that they liked having an audience, particularly an audience of their peers who were going through the same things. Typical responses along this line included statements like, “I know I have to share. I know I’m going to get feedback or I know people are going to have to make some sort of sense of what I’m saying.” “It’s cool that the people that are hearing it, too, are also going through it.” “I kind of want you guys to know about it and I want to hear about what you guys are doing.”

This speaks, then, to the notion of audience and the role it plays in the reflective process. Because writing is intended to be shared, it follows, then, that reading and discussion of it is a natural part of the process—and one that should not be discounted.

An accidental finding: The need for discussion to go hand-in-hand with writing stories. Throughout this study, I have shared my own writing and have also engaged in a kind of discussion about it, although the audience is unknown and physically removed. If I were to have shared these poems with my poet friends, though, the ensuing discussion would surely have been different. Certainly, there would have been an amount of personal identification with topics and themes, such as the study participants felt in hearing each others’ stories; but there also would have been significant critique of format and style—something that was deliberately absent from the focus group discussions I held during this study. Because I was working with students who had varying degrees of writing skill, I wanted to avoid overt critique of their work; therefore, I utilized Shulz’s (2006) pointing technique, as discussed in Chapter Three, as the primary discussion tool. As a result, pointing created a community who could share their stories without fear of being criticized or embarrassed.

While some participants stated they wrote down words simply because they were vivid, relatable, or interesting, still others explained that the words they chose had deeper significance, such as validation of themselves as communicators (“They picked up on everything I wanted to convey”). For others, though, there was a distinct validation of experience, an awareness that others were going through the same things they were.

You know these are words that other people are hearing, and they’re either hearing it because they can see that as a focus of my story or they felt the same way or a similar way. (Julia FG1)

At certain points, though, there were surprises for the participants, in that words that others recorded sometimes illuminated something they had not yet recognized.

I had a whole bunch of strong emotion words that people pointed out, like *fury*, *shocked*, *worried*, *contorted*, and that made me think maybe I am getting too caught up in the emotion of the whole thing and not thinking it through quite enough. (Amy FG1)

This last, I think, speaks to the true value of discussion: sharing stories with peers can be both an affirmative and informative endeavor. In the focus groups, participants voiced that they wanted to share their experiences with others, that they wanted other people to know what they were going through and to get feedback from them. Moreover, they wanted to connect their own experiences to the experiences of others, to measure themselves and to wonder, “How different would it be if I did something like that?” This supports the work of Coia and Taylor (2001), Mathison and Pohan (2007), and Rust (1999), who similarly found that the discursive aspect of sharing stories had value-added benefits for their participants.

The focus group discussions also afforded participants an opportunity to learn from each other in terms of practice, and to learn about other content areas and grade

levels. As Morgan stated, “I think it’s good just as a professional thing, hearing other’s experiences and sort of pinpointing am I in the right fit or am I not” (FG3). Similarly, Amy noted, “Through hearing other people’s stories about high school and stuff like that, I feel like I’ve gotten more a sort of window into what that experience is like, even though I haven’t directly had it” (FG3). In fact, through writing and sharing their stories, and through subsequent discussion, the bonds that existed between the participants by the end of this study grew much stronger than they were in the beginning. As Alec observed, “An added benefit of coming together is just almost a sense of, I don’t know, community. I would never have known you guys if it wasn’t for this” (FG3), which was corroborated by Morgan, who said, “It makes you realize that you’re not alone” (FG2).

As the focus group discussions went on, and, in particular, during the last focus group, it became evident that not only were the participants reflecting through their stories and pointing words, but they were also involved in spontaneous acts of reflection as a result of the dialogues they were having with each other.

Second grade at C _____, those are the only people I associate with now because those are the people I have to associate with. And now, having this group, it just lets me know that my personal cosmos is a littler smaller than I thought it was. There’s a bigger world out there. (Alec FG3)

I think that a lot of us picked stories that were emotionally charged, whether it involved tears or serious anger, and it seemed like a lot of them were about classroom management. I think whether or not we want to admit it, that’s a struggle for probably a lot of us. (Julia FG2).

Similarly Morgan stated, “It’s something about reading it instead of just thinking it. It kinds of validates it in a way and helps you see more clearly” (FG3), and Rebecca observed, “I didn’t cry until I was reading over it. Then I was like, I have to read this

aloud and just admitted to myself, ‘Oh, my God, I don’t know what [my students] are doing!’” (FG3).

Two of the most profound—and poetic—insights came from the final focus group session. In what started as a simple question/answer conversation about why everyone had chosen their topics, the talk began to diverge into the fact that it was getting harder for the participants to find topics they wanted to write about—being a teacher was becoming routine. In this brief exchange, Amy and Alec eloquently observed,

Amy:

It’s starting to feel more like this is our lives, this is who we are. Rather than this is a unique experience we’re going through. It’s more like this is a series of experiences that’s going to be happening to us through our entire lives and this is normal now. This is ‘new normal’ for us.

Alec:

We’re lobsters in a lobster pot, and they’ve slowly been cranking up the temperature. (FG3)

Discussion

The findings suggest that writing stories does encourage deepened reflection in two primary ways—reflection on self-as-teacher and on the role-of-teacher—and in so doing simultaneously promotes sense-making and growth. From the written stories, we see deepened reflection on self-as-teacher and role-of teacher through heightened awareness of internal and external factors, such as awareness of emotion, relationships, content, and instruction. We also see deepened reflection in the element of sense-making that the participants wrote about—those moments when they realized they had made mistakes or had had an effect on students or others. Often, these realizations were couched in terms of “I never knew” or “I realized then that,” although at other times they were more implicit than explicit. They wrote of their impact on student behavior and of

students' impact on their own behavior; they wrote of what they'd learned about their students and of how this knowledge impacted student achievement. Most of all, they wrote about relationships—with students, with parents, with their cooperating teachers—and how making sense of these relationships was central to their idea of who they were as teachers. Thus, data from this study supports the idea that writing their stories assisted the participants in not just seeing “the what and the what next” of their experiences, but also illuminated for them how real learning comes from the self-reflexivity of seeing the “who.”

However, as addressed in the previous section, writing stories alone may not be sufficient to promote either deep reflection or growth in identity. In fact, it appears that without the element of discussion many important realizations may have been lost. This supports the work of Rust (1999) and Coia and Taylor (2001) who found that the collaborative aspect of discussion brings a heightened sense of meaning and value to the stories themselves. From the focus group discussions and exit interviews, it became evident that the participants looked forward to and enjoyed the discursive aspect of this study as much as they enjoyed the writing. Further, the discussions enabled them not only to validate their experiences against those of others, but also to evolve a sort of professional learning community, which supports the research of Mathison and Pohan (2007). Through the focus groups, they gained insight into their own emotions and the perspectives of others, and also into instructional practices and classroom management strategies. They further gained insight into realms of education with which they had previously had little to no experience. As such, they not only learned and grew from what they wrote, but they also learned and grew from their interactions with each other.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

From Stone Song: Letters to My Daughter from Anam Cara

I want to know
at the end
whether I have lived

and when I meet you
whether you have lived
in the cold space between stones
and wintered there

I want to know if in this stillness
I can sit for an hour
or a day or forever
with the forgotten sound
of my own voice

and when I meet you
if you would listen
or like the wind hear nothing
above your own loud self

I want to know if it's possible
to climb through this shell
and find solace in the black
of my own intensity

and when I meet you
if you would climb with me
or pace ahead twenty steps
your whole posture
one heaving criticism

What is the significance of the events in our lives? What implications do they hold for future endeavors? How long do their impressions last? And what avenues might they open for deeper thought? At the time my mother passed away, I had already been grappling with a number of difficult circumstances in my life. Her death, although not completely unanticipated, added yet another emotional layer and left me reeling. Now,

years later, I am still coping with her passing, especially as I, too, am growing older and beginning to face my own mortality.

In the first poem in Chapter One, I recounted an argument that happened between my mother and me when I was twenty-one. The significance of that event marked me as someone who, as a natural rite of passage, was becoming an adult in her own right, and it portrayed the sometimes painful events that accompany that break. Nearly a quarter of a century later, the vividness of that evening has stayed with me, and I find I still think about it, especially as I contemplate my own relationship with my teenage daughter.

In Chapters Two and Three, the poems dealt with the coming of my mother's death and my later involvement in scattering her remains. In the first of these, I write from Death's perspective, while in the second I am somewhat of an outside observer, watching myself and my family from the top of Jaguar Temple. Both of these voices illustrate a distancing that occurred in me from both of these events, a distancing, I now find, that held great implications for the way I have lived these past four years.

In the fourth poem, in Chapter Four, I wrote of a sleepless night in which I listened for myself in a box of my mother's ashes. The implication here is that somehow I'd lost myself and so looked for answers in the past, in her. And in this last poem, here in Chapter Five, in which I imagine myself at the end of my own life, I ostensibly talk to my daughter and wonder about a meeting between her and I somewhere in the afterlife. However, the "you" of the poem is actually indeterminate; it could be my daughter, it could be my own alter ego; it could be a spiritual being or everyone or no one. It implies, I think, an encompassing of self—and understanding or coming to terms with past and present.

If I were a researcher looking at these poems, I might first note that, taken together, they are illustrative of a number of themes: grief, identity, life stages, conflict. I would then ask myself what value these themes might hold for understanding a particular phenomenon and what avenues they could lead to for future thought and exploration. In the case of these poems, perhaps their value can be correlated to developmental stages of grief, or perhaps they can be seen as part of the literature on identity. It is this last step—identifying the present and future value of data—that is the focus of this chapter. In it, I discuss not only the implications of my research from this study, but also possible lines of inquiry they might yield for future researchers.

Implications for Teacher Preparation

This study, in which a small group of student teachers was invited to write and share their stories about their internship experiences, has practical significance for teacher preparation programs, in that it potentially supports a new theory of reflective practice. First, as Valli (1997) notes, while there are multiple ways that teacher preparation programs approach reflection, the most commonly used type in the United States is technical reflection, meaning reflection that focuses on pedagogy and asks students to think back on a classroom event (or events) and to explain what they might do to improve “next time” She also notes, though, that personalistic reflection—reflection that examines self within the context of an event—is one viable option for reflective practice, though it is infrequently used. It is within this context—personalistic reflection—that this study rests. The six themes found as a result of this study—(1) Influence and Importance of Others, (2) Awareness of Self and Self-as-Teacher, (3) Awareness of the Role of Teacher, (4) Affirmations, Growth, and Realizations, (5) Perceived Value of Written

Stories, and (6) Emotion— point to a new theory of reflective practice that suggests writing stories and meeting in collaborative discussion groups may offer an alternate means of reflection. This study found that writing and sharing their stories assisted participants in reflecting deeply on their experiences, as well as in renegotiating their pre-existing beliefs about teaching and teachers and in establishing their own identities. Thus, writing and sharing stories may enable student teachers not only to reflect deeply on their practice, but also on how their practice defines them.

Through the focus group discussions, it became apparent that participants both enjoyed themselves and took fairly easily to writing the stories. However, in the third focus group session, participants voiced that they felt that the traditional journals had particular value for them, in the earlier stages of the internship. In those early days, the traditional journal prompts helped them to focus on what they should be focusing on at a time that was very chaotic for them. However, toward the middle and end of the internship, when participants felt that they had begun to settle into their new roles as teachers, they felt that the traditional journaling was too rigid, and that using both models would have been more beneficial in terms of their own reflection. This supports Valli (1997) and Spalding and Wilson (2002) who suggest that teacher preparation programs might best meet the needs of preservice teachers by adopting a reflective model that encompasses multiple forms of reflection, rather than single ones.

One participant (Morgan, the student teacher in math) felt that the stories were not as beneficial for her, and that she liked the traditional journal prompts better; the other five, however, indicated that the freedom they felt to express themselves and to explore their thoughts and feelings better assisted them in understanding themselves as teachers.

At first glance, Morgan's perception of herself as being uncomfortable with storied writing suggests that this type of reflection may not work equally as well for everyone; further, it suggests that there may be a relationship between reflective story writing and content area preparation that was not explored in this study. It should be noted, however, that because one participant in mathematics did not care for writing stories, that does not mean that *all* math participants (or science) would feel the same way, and, therefore, one cannot leap to the conclusion that writing stories does not work for "math people." Rather, it suggests that this is an area requiring further study, particularly because even though self-professed "not to be good at reflection," Morgan was nevertheless still able to make meaning for herself through her writing endeavors.

Deciding to use written stories and discussion, however, is not a leap that can be easily made. First, teacher preparation programs need to have an understanding themselves of what is meant by "story" and how using story can be beneficial to their students. In other words, as with any kind of change, there must be buy-in. Second, if using this strategy is adopted, teacher preparation programs would then need to identify who would facilitate the sessions in which stories were read and discussed. Assuming this person would be a university supervisor, this then implies that there must be some sort of protocol in place for training supervisors to facilitate discussion before this strategy can begin. It should be noted, too, that facilitating these types of discussion should not be viewed as part of the supervisory evaluative process. Bringing evaluation into this arena could potentially be viewed as threatening, and subsequently, may deter participants from engaging fully in the process.

Another avenue supported by this study is the importance *reading* student teachers' written stories can have for teacher preparation programs in discovering emerging issues and dilemmas. For myself, as Director of Student Teaching, the stories were greatly illuminative of situations occurring during the internship of which I was unaware. As such, these various issues provoked lines of inquiry for me that directly spoke to students' preparatory and supervisory needs. This supports the work of Burchell and Dyson (2000) who similarly found avenues that needed to be supported through storied reflections written by supervisors.

Implications for Professional Development

As discussed by Rust (1999), Coia and Taylor (2001), and Mathison and Pohan (2007), there is distinct value-added in having teachers, whether pre-service, in-service, or some combination, come together collaboratively to share their stories with one another. This collaboration not only fosters peer-to-peer interaction, but also gives teachers an opportunity to gain personal and professional support, investigate the perspectives of others, monitor and adjust their own teaching and learning practices, and, most of all, to be heard. This suggests that collaborative groups who come together to share their stories with one another provide not only professional support to each other as teachers, but also personal support to each other as human beings. In fact, this piece of the writing process was vital to this study because it directly contributed to the participants' understanding of not only their own experiences, but also the experiences of others. Moreover, by coming together over a period of time, they became, like the participants in the studies mentioned above, a closely-knit group who supported one another, whereas in the beginning they were nearly strangers.

As such, the discussion group in this study functioned as a sort of professional learning community. While professional learning communities are not new to education, they are often grouped by grade level or content area, with the primary purpose being to explore instructional practices and issues. SEDL (2011) finds that there are five components that occur regularly within the literature on professional learning communities:

- (1) supportive and shared leadership,
- (2) collective creativity,
- (3) shared values and vision,
- (4) supportive conditions, and
- (5) shared personal practice (n.p.).

If one examines this list, items 2-5 speak directly to the kinds of interactions that occurred within this study. Through writing their stories, there was shared creativity; through reading their stories aloud and discussing them via the pointing strategy and focus group questions, there was recognition of shared values and vision, as well as of supportive conditions and shared personal practice. Additionally, participants in this study were firm in their beliefs that mixed-grade level and subject groups had value-added for them, in that it deepened their understanding of both the scope of education and of educational practice. Taken together, this study supports the idea that intentionally creating an environment that is professionally and personally supportive can have multiple benefits. But within current professional learning community practice, groups generally convene with a specific focus already in mind. This makes me wonder, what if this practice were turned on its head? What if, instead of professional learning

communities giving rise to stories as a by-product of their research, the stories themselves gave rise to professional learning?

If teachers came together specifically for the purpose of sharing their individual stories, the implication is that, as in this study, the stories themselves would open avenues for further professional exploration, both in terms of practice and pedagogy. Further, such an endeavor could afford teachers—and indeed, novices in any number of professions—the opportunity to take their professional learning in directions uniquely situated to their own personal needs.

Implications for Further Inquiry

There are a number of lines for future inquiry that became evident in this study through the focus group discussions, written stories, and interviews. Because this study looked at a small group of student teachers, it did not adequately obtain perspectives from students in all content areas. In fact, it was limited in that only six content areas (elementary, ESL, English, Spanish, social science, and math) were represented out of the fourteen possible endorsements found within the convenience sample. This leads one to question, then, whether the writing-discussing strategy would work equally as well with students in other contents areas, such as science or music.

Along these same lines is the issue of gender. It became evident in this study that, as the lone male, Alec was something of an outlier. Although Alec's writing was particularly evolved and he evidenced no discomfort at being the only male, it does lead one to speculate that there maybe have been important differences in perspective and experience between male and female writers, and thus male and female teachers, that were not explored.

A third line of inquiry involves comparison of traditional reflective journaling with story writing. Although participants' views on the two were not explicitly sought in this study, discussion regarding the benefits of one versus the other naturally arose. In fact, what emerged from the data was a distinct difference in the perceived benefits of these two types of reflection, in terms of how they were viewed as useful learning tools. This suggests a line of inquiry that explicitly probes whether traditional journaling and storied reflection have different effects on teacher learning, and therefore, on improving practice.

Perhaps the most compelling line of inquiry, though, relates to the concept of identity formation and the role it plays in teacher development. As suggested by Kagan (1992), teachers who fail to renegotiate their identities in light of their experiences may be frustrated to the point that they leave the field. Although the participants in this study expressed personal benefit and learning from story writing and sharing, no attempt was made to follow them long-term to see if either (a) they continued to write as they became in-service teachers and whether the reflective benefits continued, or (b) whether story writing and discussion had any causal relationship on whether or not they remained in the field. Further, no attempt was made to correlate the findings in this study with any model of teacher development, or to probe whether that development was compounded or confounded by writing and sharing stories. Finally, this study did not explore the idea of whether writing and sharing stories can actually serve as a vehicle to promote teacher competence in instruction and student learning

Conclusion

The challenge of preparing teacher candidates to enter modern classrooms is a complex issue, fraught not only with collective peril, but individual peril as well. If teacher preparation programs prepare candidates incorrectly, scores of K-12 students may suffer. And while, collectively, most teacher preparation programs are very good at addressing the reflective component of professional practice, part of preparing teachers may lie in an aspect of their development that we may have overlooked. Assisting teacher candidates in bridging the gap between theory and practice, primarily through focusing on skill and expertise, may be failing to address the individual needs of student teachers in defining who they are. This study has found that giving student teachers a voice can make a difference in how they view themselves as teachers, both in terms of their personal identity and in terms of their professional practice. Potentially, this study, then, could lead to a new theory of reflective practice that, through utilizing written stories and group discussion, reveals not only deepened reflection but also assists novice teachers in moving toward expertise through actualization of the self on the page.

Appendices

Appendix A—Informed Consent Letter

Informed Consent Form Research Study: The Self on the Page:

Using Student Teachers' Written Stories as a Reflective Tool during the Student Teaching Internship

Dear Study Participant:

My name is Deborah Farina, and I am a doctoral candidate in Curriculum Leadership in the School of Education at The College of William and Mary. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to participate in my dissertation research study. The focus of the study is to discover what can be learned from written stories as a reflective tool during the student teaching internship.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw from the research project at any time without affecting your relationship with CNU, your student teaching internship, or with the College of William and Mary. Upon completion of the study, participants will be paid \$100 for their time.

If you are interested in participating, I would like for you to write three stories, at three key points during your internship, about your student teaching experiences. I will be providing you with instruction regarding story writing at our first meeting. I will be coding the stories to look for both individual and group themes. I also would like for you to participate with other student teachers in the study in a discussion about your stories each time we meet. During the discussions, I will ask you to read aloud what you have written and to share your thoughts and feelings about both the writing and the subject of the story itself. I will tape record these discussions and transcribe them by typing them into a computer for you to read at a later date. At the end of the study, I will interview each of you individually about your stories and your experiences in writing them. No one besides me will have access to the audio tape recordings of the discussions, your written stories, or the transcripts. The discussion recordings, transcripts, interviews, and stories will be strictly confidential between me, you, and other members of the study group, and your name will not appear on any of the materials or final publications.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the research project either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I will be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this research project. Being a participant in this study is not part of your academic responsibility. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 594-7538 or via email at dfarina@cnu.edu; or the study supervisor, Dr. Jim Beers at jwbeer@wm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Chair of the School of Education's Institutional Review Board, Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 or email at TJWard@wm.edu.

Sincerely,

Deb Farina, Doctoral Candidate
College of William and Mary

_____ Yes, I agree to participate in the research project

_____ No, I am not interested in participating in this research project

Print Name

Signature of Participant

Date

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone [757-221-3966](tel:757-221-3966)) ON 2012-01-15 AND EXPIRES ON 2013-01-15.

Appendix B—Brainstorm List of Story Elements

Initial Training Session

Narratives

- * informal / 1st person
- relatable
- ** dialogue
- ** descriptive details - self, others
- ** / location / setting / environment
- what people are doing
- single event ← Plot
- could use comparisons / analogies / etc...
- ** not necessarily chronological
- ** context for event
- ** thoughts / feelings
- ** Characters ← Character

↑
Setting

Appendix C—Pointing Strategy Data Collection Sheet

12/14/2014 16

Pointing Words—Session 2

- | | |
|---|---|
| Name [redacted] | Name [redacted] |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One is... - With me - on the count of three ^{every step} of the way • - treasure •• - puppy dog eyes •• - they influence me as well •• - explore - eat it - criss cross apple sauce - smirk •• - explorers •• - song •• - clapping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - US History - bad time of year •• - donuts •• - the deal - throw back in my face - yo •• - disrespectful •• - disappointment •• - silent |

- | | |
|---|--|
| Name [redacted] | Name [redacted] |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tweenagers - bus - finally seeing <u>human side</u> ← - sweatshirt - trusted me - stupid boy • enjoy self • laughed to self • questions bombarded w/ - pure shock • - open for more • - learning to appreciate learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •• - shrugged it off •• - segregated into 4 sections - Denbeigh - literally stood •• - students were everywhere •• - insecurity •• - finally... •• - cool new teacher •• - sanctuary - the other room... • (time cues) - puzzled - I could only guess - knock - clock • - silence - lucky her |

- Words Others Heard in My Writing
- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - something like this - let you know what was.... - defensive ✓ - attacking - matter of seconds - new at this ✓ - picking on J ✓ - what you have done - regular basis * real world ✓✓ - I know what I'm doing ✓ - 22 other students - blame me - not just me ✓ - feel awful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ripped away ✓✓ - just a child - huge learning exp. - facts only - ring ✓ - pushing - referral ✓ - shield ✓ - only 7 ✓ - patience - problems ✓ - labeled ✓ - half-hair - wanted to say - good citizens - not tolerated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - breathe ✓ - tears ✓ - denial ✓✓ - tore me down ✓ - testing waters ✓ - more involved ✓ - learning experience ✓ - angry parents ✓ - facts ✓ * pick your battles ✓✓ - words exchanged - pointing fingers ✓ - kids lie ✓ - deal w/ behavior - com forting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flesh + blood - parents blame others ✓ - want to know but really ✓ - don't - can't remember - rock + hard pt - capable - credit for - not personal - everything went back... - once Mom left |
|---|--|---|--|

Appendix D—Timeline for Data Collection

Timeline for the Study Using Student Teachers' Stories as a Reflective Tool during the Student Teaching Internship

End of January:	Send email to cohort 2012 soliciting volunteer participants Use convenience and random purposeful sampling to select participants Notify participants of selection Notify participants of first study meeting
Feb. 9 (beginning of Week 2 of internship):	First study meeting: obtain informed consent; acquaint participants with expectations for the study; institute initial training in writing stories and in discussion protocols (pointing strategy)
Feb. 27 (beginning of Week 5 of internship):	Second study meeting: Participants share written stories; discussion of stories; focus group interview
Mar. 26 (beginning of Week 8 of internship):	Third study meeting: Participants share written stories; discussion of stories; focus group interview
Apr. 16 (beginning of Week 11 of internship):	Final study meeting: Participants share written stories; discussion of stories; focus group interview
Last week of April:	Exit interviews

*All meetings will be held in McMurrin 254

Appendix E—Focus Group and Exit Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose this particular topic?
2. Tell me about your experience in writing this story. What was it like for you?
3. In what ways, if any, is writing this story different for you from writing your reflective journal?
4. In what ways, if any, did knowing you were going to be reading this aloud to your peers influence or shape your writing?
5. In what ways, if any, did writing this story help you to better understand or reflect on the situation you wrote about?
6. In what ways, if any, do you think writing this story helped you in terms of personal growth or professional growth?

Appendix F—Code Book Example

Dissertation Code Book: Written Stories and Focus Group Transcripts					
Data Bit #	Data Bit/Story 1	Code #	Open Code	Code #	Axial Code
1	I start to call the students "my."	1	affirmation	1	Affirmation as Teachers
2	My second graders give me an idyll of social-studies discussion – my favorite part of teaching		affirmation		Affirmation as Teachers
3	And the students are learning! Even from me?		affirmation		Affirmation as Teachers
4	I, having started as a student despite my intern title, am actually – finally – thanks to my co-op's support and my students' patience – becoming a teacher.		affirmation		Affirmation as Teachers
5	there is no class that can prepare a teacher for this feeling,		affirmation		Affirmation as Teachers
6	To have students' attitudes change from one of dread to one of excitement in a matter of minutes is quite possibly one of the best feelings or experiences to have		affirmation		Affirmation as Teachers
7	, I have had multiple students apologize as well as many parents express their support.	2	affirmation of actions		Affirmation as Teachers
8	This system has worked wonders on these kids.		affirmation of actions		Affirmation as Teachers
9	The kids that a week ago were running wild are now listening better and following directions the first time		affirmation of actions		Affirmation as Teachers
10	It's hard to believe.	3	affirmation with doubt		Affirmation as Teachers
11	, I continue to see the areas in which I can grow, but also the areas in which I can't beat myself up if I'm not perfect.	4	affirmation/growth as teacher		Affirmation as Teachers
12		5	affirmation/realization		Affirmation as Teachers
13	When I do, they master the form for the first time. I'm amazed.	6	affirmation/self as teacher		Affirmation as Teachers
14	Quiz day gave me hope that my teaching makes a difference.		affirmation-self as teacher		Affirmation as Teachers
15	The students are delighted to see us, calling out both our names.		affirmation-self as teacher		Affirmation as Teachers
16	I can envision teaching like this every day now		affirmation-self as teacher		Affirmation as Teachers
17	I have established my own system that students respect and I can see the positive difference it has made in the classroom.		affirmation-self as teacher		Affirmation as Teachers

Appendix G—Example of Code Summaries

Thematic Code: Affirmations, Growth, and Realizations

11 Axial Codes: Affirmation as Teachers, Affirmation of Choice of Profession, Affirmation of Instruction Affirmation of Teacher Action, Changes in Perception/Perspective, Growth as Teachers, Self as Teacher-Awareness of Growth, Self as Teacher-Epiphanies/Realizations, Epiphanies/Realizations/Discoveries (FG), Seeing Growth/Change (FG)

34 Open Codes: affirmation, affirmation of actions, affirmation with doubt, affirmation/growth as teacher, affirmation/realization, affirmation/self as teacher, role of teacher/realization; affirmation-self as teacher, affirmation of choosing teaching as a profession, affirmation of field, affirmation-choosing profession, affirmation-self as teacher/choosing profession, awareness-role of teacher/hidden curriculum, questioning choice of profession/self as teacher, affirmation of instruction, affirmation-doing the right thing, affirmation-self as teacher/teacher action, affirmation-teacher action, teacher action, change in perception, reflection/redirection, awareness/affirmation/move toward growth, awareness-growth, epiphany, awareness-growth, learning/role of coop, realization/growth in teaching, reflection, movement toward growth, self move toward growth, self as teacher/move toward growth-improvement, epiphany/realization, realization-self as teacher, epiphany/discovery (FG), epiphany/realization-choosing profession (FG), epiphany/realization-management (FG), epiphany/realization-self as teacher (FG), epiphany/realization-situation (FG), flexibility (FG), reflection-self as teacher (FG), theory vs practice-self as teacher (FG), ability to see growth/change in management (FG), awareness-change/growth in understanding/validation (FG), awareness-growth/change in management (FG), lobster metaphor (FG), sense-making/growth/change (FG), showing growth as teachers (FG), showing growth/change (FG), affirmation of being a teacher (FG), validation as writer (FG), validation of self (FG), validation-choosing teaching (FG)

Thematic Code: Awareness of Self and Self as Teacher

14 Axial Codes: Awareness and Influence of Prior Experiences/Perceptions, Awareness of Own Impact on Teaching and Student Behavior, Awareness--Self as Teacher (general), Awareness-Self as Teacher/Challenges and Concerns, Effects of the Internship Experience, Goal Setting/Future Planning, Knowledge/Awareness of Self/Idiosyncrasies, Self as Teacher vs Role of Teacher, Self as Teacher/Role of Teacher-Management, Increased Awareness-Self as Teacher (FG), Realizations and Awareness-Self as Teacher (FG), Turning Points (FG), Voice and Honesty in Writing (FG), Writing as Sense-Making (FG),

106 Open Codes: awareness of previous experiences, awareness of previous experiences/change in circumstances, awareness of previous experiences/feeling of belonging, awareness/relating to previous experiences, impact of previous not measuring up/questioning choice of profession, awareness-not the teacher, awareness-novice vs expert, awareness-questioning self as teacher, awareness-self as teacher/challenge, awareness-self as teacher/diffs, duties of Student Teachers, impact of criticism, impact of internship/tired, impact of internship/tired/impact of environment, reflection on preparation, reflection-responsibilities of the Student Teacher, awareness-self as teacher/planning for future, self as teacher/goals, awareness of self, awareness-self as teacher, awareness-self, awareness-role of teacher/self as teacher, self as teacher/role of teacher/confusion, awareness-self as teacher/management, managing conflict, role of teacher/management, self as teacher/management, solving conflict, teacher action/management, awareness-false mindset (FG), awareness-mngmt an area of concern (FG), awareness-self as teacher (FG), awareness-theory vs practice (FG), reflection-self as teacher (FG), role of coop/impact of instruction (FG), awareness-skill (FG), awareness-skill/hidden curriculum (FG), realization-self (FG), realization-impact on student learning/of instruction (FG), realization-self as teacher (FG), realization-self sa teacher/confidence (FG), realization-self as teacher/inadequacy (FG), realization-self as teacher/role of teacher (FG), proud moment (FG), turning point (FG), turning point-breakthrough (FG), turning point-impact of instruction (FG), turning point-pride (FG), turning point-rapport with students (FG), "real voice" (FG), honest writing (FG), honest writing/story craft (FG), sense-making (FG), sense-making/ reflection on teaching (FG), sense-making of neg situation (FG), sense-making/affirmation

Appendix H—Example of Memoing

the feelings of it and the experience. So, I don't know. It just kind of gets at two different sides of the same experience. — how journals & stories work together

I-Is one more valuable than the other? — for the value of the story

█ don't think so. I think they're both. But, I mean, probably individually everybody probably prefers one over the other. I like doing these better than doing the more scientific reflections (giggle).

I-Okay.

█ I'm going to be the scientist and say that I prefer prompts. But just because I like, and I do, I do think, to be honest, it might just be because I'm too critical of myself. But I do find self-reflection difficult and so to have the prompt kind of focuses where my attention should be. And I still get a lot out of self-reflection as long as I have those pointers of like, 'this is where you should be focusing.' And out of that I can still be just as reflective as someone without a prompt who's really good at being self-reflective. And so those pointers actually help mean a lot. I do feel, like with this, I do flounder around in my trying to find a topic. Is this good enough is it reflective enough, am I actually getting to the point or am I just writing a bunch of junk down that's gonna get, you know.

I-So you're more worried about the craft of the story than about getting down on paper whatever it is you're thinking about.

█ Yeah, because I think I'm more worried that I'm not getting enough out of it that I should. Like, wait, hold on. I'm not getting enough out of it like everyone else. Maybe I shouldn't be thinking about comparing my journey through student teaching to someone else's but it's kind of like, those pointers and those prompts actually help me and sort of give me a leg up to where someone who is really great at being self-reflective.

I-So I'm hearing perhaps there's room for both?

█ Yeah.

I-Okay.

█ I think later on when we have to do this same reflection, like 5 weeks, every other week (several agree).

I-Like the even weeks.

2 sides

reflective vs stories

pointers to focus on

prefer prompts

Not that I do

These are the main as reflection

influence of prompts in writing

Not that I do
control of reflection
value of prompts

Appendix I—Example of Field Notes

Focus Group Session II – Spring 2012

These are my field notes after Session II for my dissertation study.

Tonight went pretty good, I think. There were some similarities to the last time that we met but yet some differences at the same time.

First of all, just some things that I noticed: the two who wrote the longest stories last time wrote the longest stories this time. One of the students who wrote a shorter story wrote a longer one this time, and the others wrote fairly short stories (about a page or so). Interestingly, the ones who wrote the shorter stories went first when they read them aloud. The one who had sort of the medium length story went in the middle and the two with the longest wanted the end. One of the things that is happening, though, is that as the time is going on and we're listening and we're doing the pointing technique, I'm noticing that people are getting more tired; there's more yawning and there's more fidgeting. Having these longer stories come at the end is somewhat tedious, perhaps, so maybe next time I need to have the longer stories go first when we're fresher. Then it doesn't take quite as much energy to continue listening and thinking and processing as the stories are being read aloud.

I've also noticed that with the pointing technique, that unlike the pilot study group last year, this year's group is not spontaneously keeping track of how many times something has been repeated by the people listening to the stories. They are, in an informal way, meaning that they can tell when something has been said before. But they're not making the tic marks or hash marks like they did last year, which gives them an accurate count. It's not something I told last year's group to do; it's not something I

asked this year's group to do. It was just something that sort of happened. It's just interesting to note that is not really happening this time.

I stayed with the same focus group discussion questions that I kept from the first time. I did change it up a little bit to try to make them more specific. Trying to get them to really focus in on what personal growth means, what professional growth means, I ended up changing those to be something more like "help you understand who you are as a teacher" vs. "what the role of a teacher I's to try to clarify that. With the pointing words, I didn't ask them to look at the words they wrote down for other people. I only asked them to look at their own this time. And sort of got them to think about in what ways if any, looking at that list helps them to maybe see the event or situation they wrote about in a new or different way. The responses I got to that were varied. Some said, "Yeah maybe," some said, "No, not so much" and then gave some reasons as to why that was.

Other things that are coming out: they're tired. I'm really tired, and so the energy level is not real high; but I noticed that the first session, as well. So it could be this group is just not gelling quite as well as last year's group did, personality-wise. It's just an interesting side note, and I don't know if that has any bearing or effect on their perception of writing these stories or reading them aloud. If having a group that has bonded together makes you more motivated to write or makes you more excited to come and share. I would suspect that it does, but I don't really know if that's the case. I might want to include that in one of my exit interview questions and see if I can get at that particular piece of information.

Notes to self:

- 1) have to remember to do pizza for the next meeting and feed them more substantial food
- 2) check on the next meeting date and make sure that it does not conflict with one of the seminars that I previously scheduled. If it does, then I may need to move the study session to another day.

Other things I noticed tonight: students were picking up on that a lot of them wrote about management, which is interesting to me because we are at Week 8 and although management is prevalent in the first couple of weeks as a topic, it's usually not as prevalent by Week 8. So, I'm interested again in that and whether it's indicative of these particular students and how strong or weak they are. I suspect that they are a weaker group overall than the ones I had last year in terms of their teacher performance. Or whether that just happens to be something that last year's group didn't write about at this particular time. Underneath the management though, there were still the issues of connecting with students, connecting with parents, with other teachers, dealing with their own personal ideas of who they are and how they handle things as well as the role of teachers and the job of teachers and all the various aspects that come with being a teacher. That seemed to be a theme in a couple of them tonight, that some of the students were being stretched in ways or at least having to deal with unanticipated situations that they had never really considered as being part of the role of teacher. So that is an interesting note that I need to follow-up on as I'm doing my data analysis.

As an addendum to the field notes:

I just wanted to state that similar to last year in the pilot, these students are indicating that writing the stories is helping them to reflect more deeply and to see themselves as

teachers and the role of the teacher. They indicated that it is due to the details that they're including, but it's also just the process of going back through this and having to see it from beginning to end. That they are able to sometimes recognize cause and effect in a way that they weren't able to at the time that they were actually going through the experiences. One of the students called this "the metacognitive effect" and I have to agree. It is quite metacognitive in that they are having to be aware of themselves as learners and how they are learning. And they are seeing this as a metacognitive tool to help them make sense of their own learning within the student teaching internship.

Appendix J—Researcher as Instrument Statement

This will, I'm sure, be somewhat unusual—not what you're expecting, not “scholarly,” nor “academic.” This will be me, here on the page, who I am, what I stand for, how I approach my life....All of it, rolled into one, in an unusual way—“unusual” because I write this as prelude to my dissertation.

My professors said, “Begin with a metaphor. A metaphor is a good way of framing yourself, of framing your research.”

Well, then....

I am a teacher.

I am a teacher of writing and of other teachers.

I am a teacher of writing and of other teachers who writes.

I am a writer.

I am a poet.

I am a writer who writes poetry.

I am the poet who steers the phrase.

I am phrase that oars the boat.

I chart the path of my own experience.

I am the cup of all experience.

Metaphors, by definition, compare two unlike things to one another. I did not always set out to be the “poet who steers the boat,” to be the “cup of all experience.” Most people don't.

But it is inevitable, I think, as we go through our lives, that we become one thing or another, this or that, despite whatever initial image we may have held for ourselves.

Luckily or unluckily, we all become something interpreted as something else. Like it or not, we are living metaphors.

Cups are utilitarian. They serve a common purpose. They can be drunk from, toasted from, and used to save leftovers. Moreover, they are vessels that are both recipient and font. They can be poured into and out of, they can fill and be filled.

They are reusable.

They are also transparent or murkily opaque, thin or thick, short or tall, breakable or unbreakable. They can be used to play shell games in slick county carnivals, or to play telephone at night with a string tied between.

A cup, in short, is many things, according to use.

And so I am also many things, according to use.

“Use” is an odd word, for it is both individually and collectively defined. I can define myself by how I see my usefulness, or by how others use me. I can construct my own meaning, or interpret the meanings of others.

Thus, as I approach my dissertation, I understand that I am both constructivist and interpretivist. I make my own meaning, but also layer over that the meanings of others.

Let me take the first several metaphors:

I am a teacher.

I am a teacher of writing and of other teachers.

I am a teacher of writing and of other teachers who writes.

I have always been a lover of reading and writing. Words leap off the page for me and take me places. Reading is escapism. Reading is vacation. Reading is therapy and

drug and high. But if someone hadn't written it, I wouldn't have been reading it, so they cannot be divorced. Reading and writing are twins.

This love of reading and writing led me to become an English major at William and Mary. I was also inspired by a high school teacher to become a teacher myself. And so I did that, combined my English major with becoming an English teacher, and, with a few detours into other areas along the way, pretty much consistently taught English for over sixteen years. During that time, I never lost my love of reading and writing—especially not writing. And for ten of those years, I taught Advanced Composition and Creative Writing, as well as Honors classes and DE English. I became a fellow of the National Writing Project, and a staff member of the Eastern Virginia Writing Project.

Since I left K-12 teaching nearly seven years ago, I have been a university administrator and professor of undergraduate and master's level students. I teach writing and research to undergrads; curriculum and instruction, technology, and comparative education to grads. The English teacher in me makes me not easy to please. My expectations are high, especially when it comes to writing.

These experiences color my view. I want the best writing out of my students that I can possibly get. I want correct grammar and punctuation; I want varied sentences and structure. I want voice, I want style; I want clarity and purpose and meaning and originality. In short, I want to fill their cups and see them pour it back.

Not such a good stance for someone who is interested in pre-service teacher stories as her dissertation topic.

Ontologically/paradigmatically, I am a constructivist. This means I believe that I make my own meaning of my own experiences and believe others do the same. I cannot

say what something means to someone else; I can only define that for myself. But the interpretivist in me always looks for something more, for some connection to other things, metaphorically if not literally. I want to take my own experiences and hold them up against the flame of others' candles. I want to see if my shadow matches, or whether it distorts. Thus, I seek to validate my own experiential meanings against the backdrop of others. And I suspect they do the same.

This, then, leads to the next set of metaphors:

I am a writer.

I am a poet.

I am a writer who writes poetry.

I write every day. By this I don't mean the daily tasks of keeping lists or penning reports, though I certainly do those things. But rather, I mean, *I write creatively every day*; and if, for some reason, I cannot write, then I'm reading the writing of others, like me, who are trying to get their words out. As such, I have a unique understanding of the writing process, its recursive nature, its endless pursuit of perfect expression. I am also aware of both the constructivist and interpretivist nature of writing, because even as writers strive to make sense of their world, readers interpret those worlds in whatever ways they choose. And so words matter. Details matter. Phrasing and white space and story sense matter.

And never, perhaps, is this truer than in poetry. Having published academic writing as well as short story and poetry, I understand that all writing is necessarily "craft." But the poet in me holds this particular genre as the epitome of that word, for, in poetry, *everything—everything—* matters. Nothing is left to chance. Whether I choose to

use punctuation or not, to write in three-line strophes or all of a whole, to indent, to use italics, to delete inconsequential words, to use repetition, or figurative language, or first person, or all caps...everything matters. When a form like poetry is so succinct, you cannot mask an imperfection, risk an imperfect interpretation. And yet, you do, because once writers give up their words, it's no longer in their hands to decide what others make of them.

Constructivist meets interpretivist.

This, too, colors my view.

But it also gives me an insider's appreciation for what it takes to write something, anything, creatively and from the heart. I know what it means when people say, *I didn't know I thought that until I wrote it on the page. Or, I don't know where that came from. I didn't know I had that in me.* I understand, too, authors who speak about not knowing what their characters will do, who say they are surprised when something happens in their novels. I understand authors who cry when they read their own work. I get this because it's happened to me.

So as I think about my dissertation topic—using story as a means of reflection during the student teaching internship-- it excites me to think that maybe, through writing stories, my students will see something in their experiences they never saw before. Perhaps in pouring out their stories, their cups will be emptied... and fill in a new way. Perhaps, like me and like other writers, in telling their stories they will come not only to understand their experiences and construct meaning from them, but also be able to interpret what they've learned against the backdrop of others.

Perhaps they will be validated.

...Or perhaps they will not. And this, too, is a bias, and one I have to be wary of. Because I know the power of writing, I have to be careful not to see meaning where it is not, not to force craft when expertise is not there. I also cannot assume that just because writing is an empowering and enlightening endeavor for me that it will be so for others. I have to take my participants' writing as it is, draw from it what I can, instead of seeing how it could have been *if only*. I have to allow them to fill their own cups...not rush in to fill them for them.

And so to the last:

I am the poet who steers the phrase.

I am phrase that oars the boat.

I chart the path of my own experience.

I am the cup of all experience.

Being a poet who “steers the phrase,” “oars the boat,” and “charts the path of her own experience” becomes the motto upon which this dissertation will rest. Not only will I have to steer, oar, and chart the direction and outcome of my research, but I will also have to allow my participants to do the same. They must steer, they must oar, they must chart their own experiences, and do so in a way that is most favorable to them. And though I may use various lenses to dissect their written word, I cannot forget that it is *their written word*—not mine—and so have to be open to what they say—or don't—forgiving of missed opportunities or lack of skill. I want them to experience for themselves what it means to be “the cup of all experience”—to discover through narrative their voices and their insights and find new strength and purpose in being used...as all teachers are used...utilitarian and purposeful, breakable and unbreakable, a

repository for leftovers, filled and refilled. And so I must be careful, because it's not up to me to determine the outcome before I start. My love and predilection for writing cannot preclude whatever is the outcome of their own writing life. Instead, it has to function only as a guide, a compass point against which they can chart their own course.

I have no illusions. This will be tough. What I bring to my dissertation is so embedded in who I am that it will be difficult to divorce. But I am also excited to learn from my participants' writing, as I learn from everything I read; and hopeful, also, that the experience of writing will not only enrich their understanding of who they are and what it is they are going through, but also my own.

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Autobiographical Information

Deborah Farina completed her bachelor's degree in English and Secondary Education at the College of William and Mary, and her master's degree in Secondary Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in English at the University of Virginia. Upon completion of her master's program, she taught English, special education, and gifted education for 16 years, both in Mississippi and in Virginia. During her time as a teacher, Deborah served as K-12 English/Language Arts Coordinator for her district, Curriculum Specialist for her school, and also served on numerous division-wide leadership committees. For over ten years, Deborah was a staff member of the Eastern Virginia Writing Project.

Upon leaving her teaching career in 2004, Deborah began a second career as the Associate Director of Field Experience at Christopher Newport University. Currently, she arranges, places, and oversees all field placements for the program, including the student teacher internship; serves as associate director of the program; acts as project manager for the Virginia Department of Education Clinical Faculty Grant Program; and teaches graduate level courses in curriculum and instruction, comparative education, educational technology, and field practica, as well as undergraduate courses in English composition. She is currently working on the completion of her first collection of poetry.